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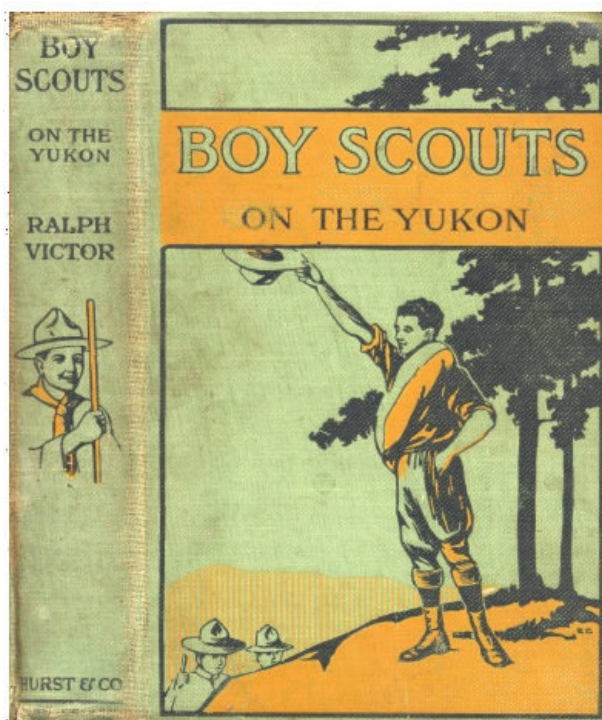
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE YUKON ***



THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE YUKON

BY
RALPH VICTOR
AUTHOR OF "COMRADES SERIES"

Illustrated by
RUDOLF MENCL

NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS.

THE BOY SCOUTS

By RALPH VICTOR

The Boy Scout Movement has secured a hold on the American boy that is remarkable in its far-reaching effects. It is doing a great work in the development of manliness, self-confidence and physical perfection and is making better citizens out of the members of the organization.

This series will foster interest in the Boy Scout Organization. There is excitement such as every boy's book should contain. There are many and varied experiences, and much worth-while information about out-door sports and camp life, in which the youths take part.

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4. The Boy Scouts in the Canadian Rockies
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6. The Boy Scouts on the Yukon
7. The Boy Scouts in the North Woods
8. The Boy Scouts in the Black Hills

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Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE "INSIDE PASSAGE."	9
II. "SWIFTWATER JIM."	21
III. INTO ROUGH WATERS.	34
IV. ON ALASKAN SOIL.	46
V. A NEW MODE OF TRAVEL.	58
VI. THE BIGGEST BEAR IN THE WORLD.	70
VII. INTO THE WILDERNESS.	83
VIII. COLONEL SNOW'S RANCH.	96
IX. AN HEIRLOOM RETURNED.	108
X. BUILDING THE CAMP.	121
XI. AT THE MERCY OF THE PEST.	136
XII. ALASKA'S FIRST AIRSHIP.	150
XIII. DOWN THE RIVER TO NOME.	158
XIV. ON THE SEWARD PENINSULA.	168
XV. THE MAMMOTH'S TUSKS.	179
XVI. HOMEWARD BOUND.	189

BOY SCOUTS ON THE YUKON

CHAPTER I.

THE "INSIDE PASSAGE."

"Ar-r-rouse ye—r-r-rouse ye, me merry, merry men," boomed the voice of Gerald Moore, with a slightly Celtic roll of the "r's," as he drummed impatiently on the shutter of the cabin window, while his companion, Jack Blake, performed a similar tattoo on the adjoining window. "Faith, and it was daylight hours ago, and ye don't know what ye're missing."

The shutter slid back, and the pleasant, if rather drowsy face of Randolph Peyton peered forth, and behind his shoulder that of Donald Graeme.

"Daylight, did ye say?" remarked the latter. "It's my opinion it's been daylight all night, for it surely wasn't dark when we retired, and we've only been in bed a few minutes."

The scene was the outside cabin deck of the well-appointed steamer "Queen" of the Alaska Steamship Company, which was plowing her way through the quiet waters of the "Inside Passage," on her way to the land of the Yukon and the Klondike.

The hour was only four in the morning, but the sun was high, and the day in those high latitudes was well begun.

"No regrets, Don, you sleepyhead," said Gerald. "You've already had seven hours' sleep, and on this trip one ought not to go to bed at all."

By this time, Jack had succeeded in arousing his brother, Pepper Blake, and the latter's bunk mate, Dick Wilson, who gazed out a little resentfully, as they threw back the sash, but whose faces quickly brightened at the scene that met their eyes.

"Yes," said Jack, "there's mighty little darkness up here at this time of year, and I suppose Don thinks it's an awful waste of good daylight turning it on while we sleep."

"Ye'll see more than this 'wasted' when ye get further north, and I suppose Don will sit up all night to save it," replied Gerald.

This reference to be cautious and prudent, not to say economical, nature of the canny Scot, raised a laugh, and the four who had been routed out of their bunks, through the energy of Jack, who, brought up in a newspaper office and atmosphere, hated to let anything unusual get away from him, hastily dressed and joined their two chums on the deck.

"I couldn't miss a yard of this scenery," said Jack, "and we've a few things in that line, along our native Hudson, to brag about, too."

The steamer was treading her way through straits and channels among hundreds of islands that fenced these almost lake-like waters from the long swells of the North Pacific. Although it was the latter part of April, early in the year for these latitudes, the influence of the warm waters of the Japanese Gulf Stream could be seen in the bright green of the islands.

On the other side of the ship, the dark green forests that clothed the mountains of British Columbia came down to the very water's edge, and swept by in one majestic panorama.

"There's certainly lots of scenery to the mile," said Rand, drawing a long breath, as he gazed in admiration.

"My grandfather said that is what makes Scotland such a great country," remarked Don, catching at Rand's half-humorous comment, "standing the land up on end."

"Let's give it the Scout's salute," suggested Pepper, with enthusiasm as the laugh over Don's serious remark died away. "There ought to be a great echo in those hills."

"Hold on," cried Jack, catching Pepper's arm as he unshipped his bugle. "I had a talk with the purser last night, and I'm afraid we'll have to 'cut out' the bugle calls on this trip. He says they have an official bugler aboard, for the call to meals and for the salute at landings, and we would interfere with him and perhaps affect the comfort of other passengers who may not be so keen on the early morning hunt for scenery as we."

The Scout discipline and what might be called the Scout ritual, to which the boys had been subjecting themselves for several years, was immediately apparent in the murmurs of approval which greeted Jack's suggestion. To those who have followed the career of the Boy Scouts of Creston on the Hudson, in the preceding volumes of this series, it is scarcely necessary to introduce the young men with whom this narrative starts.

The formation of the Patrol of Boy Scouts, at the suggestion of Colonel Snow, a retired officer of the United States army; a mysterious robbery, and a gallant rescue from the waters of the Hudson, are told in the first volume, "Boy Scouts' Patrol." The second volume leads them into adventures and difficulties incident to an excursion on motor cycles that have come to each of them as a reward for their aid in the rescue referred to which are told under the title of "Boy Scouts' Motorcycles," in the course of which Jack is captured by moonshiners on whom the boys turn the tables. "Boy Scouts' Canoe Trip," brings the chums into conflict with Sound pirates, during a canoe trip along the Long Island shore, and give Pepper and Dick, who are lost in a fog, a chance to help a foghorn operator of the United States Lighthouse Service, out of a very serious state of affairs. "Boy Scouts in the Rockies," the fourth volume, tells of the perils attending a trip into the Canadian Northwest, in search of a lost mine in which they have been given each an interest by the owner, Mr. Royce; their rescue of the latter from enemies who are also hunting the same mine; of hunting among the Indians, and of the rediscovery of the lost mine which has been named Uncas, in honor of their patrol.

The fifth volume, under the caption, "Boy Scouts' Aircraft," relates how their interest in aviation is aroused by the evolutions of a military aviator viewed during a visit to an army post; of the building by themselves of a glider with which they win a contest of these elementary aircraft, the prize being complete airship motors of the highest efficiency. With these engines they equip two aeroplanes and meet with various adventures of a thrilling nature, including an aerial kidnapping and pursuit in aeroplanes, the winning of an aeroplane meet, and the discovery and deciphering of the Narwhal's Tusk, which starts them on their way to Alaska.

The preceding February, the boys had graduated from Highcrest Academy, and some weeks before that event Colonel Snow, who had been for several years on friendly terms with the boys; had been the means of inducing them to form the Scouts' Patrol, and had looked after their promotion to be first grade Scouts, had been in consultation with their parents over a mysterious matter of which they had as yet learned nothing.

One day in March, as the boys were gathered in the club room in Mr. Scott's house, discussing plans for a Scout encampment, of the Patrols of the nearby towns, Colonel Snow entered the

gate, and they crowded out on the porch to greet him.

"We were just planning to extend our Scout knowledge and experience by an actual encampment, this summer—sort of 'Spring manoeuvres' you know, like the regulars and National Guard," said Rand.

"Perhaps I can offer you something of actual field experience," said Colonel Snow. "That's what I'm here for, and if you have time I've a proposition to make ... rather a cold one, however."

"I-i-ce c-c-cream soda?" inquired Pepper, flippantly, amid reproving frowns from the other Scouts.

"Why, you can't even think of that without shivering in your speech," said Jack, with scorn.

"Don't mind him, Colonel Snow, his appetite is like the poor, it's always with us," apologized Rand.

The army officer smiled indulgently upon the somewhat abashed Pepper.

"Don't lose it, Pepper," said he. "That appetite may prove one of the best of assets in this proposition of mine. How would you all like a trip to Alaska?"

16

The patrol came to "attention," every member on his feet and for the moment speechless.

"What! the North Pole?" gasped Rand, whose former residence in the Sunny South inclined him to look upon all high latitudes with suspicion.

"Not exactly," replied Colonel Snow, with a laugh, in which all joined as a kind of relief to their feelings. "We shall need neither sleeping bags nor furs nor pemmican. Let me explain the situation. Like all retired army officers, I am subject to call, at times by the government, for services of various kinds, and I am now intrusted with a mission in the Controller Bay region of Alaska, in connection with certain coal deposits and reservations. In our trip to the Canadian Rockies, I secured personally, as an investment, certain timber lands in British Columbia at the headwaters of the Yukon watershed, and my purpose is to cut the timber on these lands, to be eventually floated down the rivers and used in the various mines and mining camps, now being developed in both the Yukon and Alaska territories.

"On my way to my mission, this Spring, I intend to take in my sawmill plant and set it up and get ready for next winter's cutting. I shall be obliged to employ about a dozen men to establish the plant, and my experience with you Scouts in the field, in the Northwest, indicates to me that you can be as useful to me as anyone I could pick up. It will also give you a chance to see for the first time a new and growing country, by which you are bound by all the ties of government and flag. I will say at once that I have talked with your parents and your experience with me in Canada has given them sufficient confidence to furnish their consent. The decision rests with you."

17

The magnitude of the suggestion stunned the boys for the time, but they soon regained their self-possession, and promised an early decision. So it came about that after discussing the matter with their parents they had another talk with the Colonel when final arrangements were made. The boys, who had already banked three dividends from the Uncas mine, now a well paying property, were to outfit themselves, Colonel Snow paying all other expenses to, in and from Alaska, and allowing them fair wages while actually engaged on the sawmill work. Their outfits were selected by Colonel Snow, who had to veto many highly colored and fanciful suggestions of snowshoes, tents, sleeping bags and heavy furs.

18

"I have an idea," said the Colonel, "that there will be many days when you boys will be satisfied with a thin suit of khaki and even yearn for linen. Even if we should reach the Arctic Circle in winter, you will remember that our latest Arctic and Antarctic explorers have about discarded furs for thick woolens. Above all things, don't forget the mosquito nettings."

The night before the Scouts were to leave Creston they were holding a final meeting at the club-rooms, when Pepper burst forth excitedly:

"N-n-now we c-c-an s-solve it."

"What, your appetite?" asked Jack.

"N-n-no, the ivory mystery."

"What's that; your head?" put in Rand.

"N-n-no," yelled Pepper, whose face now rivaled his locks in color and whose fists were doubled up. "I mean that ivory—that narwhal's horn. We're going to Alaska and we can find that cave."

"Faith, that's so. We might get all that ivory," put in Gerald, with interest.

"I think I heard somewhere, but I'll not be sure about it," suggested the cautious Don, "that there's more than five hundred and ninety thousand square miles in Alaska, and I ha'e me doots that we find it the verra first day."

19

Despite these gibes, their interest was aroused and the cave, whose mouth was shaped like the ace of clubs, figured not a little in the imaginations of the boys, when, followed by the good wishes of relatives, neighbors and friends, they entrained the next morning like true soldiers in their patrol uniforms, and from the rear platform of the train, sounded the Scout salute to their native town upon their bugles.

Four days later they joined Colonel Snow, who had preceded them, in Seattle, and, after two days of sightseeing in the Washington metropolis, boarded the "Queen," and at ten o'clock at

night, steamed out upon Puget's Sound, for their long trip of nearly a thousand miles on the water.

Among the cases of machinery and other freight, traveling in the vessel's hold under Colonel Snow's name, was a long box shaped like an old-fashioned piano case, which had nothing to do with Colonel Snow's enterprises. Despite the fact that it weighed more than half a ton, the boys had clubbed together to pay the rather exorbitant freight charges upon it. Superfluous as it appeared at one time to the Colonel, it was destined to play an important part in the Scouts' adventures in the land of gold and glaciers.

An hour of gazing on the scenic wonders that sped past on the right and left the morning after their departure from Seattle, aroused the boys' appetites, and they were beginning to long for the breakfast bugle call, when Colonel Snow came from his stateroom and bade them a hearty good morning. He had just redrawn their attention to the magnificent land and waterscape, with the remark that Major General Greeley, of Arctic fame, had made ten voyages to Alaska, and on each trip found some new wonder in the "Inside Passage" when there arose a chorus of yells, curses and vituperation from the deck below, and leaning over the railing, the boys saw a man with a pistol in his hand backing away from two who were striking at him with handspikes that they had grabbed from the side of the vessel.

At the same time a youth of about their own age dashed in behind the man with the pistol, and dived between his legs, tripping him up. He doubled up like a jackknife, fell back against the gangway gate, which had not been properly fastened, and shot through it into the tideway, here very swift, and disappeared. The quickly raised cry of "Man Overboard," reached the pilot house, the engine room gong boomed, the screw stopped and the "Queen" gradually lost headway.

CHAPTER II.

"SWIFTWATER JIM."

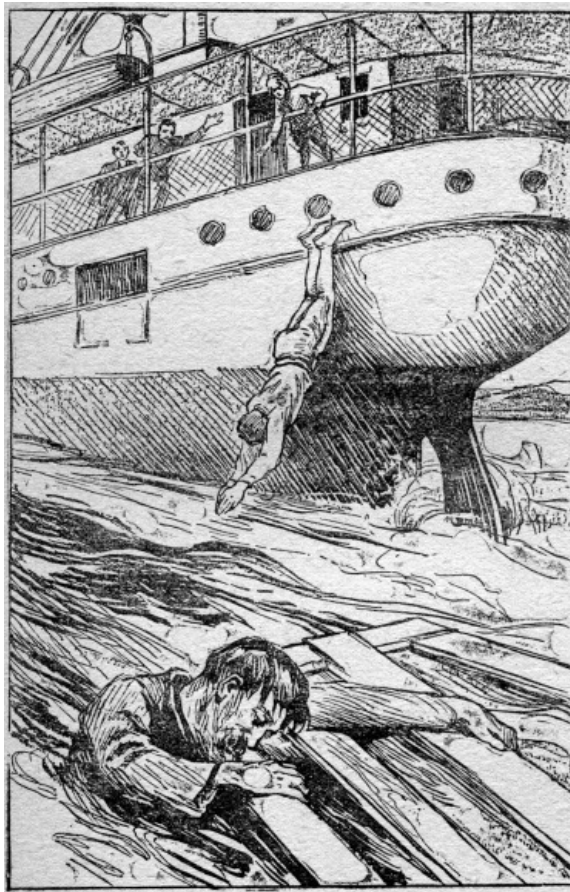
The Scouts had joined in the cry which notified the pilot house that a man had gone overboard, but before the "Queen" lost headway and began to back the man in the water had slipped some distance astern. Life preservers and life rings were quickly thrown after him, but no sooner had the derelict come to the surface than it was seen that he was dazed and almost helpless from the effects, probably, of some injury he had sustained as he went through the gangway. Luckily, the gangway gate, which he had pushed out had floated alongside of him on the tideway, and he had retained consciousness enough to grasp one side of it with a drowning man's grip, but was in danger of momentarily losing it. The boys with Colonel Snow at their head had rushed along the upper rail, where Rand began at once to strip off his coat and the soft canoe shoes he was wearing on shipboard, while Gerald followed suit. All the boys, as became trained Scouts, were good swimmers, but Rand pushed Gerald back, impetuously, saying:

"I'm the heavier, Gerald, let me go on this. It may be a fight," and at the same time mounted the rail. As he did so, Colonel Snow seized a long thin line that hung for just such emergencies, on a spike at the rail, threw the knotted loop over Rand's arm and shoulder, saying:

"These are cold waters, and you may need this. If it hampers you, cast it off, and take to the gangplank."

Rand leaped from the rail, with his utmost strength, striving to escape the suction of the now backward-revolving screw, and struck out toward the man whose head was sinking under the surface, although his hands still grasped the gangplank with a feeble hold. With a dozen stalwart strokes, Rand reached the almost unconscious man, threw the loop from his own shoulder over his head and drew it under his arms and placed both his hands firmly upon the plank. Then grasping the bolt staple of the timber, himself, he yelled:

"Pull in; don't back any further," and in a few minutes willing and stalwart hands dragged them toward the steamer.



RAND LEAPED FROM THE RAIL.

Already, a lifeboat had been dropped into the water and into this the half-drowned man was lifted, while Rand, himself already numbed by the icy water had to be assisted aboard. He was lifted to the deck amid the cheers of his chums, who rushed him to his stateroom for dry clothing.

25

"That was a great piece of work," said Captain Huxley, commander of the "Queen." "No professional life saver could have got on the job in quicker time. Those are fine boys of yours, Colonel Snow."

"That's part of their training as Scouts," replied the Colonel, "and it's meant to be practical. That's why I did not interfere with Peyton's attempt at a rescue. But what started this?"

"That's what I'm going to find out, good and quick," replied Captain Huxley. "As usual at this time of year, I've got a tough crowd in the steerage, and I imagine the whole thing started in a poker game that has been running on the engine room deck ever since we left Seattle. Will you go along?"

Accompanied by Colonel Snow and the boys who joined them at that moment, Rand none the worse for his first dip in Pacific waters, Captain Huxley strode down to the engine room, where first aid had been administered to the half-drowned man, who had come to his senses.

26

"Well, well; if it isn't 'Swiftwater Jim,'" exclaimed the Captain. "Didn't know we had you aboard."

"Wa'al, ye come mighty near losin' me," the patient answered, and then continued. "I come on board just as ye were castin' off last night."

"How d'ye come to get into the water? That hasn't been a very popular element with you in the past; eh, Jim," said the Captain with a grin. "Colonel Snow, let me introduce Swiftwater Jim, an ancient Alaskan that I believe we took over with the territory under the Seward treaty with Russia in 1867, and the oldest 'Sourdough' in any one of the six districts. He's made at least a dozen trips with me. He usually owns the boat going 'out,' but is satisfied with the steerage going 'in'."

Colonel Snow grasped the miner's hand, saying:

"Swiftwater Jim is no stranger to anyone who knows the history of the Alaskan country. Let me introduce some young fellows who are making their first trip."

27

The miner, whose drying garb was made up of a mixture of the costume of the frontier pioneer and garments of the latest cut, shook hands with the boys as he said:

"I'll pay ye captain, for puttin' me back in the mammoth class, but what I'm lookin' for is the feller that went into the dew after me. That certainly was a few damp moments. I was rattled, but I knew somebody grabbed me just before the light went out."

"Here's the chap," said Captain Huxley, as he shoved the reluctant Rand to the front.

The miner grasped Rand's hand and gazed into his face with a solemn stare.

"Wa'al, wa'al, such a young feller, too. How'd ye do it?" he inquired.

"It's part of our training as Scouts," replied Rand, modestly.

"Scouts, eh?" he cried. "Embreeo soldiers, eh? I heard of them this last trip out to the States. Wa'al, Mr. Peyton, I ain't a goin' to make no fervent speech of gratitude, for ye know how I feel, and I ain't trimmed up to make a more substantial showin' just now, but if you boys is a goin' 'in' as we say, ye'll hear from Swiftwater Jim before ye come out."

28

"Tell us how it happened, Jim," said Captain Huxley.

