FOUR
IN
CAMP

BARBOUR

APPLETONS

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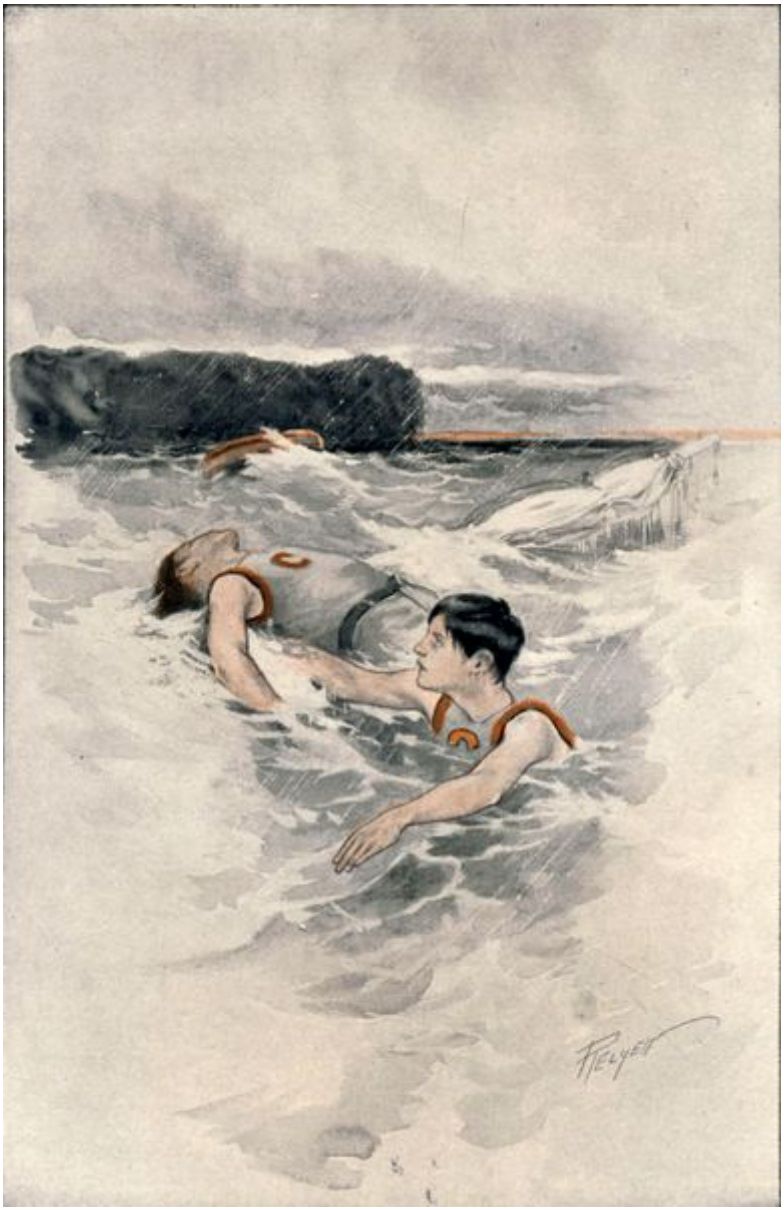

“Coming! Don’t give up, boys!”

FOUR IN CAMP

A STORY OF SUMMER ADVENTURES
IN THE NEW HAMPSHIRE WOODS

By RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

Author of "The Half-Back," "Behind the Line," "Weatherby's Inning," "On Your Mark," etc.

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TO
THE CHIEF, COUNCILLORS AND
FELLOWS OF SHERWOOD
FOREST

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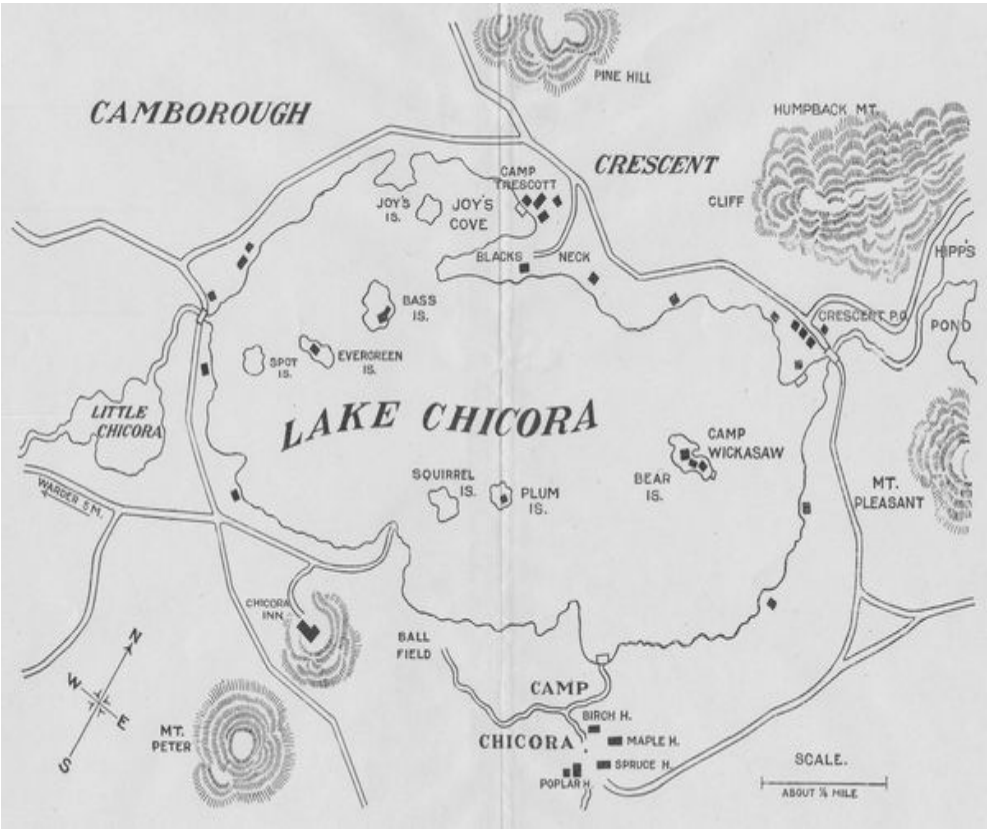


Camp Chicora.

FOUR IN CAMP

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES NELSON TILFORD, AND WITNESSES HIS ARRIVAL AT CAMP CHICORA

 hat's Chicora over there."

The man at the wheel turned to the boy standing beside him and nodded his head at a landing toward which the nose of the big steam-launch was slowly turning. It lay less than an eighth of a mile away across the smooth waters of the lake, a good-sized wharf, a float, a pole from which a blue-and-gray flag hung lifeless, and a flotilla of various kinds of boats. Several figures stood upon the pier, and their voices came shrill and clear across the intervening space. From the shore, which here circled inward into a tiny cove, the hill swept up rather abruptly for three hundred feet or more, and a third of the way up the gleam of unpainted boards through the trees told Nelson Tilford of the location of the camp which was to be his home for the next two months. It was a pleasant, peaceful scene before him, but the shadow of the hill had already crept well into the lake, leaving the shore and wooded slope in twilight, and a slight qualm of loneliness stole over him for the instant.

He had left the Boston express at Warder, six miles away, at half past four, and had been rattled over a constantly turning road behind a pair of stout horses to Chicora Landing, where, followed by his trunk, he had boarded one of the several small steam-boats which lay at intervals up and down the long shed like horses in their stalls. A half a mile at slow speed through a winding river, scarcely wide enough in places for the boat to scrape through between the low banks, had brought them into Little Chicora, hardly more than a pond. Another and far shorter stretch of river followed, and then, with a warning blast, the steam-launch had thrust her bow into the broad waters of the big lake, spread out like a

great mirror in the evening sunlight, dotted here and there with well-wooded islands, and guarded by gently rising hills covered with maples, pines, white and black birches, poplars, and many other trees whose names Nelson did not know. White farmhouses gleamed now and then from the shores, and slender purple ribbons of smoke, rising straight into the calm evening air, told of other dwellings, unseen for the thick foliage. They had made three stops on the south side of the lake, first at Chicora Inn Landing, from where the big hotel was plainly visible a quarter of a mile away, then at Squirrel Island and Plum Island. Nelson had been interested all the way, for he had never seen a New Hampshire lake before, and the glimpses he had obtained of the comfortable summer camps and their healthy, sun-browned inhabitants had pleased him hugely. But when Plum Island had been left behind and the boat had entered the shadowed margin of the lake his spirits began to sink. The water and the dim woods looked cold and inhospitable to the city-bred lad. He wondered what the fellows of Camp Chicora would be like, and wished that he had joined at the beginning of the season instead of a fortnight after it. Now that it was past, that week at the beach with a school friend had not been especially enjoyable after all; and the rôle of the new boy was not, he knew from experience, at all comfortable. He almost wished he had held out against his father's desires and stayed snugly at home.

His rueful thoughts were abruptly interrupted by a shrill blast of the launch's whistle. They were close to the landing, and Nelson picked up his suit-case and climbed to the deck. The bell tinkled, the churn of the propeller ceased, and the boat sidled up to the pier. Nelson stepped ashore into a group

of half-a-dozen fellows and set his bag down, prepared to lend a hand to the landing of his trunk. But some one was before him, a man of twenty-three or four, who, when the trunk was safely ashore, turned to Nelson with outstretched hand and welcoming smile.

"This is Nelson Tilford, isn't it?" he asked, as they shook hands. "Glad to see you. Mr. Clinton didn't get your letter until this noon, so we couldn't meet you at the station. Did you have any trouble finding your way to us?"

"No, sir," said Nelson, "every one seemed to know all about the camp."

"That's good. Well, let's go up." He took Nelson's suitcase, despite the latter's remonstrances, and led the way along the pier to a well-worn path which wound up the hill. Nelson, sensible of the frankly curious regard of the other fellows, followed. A bugle sounded clear and musical from the camp, and Nelson's companion turned and waited for him to range himself alongside. "There's the first supper call, now," he said. "I guess you're a bit hungry, aren't you? By the way, I'm Mr. Verder, one of the councilors. There are four of us besides Mr. Clinton. You'll meet them when we get up there. The Chief's away this evening, but he'll be back in time for camp-fire. We're going to put you in Maple Hall, where the seniors bunk. That's where I am, so if you want anything to-night don't hesitate to ask me."

"Thank you," answered Nelson gratefully. His companion chatted on while they climbed the path, which led by easy stages up the hill through a thin woods, and Nelson forgot his previous misgivings. If the fellows were as jolly as Mr. Verder, he reflected, he was pretty sure to get on. The man

beside him seemed scarcely more than a big boy, and his sun-burned face was good to look at. He was dressed in a gray jersey bearing a blue C on the breast, gray trousers with a blue stripe down the seam, and brown canvas shoes. He wore no cap, and the warm tan extended well up into the somewhat curly hair. His arms were bare to the shoulders. Nelson concluded he was going to like Mr. Verder; he looked strong, alert, good-humored, and a gentleman.

Two minutes of up-hill work on the winding path brought them to the clearing. The five buildings were arranged in what was practically a semicircle facing the end of the path. Back of them on all sides rose the forest. In the clearing a few trees had been allowed to remain, spruce in most cases, and one tall sentinel, shorn closely of its branches, and standing guard at the head of the path to the lake, had become a flagpole from which, as Nelson came into sight, the Stars and Stripes was being lowered, its place to be taken by a lighted lantern. Boys were coming and going between the buildings, or were scattered in little groups at the doorways.

Near at hand, by the entrance of Birch Hall, a knot of three men were standing, and to them Nelson was conducted and introduced. There was Mr. Ellery, almost middle-aged, slight, rather frail-looking; Mr. Thorpe, small, rotund, jovial, with twinkling blue eyes; and Mr. Smith, just out of college, nervous-looking, with black hair and black eyes, the latter snapping behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. It was difficult to stand in awe of persons attired negligently in shirt and trousers alone; and, anyway, none of the four councilors seemed at all desirous of impressing the newcomer with their dignity or authority. They were a sunburned, clear-eyed lot,

troubling themselves very little with such things, but brimming over with kindly good-nature. After the greetings Nelson was hurried away by Mr. Verder to the wash-room, from whence, having hastily splashed his face and hands with water from a tin basin, he was hustled to the dining-hall, just as the bugle was blaring the last call to supper and the hungry denizens of the camp were crowding and jostling into the building. Nelson followed Mr. Verder, stood while Mr. Ellery asked grace, and then pulled out his stool and took his place at table. Mr. Verder, who sat at the head of the table, was beside him. There were three other tables in the room, and all were filled.

There was very little ceremony about the meal. The clean white boards held huge pitchers of cocoa, milk, water, generous plates of biscuits and crackers and cake, saucers of wild raspberries and bowls of cereal, and to each table two boys were bringing plates of ham and eggs from the kitchen. Every one talked at once, and, as there were twenty-nine present, that meant lots of noise. At his own table there were ten boys besides himself, and Nelson looked them over as he ate. They seemed a very hungry, happy, and noisy lot; and at first glance they appeared to lack something of refinement and breeding, but he afterward found that it was necessary to make allowances for the freedom of camp life, and for the difference between ordinary attire and that worn at Chicora; gray jerseys and knee-trunks in conjunction with tanned bodies and tousled hair naturally lend an appearance of roughness. In ages the fellows varied from ten to seventeen, the most of them being apparently of about Nelson's age, which was fifteen. In the end he decided they were a very decent-looking lot of fellows.

Naturally Nelson didn't do all the examining. At some time or other during the meal every lad there who could get a glimpse of the newcomer looked him over and formed his opinion of him. Most, if not all, liked what they saw. Nelson Tilford was slim without being thin, of medium height for his years, rather broad across the shoulders and chest, brown of hair and eyes, with good features, and a somewhat quiet and thoughtful expression. A big, red-haired, blue-eyed youth at the farther end of the table confided to his left-hand neighbor that "the new chap looked to him like a bit of a snob." But the other shook his head.

"I don't think so, Dan," he answered, between mouthfuls of chocolate cake; "I bet he'll turn out to be a swell chap."

Nelson's appetite failed him long before those of his companions—for perhaps the only time that summer—and he took note of the room. It was about forty feet long by thirty broad. There were no windows, but along both sides and at one end wooden shutters opened upward and inward and were hooked to the ceiling, allowing great square openings, through which the darkening forest was visible, and through which eager yellow-jackets came and went seeking the sugar-bowls or flying homeward with their booty. At one end a door gave into the kitchen, and by it was a window like that of a ticket-office, through which the food was passed to the waiters. At the other end, in the corner away from the door, was a railed enclosure containing a roll-top desk and chairs, which Nelson rightly presumed to be Mr. Clinton's office. Presently the signal was given allowing them to rise. He rescued his suit-case from where he had left it inside the door and turned to find Mr. Verder. At that

moment a brown hand was thrust in front of him, and a pair of excited gray eyes challenged his.

“Hello, Ti-ti-ti-Tilford!” cried the owner of the hand, “what the di-di-dickens you du-du-doing up here?”

CHAPTER II

TELLS OF A TALK BY THE CAMP-FIRE AND OF HAPPENINGS IN A DORMITORY

n hour later, having discarded some of the garb of civilization for more comfortable attire, Nelson lay stretched out on a carpet of sweet-smelling pine-needles. Above him were motionless branches of hemlock and beech and pine, with the white stars twinkling through. Before him was a monster camp-fire of branches and saplings built into the form of an Indian tepee, which roared and crackled and lighted up the space in front of Maple Hall until the faces of the assembled campers were recognizable across the clearing. A steady stream of flaring sparks rushed upward, to be lost amid the higher branches of the illumined trees. Beside him was the boy with the gray eyes, who, having recovered from his temporary excitement, no longer stammered. Sitting cross-legged in the full radiance of the fire, Tom Ferris looked not unlike a fat, good-natured Indian idol. Not that he was as ugly of countenance as those objects usually are; what similarity existed was due rather to his position and a certain expression of grinning contentment. He really wasn't a bad-looking chap; rather heavy-featured, to be sure, and showing too much flesh about cheeks and chin to be handsome. He was only fourteen years old, and weighed something over a hundred and thirty pounds. He had a rather stubby nose, tow-colored hair, very pale gray eyes, and exceedingly red cheeks. He was good-natured,

kind-hearted, eager in the search for fun, and possessed a positive genius for getting into trouble. Like Nelson, he was a student at Hillton Academy, but whereas Nelson was in the upper middle class, Tom Ferris was still a lower-middler, having failed the month before to satisfy the powers as to his qualifications to advance. Nelson and he had not seen much of each other at school, but this evening they had met quite as though they had been the closest of chums for years. Nelson had already learned a good deal about Camp Chicora and its customs, and was still learning.

"The Chief's a dandy fellow," Tom was saying. "We call him 'Clint' for short. Carter called him 'Clint' to his face the other day, and he just smiled, and said, '*Mister* Clint, Carter; I must insist on being addressed respectfully.'"

"He looks like a bully sort," answered Nelson, turning his eyes to where the Director-in-Chief, the center of a merry group of boys, was sitting at a little distance. Mr. Clinton looked to be about thirty-five years old. A few years before he had been an assistant professor in a New England college, but the confinement of lecture-room and study had threatened his health. He had a natural love of the outdoor life, and in the end he had broken away from the college, built his camp in the half-wilderness, and had regained his health and prospered financially. Camp Chicora had been in existence but three years, and already it was one of the most popular and successful of the many institutions of its kind in that part of the country. He was tall, dark, strikingly good-looking, with an expression of shrewd and whimsical kindliness that was eminently attractive. He knew boys as few know them, and managed them at once surely and gently. Like the fellows about him, he wore only the camp

uniform of jersey and trousers, and the fire-light gleamed on a pair of deeply tanned arms that looked powerful enough to belong to a blacksmith.

"What did he say to you?" asked Tom.

"Said he was glad to see me, hoped I'd make myself at home and be happy, and told me to let him know if I wanted anything. It wasn't so much what he said as—as the way he said it."

"That's ju-ju-ju-just it!" cried Tom, with enthusiasm. "It's the way he says things and does things! And he's into everything with us; plays ball, tennis, and— Say, you ought to see him put the shot!"

"I liked that Mr. Verder, too," said Nelson.

"Yes, he's a peach! The whole bunch are mighty decent. Ellery—that's him fixing the fire—he's awfully nice; he'll do anything for you. The Doctor's another mighty good chap. You'd ought to have seen the way he got a nail out of 'Babe's' foot last week! It was perfectly great. 'Babe' came pretty near fainting! Say, don't you want to get the bunk next to mine? Maybe Joe Carter will swap with you, if I ask him."

"Oh, never mind; maybe when I get to know some of the fellows we can fix it up."

"Well, and"—Tom lowered his voice—"I guess they'll try and have some fun with you to-night; they always do when a new fellow comes; but don't you mind; a little 'rough-house' won't hurt you."

"I guess I can stand it. What'll they do?"

“Oh—er—well, you see, I oughtn’t to tell, Tilford; it wouldn’t be quite fair, you know; but it won’t hurt, honest!”

“All right.” Nelson laughed. “After the initiation I went through at Hillton last fall, I guess nothing short of a cyclone will feeze me!”

“Say, we’ve got a society here, too; see?” Tom exhibited a tiny gold pin which adorned the breast of his jersey. “I’ll get you in all right. We’re the only Hillton men here, and we ought to stand by each other, eh?”

Nelson agreed gravely.

“There’s a chap here from St. Eustace,” continued Tom. “His name’s Speede, Dan Speede; ever meet him?” Nelson shook his head. “Of course he isn’t a Hilltonian,” went on Tom with a tone of apology, “but he—he’s rather a nice sort. He’s in our hall; you’ll see him to-night, a big chap with red hair; he played on their second eleven last year. I think you’ll like him—that is, as well as you could like a St. Eustace fellow, of course.”

“I dare say there are just as good fellows go there as come to Hillton,” responded Nelson generously but without much conviction.

Tom howled a protest. “Get out! There may be some decent fellows—like Dan—but— Why, everybody knows what St. Eustace chaps are!”

“I dare say they talk like that about us,” laughed Nelson.

“I’d lu-lu-lu-like tu-tu-to hear ’em!” sputtered Tom indignantly.

Mr. Clinton arose, watch in hand, and announced that it was time for prayers. There was a scrambling and scuffling as the fellows arose from their places on the ground to kneel with heads bent and repeat the Lord's Prayer. The dying fire crackled softly and its mellow light played upon the motionless forms, while overhead the white stars peered down through the dark branches as though they too were giving thanks to their Creator.

Then good night was said to the Chief and the fellows separated, the younger boys to climb the hill to Spruce Hall and the older to go to their own dormitory. Presently from across the clearing floated the slow sweet notes of the bugle sounding taps, and the lights in the junior hall went out. The seniors, however, still had a half hour before they must be in bed, and they made the most of it in various ways. When Nelson and Tom entered Maple they found three distinct pillow or "sneaker" fights in progress, and the air was full of hurtling missiles. On one bed two youths in pajamas were sitting cross-legged deep in a game of cribbage when a random shoe struck the homemade board with all the devastating effect of a bursting shell, and sent it, together with the quartet of pegs, over three bunks. Whereupon two voices were raised in rage, cards were dropped, and the ranks of the belligerents were swelled by two volunteers.

The senior dormitory was erected on the side of the hill, well off the ground for the sake of dryness, and was a simply but well-built structure some eighty feet long by twenty wide, with enough pitch to its gable roof to shed rain quickly and afford a sort of open attic under the rafters, where bags and wearing apparel were precariously hung from the beams or supported on occasional planks. The effect in the dim light

was picturesque if not beautiful. There was a multitude of windows on either side, and at each end large double doors occupied a third of the space. As neither doors nor windows were ever closed, save during a driving rain-storm, the occupants of the narrow bunks ranged along each side of the hall practically slept out-of-doors. A big stove stood in the middle of the building. At the head of each bunk, secured to the wall, was a white-pine locker. Sometimes this was supplemented by a square of matched boards which let down to form a writing-table. Wooden pegs held the every-day attire, and trinkets were disposed along the horizontal joists. The bunks, wooden-framed cots, were guiltless of springs, and were furnished with mattresses, blankets, and pillows. At Chicora sheets were looked down upon as emblems of effeminacy. The fellows slept with their feet toward the walls. From a rafter hung a sheet of wrapping-paper bearing the warning "NO SNORING ALLOWED!" Some one had crossed out the last word and substituted "ALOUD."

Nelson's bunk was the last but one on the left, and in the opposite corner was Mr. Verder. At the farther end of the dormitory slept Dr. Smith. What light there was was given by two reflector lanterns at either end of the hall, although for purposes of card-playing, reading, or writing the fellows supplemented this dim radiance by lighting one or more of the lanterns which were part of each boy's outfit. Aided by such extra illumination Nelson's right-hand neighbor, a curly-haired youth of about sixteen, whose name later transpired to be Hethington, was busily engaged in patching a tennis racket with a piece of string. Near the middle of the hall, a big, good-looking chap with very red hair was entertaining two companions with a narrative that must have

been extremely humorous, judging from the suppressed laughter that convulsed them. Nelson had noticed him at table and now concluded that he was Tom's St. Eustace friend, Dan Speede.

Nelson undressed leisurely and got into his pajamas, the while examining the bed and his surroundings for a hint as to the trick which was to be played him. But there were no suspicious circumstances that he could see; the bed looked and felt all right, and of all the sixteen inhabitants of the dormitory not one was apparently paying him the least heed. When he considered it, the fact that every one seemed to be resolutely keeping his eyes from his direction struck him as of ill augury; even the boy with the tennis racket was unnaturally absorbed in his work. Tom Ferris came over in a pair of weirdly striped pajamas and sat chatting on the bed a moment until the lights were put out. Then there was a scrambling, a few whispered good nights, and silence reigned save for the sounds of the forest entering through the windows and doors. Nelson found the bunk rather different from what he was accustomed to, but the fresh night air felt good; there was a novel pleasure in being able to look out through the branches at the twinkling white stars, and he sighed contentedly and wished the worst would happen so that he could go to sleep.

But everything was very still. Minute after minute passed. He strained his ears for suspicious sounds, but heard nothing save the occasional creak of a bed. The suspense was most uncomfortable. He had about come to the conclusion that after all nothing was going to happen, and was feeling a bit resentful over it, when a sound reached him as of bare feet on the boards. He turned his head noiselessly and stared into the

gloom. He could see nothing, and the sound had ceased. Probably he had imagined——

Bang!

Thud!!

Clatter!!!

Down went the bed with a jar that shook the building; down came a shower of water that left the victim gasping for breath; and Nelson and a big tin bucket rolled together onto the floor and into a very cold puddle.

Pandemonium reigned! Gone was the peaceful quietude of a moment before. From all sides came shrieks and howls of laughter and kindly counsel:

"Pick yourself up, Willie!"

"Swim hard, old man!"

"Try floating on your back!"

"Sweet dreams!"

"Did I hear something drop?" asked a voice.

"Very high sea to-night!" remarked another.

Nelson struggled free of the clinging folds of the wet blankets and stood up shivering in the darkness. It had been so sudden and so unexpected, for all the warning he had received, that he didn't quite know yet what had happened to him. Then a match flared, a lantern was lighted, and the tennis-racket youth was holding it out to him.

"Did the water get you?" he asked calmly.

"Rather!" answered Nelson. "I'm soaked clear through!"

"Better get your panoramas off, then," said Hethington. "I've got some dry ones you can have. I'll look 'em up." And he climbed leisurely out of bed.

By that time Tom had come to the rescue with an armful of dry blankets from an unoccupied bunk. The tin lard can was kicked out of the way, the wet mattress turned over, and the new blankets spread. Hethington tossed over the dry pajamas, and Nelson, his teeth chattering, got into them and looked about him. As far as he could see in the dim light white-robed figures were sitting up in their bunks regarding him with grinning faces. There was something expectant in both faces and attitudes, and Nelson realized that they were awaiting an expression of his feelings. With a glance that encompassed the entire assemblage, he remarked earnestly, but more in sorrow than in anger:

"*Well, I hope you choke!*"

A shout of laughter rewarded him, while a voice from the nearer dimness remarked audibly:

"I told you he'd be all right, Dan!"