"Now, now, Captain, ye know me and ye know I can take care of me own troubles," replied Jim.

"Look here, Jim," said Captain Huxley, sternly. "You know I'm boss here, so long as you're afloat, and anything of this kind demands investigation. Besides, I don't propose to have a traveling feud on my manifest, all the way to Skagway. Out with it."

"Wa'al, Captain," said Swiftwater, "when I come aboard last night I found among the ruck in the steerage that gambler, Dublin, and a limpy pal of his. We got to playing poker, and the two of them cleaned me out, and because I found them using marked cards they came after me with them spikes. A young feller that was with them jumped on my back, and I went overboard. I'll tend to 'em."

"No, you won't, Jim," remarked Captain Huxley. "From this to Skagway you'll bunk on my deck and keep away from here."

Turning to a couple of the crew, the commander of the "Queen" said: "Bring that Dublin crowd here." The men hurried away, and in a few minutes presented to the astonished eyes of the Scouts their old acquaintances and quasi-enemies, Dublin, Limpy Rae, and Monkey Rae. The latter favored the boys with a look of hatred and a muttered imprecation.

29

"We ain't done nothin'"—began Dublin.

"That'll do, Dublin," replied Captain Huxley. "You know me of old, and I want to say I should have refused you passage if I had known you were going back to the Klondike. If you start another card game on this boat or get into any other trouble, I'll put you in irons, and hand you over to the authorities when we reach port. I'm not sure that there are not several United States marshals in Alaska, yearning for a sight of you, now."

Dublin turned white, attempted to speak, and then with his companions slunk back into the steerage.

"Why, we saw Monkey Rae trip up this man," said Jack pointing to Swiftwater, "but we didn't know it was Monkey then. It was a cowardly attack."

"Well," said Captain Huxley, "we'll let the matter drop now, unless Swiftwater complains."

30

"Not me," said the miner, turning away. "I'll see to this myself, later."

"Not here, though," said Captain Huxley, sternly.

"You can trust me, Captain," replied Swiftwater, as he waved his hand to the boys and Colonel Snow, and walked away.

"And now," said the Captain of the "Queen," "I'm afraid we've missed the first bugle blast for breakfast, but I should be glad to have you, Colonel Snow and your young men join my table at meals for the voyage."

This signal honor was highly appreciated by the boys, for at meals they were introduced to several territorial officials, capitalists and army officers, who, with the women of their families, were going in with the advent of Spring in Alaska. The tale of Rand's feat had preceded them, and the poor fellow spent a rather uncomfortable and embarrassing half hour of compliments and congratulations from men whose experience had taught them to appreciate a gallant deed.

Colonel Snow finally came to Rand's rescue by turning the talk to the rescued man.

31

"A great character, Swiftwater Jim, Captain Huxley?"

"Yes," replied the commander of the "Queen," "and Alaska history is full of his vagaries. He's probably the best equipped prospector and all-round miner in the territory, but it does him no good. He has owned twenty mines, and has made a dozen fortunes and spent them all. Every time he makes a 'stake' as he calls it, he indulges in extravagances that make one doubt his sanity. He went out last fall with fifty thousand dollars in dust, and I dare say will be working for day wages when he gets back in.

"He visited New York on this trip, and caused something of a sensation even there while his money held out. His diversions are innocent, turning largely to investments in food and drink, a tendency born, I suppose, of long privations in the Arctic. His most humorous exploit on this trip was entering the most fashionable restaurant in the metropolis, and ordering fifty dollars worth of ham and eggs, after vainly attempting to make out the French of the bill of fare."

Colonel Snow and the boys laughed, and the former said:

32

"I presume little of his money is really spent on himself."

"No," said the Captain. "He is the soul of generosity and scatters it right and left. Of course, a good deal of it goes to the leeches who cluster around such characters in the cities. Still, although he has the average pioneer's contempt for Indians and Eskimos he has given liberally to the missions which are civilizing them. He may make another fortune, but I believe he will die

poor.”

“D-d-did he eat all that order of ham and eggs?” asked Pepper with interest.

“Well, I hardly think so,” smiled the Captain. “I doubt if the order was really served. Head waiters of these big restaurants have very diplomatic ways.”

“Captain Huxley, what is a ‘Sourdough’? I heard you apply the word to Swiftwater Jim,” said Jack, on the alert for information.

“The aristocracy of the Alaskan mining camp,” replied the officer. “The man who has been at least a year in the territory, and is ‘wise’ as you boys say, to its methods and manners, and inured to its hardships and its climate. For a time you’ll belong to the ‘Chee-chak-O’ class.”

“What is that?” asked Rand.

“The Indian name for what the men on the Canadian ranches called ‘tenderfeet,’” replied Colonel Snow.

At this moment the vessel experienced a slight shock, and the dining saloon seemed to rise on a long and gentle undulation, and as gently to sink to an appreciable depth. The motion continued regularly for a few minutes, and Captain Huxley glanced keenly at the guests at his table, with a barely perceptible smile on his face.

A puzzled and rather serious expression came over the faces of several of those at breakfast. Suddenly, Dick exclaimed:

“We’re losing a good deal of this scenery,” and passed out on the deck, to be followed almost immediately by Pepper and Don. The Boy Scouts had met with a new sensation.

33

CHAPTER III.

INTO ROUGH WATERS.

34

The Boy Scouts of Creston, although expert in nearly all water sports, and familiar with the gently flowing Hudson, and the quiet inland tides of bay and Sound, had had no experience as yet of ocean travel. The Alaska trip was the first test of their sailor-like qualities. In the “Inside passage” are two stretches of twenty and forty miles, where the full sweep of the Pacific rollers is felt, and it was while crossing one of these stretches that the “Queen” took on those erratic motions that sent Dick Pepper and Don to the open air so quickly and caused not a few of their fellow travelers considerable discomfort.

Strange as it may seem, none of the other boys were affected by the rough waters, and they quickly followed their chums to the deck to offer aid and comfort. It has always been one of the peculiarities of seasickness that, however important and serious it may seem to the victim, it is prone to arouse ridicule and humorous suggestions in those who are not subject to its attacks, and while Rand, Jack and Gerald did what they could for their unfortunate companions, they could not resist the temptation of an occasional sly reference to their chums’ poor qualities as sailors, that under any other circumstances would have driven the combative Pepper frantic.

“Wa’ yo tellin’ me, hoeny, tha’ wa’ some great scenery, ovah da’?” suggested Rand, falling into a broad Southern dialect that he used at times.

Poor Dick, whose interest centered in the dark blue of the water beneath him, attempted a glare of indignation with poor results, while Don made no attempt to express the briefest kind of an “openion.”

“Faith, and this the celebrated *mal de mer*, is it?” said Gerald, gazing with mock curious interest at his wilted chums.

“That’s brutal, Gerald,” exclaimed Jack, “seasickness is bad enough, without any of your Celtic High School French.”

“Begorra, it’s about all of it I remember, and maybe I’ll never get a chance to use it again.”

“I wish it was catching, like the measles or mumps,” gulped Pepper in a fury, “and I’d give it to you all.”

“What, French?” asked his brother.

“Naw, seasickness,” yelled Pepper, and bolted for his stateroom to be soon followed by his two companions in misfortune. A couple of hours in their bunks with some little attention from their now rather repentant critics, and the steamer having passed again into still water the patients were soon restored to normal health, with, if possible, greatly increased appetities.

Two days later, Jack, who was ever on the alert for something new and had made friends with several of the officers, thus getting the run of the ship, was exploring the lower decks, and walked through the quarters of the third class passengers. These were largely made up of laboring men going “in” for the summer work. A few miners who had spent all their money in

35

36

the Pacific coast cities, and were going back to try their luck again, and a few of the class whom the police of those and other cities had simply told to "move on."

The steerage quarters were rather dark, and hearing voices Jack stepped aside into a narrow passageway between the bunks to let a couple of men pass. The two turned into the same passageway which concealed Jack, and the latter recognizing the voice of Dublin sank down into one of the further berths as the others sat down on a couple of bunks near the entrance.

"I tell ye it's a better game than the other," said Dublin, "and we're goin' in for anything we can make."

"I'm not strong for any new game that I don't understand," whined the voice of Rae, "and we're in bad on this boat, as it stands. We'll find games enough of our own when we git to Skagway."

"Don't lose yer nerve," said Dublin, "with a good chance to make a stake in sight. These folks is takin' in a lot of fine machinery, and that Yukon country is a long ways from where that machinery is made, and every nut and bolt in it will be worth its weight in coin by the time they've got it in there. All we got to do is to cop off a piston and a valve or two and this army man will be willin' to pay several hundred dollars to get 'em back rather than wait for months to get 'em in from the outside."

"Well," replied Rae, "ye know that stealin' up in this country is bigger crime than murder, and they don't fool with the courts much."

"Aw, this ain't stealin'," sneered Dublin, "it's only kidnappin' and holdin' for ransom. I know just whereabouts in the hold this stuff was stored at Seattle, and that kid, Monkey, of yours, can get at it in ten minutes if he has the nerve. The stuff is not a hundred feet from us, and I can show him tonight how to do it."

Rae, who was more or less of a coward, made further protest, but finally yielded, and the pair slipped out of the passageway and walked away still discussing the proposed scheme. Jack, glad to be released from the rather odorous confinement of the bunk into which he had crowded himself, left the third-class quarters and made for the upper deck.

His newspaper training, of which he had received a considerable amount in the intervals of his school days in the office of his father's paper in Creston, included an acute sense of analysis, and he at once arrived at the opinion that the conspiracy he had heard referred to the freight which Colonel Snow was taking North, and his first impulse was to lay the matter before him for such action as he might see fit to take.

Then a foolish ambition to handle the thing alone, born possibly of that newspaper desire to bring off a "scoop" as an exclusive publication is called, coupled with the usual boyish longing to become a hero, incited him to circumvent the plot singlehanded and alone, prevented him from speaking to either the leader of the party or his chums. In addition, his journalistic training had instilled deeply one of the first rules of the profession, accuracy, and to tell the truth he was rather ashamed to go to Colonel Snow with so little evidence to back up his story, and so he determined to "keep tabs," as he called it, on Monkey Rae, and knowing he could handle that young man physically to capture him redhanded and take him in dramatic fashion before the Captain.

Jack had no doubt that Dublin would carry out any scheme he had in mind at the first opportunity, and that the attempt to get into the hold would be made at a hatchway on the same deck with the steerage. The hold at this part of the ship being filled with machinery and other heavy freight, the hatch cover was not battened down and most of the time was left partially off in order to give a circulation of air through that part of the hold under the steerage.

About ten o'clock that night, Jack slipped away from his companions, and descended to the engine room deck, where he took up his place behind some packing cases, and awaited developments. Nearly all the steerage passengers were in their quarters, for the night was keen and there was little enjoyment in the open air.

An hour passed and Jack was becoming weary of his vigil, especially in view of the uncertainty of the coming of his quarry. Then, from the passageway leading to the steerage a slim figure emerged and by the dim light of the lamp which illuminated this part of the deck, Jack was just able to recognize Monkey, who carried in one hand a hatchet, and something like a policeman's club in the other. Monkey glanced rapidly around the deck, looking for the watchman who at times visited every portion of the ship, but the coast was clear.

Crossing the deck the boy slipped easily between the partly raised hatch cover and the combing, and down the stationary iron ladder into the dark hold. As he did so a ray of light appeared in the hitherto dark hold. Glancing around to be sure that neither Dublin nor Rae were standing sentinel for the young marauder, Jack slipped noiselessly over the deck, and followed Monkey down the ladder.

A glance showed him that what Monkey carried in his right hand was a portable electric light and with this he was carefully searching for the marks upon some packing cases.

Jack tiptoed quietly toward him, intending to take him unawares, failing in his eagerness to make the capture to allow Monkey to make an attack upon the case with his hatchet sufficiently to "clinch" his evidence.

Just as Jack put out his hand to grasp the arm that held the hatchet his foot struck an unseen coil of rope, and he plunged head foremost into Monkey. The latter pitched forward three or four steps and Jack landed on his hands and knees, an accident that probably saved him serious

injury, for at the moment the terror-stricken Monkey turned and aimed a furious blow at whatever had struck him.

At the same time he dropped the electric light, which promptly went out as the spring was released, and the hold was in darkness. Jack dared not move for fear of the hatchet, and all he could hear was the loud breathing of the terrified Monkey, who carefully began to grope for the lost lamp. The search was vain, and Jack was slowly backing away from the vicinity toward the ladder, intending to bar Monkey's egress when he heard a movement that seemed to indicate that Monkey was climbing up the piled-up freight. Then there were two loud blows with the hatchet on the deck above them which formed the floor of the steerage quarters.

42

Scarcely a minute passed before a man with another electric light swarmed down the ladder, and Jack was in the hands of the powerful Dublin. At the same moment, Monkey dropped his hatchet and dashed past them to the ladder, where he hung like his simian namesake, calling shrilly for the night watchman. Jack made an effort to twist himself loose from the hands of Dublin, but in vain.

"What are ye doin' down here, ye thief? Tryin' to get at the cargo? Call the quartermaster there, Monkey."

Realizing the trap into which he had fallen, Jack made no further effort to release himself until he reached the deck above, when he jerked away from Dublin and faced the quartermaster and the watchman. There they were joined by Rae and some of the other steerage passengers.

"Well, well; if it ain't one o' them boy Scouts; them amateur soldiers. Where d'ye find him, Monkey?"

"I seen him hanging round this deck and when he slipped down in the hold with a hatchet and a 'lectric light. I followed him. He jumped onto me and I run back to the ladder and yelled for Dublin, and he come and got him."

43

"How about this, young feller?" asked the quartermaster. "What were you doin' down that hold this time o' night. Ain't ye one of Colonel Snow's party?"

"I am," said Jack, "and this man's story is a straightout falsehood. It was I who followed this boy down into the hold on information that I got"—

A burst of laughter from both Rae and Dublin interrupted Jack's story, and both men swore vehemently that Monkey had been in his berth up to a few minutes before he had called for Dublin. Jack, recognizing his folly in not having notified Colonel Snow and the Captain of the conspiracy, and also the way in which the tables had been turned upon him in his attempt to "go it alone," said:

"I will explain this thing to the Captain; I think he will understand it."

"I guess you'd better," said the puzzled quartermaster; "but we can't wake him up tonight. I'll see ye up to yer stateroom and you can explain in the morning. And you," he said, sharply, turning to Dublin and Monkey, "you be on hand with your story. Meantime," to the watchman, "put on that hatch cover and lock it."

44

As early the next morning as possible, Jack sought an interview with Col. Snow and told him the whole story. The latter was greatly interested, but said plainly that Jack should not have undertaken to handle the matter by himself.

The Captain was not so easily pacified. He heard both stories and grinned quietly as both Rae and Dublin tried to make a hero out of Monkey.

"I've told you fellows you're too much in evidence on this boat and I don't want to hear anything more from you until we get to Skagway." Col. Snow's intercession arranged matters for Jack but he did not get off any too easily.

"I haven't any doubt but that your story has a good foundation, but it would hardly go as evidence in a court of law, and even if the Colonel here thought it worth while, I don't suppose he cares to be bothered with a prosecution in courts that are three years behind with their cases. I shall take occasion to draw the attention of the authorities to this crowd, when we reach Skagway, however."

45

"I should like to say, however, that in a case like this, your first duty was to have informed me, and let me police my own boat. I am the superior officer here, as you know. I understand you belong to that excellent organization, the Boy Scouts, and if I am not mistaken, there is one little line in the ritual devoted to discipline. Good morning." And despite the rebuke which brought the flush to Jack's face, the captain smiled, and shook hands pleasantly.

The story could not be kept from the chums, who were rather inclined to resent Jack's failure to let them take a hand in the capture of Monkey Rae. They rallied Jack not a little on his grand effort at heroism and Rand even dug up an old schoolbook quotation about an engineer who had been hoist with his own petard. The boys took their disappointment out in various good natured gibes, and mock congratulations to "the Sherlock Holmes of the good steamer Queen" were a daily occurrence until the arrival at Ketchikan and new scenes drove the incident from the boys' memories. It was to be recalled in much more serious form a little later.

CHAPTER IV.

ON ALASKAN SOIL.

The acquaintance between the Boy Scouts and Swiftwater Jim, which had begun with Rand's rescue of the old Klondiker, ripened before many days of the voyage had elapsed into something like warm friendship and the miner became a wellspring of joy to the young men in the wealth of adventure narrative that fell from his lips and the quiet humor of his views of life. His removal by Captain Huxley, to the saloon deck on which they were berthed, gave them constant opportunity for meeting him, and as the novelty of the scenery and surroundings gradually wore off, they turned more and more to his companionship and plied him incessantly with cross-examination as to the peculiarities of the new land which they were about to enter.

At one time in command of a whaler in Bering Sea waters, his ship had been one of six crushed in the ice of the Arctic sea, the crews of which had been forced to winter at Point Barrow, the most northerly point of the United States, where the government had established a whaling relief station. 47

The enormous burden thrown upon this relief station by the influx of so great a number of dependents coming from the whalers, who had no means of getting away, threatened starvation for all and only by the greatest good fortune did word reach the government at Washington, which at once took steps for their relief. Lieut. Jarvis of the Revenue Marine Service, who was in the east at the time on furlough, from his ship, a revenue cutter engaged in patrolling Bering Sea to protect the seal fisheries, volunteered to make the effort to relieve the starving men, although he was leaving the bedside of a sick wife whom he might never see again. Bering Sea and the Arctic are frozen over six months at a time, and the relief expedition must be made over the frozen tundra and uninhabited snow waste, eighteen hundred miles in extent, from the Seward Peninsula to the "top of the continent," as Swiftwater Jim termed it.

The problem as to how to transport the food for these men over this great expanse of country, barren of trails and almost impassible in places, was solved by Lieutenant Jarvis and his aides. By assembling from the various reindeer stations which the government had established in the Far North, a large herd of reindeer which they drove the entire distance to Point Barrow, they arrived just in time to relieve the hundreds of men who were on the verge of starvation. 48

"I tell ye," said Swiftwater Jim, in telling the story to the boys, "I have never seen anything on earth since that looked so good as them deer. There we was, a dirty, unsightly mob so near to death that we had lost about all resemblance to humanity, and not a single human feelin' left for each other. It was every man for himself and mighty little that he could do, then.

"That feller Jarvis was the man for the job. That relief expedition was received very much as I hear explorers are met by the savagest tribes of Africa, and if it hadn't been for the nerve of those three officers at the head of it, they would have lost their lives and the provision they had brought would not have lasted three weeks. But those fellows took command at once; headed off a mutiny, distributed the provisions daily and for months ran that gang, made up of the off-scourings of the seas, by reg'lar army discipline. 49

"For the months before the ice broke up, and vessels could come after us, he governed with a mighty stiff hand, and every man who was fed by government relief, and they wan't nothin' else, was compelled to live up to regulations of cleanliness and daily exercise, which is the only thing that will save a man's health in that deadly Arctic climate where the bill o' fare is only about one line long, and a healthy body is the only thing that will save a man's mind from that deadly depression that ends in insanity. When the ships come finally, that mob of whaler men was cleaner and healthier than they ever were in their lives before and they had a mighty lot of love and respect for Jarvis and the officers with him.

"It was about the biggest sacrifice a man ever made, that voluntary trip of Jarvis, and I believe that Congress, after thinkin' a long time about it finally acknowledged it by votin' him some kind of a medal. As for me I hain't been able to look a poor little reindeer in the face since."

With his vessel a splintered derelict in the ice of the Arctic sea, Swiftwater had taken to mining and had covered a good part of Alaska in his wanderings. 50

Col. Snow had noticed with considerable interest the growing intimacy between his young charges and the miner and had taken occasion himself to have several talks with the ancient "sourdough" as Swiftwater insisted on calling himself. The Colonel had found among the army officers returning to their posts in the North several old friends of his army days and had taken the opportunity to make some inquiries as to the miner with evidently satisfactory results. These army officers Col. Snow took occasion to introduce to the Boy Scouts and the element of courtesy that is a strong feature of the West Pointers' character showed itself in the consideration given the boys by these grizzled men, several of whom had won their spurs during Indian outbreaks in the West and later learned the stern demands of war in Cuba and the Philippines.

Their journey was enlivened by many a good story of camp and field and incidentally the officers evinced a strong curiosity in the organization of the Boy Scouts about which they asked many questions.

The day the "Queen" arrived at Ketchikan, the first port in Alaska, Col. Snow, after starting the boys on a sightseeing trip through the town, put in some time in company with Swiftwater Jim in the office of the United States Commissioner, who is practically a local judge. When all had returned to the steamer that night, Col. Snow called the boys together in the big saloon of the vessel for a talk.