Nelson examined the bed, but found that it could not be made to stand without the aid of tools. So, thanking Hethington again for his pajamas and eliciting a calm "All right," and looking about for evidences of further surprises without finding them, he blew out the lantern and descended into his lowly couch. The last thing he saw, as the light went out, was the amused countenance of Mr. Verder across the dormitory.

Ten minutes later he was asleep.

CHAPTER III

SHOWS THAT A MOTOR-DORY CAN GO AS WELL AS STOP

hen Nelson awoke the early sunshine was dripping through the tender green branches outside the window, the birds were singing merrily, and Tom Ferris was digging him in the ribs. He blinked, yawned, and turned over again, but Tom was not to be denied.

"Come on, Tilford, and have a douse," he whispered. "First bugle's just blown."

"Wha—" (a magnificent yawn)—"what time is it?" asked Nelson.

"Five minutes of seven. Come on down."

"Down? Down where?" inquired Nelson, at last sufficiently awake to hear what Tom was saying.

"Down to the lake for a douse. It's fine."

"Huh! It's pretty fine here. And the lake must be awfully cold, don't you think, Ferris?"

"It really isn't, honest to goodness! It's swell! Come on!"

"Oh—well—" Nelson looked out the window and shivered; then he heroically rolled out onto the floor, scrambled to his feet and donned his shoes. One or two of the bunks were empty, and a few of the fellows who remained were awake and were conversing in whispers across the

dormitory, but for the most part sleep still reigned, and the "No Snoring" order was being plainly violated. Tom and Nelson pattered down the room—the former stopping long enough at one bunk to pull the pillow from under a red-thatched head and place it forcibly on top—and emerged into a world of green and gold. As they raced past the flagstaff the Stars and Stripes was fluttering its way aloft, while from the porch of Birch Hall the reveille sounded and floated echoing over the lake. The air was like tonic, crisp without being chill in the shady stretches of the path, pleasantly warm where the sunlight slanted through, and the two boys hurled themselves down the firm pathway as fast as lurking roots would allow. At the pier a handful of fellows were before them. There was very little breeze, and what there was blew up the lake and so failed to reach the water of the cove. Over on Plum Island the thin streamer of purple smoke betokened breakfast, while up at Bear Island, farther away across the sunlit water, the boys of Camp Wickasaw were moving about the little beach. At the edge of the pier the water was bottle-green, with here and there a fleck of gold where the sunlight found its way through the trees that bordered the lake. It looked cold, but when, having dropped their pajamas, they stood side by side on the edge of the pier and then went splashing down into fifteen feet of it, it proved to be surprisingly warm. A moment or two of energetic thrashing around, and out they came for a brisk rub-down in the dressing-tent and a wild rush up the hill and into the dormitory, where they arrived side by side—for, considering his bulk, Tom had a way of getting over the ground that was truly marvelous—to find the fellows tumbling hurriedly into their clothes.

Nelson had received his camp uniform, a gray worsted jersey, a gray gingham shirt, two pairs of gray flannel trousers reaching to the knees, one gray worsted sweater, two pairs of gray worsted stockings, a gray felt hat, a gray leather belt, and a pair of blue swimming trunks. Jersey and sweater were adorned with the blue C, while on the pocket of the shirt ran the words "Camp Chicora." Following the example of those about him, Nelson donned merely the jersey and trousers, slipped his feet into his brown canvas shoes or "sneakers," and, seizing his toilet articles, fled to the wash-house in the train of Hethington and Tom Ferris. By the most desperate hurrying he managed to reach the door of Poplar Hall before the last note of the mess-call had died away. He found himself terrifically hungry, hungrier than he had been within memory, and applied himself diligently to the work in hand. Mr. Verder asked how he had slept, and referred jokingly to the bath.

"Every fellow has to go through with it sooner or later," he said smilingly. "They don't even exempt the councilors. I got a beautiful ducking last week."

"Oh, I didn't mind it," laughed Nelson. "But I was awfully surprised. I expected something of the sort, but I hadn't thought of a wetting. I don't see how they did it, either."

"Well, in the first place, they got a wrench and took the legs off your bunk; then they put them on again the wrong way, tied a rope to the bed and trailed it along the wall where you wouldn't see it. All they had to do then was to pull the rope, and the legs simply doubled up under the bed. As for the water, that was in a pail on the beam overhead; it's so dark you couldn't see it unless you looked for it. Of course

there was a string tied to that too, and— Who pulled the string last night, fellows?"

"Dan Speede," two or three replied promptly.

"And Carter pulled the rope," added another gleefully.

The fellow with the red hair was grinning at Nelson in a rather exasperating way, and he experienced a sudden desire to get even with that brilliant Mr. Speede. But he only smiled and, in response to numerous eager inquiries, tried to describe his sensations when the bed went down. The affair seemed to have had the effect of an initiation ceremony, for this morning every one spoke to him just as though they had known him for months, and by the time breakfast was over he no longer felt like an outsider. Under escort of Tom and Hethington, who appeared to have detailed themselves his mentors for the present, he went to Birch Hall to examine the bulletin and find out his duties for the day.

The recreation hall stood on the edge of a little bluff, and from the big broad porch thrown out at the side a magnificent view of the lake and the farther shore presented itself. Across from the porch was a monstrous fireplace of field stones in which four-foot logs looked scarcely more than kindling-wood. The hall contained a piano, a shovel-board, innumerable chairs, one or two small tables for games, the letter-boxes, and the bulletin-board. Consultation with the latter elicited the fact that Nelson, whose name was the last on the board, was one of the ferry-boys. Tom explained that he would have to go across to Crescent with the mail at nine, two, and six-thirty.

“You can take the motor-dory, if you like. The letters are in that box over there; and the bag hangs over it—see? You take the mail over and bring back whatever there is and distribute it in the letter-boxes yonder. Who’s the other ferry-boy?”

“Speede,” answered Bob Hethington, referring to the bulletin.

“Well, that’s all right,” said Tom. “Dan knows all about it. You let him attend to it, but you’ll have to go along, you know.”

“Don’t let him work any games on you,” advised Bob dryly.

Nelson made a mental resolution that he wouldn’t.

Then Tom explained about the duties. Every fellow had something to do. There were four lamp-boys, who filled, trimmed, and cleaned the lanterns and lamps all through the camp; four shore-boys, who looked after the landing and the boats; four fire-boys, who cut wood for and built the camp-fire and the fire in Birch Hall; four camp-boys, who swept out and tidied up the dormitories and the recreation hall; three mess-boys, who set the tables and waited at them; two color-boys, who saw to the hoisting and lowering of the flags in the camp and at the landing; two ferry-boys; one historian, who wrote the history of the day; two orderlies, to whom the others reported, and who in turn reported to the officer of the day (one of the councilors); one police, whose duty it was to keep the camp-grounds clean, and one substitute, who stood ready to take on the duties of any of the fellows who might be ill or away from camp. The duties changed day by day,

and the penalty for intentional non-performance of them, as Tom explained with gusto, was to be ducked in the lake by the other chaps.

Then a couple of the camp-boys clattered in with brooms, and the trio were glad to make their escape. Tom and Bob hurried away to their neglected duties, and Nelson idled back to Maple Hall with the intention of getting his things arranged. But the other two camp-boys were busily at work there and raising such a dust that he retreated. Just outside, on the scene of last night's conflagration, two fellows were bringing brush and piling it up for the evening's camp-fire. In the rear doorway of Spruce Hall Mr. Ellery was coaching one of the juniors in Latin. Near-by a freckled-faced youngster with a pointed stick was spearing bits of paper and other rubbish and transferring them to a basket which he carried. Every one seemed very busy, and Nelson wondered whether the fire-boys would be insulted if he offered to aid them. But at that moment he heard his name called, and saw Tom beckoning him from in front of the mess-hall. As Nelson answered the hail he saw that Dan Speede was with Tom, and surmised that an introduction was in order. Speede shook hands, and said, with that irritating smile on his handsome face, that he was glad to know Nelson, and Nelson muttered something that sounded fairly amiable. Speede was getting on his nerves, for some reason or other; perhaps because he looked so confoundedly well pleased with himself and appeared to look on everybody else as a joke prepared for his special delectation.

"I know one or two Hillton fellows rather well," Dan said, and he mentioned their names. One of them was a special

friend of Nelson's, but the fact didn't lessen his irritation to any degree.

"We're ferry-boys," Dan continued. "Suppose we go over now? It isn't quite nine, but no one ever waits, anyhow."

"All right," Nelson answered.

They left Tom, put the letters in the bag at Birch Hall, and went down the path. There wasn't much conversation on Nelson's part, but Dan rattled on carelessly from one thing to another without seeming to care whether his companion answered or not. At the landing he threw the bag into the motor-dory and climbed in, followed by Nelson.

"They've got quite a navy here," observed the latter.

"Yep; steam-launch thirty feet long, motor-dory, four steel skiffs, three canoes, one punt, and two four-oared barges—only the barges aren't down here yet. All aboard!"

Nelson took the lines and off they chugged straight for the corner of Bear Island, where the red-and-white banner of Camp Wickasaw floated above the trees.

"Hold her off a little more," advised Dan; "there's a shoal off the end of the island." He was gazing steadily toward the landing there, and Nelson noticed that he looked disappointed. "Pshaw!" said Dan presently; "I guess they've gone on ahead."

"Who?"

"The Wickasaw fellows. They have a little old sixteen-foot launch which they think can go. We usually get here in time to race them over."

“Who beats?”

“We do—usually. Last time I raced with them this pesky dory stopped short half-way across. I thought they’d bust themselves laughing. That’s why I hoped we’d meet them this morning.”

“Too bad,” said Nelson. “What sort of a camp is Wickasaw?”

Dan shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. “No good. The fellows sleep between sheets and sing hymns every night before they go to bed. Besides, the worst of it is, they have women there.”

“Is it a big camp?”

“Only about twenty fellows this year.”

Presently Nelson asked another question: “Can you walk from the camp over to the village?”

“Yes, there’s a good road.” Dan nodded toward the end of the lake. “But it’s pretty near two miles, I guess. I never walked it.”

Crescent proved to be the tiniest sort of a settlement. There were no more than half-a-dozen buildings in sight. To the right of the landing was a high stone bridge, through which, as Dan explained, the water from the lake flowed on into Hipp’s Pond by way of a small river, and so, eventually, to Lake Winnipesaukee.

“You’d better go up front,” advised Dan, “and jump onto the landing when we get up to it. Take the painter with you.”

Nelson obeyed. The dory wormed its way in between a lot of rowboats, the propeller stopped, and Dan poised himself for a leap as the boat drifted in. When it was still some three or four feet away from the float he jumped. All would have gone well with him if at the very moment of his take-off the dory had not, for some unaccountable reason, suddenly started to back away. The result was that Nelson landed in five feet of water, with only his hands on the float. It was something of a task to crawl over the edge, but he managed it finally and sat down in a pool of water to get his breath. Then he glanced up and encountered Dan's grinning countenance and understood. But he only said:

"That was farther than I thought, or else the boat rocked. Throw me the painter and I'll pull you in."

Dan, his smile broadening at what he considered Nelson's innocence, tossed the rope and jumped ashore with the bag.

"I guess I'll let you go up alone," said Nelson. "I'm too wet to visit the metropolis."

Dan said "All right," and disappeared with the mail-bag. Nelson climbed back into the boat and started the motor. The sun was warm, and after taking his shoes off and emptying the water out of them he was quite comfortable. He even smiled once or twice, apparently at his thoughts. Presently Dan appeared around the corner of the nearest building, and Nelson quietly pushed the dory away from the landing.

"What did you start her up for?" asked Dan. "She'll get all hot and smelly if you do that."

"Oh, I just wanted to see if I could do it," answered Nelson. "Pitch the bag in; I'll catch it."

Dan did so.

“You’ll have to bring her in, you know,” he said. “I can’t walk on water.”

“But you can walk on land, can’t you?” asked Nelson sweetly.

“Walk on—? Hold on, you idiot, you’re backing her!”

“Must be something wrong with her,” replied Nelson calmly. He reached for the tiller-line, swung the dory’s nose toward the camp, shot the lever forward, and waved gaily at Dan. “It’s only two miles, you know,” he called, as the boat chugged away. “And it’s a good road!”

He looked back, expecting to hear Dan explode in a torrent of anger. But he didn’t; he merely stood there with his hands in his pockets and grinned. Half-way across the lake Nelson turned again and descried Dan’s form crossing the bridge on the road back to camp. Nelson winked gravely at the mail-bag.

CHAPTER IV

RELATES HOW NELSON BORROWED A LEAF FROM BOB, AND HOW DAN CRIED QUITS

There wasn't much about gas-engines that Nelson didn't know, for ever since he was old enough to walk his family had spent a portion at least of every summer at the shore, and of late years a gasoline-launch had been a feature of the vacation program. To be sure, a power-dory was rather a trifling thing after a thirty-six-foot cruising-launch, and the engine left much to be desired, but it got along pretty well, and Nelson wished he didn't have to return to camp, but might turn the dory's head up the lake and go cruising. But perhaps they would let him take the dory some other time. Tom Ferris was on the pier when the boat came within easy hail.

"Where's Dan?" he asked.

"Coming back by road."

"*Road?*"

"Yes; he decided to walk."

"What for?" asked Tom incredulously.

Nelson shook his head. "Exercise, I guess," he answered, as he steered the dory in under the boom. "Here! catch the bag, will you?"

It was evident that Tom was far from satisfied with the information supplied, for all the way up the hill he shot suspicious glances at Nelson, and stumbled over numerous roots and stones in his preoccupation. But he didn't discover anything more, at least from Nelson.

After the mail was distributed in Birch Hall the two boys got their rackets and balls and climbed the hill, past the spring and the little sunlit glade where church service was held on Sundays, until a tiny plateau was reached. Here was the tennis-court, fashioned with much difficulty and not altogether guiltless of stones, but not half bad for all that. It was well supplied with back-nets—a fortunate circumstance, since the woods closed in upon it on all sides, and balls once lost in the undergrowth would have been difficult to find. Tom, considering his bulk, played a very fast and steady game, and succeeded in securing one of the three sets which they managed to finish before the assembly sounded at eleven o'clock and they fled down the hill to the lake.

The morning bath, or "soak," as it was called, was compulsory as regarded every camper. Nothing save absence or illness was allowed to excuse a fellow from this duty. Tom and Nelson donned their bathing trunks and pushed their way out onto the crowded pier. Two of the steel boats were occupied by councilors, whose duty it was to time the bathers and keep an eye on adventurous swimmers. The boys lined the edge of the pier and awaited impatiently the signal from Mr. Ellery. Presently, "All in!" was the cry, and instantly the pier was empty, save for a few juniors whose inexperience kept them in shallow water along the little sandy beach. The water spouted in a dozen places, and one by one dripping heads bobbed above the surface and their owners struck out

for the steps to repeat the dive. Nelson found the water far warmer than he was accustomed to at the beaches; it was almost like jumping into a tub for a warm bath. When he came to the surface after a plunge and a few vigorous kicks under water he found himself close to the boat occupied by Dr. Smith. He swam to it, laid hold of the gunwale, and tried to wipe the water from his eyes.

"What's the trouble, Tilford?" asked the councilor smilingly.

"I guess my eyes are kind of weak," Nelson answered. "The water makes them smart like anything."

"Better keep them closed when you go under. It isn't the fault of your eyes, though; it's the water."

"But they never hurt before, sir."

"Where have you bathed—in fresh water?"

"No, sir—salt."

"That's different. The eyes are used to salt water, but fresh water irritates them."

"I should think it would be the other way," said Nelson, blinking.

"Not when you consider that all the secretions of the eye are salty. Tears never made your eyes smart, did they?"

"No, sir; that's so. It's funny, though, isn't it?"

"Well, it's like a good many other things, Tilford—strange until you get used to it. I suppose you swim pretty well?"

“Oh, I don’t know, sir. I’ve swam all my life, I guess, but I don’t believe I’m what you’d call a dabster.”

“I wouldn’t think of calling you that, anyhow,” laughed the Doctor, “for I don’t think I know what it means. But how about diving?”

Nelson shook his head.

“I’ve never done much of that. I’ve usually bathed in the surf, you see. I’d be scared silly if I tried what those fellows are doing.”

The fellows referred to were standing on a tiny platform built up a good ten feet above the floor of the pier. One by one they launched themselves into the lake, at least eighteen feet below, some making straight dives, some letting themselves fall and straightening out just as they reached the surface, and one, who proved to be Dan Speede, turning a backward somersault and disappearing feet first and hands high over head.

“That was a dandy, wasn’t it?” asked Nelson with enthusiasm.

“Yes; I guess Speede’s the star diver here. But he takes mighty big risks sometimes. If you want to try a dive I’ll watch you and see if I can help you any with criticism.”

“All right, but I just jump off when I dive,” said Nelson. “But I’d like to learn, sir.”

So he swam over to the steps, reaching them just ahead of Dan, and walked along the pier to a place where there was no danger of striking the steam-launch which was tied alongside. He had just reached a position that suited him and

was standing sideways to the water, when there as an exclamation, some one apparently stumbled into him, and he went over like a ninepin, striking the water in a heap and going so far under he thought he would never come up again. But he did finally, his lungs full of water and his breath almost gone from his body—came up choking and sputtering to see Dan looking down with that maddening grin on his face, and to hear him call:

"Awfully sorry, Tilford. I tripped on a knot-hole!"

Nelson coughed and spat until some of the water was out of him—and it was odd how disagreeable it tasted after salt water—and turned to swim back. Dr. Smith was smiling broadly as Nelson passed, and the latter called, "We won't count that one, sir."

Dan was awaiting him on the pier, apparently prepared for whatever Nelson might attempt in the way of revenge. But Nelson took no notice of him. This time he made his dive without misadventure, and then swam out to the Doctor to hear the latter's criticism.

"That wasn't so bad, Tilford. But you want to straighten out more and keep your feet together. And I wouldn't try to jump off at first; just fall forward, and give the least little bit of a shove with your feet at the last moment."

"I'll try it again," said Nelson.

This time Dan did not see Nelson as the latter came along the pier. He was standing near the edge, daring Hethington to go over with his hands clasped under his knees, and knew nothing of his danger until he found himself lifted from his feet. Then he struggled desperately, but Nelson had seized

him from behind and his hands found no clutch on his captor's wet body. The next instant he was falling over and over in a most undignified and far from scientific attitude. He tried to gather himself together as he struck the water, but the attempt was not a success, and he disappeared in a writhing heap. Like Nelson, he came up choking and gasping, trying his best to put a good face on it, but succeeding so ill that the howls of laughter that had greeted his disappearance burst forth afresh. But, thought Nelson, he was a wonderful chap to take a joke, for, having found his breath, he merely swam quickly to the steps and came up onto the pier looking as undisturbed as you please.

"That puts us even again, doesn't it?" he said to Nelson.

Nelson nodded.

He kept a watch on Dan the rest of the time, but the latter made no attempt to trouble him again. He profited to some extent by Dr. Smith's instructions, and when the cry of "All out!" came he believed that to-morrow he would have the courage to try a dive from the "crow's-nest," as the fellows called the little platform above the pier. He walked up the hill with Bob and Tom.

"I don't see why that silly idiot of a Speede wants to be forever trying his fool jokes on me," he said aggrievedly.

"That's just his way," answered Tom soothingly.

"Well, it's a mighty tiresome way," said Nelson, in disgust.

"He has an overdeveloped sense of humor," said Bob Hethington. "It's a sort of disease with him, I guess."

“Well, I wish he’d forget it,” Nelson grumbled. “I’m afraid to sit down on a chair now for fear there’ll be a pin in it.”

“Oh, he gets tired after a while,” said Bob. “He was that way with me for a day after camp began.”

“What did you do?” asked Nelson curiously.

Bob smiled; so did Tom.

“I gave him some of his own medicine. I filled his bunk with pine-needles—they stick nicely to woolen blankets, you know—tied knots in every stitch of clothing he had, and put all his shoes in a pail of water. He’s never bothered me since.”

“Did he get mad?”

“Mad? No, you can’t get the idiot mad. Carter says he laughed himself to sleep that night—Dan, I mean.”

“I wonder if all the St. Eustace fellows are like him,” Nelson mused. “If they are, life there must be mighty interesting. Perhaps they have a course of practical joking there.”

Dinner was at twelve-thirty, and it was a very hungry set of fellows that dropped themselves onto their stools and attacked the soup, roast beef, potatoes, spinach, beets, apple pie, and cheese. Nelson marveled at first at the quantity of milk his neighbors got away with, but after a day or so he ceased to wonder, drinking his own three or four glasses without difficulty. After dessert the history of the preceding day was read by one of the councilors, while the historian, a very small youth known as “Babe,” grinned sheepishly and proudly as he listened to his composition. Nelson’s hazing

was referred to with gusto and summoned laughter, and "Babe" was loudly applauded when the history was finished and the reader had announced "George Fowler."

At one-thirty the bugle blew for "siesta," the most trying part of the day's program. Every boy was required to go to his bunk and lie down for half an hour with closed eyes and relaxed body. By the middle of the summer custom had enabled most of them to accept this enforced idleness with philosophy, and to even sleep through a portion at least of the terrible half hour, but at present it was suffering unmitigated, and many were the pleas offered to escape "siesta." When Nelson approached his bunk he was confronted by a square of brown wrapping-paper on which in black letters, evidently done with a blacking-brush, was the inscription:

HILLTON IS A
BUM SCHOOL

He felt his cheeks reddening as the snickers of the watchers reached him. There was no doubt in his mind as to the perpetrator of the insult, for insult it was in his judgment, and his first impulse was to march down the aisle and have it out with Dan there and then. But he only unpinned the sheet, tossed it on the floor, and laid down on his bunk. Presently, when his cheeks had cooled, he raised his head cautiously and looked around. The dormitory was silent. One or two fellows were surreptitiously reading, a few were resolutely trying to obey orders, and the others were restlessly turning and twisting in an agony of inactivity. Mr. Verder was not present, and the dormitory was in charge of Dr. Smith, whose bunk was at the other end. Nelson quietly reached out and secured the obnoxious placard, laying it clean side up

between his bed and Bob's and holding it in place with a shoe. Then he found a soft pencil, and, lying on the edge of the bunk, started to work. Bob looked on dispassionately. Nelson wondered if he ever really got interested in anything.

After a while the task was completed. Nelson looked warily down the room. Dr. Smith was apparently asleep. Finding two pins, he crept off the bed and secured the sheet of paper to the rafter where it had hung before. Up and down the dormitory heads were raised and eager eyes were watching him. This time the placard hung with the other side toward the room, and the new inscription read:

1903	
HILLTON	17
ST. EUSTACE	0

Nelson scuttled back to bed. Faint whispers reached him. Then:

"Where are you going, Speede?" asked the Doctor's voice suddenly.

Dan, creeping cautiously up the aisle, paused in his tracks.

"I left something up here, sir."

"Get it after siesta, then."

Dan went back to bed. The whispers grew, interspersed with chuckles.

"Cut that out, fellows," said the Doctor, and silence reigned again. For the next quarter of an hour the score of last autumn's football game between Hillton and St. Eustace flaunted itself to the world. The fellows, all save one or two

who had really fallen asleep, wondered what would happen after siesta. So did Nelson. He hoped that Dan would make trouble, for it seemed to him then that that insult could only be wiped out with blows; and although Dan was somewhat taller and much heavier than Nelson, the latter fancied he could give a fairly good account of himself. And then the bugle blew, fellows bounded onto the floor, and the ensuing racket more than made up for the half hour of quiet. Dan made at once for the placard. Nelson jumped up and stood under it. Dan stopped a few steps away.

"That's my piece of paper, you know," he said quietly.

"Get it," answered Nelson.

"Cut it out, you two," said Bob.

Nelson flashed a look of annoyance at the peacemaker.

Dan viewed him mildly. "Look here," he said, "if you'll take that down and tear it up, we'll call quits."

"I don't know," said Nelson. "How about Hillton being a bum school?" Dan grinned.

"You take that down," he said.

"I will when you take back what you wrote on the other side."

"Don't you do it, Dan," advised a snub-nosed chap named Wells.

"You shut up, Wells," said Bob; and Wells, who wasn't popular, was hustled out of the way by the others who had gathered.

"Well, ain't she pretty bum?" asked Dan innocently.

“Not too bum to lick you at football,” answered Nelson hotly.

“Pooh!” said Dan. “Do you know why? Because they wouldn’t let me play.”

That aroused laughter, and Nelson stared at his antagonist in deep disgust. “What an idiot he was,” he said to himself; “he couldn’t be serious even over a quarrel.”

“Well, she did it, anyhow,” he said rather lamely.

“Well, it’s over now, isn’t it?” asked Dan calmly. “So let’s take the score down,” and he moved toward the placard.

“No you don’t!” Nelson exclaimed, moving in front of him; “not until you’ve apologized.”

Dan smiled at him in his irritating manner.

“Don’t you believe I could lick you?” he asked.

“Maybe you can,” said Nelson, “but talking won’t do it.”

“Well, I can; but I’m not going to. There isn’t going to be any row, so you fellows might as well chase yourselves. It was just a joke, Tilford. Hillton’s all right. It’s the best school in the country, barring one. How’ll that do for an apology, my fierce friend?”

“It isn’t quite truthful,” answered Nelson, smiling in spite of himself, “but I guess it’ll answer. Here’s your old paper.”

Dan accepted it and tore it up. Then he stuffed the pieces in the first bunk he came to.

“War is averted,” he announced.

Then he went out, followed by most of the inmates of the dormitory, who were laughingly accusing him of “taking water.”

“He’s a queer chump,” said Nelson, with something of unwilling admiration in his tones. But Bob didn’t hear him. He was back on his bed, absorbed in a magazine.

“And you’re another,” added Nelson under his breath.