"You know," said the army officer, "that after I have seen you and the machinery disembarked in Skagway, I must leave you to carry out my mission to Controllers Bay and Valdez, and that I shall not be able to join you in the Yukon Country until later in the summer. It has been my purpose, of course, to place you in charge of a competent manager who will really command the expedition the rest of the way until the machinery is installed on the timber land that I intend to exploit. Of course you will be furnished with sufficient expert Indian labor to assist in navigating the streams over which this freight must be transported, for there are no roads, and water at this season of the year is the only transportation available. What do you think of Swiftwater Jim for commander-in-chief, guide, philosopher and friend to this expedition?"

"B-b-bully," exclaimed Pepper, adopting the vernacular of an ex-President.

"The very man for the place if I understand what we are to do," commented Rand.

"Faith, now we will see Alaska; and what we don't see, Swiftwater is the man to tell us about," cried the enthusiastic Gerald.

"Well, if we can get him," said the cautious Don, "there's nobody we'd like so well."

"I might as well tell you that it's all arranged," said the Colonel. "He was the best man I could find for the work I want done, and I took the first opportunity to arrange with him; but at the same time I am glad that you are all so well satisfied.

"I must have you understand that Swiftwater will be the leader of the party and in all things you will be under his direction. I do not think it will be necessary for me to tell you that the discipline will be perhaps a little more strict than it has been in the ranks of the patrol at home, and while it will not be on an unrestricted army basis, there will be some resemblance and I shall trust to your experience as Scouts to induce in you cheerful acquiescence."

"It will be something like a campaign then," suggested Dick.

"It will be a good deal like a campaign," smilingly replied the Colonel, "and while there will be much that is enjoyable and novel, there won't be much peaches and cream about it. Plunging into a wilderness as you must, you leave behind all the comforts and most of the sanitary safeguards of civilization, and it is absolutely necessary for the preservation of your health that you adopt certain rules of diet and comfort."

"Do we have to diet?" inquired Pepper, doubtfully, whose mind reverted to certain milk and porridge days, imposed after an orgy of green fruit and its consequent painful disturbances.

"I didn't use the word in the sense that you mean, Pepper," said Col. Snow. "There will be plenty to eat and I hope well prepared, but you must govern yourself as to how you deal with it. Food in most parts of Alaska is a costly proposition, but I guess we shall have enough to go round unless the wild life increases your already healthy appetites."

"I hae ma doots," said Don, falling into his Gaelic-accented English, as he often did when he seemed to be wrestling with a problem, "if yon appetite of Pepper's can increase much wi'out straining the capacity."

"Look after your own appetite," said Pepper, growing red, "I read once in a book that four thousand years of oatmeal porridge, three times a day, had wiped out every appetite and spoiled every stomach in Scotland."

"There, there," admonished Jack, "that'll be about all of that. You fellows are about even now. The smallest sort of an appetite may prove to be an inconvenience before we get out of Alaska."

"I want to say, Colonel," said Rand, rising and facing the army officer at "attention," "that I think I speak for the whole patrol when I promise in their names the most earnest fidelity and strict attention to rules and regulations until our mission up here is finished."

"Yes, yes," echoed the Scouts, springing to their feet and saluting the Colonel, who also rose and returned it with a smile of acknowledgment. At the same moment Swiftwater Jim entered the saloon.

"Young men, your commander," said Colonel Snow, waving a hand toward the miner. With one accord the patrol turned toward the grizzled Alaskan and saluted. Jim turned red with pleasure and waved a knotted hand in recognition.

"Glad to see ye, boys, but salutin' won't be necessary ev'ry time we meet. I used ter be satisfied on shipboard if a man jumped about a foot high every time I spoke real serious, but I guess we can get through this job without much loud bossin'. I simply want ter sejest that I ain't very good at argying, so I hope we shan't have much of that."

One by one, the boys shook hands with the miner in token of fealty, and from that time until the steamer reached Skagway spent several hours a day with him in what he called his "first class in gettin' on the job." The most of this work included thorough instruction in the geography of Southeastern Alaska and Southern Yukon territory, the Colonel's land being located in the Canadian dominions. Especially was their attention drawn to numerous waterways as shown on the maps, which must form the highways for all transportation during the summer time, and knowledge of whose location, size and tributaries formed a man's best safeguard in this almost

pathless wilderness.

A visit was paid to the hold, this time with the captain's permission, to enable Swiftwater to estimate the amount of freight that was to be handled and the best way of distributing it among the transports. The boys went with him to learn something of their new duties in this connection.

"I move," said Rand, "that that earnest young sleuth, Mr. Jack Blake, be appointed guide to this expedition to the dark and creepy hold. He knows where everything is, for he has fallen over it all, I hear."

"He might meet Monkey Rae," said Dick with a mock shudder, "then think of the carnage."

Dublin and the Raes, fearing Captain Huxley's possible report to the authorities at Skagway, had "jumped the ship" as the commander of the "Queen" expressed it at Ketchikan, the first port of call in Alaska, and Dick's fears were therefore groundless, but Jack, who had learned the lesson of taking a joke goodnatureedly grinned feebly, and readily dived into the hatchway and down the ladder. The electric lights had been turned on, and the hitherto Egyptian darkness of the hold had vanished. They readily found their consignment, and the miner went over it carefully.

"What ye got here?" he asked, kicking the heavy case before referred to, which the boys had brought along on their own initiative. "Pianny? Don't believe we need any pianny, up Yukon way. There's plenty piannys in Alaska, now, but I remember the first one that was brought in. It's up in Dawson yet. It was brought in on the first rush in '98. Cost four hundred dollars in the States and two thousand dollars to haul up from Skagway. The last time I heard it, it was being mauled by a feenomion, who had a patent pianny-playin' wooden arm on one side, and it sounded like a day's work in a boiler factory at one end and a bad smash in a glass pantry at the other. I heard some o' them educated Cheechakos talkin' about art, but I didn't care for it much."

"It isn't a piano," said Gerald as the laugh subsided. "It's a little enterprise of our own, and is to be put in storage in Skagway until we're through with our work."

"Wa'al," replied the guide, as he tested its weight, "we don't have to handle it then, and that's something of a load off my mind."

The next day when the boy Scouts awoke they found the vessel anchored in the picturesque harbor of Skagway, the end of the "Inside Passage."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW MODE OF TRAVEL.

Their stay in Skagway was brief. It was the point of parting between Colonel Snow and his young charges, as it was necessary for him to hasten a way westward to another part of Alaska on his mission, which would occupy some weeks. The boys parted with him reluctantly and with some little feeling of homesickness, but he promised to join them as early as possible and assured them that he had placed them in safe hands, with ample means for their return to Skagway should sickness or accident befall them.

Except for the brief glimpses of native and local Alaskan life which they had obtained during the stoppages of the steamer at Metlakatla, in the Annette Islands, a reservation set apart by Congress for the now civilized Tsimpsean Indians, a tribe which, with their devoted missionary head, William Duncan, immigrated from British Columbia to secure, it is said, greater religious liberty, and at Ketchikan, a thriving town, the boys here gained their first real impressions of Alaskan conditions. They found Skagway a town of about fifteen hundred people, set in a great natural amphitheatre surrounded by mountains capped with perpetual snow. It is connected with the outside world by a cable to Seattle, and by other parts of Alaska by telegraph, and has electric lights and a telephone system. A fine school building and several churches that reminded the young Scouts of many Hudson river towns, and wiped out the last remaining evidences of homesickness, were among the attractions, and the sight of a real railroad equipped with locomotives, cars, shops and station were among the marvels found where they had expected to find a wilderness.

It was from this town that thousands of prospectors and adventurers started in 1897 and 1898 in the rush to the Klondike, and Swiftwater told them many stories of the terrible winter trip over the White Pass in those years in which hundreds of men lost their lives and thousands of horses were killed.

With Colonel Snow they made one or two trips into the surrounding country, visiting the nearby Chilkat and Chilkoot villages, during two days that Swiftwater had gone over to White Horse in Yukon territory, at the other end of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, a distance of 112 miles, to make arrangements for boats and Indian guides and boatmen to carry their machinery into

the wilderness. The boys were greatly interested in this first near view of Alaskan Indian life in the two villages which they visited, and in comparing the natives with the Indians with whom they had been associated in their trip to the Canadian Rockies. The Alaskan Indians were shorter in build, more squatty in figure and broader faced than the Crees and the other Southern red men. Jack, who had been poking about into the various corners of the first village, which were composed of huts and sod houses, came back with a look very like disgust in his face.

"I say, Don," he exclaimed, "for goodness sake don't do anything to get adopted into this tribe," referring to an episode of their journey in search of the lost mine, when Don had for obvious bravery been made a fullfledged Indian.

"Sure, I'll na do anything to deserve it; it would be naething to be proud of. They do not look much like our friends in Canada."

"There are two points in which I find they are identical," said Jack.

"What are those?" asked Rand, "color and clothes?"

"No," replied Jack, "dirt and dogs. The dirt must have been here when the Indian came onto this continent, but I've wondered whether the Indian found the dog when he came here or the dog found the Indian. They seem to have been inseparable ever since."

"D-d-do you s'pose they have dog days up here so near the pole?" asked Pepper.

"Begorra, it looks to me as if all days might be dog days around here," suggested Gerald, who was surrounded at that moment by at least a dozen of the hundred animals in the village.

"You would be surprised to know," said Colonel Snow, "that the dog is really the most important animal, except perhaps the reindeer in our Northern possessions. Little of this country would have been explored or settled except for his good services. There was a time when as much as two thousand dollars has been paid for a good dog up here."

The Indians were persistent peddlers, offering the handsome baskets, hats and blankets which they are peculiarly skilful in making, and the boys would have loaded themselves down with souvenirs had not Colonel Snow suggested that they would have plenty of time to supply themselves before they left for the south again.

Two days later, Swiftwater Jim, having returned from White Horse, and the freight having been taken from the steamer's hold, it was placed on cars of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad; the "piano case" as it had come to be called having been put in storage until their return, and early in the morning of a June day the boys bade farewell to Colonel Snow and boarded the train for White Horse.

The journey required nearly six hours, but the first half was a stiff climb to the top of the pass and through such magnificent scenery of mountain and gorge that the boys scarcely noticed the passage of time, beguiled, as it was, with thrilling tales by Swiftwater Jim, with the story of the fight of the Argonauts against the winter horrors of this same trail in the early days of the great gold rush.

They arrived at White Horse about four o'clock in the afternoon, and were met by six halfbreed Indians headed by a well-known guide of that region known as Skookum Joe, who spoke good English and greeted Swiftwater as an old friend. He had been charged with securing the crews for the two boats that Swiftwater Jim was to use in the trip, and he introduced the men whom Jim greeted in the "pigeon" Siwash of that section, used as a means of communication with the natives who do not speak English.

"I send up river for um," said Skookum Joe, "Dey know dat country. Good work when no rum; rum, no work," referring to the prevalence of the liquor habit among the Indians since they have come into contact with the whites.

"This here is going to be a traveling lodge of the Cadets of Temperance, especially so far as natives is concerned," said Swiftwater Jim, "and consequently everybody will work on this voyage."

As the cases of machinery were removed from the cars they were opened and the assembled parts as far as possible taken to pieces. These the Indians wrapped in heavy canvas, making convenient bundles or "packs" for handling, and obviating the necessity of transporting the heavy material of the cases. Bundled together the entire freight was transported by teams to the water front, where were tied up two commodious shallow flat-bottomed boats into which it was loaded. To this was added provisions sufficient for two months, which Swiftwater had contracted for on his previous visit to the town, and sundry tents, tools and blankets.

Much of the clothing with which the boys had provided themselves had been left at Skagway as it was not needed for the present season. As it was necessary to pay duties on the machinery which had been brought from the United States into the Canadian territory, and to give bond for the two arms and personal equipment which was to be taken into the woods, but eventually returned to American territory, Swiftwater visited the Custom House, and while there introduced the Scouts to the Commissioner of Customs, who spent part of the remainder of the afternoon in showing the boys the town and the natural beauties surrounding it.

Among other places they visited the barracks, where they were introduced to the small squad of Northwestern Mounted Police, the splendid organization maintained by the Canadian Government for the preservation of order in its western and northwestern possessions. Its

members are recruited from among ex-soldiers of the British army, with a reputation for hardihood and intrepidity second to none.

The station squad, composed of four members, received the boys cordially, and showed considerable interest in the organization of the Boy Scouts in the United States. Major McClintock, head of the station, apologized for the necessity of registering the young men at the barracks as police regulations required.

"This is a vast and wild territory, and we police, who are responsible for law and order here are few and far between. It is necessary for the safety of all that we know as far as possible just who the people are who come into Yukon territory. Besides, this country is a refuge for hundreds of men who find life unpleasant in more civilized sections, and we must keep them under supervision. By the way, I have just received notification from the United States marshal at Ketchikan that three queer characters dropped off the steamer from Seattle there and were heading for the Klondike, and would probably pass through here, and he asks us to keep an eye on them. Thus far I have seen nothing of them."

66

"Dublin, Rae and Monkey," exclaimed Rand.

"Oh; you know them, do you?" said Major McClintock.

"Jack here knows them very well," said Dick with a grin.

"Chance for more detective work, Jack," urged Rand.

"Faith, he might join the Mounted Police," cried Gerald. "Major, won't you give Jack a chance with your troop?"

The boys joined in the laugh, and Jack, who had begun to enjoy the joke on himself, told Major McClintock of their various encounters with the three men, and all that was known of their careers.

"Well," said the officer, "we'll keep a sharp eye out for them."

The head of the Mounted Police, who seemed very familiar with the Boy Scouts of Great Britain, told them something of the great organization in England headed by General Baden-Powell, with whom he himself had served in South Africa.

As they bade him good night the Major said that the jurisdiction of his post extended over the territory to which they were going, and that some time during their stay there one of his patrols would call on them.

67

At an early hour the next morning, Swiftwater and the boys went down to the boats, aboard which the Indian crews had passed the night, and were there joined by Skookum Joe, who was to go with them as far as the mouth of the confluent upon which Colonel Snow's land was located, at which point he was to join a steamer running on down the Yukon River to Dawson.

They floated out upon the swift current of the Lewes River, which many miles further away is joined by the Pelly to make the Yukon, the Behring Sea, some eighteen hundred miles away.

The passage down the Lewes was comparatively easy except for the rapids through which the Indian boatmen guided the flat-bottomed craft by long steering oars, one at each end and one at the side. Swiftwater had placed himself and Jack, Don and Gerald in one boat, and assigned Skookum Joe and Rand, Pepper and Dick to the other.

The run through the small canyons and the rapids was an exciting one to the boys, who were unused to such rough waters, where it seemed almost impossible at times to avoid the dangerous rocks that reared their heads above the current. By Swiftwater's direction the boys were allowed to take a hand at the oars at times, beside the Indian oarsman, to accustom them somewhat to the ticklish navigation of the rivers. While they found the navigation something new, their previous experience in canoe work had taught them sufficiently "the feel of the water" to make them fairly useful.

68

Pepper, who always threw a good deal of enthusiasm into anything he attempted to do, was barely saved from going overboard several times, and when once left alone with the side oar, succeeded in dipping the blade under a piece of hidden rock and was thrown by the swift motion of the boat high in the air, alighting somewhat breathless on the mass of tarpaulined freight in front of him, luckily without serious injury. The oar, however, went by the board and was lost.

"Wh-wh-what was that?" gasped Pepper, as he got his wind again and began to caress his ribs where the oar handle had struck him.

"I've only got one guess," laughed Dick, "but I should say it was the bottom of the river," while Rand sarcastically suggested that it wasn't part of the business of this expedition to try and clear the channel of the Lewes.

69

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and the sun in that high latitude was still visible when the boats reached the mouth of the stream known as Gold Creek, which entered the Lewes from the southeast. It was some miles up this confluent that Colonel Snow's land lay, and by direction of Swiftwater the Indian boatmen skilfully rounded the batteaus out of the current of the Lewes into the Creek and into a little backwater formed by a projecting sandy point between the two streams. Here the water was fairly deep, and as no trees came down to the water's edge two of the Indians held the boat up to the bank, while the third sprang ashore with coils of rope and two long iron stakes which he drove deep into the gravel and sand, and tied the stern and bow of the boat to the bank. The other boat was fastened the same way, and Swiftwater, springing ashore and stretching his long legs, cried: "All ashore; we'll make camp here, tonight."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIGGEST BEAR IN THE WORLD.

As soon as the Boy Scouts had set foot on land Swiftwater drew the boys about him and assigned certain of the camp duties to each, directing the Indians, however, to the heaviest tasks of "making camp." A large number of stones were gathered at the highest point of the sand and gravel, and a rough fireplace constructed. Two of the Indians, under the direction of Rand were sent across a short strip of meadow, which intervened between the point and the adjacent forest, for a supply of firewood. Rand took his rifle along under Swiftwater's direction, for protection, and with the suggestion that he might see something worth shooting, although he was enjoined not to meddle with moose or caribou.

"Not that I think ye'll see any," said Swiftwater, "for they're mighty scarce here, but it's a poor time of year for the meat. Still, there's a few cats and other varmints in this section of the country that don't like strangers, and they make it lively for you."

71

"Do the cats belong to the Indians?" innocently inquired Jack, remembering the aborigines' fondness for dogs.

Swiftwater laughed.

"I never seen an Injun that cared to keep one of 'em longer'n he could let go of it," said the miner. "I'm talkin' of lynxes and the lou'g'rou (loup garou), the Injun Devil, that is still pretty thick in this country."

The Indians who had come with the expedition were no exception to fondness for dogs, and had brought two shaggy, short-eared, long-nosed brutes with them that had never barked or uttered a sound except to snarl at any stranger who came near them and absolutely refused to make friends with anyone. One of these accompanied Rand and the two Indians into the woods and began nosing around in the bush and underbrush, while the two men were engaged in cutting light wood into short lengths and tying it together in bundles.

They accumulated nearly two hundred pounds apiece; loads that Rand doubted their ability to lift, much less carry to camp. They were about ready to start back when there came from a thicket forty yards distant a shrill scream that sounded like a child in distress. At the same moment the yelp of a dog was followed by a succession of snarls and screams so nearly human that Rand started toward the thicket crying:

72

"Quick, the dog is worrying a child."

"Na, cat; killum malamute," and with his axe in his hand the Indian rushed ahead of Rand into the thicket.

As Rand entered the brush the sounds of the struggles and the snarls and screams were intermixed with the loud commands of the Indian to the dog. Rand raised his rifle as he burst through the brush after the guide, and saw the dog and a mass of gray fur mixed up in a writhing rolling combat that tore up the grass and raised a cloud of dust and mold and leaves. Before he could get a chance at a shot the Indian had dashed in and with a single blow of his axe had ended the fight.

When the dog's owner succeeded in separating the dog from the dead animal, no small task, for the former was made furious by the wounds he had received, Rand saw the prey to be a short, heavy creature with stumpy tail and tassled ears.

73

"Wild cat," muttered the Indian, turning the dead animal over with his mocassin, so that its formidable claws could be seen, "easy killum dog."

Examining the wounds of the dog, which were not serious, he pointed to the cat and administered several severe kicks to the dog, which ran snarling toward the camp, while the guide picked up the body and returned to where his companion stood fastening his bundle, having apparently taken no interest in the contest. There was a short exchange of gutterals and then each of the Indians stooping down placed a band of strong cloth around his forehead, slipped it under the cord around the wood, and, with the aid of his companion, easily raised it to his back and walked off to camp as if it was a burden of no moment.

"Well, I see ye met up with a cat," said Swiftwater, as Rand and the Indians returned, "and at that ye only got the smallest of the tribe."

"If the others can fight any harder than this specimen, I don't believe I want to meet any of them. I thought there was a child in the thicket."

"Lots of these cat varmints have voices jest like a human. Ye can't tell a panther from a squallin' child sometimes."

74

Bacon, canned beef, potatoes and coffee had already been brought from the boats and the Indians soon had a rousing fire which soon heated the stones to red heat. Three of these had been joined together to make a sort of three corner oven and into this the potatoes were placed,

while over another portion of the fire the bacon was fried and the coffee boiled.

A large tarpaulin had been brought ashore and spread upon the sands, and upon this, or upon stones placed thereon, the party seated themselves and ate their repast from tin or thin wooden plates. A day of excitement and vigorous exercise had furnished them with strong appetites and the rather coarse food of the camp was greatly relished.

Arrangements for the night had been made by raising a large tarpaulin over one of the boats upon several of the crossed bars, forming a sort of shelter under which were spread several of the light mattresses that were part of the equipment; and Swiftwater directed that the Scouts should all "turn in" to this improvised barracks together, while he and Skookum Joe retired to the other boat. The Indians were given several small canvas coverings known in the army as "dog tents," and were to sleep around the fire, which one of them was delegated to replenish during the night.