CHAPTER V

TELLS HOW DAN PLAYED A TRUMP CARD, HOW BOB GAINED HONOR, AND HOW THE "BIG FOUR" CAME INTO EXISTENCE

6.55. First reveille: morning bath.
7.00. Last reveille: colors.
7.25. First mess-call.
7.30. Last mess-call: breakfast.
8 to 9. Duties.
11.00. Assembly: "soak."
12.30. Mess-call: dinner.
1.30 to 2. Siesta.
2 to 5.25. Recreation.
5.25. First mess-call: colors.
5.30. Last mess-call: supper.
7.30. Assembly: camp-fire.
8.30. Taps: Juniors' lights out.
9. Seniors' lights out.

 hat was the daily schedule. On Sunday it differed in the rising-time and time for dinner, the first being half an hour and the latter an hour later. But there was nothing very hard-and-fast about the schedule, for frequently an afternoon's outing on the lake prolonged itself past the hour for supper, and quite as frequently the tales about the camp-fire became so absorbing that taps didn't sound until long after the accustomed time. Largely for this reason the

schedule never proved irksome. Life moved very pleasantly and smoothly at Chicora. Ordinary misdemeanors were passed over by the councilors, to be dealt with by the fellows, and so to a great extent the boys governed themselves. To be ducked by his companions was the most degrading punishment a boy could receive, and only twice during the summer was it meted out. The Chief and the councilors mingled with the fellows on all occasions, and were tireless in the search for new methods of enjoyment. Mr. Clinton played the headiest kind of a game at second base in the scrub games, and knocked out three-baggers and home runs in a manner beautiful to see. Mr. Verder, too, was a good player, while Dr. Smith, laying aside his eye-glasses, would occasionally consent to go into the field and excitedly muff everything that came in his direction. Mr. Thorpe was the camp champion at ring toss, and Mr. Ellery was never defeated at shovelboard.

The afternoons were given over to baseball, or tennis, or boating, if the weather permitted, or, if it rained, to fishing for bass, pickerel, perch, and chub in the lake, or to the playing of games or reading in the recreation-hall or dormitories. But always, rain or fine, there was a bath at five o'clock, which few missed.

By the end of his first week at Chicora Nelson was thoroughly at home, and any doubts he may have entertained as to his liking the place and the fellows had vanished. It was a healthy life. He was out-of-doors all day long, and even at night he could scarcely consider himself housed. He went bareheaded, barelegged, and barearmed, and rapidly acquired a coat of tan of which he was very proud. He went to every meal famished, and jumped into bed at night in a condition

of physical weariness that brought instant slumber. And he made friends on all sides. The closest of these were Bob Hethington and Tom Ferris. But there was one other who, if as yet scarcely a bosom friend, had captured Nelson's respect and liking; and that one was Dan Speede.

After the incident of the placard in Maple Hall Dan had not offered to molest Nelson in any way during the two days following; neither had he appeared to take any notice of him. But on the evening of the second day Nelson was coming back from the dormitory after supper when he met Dan.

"You're the fellow I was looking for," Dan announced in quite the most cordial manner in the world. "Want to go down to the Inn with me in the dory? I'm going to take a note for Clint."

Nelson hesitated.

"I don't believe I can, Speede. I promised Bob Hethington to help him mend his camera."

"Oh, let that go. I'll ask him to come along."

"Well," said Nelson.

Bob consented, and the three tumbled into the dory and set out. The distance to the Chicora Inn landing was short, if you kept along the shore; but Dan suggested prolonging the trip by going around Bass Island, with the result that they navigated most of the upper end of the lake before they reached their destination. Dan was evidently on his best behavior, for the trip was completed without misadventure, and they got back to camp just as assembly sounded.

After that Nelson and Dan saw a good deal of each other, and the more they were together the more Nelson liked the big, handsome, red-headed fellow with the clear blue eyes, and began to understand him better. There wasn't a grain of meanness in his make-up. The jokes he was forever playing were usually harmless enough, and served as outlets for an oversupply of animal spirits. Nelson thought he had never seen a fellow more full of life, more eager for adventure and fun, than Dan. He would go almost any length to secure a laugh, even if it was against himself, and toil for days at a time to bring about an event promising excitement. He seemed to be absolutely without fear, and no one ever saw him really angry.

Nelson's liking for Dan was not, however, altogether shared by Bob, who dubbed Dan's tricks and jokes "kiddish," and usually treated him with a sort of contemptuous indifference. As a rule he avoided Dan's society, and finally Nelson was torn between his allegiance to Bob and his liking for Dan. Affairs stood thus when, about two weeks after Nelson's arrival, the election of captain of the baseball team came off, and Dan played a card which, if it did not at once gain Bob's friendship, at least commanded his gratitude.

At camp-fire Mr. Clinton announced that he had received a note from Camp Wickasaw asking when Chicora would be ready to arrange a series of ball games with them.

"Last year," said the Chief, "as those of you know who were here then, Wickasaw won all three games from us. There's no disgrace in being beaten, but it's lots more fun to beat. So this year let's see if we can't do better. They have fewer fellows than we have, and last year we allowed them

to play their councilors. I guess it was that that beat us. But it was only fair, and unless you fellows object they will make use of the same privilege this year. How about it?" and Mr. Clinton looked about the fire-lit group questioningly.

"Let them use them, sir," exclaimed one of the boys. "We can beat them anyhow."

"That's so, sir; and there'll be more glory in it," said another.

And a chorus of assent arose.

"All right," said Mr. Clinton. "Now we ought to get things fixed up so that we can arrange dates with Wickasaw and the other nines. There will be the Mount Pleasant team to deal with, and I suppose there will be a nine at the Inn as usual. And I guess we can arrange some games with the Camp Trescott fellows. I propose to supply bats and balls and such things, as I did last year. We'll need one new base-bag, too."

"I think that one can be fixed up all right, sir, with some sawdust, and a piece of canvas to patch it with," said Bob.

"Well, we'll have a look at it. If it can't, we'll send for a new one. We'll have to have some balls and bats, anyhow. We've got two masks and a protector left from last summer. Is there anything else?"

"We ought to have some mitts," said Carter.

"Seems to me the fellows ought to buy those themselves," Dan announced.

"Well, I'll get some," said the Chief. "If any one wants to have his own, he can. Now, how about choosing a captain? Shall we do that here to-night, or had you rather wait?"

"To-night!" "Now!" were the cries.

"Very well; suppose you nominate your candidates, and we'll have a rising vote."

Much laughter and whispering ensued. Then Dan was on his feet.

"Mr. Clinton," he began.

"Mr. Chairman," some one corrected.

"And gentlemen of the convention," added Mr. Verder.

"Who's making this speech?" asked Dan good-naturedly. "Mr. Clinton, I nominate Bob Hethington." Applause followed. "He's as good a player as any of us; he was here last year, and knows the ropes, and he—he's a good fellow for the place."

"I second the nomination!" cried Nelson.

Three other nominations followed, among the candidates being Joe Carter and Dan himself. The latter promptly withdrew in favor of Bob, and when the voting was over, Bob, in spite of half-hearted protestations, was declared elected. Thereupon Carter moved that the election be made unanimous, and it was. "Babe" Fowler was elected official scorer, an honor which quite overwhelmed him for the moment, and Mr. Verder was appointed manager. He and Bob were to get together at once and arrange dates, issue challenges, and start things moving generally. A call for candidates was issued on the spot, that constituting Bob's speech of acceptance, and it was decided that practise should be held every week-day afternoon, when there were no games, at four o'clock.

“It seems to me,” said Mr. Verder, “that the best way to get good practise is to have some one to play against. Couldn’t we form a scrub team to play against the camp nine? We’ve got plenty of fellows here.”

“That’s a good plan,” said the Chief. “And you and I’ll join it.”

“And the Doctor,” some one suggested. Whereupon there was a laugh, and the Doctor begged to be excused.

“I tell you what I will do, though,” he said; “I’ll umpire.”

“All right!” they called.

“Kill the umpire!” shouted Dan.

“And I’ll get even with you, Mr. Clinton,” threatened the Doctor. “You’ll never see first when I’m umpiring!”

“He never does see it,” grumbled Tom. “He runs too fast!”

“Well, that’s all settled, then,” said Mr. Clinton when the laughter had subsided. “Now, let’s all get to work and turn out a good team, one that’ll knock the spots off of Wickasaw! And when we can’t find any one else to play, we’ll have some, good games between the first team and the scrub, and I’ll put up some prizes—boxes of candy, or something like that. How’ll that do?”

“Bully, sir!”

“That’s swell!”

“I’m going to play on the scrub!”

And the next afternoon, while the enthusiasm still held, the first practise was held, with almost every boy in camp as a

candidate. Nelson turned out with the rest, and even Tom, under the excitement of the moment and with visions of candy before him, essayed to try for the outfield. Dan and Nelson were practically certain of making the first, if only by reason of former experience, for each had played on their class teams at school. The most glaring deficiency was a good pitcher, and the problem of finding some fellow to work with Bob, who was catcher, bothered the latter for some time. In the end a rather likely candidate showed up in the person of Wells, a chunky, snub-nosed senior, who, in spite of the fact that he was rather unpopular, decidedly stubborn, and a bit lazy, gave promise of turning into a fairly good pitcher. Dan was put on first, and soon proved his right to the place. Nelson went into the field, and finally found his position at center. He was a good batsman and a heady base-runner. Tom dropped out of the contest after a day or two, having been thrice struck by the pitcher while unsuccessfully endeavoring to hit the ball, and retired to watch the practise from the spectators' gallery and nurse his bruises. A series of three games with the rival camp of Wickasaw were arranged for, and five other dates with hotel and camp nines were made. This meant an average of two games a week for the remainder of the season, and Bob got down to hard work. As it proved, it was lucky that the enthusiasm came when it did, and supplied him with sufficient material from which to turn out a team, for shortly afterward a spell of hot weather made its appearance, and while it lasted it was difficult to get any save the members of the camp nine to make the trip to the baseball field. But Bob didn't let the heat bother him much, and practise was as rigorous as ever. When not enough fellows came out to make up the scrub, Bob held batting and

base-running practise instead, until Dan declared that he had lost ten pounds in a week.

He and Bob were rapidly becoming friendly, or rather Bob was, for Dan had liked Bob all along. Dan took hold of baseball affairs in a way that won the captain's heart, playing his own position for all there was in it, and helping cheerfully with the coaching no matter how hot the sun beat down on the field. As a result of this change of sentiment on Bob's part a four-cornered friendship was formed which lasted for a good many years. Nelson, Dan, Bob, and Tom were together pretty much all the time, and finally the camp took notice and dubbed them the "Big Four." Nelson meanwhile had been taken into the society and had afforded amusement for the entire camp when he had been put through his initiation, which, for want of a building affording privacy, was conducted in the clearing between Poplar and Spruce Halls.

CHAPTER VI

OPENS WITH AWFUL TIDINGS, AND ENDS WITH A GLEAM OF HOPE

ire news reached the camp one morning, brought over from the village by a small junior who had gone for the mail. His tale was listened to with incredulous indignation by a large group of the fellows congregated outside of Birch Hall. The junior's name was Rooke, and he was vastly impressed with his importance when he saw with what breathless interest his news was received. When Dan joined the group, after having reported as orderly to Mr. Ellery, officer of the day, Rooke was telling his story for the second time, and with what Tom called "imposing detail."

"There's a fellow over at Crescent staying at the boarding-house named Harry Fraser," began Rooke.

"Queer name for a boarding-house," said Dan.

"Shut up, Speede!" some one admonished him.

Rooke looked hurt.

"All right; never mind what the boarding-house is called, Kid," said Dan. "Fire ahead!"

"I'd met him now and then at the post-office, you know. Well, this morning, when I came out with the mail, he was there——"

“Were there any letters for me?” asked Dan eagerly. Then he retired to a safe distance, and waited for his pursuers to become absorbed again in the narrative.

“‘Say,’ he said, ‘Wickasaw put it on to you fellows good and hard, didn’t they?’ ‘How did they?’ says I. ‘Oh, you don’t know anything about it, do you?’ says he. And of course I didn’t, but I wasn’t going to let on to him.”

“Foxy kid!” murmured Dan.

“‘Oh, that!’ I says; ‘that’s nothing! Any one could do that!’”

“Good for you, Rooke!” his audience laughed.

“Well, pretty soon I found out what he was talking about. And what do you think those chumps have done?” And Rooke paused dramatically, looking very indignant.

“You told us once,” said some one unkindly. “Go ahead!”

Rooke resented this remark, and for a moment seemed inclined to sulk. But Joe Carter patted him on the back, Dan told him he was a smart kid, and he decided to let the incident pass.

“Why, they’ve gone and painted ‘Camp Wickasaw’ on the rocks over at the cliff back of Crescent! And Fraser says the letters are done in red paint and are three feet high, and you can see them for miles!”

“Phew!” said Dan. “Aren’t they the cheeky beggars?”

“When did they do it, Kid?” asked Bob.

“Day before yesterday. They went on a picnic, or something, over that way.”

“Well, we’ll just have to go over and paint it out,” said Carter decidedly, amid a murmur of concurrence.

“You couldn’t do it, my boy,” Dan objected. “It would take more paint than you could lug over there.”

“Don’t you care; they can’t go and paint up the scenery like that,” answered Joe. “Anyhow, we can daub the letters up so they can’t be read.”

“How did they do it, Kid—do you know?” Dan asked.

“Why, they climbed up as far as they could, you see, and just did it.”

“All right; then we’ll just have to climb up farther and paint ‘Camp Chicora’ above it!”

This elicited hearty applause, and Rooke’s small voice was quite lost for a moment. Then he made himself heard:

“You can’t climb any higher!” he shouted triumphantly. “Fraser says you can’t!”

“Fraser’s a liar, then!” answered Bob calmly. “You ought to select your associates more carefully, Kid.”

“But the Wickasaws climbed up the cliff until the smooth rock began,” said Rooke indignantly; “and you can’t climb any higher than that. Any one will tell you so, Bob Hethington.”

“Well, don’t get excited, Kid; we won’t ask you to do it,” said Bob soothingly. “I tell you what, fellows, Dan and I’ll go over there now and have a look at it, and see what can be done. We can get permission, I guess.”

“What’s the matter with the bunch going?” asked a chap named Ridley.

“Clint won’t let a lot go, you idiot! We’ll say we want to go over to Crescent, and then Clint and the councilors won’t need to know anything about it. If they did, they might—Who was that went away?”

The crowd turned to look. Mr. Verder was walking off toward Maple Hall.

“Gee! I bet he heard!” said Carter.

“He did,” piped Rooke. “I saw him standing over there!”

“That’s all right,” Bob said. “He won’t say anything about it if we keep it quiet. Dan and I’ll go over there right off, and we’ll let you fellows know what can be done. There’s one thing certain: Wickasaw hasn’t any mortgage on that bluff over there.”

“You bet she hasn’t!” Dan concurred earnestly. “And just think how it must look from up the lake!”

“And from Camp Trescott!” exclaimed Carter. “Why, thunder! Trescott’s right under that bluff!”

“Gee!” groaned Carter. “Aren’t they having a fine laugh on us!”

“The laugh will be on some one else when we’re through,” said Dan determinedly. “Come on, Bob!”

The group broke up, and Dan and Bob sought and received permission to go to the village. Naturally, Tom and Nelson wanted to accompany them, but consented to remain behind

when Bob explained that they must be careful not to awaken suspicion.

They lifted Bob's crimson canoe from the rack under the trees, dropped it over the side of the float, and tumbled in. Then each took a paddle and made the craft fairly fly. At the landing by the bridge they pulled it out of the water and set off along the Pine Hill road through the tiny village and along the edge of a sloping meadow that skirts Humpback Mountain. Presently the cliff was in sight, rising sheer from the meadow to a height of some seventy feet. From the side it looked for all the world as though a giant had sliced a piece off the end of the mountain as one might cut the end from a loaf of bread, and had left the crumbs in the shape of big and little boulders piled up at the bottom. From the top of the cliff the ground sloped gradually for a ways and then sprang abruptly upward into the oddly shaped cone that lent the mountain its name. Their first view of the cliff gave them no sight of the face, and it was another minute's walk before they could see the daubs of bright red paint that adorned it. There, staring down at them across the field, was the legend:

CAMP WICKASAW, '04

But, after all, the reality was not so bad as what Rooke had described. The letters were *not* three feet high, and even an eagle would have experienced difficulty in reading them a quarter of a mile away. But it was bad enough, and Dan and Bob scowled wrathfully. Then they climbed the fence and set off across the meadow to get a nearer view. Presently they reached a sort of terrace of tumbled boulders and stones, some of them crumbling and some as impregnable as when they had fallen, which was banked up under the cliff. Bushes

and weeds had grown up between them, and it was all the two could do to thrust themselves through; and when, after a minute or two, they had gained the edge of the towering mass of rock their legs and arms were scratched and their jerseys and trunks torn.

"Phew!" said Bob, looking ruefully at his wounds, "that's a merry place to come through, isn't it? I hope those Wickasaws got as much as we did!"

Above them the cliff arose at a steep angle for some twenty feet, and from there sprang almost straight into air. That first twenty feet could be climbed in places if one used care, and it was evident that the Wickasaw fellows had climbed it.

"Probably two of them went up there," said Bob, "and one sort of steadied the other while he painted. But it was a risky thing to do."

"Pshaw," answered Dan, "that wasn't very hard. The trouble is, they've got their old patent-medicine sign up as high as any one can reach. And it will be mighty hard work to paint it out, besides taking a whole lot of paint."

"That's so," said Bob, craning his head back to look. "But it's got to be done somehow."

Dan was silent for a moment; then, "No, it hasn't, either!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, what we want to do isn't to paint out their sign, but to paint our own above it; see?"

"Yes, but how? Use ladders?"

“Where’d we get the ladders?” asked Dan scornfully. “Now, how would ‘Camp Chicora, ’04’ look about twenty feet above their old letters?”

“Fine, but we can’t get it there, can we?”

“Sure! Get some paint and a good big brush, and about fifty feet of rope.”

Bob whistled.

“You’re a wonder, Dan!” he said softly. “I choose to do the painting!”

“Like thunder! Whose idea was it?”

“Yours, but I weigh less than you do, Dan.”

“That doesn’t matter. We’ll get rope that’ll hold three times my weight.”

“Do you think you can do it?” asked Bob, looking upward at the smooth face of the rock.

“Course I can do it; any fellow could. Hello!” He stumbled over the rocks and picked up a paint-brush, very sticky with vermilion paint. “Just the thing,” he chuckled. “We won’t have to buy one. Kind of them to leave it, eh? And here’s the can over here. Think we’ll want that?”

“I don’t believe so, but you might fetch it out in case we do.”

Dan did so, and carried can and brush down through the bushes to the edge of the meadow and there hid them. Then, with many a backward look at the cliff, they made their way to the road, and so to the village, arranging ways and means as they went.

“We’ll go along the road by the river and strike up the mountain from there, keeping along this side. I’ll make a seat out of a piece of board, like a swing, you know, and hitch that to the end of the rope. Then all you fellows will have to do is to lower me down.”

“That’s all right; but how will you move along from left to right when you’re down there?”

Dan considered this problem for a minute in silence; then he was forced to own himself stuck.

“Of course, you can pull me up and move the rope, and then let me down again, but that will take a month of Sundays.”

Nevertheless, no better solution of the problem presented itself, and Dan reckoned that he could paint three letters from each position, necessitating but five changes.

“I guess we’d better not tell the fellows about it,” said Bob. “If we do, it’s sure to get out and Clint will hear of it. If he does, it’s all over.”

“That’s so. We’ll just say that we’re trying to think up a way to do it. And this afternoon some of us had better go to Warder and get a gallon can of nice blue paint. Then to-morrow morning we can get to work before any one knows anything about it.”

“We’ll have to have Nelson and Tom, though.”

“Sure! We couldn’t do it without them. It will take a couple of you to hold the rope. You’ll have to snub it around a tree, or something, you know. I guess you and I’d better go

to Warder, because we'll have to buy the rope too, and I want to have a hand in that; I feel a sort of interest in that rope."

"I guess you do," Bob answered with a smile. "But I don't think I can go with you on account of practise. Take Nelson."

"All right. Who's got any money? I've drawn my allowance for next week already."

"I guess I've got enough. I suppose we'll have to stand the thing between us."

"Sure! What's the good of trying to collect from the crowd? Besides, if we did, Clint might hear of it. It won't come to more than a dollar apiece, I guess."

Nelson and Tom were duly let into the secret, and the latter became wildly excited.

"It's a du-du-du-dandy scheme!" he sputtered with enthusiasm. "Won't Wi-wi-wi-Wickasaw be mu-mu-mu-mad?"

"Look here, Tom," said Dan, "don't you get to stuttering when you haul me up. If you do you'll jar me off my perch!"

In the afternoon Dan and Nelson set the signal for the Navigation Company's boat to stop and take them to Chicora Landing. They found everything they needed at Warder, and were back in time for supper, evading inquiries as to what was contained in the bundles they carried. After supper Dan worked at the bench in the carpenter-shop under Poplar Hall until it was dark, and then sneaked over to Birch Hall and hid the result of his labors under his bunk. During camp-fire the quartet of conspirators sat apart and rehearsed the morrow's

plans in whispers. Of the four, only Bob was calm enough to fall asleep as soon as the lights went out.

CHAPTER VII

PROVES THE TRUTH OF THE SAYING THAT THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM AT THE TOP, AND SHOWS DAN WITH THE "BLUES"

As luck would have it, Bob and Tom were camp-boys the next morning, and, as their duties required the better part of an hour in the performance, it was after nine o'clock before they were able to join Dan and Nelson at the landing. The canoe held Dan, Nelson, and the bundles, and Bob and Tom followed in one of the rowboats. Their embarkation was watched by several of the fellows, whose suspicions were aroused, and questions were hurled after them as long as they were within hearing. As they passed the landing at Wickasaw three boys who were making fast the launch after returning from the village with the mail stopped work and observed them with meaning grins.

"Hello, Chicks!" one called. "Been over to the bluff lately?"

"Hello, Wicks," Dan replied; "you're all the 'bluffs' we've seen."

"You'll be lu-lu-lu-laughing out of th-th-the other side of your mu-mu-mouths pretty su-su-soon!" muttered Tom.

At the village they divided the bundles and started down the road toward Hipp's Pond; but presently they turned to the left and began the ascent of the mountain, keeping along the

side nearest the village. It was tough going, and twice Tom put down his load and suggested that they pause and have a look at the view.

"The view's perfectly swell, Tom," answered Nelson, "but as it's getting late you want to forget about it and toddle along."

So Tom, with many a sigh and grunt, toddled.

Ten minutes later they had reached their destination. Behind them rose the thickly timbered slope of the mountain, and at their feet was the bluff. Even Nelson found time now for a look at the panorama of blue sunlit lake spread below them. The camp landing was hidden from them by the trees, but the upper end of the lake was in plain sight, each island standing out distinct against the expanse of breeze-ruffled water. Below them at a little distance a column of smoke rising from the trees told of the location of Camp Trescott. Beyond was Joy's Cove, and, to its left, Black's Neck. Chicora Inn looked very near across the lake. Far away a shimmer of blue indicated Little Chicora. It was a beautiful scene, and the boys, their hats thrown aside, gazed their fill while the breeze ruffled their damp hair. Then Dan started to work.

The bundles were undone and their contents laid out on the narrow bit of turf between the trees and the edge of the cliff; two lengths of rope, a gallon can of blue paint, a ball of stout twine, a piece of steel wire bent into a double hook, and an oak board sixteen inches long and six inches wide, notched on each side near the ends. When they were all displayed Dan looked them over as a general might view his

troops. Suddenly he struck his right fist into his left palm with a loud smack:

"Oh, thunderation!" he exclaimed.

"What's the row?" asked Bob.

"We left the paint-brush down there!"

Sorrowfully they walked to the edge of the bluff and looked down into the meadow.

"Somebody'll have to go and get it," said Nelson.

"Where'd you leave it?"

"You couldn't find it in a week," answered Dan in vexation. "Here, let's get these things rigged up. It would take half an hour to go down there and back the way we came. You can let me down with the rope and I'll find it."

So they set to work. The board was lashed firmly to one end of an inch rope, the can of paint was opened, one end of the other length of rope was tied into a noose, and the hook was passed through the rope at the end of the swing.

"That looks like awfully small rope," said Tom.

"But it hasn't got to hold you, my boy," said Dan. "Pass the end of it around that tree, fellows. That's it. Now let's see where to put it over." He sank onto his hands and knees and crawled to the edge of the bluff. "Here's a good place," he said, and dropped the swing over the edge. "Now haul up the slack, Bob."

"Look here," said Nelson, "it will be easy enough letting you down, but are you sure we can pull you up again?"

“Well, if you can’t—!” Dan’s tones spoke volumes of contempt. “But you’ll have to unwind the rope from that tree, you know, and pull on it directly.”

“Wouldn’t it be safer if we left it snubbed around the tree and pulled on it here at the edge, letting some one take up the slack at the tree?”

“Yes, if two of you can lift me.”

“We can, if we don’t have to bear the strain between hauls.”

“That’s proper,” said Dan. “But say, how about having the rope work over the edge of the turf here?”

“Won’t do,” answered Bob. “It would cut into the turf and scrape on the edge of the rock. We ought to have a plank or something.”

“That old log over there will do all right,” said Nelson. “Fetch it over, Tom.”

Tom obeyed, grunting, and the dead trunk was laid at the edge of the cliff.

“What’s going to keep it from rolling over onto your head?” asked Tom of Dan.

Dan looked puzzled. So did the others.

“Seems to me,” said Nelson, “we didn’t get this more’n half planned out.”

“History teaches us,” said Dan, “that even the world’s greatest generals have been quite frequently ‘up a tree.’”

“Wonder if they were ever up a bluff?” murmured Tom.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Dan, after a moment’s consideration of the problem, “we’ll have to drive stakes on each side of the log; see?”

“Yes,” Bob answered dryly, “but I don’t see the stakes.”

“That’s easy. Who’s got the biggest knife?”

It appeared that Tom had; so Dan borrowed it, and set to work cutting down a stout branch and converting it into four stakes some eighteen inches in length. It took a good while, and the other three fellows disposed themselves comfortably on the ground and looked on.

“Wish those Wickasaws had broken their silly necks!” grumbled Nelson. “We’re going to miss our soak.”

“Maybe we’ll miss our dinner, too,” said Tom.

“Oh, cut it out!” said Bob. “You can eat to-morrow. I don’t see what you want to eat for, anyhow, fat as you are.”

At last the stakes were done and were driven into the turf at each side of the log, Tom mashing his finger with the rock which he was using as a hammer. Then Bob and Tom and Nelson manned the rope, and Dan wriggled over the edge of the cliff, feet foremost, keeping a tight hold on the rope. When only his head remained in sight he winked merrily.

“If I make a mess of it, fellows, kindly see that you find all the pieces,” he called. “And don’t forget to put on my headstone ‘Requiescat in pieces.’”

Then the flaming red head disappeared, and the fellows let the rope slip slowly around the tree. It seemed a long while before it slackened. When Bob got to the edge Dan was

scrambling over the rocks into the bushes. Presently he was back flourishing the brush and can.

"We don't need to pull you all the way up again," shouted Bob. "We'll get you up where you are going to paint and then lower the can down to you. Is that all right?"

"All right," echoed Dan. Then he stepped onto the seat at the end of the rope and waved his hand. Bob and Nelson laid back on the rope, and slowly it began to come up over the log, Tom securing the slack after each haul with a double turn around the tree. Finally there came a shout, and, after a glance over the edge, Bob directed them to make fast, and tied the twine to the can of blue paint and lowered it. Suddenly there was a yell of dismay and wrath from below.

"See what's wrong!" cried Bob.

Nelson crawled to the edge and peered over. Then he crawled back, and seemed to be having a fit on the turf. Tom looked down, and then joined Nelson.

Bob stared at them as though they had suddenly gone insane. "What's the matter, you idiots?" he cried. But Tom only shrieked the louder, while Nelson rolled onto his back, held his sides, and kicked his heels into the turf, gasping. In disgust Bob got cautiously to his knees, tied the line around a stake, and had a look for himself. Thirty feet beneath sat Dan on his wooden seat, muttering incoherently under a baptism of bright blue paint. The can had caught on the edge of a tiny projecting ledge and had tilted in such a way that a portion of the contents had slopped over onto Dan's bare head, and even yet was still trickling a tiny stream. At first glance, so thoroughly was Dan's head and face adorned, it seemed to

Bob that the entire contents of the can must have been emptied. But a second glance showed him that at least three-fourths of the paint still remained at the end of the cord. He swung it away so that it no longer dripped, and hailed Dan.

"What's the good of wasting the stuff like that, Dan?" he asked with simulated anger.

Dan raised a strange blue visage from which his eyes peeped coyly upward. "If you'll haul me up I'll lick you within an inch of your life!" he said solemnly. Then he spat and sputtered and tried to wipe the sticky fluid from his face with his arm, his hands being already well covered.

Tom and Nelson, who had managed to creep to the edge for another look, here retired precipitately so that they might indulge their mirth where there was no danger of laughing themselves over the edge.

"Too bad, Dan," laughed Bob. "Haven't you got a handkerchief?"

"*Handkerchief!*" said Dan scornfully. "What good would that be? What I need is a Turkish bath and a dozen towels. Say, did you do that on purpose, you—you blamed fool?"

"No, honest, Dan, I didn't. I didn't know what was up, until Nelson was taken with a fit."

"Fit! I'll fit him!" said Dan with a grin. "How do I look?"

"Like New Haven after a football victory!"

"Huh! Well, let's have that stuff and get this fool job done!"

"Sure you don't want to come up and clean off a bit?"

“I’m not coming up until the thing’s done, I tell you. Lower away on that paint, only for goodness’ sake be careful!”

“Of course I will! What’s the saying about gilding refined gold and painting the lily, Dan? There’s no use wasting any more of this precious stuff on you; you’re complete now. I couldn’t add to your beauty if I had gallons and gallons here!”

“Shut up!” said Dan cheerfully; “and tell those two other idiots that if they don’t stop laughing I’ll go up there and paint ’em from head to feet!”

Here Tom looked over.

“Su-su-say, Dan,” he shouted, “di-di-didn’t you mean ‘Re-re-requiescat in pu-pu-pu-paint’?”

“Shut up, Tom,” gurgled Nelson, thrusting his blushing countenance over the edge. “Can’t you see he has enough already to make him blue?”

But Dan made no answer. He was tracing a monstrous C on the face of the cliff with a dripping brush.

He was tracing a monstrous C.

“Don’t be too generous with that paint,” cautioned Bob. “Remember, there isn’t very much left.”

“Guess I know that, don’t I?” asked Dan.

An A and an M followed the C, and then it was necessary to move the artist along. Nelson had solved the difficulty after a fashion the preceding afternoon. The second rope was made fast to a tree at the top and lowered down to Dan. He put his foot in the noose and swung free of the seat, keeping hold, however, of the rope above it. Then this was moved at the top and made fast anew. Dan stepped back on the seat, released the rope with the noose, and went swinging across the face of the rock like a pendulum. The watchers held their breaths, but Dan clung fast, and presently the swing came to a stop and the painting was resumed. Four times more was this process gone through with to the risking of Dan's limbs before the last numeral of "'04" was completed. Then Dan heaved a sigh of relief, viewed his work approvingly, and trickled what remained of the paint down the face of the rock in a partly successful endeavor to obliterate the red lettering below.

"How does it look?" asked Nelson eagerly.

"Swell," said Dan. "Pull me up."

They obeyed, and when he crawled over the edge and stood up they all sat down and howled anew. And Dan, just to be sociable, sat down and laughed at his plight until the tears came.

"Oh, Dan, if we could only keep you just as you are!" gasped Nelson, "and use you for a mascot!"

Head and face were as blue as though he had dipped them in the paint-can; his hands and arms were a lighter shade; the stuff had trickled down behind one ear and so down his back, and his jersey was patriotic to a fault.

“What shall I do?” he asked finally. “I can’t go back like this.”

“We’ll land you just across from the village,” said Nelson, “and you can sneak back to camp through the woods. No one will see you, because the crowd will be having soak. Get a lot of kerosene and take a bath in it.”

The plan was the best they could think of, and so it was carried out. The ropes and the rest of the paraphernalia they hid in the woods, and then they got down the hill as fast as their legs would carry them. Going through the village, Dan created quite a little interest, although he modestly strove to avoid notice. They put him ashore a quarter of a mile from camp, and when last seen he was stalking through the trees like an Indian in war-paint. The others got back to the landing in time to hurry into their bathing-trunks and get a few plunges before the signal “All out!” was given. They were very reticent as to what they had been doing, but somehow the secret was all over camp by dinner-time, and the fellows spent the most of the afternoon rowing to and fro across the lake to the point of Black’s Neck, from where an excellent view of the cliff was obtainable. And what they saw pleased them immeasurably. Dan had fairly beaten the Wickasaws at their own game. He had painted his legend in letters fully three feet high at least fifteen feet above theirs, and there could be no comparison either in artistic effect or publicity. Camp Chicora hugged itself in gleeful triumph.

Just before supper Dan ran across Mr. Verder.

“Why, Speede,” asked the latter, stopping him, “aren’t you feeling well?”

“Me, sir? Oh, I’m all right,” answered Dan uneasily, eager to pass on.

“Sure?” asked the councilor. “You look—er—kind of blue and unhealthy.” And Dan thought he heard a chuckle as he hurried away.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLS HOW TOM WAS VISITED BY AUNT LOUISA—AND SOME OTHERS

aturdays at Chicora were by way of being fête-days. Relatives and friends were given the freedom of the camp, and the visitors' table in the dining-hall was usually full. Frequently the father of one of the boys stayed over until Monday morning, sleeping in one of the dormitories and getting a genuine taste of camp life. On the day following the adventure at the cliff the visitors began to reach camp early, and among the first to put in an appearance was Tom's Aunt Louisa, from Boston. Her arrival was so unexpected, and Tom became so excited over it, that he started at the landing to tell her how glad to see her he was and only finished at the flag-pole, having been set back twice in his stuttering by stubbing his toe on the way up. With parents and friends appeared simultaneously baskets and boxes of fruit, candy, and cake. Sunday morning found many absent from the breakfast table, and Dr. Smith made the rounds of the dormitories with what he called his "Sunday Specific." But Aunt Louisa wasn't the sort to bring trouble to a boy's digestion; she said so herself in the presence of Nelson and Dan and Bob and Tom, the first three having been formally introduced by Tom as "my special friends."

"I don't believe in candy, Tom," said Aunt Louisa, "and you know it. So don't expect any. You're looking so well, my dear, that I wouldn't think of bringing you anything that

might upset you. I did consider fruit, but I'm always afraid of fruit; in hot weather—aren't you, sir?"

Dan, finding the question put to him, answered with alacrity.

"Yes'm," said Dan soberly.

"Yes, that's what I think," continued Aunt Louisa. "And so I said to myself, 'If it must be something sweet'—for Tom's got the sweetest tooth of any boy I've ever seen, and I've seen a good many in my time—'if it must be something sweet,' I said, 'why, it will be something healthful.' And so, Tom, I've brought you two of those lemon pies and a dozen cream-puffs from that nice store on Temple Place. There's nothing about a good honest pie can hurt any one—is there?"

"No, indeed," answered Dan with enthusiasm. Tom murmured his thanks, but withal looked a trifle dissatisfied. Aunt Louisa saw it.

"I do believe he's disappointed at not getting candy!" she said.

"No, really, aunt," Tom answered, striving to put conviction into his tones. "I'm awfully fond of cream-puffs —and pie."

But Aunt Louisa shook her head, unconvinced. "I'm afraid you are, though," she said. "I kind of felt you would be. That's why I said to myself, 'Now, there's mighty little use in being in good health if you're unhappy. If the boy's going to get more enjoyment out of having a stomach-ache than by not having one, why, he shall have it. Boys aren't real happy, anyhow,' I said to myself, 'unless they're in trouble, and I guess a stomach-ache's about as harmless a trouble as he

could have.' And so I just went down to Sage & Paw's and ____"

"Hooray for you, Aunt Louisa!" shouted Tom. "What d'you get?"

"Mixed chocolates," said Aunt Louisa, her eyes dancing, adding grimly, "I guess they'll do the work as quick as anything!"

Candy never tastes so good as when a chap has been subsisting on what the school catalogues call "a plain, wholesome diet with a sufficiency of pure milk and butter and fresh eggs." The box, a generous four-pound affair, was quickly obtained, and the five—Aunt Louisa reminding one of a valuable transport under the protection of four men-o'-war—sought a quiet spot in the forest above the clearing where they, or at least four of them, could do the matter full justice. Aunt Louisa sat on a fallen tree, with her neat gray traveling-gown well tucked up around her, and encouraged them to eat all they could.

"You might just as well have it over with," she declared. "You're all bound to be ill, and the sooner you're ill the sooner you'll be well again. Mr. Hurry, you mustn't let Tom get ahead of you."

"Dan's name's Speede, auntie," corrected Tom.

"Speede, is it? Well, he's real slow compared to you, Tom, when it comes to candy."

They unanimously voted Aunt Louisa a "brick," and hospitably pressed her to come again. And in the afternoon, when the camp turned out in a body and traveled to the ball field for the first game of the season, Aunt Louisa was

escorted in state. The box of candy didn't go along however; they had lost the edge of their appetite. So Tom bore the depleted box to Maple Hall, and, because his locker no longer locked, and because the sign artistically done on the door with a hot poker, which sign surrounded a grinning skull and cross-bones and read, "DANGER! KEEP OUT!" had no meaning for the other occupants of the hall, he secreted it at the head of his bunk under the mattress.

Chicora's adversary that day was Camp Trescott. Trescott was situated directly across the lake in Joy's Cove. It was a small camp, and the dozen and a half fellows inhabiting it were all from one school. Trescott rather prided itself on being select. But select or not, it wasn't much at baseball, and Chicora had little difficulty in winning as she pleased. But despite a very one-sided score—17 to 3—there were some good plays, and the spectators were well repaid for their half-mile walk through the woods. Bob found plenty of things that needed remedying, but on the whole the Chicora team played very well for a first game.

There was quite a gallery of spectators at the evening plunge, and Dan excelled himself at diving, bringing forth screams of terrified protest from Aunt Louisa, who "just knew that Mr. Hurry would drown himself, if he didn't break his neck first!" Even Nelson, who of late had been profiting by Dan's instruction, did some very respectable stunts in the line of what Tom called "high and lofty tumbling." Aunt Louisa, together with nearly a dozen other guests, stayed to supper and camp-fire, being taken back to Chicora Inn at nine in the steam-launch. A dozen or so of the boys went along with the guests, the Four among them. There was a jolly big white moon that made a wide sparkling path across

the water, and there was a nice nippy little breeze from the east that rendered the seats about the boiler very popular. Mr. Clinton ran the launch, and coming back he made no protest when Bob, who was at the wheel, turned the head of the Chicora across the lake and hugged the opposite shore all the way back, explaining *sotto voce* to Nelson that "the longest way around was the shortest way home."

It was after ten when they finally made the landing, and nearly half past when, having helped the Chief make fast the boat for the night and partaken of a lunch of milk and crackers in the dining-hall, the Four tumbled into bed and put out their lanterns. And it was just about midnight when a heartrending shriek broke out on the stillness and brought every fellow into a sitting position in his bunk with visions of murder. In the momentary silence ensuing there was a loud *thump* of a body striking the floor, the building shook on its foundations, and Mr. Verder's alarmed voice rang out:

"What's the matter? Who yelled, fellows?"

"*Wha-wha-wha-what's the mu-mu-mu-matter?*" shrieked a voice midway down the hall. "I du-du-dunno what's the mu-mu-mu—what's the mu-mu-mu-matter! I only know I'm bu-bu-bu-being eat-tu-tu-eaten alive!"

A howl of laughter rewarded the explanation, and lanterns were quickly lighted. Dan was one of the first on the scene. Tom, his blankets scattered around him, stood in his pajamas with staring eyes and busy hands. First he rubbed and slapped one part of his body, then another, and all the time he kept up an indignant stuttering.

“Tu-tu-talk about pu-pu-pu-pins an’ nu-nu-needles! Gu-gu-gee! Su-su-somebody’s put a whole pu-pu-pu-package of ’em in mu-mu-my bed!”

“Shut up your howling,” said Dan with a grin. “What’s the fun?”

“*Fu-fu-fun!*” yelled Tom. “I wish you had it!”

“Had what?”

“Wha-wha-whatever it is, you bu-bu-bu-blamed idiot!” answered Tom wrathfully. Then, with a sudden shriek, he leaped a foot into the air, grabbed his pajamas above his left knee, and danced nimbly about the floor, at last becoming entangled in the blankets and tumbling headlong at the feet of Mr. Verder, who came hurrying up. Every fellow was on hand by that time, and Tom was pulled sputtering to his feet. Mr. Verder took the nearest lantern and investigated. The cause of Tom’s unhappiness wasn’t far to seek. Over the bed and blankets swarmed a veritable army of big black ants!

“Ants!” said Mr. Verder, laughing. “What are you doing, Ferris, studying entomology?”

“Probably *ant*omology,” hazarded Nelson.

“Ants?” exclaimed Tom, still rubbing himself busily. “Ants! Gee, I thought they were bu-bu-bu-bees at least! They haven’t done a th-th-th-thing tu-tu-tu-to me, sir!”

“Well, I’m sorry, Ferris,” said the councilor. “The Doctor will get you something to put on the bites. But what are they doing on your bed?”

“I gu-gu-guess it’s the cu-cu-cu-candy, sir,” said Tom sheepishly.

“Candy? What candy?”

For answer Tom raised the mattress, revealing a box about which the ants were crawling excitedly to and fro.

“Well,” said Mr. Verder when the laughter had somewhat subsided, “after this you had better keep your candy somewhere else.”

For answer Tom seized the box gingerly and hurled it out the nearest window. Dr. Smith appeared with a bottle of witch-hazel, and Tom, dispensing with his pajamas, received medical assistance. After that order and quiet were restored only with much difficulty. Tom went elsewhere to continue his interrupted slumber, hugging the bottle of witch-hazel to his breast, but he couldn’t get beyond the gibes of his companions. They sat on the edge of his new bunk and pointed out the moral to him, which, according to them, was to the effect that selfishness had been justly rewarded. And Tom, rubbing and grimacing, had no spirit left with which to defend himself.

“It proves,” declared Dan, “that a fellow can have too many ants!”

Tom only groaned, whether at the pun or at his pain they didn’t know.

CHAPTER IX

STARTS OUT WITH POETRY, HAS TO DO WITH A BEETLE, AND ENDS WITH A PENALTY

 elson read with a nod of approval.

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

He was sitting at the table on the porch of Birch Hall, and the lines that pleased him were burned on a wooden tablet affixed to the big stone chimney across the room. His gaze, returning from the quotation, fell on Tom, who at a neighboring table was, like Nelson, writing home. One of Tom's legs was twined around the camp-stool upon which he was seated, as a morning-glory vine twines about a post. The other leg was stretched straight ahead, as though seeking inspiration at a distance. His forehead was puckered with wrinkles until it resembled the surface of a washboard, and he chewed ravenously at the tip of his pen. Nelson smiled, and let his gaze wander back to his own task only to have it prove truant again, attracted by the scene at his left.

The porch overhung the hill, and from where he sat he looked into the swaying branches of the trees. Between them,

like turquoises set in a field of emerald and chrysoprase, shone patches of the lake ruffled to a tender blue by the breeze that sang amid the trees. Near-by a silver poplar flashed the under surface of its leaves into the sunlight, so that they seemed to have been dipped in pale gold. A gray squirrel chattered and scolded on a neighboring limb, and all about birds sang blithely. Nelson sighed, and brought his eyes resolutely back to the half-written letter before him. It wasn't a morning for letter-writing; the woods called too loudly; his thoughts would stray.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Tom, "I don't know what to write!"

"Did you tell them about the ants last night?" asked Nelson innocently.

"You bet I did! And say, one of those bites still aches like the mischief. I never thought ants could nip like that!"

"You probably rolled over on them; that's enough to make any self-respecting ant angry."

"Oh, dry up and blow away! What are you writing about?"

"Not much of anything—yet. I mentioned the ants. And the weather; I suppose they'll be pleased to know what sort of weather we had two days before they get my letter! I've got almost a page about the weather."

"Gee! I wish I could write like that. I told 'em it was a fine day, but it only took a line. Wish I could string it out like you can! I guess I'll just say that I'm well, and that it's time for dinner, so no more at present."

"Time for dinner! Why, it's only half past nine!"

“Oh, you’re too fussy,” answered Tom, drumming on the table with his pen. “Besides, it’s always time for dinner!”

“Have you told them about your aunt?”

“Great Scott, no! I forgot all about her. Say, you’re a true friend, Nel!” And Tom, after scowling fiercely at the tip of his pen for a moment, took a firmer hold of the camp-stool with his leg and began to write vigorously, so vigorously that Nelson feared he would break his pen. Ten minutes passed, during which Nelson finished his own letter, and Tom, having told of Aunt Louisa’s visit in a scant half-dozen lines, informed his parents somewhat unnecessarily that “the weather continues fine,” and that “I will tell you more in my next,” and signed himself “Your loving son, Thomas Courtenay Ferris.”

Then, having hastily sealed and stamped their letters, they dropped them into the mail-box with sighs of relief and hastened out-of-doors.

“Let’s go up to the tennis-court and be lazy until time for church,” suggested Tom.

So they climbed the hill, found a place where the grass offered comfort and the overhanging branches promised shade, and stretched themselves out. Above them was a wide-spreading oak, behind them a little settlement of young birch carpeted with trailing evergreen and partridge-berries. Bordering the path were blueberry and raspberry bushes and goldenrod, the latter already beginning to glow, although August was but just at hand. Thereabouts grew wild strawberries, if Tom was to be believed, although they had long since ceased fruiting. Rocks outcropped on every side,

and tall ferns grew abundantly. It was Tom who presently wiggled forward and plucked from a tiny covert of evergreen and grass three oddly shaped blossoms, pallid and translucent.

"What the dickens are these things?" he asked perplexedly. He viewed them suspiciously as though he feared they might poison him.

"Indian-pipe," answered Nelson. "*Monotropa uniflora.* Let's see one."

"Are they poisonous?"

"No, indeed, but they do look a bit unhealthy, don't they? Corpse-plant they're called, too."

"They sure do; look like mushrooms gone wrong. Indian-pipe, eh? Gee, I guess nobody but an Indian would want to smoke such a thing! Say, they smell nice, don't they?"

"Nice?" repeated Nelson suspiciously. "Smell pretty bad, I suppose. By jove, they don't though. Say, they're real sweet! I never knew that they had any odor before. If it was stronger it would be mighty sweet, wouldn't it? It's—it's what you might call illusive."

"That's a fine word," said Tom lazily. "Ill-use-ive, of no use." He tossed them aside and settled his hands under his head, staring drowsily up into the sun-flecked branches. "Good night; wake me in time for dinner." He was really dropping off to sleep when Nelson called to him softly:

"Say, Tom, come over here."

"What for?" asked Tom sleepily.

“I want you to see this beetle,” giggled Nelson. “He’s the craziest dub you ever saw. Come, look!”

“Beetle!” muttered Tom disgustedly. Nevertheless he found sufficient energy to wriggle along on his stomach to the other’s side. “Where’s your old bu-bu-beetle?” he asked.

“There,” answered Nelson, pointing with a twig. He was a small chap, grayish-black in color, with what Nelson declared to be the Morse code written down his back. He was trying to get somewhere, just where wasn’t apparent, for no sooner did he make headway in one direction than he changed his route and started off in another. He was laughably awkward, and bumped into everything in his path.

“Bet you he’s been eating toadstools,” said Tom, “and is very ill.”

“I’ve named him ‘Tom,’” said Nelson soberly.

“Think he looks like me?” asked Tom.

“N-no, but he walks like you.”

“Huh! Look at the idiot, will you?” The beetle had encountered an acorn at least ten times his size and was vainly striving to shove it out of his path. Again and again he stood on his hind legs and tried to move the acorn, acting in a most absurdly exasperated way.

“He’s getting terribly mad,” said Nelson. “It doesn’t occur to him, I suppose, that he can walk around it. Let’s take it out of his way; if we don’t, he’ll stay there all day and never get home to his family.” So the acorn was flicked aside with Nelson’s twig. But the effect on the beetle was not what they had expected. He immediately began to run around very

hurriedly in a tiny circle as though trying to make himself dizzy.

"Bet you he's wondering where the acorn went to," said Tom. "Look at the idiot! Hey, get up there!" And Tom, borrowing Nelson's twig, gave the beetle a shove. Apparently that was just what he needed. After a moment, spent perhaps in gathering his thoughts, he started off in a new direction and covered six inches of ground, knocking into every blade of grass and every tiny obstruction on the way. Then, for no apparent reason, he crawled in at one end of a dried and curled leaf and proceeded to try and get out again by climbing the sides. As the sides curved inward he had a terrible time of it. Six times he fell onto his back, all legs waving wildly, and had great difficulty in regaining his equilibrium. At last, quite by accident, he got too near one end of the leaf and tumbled out. Then he took up his journey again.

"I don't think insects have much sense," said Tom disgustedly.

"This one hasn't, that's certain," said Nelson. "If he doesn't look out he'll— There he goes, plump into that spider-web. Why, any one could have seen it! Look at him! Tom, you're an awful fool!"

"Huh?" said Tom in surprise.

"I was addressing your namesake," explained Nelson.

The namesake was blundering deeper and deeper into the tiny web, reminding the watchers of a man walking through a series of hotbeds as depicted in a comic paper. Finally, by sheer weight, the beetle came out on the other side with a

large part of the web trailing behind him, and a very small spider, looking like the head of a black pin, emerged from her hiding-place and began to run excitedly over the scene of her former habitation.

"Don't blame her," grunted Tom. "Things are certainly torn up."

The beetle, doubling in his tracks, progressed without further misadventure for almost a foot. Then he stopped, dug his head into the earth, and waved his legs vexatiously.

"Oh, he's plumb crazy!" laughed Nelson.

"I guess he dropped something and is looking for it," said Tom. "Perhaps it's his watch. Or maybe——"

Tom's further surmises were rudely interrupted. Up the hill floated a most unmelodious shout. Nelson sat up as though he had touched a live wire.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "what's that?"

"It's Joe Carter," said Tom. "He learned that yell from his brother, who was on the Yale freshman crew."

"It sounds like—like a banshee!"

"Never heard one," said Tom.

"Really? I had a tame one once," answered Nelson, laughing.

"You mean *bantam*, I guess. Hello, there he goes again. Maybe he's calling us." And Tom lifted up his voice in a weak imitation of Carter's awful effort.

“Oh, you can’t do it, Tommy, my boy. Why, I couldn’t have heard that ten miles!”

But Carter wasn’t that far off, and presently, after sending an answering hail, he appeared in the path.

“Say, you fellows, Clint wants to see you in the office.” Then he dropped his voice to an awed whisper. “He’s found out about the sign on the cliff,” he added.

“Phew!” said Nelson. “Was he mad?”

“N-no, I don’t think so, but it’s hard to tell,” Carter replied. “But he looked pretty serious. He’s sent for Bob and Dan, too.”

The latter were coming up the hill into the clearing as Nelson and Tom appeared from above. They exchanged sympathetic grins and shakes of the head, and then composed their features and filed into Poplar Hall. Mr. Clinton was at his desk behind the railing.

“Bring some chairs over here, boys, and sit down so that I may talk to you. That’s it. Now, how about this blue-paint episode?”

His glance encountered four rather sheepish faces, but every eye met his fairly. It was Bob who spoke first.

“We all had a hand in it, sir.”

“That’s so, sir,” Tom supplemented. And Nelson nodded. Dan alone gave no sign. Mr. Clinton observed the fact and looked surprised.

“You didn’t have a hand in it, then Speede?” he asked.

Dan's face suddenly wreathed itself in a broad smile and his blue eyes twinkled.

"I was pretty near all in it, Mr. Clint," he answered. "You see, sir, they emptied the pot of paint over me!"

The Chief smiled a little.

"Too bad they didn't use it all that way," he said. "Now, look here, boys; I've heard how you rigged up ropes and slung—slung one of your number over the cliff——"

"That was me, sir," interrupted Dan modestly.

"Whoever it was, it was a foolhardy and dangerous piece of business. You might have fallen and broken your neck. I'll confess to a feeling of admiration for the pluck displayed, but I have no sympathy for the achievement. I am responsible for the welfare of you boys while you're here in this camp. How do you suppose I could have faced your folks, Speede, if you had injured yourself?"

"I don't think the danger was so great as you think, sir," answered Dan. "We—we took every precaution."