75

The attraction of the big campfire and the beautiful clear sky overhead filled the boys with aspirations to "camp out," and they were rather inclined to grumble at Swiftwater's orders compelling them to sleep on the boat.

With the growing soldier spirit of the Scouts, they resented being coddled, as Gerald chose to express it, and he voiced the sentiment of the patrol when he said:

"Why can't we sleep by the fire, Swiftwater? I feel as if I was being sung to and then tucked in same as I used to be at home."

"Ye'll have camping out enough before ye're through with the woods; and I'm not going to take any chances with all that tundra over there, and that swamp back beyond of starting the season with six fine cases of malaria on my hands. Until ye're a little better acclimated and a little more hardened, it's better for ye to sleep with a board or two under you."

The good sense of the old scout's argument as well as a fine appreciation of the miner's thoughtfulness for their welfare led the boys to at once acquiesce, and Rand voiced their appreciation.

76

Although it was early in the season, and the insect world had hardly awakened to life, there were a sufficient number of mosquitos about to remind the boys of Colonel's Snow's injunction regarding the supply of nettings, and Jack, after several vigorous slaps, murmured sleepily:

"Gee, that certainly sounded like a voice from home."

"They've got the good old Jersey accent," replied Jack.

"Straight from the Hackensack meadows," said Rand, referring to the once most favored habitat of the mosquito in the East.

"I hae ma doots," said Don, "if that is a mosquito I killed just noo. I think it was some new kind of night bird."

How long he had been asleep Jack did not know, when he was aroused by the growling of the two dogs on the shore, and crawled out from under the tarpaulin. The night was clear, and there was a fine starlight. In the East there was the faintest glimmer of dawn. The fire on shore had died down, but the embers still shone. The Indian who had been on watch had risen from his seat and followed the dogs, which had run growling up the strip of sand toward the meadow which lay between the water and the woods. Evidently there was some game in sight, and Jack crawled back under the tarpaulin and grasped his rifle, a Remington repeater. He did not arouse any of the others as he had really seen nothing, and was a little sensitive to possible ridicule.

77

He ran up the gangplank and stepped ashore. The other Indians were still asleep and Jack took the trail of the sentinel, whom he could dimly see in the distance.

The latter turned as he heard Jack's footsteps on the gravel, and waited for him.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"No know," replied the Indian, "maybe bear, dogs no fight, only growl."

Dimly through the dawn Jack could make out a black mass lumbering slowly down through the meadow toward them. The dogs ran around it in circles, merely growling and offering no attack. At a word from the Indian, however, they ran in snarling on the animal, which stopped, and with a loud "woof" reared up on its haunches, showing an enormous height.

"Bear; shootum," cried the Indian, who had only an ax with him. Jack raised his rifle and fired, and as the bear dropped on all fours fired another shot.

78

The animal let out a snarling cry, and, grasping one of the dogs which had ventured within reach of its enormous paws, squeezed the life out of it before it could let out a cry. The Indian gave a yell and ran in on the enormous animal, and with a well-directed blow of the ax split its skull open between the eyes. At the same time Jack, as a precaution, fired another shot into the creature's open mouth, and it rolled motionless on its side.

The shots and the cries of the Indian had aroused every one on the two boats, and Swiftwater and Skookum Joe came running over the sands, rifles in hand. By this time the early dawn of the high latitude had rendered all objects visible, and the boys had also joined Jack and the Indian, who was circling cautiously around the huge brute, trying to ascertain the fate of the dog, which was still clasped in the death clutch of the now motionless animal.

"Ha," exclaimed Swiftwater, "a kodiak, and a corker; the biggest one I ever saw. You fellers were lucky to get him on the first shot, for that breed can make an awful mess if they start to fight. Hey, Skookum, catch hold and let's flop him over."

Having satisfied themselves that the bear was dead, the miner and the guide, with the aid of the Indians, moved the enormous mass which, with the Indian's blow, had slumped down upon its hindquarters. With the greatest difficulty they succeeded in straightening it out. The Indian dog had been squeezed into a shapeless mass, and, ascertaining this, the Indian gave it no further attention for the time being.

"Mighty good thing you had a softnosed bullet in that rifle," said Skookum, pointing to the gaping wound in the breast of the bear. "That spread, and did the business right away. A steel jacketed bullet would have gone straight through and would not have done so much harm. Then you might have been where the dog was."

Jack, who had been seized with a sort of buck fever after he realized what he had shot, was trembling with excitement as he received the almost envious congratulations of his friends.

"Begorra, we'll courtmartial you and drop ye from the Patrol," said Gerald, "if ye insist grabbing all the glory for yourself this way. Why don't you let us know when you are going out after adventures?"

"Yes, this is the second time that you have gone knight-erranting by your lone," said Dick, "and I can see nothing for it. If this Patrol of Boy Scouts is to get any chance to make a reputation it will have to put Mr. Jack Blake on a leash, and tie him to our wrists when we lie down to sleep."

"Weel, if that big bear or whatever it is, is really dead, ye've certainly made a better job of it than ye did with Monkey," exclaimed Don, and, with the laugh that followed, poor Jack felt that the ridiculousness of that episode on the steamer had been practically wiped out.

Swiftwater and Skookum measured the huge brown carcass that lay stretched on the sand before them, and found it to be nearly ten feet from tip to tip. They guessed its weight to be about eight hundred pounds.

"That's about the limit," said Skookum, "tho' I did hear of a skin once that measured thirteen feet."

"Well, Jack," said Swiftwater, "you've killed the largest meat-eating critter, in the world—carnivorous I think ye call it. There's none bigger than the big brown bear of Alaska. Some say he isn't so fierce as the grizzly, but he is nearly twice as big, and there's certain seasons that he'll fight at the drop of the hat, as the sayin' goes. I never see one so far from the coast before. He's called a kodiak because he hangs out down on Kodiak Island and on the Alaska and Kenai peninsulas."

"Yes," said Skookum Joe, "he likes salmon better than a Siwash, and he set on the river bank and fish for himself all day long."

"Smellum salmon," spoke up one of the Indians, pointing to the fire where some skin of the rough, Indian smoked fish had been thrown by the aborigines the night before.

"Wa-al," said Swiftwater, with a grin at the Indian, "I reckon they could 'smellum' some o' that seal oil o' yours down to Seattle."

The Indians set swiftly to work while the boys looked on curiously, and soon had the enormous brown hide of the animal off the body. The latter they cut up and such portions as were available they put aboard the boats. A few steaks were cooked for the boys for breakfast, but, as Swiftwater suggested, they found the meat dry and tough and very lean. The Indians seemed to relish it, however, and the remaining dog ate enormously.

Swiftwater promised Jack that as soon as they reached their destination he would arrange for the proper curing of the skin which he could have as a trophy.

"No," said Jack, "that goes to the Patrol for the floor of our room back in Creston, and if there is any glory attached to this matter that don't really belong to that Indian with the ax, I shall be glad to hand that over to the Patrol."

As they had all been aroused so early, Swiftwater gave orders for an immediate start up Gold Creek as soon as breakfast was over, that they might get in a long day and possibly reach their destination before night. Just as they were aboard and were about casting off, one of the Indians who had disappeared for a time came running down to the water with a small bundle of fur in each hand. One was the skin of the wild cat killed the night before; the other the skin of his dog crushed to death by the bear that morning.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO THE WILDERNESS.

Skookum Joe, equipped with a dog tent and some provisions, had been left on the point of the junction of the Lewes River and Gold Creek, to await the arrival of the down-river steamer of the Yukon and White Pass Railroad Company to arrive that day, and he waved them a friendly farewell as the Indians slowly poled their boats out into the stream. The current of Gold Creek was by no means as swift as that of the Lewes, and, while Swiftwater Jim took command of one boat, Rand was made captain of the other. Both boats had been built with narrow walking boards along the sides after the manner of the celebrated pole boats that plied on the Mississippi and its tributaries in the upstream journies in Lincoln's time. One of the boys was told off to work with the three Indians in each boat for short stretches at a time, thus placing two men on each side with poles about twelve feet long, while the commander of each boat with a long oar gave an occasional impulse to the direction in the way of steering, although little of this was necessary. Two of the pole men would start at the bow of the boat, placing their poles on the bottom of the creek and walk the full length of the "running board." As they reached the stern, two others would start at the bow and walk down the boat while their predecessors returned to the bow.

84

The Indians seemed to be able to continue this performance without intermission, and feel no fatigue from it, but the Scout who was detailed to aid the Indians soon found himself suffering from a peculiar aching in the side and back, that Swiftwater described as the "Siwash Curve," due entirely to the fact that the white man in poling up a river would exert himself in a way that the average Indian considered unprofessional, and would try to hold back, thus adding to the "white man's burden." He insisted that the white man usually got over this after the first day's work, and tried to make it pleasant for the Siwash ever after. He limited the trick of each boy at the pole for the first day to one hour, and he himself and Rand took their own turns at the poles to relieve the aching and untried muscles of the younger Scouts. Soon after leaving the sandy banks and tundra of the lower stream, the creek began to wind its way through dense forests of spruce, poplar and oak with the ghostly bark of the birch lighting up the dim that marks the tangled wildwood of more southern climates, showing how little the sunlight of these northern climes penetrated the overshadowing canopy.

85

"Fine woods for huntin'," remarked Swiftwater to Jack, as they poled slowly up stream, "also for travelin' in winter. Bresh won't grow very far in from the streams this far north. Great country for garden stuff howsomever."

"Do you mean to say that vegetables will grow this far north?" inquired the interested reporter.

"Finest garden sass in the world in some sections. Why, there's a valley between the Yukon and the Tanana, three hundred miles north of here, that can grow anything but bananas and cocoanuts. I'm told they grow bigger potatoes and cabbages, and carrots and other plain, ordinary cooking vegetables up there within a couple of hundred miles of the Arctic Circle than they do down in Oregon, where every man's truck patch looks like the floral hall at the county fair when I was a boy."

86

"How can anything ripen in the short summers up here?" asked Don.

"All vegetation has got to have light, and the more it has the harder it will grow. Sun up here is on the job all the time. Reminds me of the year that I started out to be star performer with old John Robinson's circus back in Injianny. Got up at three a. m. to help feed the animals and hosses, and assist the chef in the cook tent; waited on table for the canvas men and other nobility from six to nine a. m., 'doubled in brass' as the sayin' goes, with the band, by carryin' the front end of the bass drum in the gra-a-nd street parade, wore a toga as a Roman senator in the great entree, handled jugglin' and other apparatus durin' two performances, and at midnight helped to take down the big top. The other three hours I had to myself. I don't mean to say that the sun up here in the summer time performs all those gymnastics, but he works the same number of hours and everything up here that wants to live must keep right up with him. Ground is frozen twenty feet deep, and thaws out about eighteen inches in the summer time. That furnishes moisture. Consequently, grass and vegetable are on the jump all the time, working twenty hours a day, and they manage to mature. Oats and other grains that have to grow long stalks, I understand, however, never top out."

87

The work of poling the boats up stream was varied at times by what Swiftwater described as "canal work." At stretch where the banks of the stream were reasonably high and precipitous, and the water of considerable depth close to the shore, the three Indians in each boat fastened themselves tandem to a long cable stretched from the bow of the boat to the shore, and towed the craft for miles at a time, while one of the boys with the long steering oar kept the bow away from the shore and headed up stream. This method was considerable relief from the steady poling which told perceptibly upon the back and shoulders of the novice, and it formed a method of rest for the Indians. The progress was about three miles per hour, and the boys alternately spent considerable time ashore, walking along the banks and occasionally relieving one or two of the Indians in the harness. The miner on the occasion of these tows spent most of his time ashore, directing the Indians and making frequent excursions into the neighboring forest with one or the other of the young Scouts, examining the timber and pointing out the peculiarities of the different trees. He carried with him a repeating shotgun, and was constantly on the lookout for game, both birds and mammals.

88

"Might run across a caribou," said he, "but I scarcely think so this time of year. Besides, up here he doesn't take to heavy timber like this same as he does in Maine and the Kanuck provinces. He runs in droves of hundreds and thousands up this way, and seems to like the scrub timber."

A short time before noon they came to a sharp bend in the creek where the nature of the bank

hid the current ahead from the boys in the two boats. Suddenly the Indians towing the leading craft stopped, and as three held it against the current, the leader of the team beckoned to Swiftwater, who had fallen behind.

"Carry," he said, briefly, to the latter as he came up, and pointed to the stream ahead.

"He means a portage," said the miner to Jack, who was walking with him, as they topped the rise, they went forward to inspect the creek. Directly in front of them where the stream had made a turn, the heavy timber of the forest had retreated back from the water for several hundred yards and the elevated shore sank to almost the level of the water, and became half swamp and half meadow, covered with tufts of grass, and nearer the woods with a stunted growth of brush and small dwarf birches. Gold Creek itself spread out to nearly twice its former width, with innumerable little sandbars and a few boulders protruding from the bottom. Even Jack's unpractised eye could see that the current had no depth of any moment.

"Stake out," said Swiftwater to the Indians. "We'll have to portage." The Indians at once drove the steel anchorage stakes which they carried into the soil and drew the bow of the boats up against the bank and took similar precautions with the stern of each. The Scouts had all joined Jack and Swiftwater at the top of the bank, where the commander of the expedition pointed out that the widening of the Gold had so reduced the depth of the channel that it would be impossible to take the fully loaded boats over the route. As a result most of the cargo if not all of it would have to be unloaded, and perhaps "toted" around the shallow to the deep water of the channel.

"A good deal of work, isn't it?" inquired Dick.

"There's no freighting de luxe up in this country that I ever found," replied the miner. "We shall be lucky if we can get along without a 'carry.' First thing we've got to know is how much water we're drawing on each boat fore and aft. Gerald, you're nominated boat measurer, and you can take Pepper with you. You will find two or three lumber gauges in the dunnage in the rear boat. Each of you take one, and let me know at once what each boat is drawing. Rand, you and Dick are leadsmen of this voyage, and you will each take a pair of knee boots and a lumber gauge and follow the channel of the Creek from shore to shore and give me the greatest depth of water you can find in a continuous channel up to where the creek narrows again and the water will naturally deepen. If you will wait a few minutes we will give you the data to work on. Jack, you and I will take up a job of stevedorin' and get our longshoremen to work. You take three of these Injuns and get to work unloading this first boat, and I'll take the others and rustle cargo on the other. Most o' these pieces can be jacked up the gangplanks, but where they're too heavy in either boat we'll call all hands and get 'em ashore."

By this time, Gerald and Pepper were armed with two slim painted woodstuffs, not unlike the wands of the Boy Scouts, but marked with figures, and having at one end a movable arm about two inches long that could be screwed fast at any point. These they fastened at the extreme end of each gauge, and hooked them under the bottoms of the boats and marking the top of the water were able to tell just what each boat was drawing. They found, however, that the boats did not trim exactly even, and that at one point or another, bow or stern, the draught was more or less by perhaps an inch. The general average was about twenty-six inches in one boat and twenty-eight inches in the other.

"These here ocean greyhoun's had a displacement, as they say in ocean goin' craft, of six inches before they were loaded," said Swiftwater, "when I had 'em measured in White Horse, and if the channel anywhere above here peters out to that it's a case of carrying all this stuff around this meadow land. If we can get even two inches above that the job'll be easier." With the above figures in mind, Rand and Dick plunged into the shallows of the broad channel. Working from rock to sandbar, and bar to boulder, they followed the deepest pools in a tortuous path that corkscrewed nearly from one shore to another, and in an hour's time were able to report to Swiftwater that they could find passageway sufficiently wide for the boats with a minimum depth of fourteen inches.

When they made their report to Swiftwater, a look of intense satisfaction crossed his face, and he remarked:

"Wa-al, I guess that cuts out one big engineerin' problem that might o' kept us here a week. Hustle that freight off; smallest pieces first." The channel figures were reported to Gerald and Pepper, and they were instructed to measure frequently the draught of the boats as the stuff was moved ashore, and to report to the miner when the draught was reduced to eleven inches.

"Better be on the safe side," he remarked. "Poor place to move freight if we should get stuck out there through any mistake of our survey men."

So fast had the Indians worked while the leadsmen were in the channel that it required but a few minutes more to reduce the draught of the batteaus to the scale.

"S-s-say," said Pepper with an anxious look, "isn't it a long time since breakfast? I can hardly remember it."

Swiftwater grinned.

"It surely is, Pepper," he said, "and I guess we'll camp right now and do a little business with the inner man before we go any further. I'm apt to become int'rested at times, and forget all about that other feller."

At his orders the Indians constructed a small fireplace, and the voyagers were soon sitting about

on the bank and boats enjoying with eight hour appetites, strong black tea, ship's biscuits and canned baked beans, to which they did full justice.

As soon as the meal was over, Swiftwater ordered all six Indians to harness themselves to a single boat, and placed Rand in it to handle the steering oar while he himself waded along with the Indians over the shallows to direct their movements, Dick accompanying him to point out the channel. The current was very sluggish, and rapid progress was made over the half mile that intervened before reaching deep water again. Arrived at the desired point the boat was tied to the bank and the remaining cargo quickly removed. Then with all hands aboard, and poles in hand the crew floated the scow back to their former landing place. Here two of the Indians were left to work with Gerald, Jack, Pepper and Don in replacing cargo on the empty boat while the other was towed up stream and unloaded. The first trip had been so easy and successful that Swiftwater told Gerald to allow a load sufficient to give thirteen inches draught. The second boat returning was loaded to the same capacity, leaving still a small amount of cargo, requiring a third trip for one of the boats. On this last trip the boat also took in the boys, and as the Indians had by this time learned the channel the trip was made by poling without mishap.

94

By the middle of the afternoon the cargo had all been replaced on the two boats, and the miner announced that as they could not reach their destination before dark they would make camp and take the rest of the day to themselves. At this point the forest came down close to the water's edge, and the ground was high and dry, and Swiftwater told the boys to "camp out" if they so desired, and had double tarpaulins placed on the ground for them and "dog tents" erected for them near the Indians.

95

A roaring big fire was built, and one of the Indians told off to keep it up. The Scouts thought it was very soldierlike. They talked excitedly for a while, and being weary fell into an early deep sleep. Later there was a good deal of restlessness and turning and twisting. Then through the starlight, occasionally a mysterious figure could be dimly discerned stealing silently toward the boats. There was a quiet grin on the face of Swiftwater, who had bunked on one of the boats, when he arose at an early hour and found three recumbent figures sleeping peacefully on the comfortable mattresses in his own boats, and on going ashore saw that the "dog tents" were empty.

"Not quite seasoned yet," he said to himself, as he quietly awakened the Indians.

CHAPTER VIII.

96

COLONEL SNOW'S RANCH.

At an early hour that morning the journey was resumed and their progress up stream continued uninterruptedly until about the middle of the forenoon, when Swiftwater stepped ashore and began to search along the right bank for landmarks. Suddenly, he stepped out of the woods, and held up his hand and the Indians in the first boat began to turn the craft's head in toward the shore.

"Here we are," cried the miner, pointing to a large board nailed across two small trees, under which a "cairn" or pile of boulders had been erected. "This is one of the corners of the Colonel's property."

The boats were quickly fastened and the boys tumbled up the bank with some curiosity to investigate the site of what was for some weeks to be a home to them.

"The Colonel told me," said Rand "that he had bought from the Canadian Government about two thousand acres of the best virgin timber of the British Columbia section, and this must be some of it."

97

The site of their camp certainly bore out the owner's anticipations of the value of his purchase. For miles in every direction stretched a solid substantial growth of timber—hemlock, spruce, fir, poplar and birch, towering to hundreds of feet into the air, and many bolls five and six feet through at the butt. There was very little undergrowth and heavy turf extended in the long aisles of the forest in every direction.

Within a very short time the boats had been permanently fastened to the banks by heavy ropes and strong stakes cut in the small timber, and all hands began to unload the camp equipage. From the bottom of one end of the craft where the camp stuff and supplies had been piled, rough boards which Swiftwater referred to as "sawed stuff," and which had been carried as a sort of false bottom to the boats, were brought out and made into a sort of platform roughly nailed together and placed on a foundation of small boulders gathered from the bed of the creek which raised it a few inches from the ground. On this a heavy army tent, which had been brought from White Horse, was erected by the Scouts themselves and stoutly pegged and guyed in the most approved fashion. A series of flies divided the interior into rooms, and in these the camp bedsteads were placed. This was to be the permanent abiding place of the boys and the miner while the work of preparing the sawmill camp for the next winter's work was going on.