The Chief sniffed audibly. "The only sensible precaution would have been to have an ambulance waiting at the bottom," he said dryly. "If you had to endanger your limbs—and I confess I can't see the necessity of it—I'd prefer you did it in some better cause. In plain language, what you committed was an act of vandalism. To daub up the scenery with a lot of blue paint is nothing else. It shows not only mighty poor taste, but selfishness as well. The Lord put that cliff there to be a part of the natural scenery, for people to look at and enjoy. And when you deface it you are depriving

others of their rights, merely to give yourselves an instant's selfish satisfaction."

He paused and awaited a reply; finally:

"It was Wickasaw started it, sir," said Tom. "They painted their name there first, and they hadn't any business doing that, sir; and so——"

"And so you thought you had to outrage good taste also? A very poor excuse, Ferris. Now I want you to promise never to attempt anything of the sort again. And I want you to promise, too, that whenever, not only while you're here but all your lives, you know of an attempt on the part of any one to deface the natural scenery, you will do all in your power to prevent it. What do you say?"

"I'll promise, sir," said Bob, and the others chimed in.

"Very well. I am pretty certain you went about this thing thoughtlessly, and I don't want to be hard on you; but at the same time I can not altogether overlook it. Let me see; you asked for permission, didn't you, to take dinner at the Inn?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I gave it. Now I fancy you accord me the right of retracting that permission, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Nelson softly.

"Yes; well, I think you had better stay in camp the rest of the day. That's all, boys."

"Mr. Clinton," said Tom, as they replaced their chairs, "please, sir, will you stop at the Inn landing for my aunt? I

told her we'd be over to dinner and take her on the launch afterward, and I guess she'll be worried."

"H'm. I'd forgotten your aunt was here, Ferris. When does she return to the city?"

"First train in the morning, sir."

"Well, you may come along on the launch, I guess, all of you. But no going to the Inn for dinner, you understand."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir."

Outside they heaved sighs of relief.

"Gee!" said Dan, "we got out of that cheap, didn't we?"

And all concurred. Only Tom looked sorrowful.

"They have swell grub at the Inn," he murmured regretfully.

CHAPTER X

DESCRIBES AN AFTERNOON ON THE LAKE AND A GALLANT RESCUE

he Chicora was a trim-looking steam-launch, thirty feet in length, and with a comfortable beam. And when she steamed away from the landing, at three o'clock, she held sixteen boys, Mr. Clinton, Mr. Verder, and Mr. Thorpe. She was pretty well loaded, but there still remained room for several parents and relatives who were to be picked up at the Inn. Dan, Nelson, Tom, and Bob were perched on the tiny deck space aft of the cabin and looked very, very good. When Aunt Louisa appeared, looking rather doubtful of the enterprise, she was conducted to a seat near-by.

"You needn't tell me why you didn't come to dinner," she said at once. "I felt pretty certain you'd made yourself sick with that candy, and now I'm sure of it. I never knew you to look like an angel, Tom, save when you were sick or getting well."

Whereupon she was acquainted in whispers of the real reason of their non-appearance, and wouldn't believe that "Mr. Hurry" had performed such a hazardous feat until, the launch having turned its nose across the lake, the cliff came into sight and the staring blue letters were quietly pointed out to her.

"Well, I never!" she ejaculated. "If that wasn't a clever thing to do! And a very wicked one!" she added quickly and

disapprovingly.

"Scenery's very pretty to-day," remarked Carter, grinning at Dan. And Dan, with an apologetic glance at Aunt Louisa, kicked Carter good and hard. Mr. Clinton, busy at the engine, refused to hear. Neither did he show that the offensive inscription on the cliff ahead of them was in existence. Once headed down the lake the launch got the full effect of the waves, which, under a strong easterly wind, were kicking up quite a rumpus. Those in the bow received frequent wettings, and there was a struggle for places there. Aunt Louisa was quite certain she was going to be seasick, and insisted cheerfully that, in such a contingency, she must be set ashore at once, no matter where.

"I always say," she announced, "that it's a heap better to go ashore, even if it's on a desert island, than stay in a boat and be sick. And I do hope Mr. Clinton will keep near land, for seasickness does come on so suddenly!"

But the foot of the lake was reached without any signs of illness on her part other than a slight uneasiness, and when they had passed under the bridge by the village and began to wind through the little river, even that was forgotten. In many places the trees almost swept the boat with their branches, and the channel was so narrow that the most careful steering was necessary. Half-way through to Hipp's Pond there was a shout from the fellows in the bow.

"Look at the duck!" they cried. Those aft struggled for a view. A small duck, and evidently a young one, was bobbing up and down in the boat's waves scarce three yards away. As they passed, it watched them with staring, beady eyes, but made no move toward flight.

“Gee!” said Tom, his own eyes quite as starey as the duck’s, “if we only had a gun!” Then the duck came alongside him and the temptation was too great. With one hand on a stanchion, he leaned far out and made a wild grab. He didn’t get the duck he expected, but he got one kind; for he lost his balance and his hold simultaneously, and went overboard head foremost with a mighty splash. Aunt Louisa gave a shriek of terror and turned to Dan:

“Go after him, Hurry! Save him!”

“Yes’m,” answered Dan, with a grin. Then over he went just as the engine was stopped, and just as Tom came up sputtering some twenty yards away.

“Keep up!” called Dan. “I’ll save you!” And Aunt Louisa, watching anxiously, couldn’t understand why the fellows laughed so uproariously. Tom, shaking his head to get the water from his eyes, turned and started toward the boat. But Dan wasn’t a life-saver for nothing.

“Don’t give up!” he called. “Fight hard! I’ll have you in a moment!”

“You ku-ku-ku-keep away from mu-mu-mu-me!” answered Tom.

“Saved!” shouted Dan, and then rescued and rescuer disappeared from sight.

“Oh!” shrieked Aunt Louisa, “they’re both drowning!”

And every one else laughed harder than before.

Then up came Dan’s head, and up came Tom’s, and a merry struggle took place. Dan insisted on pulling Tom back to the launch by the back of his sweater, and Tom refused.

“Lu-lu-lu-let mu-mu-mu-me alone, you, i-i-i-idiot!” he protested.

“You shut up!” answered Dan. “I was asked to save you, and I’m going to do it if I have to drown you.” He got a fresh grip on Tom and—down they went again. In the end Mr. Clinton had to take a hand, otherwise they might have been there yet. Tom, looking sheepish, was helped over the side, and Dan pulled in after him. Aunt Louisa began a speech of thanks to the latter, but Nelson, wiping the tears from his eyes, at last found his voice.

“He didn’t do anything, ma’am,” he explained. “Tom can swim like a fish; he’s the best swimmer in camp!”

“Do you mean to tell me,” she demanded, “that he wasn’t drowning?”

“No’m—yes’m—I mean he wasn’t.”

“Well!” she said vigorously, “well!” And she looked indignantly at Dan. But the hero looked so penitent that she said no more; besides, it wasn’t necessary, for Mr. Clinton was already reproving him for adding to the lady’s distress, and, even if his eyes twinkled a good deal, what he said was straight to the mark. Meanwhile the Chicora had taken up her voyage again. Tom and Dan removed their shoes and sweaters and hung them near the boiler to dry, and tried to bring warmth into their chilled bodies by alternately turning faces and backs to the engine. The incident enlivened the party, and afterward the laughter was never quite stilled. Coming back “Babe” Fowler, who had lived all his short life by the salt water, proclaimed himself awfully thirsty and wished he had a drink.

“Gee,” said a neighbor, “you must be awfully tony if you can’t drink this water!”

The changing expression of “Babe’s” face was worth seeing. Finally:

“Why, it’s fresh water, isn’t it?” he cried. “I was thinking it was salt!” And thereupon he had his drink, and was unmercifully teased by the fellows, one of whom recited, “Water, water everywhere, and not a drop for ‘Babe,’” all the way back to the landing.

The stay-at-homes were having their evening dip when the launch bumped up to the pier, and the newcomers joined them in short order. The guest-table was filled again at supper-time, and Aunt Louisa was one of those who remained. After the meal was over Bob and Tom took her over to the village in one of the rowboats and got the Sunday mail. The wind had died down, and the lake was a great limpid pool in which the afterglow was reflected in changing hues of steel and copper and dull gold. Half-way back the bugle’s summons floated down to them and was echoed back from the farther shore. As they glided past Bear Island the boys of Wickasaw could be heard singing, and, although Tom pretended to think such doings beneath contempt, he followed Bob’s example when the latter rested on his oars.

“Oh, it’s perfectly heavenly!” exclaimed Aunt Louisa softly.

“Huh!” said Tom, “you wait till you hear Joe Carter sing ‘Bluebell’ on his banjo!”

“That must be quite a stunt,” laughed Bob.

“Oh, well, you know what I mu-mu-mean. I’ll ask him to sing at camp-fire. I’ll tell him you want to hear him, auntie.”

“But I don’t think—” began Aunt Louisa.

“Oh, he won’t mind; he likes to make a noise!”

And so, when the flames were leaping and dancing under the big trees, Joe produced his banjo and sang, and every one else helped him. And Mr. Thorpe got his guitar and sang rag-time melodies in a way that caused half his audience to laugh until the tears came, while the other half, composed of the visitors and the more sedate campers, showed a desire to shuffle their feet or clap their hands in time to the rollicking tunes. Then came prayers, and a trip down to the Inn landing, where Aunt Louisa said good-by, and invited each of Tom’s friends to visit her in Boston. And as “Mr. Hurry” was included in that invitation it is probable that Aunt Louisa had forgiven him for his too gallant rescue.

CHAPTER XI

TELLS HOW THE FOUR PLANNED AN EXCURSION, AND HOW DAN AND NELSON PLAYED HARES, MADE A DISCOVERY, AND HAD A FRIGHT

think it's a deuce of a note that I'm going to get left on the long trip!" said Dan aggrievedly.

They were sitting, the Four, in front of the fireplace in Birch Hall. Before them a couple of giant logs were crackling merrily. Outside it was raining steadily, and through the open door and windows the breeze swept in damp, and redolent of wet earth and vegetation. Now and then a rain-drop found its way down the big chimney and fell hissing into the fire. Siesta was over with, and the weather made outdoor pursuits uncomfortable, if not impossible. Besides the Four, the room held a dozen or so other lads, three of whom—juniors these—were busily engaged in filling a soap-box with torn paper for the hare-and-hounds chase scheduled for the morrow.

"Well, so am I," said Nelson. "I've got to get back home by the first of September myself. We're going to the St. Louis Fair about the first."

"Wish *I* was," Dan responded gloomily. "I've got to put in a couple of weeks with the oculist. He's going to do something to my eyes, and I'll have to mope around for about a week with a bandage over 'em."

“Hard luck,” said Bob. “And I wish you fellows were going on the trip with us, I certainly do. It’s the finest sort of fun. Can’t you stay, Nel? What do you care about their old Exposition?—a lot of machinery and fool pictures, and such truck!”

“I’ve got to go. Anyhow, I want to see it; I didn’t get to the one in Buffalo. I saw the Chicago Fair, though. That was swell!”

“You bet it was!” said Tom, his patriotism to the fore. “There hasn’t been one to come up to that yet, and there won’t be for a long old while!”

“Oh, forget it,” answered Dan, “you and your old Chicago! To hear you go on, a fellow’d think Chicago was the only place in the world!” Dan was from New York, and pretended a deep scorn for the Windy City.

“That’s all right,” said Tom. “But you’ve never had anything like our fair in your tu-tu-tu-town!”

“Don’t want one,” answered Dan calmly. “You just lost a lot of money on it.”

“Mu-mu-maybe we du-du-du-did,” said Tom warmly. “Bu-bu-but mu-mu-money’s not the only th-th-th-thing. We sh-sh-showed you fu-fu-folks what we cu-cu-could—could do, by gum!”

“Cut it out now!” laughed Nelson. “Tommy’s getting excited, and excitement isn’t good for him. Besides, he wants to save his breath for the chase to-morrow. He says he’s going to get home before you and I do, Dan.”

Dan and Bob found the idea amusing.

“Another case of the hare and the tortoise,” suggested Bob. “You and Dan will have to be careful, and not fall asleep.”

“If it keeps on raining we won’t have a chance to do much sleeping, I tell you,” answered Nelson. “The ground will be as soft and slippery as anything!”

“Hares don’t mind soft ground,” said Tom.

“This hare does,” replied Dan.

“So does this one,” Nelson added.

“I guess Tommy wants to lose flesh,” said Bob. “There’s nothing like a good hard run to remove superfluous avoirdupois.”

“Oh, isn’t he good?” cried Tommy. “Did you hear him say that?”

“That’ll do for you, Bob,” said Dan.

Bob made an unsuccessful attempt to pull Dan’s stool from under him, and then gave his attention to the workers.

“Come now, ‘Babe,’ this isn’t a funeral, you know. You’ll have to tear paper faster than that, or you won’t have enough to trail from here to the dining-hall. Say, Kid Rooke, you’ve got a wrong idea of the game of shovelboard; it isn’t necessary to throw those weights on the floor *every* time! Besides, you’re making a beastly lot of noise.”

“All right, Bobby,” was the disrespectful reply. “Bobby” promptly threw a stick of kindling-wood with admirable precision, and Rooke played badly for some time in consequence of nursing a lame arm.

“Say, Bob, why couldn’t we get off on a little trip of our own?” asked Dan. “Don’t you think Clint would let us, seeing we’re not going to be here for the regular one?”

“Maybe he might,” answered Bob. “Last year he let six of the big fellows go off on a two days’ canoe trip.”

“Just the thing!” said Dan. “We’ll take your canoe and Carter’s—he’ll let us have it, all right—and we four’ll go. What do you say, fellows?”

“Great scheme!” said Nelson.

“Perfectly swell!” seconded Tom.

“Maybe, though, he wouldn’t let Tommy and me go,” objected Bob, “because we’ll be here for the long trip.”

“Well, don’t go on the long trip, then,” suggested Nelson. “Come to ‘St. Louis, Louis’ with me.”

“By ginger! I’d like to, all right. I’ll see what Clint says. If he makes that objection, I’ll tell him I’m thinking of cutting the long trip out this year; and maybe my folks would let me go to the fair.”

“Still, there’s Tommy; what about him?” asked Dan.

“What do you think I care about the trip, if you fellows aren’t gu-gu-gu-going?”

“Noble youth!” said Bob. “Who’ll ask Clint?” Silence ensued.

“Whoever asks him,” said Dan presently, “had better wait until he’s sort of forgotten about that painting affair.”

“Maybe,” answered Bob, “but I don’t believe he holds that against us; Clint isn’t that sort. When a thing’s done with, it’s done with for him. I don’t mind asking. You leave it to me, and I’ll wait until I find him feeling his best.”

“Good for you, old man!” said Dan heartily. “I always said you were the bravest of the lot.”

“Brave nothing!” scoffed Tom. “He thinks he has a winning smile. Bob’s a regular fusser at home, I’ll bet!”

“Hey!” exclaimed Nelson, arising and stretching his arms in accompaniment to a mighty yawn, “who’s going to soak?”

“I am,” said Bob; and the other two expressed themselves similarly. “Babe” came up, kicking his box before him.

“Isn’t that enough, Bob?” he asked pathetically.

“Sure, ‘Babe,’ that’s enough. Come on and soak. Ho, for ‘Babe’s’ briny ocean!”

The next day dinner was a half hour earlier, and promptly at the stroke of two Nelson and Dan left Spruce Hall and trotted down the road to the village, each bearing a bag of “scent” in the shape of torn paper, and each wearing the scantiest costume modesty would permit. The hounds were to start twelve minutes later, and the trail was to be laid for a distance of about three miles and return, at least half the trail to be over roads. Nelson thought twelve minutes rather scant time allowance, but Dan, who fancied himself a bit as a cross-country runner, was quite satisfied. Almost every fellow in camp was going to have a try at the chase, although it was a foregone conclusion that many of them would drop out the first mile. Mr. Verder was leader of the hounds, and he was the only member of the pursuit that Dan feared.

Once out of sight of the camp, and having reached the beginning of the slight slope that led down to the foot of the lake, the hares let themselves out. It was a cloudy, threatening day, somewhat chill for the month of August, and the rain, which had fallen continually from Monday morning until some time last night, had left the ground soft, and in some places decidedly slippery. Once or twice during the forenoon there had been tiny showers, and there was every indication of more to follow before night. The distance to the village of Crescent, Dan's estimate on the day of his enforced return to camp by way of the road notwithstanding, was but a trifle over the mile, and they made it in short order, and passed over the bridge and by the post-office, running well, having got their second breaths. They followed the road around to where Dan and Bob had cut across the meadow when they had made their trip to the base of the cliff. There they climbed the fence and struck across the field under the cliff, exchanging smiles as they caught fleeting glimpses of the inscription on the rocks, and swung around to the right on the farther side of Humpback Mountain. Their plan was to keep along the lower slope of the mountain, return to the road at the farther end of Hipp's Pond, and come back by the highway to some spot near the village, where they were to ford the river and reach the road to camp near the forks. Once in the forest their going was necessarily slower. It was slightly up-hill, and the wet leaves made anything beyond an easy trot impossible. They lost nearly a minute on one occasion, when Nelson tripped on a log which he had tried to hurdle and came down sprawling, emptying most of the contents of the bag he carried. The paper had to be picked up before they could go on, since already they had begun to wonder whether the scent would hold out. Half-way along

the side of the mountain it suddenly grew dark, and the tree-tops began to sway in quick gusts of wind.

"By Jove," panted Dan, "I'll bet we're in for a wetting!"

"Well, I haven't got anything on that will spoil," laughed Nelson.

And then a few big drops pattered down on the leaves.

"Coming!" shouted Dan.

And it came!

It was a veritable torrent that lashed aside the leaves and pelted the boys with great hissing drops. For a moment they stumbled on through the darkness. Then there was a blinding flash of white light, and a crash of thunder seemed to shake the mountain from top to bottom. As though by mutual consent, they dived beneath a clump of underbrush and huddled up out of the worst of the storm.

"Gee!" said Dan, "that scared me."

"Me too," answered Nelson. "It was kind of sudden."

"I should say so! I don't suppose there's much use in our staying here, though. We can't get much wetter by going on."

"And there isn't much use in going on," answered Nelson. "I'll bet the others have given up the chase by this time. Besides, our paper's about soaked through, I guess. I vote we hike up over the mountain and get home."

"Seems to me we'd better go back the way we came."

"It will be lots nearer if we strike up hill here. It'll be hard going until we reach the top, but easy going down the other

side. We ought to strike the road about half-way between the pond and the village. Perhaps we'll find a place where we can get out of the wet. Anyhow, there's no use staying here. I'm getting wetter and wetter every minute, and there's a regular cascade running down my back. Here, let's empty out this fool paper and stuff the bags in our pockets."

"All right," answered Nelson; and the paper chase came to an ignominious finish then and there.

It was tough work climbing that slope in the face of a blinding torrent, but they struggled upward, slipping and stumbling and panting. The lightning had become almost continuous, and the thunder did its part with might and main. What with the darkness of the sky and the gloom of the forest, there was very little light to go by; and as the rain forced them to close their eyes half the time, they were continually butting into trees, tangling themselves up in the undergrowth or stumbling over dead branches.

"This is a deuce of a note!" grumbled Dan as he picked himself up for the fifth or sixth time, and tried to dry his wet hands on his wetter trousers. "I'd give a dollar for an umbrella!"

"Or a tent," sputtered Nelson. "I'm mighty nigh drowned and— Hello! Look yonder!"

Dan looked, and the next instant they were floundering toward shelter. What Nelson had seen was an old log house. It wasn't in the best of repair, for the roof had fallen in at one end and the door had long since disappeared. But it was a case of any port in a storm, and when, breathless and dripping, they reached it, they found that it afforded ample

protection. It was about twelve feet long by eight feet wide, with a door at one end, and a tiny opening at the other that had probably served in its day as a window. It was unfloored, but, save near the doorway and at the farther end where the roof had fallen inward, it was quite dry. It was as dark as pitch in there save when a flash of lightning momentarily illumined it.

"Gee," sighed Dan, "this is great!"

"Swell!" murmured Nelson, with a shiver. "But I wish we had a fire."

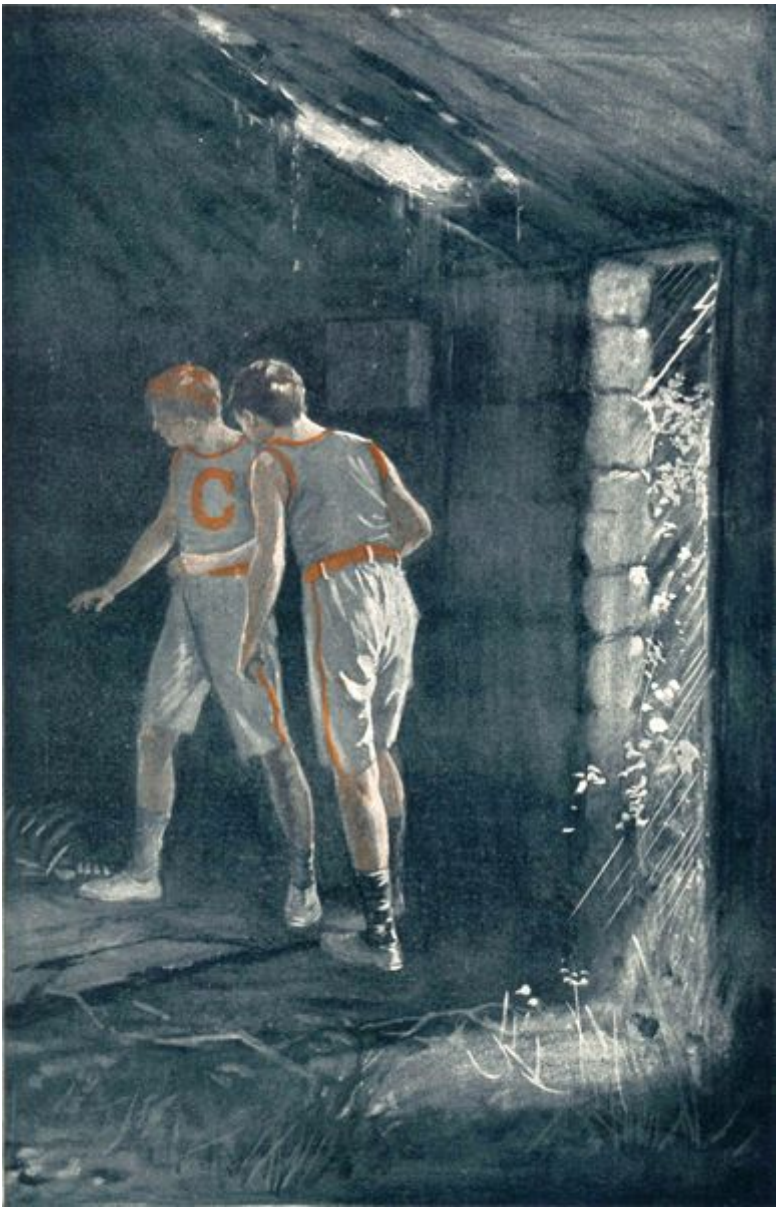
"Got any matches?"

"Yes."

"Good boy! Let's see if we can't find something that'll burn."

Carefully they felt their way toward the back of the cabin, their eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the gloom. Suddenly Dan, who was slightly in the lead, gave a cry of fear.

"Look!" he cried.



“Look!” he cried.

At the same instant there was a glare of lightning, and Nelson, peering fearsomely ahead, saw a sight that sent an icy chill down his back.

Almost at their feet stretched a pile of bones that glared white and gruesome in the uncanny light.

CHAPTER XII

HAS TO DO WITH STORM AND LIGHTNING; DISCOVERS TOM IN TEARS, AND CONCLUDES THE ADVENTURE

hen Mr. Verder gave the word, twenty-three hounds started in pursuit of the hares, and in the foremost group trotted Tom. They had just reached the village when the rain burst, and the way in which they piled into the post-office led the village gossips there assembled to jump from their chairs in terror, thinking they were attacked by a gang of desperadoes. And when the fellows had slammed the door behind them and gathered at the windows to watch the torrent, they saw through the hissing sheets of water the solitary form of Mr. Thomas Courtenay Ferris trotting doggedly on up the road. Then the door opened and closed again, and Bob sped after him.

"What are you going to do, you crazy dub?" panted Bob when he had caught up.

"Cu-cu-catch those fu-fu-fu-fellows," answered Tom resolutely.

"Why, they've given it up by this time, you idiot!"

"I haven't. I su-su-said I was going to finish, and I am!"

"Poppycock!" muttered Bob. "However, I'll see you through."

"You'll gu-gu-gu-get wet," said Tom.

“So’ll you.”

“I du-du-du-don’t mind.”

“Neither do I; I like it. Fine, isn’t it?”

“Su-su-swell!” gasped Tom.

So on they plodded, every footfall sending a spray of muddy water against their bare legs, keeping the trail in sight with difficulty, since the torn paper had in many places been washed aside or covered by the pools of water that had already formed along the road. They overran the trail where it left the highway and had to cast about for fully a minute before they found it again, and took off across the field, which was rapidly becoming like a cranberry bog. Once in the forest it wasn’t quite so bad, for the trees afforded some slight protection. But poor Tom’s breath was almost gone, and when they finally reached the place where a pile of wet paper told its own story, he was glad to throw himself down on the wet ground and rest. What to do next was a problem. Finally Bob, with a fair idea of their whereabouts, suggested climbing the hill and reaching the road on the other side. So Tom, with a final gasp, struggled to his feet, and they took up their way again. It was Tom who caught sight of the hut.

“Lu-lu-lu-look over there, Bu-bu-bu-Bob!” he spluttered.

And that is how it happened that Nelson and Dan, horrified one instant by the ghastly object at their feet, were terrorized the next by a sudden loud shout behind them. They turned and fled ignominiously to the door. The flash of lightning had intensified the darkness that followed, and neither saw anything until their exit was suddenly impeded, and even then not enough to understand what was up. Dan

collided with Tom just inside the doorway, and, like a center putting out his opponent, bore him backward to the ground. Tom, stammering in surprise at the welcome, clung desperately to his assailant.

"Lu-lu-lu-let go of me! Wha-wha-what's the mu-mu-mu-matter with you? Gu-gu-gu-get off mu-mu-my stomach!"

Nelson, tumbling out with scared face on the heels of Dan, ran into Bob outside. The latter grabbed him just in time; in another moment he would have been a hundred yards away, and still going.

"What's the row?" cried Bob, turning from Nelson to where Dan and Tom, the latter on his back in a litter of wet leaves, and the former sitting on top of him, were viewing each other in wide-eyed surprise. "What kind of a game are you fellows playing?"

"Is that you?" muttered Nelson sheepishly.

"Hu—hallo, Tommy!" grunted Dan, pulling him up.

"'Hallo, Tu-tu-tu-Tommy' be bu-bu-blowed!" muttered that youth as he found his feet and viewed Dan angrily; "wha-wha-what kind of a fu-fu-funny fu-fu-fool are you?"

At that instant the rain, which had momentarily let up as though interested in the proceedings, came down harder than ever, and the Four crowded inside the hut, Dan and Nelson, however, keeping close to the doorway and casting uneasy glances into the darkness. At length the matter was explained, and Bob, lighting a match, advanced toward the back of the cabin, the others following breathlessly and gazing nervously over his shoulder. As the match flared up, there lay the skeleton, and even Bob drew a sudden breath

and backed away a foot, thereby stepping on Nelson's toes and eliciting an exclamation of pain that almost resulted in another stampede to the door. It was Tom who stayed the rout.

"Huh!" he cried; "it's nothing but a calf!"

And so it proved. Grown suddenly brave, they examined more carefully, and Bob began to tease Dan and Nelson for being frightened at the skeleton of a calf.

"That's all right," said Nelson, "but I noticed you were looking up the exits a minute ago!"

"Let's have that fire," suggested Dan. "Any matches left?"

Tom had a pocket full of them, and in a minute they had found several dried branches on the floor and a box nailed to the wall. They tore down the latter and soon had a fire going. As the heat began to penetrate their chilled bodies their spirits arose.

"I wish it had been a human skeleton," said Dan regretfully.

"Yes, you do!" responded Bob sarcastically. "Why?"

"So I could have had the skull. My uncle has one for a tobacco jar; it's swell!"

"I can see you getting the skull!" said Bob laughingly. "Why, you wouldn't have stopped running before to-morrow morning if we hadn't stopped you!"

"Get out!" answered Dan good-naturedly. "I'd have come back for it. But I tell you, fellows, that old pile of bones

looked mighty unpleasant in the lightning. I'd have sworn the thing moved."

"It was you that moved," said Tom, "and you moved fast."

"Say, what the dickens are we going to do, fellows?" asked Nelson. "We can't get home in this storm. Just listen to it!"

"Oh, it'll let up after a bit. What time is it?" asked Bob.

"Ten of four," answered Tom. "Wish we had something to eat; then we could stay all night. Wouldn't it be swell?"

"Yes," said Dan, "but we haven't, and I, for one, prefer to get wet again rather than go without supper. I'm starved now."

"Well, let's wait a bit and see if it doesn't hold up some. This fire's immense! Wonder can we find any more wood?"

At that instant there was a blinding flash of lightning, a terrific crash of thunder, and a shock that threw Dan and Tom, who had been standing, off their feet. Simultaneously a portion of the roof of the cabin fell, with a cloud of dust and débris, and one of the timbers crashed into their midst, scattering the fire. For an instant there was silence. Every one of the quartet had been momentarily stunned by the lightning. Then they were on their feet, white-faced and trembling; all save Nelson, who lay stretched on the floor, with the blood flowing from a gash in his head. Here and there a brand from the fire flickered, but a new light flooded the cabin from without, where a giant pine, its trunk lying across the cabin, was burning fiercely. After the first instant of terror Bob ran to Nelson.

“Get some water, somebody!” he called.

“Is he dead?” asked Tom weakly.

“I don’t know; he’s got a beast of a cut here from that log; stunned him, I guess. Where’s the water?”

Dan hurried back with his cap dripping.

“Here’s some,” he panted. “Fetch some more, Tom; hold your cap under the corner of the house. Is he much hurt?”

But Nelson answered the question himself, reaching up to push away the hand that was bathing his face and head, and opening his eyes to blink dazedly about him.

“You lie still a minute,” commanded Bob. “That log fetched you a whack on the head, but you’ll be all right in a minute.”

“Oh,” said Nelson, memory returning, “say, that was a peach of a bump, wasn’t it? Any one struck? Where’s Tommy?”

“He’s here. Shut up a minute and lie still.”

“I’m all right.” He felt of his wound, and wiped the blood from his fingers onto his jersey. “If I had a handkerchief ____”

“Here’s one,” said Dan. “You tie it on, Bob.”

Bob did so, and Nelson was helped to his feet, where he stood an instant swaying unsteadily.

“Say, we’ll have to get out of this,” said Dan. “The hut’ll be on fire in a minute. Gee, but that was a close shave! That tree wasn’t thirty feet away!”

“We got some of it as it was,” said Bob. “I felt as though some one had hit me with a plank. Can you walk, Nel? Here, we’ll give you a hand. We’ll have to get out at the corner there; the doorway’s blocked up. Where’d Tommy get to?”

“He went for some more water,” said Dan. “Come on; it’s getting hot!”

Outside they came on a strange sight. Tom was sitting on a log, with his face in his hands, sobbing as though his heart was breaking. Beside him lay his cap, and a small rivulet of water from the top of the cabin was spattering down onto his bare head. The three stared in bewilderment. Then Bob patted him on the back:

“Come on, Tommy,” he said kindly. “You’re all right; cheer up!”

But Tom only shook his head without looking up.

“He’s du-du-du-du-dead!” he wailed.

“Who’s dead, you idiot?”

“Nu-nu-nu-Nelson,” sobbed Tommy.

“No, I’m not, Tommy,” called Nelson; “here I am!”

Tom raised a wet and miserable face; then he leaped to his feet, tumbled over a branch, and fell into Nelson’s arms.

“I th-th-th-thought you were a gu-gu-gu-goner!” he cried.

“I’m all right,” answered Nelson, cheerfully submitting to Tom’s hugs. “Get your cap and come along, or we’ll be drowned.”

Tom sniffed a few times, picked up his hat, and sheepishly joined the procession that wound its way up the hill in the rain.

“Poor old Tommy!” chuckled Dan.

“He’s a good-hearted dub,” answered Nelson softly.

Five minutes of toil brought them to the summit, and after that it was easier work. By the time they had reached the road the rain had almost ceased, and for the rest of the way they had only the mud and their chilled bodies to contend with. Twenty minutes later they straggled into camp to find Mr. Clinton in the act of leading a search party after them. Nelson was conducted to the surgery, where Dr. Smith washed and bandaged his head, and the other members of the party hied them to the dormitory and dry clothes, followed by half the fellows of the camp eager to hear the story of their adventures. And when it had been told—losing nothing in the telling by Dan—Bob suddenly exclaimed:

“Well, if he didn’t do it!”

“Do what?” “Who did?” “When?” were the queries fired at him.

“Why, Tommy did! He said, before we started, that he was going to beat the hares home, the cheeky kid! And he did it!”

“But we all came home together,” objected Dan.

“Yes, but if you’ll recollect, it was Tommy who headed the procession coming into camp.”

“So it was,” said Dan.

“So I did,” said Tom. “Ain’t I a smarty?”

Whereupon Dan tumbled him over backward onto the bed and sat on top of him a long, long time, and told him how very, very smart he was. And it was not until Nelson, appearing on the scene with a wealth of surgeon's plaster adorning his brow, asked innocently, "Who's going to soak?" that Dan's attentions ceased; and then it was only because he felt obliged to stand firmly on his feet in order to put the necessary amount of withering sarcasm into his reply to Nelson.

CHAPTER XIII

RECALLS THE FACT THAT WHAT'S FAIR FOR ONE IS FAIR FOR ANOTHER, AND RECORDS A DEFEAT AND A VICTORY

week later Wickasaw came over to the mainland and met Chicora on the diamond. The final score, when the game came to an end at the last of the seventh inning, was 18 to 4, and I had rather not say which side scored the 18. However, defeat is not dishonorable; Chicora had that thought to comfort her. Wells, he of the snub-nose, pitched a magnificent game for five innings, and then went so high into the air that he wasn't able to get down again while the game lasted. And while he was up there Wickasaw unkindly batted in eight runs and scored seven more on errors, four of them being due to Wells's wildness. Wickasaw played every last one of her councilors—four in all—and would probably have won by a small margin even if Wells hadn't gone to pieces. But the result was a disappointment to Bob, and he worried over it a good deal during the ensuing three days. Wickasaw went home in her launch and rowboats audibly pleased with herself, and the next day, beneath her camp-flag on the pole at the landing, floated a square of white sheeting inscribed:

W. 18; C. 4

And every time Bob saw that flag floating in the breeze he ground his teeth. And Dan smiled his widest smile, and drew

a sketch of the flag *they* were going to put up after the next game. And in the meanwhile everybody went to work harder than ever at the batting-net and in the field; for the lesson of defeat is renewed endeavor.

On the following Saturday Chicora played again, this time with the nine from the Chicora Inn, a nine made up of guests and employees of the hotel. It was the finest kind of an August afternoon, warm enough to limber the players' muscles, and yet not so hot that the spectators were uncomfortable under the shade of the trees. Wells went into the box again for the Camp, while the Inn had her head clerk, a Dartmouth College man, do the pitching for her. For the first three innings the Camp had everything its own way. Nelson started things going with a three-bagger in the second, and after the bases had filled up Bob went to bat and cleared them, himself reaching second. Again, in the third a base on balls to the second man up proved costly, the runner on first reaching second on a passed ball and taking third on a single by Carter. Then Wells got in the way of an in-shoot and limped to base amid the laughing applause of the Camp rooters, and the bags were all occupied. It was Nelson's chance again, and he made the most of it. With two strikes and three balls called on him he found what he wanted, and hit safely for two bases over short-stop's head. The Inn had meanwhile scored but one run, and so at the beginning of the fourth inning the score stood 6 to 1, and the spectators who were gallantly flaunting the crimson flags of Chicora Inn were becoming anxious.

When the Inn next went to the bat it was seen that she had substituted a new player for the one who had thus far been holding down second base. The new man was about six feet

tall, and fully thirty-five years old, and his face seemed dimly familiar to Bob. And when, having gone to bat, he lined the first ball pitched between first and second for three bases, Bob recognized him as "Monty" Williams, an old Princeton player who had made a reputation for himself while in college as a star ball-player. In that inning the Inn netted three runs, and the score was no longer so one-sided. But Bob was worried, and as the teams changed sides he made his way to the captain of the opposing team.

"Look here," he said, "I don't think it's a fair deal for you fellows to play Williams. He's an old college player, and we know that he isn't staying at the Inn. He's visiting over at Bass Island."

"Oh, what's the use in being fussy?" asked the other good-naturedly. "This isn't a championship game; we're only here for the fun of playing. Besides, Williams hasn't played baseball for at least ten years."

"Well, it isn't according to the understanding," answered Bob; "but if you insist on playing him, all right; it's a bit raw, though. We're playing fellows on our side some of whom aren't sixteen years old; and we're not playing a single one of our councilors."

"Well, why don't you? Go ahead and play any one you like. We don't care who you play; we're here for the fun of playing, that's all."

"All right," answered Bob; "I don't intend to be nasty about it. We'll beat you, anyhow."

"That's the stuff," laughed the other captain. "Go ahead and do it."

But it didn't look very easy during the next two innings. To be sure, the Camp managed to tally two more runs, but the Inn wasn't idle. The next time Williams came to bat the bases were full, and as a result of the long drive he made into left field three tallies were set down to the Inn's credit, and a minute or two later Williams made it four by heady base stealing. That tied the score, 8 to 8. Bob didn't mind a defeat at the hands of Chicora Inn very much, but to be beaten two games running was more than he could relish; and while he was doing a lot of hard thinking Tom came to the rescue:

"Say, Bob," he whispered, "we're going to be licked if you keep Wells in there. That fellow Williams can hit him easy."

"I know it, but they insist on playing Williams. They say I can put in any one I want to, but we haven't played our councilors, and I don't want to start it now. And as for Wells, there isn't any one on our team can do any better."

"Get Billy Carter to pitch."

"Billy Carter? Who's Billy—? You mean Joe's brother? Can he pitch? Thought he was a crew man."

"He is, but he pitched for the Yale freshman nine last spring, and I'll bet he's a peach!"

"Good stuff! Will he play, do you think?"

"I don't know, but he seems a decent chap. Get Joe to ask him."

"I will. Oh, Joe! Joe Carter!"

The result of this conference was that two or three minutes later when the teams again changed sides Wells retired to the shade of the apple-trees and his place in the pitcher's box

was taken by a stocky, fair-haired, and sun-burned chap of eighteen who, having discarded his coat and cap, picked up the ball and began pitching to Bob in a way that suggested a good deal of experience. He was a fine-looking fellow with a chest that brought murmurs of admiration from the spectators. He had rowed on the winning Yale freshman eight and pitched on the Yale freshman nine, and so his chest development and the muscles that played so prettily along his arms were there of good reason. He had reached camp only that forenoon on a visit of two or three days to his brother, and there hadn't been a moment's hesitation on his part when Joe, earnestly seconded by Bob, had asked him to play. He had kept in training since the boat races and had not forgotten his cunning in the box.

And the opponents had occasion to note the fact. For in the next two innings not a man on their team reached first base. Carter's delivery puzzled them effectually, and when the mighty Williams had three strikes called on him and tossed down his bat with a grim shake of his head the supporters of the blue and gray shouted their delight. But shutting out the Inn wasn't winning the game, and when at last the ninth inning opened with the score still 8 to 8 Bob had visions of a tie game. But he had reckoned without the new pitcher. That youth didn't have a chance at bat until with one out in the ninth things were looking their darkest for the Camp. Then he selected a bat and faced the Inn's pitcher calmly. He allowed two balls to go by him, but the third one he liked. And the way in which he lit on to it was beautiful to behold; at least that's the way it seemed to Bob and Dan and Nelson and all the other Chicorians. For that ball started off as though it had got tired of being knocked around so much and

was going straight home to sit down and rest. That it didn't get all the way home, but only as far as the woods behind center-fielder, didn't affect the result of the contest. It went quite far enough. And Billy Carter romped home like a playful giant and subsided under the trees and fanned his face, while about him danced the delighted cohorts from the Camp. After that it was only necessary to keep the Inn from scoring, and with Carter still in the points that was an absurdly easy task. It wasn't a very decided win, 9 to 8, but it sufficed, and Bob was comforted.

After the game was over the captain of the Inn's forces sought out Bob.

"Who was the chap that pitched for you?" he asked curiously.

"Oh," Bob answered, "that's Carter, pitcher on last year's Yale freshman team. You told me to play any one I liked, you know; otherwise, of course——"

"Oh!" said the other.

On the way back to camp Dan alone seemed not entirely happy.

"Oh, yes," he said in response to inquiries, "the game was all right enough. But did you notice that Wickasaw was over there cheering for the Inn?"

"I didn't notice who they cheered for," answered Bob. "What of it?"

"What of it? Lots! Call that sportsmanlike? Huh! You wait, that's all, my friends. We'll get even with Wickasaw!"

CHAPTER XIV

BEGINS A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE WHICH THREATENS TO END IN DISASTER

haven't said anything about it to Bob," Dan explained. "You see, he's so kind of—kind of —well, proper, you know."

They were sitting—Dan and Nelson and Tom—on the edge of the landing. Supper was over and camp-fire was still an hour distant. Behind them the hillside was darkening with the mysterious shadows of night. Before them the lake lay like a sheet of purple glass, streaked here and there with pencilings of steely blue. At the end of the lake and at intervals along the farther shore the lights twinkled in windows or at landings. From the direction of Crescent came the *chug—chug—chug* of the motor-dory returning with the evening mail. Overhead gleamed the white light of the lantern, pale and wan as yet against the sky. Tom beat a tattoo with his feet against the spile beneath. They had come down here because the camp was infested—to use Dan's language—with kids and visitors, and they wanted to be alone to plot and conspire. But Tom didn't relish just sitting here and watching the afterglow fade over Bass Island. He yawned.

"Seems to me," he said disgustedly, "we're a mighty slow lot of conspirators. If some one doesn't get busy pretty quick and conspire I'll go back and read that book. There's more conspiracy in that than you can shake your ears at. When I

left off the villain was creeping up the lighthouse stairs in his stocking feet with a knife a foot long in his hand."

"What for?" asked Nelson interestedly.

"To kill the hero and the girl he was shipwrecked with, of course!"

"Of course there'd have to be a girl in it," sighed Nelson. "That's the way they spoil all the good stories nowadays, putting a silly girl into it! Wait till I write a story!"

"This girl's all right," answered Tom warmly. "Why, she saved the hero's life; swam with him over half a mile from the wreck to the lighthouse, carried him in her arms to the door, and fell fainting on the threshold!"

"Rot! No girl could do that!"

"Why couldn't she? I'll bet you she could!"

"Oh, get out! Swim half a mile and lug a man with her? And then carry him in her arms another half mile——"

"It was only a little ways, and——"

"She must have been a—an Amazon!"

"She wasn't, she was a Spaniard."

"Maybe she was a Spanish mackerel," suggested Dan. "They can swim like anything. Now shut up, you chaps, and listen."

"The chief conspirator has the floor," murmured Tom.

"You know those Wickasaw dubs came over here to-day to our ball field and had the cheek to cheer for the Inn, don't you?"

“Sure,” muttered Tom.

“Well, they had no business doing it.”

“That’s so,” Nelson concurred.

“And so we’re going to get square with them.”

“Hooray!” said Tom in a husky whisper.

“How?” questioned Nelson.

“I’m coming to that,” answered Dan importantly.

“You’re a long old time coming,” Tom grumbled. “I’ll bet that fellow has got up-stairs by now and murdered the hero and the girl, and I wasn’t there to——”

“Cut it out, Tommy!” commanded Dan. “You see that flag over there at Wickasaw’s landing?”

“I see something sort of white that may be a flag, or may be some fellow’s Sunday shirt,” answered Nelson.

“Well, that’s that old white flag with the score on it. They’re too lazy to do anything shipshape, and so instead of tying it onto the lanyards under the camp-flag——”

“Bending it on, you mean,” said Tom.

“You be blowed,” said Dan. “You know too much, Tommy. Well, instead of *fixing* it on to the rope they just nailed it on to the pole. That’s the lucky part of it; see?”

The others looked across at the blur of white and then looked at Dan. Then they shook their heads.

“I may be stupid, Dan,” said Nelson apologetically, “but I’m blowed if I do see.”

“I guess the answer’s a bottle of ink,” said Tom flippantly.

“Why,” said Dan impatiently, “if they’d taken it in we couldn’t have got it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Nelson. “Then we’re going—to—to ____”

“Swipe it!” said Dan.

Tom heaved a sigh of relief.

“Bully! I was afraid it was something to do with blue paint!”

“What’s your scheme?” asked Nelson, beginning to take interest. But Dan had nothing more to say until the motor-dory had come alongside and its occupants had finally taken themselves off up the hill, whooping like an Indian war-party.

“When it’s good and dark,” he continued then, “we’ll swim over there and get the old rag; that’s all.”

“But why not take a boat?” asked Tom.

“Because somebody would be sure to hear us.”

“Then what’s the matter with a canoe?”

“Well, that might do,” answered Dan thoughtfully. “But we don’t want to have any trouble about it; Clint’s got his eye on us, I’ll bet, and if we get caught swiping Wickasaw’s flag we’ll get what for!”

“But there won’t be any fun in it if they don’t know who’s taken it,” Nelson objected.

“Oh, they’ll know all right,” said Dan; “only they won’t be able to prove anything.”

“I tell you what,” Tom exclaimed. “We’ll tear it up and tie it around that stake off the end of the island, the one that marks the sand-bar.”

“That’s so,” said Nelson. “And look, Dan, we can take a canoe and paddle down the shore until we’re opposite the landing and then swim across. That way we won’t have to swim over a half mile in all.”

“All right,” agreed Dan. “I don’t care whether we paddle or swim; but that flag’s got to come down from there.”

“They’ll probably put another one up,” said Tom.

“Let ’em! We’ll have had our fun,” said Nelson. “What time had we better go, Dan?”

“About eleven, I guess. We want to wait until Verder and Smith are asleep so that they won’t hear us sneak out.”

“You don’t think Bob will be hurt at being left out, do you?” asked Nelson.

“I don’t believe so; anyway, I don’t think he’d go. And if any row comes up he won’t get into it because he won’t know anything about it. Come on; let’s go up.”

So the plotting ended and they went back to camp-fire looking beautifully innocent, and were so sleepy, all three of them, that no one would have suspected for an instant that they intended to stay awake until midnight. After camp-fire the launch took the visitors back to the Inn, but none of the Four went along; they didn’t know what time they would get back and they wanted the senior dormitory to be wrapped in

slumber as early as possible; for, after all, the day had been a busy one and it might prove to be no easy task to keep eyes open until even eleven. The lights went out promptly at half past nine, and Dan and Tom and Nelson stretched themselves out between the blankets with the other occupants of the hall. It was hard work to keep awake during the next hour and a half. Nelson, despite his best endeavors, dozed once or twice, but was sufficiently wide awake to hear Dan's bed creak and Dan's bare feet creeping up the aisle.

"Awake, Nel?"

"Yes," Nelson whispered.

"All right; come on. I'll get Tommy."

Nelson slipped noiselessly out of his bunk and as noiselessly out of his pajamas and crept along to Tom's bed. That youth was fast asleep, breathing like a sawmill, and Dan's gentle shakes and whispers were having no effect.

"Oh, come on and let him stay here," said Dan finally. "We can't wake up the whole place on his account. The silly dub ought to have kept awake."

"Wait, let me try him," whispered Nelson. Some one had told him that the best way to awake a person so that he wouldn't make any noise was to take hold of his nose with the fingers and press it. So Nelson got a firm hold on that organ and gave a vigorous pull. The effect was instantaneous.

"*Lemme 'lone!*" said Tom drowsily but sufficiently loud to be heard all over the dormitory. Dan slapped his hand over the slumberer's mouth, and Nelson whispered "Hush!" as loudly as he dared. Luckily, save for a sleepy murmur from the next bunk, there was no notice taken of Tom's

remonstrance. By this time Tom had gained his senses and a realization of what was up, and in a moment the three conspirators were stealing down the aisle and out of the dormitory, naked and shivering.

Once on the path they could talk, and Dan called Tom to task for going to sleep and nearly spoiling everything. “It would have served you bloody well right if we had left you behind,” he ended severely.

“Wish you had,” muttered Tom. “I’m as sleepy as a cat.”

“Did any one hear the launch come back?” asked Dan presently.

“I didn’t,” said Nelson; “but I dropped off to sleep a couple of times.”

“So did I,” said Tom truthfully but unnecessarily.

“Well, I was awake all the time,” Dan said, “and I’ll swear I didn’t hear a sound from it. But they must be back by this; it’s ten minutes to eleven.”

“Well, just as long as we don’t meet them at the landing it’s all right,” said Nelson cheerfully. “Hush! What’s that?”

They stopped short at the foot of the hill and listened breathlessly.

“What?” whispered Dan.

“I thought I heard voices,” answered Nelson.

But after a moment, as no sounds reached them, they went on, and found the landing dark, save for the little glare of the lantern, and quite deserted. It was but a moment’s work to put one of the canoes into the water, and soon they were

paddling stealthily along the shore toward the foot of the lake. The stars were bright overhead, but for all of that the night was pretty dark and here under the trees it was difficult to see their course and to keep from running aground. As a result they made slow progress. Bear Island was a darker blotch against the dark water. Wickasaw never displayed a lantern at night, but the boys thought they could make out a dim light where the landing ought to be. When they had reached a point along the shore about opposite the farther end of the island they drew the canoe half onto the shore and waded out into the darkness.

"Swim for the landing," instructed Dan, "and don't make any noise. We'll see what that light is before we get very near."

Then they struck out, swimming slowly and silently, Dan and Tom abreast and Nelson a length behind. The water was warm and felt grateful to their chilled bodies; although the days were warm the nights were getting cool. It was very good fun, this stealthy progress through the dark water with only the white stars to see. Nelson experienced an exhilarating sensation of excitement as they drew near the shadowy island; he felt like a conspirator, indeed, and one on a desperate mission. To be sure, the danger of being caught was very slight, he supposed, but there was enough of it to lend spice to the venture. The distance from shore to island was well under a quarter of a mile, but at the slow speed they went it was almost ten minutes before Dan called a halt a hundred feet from the landing. Nelson swam up to the other two boys, and they remained quiet for a moment, looking and listening. There was no sound to be heard, but an orange glow slightly above the level of the float puzzled them.

Finally Tom was sent forward to reconnoiter. Presently he was back again.

"It's the Chi-chi-chi—" he sputtered excitedly.

"Cut it out," whispered Dan. "Say it quick without thinking."

"It's the Chi-chi-chi-chi-chi——"

"Steam-engine," suggested Nelson *sotto voce*.

"Chi-chi-Chicora!" blurted Tom finally in a hoarse whisper.

"What?" asked Dan. "The Chicora? Then, Clint's there visiting Doctor Powers. Wonder who's with him?"

"I think Thorpe went along in the launch," said Nelson.

"Lu-lu-let's go back," suggested Tom uneasily.

"What for? It's better to have Clint here than at camp, I think," said Dan. "Come on. Did you hear any one, Tommy?"

"No, but I could see a light in the main house."

"That's it, then; Clint and Thorpe are paying a call on Powers, probably about the water sports. Shall we go on? What do you say?"

"Yes," answered Nelson. "Let's do what we started to do."

"I don't care," said Tom.

So ahead they went, and in a minute were pulling themselves up onto the float. Beside it lay the steam-launch, her engine sizzling gently. The light they had seen came from

the lantern which hung by the steam-gage. Softly they crept up the gangway to the pier above and there listened. The main building of Camp Wickasaw, a rather elaborate cottage, stood about two hundred feet away. Light shone from the door and from the window to the right of it. Both were open, and the boys thought at times they could hear the hum of voices. But they couldn't be certain, for Tom's teeth were chattering loudly and they were all shivering so they could scarcely keep still. But no one was in sight, and so they hurried to the end of the pier and Dan mounted the railing. The flagpole, a small affair, was secured to the floor of the pier and to a post of the railing, and on it, barely visible in the darkness, hung the obnoxious white flag. Unfortunately, it was two feet out of Dan's reach.