98

The Indians were each given a dog tent and two of the tarpaulins were turned over to them, and at some little distance away they soon rigged up something between a hut and a burrow of stones, sods, and brush, about ten feet square, the bottom of which they filled two feet deep with spruce and fir boughs. Over all they drew the tarpaulins and pegged them down. The boys watched curiously the gathering of the fir and spruce sprigs.

"Makes the finest spring bed in the world," said Jim. "I've slept on it hundreds of nights, and there's no mattress made that equals it. We'll make up some for ourselves within a few days."

Preparations for the night having been made, and a fireplace dug out of the bank of the creek near the water's edge, and walled up with stones to some distance above the bank so that a perceptible draft was obtained, one of the boys was directed to bring from the stores a bright new copper kettle with a porcelain lining and a tight cover. Three flat stones were placed together and formed a support for the pot.

"Pepper," said Swiftwater, "from this day to the time we go out, you are to be captain of the Kettle. You are to see that it is kept clean and filled with clear water from the creek at least once a day; that the water is boiled and that these water jugs are kept filled and corked. I want to ask the rest of you boys to drink, for a time at least, nothing but the water that our friend Pepper turns out; none from the creek. A man's health in a new country depends a good deal on how the water hits him, and until you are acclimated it is the safest thing." The Scouts readily promised to comply with the miner's request, and Pepper feeling that the health of the camp was somehow in his charge felt not a little elated. He issued orders at once for a supply of firewood, agreeing to carry the water himself, which he did, filling the kettle which held about ten gallons. He put on so many small airs while the boys were bringing in the firewood and arranging it beneath the kettle that they began to dub him "Health Officer," "Doctor," and poke fun at him in several ways. Finally Dick came up and inspected the whole arrangement as if he had never seen it before, and said:

"Hello, Grandma, makin' apple-butter or quince preserves?"

Pepper turned red but went on poking the fire. A minute or two later Gerald strolled by with:

"Auntie, can't I have one of the doughnuts, now?"

Still Pepper struggled to preserve his temper and gave his whole dignified attention to his new duties until:

"Mamma, how long fo' dat hog and hominy fit to eat?" and Rand dodged a stick of firewood, as the infuriated Captain of the Kettle turned back to the simmering pot. He was undisturbed for nearly an hour when Don strolled up with an ostentatiously small armful of sticks and stayed only long enough to ask:

"Seems to me that I smell braw parritch; or is it kail-brose ye would be steaming there, gilly?"

Satisfied that a small conspiracy had been hatched against him the ruffled Pepper bided his time. Suddenly, Jack came hurriedly toward him holding his nose and pushing him away snatched off the cover of the kettle and yelled dramatically:

"I told you so; I told you so; he can't even cook water; and now it's all burned black."

The shout of laughter that went up was the last straw for the enraged Pepper and jumping on his brother the two rolled over on the grass together in one of those friendly tussles that had been frequent incidents of their boyhood and that always served to bring Pepper's ruffled temper down to normal temperature. Thereafter Pepper insisted in supplying his own firewood and running the kettle without help, and resented any interference with his duties.

The days that followed were busy, but uneventful. Swiftwater kept the camp busy at something all the time and not many days passed before the camp began to take on a look of permanency. He set up first what he called a saw-pit, two big "horses," each made by driving fir poles into the ground and crossing them and laying other sapling across these. The two horses were about seven feet high and twelve feet apart. From one to the other of these ran a sixteen foot plank. Spruce trees of medium size were then cut down, divided into sixteen foot lengths, and typo squared with an ax. These timbers were then raised to the top of the horses, and, while one Indian mounted the log, the other stood underneath and with a long gang saw "ripped" the timber into deals or boards, thick plank or scantling as was needed for camp use. As this lumber began to pile up, he set the other Indians at work clearing a place among the heavier trees, but not far from the creek, for a sod house. It was to be some twenty feet square and was to house Colonel Snow's lumbering gangs when they came in the following winter.

"'Tenting on the old camp ground,' 's good enough, up here in the summer," he said to the boys, "but with the mercury loafing around sixty below zero, canvas is no sort of shelter. A log house is better but it is almost impossible to make the caulking of that weather-proof.

"Sod houses are the invention of the pioneer of the plains whose chief recreation was going twenty miles to look at a tree four inches through. Of course if we had the time we could saw out lumber enough to make a 'camp' that would be weather proof, but the sod house is insured against fire, flood, lightning and wind and is as cosy as a cave; besides, it takes a shorter time to build," and with this the miner led the boys, with the exception of Gerald, who was to keep camp and oversee the four Indians left there, to the boats, one of which the other two Indians had unmoored, and when all were aboard, began to pole upstream.

About a half mile above the camp the woods receded from the creek and a broad stretch of elevated meadow intervened. Early as it was, the short grass was green and luxuriant, and what

surprised the boys more than any thing else was the number, variety and size of the wild flowers.

All hands had been supplied with long handled spades with sharp edges, and as Swiftwater marked the turf out in strips five and ten feet long by two feet wide, the boys quickly cut it out, while the Indians with a hand barrow carried and loaded it onto the boat. It was cut to the bottoms of the grass roots and was found to be of unusual thickness and tenacity, the ten foot lengths folding up like matting without breaking.

The miner told the boys that its condition was due largely to the shortness of the seasons; for while the grass grew with remarkable rapidity, the underlying roots decayed much more slowly than in lower latitudes, and in time made the turf a tough mass of twisted roots that it was almost an impossibility to separate. Hence it was much better for their purpose.

104

They spent the greater part of the day at the work, having brought food and water with them, and when night came the boat was loaded as deeply as was safe for her draught. She dropped slowly down the stream directed by the Indians and was soon tied at her old moorings.

During the day, what Swiftwater called "the hold," had been excavated by the Indians to a depth of about eighteen inches over the entire site of the proposed house, and this had been filled in as solidly as possible with small boulders from the creek. The crevices between the stones had been filled with creek sand and the whole rammed hard. On this a solid platform of two-inch planks had been laid by the sawyers and at intervals of three feet long, thin stakes, sharpened at the top, had been driven deeply into the ground just at the ends of the excavation. Thus all had been prepared for the erection of the sod walls the next day.

Early the next morning Jack, who had determined to keep an eye on all the details of a sod house in case he should ever want to erect one himself, was wandering around the newly laid foundation, when suddenly there came to his ear a muffled buzzing much like the drone of a distant grasshopper. "This sounds like real summer," said Jack to himself, instinctively looking around for the insect. As he approached one corner of the foundation, the sound increased in strength, and less resembled the grasshopper than something like the shaking of a bag of marbles. One of the Indians was approaching the structure and as the sound caught his ear he broke into a run with a deep guttural exclamation, at the same time motioning to Jack to keep away from the foundation.

105

"Snake," he said. "Mooch bad. Killum."

He picked up a stake lying beside the platform and began to poke around beneath it. As he reached forward to push the stake underneath, something struck like a flash at the back of his hand, and at the same moment a large rattlesnake uncoiled and slid from underneath the boards out into the short grass. With a blow of the stake the Indian broke the snake's back and then began to suck the two punctures on his knuckle, at the same time keeping the hand tightly closed and the skin drawn tight.

106

For a moment Jack was horrified. Then the instincts of the Scouts and his quickly working brain ran rapidly over the instructions of "first aid." With a shout that brought the other boys and Swiftwater on the run he drew from his pocket a small cord, doubled it into a slipnoose and placing it on the Indian's wrist drew it so tight as to cut off the circulation. At the same time he called to Rand to bring the medicine case. The miner, as soon as he comprehended what the trouble was, also disappeared in the direction of the tent. When Rand returned he had in his hand a solution of permanganate of potash and a vial of strong ammonia. With each of these he saturated the wound with some difficulty, however, as the aborigine insisted for a time in keeping his lips to the wound as his own theory of first aid. The hand and wrist had now swollen so much that the cord had practically disappeared in the flesh and the Indian was evidently suffering much pain. At this moment Swiftwater appeared with a small gallon demijohn, from which he poured for the Indian a large tin cup full of neat whisky. The red man swallowed it without a quiver and the miner poured out another of similar size which the Indian also drank.

107

"That'll fix him," said Jim, "but I'm very glad you thought of that cord Jack or we'd have been an Indian short. Those drugs you have will neutralize the poison and I don't know but they would have been sufficient, but I'm takin' no chances. This" (indicating the demijohn), "is the old reliable snakebite cure, discovered by Columbus when he discovered the rattlesnake over here and my mind naturally reverted to it at the first jump. The worst of it is that the Injun won't be of much use for a couple of days and I'm afraid all the other Siwashes will quit work and go to huntin' rattlesnakes."

The work of building the sod house began soon after the morning meal, and by night had made substantial progress. One of the side walls was built higher than the other, and a roof of rough boards was laid on top of thick planks which formed the top course of the walls. On this roof was laid a course of sod, the grass of which began in a few days to grow lustily.

"Taint everywhere," said Swiftwater, with a smile, "that a man can have his lawn on the roof of his house."

CHAPTER IX.

AN HEIRLOOM RETURNED.

Rand, whose inquiring turn of mind was scarcely inferior to that of Jack, but of a more profound and less transitory nature, had shown a strong interest in the Indian boatmen from the beginning of their journey and had struck up an especial friendship with the Indian whose dog had tackled the wild cat and had been later crushed by the Kodiak bear. The red man, while not morose, was taciturn, and replied to all questions with monosyllables and scarcely a smile. He showed friendliness in other ways, and as he became better acquainted with the boys responded to the young Scout leader's approaches. Day by day and word by word he inducted Rand into the mysteries of the "pigeon," or jargon used as a language of communication with the natives. It was made up of half Siwash, half English words, the latter so amputated and distorted as scarcely to be recognizable. It was rather automatic in character, as it could be changed or added to as circumstances required, and Rand found it easy to use after he had mastered the first few principles of it, if it may be said to have had any.

109

One evening, after the day's work was over, Rand strolled over to the shack where the Indians lived and found his erstwhile friend sitting on a stone, engaged in slowly carving with a sharp knife the soft wood of a sycamore spar that had been carefully cleared of its branches and smoothed to comparative symmetry. The worker had begun at the butt end of the pole and had worked his way carefully upward. The carvings were weird, goggle eyed, snouted and saw-toothed creatures, the like of which could only have originated in the brain of the late Lewis Carroll, who wrote "Alice in Wonderland" or in the dreams of a Siwash nourished on smoked salmon and rancid seal oil. Part of the carved lines of one creature formed the features of another (if they could be dignified by the name of features), and there was a sort of artistic continuity about the whole that aroused Rand's interest and admiration. At the butt of the pole another Indian had begun with two or three bean tins filled with crude colors evidently made from vegetable dyes, to paint the carvings already finished. Rand pointed to the pole, and asked:

110

"What?"

"Totem," grunted the Siwash. "Me chief." He further informed the young Scout that it was his purpose to set it up in front of the camp. Just then, Swiftwater came along and spoke to the Indian in his native Siwash. The latter arose and stood for a moment erect, with his hand on his breast with so dignified an air that Rand could scarcely recognize in the figure before him the slouching round-shouldered aborigine, who went daily, so stolidly, about the labor of the camp. Swiftwater listened to the rather oratorical harangue which the Indian delivered, smiling at times, but giving the man respectful attention. He even gave him half a salute, as he turned and walked with Rand toward their own tent.

"I didn't know that we had with us a representative of the old Siwash nobility. The tribal relations of these people are pretty well broken up since we brought our boasted civilization and our whiskey up among their homes, and they don't recognize the authority of their head men any more. They have 'got onto' our most cherished principle that all men were created free and equal, and the chiefs and their families have to hustle for a living as hard as the lowest of them. Still, they cling to their ancient dignities. That totem he's been carving is the insignia of his clan or family, and as he couldn't bring the old family totem pole with him, he carves one wherever he settles for a time, and sets it up. You remember in old 'Ivanhoe,' Front de Boeuf and the Templar displayed their banners on the castle walls whenever they came up for the week end, and they really didn't have so much on this old rootdigger after all. I rather like his spunk. Good family connections are really something to be proud of if ye don't let 'em interfere with yer business, and they don't come visitin' too often."

111

Something about the totem pole aroused Rand's imagination, and with the other boys he went over to the shack to look at the "work of art" as Jack insisted on calling it. Although the boys had seen totem poles in the city museums, and one or two on their original ground in the Alaskan villages that they had visited, there was something familiar about this one. As they went over the various figures, trying to distinguish them from each other and speculating on what they were supposed to represent, Pepper, who had been inspecting the upper part of the work, where lack of color made the figures less conspicuous, suddenly exclaimed:

112

"S-s-say, this fellow's family isn't so very old. Here's the ace of clubs, and that couldn't have got over here before Columbus, and he didn't come up this far."

"What's that?" said Rand. "Let's look at it." Then, for the first time, the reason for the familiarity of the design struck him.

"Hey, boys," he cried, excitedly, "don't you see it?"

"What is it?" they cried in chorus, crowding around him.

"There, there, and there. The top of this totem is an exact replica of our narwhal horn. Here's the mammoth, and here's the pile of tusks."

"Begorra, that's truth," said Gerald. "Looks as though he had copied it from our ivory. Run and

get it, Rand.”

The young Scout leader, who had been made custodian of the treasure, returned to the tent and brought out the relic. It was a short, broken piece of the twisted horn of the narwhal or white whale, discolored, and rubbed smooth as if with much handling. It was covered with rude etchings evidently made with flints or sharp shells. As nearly as could be made out, the figures represented a mammoth, an extinct creature of the elephant tribe, a man beside a dogless sledge, a pile of mammoth tusks, and a high cliff with an opening or cave at the top whose mouth was shaped like the ace of clubs referred to by Pepper. 113

With the greatest care the boys went over the lines of the graven ivory comparing the figures with the carvings of the hieroglyphics which the “chief” had carved on his totem pole, and found them to be almost identical, except for a few minor particulars caused by the relief work on the totem, and less crudity in the carvings.

The Indians at this time of day were engaged at their work of sawing lumber and in finishing the foundations of the sod house, where a ditch was being dug, but it being near the hour of noon the man who had described himself as a “chief” came to the shack to arrange for the noonday meal.

The boys turned to greet him as he came up, and Rand drew his attention to the ivory, intending to indicate the resemblance of the two carvings. As his eye fell upon the relic a remarkable change came over the Siwash. He reached forward, and his eyes blazing with excitement, almost tore the ivory from Rand’s hand and stepped back in a defiant attitude. 114

Heretofore, the tones of the Indians, like those of their dogs, had been low, guttural and subdued. Now the aborigine gave vent to a shrill piercing yell, and, at the same time, waved hysterically to his comrades, all five of whom dropped their tools and rushed to the shack and surrounded the chief.

With a wealth of wild gesticulation and deep growling tones that at times rose to almost a shriek in a higher note they examined the horn and appeared to pay it the most awed reverence. The Scouts seeing that they were so deeply interested did not attempt to repossess themselves of their treasure for some minutes, and then Rand was met by a most firm refusal on the part of the leading Indian to give it up.

The other Indians surrounded him in a defiant attitude—the first sign of insubordination that had yet appeared among them, and the boys seeing that they had encountered a mystery which could not at once be unraveled, and that the relic had some almost overpowering importance to the Siwashes, determined to drop the matter for the time being, and put it up later to the commander of the camp. 115

The aborigines went back quietly to their labor in the afternoon, and the boys who were at work with the miner, laying out the foundation for the sawmill, took occasion in the intervals of their labor to tell Swiftwater the story of the narwhal’s horn, and the incident that had taken place at noon. The guide listened with close attention, and at the finish of the incident his face was rather grave.

“I’ll talk with that main guy Siwash, some time this afternoon. Meantime, I wish you would all leave this matter in my hands. It may turn out to be of more importance to us than we think.”

The Scouts readily agreed, and toward the middle of the afternoon the miner left them and strolled over to where the Indians were at work on the sod house, and calling the “chief” to one side walked away with him to the bank of the creek.

“Well,” said Jack, when they were all together at one end of the foundation, “what do you think of it? There seems to be more in that horn than we thought when we decided to bring it along with us.” 116

“Yes,” replied Rand, “and we seem to be coming out of the little end of it.”

“Faith,” exclaimed Gerald, “it looks as if that Indian was going to hold on to our relic, and the others seem as if they were going to stand by him.”

“They certainly have seen something like it before,” commented Dick, “and maybe it’s worth more to them than to us. It was only a mere guess of ours, after Colonel Snow undertook to interpret it to us, that there might be anything behind it, and it was only because it had evidently come from an Arctic country that we even thought of bringing it along with us.”

“I think,” said Rand, “that we shall have trouble getting it back, and I, for one, propose that we leave the whole matter in the hands of Swiftwater and try and get the true inwardness of the thing from him. It ought to be a good story if we don’t get anything else out of it.” This view was readily agreed to, and the afternoon’s work was progressing satisfactorily when Don, after deep thought, said: 117

“I’ve been listening to this Siwash language, and I haed me doots as to whether it was a real language like Gaelic or English or just a rumble, but when I heard that head man scream like a white man I concluded that it’s got some elements of a language.”

The conference between the miner and the chief lasted for a half hour, after which the latter returned to his work, and Swiftwater joined the boys. His face was still grave, and simply remarking that he would enlighten them at supper when the afternoon’s work was completed.

“I’m a little bothered about this matter,” said Swiftwater, after the evening meal was concluded, “and would have given a good deal if it hadn’t happened. My experience with savages the world

over has taught me that while you may rob them and make war on them and get away with it, that you cannot interfere safely with their religions or their traditions. Not that we have intentionally done so, but it may have an effect after all.

"The chief told me a long story, a good deal of which I couldn't quite make out the sense of, but it seems that you boys have in some way got hold of an ancient treasure of his tribe many hundred years old, and considered in some way, sacred. He says there were two of these relics, that they were handed from generation to generation and carefully guarded. At first they were merely the record of a buried treasure, the wealth of the northern tribes being the ivory of the walrus and the narwhal and such tusks of the mammoth as came to them through the melting of the glaciers. The buried treasure was never found, and the tradition finally became incorporated in the totem or coat of arms of the tribe.

"Many years ago this family of Siwashes was raided by tall red Indians from the far southwest and the family scattered, and many women and children and much loot taken. These ivory relics were among the loot, and have been simply a legend of the remnants of the tribe ever since.

"The unexpected return of this relic has aroused a new spirit in them, and I can see a little offishness and suspicion. While I do not expect any trouble from them I want to be absolutely certain of them until we get this work of Colonel Snow's done, and as I say, I should have been better satisfied if the matter had not come up at this time."

"I want to suggest," said Rand, "that we Scouts surrender all claim to the ivory, and tell the Indians that they are welcome to the relic."

"That might be a good idea, and I will go along with you and explain to the Siwashes that it came into your hands accidentally."

The boys crossed over to the shack where the chief sat smoking with the others. For some reason all work on the totem pole had been abandoned for that night at least.

Rand, in his newly acquired jargon, explained to the aborigines that the Scouts desired to present the heirloom to the tribe, and Swiftwater supplemented this with a talk in the native tongue telling just how the boys had come into possession of the horn.

The Indians listened gravely, without expression, except to nod eager assent to the offer of the Scouts to relinquish the prized relic. The chief even showed some cordiality, saying:

"Good! You come me potlatch," which Jim explained was an invitation to visit him at his village on the occasion of a merrymaking similar to a Christmas celebration.

The Scouts retired that night full of the mystery of the thing, feeling as if they had come, somehow, into touch with a long dead past. Swiftwater appeared more reassured, but took occasion to visit the shack before turning in and found the aborigines all herded together with the dog in the almost air tight hut, ventilation appearing to be a thing abhorrent to them.

The first thing that became apparent when the boys and the miner threw back the cheesecloth door of their tent that kept out the horde of mosquitos in the early morning was the absolute silence of the forest. The six Indians had taken one of the two boats, and with the dog had silently drifted away during the night down the current of Gold.

CHAPTER X.

BUILDING THE CAMP.

The chagrin of Swiftwater Jim was almost too great for expression when the discovery of the Indians' desertion was made.

"It was what I had feared," he said. "Still, I thought our talk last night had absolutely satisfied them. I don't think they were so much afraid of us as that they desired to be sure that the sacred bone got back safely to their village, and they knew that a big feast would be made for them when they returned. It would be useless to pursue them, for it would be a hard trip back to White Horse, and there would be no certainty of our being able to keep them if we got them back. Our work here is so nearly finished that I believe if we turn to it heartily we can complete it in the time we intended and get back to Skagway in time to meet Colonel Snow on his return from the northwest. How about it?"

The Scouts, and especially Rand, felt themselves to be to a certain extent responsible for the situation in which they found themselves that they readily agreed to turn to and exert themselves to the utmost to finish up the work of preparing the camp for the winter's work.

The sod house had been practically finished by the Indians before they deserted, the only thing remaining to be done consisting of the hanging of a pair of stout double doors on the casings that had been let into the sod as the walls went up, the finishing of the windows and the erection of a chimney for the big fireplace that had been built into the house at one end.

The doors had nothing artistic or ornate about them, and in half a day were constructed of rough lumber and hung on strong hinges from among the hardware in stock. Instead of glass for the windows, which hard freezing of the sod house and settling of the walls might have a tendency to shatter, double sheets of mica, such as is used in the flexible tops of automobiles, were set in and plastered with clay which was burnt to the hardness and consistency of brick by a plumber's flash lamp sending out the hot flame of burning gasoline in the hands of Swiftwater.

The construction of the chimney was a novel experience for the boys, who knew little of the expedients that pioneers far from stone and lime were compelled to resort to. It is true there were many boulders in the creek, but skilled work was necessary to lay them, and the miner resorted to an easier method.

A considerable amount of lumber sawed by the Indians remained, and this was split up into stakes about two inches square. These were driven into the walls of the house alongside of the fireplace and other stakes laid across them at their outer ends.

As fast as this structure became a foot high it was plastered inside and out with clay which was burnt hard with the blow lamp. Above the opening in the fireplace the chimney was continued by putting of clay on the sod wall and burning it in, making the chimney smaller for better draft.

The top of the chimney above the house was provided by constructing a cratelike affair by fastening smaller pieces to four stout stakes and setting these stakes down into the chimney and plastering the whole inside and out with clay. After a hot fire had been kept up in the fireplace for twenty-four hours to thoroughly bake the clay Swiftwater announced that the sod house was finished.

This work was not accomplished without some inconvenience, and even suffering to the boys as yet scarcely inured to hard labor. Blistered hands and aching backs were the daily portion, and it was only by working them in shifts of three that the miner was able to gradually break them in. But pure air and good food worked wonders, and in a few days they hardly felt the effects of a day's labor except in increased appetites and sound sleep. As the days went on, however, the small pests of wood and water that come with the summer increased in number, and almost drove the boys frantic. The mosquito seemed to be always present day and night, and despite the use of nettings and cheesecloth it seemed almost impossible to keep them out of the tent. A worse plague if possible was the "black fly," a minute midge that bored deep into the skin and brought the blood with every bite. There was also in lesser numbers a large striped fly that had a habit of hanging on the spruces and birches in clusters, but came at once to welcome the white man as an old friend.

His bite was like the cut of a knife. Swiftwater said he had never been able to discover what this fly lived on when the white man was not there, for it is matter of record that it would not touch an Indian or an Eskimo.

As it became necessary to protect one's self against these tiny marauders, Swiftwater dealt out to the boys small vials of a swarthy looking mixture compounded of oil of cedar, oil of tar and pennyroyal. With this they bathed their faces and hands frequently, which had the effect of discouraging the pests and greatly reducing their attacks. The mixture entered the pores of the skin, however, and it was not many days before everyone of the Scouts was as tawny colored as the Siwash who had left them.

"You're not the only Injun in camp, now," said Jack, addressing Don, who had been adopted into a tribe of Crees in the Canadian Rockies. "If this Patrol should step into an Indian village now we'd be adopted offhand on our complexions alone."

"I'm na so certain," replied Don, "but I think I could get along the rest of my life in comfort if I never smelled pennyroyal again. 'Tis not a perfume that grows on ye."

"It certainly has grown on us the last week," said Rand, "and I notice that lately the mosquitos seem to be taking a liking to it. At least they don't seem to mind it as they did at first."

It was true that the insects seemed to be growing larger and fiercer as the summer advanced, and it became essential to secure better protection for the workers in the daytime. The miner brought out a half dozen ordinary linen hats, and cutting up sufficient netting for the purpose with his sailor's "palm," sewed it around each of the headgear. This, when placed on the head, allowed a fall of netting to drop down on the shoulders, protecting the face and neck. This was found to be a great protection, and as the boys had grown somewhat hardened to the stings they got along very nicely.

The next job undertaken was the foundation for the sawmill itself. For this purpose, Swiftwater had brought along some bags of cement, and a small excavation similar to that made for the house was dug about eighteen inches deep and filled with boulders rammed in with clay. On this a wood fire was built, and the clay burned hard, resting on this around the edges a form of boards was placed, making a sort of bottomless box. The cement, mixed with sand and water from the creek, was made into a concrete which was poured into the form upon the baked clay and boulders. The plastic mass when it filled the boxlike structure to the top was smoothed off and allowed to dry. Forty-eight hours after it had hardened into stone and the foundation was complete.

The camp duties devolved upon the Scouts as well as the hard labor which had been a legacy from their Indians. The miner divided up these duties as best he could, making Rand responsible for the sanitary condition of the place, and giving such hints as he himself had gained by a service as an enlisted man in the army and as a shipmaster. He himself took upon himself most

of the cooking, although when the ship's bread they had brought with them began to pall upon the boys he selected Gerald for baker, and taught him how to mix a batch of baking powder bread, and bake it in a "reflector" before an open fire.

The first batch of loaves that Gerald produced came out of the little oven so dark colored and hard, as they had failed to rise sufficiently that they could not be eaten, and aroused the jeers of the "baker's" fellow Scouts, who used them for several days in a game of basketball until Gerald sneaked them out of camp and threw them into the creek. He had excellent results with the bakings which followed, and after the chimney on the sod house was finished a fire was built in the new fireplace that gave a steadier heat, and he even attempted a batch of biscuit with such excellent results that they informed him they were as good as any "that mother used to make."

128

Swiftwater was indefatigable in his attention to the diet and health of the Scouts, and made an effort to vary the former as much as possible. Most of their food was canned or cured provisions, and the miner did his best to secure fresh food. After the adventure with the bear no large game was seen at all, but occasionally small birds were shot, and squirrels were found fairly abundant. These, with a few small trout caught by Pepper in the creek, helped to form a pleasant change from bacon, canned beans and what the former sailor called "salt horse," or corned beef. The commander of the camp was especially anxious to get hold of some green vegetables, but the time was too short to attempt to grow anything, and he spent some leisure time in the woods trying to find some substitute. A change to green stuff is found very essential on shipboard to prevent certain diseases that follow a too steady diet of salt and canned foods, and the alternative where vegetables are not obtainable, is lime juice, occasional doses of which the miner administered to the boys.

129

One Saturday Swiftwater suggested a half holiday, and with the remaining boat pole up to the meadow where they had obtained the sod, and search for some wild vegetables of an edible character. It was also suggested that as the May flies had begun to appear the party should take their fishing tackle along and run a few miles further up the Gold and try casting off for the handsome, brown, steelhead and brown trout that frequent the interior waters of the British Columbia region, especially near their mountainous sources.

"Hadn't we better take some larger tackle and try for salmon?" suggested Dick. "I understand this country is famous for salmon."

"Well, hardly," replied Swiftwater. "If we were on waters that flowed into the Pacific and Alaskan waters we should probably find them. But the rivers hereabouts rise in the Coast range mountains which separate us from the sea and flow northeast. The salmon is not a fresh water fish. He lives in the most remote depths of the ocean, and only runs up the rivers during the summer to spawn, and usually dies there. He can climb a pretty high waterfall, but I don't think he could climb the Coast range to get into Gold Creek."

130

As this was the first outing they had had it was decided to take sufficient provisions and firewood with them to last until the next day and stay over night if they found encouraging fishing up the stream, and to return before dark on Sunday.

"While I like to make Sunday a pretty good day, when I can," said the miner, "I think that our necessity for fresh fish and vegetables makes this trip a work of necessity."

It was decided that two of the boys should stay and guard the camp, and Rand and Jack expressed a willingness to do so when they saw that Pepper and Dick were both anxious to get away from the monotony of the place they had been tied up to for weeks. So with Swiftwater and Gerald poling on one side and Don and Dick on the other, and Pepper at the long steering oar in the rear the boat was pushed off into midstream with a bugle Scout salute from the garrison left behind.

131

The day was beautiful, and nearly as warm as midsummer in New England. The trip up to the meadows would have proven uneventful except for the unparalleled energy of Pepper, who, as Dick said, was "always sticking his oar in at unexpected times." As the boat steered easily he attempted to aid the polesmen by pushing at times with his long stern sweep, until at an unexpected moment the blade of the oar slipped between two rocks and down into the soft bottom and stuck there straight upright, dragging the bewildered Pepper, who clung to it, completely off the stern of the boat.

The frightened young Scout, not knowing how deep the water was under him, wrapped his legs around the sweep which remained upright, and clung to it yelling for help.

The impetus of the boat carried the craft on about twenty-five feet before it was stopped by the current, for the polesmen had stopped work and turned around to whoop with laughter and delight when they saw the ridiculous figure perched on the oar in midstream still crying for rescue.

Shouting words of encouragement they let the boat drift slowly down stream again. Before they reached him, Pepper's strength gave out, and he slid slowly down the sweep, and was preparing to battle for his life in the icy water when his moccasins brought upon a rock in a foot of water, and he pulled the oar loose, and as the stern of the boat reached him stepped aboard with a foolish expression on his face, barely wet to the knees.

132

It would be cruel to Pepper to record in this history the sarcastic expressions of admiration for his agility and ability "to reach out and grab trouble every time it went by," as Dick expressed it. There were references to the "champeen pole vault of Alaska; height ten feet; depth, twelve inches," "veteran oarsman of the Gold," "Rocked into the Cradle of the Deep," but the last

comment which brought out the old Pepperian red through the tan and the yellow of the mosquito "dope" was a quotation from an old boyhood rhyme made by Gerald, apropos of "appearances."

"Willie had a purple monkey, climbing on a
yellow stick,
Willie sucked the purple monkey and it made him
deadly sick."

Arrived at the meadows they found the grass grown to the height of their heads and a wealth of wild flowers such as they had never seen before. Acres of yellow poppies, wild geraniums, bluish in color, saxifrage, magenta colored epilobium, moccasin plants and a hundred others with familiar faces. But what pleased Swiftwater especially were the immense quantity of dandelions.

He set the boys at work gathering all the plants they could secure, while himself began to hunt for a peculiar wild onion, which he finally found in abundance. He also found sorrel, both the tops and root of which are pleasant to the taste. They half filled the boat with these and other harmless edible plants, and then late in the afternoon started to pole up the river to the fishing grounds, intending to try for the trout in his most amenable season, the early evening.

After the boat had pulled away from the camp, Rand and Jack cleared up the remains of the dinner and put things to rights, after which Rand said:

"I say, Jack, I'm going to indulge in a little luxury—a hot bath. This bathing in the creek is all right, but that water feels as if it came right out of the snow, and I can't get it to take hold on this 'dope' stain on my skin at all.

"How are you going to do it? We didn't include anything like a bathtub in our luggage you know, and we haven't anything big enough to heat more than a few gallons of water."

"I'll show you; give me a hand and I'll rig up a bath big enough for both of us." They went to the tent and got the biggest of the tarpaulins lying there, and taking it to the two seven-foot sawhorses which the Indian sawyers had used. Placing the two close together they threw the ends over the horses and fastened them, allowing the middle to hang down almost to the ground. By drawing the sides a little tighter than the middle of the ends, they formed a sort of loose bag. While Jack made up a hot fire in the fireplace, into which he dumped a dozen boulders from the creek, Rand carried water enough to fill the "bath tub" in the tarpaulin, the texture of which was so thick and so closely woven that very little of it dripped out. As the boulders became red hot, Rand and Jack brought the hand barrow used to cart stones from the stream, with a little sand in the bottom, and rolling the stones into it carried them to the "tub" and dumped them in. They soon had the water at a boiling heat, and quickly stripping both tumbled in and were soon luxuriating the first hot dip they had enjoyed since leaving the hotel in Skagway.

They were engaged in an effort with strong soap and sand, trying to remove their lately acquired complexions, when the sound of oars and poles on the river reached them. They were considerably back of the camp in the timber, and could not see the landing from the "bathroom," but supposed the sounds were by their comrades returning. They stepped from the tarpaulin to go to the creek for a cold plunge as a finishing touch, when over the bank swarmed the six Siwashes who had so lately deserted them. They were unarmed and were driven by three men with guns. The two boys seeing the strangers were about to step aside for their clothing when they were ordered to stand and throw up their hands. The three newcomers were Dublin, Rae and Monkey.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE MERCY OF THE PEST.

"Sorry ye'r not in receivin' costume, but that won't make no difference. We got off down to the mouth of the creek when the steamer went down and started to walk up when we met these Siwash comin' down with the boat, and concluded it was just what we needed. We held 'em up, and finally persuaded them to pole us back up. They wouldn't talk much at first, but finally told us what ye were doin' up here. We intended to git here at night and su'prise ye a little, but when we stopped at the bend just below we saw the other fellers pushin' up stream, and concluded to come right on and su'prise ye this afternoon. Rae, you and Monkey herd them Injuns into that shack over there, and let Monkey stand watch on them. Then you come back here and we'll take care of these young Scouts."

"What are you doing up here?" asked Rand. "What do you want of us?"

"Well, we're after part of the outfit you brought in here, for we're goin' on down the Yukon prospectin'. Then I think there's some of that machinery you brought in that Colonel Snow would pay pretty heavy to git back, and we'll annex some of that."

"Yes," snarled Rae, who had returned, "and first thing we'll put you two where you won't bother for a while. I'll git some rope," and so saying, he turned toward the tent and soon returned with some cord.

"Look here, Dublin," cried Jack. "Whatever you intend to do let us get on some clothing, for these mosquitos and black flies are torturing us."

"Haw, haw," yelled Rae, "that won't do you any harm. Let's tie 'em up just as they are and let the bugs chew on 'em."

"Why, man," protested Rand, "they would torture us to death in a few hours. Do you want to murder us?"

"Oh, I ain't so pertikler," sneered Rae. "You fellers have made us trouble enough around Creston, and ye'll have to take yer chances."

"Here, cut that out, Rae," said Dublin, in whom, despite his criminal instincts, there were still many elements of decency. "We're not here to murder anybody. Git them some clothes." 138

With a growl, Rae limped away to the tent again, returning with two pairs of pajamas, and despite the boys' complaint that these would prove but little protection, they were compelled to don them. Their hands were then bound, and they were then taken a short distance back into the woods, where they were fastened to trees. Then the desperadoes went back and began to ransack the stores. Ripping open boxes and bags they piled up a varied quantity of provisions, and even helped themselves to a quantity of clothing and blankets which the expedition had brought up to be left in cache for the following winter. They also tore open the canvas coverings of the sawmill and a dynamo which accompanied it, which was intended to supply electric light for night work to supplement the short days of winter. From both of these they selected a dozen of the smaller parts of the greatest importance and made one canvas bundle of them, thus disabling the machinery completely.

Having gathered their loot together they went to the shack and compelled three of the Indians to come out and carry these things and place them aboard the boat. They had worked nearly two hours, and now cursing the Siwashes, they urged them to hurry with the plunder, fearing the return of the other members of Swiftwater's party. 139

Meantime, the boys had been suffering tortures. The woodland pests of all kinds swarmed about them, stinging through the thin clothing and covering their heads and faces, which had now begun to swell to an extent that threatened total blindness in time. Fortunately, the gang had not gagged them, and they were able to comfort one another with the hope that their comrades would find no fishing and return that night. They made desperate effort to release themselves, but with no result except to chafe wrists and ankles to a painful condition. The place where they had been fastened was further up stream than the camp, which was partly concealed from them, but commanded a view of a mile or more up the creek. As time went by they scanned this stretch of water eagerly for some signs of their friends, but in vain. At last, Jack, who had tried to bear up bravely as became a good Scout, spoke up in rather a tremulous voice:

"Rand, do you suppose they will go away and leave us tied up like this all night? These mosquitos will come in clouds after dark, and we can't last long then. One of my eyes is about gone now." 140

"Rae and Monkey might do it, but I am sure Dublin will see that we are cut loose," replied Rand. Suddenly, Rand, who had been straining his eyes up the stream, exclaimed excitedly:

"Jack, Jack! There's some one coming down the creek on the shore."

Jack turned eagerly to the shore above. Sure enough. Three figures on horseback had just emerged from the forest, but a hundred rods above them, and rode slowly down the bank.

"They don't see us yet," said Rand. "Wait until they get about half way here, and then yell for help with all your might."

The horsemen rode slowly toward them, and as they reached a point a few yards distant both Rand and Jack let a high boyish scream with all their strength:

"Robbers! Thieves! Help! This way."



THEY RODE STRAIGHT FOR THE BOYS.

At the same moment the three strangers caught sight of the two queer figures tied to the trees and pulled up a moment. With the first yell, Rae and Dublin came running around the sod house with their guns leveled, cursing the boys and commanding silence. At the same moment they caught sight of the strange horsemen. They turned at once and ran back for the shack just as the horsemen seemed to comprehend the situation. There was a sharp bugle call, and the three put spur to their horses, and with carbines in rest came on at a hard gallop. They had to come round a little bend in the creek which delayed them a little, then they rode straight for the boys.

"Don't mind us," cried Rand, "get that gang before they get away. They've been raiding the camp."

Two of the men turned and rode around the sod house while the other with a spring from his mount and with a couple of slashes of a big wood knife cut their bonds, and remounting, followed his comrades without asking a question.

The boys followed as rapidly as possible, and when they came into view of the camp a curious and lively scene met their gaze. Dublin and Rae had gotten the Indians out of the shack and at the point of their guns had herded them toward the boat into which they were tumbling as fast as they could. The horsemen were riding toward the struggling crowd crying out to them to halt. As they rode near, Dublin and Rae turned and deliberately fired at the men, whose carbines at once cracked in reply. The last of the Indians who had not yet gotten into the boat pitched forward on the bank, and jumping over him, Dublin and Rae gave the boat a push out into the middle of the stream, sprang aboard and dropped into the bottom of the craft, which at once began to drift down with the current. As nothing was in sight above the gunwale except the Indians the horsemen did not fire again. As the batteau drifted around the point, Monkey Rae, who had been the first to get aboard and conceal himself, rose, and putting his fingers to his nose, shouted back some insulting epithets.

Having dismounted, the three strangers turned to meet the boys, who at once recognized in their khaki uniforms, blue flannel shirts and broad-brimmed hats, three of the members of Major McClintock's patrol of Royal Northwest Mounted Police, whom they had met in White Horse.

They saluted the boys, who returned the recognition, and then shook hands with their rescuers.

"Faith, it seems we were just in time," said O'Hara, the sergeant, "but I'm sorry we didn't get that crowd. If I'm not mistaken, it's one the Major has been looking for that came up on the same boat from Seattle with you."

Rand assured him that the desperadoes were the same that had been referred to, and he continued:

"I'm sure I don't know how they got by our post at White Horse, but they must have made a circuit. However, our men'll get thim somewhere. How are ye yerselves? Begorra ye have foine lookin' faces on ye. Wait till I docther ye up a bit. We all get lukin' worse than that sometimes on this patrol duty."

He produced from the haversack or his "war bag," as he called it, at the rear of his saddle, a couple of bottles, one of which contained water of ammonia and another glycerine and vaseline mixed. The application soon relieved the pain and reduced the swellings. As he did so the other policemen walked down to the landing, where they were attracted by groans at the foot of the bank, and there found the Indian who had pitched forward when they had fired, and whom they supposed had been dragged into the boat. Instead he had rolled down the bank and partially into the water.

146

They picked him up and carried him up onto the grass, where the boys at once recognized him as the Siwash chief who had deserted at the head of their Indians a few days before.

An examination showed that one of the police bullets had gone through his thigh, but had not made a dangerous wound. Rand at once dressed this, at the same time having some talk with him in "pigeon." The chief could add but little in his jargon to what Dublin had already stated—that they had been met at the conjunction of the Gold and the Lewes by the desperadoes, and under cover of the rifles been compelled to return up stream. Of the narwhal's horn he refused to talk, and his wound having been dressed he was placed on the balsam boughs in the shack.

Rand and Jack at once extended the hospitalities of the camp to the mounted police, who gladly accepted the offer of the empty sod house to stable their mounts, and thus kept them from the attacks of the insect pests. They also showed extreme satisfaction at a rather elaborate camp dinner gotten up by the boys in their honor as a relief from the rather limited army rations that constituted their portion when riding over the long trails of the "beat" which they covered four times a year.

147

The evening was spent around the camp fire; the boys giving an account of the work that they had done since they left White Horse, and the troopers relating many wild and hazardous adventures of the lands above Winnipeg, including the forests, the posts of the Hudson Bay Company, the "land of Little Sticks," and the "Great Barrens" that stretch north to Hudson's Bay, and known as the "Silent Places" over to the west, where the Yukon begins and joins itself to Alaska. To these were added many tales of the Soudan and Indian by O'Hara, who had served in the British army.