"I've got to shin up a ways," he whispered. Then he wound his legs about the slender pole and started up. And then—well, then there was a sharp sound of breaking wood, an involuntary cry from Dan, and an instant later a mighty splash as boy and pole and a section of railing went down into the water six feet below. And at that moment voices came from the house and footsteps crunched the gravel of the path!

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUDES THE ADVENTURE AND SHOWS TOM SLEEPING THE SLEEP OF THE JUST

 t the first alarm Nelson and Tom had sprung down the gangway to the float, ready to lend assistance to Dan. Luckily there were no boats at the head of the pier, and so Dan had struck nothing harder than the water. He was up in an instant.

"Are you hurt?" called Nelson anxiously.

"No, I'm all right," was the reply. "Did they hear?"

"Yes, they're coming!" And Nelson slipped into the water, followed by Tom, and struck out vigorously.

"Swim like the dickens!" counseled Dan. "Make for the shore!"

Back of them a lantern was swaying down the path and a voice cried:

"Who's that? What's the matter?"

But the boys offered no explanations. They were very busy at that moment. There was no thought now of quietness; their one endeavor was to get to shore as soon as possible. Once Nelson turned to look. The light of the lantern showed two or possibly three forms on the pier, and from the way the lantern was lowered and carried back and forth he knew that

they had seen the wet footprints and, perhaps, had discovered the loss of the pole.

"Some of your boys on a lark, I fancy," said a voice. "I'm certain I heard them swimming away as I came down. No, I won't go along, thanks."

When Nelson glanced back again the lantern was moving about the float. After that he attended strictly to business. Tom and Dan were well in the lead and he swam his hardest to overtake them. Hand over hand he went, *splash*, *splash*, his eyes full of water, and his breath coming harder and harder. Then a new sound came to him, the steady churn of the Chicora's propeller. Desperation lent new strength and in a dozen strokes he was even with Dan; Tom still led by a couple of lengths.

"They're after us in the launch," gasped Dan. "When we get—near shore—spread out—and take—to the woods. They won't see—the canoe."

"All right," answered Nelson.

The camp record for the quarter mile was something a little under nine minutes, but there is no doubt but that that record was smashed to fragments that night, at least by Tom. Yet in spite of their best endeavors the launch gained on them from the start. Had they had much farther to go they would have been caught beyond a doubt. As it was they were in the darkness under the trees before the Chicora could reach them. The launch could not come nearer than twenty yards from shore because of her draft, and that fact saved them. As they floundered, up to their waists, over the

submerged branches and rocks toward land they heard a hail from the boat:

"Stop where you are or I'll fire at you!"

"Down!" whispered Dan. Nelson heard, but Tom, who was well ahead, splashed on, sounding in the stillness like an elephant at his bath. The Chicora had stopped her screw, and those on board were listening intently. Dan and Nelson, flat on their stomachs in two feet of water, made no sound and waited nervously for the report of Mr. Clinton's revolver. They were certain that he couldn't see them and certain that he wouldn't shoot them if he did; but he might discharge his revolver to scare them, and there was just an unpleasant possibility that one or other of them might be hit by mistake. Tom had subsided on the ground at the edge of the woods, and they could hear him panting heavily where he lay. Then:

"I heard only one," said Mr. Clinton, his words coming clear and distinct across the water. "Surely one of our boys wouldn't do such a trick alone."

"There may be more around, though," said Thorpe.

"I doubt it. More likely it was some one looking for a chance to steal. Although why he wanted a flagpole is beyond me. Anyhow, we can't get any nearer. We'll go on to camp, I guess."

Then, to the boys' relief, the screw started again and the light that marked the position of the launch moved away up the lake.

"Quick!" whispered Dan. "We must make a run for it. If we can get into our bunks before he gets there we'll be all right."

They floundered out of the water, were joined by Tom, and went crashing through the woods, bumping into trees, lashing their faces with branches, and making enough noise to be heard by those on the launch had it not been for the beat of the propeller. Fortunately the road was but a short distance, and once on that they made fine time.

"Talk about your hare-and-hounds!" gasped Nelson. "Gee!"

When they reached the clearing they stopped running and went forward cautiously. All was silent and deserted. In a moment they had gained Maple Hall. But Dan stopped them before they had laid foot on the porch.

"We must wipe our feet," he said, "or Clint will see the tracks. Here."

Some one had left a towel over the railing, and with this they hurriedly wiped their feet clean of dirt and leaves. Their bodies had dried long since and were glowing from their exertions. Just as the towel was thrown aside and they had mounted the porch a light gleamed between the trees of the path from the landing and voices reached them.

"Quick!" whispered Nelson. "What did you do with the towel? We mustn't leave it here." He picked it up and followed the others into the gloom of the dormitory, treading softly over the creaking boards. If Dr. Smith was awake it was all up with them. But the bed by the door gave no sound. The hall was silent save for the deep breathing and occasional snores of its occupants. Nelson found his bunk, tossed the soiled towel beneath it, dived into his pajamas, and slipped into bed just as the door at the end of the

dormitory became suddenly illumined and footsteps sounded on the porch outside. He was panting hard, but he drew the clothes up to his chin, threw one arm over his head, and strove to look as though he had been asleep for hours. Then he waited, hoping that Tom and Dan had gained their bunks and that Mr. Clinton would not look too closely at his hair, which was still wet.

Then the light glowed against his closed lids and he heard the Chief and Mr. Thorpe walking slowly down the aisle. And at the same moment he became aware of a sound he had not heard before, a loud, unmusical wheeze and gurgle that came from his side of the hall further down. The next instant he realized what it was and would have given much to have been able to give vent to the laughter that threatened to choke him. Tom was snoring!

To have heard that snore would have satisfied any one that Thomas Courtenay Ferris had been sleeping the sleep of the just for many hours. And Mr. Clinton was no exception. When he raised the lantern over Tom's wide-open mouth and listened to the evidence that poured forth he smiled and walked on. Up the aisle he went, stopping at each bunk. And then:

"Everything seems all right here, Thorpe," Nelson heard him mutter.

"Yes, I guess you were right, sir," answered Mr. Thorpe with a yawn.

"I guess I was, only—what any one should want with a flagpole is more than I can see!"

Then they retraced their steps, passed out of the door and disappeared, and Nelson, raising his head with a sigh of relief, saw the lantern's light grow dimmer and dimmer. Two minutes later they were all on Dan's bunk, hysterically whispering and giggling, and it was an hour later when sleepiness at last broke up the meeting. When the first bugle sounded three of the occupants of Maple Hall only muttered and turned over again, to arise finally with heavy eyes and aching limbs.

CHAPTER XVI

RECORDS TWO VICTORIES OVER WICKASAW AND AN EPISODE WITH FISH

That afternoon a new flagpole was raised at Wickasaw and on it appeared again a square of white cloth bearing the inscription "W. 18; C. 4." But Dan and Nelson and Tom only smiled knowingly when they saw it. There are flags and flags; and they knew of one flag that would never flutter again over the Wickasaw landing. For Dan had greatly surprised the other two that morning by producing a very bedraggled square of white sheeting bearing marks that, before its immersion in water, had been two letters and two numerals.

"Why, you got it after all!" exclaimed Tom.

"You didn't think I was coming away without it, did you?" asked Dan scornfully.

It was subsequently cut into four equal pieces and distributed among the quartet, Bob having been duly apprised of the midnight proceedings and having been so evidently hurt at being left out of their confidence that he was made a recipient of a share of the spoils of war. Directly after breakfast the Four had taken themselves unobtrusively off through the woods to bring back the abandoned canoe. When they neared the spot where they had left it they heard voices and paused to consider.

“Some of the fellows are ahead of us,” said Dan. “It’s Carter’s canoe and they’ll want to know how the dickens it got down here. If Clint hears of it he will put two and two together——”

“And make we three,” finished Tom.

“Come on,” said Bob. “You can say you paddled down a little while ago and left it there.”

“Which would be a silly lie,” said Dan. “Besides, they know we haven’t had time. We’ll see who it is and ask them not to say anything about it.”

So they went on and emerged from the woods just in time to see two boys in the white jerseys and trunks of Camp Wickasaw climb into the canoe and start to paddle away to where, a little ways out, the Wickasaw launch, manned by three other fellows was waiting.

“Here, that’s our canoe!” shouted Dan.

The two stopped paddling and looked doubtfully at the new arrivals.

“Come on, Jack!” called a voice from the launch. “Don’t mind them!” Whereupon the pair in the canoe dug the paddles again.

“Drop those paddles and let that canoe alone, I tell you,” commanded Dan again. “That canoe belongs to us and you know it.”

“We found it,” said one of the fellows. They stopped paddling again and would undoubtedly have relinquished the craft then and there had not their companions in the launch encouraged them to keep on.

“I don’t care if you did,” answered Dan. “We left it here.”

“When?” asked a Wickasaw youth.

“That’s no affair of yours,” said Bob. “Just you tumble out or we’ll throw you out.”

“Bring it along, you fellows!” came from the launch. “If it’s theirs they’ll have to prove it.”

“It was on our land,” said Nelson, raising his voice and addressing the party in the launch.

“No, it wasn’t either. Your line’s away over there. This land belongs to Mr. Carpenter. You fellows swiped our flag last night and if you want that canoe you’ll have to come over to camp and prove it belongs to you. Bring it out, Jack.”

“Come on,” said Dan quietly. “We can get to ’em before they reach the launch.” And he led the way into the water on the run, stumbling over hidden obstacles and making straight for the canoe. Bob and Nelson and Tom followed. As soon as there was depth enough they threw themselves forward and began to swim. Meanwhile the two lads in the canoe were paddling for all they were worth and the launch had started up and was coming in gingerly to meet them. Had they been expert paddlers the two Wickasaw youths might easily have won that race with the long start they had, but neither of them knew very much about it and their strokes got more and more flurried and ragged as Dan and the others began to overhaul them. The launch had sighted obstructions and was now backing again, the while its occupants shouted encouragement to their companions and defiance to the foe. Half a dozen yards from the launch Dan’s hand reached up

and seized the end of the canoe. The nearest paddler raised his “beaver tail” threateningly.

“If you hit me with that,” said Dan calmly, “I’ll just about drown you.” And while the other hesitated Tom, coming through the water like a torpedo-boat, joined Dan. The launch, its occupants angry and excited, was trying to reach the scene. But it didn’t get there in time.

“Over with them,” said Dan, and the next instant the two Wickasaw boys were struggling in the water. Dan grabbed one of them and Bob, who had arrived on the scene of action meanwhile, seized the other. The wearers of the white and red disappeared from sight. When they came up a moment later, choking and sputtering, the paddles had been wrested from them and the capsized canoe was yards away in charge of Nelson. A big youth with a very red and angry face stood on the bow of the launch aiming blows at Dan with the boat-hook. But he was a yard too far away and Dan only grinned at him exasperatingly and said:

“Over with them,” said Dan.

“Say, if you don’t look out you’ll fall overboard, and if you do—well, I won’t do a thing to you!”

The former occupants of the canoe had been released and the way they were striking out for the launch was beautiful to

see. Bob brought down the paddle he held behind one of them, which so alarmed the swimmer that he went down again. Nelson, having dragged the canoe out of range, returned, eager for the fray. But the fray was over, all save verbal encounters, and the Four, with a final retort to the revilements thrown at them, turned their backs to the enemy and swam leisurely back to land, rescuing and righting the canoe on the way. Then they got into it and paddled off up the shore, leaving the Wickasaw launch churning the water angrily in an effort to get free of a sunken tree trunk or rock upon which she had run her bow. As long as they were in ear-shot taunts and challenges followed them, but they could afford to be calm and undisturbed; they had come off victorious. When last seen the launch had finally got clear and was chugging its way home.

The Four returned to camp in the best of humor and set about their neglected duties. Luckily they all had easy tasks that morning and so were able to report on time to the orderly. Bob felt in such conceit with himself that he selected that morning for his interview with Mr. Clinton regarding the proposed canoe trip and half an hour afterward sought out the others with cheerful countenance.

"It's all right," he announced. "Clint says we may go for three days. We're to start next Monday morning and we must be back to camp by Wednesday night. We're to keep away from hotels and behave ourselves. He wanted to send one of the councilors along with us at first. Then he thought better of it; said he guessed we could be trusted to look after ourselves for three days. Isn't it great?"

"Bu-bu-bu-bully!" sputtered Tom.

“Swell!” said Nelson.

“Out of sight!” declared Dan. And they began to lay plans for the trip then and there. Bob produced a map of the country thereabouts and they proceeded to mark it up with pencil lines until, had they followed all the routes laid out, they would have been busy for the rest of the year. When it was time for “soak” the route was still undecided, but as the hour of departure was yet six days off that didn’t much matter.

The next day Dan and Nelson went fishing up at the head of the lake near Evergreen Island. They brought home seven bass and four chub. The bass went to the cook, and appeared on the supper table, but the chub Dan took up to the storehouse with the explanation that he was going to put them on ice until the next day.

“Oh, throw them away,” said Nelson. “Nobody wants to eat chub.”

“That’s all you know about it,” answered Dan. “Bob’s terribly fond of them. I’m going to give them to him, but don’t say anything about it because I want to surprise him.”

Nelson eyed him suspiciously.

“I’ll bet you’re up to one of your silly jokes,” he said. Nevertheless he kept his own counsel.

That night Bob and Joe Carter and his brother, who since Saturday’s baseball game was looked upon as a veritable hero, played euchre on Bob’s bunk from after camp-fire until it was time to go to bed. Dan looked on awhile but seemed very fidgety and quoted somebody whose name he didn’t remember to the effect that cards were only fit for fools and

imbeciles. Finally he wandered back to his own bunk and began to prepare for slumber. Tom was already in bed with his lantern rigged up beside his pillow and was deep in his fascinating book.

"What are that silly hero and the girl doing now?" asked Dan.

"Escaping from the lighthouse," answered Tom without raising his eyes from the volume.

"How? In a trolley car?" asked Dan sarcastically.

"Boat; and they've only got one oar and there's a peach of a storm coming up, and they haven't got anything to eat, and ____"

"Tommy, you ought to be ashamed to read such trash," said Dan severely. Then he seized the book and sent it with excellent aim to the farther end of the hall, where it narrowly missed Bob's nose and created consternation among the card-players. Tom leaped out of bed and raced after it, and during the next thirty seconds Dan, unnoticed of all, worked very hard. Having recovered his book Tom started to retrace his steps.

"Don't you bring that pernicious literature around here," warned Dan. "If you do I shall be forced to take it away from you. I must protect my morals at any cost."

Tom told him what he thought of his morals and then annexed Nelson's bunk and returned to his story. When he was ready for bed Dan went visiting farther down the dormitory. The result of this maneuvering was that when bedtime came and the lights at the ends of the hall were put out by the councilors Tom and Dan were still out of their

bunks. The former closed his book with a sigh of regret and stumbled down the aisle. Dan heard him putting the book away. Then there was a moment of silence save for the whispers of the fellows, and then——

"*Gu-gu-gosh!*" shrieked Tom, leaping out of bed again. "Wh-wh-wh-what's in my bed?"

Instantly the dormitory was in a turmoil, the fellows, scenting fun, tumbling out of their bunks to gather about Tom, who stood, wild-eyed and disgusted, in the middle of the aisle.

"What's the matter?" they asked him expectantly.

"Somebody's pu-pu-put something nu-nu-nasty in my bed," he answered. "I bu-bu-bu-bet it was Du-du-du-Dan did it!"

"What's that about me?" asked Dan innocently. By this time there were plenty of lanterns, and Tom gingerly threw back his blankets. In the bed repose four slimy, cold chub, their round eyes seemingly fixed reproachfully upon Tom.

"Fish!" shouted Nelson quite as though he hadn't expected it.

"Chub!" cried Dan.

Tom, cautiously examining his bedfellows, caught the expression on Dan's face.

"You du-du-did it!" he shrieked wrathfully, and seizing one of the fish by the tail he whirled it once around his head and let it fly at Dan. Now, as anybody who had ever attempted to throw a fresh fish by his tail must know, accuracy is impossible. That's why the chub, instead of

hitting Dan, smacked itself straight into Dr. Smith's face. But Tom was not to be easily discouraged. Without stopping for apologies he seized upon the remaining fish and chased Dan down the aisle and out into the darkness under a veritable fusillade of chub. Tom's aim was hasty and the chub were slippery, and so Dan escaped all save one of the missiles. That one took him squarely in the back and imprinted itself upon his nice clean light blue pajamas. Then Tom went back to make his peace with Dr. Smith.

That night was long remembered. Tom's misadventure was the forerunner of others. Several beds were upset with their contents and "sneakers" were so thick in the air that Dan, cautiously returning from outer darkness into inner gloom, was struck twice between the door and his bunk.

It was almost midnight when the councilors at last secured quiet. And then, just when most fellows were getting drowsy, there was a strange, uncanny noise like that of a man talking through a hundred feet of gas-pipe, a whirring and buzzing, and finally a loud discordant laugh and a jumble of shrill words that sounded as though they were coming from the stove. Somebody in some manner had got hold of Wells's phonograph and started it going. Up and down the hall fellows sat up in bed and laughed and shouted their applause. Bedlam was loose again!

"Give us 'Bluebell'!" some one demanded.

"I want 'Hiawatha'!" called another.

"Cornet solo, please!"

Then Dr. Smith's voice was heard above the babel.

"Cut it out now, fellows! Wells, stop that noise!"

“I didn’t do it, sir.”

“I don’t care who did it; I want it stopped.”

“Why, Wells, you know you did it!” said some one up the hall.

“Sounded just like your voice, Wells!” called another.

“Cut it out, fellows,” said Dr. Smith sternly.

“Yes, sir.”

“All right, Doctor!”

“Good night, sir!”

“Thank you for stopping the noise, Doctor; I’m very sleepy!”

“Yes, sir; thank you, sir!”

Then followed giggles—silence—slumber.

Three of the Four were very busy for the balance of the week. Every afternoon there was hard practise on the diamond for the baseball team in preparation for the second game with Wickasaw on Saturday afternoon. If Wickasaw should win this game she would have the series; if not, a third game would be played. Dan had made up his mind to conquer, and the way he worked the team was a caution. On Thursday there was a spirited contest between the camp nine and the scrub in which Mr. Clinton distinguished himself by knocking three home runs out of five times at bat. But for all that the first team won handily, displaying far better form than at any time during the season.

Besides the practise there was a lot of planning to do in regard to the trip. By Friday all arrangements were complete, and at last they had agreed on a route. They were to go through to Hipp's Pond, carry across to Northwest Bay, and so reach Lake Winnipesaukee. Tuesday they would cruise on the lake and on Wednesday they would return as far as The Weirs by train and from there paddle home again. They were to take two canoes, not so much because they were both necessary as because it looked more imposing. A 7 x 9 canoe tent, blankets, an aluminum cooking outfit, a waterproof duffle bag, a few provisions, hatchet, fishing-tackle, camera, and compass made up the bulk of their luggage. Tom was strongly desirous of taking a great many more things, among them a checker-board, a pack of cards, and his wonderful book—but the others refused.

"We may have to carry a good ways," explained Bob. "If we do you'll be glad we haven't any more truck, Tommy."

Mr. Clinton gave his counsel and help and regretted many times that he wasn't going along. By Saturday morning all luggage was assembled under Dan's bed and nothing remained but to await as patiently as possible the hour of embarkment. Naturally, they were much envied by the other boys and many were the applications received for membership in the expedition.

Wickasaw appeared on the field Saturday afternoon minus one of their councilors, who was too ill to play. As he was one of the best of the Wickasaw nine his absence was partly accountable for the result of the contest. But Chicora's playing had a good deal to do with it. Wells pitched a good game and very few hits were made off his delivery. On the

other hand Nelson and Bob and Loom, who played short-stop, were able to find the Wickasaw pitcher for a number of timely hits. At the end of the sixth inning Chicora had a comfortable lead of four runs. In the seventh an epidemic of errors in the Wickasaw infield enabled her rival to pile on three more, and the game ended with a score 9 to 3 in Chicora's favor.

Dan spent most of the evening manufacturing a flag of victory, while the other three lent him valuable advice. He sacrificed one of his two pillow-slips and on it drew a broom —which he explained was emblematic of victory and a clean sweep—from the upper right-hand to the lower left-hand corner. Above it, in amazing letters and numerals, he inscribed "Chicora 9!"; below it in much smaller characters he traced the inscription: "Wick. 3." As his exclamation point had much the appearance of a figure 1, the score at first glance was a bit startling. When they went for their dip in the morning they attached the flag to the line under the camp banner.

"They won't be able to steal it if they want to," said Dan. "Because, you see, it'll come down at night and go up to camp."

The only thing that marred his happiness that morning was the fact that there was no breeze and consequently the flag hung straight downward and failed to flaunt its message to the eyes of the inhabitants of Bear Island.

Sunday passed very slowly for the Four. In the forenoon they wrote their regular weekly letters home and had their "soak." At noon they ate a great deal of dinner. In the afternoon they secured the motor-dory and with three others

went for a trip around the lake. But for the most part their thoughts were set on the morrow. In the middle of the night Nelson awoke in a most unhappy frame of mind. He had dreamed that it was raining so hard that the dormitory was afloat and Dr. Smith was dealing out rowboats so that they could get to breakfast. But one glance through the open window at the foot of the bunk brought relief. The night was still and cool and through the silent leaves the white stars were twinkling merrily.

CHAPTER XVII

WITNESSES THE DEPARTURE OF THE FOUR ON A CANOE TRIP AND BRINGS THEM INTO CAMP FOR THE NIGHT

 alf the inhabitants of the camp saw them off and, being envious, professed to be glad they were not going themselves.

"Look out for bears, Tommy," counseled Joe Carter. "You'd make a nice fat breakfast for them."

Joe had very willingly contributed his canoe to the expedition, but he would have liked mightily to go along.

Finally the last of the things were stowed away in the two canoes and the paddles were dipped.

"Be very careful," said Mr. Clinton, "and take good care of yourselves. Good-by."

"Good-by!" yelled the crowd on the landing, and——

"Good-by, sir," called the Four. "Good-by, fellows!"

In the excitement of the moment the "Babe" fell off the pier, and during the subsequent hilarity the two canoes sped out into the lake. In one sat Nelson and Dan, in the other Bob and Tom. They were to change about when they reached Northwest Bay. As they swung around the corner of Bear Island a number of the Wickasaw fellows were on the pier. From the flagpole hung the objectionable white banner.

"Take it down," shouted Dan. "It's out of date!"

"Come and get it," answered one of the assembly.

"Oh, we haven't got time," said Nelson.

"One's enough for us," added Tom.

Whereupon they were subjected to a chorus of angry jeers and hoots. That raised their spirits still higher and they shot under the bridge at Crescent as happy a quartet as ever paddled their own—or any one else's—canoe. There was very little wind and what there was favored their progress. Little of interest happened during the voyage to the head of Hipp's Pond. By that time they were all glad to lay down the paddles and stretch tired arms and legs. From the pond across to the bay was a matter of two miles over a well-traveled trail. After a few minutes of rest the outfit was apportioned and they set out. Dan carried one canoe and Bob the other, and Nelson and Tom shared the luggage. A seventy-pound canoe weighs one hundred pounds at the beginning of the carry, two hundred at the end of the first half mile, and something like a ton at the end of the mile. After that it gains four tons every three hundred yards. That's one reason it took the party just short of an hour and a half to cover that two miles. They changed burdens frequently, but, even so, when Nelson suggested that they return all the way by water and train, cutting out the present feature of the trip, they were unanimous in favor of the suggestion.

"I never knew a canoe weighed so much," grunted Dan, stumbling over a log. "I'll bet the Chicora isn't half so heavy as this pesky thing!"

“Wish we’d brought only one of them,” said Tom, who was struggling with the other. “Don’t see what we needed two for. You fellows wouldn’t let me bring things that were really necessary, but you had to saddle us with a canoe that isn’t needed at all.”

“Dry up, Tommy,” said Nelson. “You’re doing finely, if only you’d lift your feet now and then. Talking about unnecessary things, now, I don’t see what you have two feet for; one of them is big enough for any ordinary person. Look out there! I told you so!”

Thereupon burdens were set down, not unwillingly, while the canoe was lifted off of the prostrate form of Tom and balanced over his shoulders again.

“Well, we’re almost there,” said Bob encouragingly. “And this is the last time we’ll have to lug things.”

“Almost there!” grumbled Tom. “You’ve been saying that ever since we started. Don’t believe there is any ‘there’!”

But there was, and presently it came into sight, a narrow strip of blue water just barely ruffled in the breeze. When they reached the bank they laid aside their loads and stretched themselves out gratefully in the shade.

“Hooray!” murmured Dan.

“Me too,” sighed Tom.

Bob, who appeared the least fatigued of the party, got out the tin cup and served drinking water and was called blessed. Nelson took the camera from the case and snapped it several times at the recumbent forms. Then the canoes were slipped into the water and the luggage arranged again. This time

Nelson and Bob paddled together, and Dan and Tom. As they started away Tom waved his arm politely toward the trail through which they had journeyed.

"Good morning, Carry," he called.

And Dan was heard threatening that if he ever said anything like that again he would be tipped out of the canoe.

"And this time," added Dan, "I won't jump in and rescue you!"

Noon saw them opposite Beacon Point, and heading across the water they found a comfortable spot and drew the canoes up on to a tiny sandy beach. They had provided themselves with a cold lunch for the first meal and they ate it lying around on their elbows or stretched flat on their backs in the shade of a big white birch which fluttered its leaves above their faces. The lunch was principally sandwiches and gingerbread and apples, but it tasted better than any meal they had eaten for a long time, and Tom begged to be allowed to attack the other supplies after his share of the feast had vanished. He was heartlessly denied and presently fell asleep, where he lay and snored beautifully in four distinct keys for half an hour. Perhaps the others slept a little as well. The sun was delightfully warm and life held no cares.

By one o'clock they were on their way again. Camps and their attendant landings, with here and there a hotel or boarding-house, became frequent along the shores, while in the distance launches and steam-boats shone like white specks against the blue water. Now and then a canoe or sailboat passed them with its merry party.