When they retired that night the troopers refused to accept the share of the tent offered them, but taking the hammocks which they carried, from their saddle-gear, fastened it to trees, and with their ponchos and mosquito nettings over them, calmly retired for the night.

It was noon the next day when Swiftwater and the Scouts with him slipped slowly down the river in their barge, and tied up to the bank. He greeted the Northwest Mounted Police with pleasure, but showed considerable perturbation when the story of the attack on the camp was related. He at once investigated the extent of the raid on the stores, and was evidently much pleased to find that although the robbers had taken considerable loot with them they had not had time to load up the parts of the machinery which they sorted out.

148

On Sunday afternoon the troopers took their departure, saying that they would cover the creek on their way down, and try to find out where the gang and their Indians had gone to. Swiftwater promised to follow down the creek in a few days and up the Lewes and file a formal complaint at White Horse. The "green stuff" and trout which the expedition had brought back made a most acceptable Sunday dinner, and after it was over Swiftwater gave the boys a small talk.

"I propose," said he, "to get to work to-morrow morning and erect the last and most important building of our little city in the wilderness here, and that is the cache. I'm going to hang onto this Injun we have here, although he won't be of any use to us, and take him before the Commissioner in White Horse and find out the reason for his leaving all of a sudden. If there's anything important in that ivory horn he's got I'm going to find it out for you boys and see if he can be of any use to you. We can leave this camp shipshape in two days. We'll simply drift down the Gold, and wait at the entrance to the Lewes for the steamer up from Dawson to White Horse."

149

On the following Monday morning the Scouts went heartily to work, and by night had erected a rough house of planks without windows, and raised from the ground about a dozen feet on spars built in bridgework shape. Into this was conveyed all the remaining stores and the machinery, the whole being covered with heavy tarpaulins and tightly tied.

The cache was raised from the ground to prevent bears and other marauders from reaching the provisions it contained, and the shelter was sufficient for all the stuff left behind.

On Wednesday morning the tent was pulled down, the provisions necessary for their few days' journey placed aboard, the wounded chief helped into the craft, and as the boat drifted out into the stream the Creston Patrol of Scouts stood at attention, and with their bugle sounded a salute to their first camp in the wilderness.

150

CHAPTER XII.

ALASKA'S FIRST AIRSHIP.

The Scouts and their commander reached the mouth of the Gold early in the evening, and made camp on their old ground, the sandy spit between the two rivers. The steamer from Dawson was due some time during the night, and before they turned in they set up a red lantern on the long steering sweep as a signal. The dawn had broken when the hoarse siren of the steamer was heard down the Lewes, and by the time all hands were awake she was backing water at the mouth of the Gold. The flat boat was quickly poled out to her, and what Swiftwater called their "dunnage" was placed aboard. Then, with the steamer's boat in tow the batteau was taken back into the mouth of the creek and securely anchored to the bank to be called for by Colonel Snow's men the following fall.

The trip to White Horse was uneventful, and from there the boys, after a call on Major McClintock at the Mounted Police post, where they left thanks for their rescuers, who had not yet returned from their patrol duty, took a train to Skagway. They found Colonel Snow awaiting them, and after Swiftwater had given an account of the work at the camp on the Gold, preparations were made for the journey down the Yukon to St. Michaels and the Seward Peninsula, where Colonel Snow had some further business to transact for the government. Traveling in Yukon and Alaska is expensive, but Colonel Snow had agreed to defray the expenses of the trip from Skagway to Nome in payment for the boys' services in the camp, and they had already confided to him the scheme they had in mind to make some money for themselves.

The Scouts had given every attention to detail in setting up the machine, and the apparatus had been given a tryout by frequent runs across the grass and short lifts into the air. A small grandstand had been built for the town officials and invited guests, and the Scouts attired in their khaki uniforms and broad hats acted as a reception committee and as ushers.

Swiftwater, who was to go down the Yukon to Dawson with them on his way to the Fairbanks mining district, where he proposed to carve out what he termed a new "stake," acted as box office man and ticket taker. There were nearly two thousand persons on the grounds when the boys brought out from its canvas hanger the neat double plane with its bright motor and varnished propeller. The skids had been replaced with rubber tired bicycle wheels and the controls were of the latest pattern. The machine was dressed with tiny flags, and out of compliment to the neighboring Yukon territory the British colors shared the display equally with the American flag.

The hour of the ascent was announced by a bugle call, and the boys surrounded the aeroplane to keep the crowd back, when Gerald climbed into the seat. A cleared space of nearly a quarter of a mile had been reserved for him, and starting the motor he glided gently away over the grass, then lifted his forward plane and rose into the air. He lifted the plane to about two hundred feet, circled the lower end of the field and came back over the heads of the crowd. As he swept over the grand stand the astonished crowd recovered somewhat from its amazement and sent forth a mighty cheer that was added to by almost as great a throng outside the grounds. Having given the crowd an opportunity to inspect the machine at close quarters, Gerald began to mount in spirals until he reached an altitude of nearly two thousand feet, after which he headed directly for the summit of one of the lofty mountains that form the natural features of the Skagway region. It was nearly a dozen miles away, but he passed over the intervening country at a speed of nearly sixty miles an hour, and after the lapse of about twenty minutes returned, and dropping slowly in spirals, glided gently to earth within a score of feet of the spot from which he had risen.

Soon after their return to Skagway the mysterious "piano case" was brought out of storage and unpacked, a vacant but fenced lot was rented and the first aeroplane that Alaska had ever seen was soon put together, and was in process of being tuned up.

As has been told in a previous volume, the Creston Patrol of Boy Scouts had become fairly proficient airmen, having constructed a glider which in a contest had won for them a motor with which they later equipped an airship. Gerald, especially, had shown himself a most capable and courageous aviator, and only a short time before coming to Alaska had received from the Aeronautical Society his license as a full fledged air pilot. Needless to say their exhibition was the notable event of the year, and it added as well a goodly sum to the boys' exchequer.

Citizens and visitors were delighted with the exhibition, and begged for another day of the same thing, but Colonel Snow was anxious to be on his way to the Klondike country, and could not allow the boys more time. The sum realized was not only satisfactory to the town officials, but the share coming to the boys went a considerable way toward providing funds for their trip down the Yukon.

The aeroplane was loosely crated for the journey, and early in the month of July the Scouts took the train for their second trip from Skagway to White Horse. Upon their arrival at the end of their three hours' journey, Colonel Snow, Rand and Swiftwater repaired to a nearby Siwash village, to which the wounded chief had been conveyed upon their return from Gold Creek and found him nearly recovered from his injury.

He showed considerable satisfaction at meeting them, and was evidently very grateful to Swiftwater and the boys for their kindness to him. He said the return of the ancient tribal relic had greatly rejoiced the members of the tribe, and had aroused great interest among the older men in the old legends attached to the heirloom. These had to do with a great wealth of ivory which had been stored in a cave at the top of a cliff during a tribal war over a hundred years

before, and that this cave was in the mountains which "ended near the Great Water." As near as Swiftwater could make out the mountains referred to were either the great Alaskan range which swings in a semicircle across the territory from the international boundary on the Yukon, where the range bears the name of Nuzotin, west to Cook Inlet, an arm of the North Pacific Ocean or the Chugach or Kenai ranges nearer the coast. Four great peaks are features of the Alaskan range, chief of them being Mount McKinley, the highest mountain in all America—20,464 feet—until recently unconquered by any of the ambitious mountain climbers who have attacked it.

The chief said further that some of his young men were ambitious to hunt for this peak, and that he himself would go with them over into the Cook Inlet region for the salmon fishing, and later would take up a search through the mountains aided by a remnant of the tribe which still haunts that section. He promised Rand that should the treasure be found he would share with the boys who had returned their ancient relic to the village.

While Colonel Snow had little faith in the existence of the cave or the possibility of its rediscovery, he saw that the spirit of adventure was aroused in the boys, and as he proposed that they should see as much as possible of Alaska, and as he himself must later visit the copper mining region he made an arrangement to meet the chief at Seward in the Kenai Peninsula, the end of the military cable to Seattle, late in August.

The Indians greatly desired that the boys should visit their village that night for a "potlatch," but as they could not do so the villagers insisted on presenting each of the party with a handsome hand woven blanket, the manufacture of which is the chief native industry.

Meantime, the other boys had paid a visit to the Custom House to give bond for their airship, but as the collector could find nothing of the kind on the tariff list, as none had ever been entered at a Yukon customs house, he concluded it was exempt and allowed it free entry.

"I see that the members of your Congress insist that a protective tariff is for the primary purpose of preventing foreign competition with home industries. As I do not believe that you will find an aviation industry on the Yukon, I guess I am safe in letting you take your machine through."

The boys also visited the police barracks and found their three friends of the forest patrol whom they again heartily thanked. At seven o'clock, at what would have been night anywhere else, they went aboard the "Yukoner" with the aeroplane, and an hour later cast off lines for Dawson. Here another exhibition was made, and under Swiftwater's guidance a visit paid to the mining camps.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOWN THE RIVER TO NOME.

Two days later, Colonel Snow and the boys, accompanied by Swiftwater, having taken leave of their new made friends at Dawson, embarked on a small launch (a new importation from the States) and started on a leisure trip down the Yukon, intending to use this means of river travel as far as the military post at Fort Gibbon, at the mouth of the Tanana, up which river Swiftwater was to proceed to the Fairbanks mining district, the latest discovered and most important in Alaska.

Colonel Snow's plan was to drop down the river in the swift motor boat, stopping at several army posts where he had friends, some of whom had come up from Seattle with the party and had extended the hospitalities of the various posts to them. They had left the crated aeroplane at Dawson with other heavy baggage to come down on the large river steamer Amelia, which was not due on its first trip up from St. Michael's for nearly a week, and which would overtake them on its return trip down the river at Fort Gibbon, another United States Army post.

The first stop of the party was to be at Eagle, a small, but prosperous town, on the boundary line between Alaska and Yukon territory, containing the most northerly custom house of the United States. Here they were to "declare" the aeroplane and the property they were to bring back into the United States and satisfy the customs authorities that it was all of American manufacture, after which it would be examined and passed when the "Amelia" came along. Adjoining the town of Eagle is the army post of Fort Egbert, garrisoned by two companies of infantry, and here Colonel Snow proposed to spend the night with his brother officers as their first stopping place.

The distance from Dawson to Eagle is about 150 miles, but the high powered launch they had secured with a crew of two, running down stream made easily thirty miles an hour, and they expected to reach their destination early in the afternoon.

"Colonel, if ye don't mind," said Swiftwater, "I'd like to stop off an hour or so up at Forty-mile, jest above here."

"Certainly," replied the Colonel, "we're making first-class progress and shall have plenty of time to reach Eagle before night. There's a wireless station and a line of military telegraph to the

coast at Eagle, and I simply desire to get there early enough to get off some dispatches to Washington before the post telegraph office closes."

"W-w-hat's 'Forty-mile?' I've heard of 'Forty-rod,' but never of 'Forty-mile,'" remarked Pepper flippantly.

"Wa-al," drawled the miner, "they was pretty near synon'mous, as you say, when I first knew the place. Forty-mile is the only civilized place of habitation between Dawson and Eagle. It's on the Yukon side of the river, and is a trading station for the Forty-mile mining district, the first real gold mining region opened up in this region. It was the scene of my early triumphs as a 'sourdough' after I left the whaling business, and I 'mushed' into it in the winter along with Dowling, the great mail carrier of this region, who carried the mail up the Yukon on the ice, with a dog team, nine hundred miles between Dawson and Fort Gibbon once a month.

161

"I got a good paying claim on Forty-mile Creek and took out so much rich gravel that winter that after I cleaned up in the spring I got an idea that I didn't need any more, and sold out and hiked for the States. It didn't last long, and I had to come back, but not up here. I thought I'd like to stop for an hour or so and see if any of my old partners were here."

There was little of interest at Forty-mile, except the big warehouses of the trading companies, but they had dinner ashore, and Swiftwater managed to find among the scanty population one or two of his old comrades, who had given up the search for gold and were content to work for the trading companies. A rapid but uneventful run during the afternoon brought them to Eagle, where they were greeted with delight by the three hundred or more citizens, and the few army officers, who, after welcoming the party, carried the Colonel off to the barracks, the boys being quartered in the only hotel of the place, run by the postmistress of the town, who had formerly been a school teacher in the States, and who made the boys' stay delightfully homelike.

162

Desiring to make Circle the next day, a distance of nearly two hundred miles by the river, they left Eagle at an early hour after taking on board a supply of fuel of a rather questionable character, for which they had to pay a heavy price. The trading companies said that this was the second launch that had visited Eagle and the demand for high-grade fuel was not great.

"Say, boys, what is 'mush'?" asked Jack, suddenly, as they sped down the river.

"C-c-cornmeal, salt and water, boiled," promptly spoke up Pepper, who was the expert on most things edible.

"It's what we make de pone an' de hoecake of, honey," corrected Rand.

"I dunno," broke in Don, "but I hear it's some foolish substitute for oatmeal porridge."

"My uncle feeds the chickens lots of it out on his farm," insisted Dick.

"Here, here," cried Jack, as soon as he could get in a word. "My mind isn't constantly on the menu. It's queer how a young man's fancy constantly turns to something to eat at any time of day. I'm talking of some word that Swiftwater used yesterday, referring to Forty-mile."

163

"Better ask him," suggested Rand, "he's an awful good explainer."

The miner, who had been talking with Colonel Snow about the value of Alaska mining investments in various districts, heard his name mentioned and turned with a smile.

"What's Swiftwater's latest crime?" he asked.

"We wanted to know what you meant by the word 'mush' you used yesterday," said Jack.

"Oh, that means simply gettin' somewhere; jest walkin' which, I might say, has been up to this time the chief means of communication in this big Alaska. I don't know where the word come from, but it was here when I arrived. I always supposed it was Eskimo. The whole Eskimo language, before I learned it, used to sound to me like a mouthful of it. However, a young feller who was up here some years ago, a newspaper man like you (he was with a party of United States senators), gave me a new idea on the matter. He showed me that the most of Alaska that wasn't forest and mountain and rock was just a soft wet spongy mat of roots and grass and moss that every step on it just pernounced the word."

"Ah, you mean McClain," exclaimed Colonel Snow. "I've read his work, and it is the most lucid, modest, and understandable descriptive work on the Alaskan country that has yet appeared."

164

The low grade fuel and inferior oil which they had taken aboard at Eagle had its effect on the engine which showed signs of "laying down," as the engineer said, several times during the day. Finally, after a peculiarly vicious splutter the motor "backfired," setting the oil soaked dungarees of the engineer aflame, and promptly "died." The engineer did not hesitate with so much oil and gasoline around him, but went over the side into the Yukon with one hand on the gunwale and, as soon as his burning clothing was soaked, was helped aboard again by his companion.

It became absolutely necessary to clean the engine, and while one of the boys kept the launch in the middle of the river as it drifted, with an oar, the others rolled up their sleeves, and with the knowledge gained from their aeroplane motors, aided the steersman to disconnect and clean the machinery. Meantime the engineer arrayed himself in dry clothing.

"Well, well," said he, as he came out of the cabin, "I didn't know we had a group of experts aboard. I supposed the aviator that went up yesterday knew all about it, but this help will save us about an hour's time, and we haven't been getting any too much speed out of her to-day."

165

The engine behaved excellently for the rest of the day, and about five o'clock in the afternoon

they landed at the town of Circle.

They found it a village of a couple of hundred, the supply point for the Birch Creek mining region.

At an early hour the next morning they were again on the bosom of the river, the engine having again been cleaned and "nursed" as the engineer described it for the day. The river had begun to widen and the bank to fall to almost a dead level just before reaching Circle the night before, and they now entered upon a dreary expanse of tundra or flat marsh land covered with a meager growth of willow and stunted birch. The river spread out to a width of nearly a dozen miles, dividing into many channels surrounding small bushy islands and rendering navigation very difficult. The wheelman, who was an old river pilot, was thoroughly acquainted with what he called the "Yukon flats," and managed to elude the sandbars and sunken islands with considerable dexterity.

166

"The trouble is," he confided to Swiftwater, "that this old river is closed six months in the year, and we never can tell whether we're goin' to find any of it here when the ice goes out in the spring. It wanders 'round as if it had no home or mother, and where we find a twenty-foot channel this fall there may be a dusty wagon road next spring."

At nine o'clock in the forenoon, Swiftwater rose and stepped onto the roof of the cabin and scanned the far-off shore intently. Suddenly, he turned to the interested Scouts, and removing his broad brim made a mock bow and said impressively:

"Young fellows, let me welcome you to the Frigid Zone; we have just crossed Arctic Circle."

"Wha—wha—where is it?" cried Pepper excitedly.

"Where's what?" asked Swiftwater.

"Th-the Circle."

"All in your imagination, if you'll remember back to your geography," replied the miner, with a smile, while the other boys who were slightly awed by the new situation, for a moment, gave a hearty laugh.

167

"Don't appear to be very frigid, does it?" remarked the Colonel, and the boys, who, for the first time, felt that they had really invaded the "Terrible North" of the explorers, gazed with new interest on the lush green meadows of the shores and the foliage of the tree-covered island.

They ran on down the river, and an hour later landed at Fort Yukon, an abandoned military post, the most northerly point on the river, lying at the mouth of the Porcupine, the Yukon's most important tributary.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SEWARD PENINSULA.

168

The voyagers left Fort Yukon the same afternoon and soon recrossing the Arctic Circle, continued on the dreary Yukon Flats, where the river broadened to more than thirty miles. As there was almost perfect daylight at midnight they proposed to sleep on board and continue the journey.

In spite of the clouds of mosquitos, which managed to invade even the well-closed in cabin, they passed a restful night, the engine working perfectly, and soon passed into the narrower reaches of the Yukon, and in the early morning came to the town of Rampart.

Here is a federal court which people come nearly a thousand miles to attend. There was also a telegraph station the end of the line to St. Michael's and Colonel Snow stopped only long enough to send certain despatches to that point. Then, again aboard the launch, they put on all speed, the purpose being to reach the mouth of the Tanana and Fort Gibbon that night. The day's journey was almost as uninteresting as that through the Yukon Flats, for while the river was narrower, the banks were low, thinly wooded and monotonous. Along in the afternoon they reached the mouth of the Tanana and landed at the town of that name, next to which stands the military post of Fort Gibbon, where Colonel Snow was to be a guest until the arrival of the down river steamer from Dawson.

169

Two days later the steamer Amelia put in an appearance, and they boarded her, to find their aeroplane and baggage aboard. Swiftwater Jim, who was to journey up the Tanana, had stayed to bid them goyby, and the boys parted with him with real regret. He promised faithfully that after he had made his "stake" he would come out to the "States" again, and would visit them at their homes. As the steamer backed out the boys gathered at the bow and gave him the Scouts' salute and a hearty cheer.

The journey down the lower Yukon, while unimpressive as to scenery, was pleasant in many respects, as the boys made many acquaintances who were thoroughly acquainted with the river,

170

along which were many old missions and Indian villages. At several of these stops were made, and the boys found many curiosities along the shores. At one place they visited a museum that contained three of the gigantic ivory tusks of the mammoth of which they had read a good deal since finding the narwhal's horn.

"Gee," said Gerald, "they must weigh nearly a hundred pounds apiece. If we ever find that cave with anything in it, it ought to be worth a good deal."

"Do you suppose that the chief will show up at Seward?" asked Dick.

"Oh, yes; I think so," said Rand. "I think he was very grateful for the way we treated him, and I understand these Indians are much like ours at home, and usually remember a favor."

"I don't care so much for the ivory as for the good story we will get out of it, if the whole thing turns out as we hope."

"There's you newspaper men again," said Don, "always after a good story, but why not take the ivory too if we find it?"

"Well," put in Pepper, "we'll soon know, for Colonel Snow said last night that we should remain in St. Michael's only until the Seattle steamer comes up to take us over to Nome, and he proposes to sail South with her, when she returns. Then we shall land at Seward, and meet the chief if he is there, and find out whether he has discovered the location of the cave."

The travelers were surprised to find the mouth of the Yukon spread out over an enormous expanse of country before it finally empties into Behring Sea. The river, about ninety miles from the sea, begins to split up into separate streams, and is said to have nine or ten mouths.

Behring's Sea is very shallow, and the waters are most of the time very rough, especially for the flat-bottomed boats that ply upon the Yukon. St. Michael's lies about seventy miles up the coast from the mouth of the river which is used by the steamers, and the passage is uncomfortable, not to say, at times, dangerous.

The ground swell of the shallow sea tested the seamanship of the young Scouts to the utmost and one or two of them retired to their stateroom, but as a large proportion of the passengers were affected in the same way there was very little disposition to deride the unfortunates, as had been done on the trip up the "Inside Passage." They arrived safely, however, and were again accorded a warm welcome by Colonel Snow's comrades of the army, who at once took them to the post, which is the chief institution of importance in the small town.

St. Michael's is situated on an island which constitutes a military reservation of the United States. Russia, in 1833, established a trading post there, and one of the curiosities of the place is the old Russian block house, a relic of primitive ideas in warfare. The town is the point of departure for the Yukon River steamers, and the aeroplane and the other luggage was taken off here to be placed on the Seattle steamer, which was to take them over to the Seward Peninsula, the other side of Norton Sound.

There are two small Indian villages on the island, and the boys spent part of a day in the inspection of these, buying large quantities of curiosities and looking on with interest at a "potlatch," an institution which means the entertainment of a man's neighbors so long as his goods hold out, and the host generally finds himself ready for a receiver by the time the entertainment ends.

The officers of the post were greatly interested in the aeroplane, and it was uncrated for their inspection, but stormy conditions on Behring's Sea during their stay prevented a flight.

Two days after their arrival, the steamer from Seattle to Nome came along and they embarked and steamed the 112 miles across Norton's Sound to Nome, the metropolis of that great northwestern section of Alaska that borders on the Arctic Ocean and extends within forty miles of Asia. There is no harbor at Nome, and the ships must lie about a mile off shore, while passengers and freight are taken in on flatboats, from which everything is raised on an elevator by a gigantic crane, and swung in shore.

Nome is one of the largest cities of Alaska, having a summer population of nearly 8,000. It is a lively, public-spirited place, and the army officers and business men greeted with enthusiasm the proposal of an airship exhibition.

Colonel Snow was especially in favor of it, as the army had already begun to take a great interest in aviation, and the officers desired an opportunity to inspect the workings of the machine. A popular subscription was decided on for the boys, and a sum amounting to about fifteen hundred dollars was quickly provided.

The beach at Nome, from which most of the gold of that region has been extracted, was found to make a fine starting field, and, as the country back of the town is mostly flat "tundra" or moss covered ground, with no trees to interfere, the flights made by Gerald were the most successful of his career. He delighted the army officers by taking them up, one at a time for short flights, and the citizens were so enthusiastic that they offered the boys almost any price they might name for the airship. Their affection for it was too great, however, and they refused to sell.

The Scouts were shown every attention, and were taken for a ride on the "Farthest North" railroad, known as the "Wild Goose" road, leading up to some of the most important placer mines on the peninsula. The Scout uniform caught the fancy of some of the young men of the town, and when the organization had been explained to them they organized two patrols, and Colonel Snow administered the first degree of the ritual.

In three days the steamer for Seattle was ready to sail, and the boys bid farewell to their new friends and started on the homeward leg of their journey. Steaming far to the westward to get around the long reach of the Alaska Peninsula they sailed a thousand miles south, and at Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island they transferred to the line of steamers which was to take them along the peninsula to Seward. Stopping part of a day on Kodiak Island, they visited the great salmon canneries at Karluk, where the boys were told they could catch all the salmon they wanted. They saw the great fish handled literally by the ton and canned by machinery. The boys disembarked with the aeroplane at Seward and found the chief and three of his men awaiting them, with the news that they believed that they had discovered the cave.

"No can get him. Very high. Most to sky," the chief told Rand, and indicated in "pigeon" that the cliff was a pinnacle of three spires of rock standing alone and utterly inaccessible from any side. He said it was two days' journey by easy trail, and that they would take horses.

Colonel Snow, deciding that the trip would be an interesting experience for the boys, provided them with pack horses and a trusty guide, in addition to the Indians. He was opposed at first to their trying to take the aeroplane into the mountainous regions, but finding that it could be conveyed by pack horses without trouble, and that the boys had some project on hand which made it very desirable to them withdrew his objections. He exacted a promise, however, that if they got into difficulties with it they would abandon it at once. He himself had business at Cordova and up the Copper River Railroad, and he agreed to meet them at the steamer from Seward to Cordova at the latter port within a week or ten days at the utmost.

The United States Government has in recent years constructed a large number of miles of good wagon roads and trails in different parts of Alaska, and nearly three-quarters of the distance to the point to which they were bound was thus equipped. The guide engaged for them was an old miner of the character of Swiftwater, and he was employed as a mail carrier and driver over the winter roads from Valdez to Fairbanks.

Horses were provided for the boys for such a distance as trails could be found, and from that point they would take only the pack animals and get through as they could. By taking out the motor, it was found that the plane could be easily carried by two animals, and the machinery was distributed between two others. Beyond some small food supplies and a quantity of strong rope no other luggage was taken.

The roads were found to be so good that although the trail ran right up into the foothills of the Kenai range they made excellent progress the first day and camped in a little mountain meadow full of late flowers, and with good running water.

They used gasoline for cooking, as they had brought along sufficient for use in the aeroplane and the Indians fed by themselves on salmon and other fish. Away in the distance, more than a hundred miles, could be seen the giant peaks of the Alaskan range—the backbone of Alaska—Foraker, Russell, Spurr and McKinley, snow clad and dazzling.

"I'd like a chance to climb one of those big mountains," said Jack. "You know we didn't get an opportunity in the Canadian Rockies, although they seemed to be very near."

"I guess," said Rand, "that we've got all we can do to climb the mountain we're looking for. We'll be lucky if we do that."

"How did the Indians or whoever hid this ivory, if there's any there, get it up to the cave, if it is a cave?" asked Don the Doubter.

"That's what we've got to find out; also how we're going to get up there ourselves," said Dick.

"I think we have a way to do that," said Gerald, "but we've got to know the size and shape of this hill or peak or whatever it is, before we decide how to climb it."

"Well," said Pepper, with a yawn, "I move we go to bed now and get up early and get on the road and try and reach the place before night," and he rose rather stiffly, for he was not known at home as a great admirer of horsemanship, and the day's journey had told on him.

"I'll keep watch for awhile yet," said the guide, "and then I'll put one of the Injuns on. Don't get scared if ye hear a shot early in the mornin', for I'm goin' out to see if I can get a caribou. I hear they're pretty thick up here in the foothills, and it'll tickle these Injuns to death. The poor fellers have been workin' the canneries all summer and ain't had a mouthful of fresh meat all that time. A little feast'll put more heart into 'em for the work."

The boys camped under a cluster of small trees with ponchos and blankets over them, and as the black flies had disappeared and mosquitos were few, enjoyed a good night's rest.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAMMOTH'S TUSKS.

Sure enough, the camp was awakened at an early hour the next day by a couple of rifle shots,

and an excited commotion among the Indians. The boys in whom, as in all healthy American youths, the hunting instinct was strong, at once scrambled from under their blankets, seized their rifles and dashed through the bushes toward the small stream which flowed from the mountains toward an arm of Prince William Sound.

A dozen rods from the camp, they came upon the guide and the Indians standing around a large bull caribou whose head boasted a magnificent pair of antlers. The animal's throat had been cut and the Indians had already set to work to take off the hide.

"Got him the first shot," said the guide, "and tried to get another, but they was too swift fer me. They was six in the herd. However, this is enough, and the poor things is bein' killed off fast enough fer their hides and horns without our takin' more'n we need."

180

"Why didn't you call us?" asked Jack, "I should like to have got a shot at some big game before we leave Alaska."

"Fer that very reason," replied the guide, "it's the close season now, and we can only kill what we need for meat. Besides that, it's ticklish business gettin' a shot at caribou, and two persons would have made more noise than one, and I wanted very much to get one or two fer these Indians, who need it, as I told you. Hurry up there, you Siwash, and get yer meat and have yer feast fer we've got to be movin'."

"What a handsome pair of antlers," said Rand, who was something of a naturalist.

"Best head I ever see," said the guide. "I'd be glad to make ye a present of it if there was any chance of yer gettin' it out of Alaska at this season. However, we'll take it back to Seward and maybe Colonel Snow can find some way to do it."

By this time two of the Indians had cut the carcass up, while the others had built a hot fire. Several steaks were cut off and roasted before the flames under the guide's direction for the boys' breakfast, and they found the meat juicy and palatable. Then the Indians turned to and had their "feast." They partially roasted the flesh in great chunks, and for an hour gorged themselves like starving men just escaped from the desert.

181

"T-t-hey won't be able to walk," commented Pepper, after gazing at the gastronomic feat that put any of his previous efforts in the shade.

"Let 'em alone fer that," said the guide, "I never in my life see anything that could carry a bigger cargo of grub, and do a day's work than a Siwash. I s'pose it's because starvation's got ter be a regeler profession with 'em. They can lay in food like a camel does water, and then go fer days without it."

The Indians, having packed some of the meat for the next day, cut the rest into thin strips, and with the caribou's head, hung them to the branches of trees out of reach of bears, to be called for on their return. The riding horses were also turned loose, in a broad meadow to stay until the return, and nothing but the pack animals taken.

Their morning journey carried them higher and higher into the foothills of the Kenai range, and the trail became more rugged. About nine o'clock the Indians began to show some eagerness and excitement, and the chief told the guide that they would soon sight the peaks. Finally, the Siwashes ran ahead to the top of a sharp rise and excitedly beckoned. The boys joined them, and as they reached the summit of the ridge a peculiar scene met their gaze.

182

The other side of the ridge sloped sharply for nearly two hundred feet to a valley nearly half a mile wide, paved with gravel and boulders, and as bald of vegetation as a desert. The rocks on the slope of the ridge and along the sides of this wide shallow ravine were cut as sharply and worn as smooth as if the stone cutter's chisel had shaped their surfaces.

A quarter of a mile distant, and almost in the middle of the valley stood an immense obelisk of rock some three hundred feet high, dividing, some distance from the top into three sharp pinnacles. On the surface of the middle spire could be seen a small black dot. The Indians were dancing with excitement, and the boys themselves felt a thrill as they realized that they were nearing the climax of a great mystery.

"That looks like a great river bed, in which the water had dried up," remarked Rand, "I never saw anything like it before."

183

"Bed of an old glacier," said the guide, who had come up. "Lots of 'em in this country."

"That explains it, then," said Jack, excitedly.

"Explains what?" inquired Dick.

"How they got up there," replied Jack. "Don't you see? This valley was full of ice once nearly to the tops of those rocks, and when it came down and melted off, the bodies of the mammoths dropped out, and the natives gathered the tusks and stored them in the cave which they could easily reach with the glacier so near the top. Then the snow gave out somewhere in the mountains and the glacier gradually pushed its way out and melted, leaving the cave high and dry."

"All right for you, Jack," said Gerald. "Begorra, you've had that story already written, I see. But it looks like the real goods."

"I've read of these things before," replied Jack.

"That's about what happened," commented the guide. "Some geological sharps who were up here last year explained one of these rocky holes the same way."

The pack horses were now brought up to the top of the ridge and unloaded, as they could not very easily be taken down the valley slope. With the greatest care the plane was removed from the two pack animals, and with ropes lowered on its own wheels down the gravelly slope. The motor and other machinery was slid down upon skids cut from the forest and placed along the bank. At the bottom, the Scouts set to work putting the machine together.

"Ah," said the guide, with the air of a great discoverer, "I see what yer scheme is now. Ye're goin' up in that arrerplane, and see if ye can git a peek in that hole up there."

"Better than that," replied Gerald. "We're going to get up and get into that hole."

Delighted at finding they were nearing the goal of their hopes with so few obstacles, the Scouts worked cheerfully and earnestly upon the reassembling of the plane, and by noon had replaced the motor and tested every stay, brace and control. Then, after a dinner of caribou meat and coffee, they wheeled the plane over the gravel to the foot of the great gray granite obelisk. As they neared it they could see that the dot at the summit took more and more the shape of the ace of clubs, the mouth of the cave appearing as if cut by the hand of an artist, into gothic form. The Indians were awe-stricken spectators, scarcely able to raise a hand to work, so impressed were they with the preparations.

Some seven hundred feet of strong, but light manila rope had been attached to the lower frame of the machine, and to guard against accidents as much more had been coiled under the seat. It was Gerald's intention to rise over the obelisk, and trail the rope over the rock between two of the pinnacles, thus affording means for the raising eventually of a block and tackle and a rope ladder by which they would be able to reach the summit. But the "best laid plans o' mice and men" and even Boy Scouts, "gang agley," as Burns says.

They found a patch of smooth gravel, clear enough of boulders to allow the aviator to make an excellent start, and after trying out the engine to find that it was working without a flaw, Gerald got a fine running start and mounted into the air. Working west half a mile, mounting all the time to raise his trailing rope from the ground, he turned and circled around the mighty mass of rock looking for the most likely point on the top over which to trail his line. As he passed he caught a glimpse of the interior of the cave, and saw that it was much larger than it looked from the ground to be.

Turning again, he concluded to pass between two of the pinnacles, and immediately volplane down on the other side. As he approached the rock he shut off the engine, and the aeroplane began to slow down. The propellor stopped, and the plane sank perceptibly. One plane struck the side of a pinnacle and crumpled up, the weight of the engine carried the middle section, and the machine sank down a wrecked mass of canvas and wires upon a narrow plateau between two of the points. Gerald was scarcely jarred from his seat by the impact and soon freed himself from the wreckage to find himself marooned upon the top of a perpendicular rock three hundred feet from the ground. The Scouts and the Indians set up a cry of dismay when the possibility of the disaster became apparent, but as soon as he had freed himself, Gerald assured them of his safety, and of the fact that he had plenty of room to stand and move around upon. Another thing that relieved their fears was that he had about sixteen hundred feet of rope available. He first gave his attention to the cave, and found that by an easy climb of seven feet he could reach the mouth. He found the hole to be about ten feet deep, by as many broad. It was perfectly lighted and piled in the rear was what appeared to be an indiscriminate mass of bones buried under a pile of dust. Dragging some of them out, he saw that the pile consisted of some ten fine mammoth tusks, well preserved, two of which were still attached to part of the skull of the animal, a fine museum relic. The rest was made up of a miscellaneous collection of ivory—narwhal's horns and tusks of the walrus—all weighing about five hundred pounds.

There were also many Indian relics, nearly all in a decayed condition. He soon notified his companions of what the cave contained, and asked them to send up the block and tackle on the rope he had dragged over the pinnacle. Fastening the block by a turn of the rope around a small point of rock above his head, he bundled up the bones in canvas cut from one of the planes and lowered it to his comrades. When the last of the ivory had been lowered, together with the Indian relics which he thought the Siwashes might prize, he took the other rope from the aeroplane and knotted it at ten foot intervals. This he fastened to another point of rock and threw down. Then he placed a noose of the tackle rope around his body under his arms. Yelling to his companions to lower away he bent a last sorrowful look upon his beloved aeroplane, and with tears in his eyes, swung off with his knotted rope in his hands. Placing his feet against the perpendicular rock, he swung out by his knotted guide line, and fairly walked down the face of the obelisk backward.

The loss of the machine and Gerald's stupendous adventure and escape was almost too much for the emotions of the Boy Scouts, and with watering eyes they surrounded their comrade with many a hug and pat upon the back.

As for the Indians, they were on their knees almost worshipping the mammoth's tusks and the Indian relics. To hide their emotions the boys began at once preparations for departure. The ivory was divided up, and under the guide's direction taken across the gravel and up the ridge, where it was packed upon the horses. The remainder of the stuff was abandoned, including the ropes, gasoline and tools to keep the derelict and exalted plane company. When they reached the top of the ridge, and were about to descend into the foothills, the Scouts turned, and with bared heads paid a last tribute to the "First Airship in Alaska."

CHAPTER XVI

HOMEWARD BOUND.

They camped that night on the site of their previous resting place, and at early morning gathered in their horses, some of which had strayed for miles, and were soon on their road back to Seward. By journeying rapidly, most of the trail being down hill, they arrived at the town early in the afternoon, where they found a despatch from Colonel Snow, asking them to await him there, as he would return to that port.

With the guide, they put in their time visiting the surrounding country, and in a trip to the celebrated Columbia glacier, considered the most beautiful and impressive on Prince William's Sound. It is about four miles wide, and about three hundred feet high. There are ten other glaciers in Prince William's Sound which keep its magnificent fiords filled with icebergs which fall from the glaciers, with the sound of thunder. The Scouts made a trip over the ice fields of Columbia, which were full enough of ice bridges and crevasses to furnish many a thrill.

190

"I wonder if there are any more mammoths on ice under us here," said Don as they tramped over the snowy surface.

"If there are, we shan't need an airship to get them," responded Rand.

"No," said Jack, "we shall want another kind of ship if we catch any more of that sort."

Two days later the steamer from Seattle, by way of Cordova and Valdez, reached Seward and the Colonel was a passenger. He brought with him a large package of letters from Creston which had been wandering over the Yukon, and had finally come across from Eagle to Valdez by way of Fairbanks.

The boys repeated the newsy gossip of their home town, and exchanged their letters freely. Pepper had three, however, which he read quietly by himself.

"Come, Pepper," said Jack, "produce."

"These are entirely for private consumption," replied Pepper, turning red, but with an effort at dignity.

"Pretty much everything you get your hands on seems to be," commented Dick, and the boys surrounded Pepper with joined hands, singing: "I'll Bet He's Had a Letter from Home," until the badgered youth tackled his brother and broke through the line of his tormentors. The Colonel had also found at Valdez a brief letter from Swiftwater, who announced that he had gotten hold of what he considered a good claim, and if any of his late "command" cared to come up and help him work it, they might all be millionaires before the following spring.

191

"Any of you care to take the job?" asked the Colonel with a smile. "I've taken an interest with Swiftwater in any claims he may file on, and you might find it worth while. However, I'm frank to say that, having gotten you this far without disaster I should prefer to return you to your homes safe and in good order."

The reader may wish to follow the later adventures of the Boy Scouts, and in the next volume, "In the North Woods," their further history will be told.

The letters from home awakened many pleasant memories, and perhaps a little feeling of home sickness, and there was no eager acceptance of the miner's proposition, which, anyway, was probably made in a joking spirit.

192

"I believe," said Rand, "I should like to come back here some time. I sometimes think that in spite of the fact that this great territory is so near the North Pole, it's going to be a great commonwealth. I want to see it in the winter time, when they say it is so terrible."

"Gee, I think we've had enough of it for this time," put in Gerald, with a serious look. "I want to get home and build another aeroplane. They'll be getting ahead of us on airships if we stay away much longer."

"And I hae me doots," put in the economical Don, "if this country isn't too expensive for just regular living."

"I'm going to write a book about this country, and I want to get home to do it," said Jack.

"Well," said Dick, "I'm rather in favor of a short visit to the old home at this time, just to astonish the natives with a few of our adventures. Since this patrol was formed, its experiences have got to be a regular habit with the Creston folks, and I have an idea they must miss something by this time. I think it's our duty to let them have at least an 'Old Home Week' to relieve their—hey, what do you call it, Jack, in that high school French of yours?—oh, yes, their *ongwee*."

193

"Well," said the ingenious Pepper, unguardedly, "I've got no reason—I just want to go home."

"Nothing to do with a sudden case of 'private consumption?'" cruelly remarked Jack, and amid the shout of laughter that followed Pepper, covered with a sunset glow, made a sudden exit in search of the guide.

Colonel Snow had a conference with the Indians after he had inspected the “treasure,” and heard the story of its perilous recovery. He recognized that the value of the mammoth tusks as museum specimens was far greater than its worth as ivory, and he offered to pay the Indians far above its commercial value for their interest in it, allowing them full possession of the remaining ivory. They gladly accepted his suggestion, and all of them returned to their village near Skagway, with sufficient wealth to make them independent until the next “potlatch,” when they would probably give it all away.

After a conference with the old guide, Colonel Snow made him an offer to join Swiftwater in the Fairbanks region, and operate with him on such claims as he should secure, and the old man prepared to return to his occupation as a miner, by the first fall stage from Valdez.

Having secured an official permit to take the caribou’s head out of the territory through the influence of Colonel Snow, the whole party embarked next day on the homeward bound steamer, which leaving Seward, and stopping at Valdez and Cordova, took the “outside passage,” for their trip, giving the Scouts for the first time a full taste of the Pacific Ocean. They proved good sailors in this instance, however, and in a few days stepped ashore in Seattle in their “Ain Countree.”

As they crept into their berths in the Great Northern’s Transcontinental Limited that night, eastward bound, Jack said:

“Rand, what do you suppose became of Dublin, Rae and Monkey? They seem to have missed us lately.”

“You’ve heard, Jack, of a bad penny, haven’t you? Well, they’re three bad pence. Look out.”

(THE END.)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE YUKON ***

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