“Seems to me,” said Dan, who was paddling at bow in Bob’s canoe, “that folks down here don’t have anything to do but float around on the water. It’s a sick way to spend vacation.”

“What ought they to do?” asked Bob carelessly.

“Anything so as not to be so plumb lazy. Look, there’s a swell camp over there, Bob.”

“And that’s a dandy on the little island over there. Hey, Nelson, how’d you like to have to live there all summer?”

“I wouldn’t kick. That’s swell, isn’t it? There are some mighty fine places along here. It’s prettier than Chicora in that way.”

“Yes, but you’d soon get tired of having so many camps around you; it’s too crowded. What’s the point over there, I wonder.” And Bob pulled his map out for the fortieth time. “Shingle Point,” he announced. “Now, why the dickens do they call it that? It doesn’t look like a shingle, it doesn’t feel like a shingle, and it doesn’t smell like a shingle.”

“You’re a silly chump, Bob,” said Dan. “It’s called Shingle Point because it scratches like a shingle, of course.”

“How does a shingle scratch?” asked Nelson.

“With its nails,” chuckled Dan.

“Splash him for me, please,” Nelson begged, and Bob obligingly obeyed, sending a fine shower against Dan’s back.

“I suppose that’s Clapboard Island there off Shingle Point?” asked Tom.

“And that’s Shutter Cove yonder,” said Dan.

“Well, that looks like a boarding-house on the hill,” added Nelson.

“Maybe we could get a planked steak there,” Bob suggested.

“Oh, this is awful,” laughed Nelson. “Come on, Tommy, let’s get out of this atmosphere.” And they bent to their paddles in an endeavor to draw away from the other craft. But Bob and Dan were ready for a race and they had it out for a quarter of a mile, nip and tuck, Tom, who had yet to acquire skill at paddling, throwing water over himself and whoever came within six yards of him, but nevertheless managing to keep his end up. When they called the contest off, both parties claiming victory, they had reached a point where it was necessary to choose their course. Before them the island which Tom had dubbed Clapboard barred their direct path and it became a question of going to right or left. Bob consulted the map once more.

“It doesn’t make much difference,” he said. “The right is a bit nearer according to this.”

“Right it is, then,” answered Dan.

“Let’s quit for a while,” said Tom. “My arms are lamer than thunder.”

“All right, Tommy.” So they laid aside their paddles, scooped the water up in their hands and drank, and then disposed themselves comfortably in the canoes.

“Is the tide going in or out?” asked Nelson absent-mindedly. Then he wondered why the others laughed at him until he recollected that he was not on salt water. Bob

brought his canoe alongside the other and held it there while they bobbed lazily about in the afternoon sunlight.

"Who knows where the fishing-tackle is?" asked Tom.

"I do," Dan answered, "but we haven't any bait."

"I'll go ashore and dig some. We ought to have some fish for supper."

"I'll eat myself all the fish you'll catch, Tommy," said Bob. "But go ahead and get your bait. How many lines are there?"

"Two," said Tom. "You take the other and I bet I'll catch more'n you do."

"All right, Izaak Walton. Run away and get your bait. But it's dollars to doughnuts you won't find anything but earthworms, and no self-respecting fish will bite at those."

"A chub will take anything," said Dan.

"Yes, but we won't take the chub," answered Nelson. "I'll go hungry before I'll eat those things."

"Chub are all right," said Dan. "You ask Tommy; he knows all about chub, don't you, Tommy?"

But Tommy, searching for the hatchet, made no response. Armed with this weapon in lieu of a spade he paddled in to the shore, Nelson, on his back with one foot over each gunwale, taking slight interest in the proceedings. Tom disappeared into the woods and was presently back again with a varied collection of worms and bugs gathered from rotten logs and from the earth. They returned to the other canoe, and he and Bob made ready their lines.

“I’d like to know what sort of beasts these are,” said Bob disgustedly. “I’m afraid to touch some of them. Here, I’ll use the earthworms and leave these fancy things to you; and I hope they bite you. There, here goes for a whale.”

He threw his line out, and Tom followed a moment later with his. Then they waited while Dan and Nelson sarcastically made bets on the result. After five minutes without a nibble Bob grew restive.

“Any one know whether there are any fish in this lake?” he asked.

“All fished out, I guess,” said Dan. But at that moment Tom gave a suppressed whoop of excitement and began to let out his line.

“Play him, Tommy,” said Nelson lazily. “It’s probably a codfish.”

“Fu-fu-fu-feels like a wh-wh-whale!” answered Tom.

“Now don’t get excited,” advised Dan. “Give him his head for a while. Maybe it’s a sunfish.”

But Tom was really having all he could attend to, for whatever was on the end of his line was making the gamest sort of a fight. Tom had to let out several yards of line, for he was none too sure of his leader. Then he began to take it in again a little at a time until the fish, which seemed to have given up the struggle, was not six feet away. They all peered wonderingly into the water, but it was too rough to allow the fish to be seen.

“I’m going to pull him in,” said Tom in a hoarse whisper. “You fellows su-su-stand by to gu-gu-grab him!” Then he

pulled in hand over hand, there was a thrashing a yard away and a momentary glimpse of a big silvery body that turned and twisted. Then Tom sat down suddenly in the canoe, sending it down to the gunwale and shipping several quarts of water, while the end of the line, minus leader and hook, flew over his head.

"*Gosh!*" exclaimed Tom, picking himself up and looking disgustedly into the water.

"Say, he was a peach!" said Dan. "What do you suppose he was?"

"Trout," said Bob.

"Salmon," said Nelson.

"He was the biggest I ever saw in fresh water, anyway," Dan declared. Tom was feverishly fitting a new leader and baiting his hook.

"Maybe he'll be back," he whispered excitedly.

"Not he," said Bob. "He's scared to death. I'll bet he's half a mile away by this time. Hello!" He had drawn in his own line, forgotten in the excitement, and found the hook empty. "I got a bite at last."

"So did the fish," laughed Nelson.

Tom's "whale" didn't put in any appearance, but at the end of half an hour or so he had four fair-sized bass and two chub to his credit, while Bob had only one small perch to show.

"You win, Tommy," he said, winding up his line. "The old farm is yours, to say nothing of the wood-lot on the hill. Now

let's get along. It's after four and we ought to get to Morris Island by five."

So they took to the paddles again and glided on through the channel that divided the island from the mainland. At the end of the island they met one of the steamers, her deck well filled with passengers who waved and shouted to them as they swept past. There was lots to see now, for they were well inshore and the houses and cabins were thick thereabouts. At the end of an hour their camp-site was in view. Morris Island lay well out in the lake and was one of the largest there. A few camps were scattered over it, but there was plenty of room for a night's lodging. They crept along the shore until they found a little cove with a gravelly beach. Here they disembarked, stretched their limbs, and set about making camp.

The canoes were emptied, carried up under the trees, and laid bottom side up for the night. Tom went off after firewood, and the others unpacked the cooking things and set up the tents. Bob, who had had experience in camping, took command. The blankets were distributed, water was brought, and a big log was rolled down to the edge of the beach. Tom came back with his first armful of wood, and Bob set about the building of the fire. With some small stones dug from the beach he built a fireplace, the back wall of which was the tree trunk. Between the side walls he dug out the gravel for a depth of six inches, continuing the excavations for a foot or so in front. Then with a broad, flat stone he made a hearth, fixing it in such a way that there was a draft from front to back. On the flat stone he threw some dried grass and twigs and lighted them. Then Tom's supply was drawn upon and in a moment there was a roaring fire. With the hatchet Bob cut

a stout branch, sharpened one end, and thrust it into the earth so that it leaned over the fireplace. From this, just above the flames, he depended the water-kettle. The cooking utensils and the provisions were spread out and Nelson and Dan were set to cleaning the fish. The bread was cut—Tom managing to gash his finger in the operation—the coffee made, and the potatoes were washed and plumped into the boiling water. Meanwhile the skillet was leaning against the fireplace getting hot.

Dan and Tom and Nelson sat down and watched, jumping up now and then to do Bob's bidding, but for the most part cultivating their appetites by observing the preparation of supper. Bob seemed to know just what to do and how to do it. By the time the potatoes were almost done the fish were frying in the skillet and the coffee-pot was singing a tune of its own.

Then plates were passed around and in a moment there was a deep and eloquent silence that lasted until Tommy, with a sigh, laid down his plate and reached for the frying-pan. "Work," quoth Tom, "makes a fellow hungry."

"Work!" answered Nelson scathingly.

"Work!" grunted Dan.

"Work!" laughed Bob.

"Huh!" Tom retaliated. "Who caught these fish?"

"Well, even if you did catch them you needn't eat them all," said Dan, wresting the skillet from his hands. "There are others, my boy. Pour me some more coffee, Bob, will you?"

While they ate, with the smoke from the dying fire floating straight into the air and the last rays of the sun tinging the lake with rose-gold, the steamer from The Weirs passed a little way out, her cabin windows alight and her lanterns flashing red and green and white across the mirror-like surface. Bob waved the coffee-pot, incidentally splashing Tom's face with the contents, and a group at the stern of the boat fluttered their handkerchiefs. Then the dishes were washed at the edge of the lake and the fire replenished. After that they took a stroll along the shore, pausing now and then to shy pebbles at the muskrats which, with little bullet-shaped heads just above the water, swam hither and thither, leaving long ripples behind them. Back to camp they wandered just at dark and sat for a while in the light of the little fire, and then they rolled themselves in their blankets and dropped off to sleep one by one, Tom's unmusical snores alone breaking the silence. And so ended the first day of the trip; not an exciting one, to be sure, but one of the happiest of the summer.

CHAPTER XVIII

TELLS HOW THEY FOUND A DERELICT AND A COURSE DINNER, AND MET WITH SHIPWRECK

When they awoke nature presented a far different aspect. A stiff, cold wind blew out of the northeast, the sky was hidden by dark clouds that hurried up the lake, and the water was of a leaden green hue and crested with whitecaps. They viewed the prospect gloomily while they tumbled into their clothes and lighted the morning fire. But a good breakfast put them in better spirits, and at half past eight they were in the canoes again battling with wind and waves. It was hard paddling, and to make it worse the spray drenched them before they had made a half mile of progress. Long before noon, in spite of many rests, they were ready to seek the shore. The wind increased with every hour and the heavy clouds drove faster and faster into the southwest. At half past ten they decided to land and so turned the bows of the canoes toward a fair-sized island that guarded the entrance to a bay. It was while making for this that Bob, who was in the leading canoe with Dan, pointed to an object which drifted along a quarter of a mile up the lake.

"Looks like a boat, doesn't it?" he asked.

"It surely does," Dan answered after studying it a moment. "But it seems to be empty. Let's go and investigate."

So they shouted to the others and paddled away in the direction of the derelict. When they drew near they saw that it was a cedar rowboat, apparently a yacht's tender. At the stern was the word "Elf." It was almost half full of water and a crimson sweater washed to and fro in the bottom. There were no oars in it and the rowlocks were not in place.

"If it wasn't for the rowlocks being out," said Dan, "I'd think there'd been an accident. But I guess no one ever went overboard and stopped to take the rowlocks out. What'll we do with it?"

"Tow it over to the island," answered Bob promptly. "That's maybe where it belongs. It's a derelict and we can claim salvage. She's a fine little boat, isn't she?"

When they worked the canoe up to the tender's bow the mystery was explained. A few feet of rope, frayed at the end, told the story.

"She's blown away from the landing," said Dan. "That painter probably sawed itself in two during the night; probably rubbed against the edge of the wharf. We'll claim the reward if we can find the owner."

So they took the end of the rope aboard and tried to paddle away. They'd probably been there yet had not Nelson and Tom come up presently and lent assistance. A half-filled rowboat is no light tow in a heavy sea, and by the time they had beached it they were all well tired out. After turning the water out of it, and wringing the sweater until it was somewhat drier, they set out on a tour of discovery.

There were no habitations in sight from their landing-place, but a few minutes' walk took them around a corner of

the island and brought them in sight of a sumptuous camp building which, planned like a Swiss chalet, stood on a little bluff above the edge of the lake and towered up among the trees. Jutting into the water was a long pier with several craft of different kinds about it, while further out a sixty-foot steam yacht was moored.

"Bet you this is the place," said Tom. "How much we going to ask for reward?"

"Nothing," said Bob. Tom looked disappointed, but the others agreed that they wouldn't take any money for the rescue of the tender. As they approached a ferocious-looking bull-terrier made a dash at them and barked savagely, only to change his behavior on closer acquaintance and leap about them joyfully. The noise brought one of the inmates of the house to the front door, and he waved greetings to the party and awaited their approach. He was a middle-aged man, rather fussily dressed—as Dan put it—for camp-life, and he held a newspaper in his hand and smoked a pipe. At the steps Bob became spokesman and explained their errand.

"A cedar tender named 'Elf,' eh?" asked the man. "That's mine, sure enough. Found her afloat, eh? Well, I'm mightily obliged to you, gentlemen. Come in, come in! Get out of the way there, Pete. Oh, Jack! tell Barry to go around the island on the lake side and bring home the tender. The fool thing ran away last night and a party found her half full of water."

"All right," answered an unseen voice from the house, and the Four, following the host, found themselves in a great living-room at one end of which big logs blazed in a monstrous fireplace. The room was beautifully furnished; bright-hued rugs covered the floor, heads of deer, bears, and

caribous adorned the walls, and a giant moose head glared down from the stone chimney above the high mantel. A flight of stairs led past the chimney to a gallery which ran around three sides of the building and from which the up-stairs rooms opened. Over the gallery railing hung hides and pelts of deer, bears, foxes, and other animals. The host led the way to the fire, before which two ladies and a second man were sitting. The latter proved to be "Jack," and "Jack's" last name proved to be Merrill. The boys gave their names, and were duly introduced. The host's name was Carey; one of the ladies was Mrs. Carey, and the other was a Miss White. The inhabitants of the camp were dressed as though they were in a city house instead of a log building on the edge of the wilderness, and the boys regretted their own scanty attire. That is, three of them did; I can't honestly say that Tom looked worried about the matter. But, for that, neither did their hosts. The boys were given places about the broad hearth, and the bull-terrier threw himself down at their feet and viewed them with a friendly grin. Bob, with occasional help from his companions, told about their trip, about Camp Chicora, and about the finding of the tender. The matter of reward was broached, but, upon their refusal to consider it, was not pressed.

"But you'll have to take dinner with us," said Mr. Carey, and the others indorsed him. The boys were nothing loath to change camp-fare for the luxuries promised by the appearance of the camp and its inmates, and Tom, who had possibly feared a refusal on the part of his companions, heaved a sigh of relief when they accepted the invitation. After that they spent the jolliest kind of an hour until dinner was announced. They were taken over the house and

marveled at its conveniences and appointments; they were challenged to a game of pool by Miss White, accepted, and were one and all badly beaten; they were shown the contents of the gun-racks by Mr. Carey, and listened to his tales of moose and caribou hunting in the north with tingling veins; and finally they were conducted by a smart servant to a cozy up-stairs room to get ready for dinner.

"Wish I had a little more on," said Bob ruefully, looking at his scant camp uniform in the big mirror. "I don't feel decent."

"I wouldn't mind so much," said Dan, "if I even had long trousers. My legs look awfully bare."

"Bet we have a swell dinner," was Tom's contribution to the subject.

And Tom was quite right. The dinner came on in so many courses that he lost count of them, and was as perfect as though served in the heart of New York city. Afterward they went back to the big fireplace and watched the four-foot logs blazing and crackling, and talked lazily while the wind blustered against the windows. Tom almost fell asleep once, and Dan had to kick him hard before he was fully awake again. About two o'clock Bob suggested departure.

"Why don't you stay overnight with us?" asked Mrs. Carey. "You really ought not to go out on the lake in canoes a day like this."

"That's so," said her husband. "No sense in it at all. You stay right here until this storm blows over. If you like, in the morning I'll take you up the lake on the yacht. I can get you up to Northwest Bay in no time."

But Bob thanked them and declined. And Tom sighed dolefully. So a half-hour later they took their departure amid cordial invitations to come again. Mr. Carey walked around to their landing-place with them and was much interested in their canoes and outfit. And after they were afloat and paddling away he waved to them from the shore and laughingly cautioned them not to get drowned.

Tom was loud in his expressions of disfavor of their course.

"Don't see why you fellows wouldn't stay," he grumbled. "Gee! you don't know when you're well off. Think of the supper and breakfast we've missed! And the dandy beds! And that peach of a fire! And——"

"Mind your paddle," said Bob. "You're kicking up an awful mess with it. If you can't do better than that you'd better take it out."

And Tom, still protesting under his breath, set to work again.

Bob, who had fallen naturally into the position of chief navigator, had planned to keep down the southwest side of the lake to West Alton and camp near the village for the night. The next morning they would start early and cross to Wolfeborough, take the forenoon steamer back to The Weirs, and from there return to Camp Chicora by the afternoon train. But once past the shelter of the island they began to doubt their ability to make West Alton. The wind had swung around into the south, and to hold the canoes in an easterly direction was a difficult task. After laboring some time with little success Bob decided to run across the lake before the

wind in the direction of Long Island and go into camp on one of the smaller islets thereabouts or, failing that, on the mainland. So they swung the canoes about and headed north-by-east and found a chance to rest their tired muscles. With the wind almost directly aft it was only necessary to paddle easily and keep the noses of the craft in the right direction. The canoe containing Bob and Tom, being somewhat less heavily weighted, rode higher out of water and consequently presented more surface to the wind. As a result, when they were half-way across the lake they were leading by almost an eighth of a mile. Nelson suggested catching up with them, but Dan objected.

"Let them go," he said. "I'm tuckered out and I'm going to rest. That was a pretty hefty bit of paddling back there, Nel; we made about a foot to every ten strokes. I'm wet through with perspiration."

"Well, I'm wet through, too," answered Nelson, who was in the bow, "but not with perspiration. You'd better pull your sweater on or you'll catch cold."

"Guess I will," said Dan. "This breeze is pretty chilly on a fellow's back. Where is that sweater of mine? I see it. Hold steady and I'll get it."

Dan shipped his paddle, arose cautiously to his feet, and took a step toward the middle of the canoe. At that instant a tiny squall of wind struck them, he lost his balance, and the next thing Nelson knew he was struggling up through yards and yards of dark water. When his head was finally above the surface and he had shaken the water from his eyes he stared bewilderedly about him. Fifty feet away the overturned canoe was drifting heavily before the wind. About him here

and there such of the luggage as had not sunk at once was bobbing about from wave to wave. Near by, Dan's head with the red hair plastered to it was visible. Every moment the canoe was drifting farther away, and Nelson realized that their strait was already desperate and was growing more so with every instant of delay.

"Come on, Dan!" he shouted. "Make for the canoe; we'll pick up the stuff afterward."

He heard some sort of a response from the other and then struck out fiercely for the craft. If he could get on top of it it might be possible to attract the attention of Bob and Tom to their plight. It was a hard chase, and when his hand finally touched the wet surface of the canoe he was pretty well tuckered. Throwing one arm across the bottom he managed to get his head some two feet above the water and could catch glimpses now and then above the waves of the other craft well to the right and apparently a long distance away. Then he turned to shout to Dan, turned and saw only the empty water. He dashed the drops from his eyes with his free hand and looked again, searching the hollows between the racing waves. Once he thought he saw for an instant Dan's head above the surface, but it was gone again instantly.

"*Dan!*" he shouted in terror. "*Dan!*"

There was no sound but the ceaseless splashing of the waves. With an awful fear clutching at his heart he threw himself away from the canoe and plunged back in the teeth of the gale.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCERNS ITSELF WITH THE DANGEROUS PLIGHT OF DAN AND NELSON AND THE COURAGE OF THE LATTER

s long as he lives Nelson will never recall that struggle through the angry waters without a sudden sinking of the heart. Wind and wave were dead against him, mocking his frantic efforts at haste, burying him for moments at a time in ugly swirls of white-frothed water, that blinded and confused him. In those moments which, brief as they must have been, seemed minutes long, the monotonous sound of rushing wind and splashing wave were silenced and only the stealthy swish of water flowing over his submerged head reached him. It was pleasant, that calm, after the confusion of the world above, and once he found himself giving way to a sort of stupor. What was the use of struggling? Under the water it was calm and peaceful; down here there was rest for tired limbs. Involuntarily his aching arms and legs ceased their labors, and even the swirling of water past his ears no longer came to him, and he knew that he was sinking. Then the benumbing stupor passed, fright gripped him with icy hands at his heart, he opened his mouth to cry aloud, and arose, fighting wildly, to the surface, his lungs half filled with water. For a moment a panic held him; he fancied unseen hands were clutching at him, striving to drag him down again to that awful stillness, and he thrashed and struggled and shrieked at the leaden sky. Then recollection of

Dan came to him and the terror passed. Blinking his streaming eyes, he looked about him. Almost at hand was something half submerged that at first he thought might be his companion. But as he reached it, swimming hand over hand with the waves breaking above his head, he saw that it was only the canoe tent, which, partly on account of its wooden pole and partly because a certain amount of air was imprisoned beneath the canvas, was still afloat. Grasping it with one hand he turned to search the water. And as he turned fingers gripped themselves about his wrist in a feeble clutch and Dan's face arose white and drawn beside him. The eyes were wide open and staring, and for a moment Nelson believed that they were the eyes of a dead person. But the clutching fingers told a different tale, and as he reached across the tent and seized Dan under one armpit the staring eyes seemed to flicker with recognition. Then the lids closed slowly, wearily over them.

He was not dead, thought Nelson with a sudden rush of blood to his chilled heart. And then, driving before it that brief sensation of relief, came to him a knowledge of the hopelessness of their situation. The canoe was drifting bottom upward hundreds of feet away. No hail came from Bob or Tom. He must keep afloat himself and sustain Dan as well, and for aid there was only the canvas tent lashed about its pole and already half water-logged. But the feeling of panic was a thing of the past. Even fear had gone from him. Discouragement was left, but with it was a determination to fight the battle to the very end and win if strength and wit could do it.

After a moment, during which he strove merely to keep his head above water and regain his breath, he set about getting

Dan over the tent. The latter would not hold the weight of both of them, but it might keep Dan up for a while. It was hard work, with the waves battling against his every effort, but at last he succeeded in getting Dan's shoulders over the bundle of canvas. Then, with a firm grasp on the other's forearm, he let himself float. To swim was out of the question, since it would only exhaust what little strength remained to him. The wind and waves were already bearing them along to some extent toward land. Sooner or later Bob must discover the disaster and turn back, and all that could be done was to keep afloat until he came. The minutes passed. Dan's eyes remained closed, but the lids flickered now and then. Once Nelson strove to wake him by calling his name, but there was no response; and as it exhausted his breath Nelson gave it up. One thing he was thankful for during those lagging minutes, and that was his and Dan's attire. The light jerseys and trunks were scarcely more than bathing suits, and even the rubber-soled canvas shoes added little to their difficulties. With something almost approaching a smile he wondered what Mr. Carey would have done in his place, wearing the clothes which they had envied him an hour or so before.

Presently he began to feel drowsy and longed to close his eyes for a moment, but was afraid to do so. The canvas tent lost more and more of its buoyancy as the imprisoned air escaped, and Nelson dreaded the moment when it would no longer give him aid. It seemed at least an hour since the overturning of the canoe and yet could have been scarcely more than ten minutes. Time and again he strove to lift himself high enough from the water to see over the white crests, but always his view encompassed only seething lake

and dull, stormy sky. His arms and legs ached. The water, warm when the involuntary bath had begun, now felt like ice against his body, and his teeth chattered together whenever he opened his mouth. Dan's face looked blue, and the fear that he would die before rescue arrived began to creep into Nelson's heart. Suddenly there came a strain on his arm and he looked and saw the end of the canvas bundle disappearing under the water. Seizing Dan by the shoulder of his jersey, Nelson pulled the other toward him so that his head and upper part of the body lay across his chest. So, with the waves washing over them, they floated awhile, Nelson swimming slowly with legs and one arm. But it couldn't keep up long, that sort of thing, and he knew it. And with the knowledge came a certain sensation of relief. He had struggled almost as long as human power was capable of; surely he had done his duty, and now——

His half-closed eyes suddenly opened. Surely he had heard ——

"*Coming! Don't give up, boys!*"

The cry now reached him plainly, borne on the rushing wind, and told of succor near at hand. He had lost all sense of direction, nor did he try to recognize the voice. His first sensation was one of mild annoyance. It seemed so silly to bother about rescuing him now. He was sure that Dan was drowned and sure that he had but a moment or two longer to struggle himself. They would try to haul him into the canoe, and things would be very fussy and troublesome; he would much rather be left alone. However, since they insisted he would do what they asked. And so he urged his weary limbs

to further effort and was still afloat with one hand gripping Dan's arm when a boat shot alongside.

The next thing he knew he was still rocking in the waves, as it seemed, and the dark clouds were still racing across the heavens above him. But the water had grown delightfully warm, and he felt deliciously comfortable. Some one, it must have been Dan, of course, said:

"Hard on your left! All right; you're straight for the pier!"

It was a foolish thing for Dan to say, and Nelson closed his eyes again in an effort to puzzle out the meaning. And doing so he fell asleep once more, and didn't wake again until an hour later to find himself snug and warm in a big white bed with a sound of crackling flames in his ears. A little bald-headed man was leaning over him holding out a spoon, and Nelson obediently opened his mouth. Some one said something about supper, and the word suggested many things to him, and he closed his eyes again and scowled his forehead and tried to think. Plainly he was no longer in danger of drowning, for people don't drown in beds. They had rescued him and brought him ashore, and he was—where was he? He opened his eyes and moved his head. Things were dimly familiar and he was sure he knew the man by the hearth. And—yes, there was Bob.

"Hello, Bob," he whispered. He had meant to say it right out loud just to let Bob know that all was well with him, and the result surprised and annoyed him. But Bob had heard, and he came over and put a hand on Nelson's shoulder.

"How are you feeling, Nel?" he asked with affected cheerfulness. Nelson considered a moment. Then:

“Hungry,” he said. This time it wasn’t so much of a whisper and he was encouraged. “Where’s Dan?” he asked.

“In the next room. He’s—he’s all right, Nel,” was the answer. Then the little bald-headed man, whom Nelson didn’t know, came and took his hand.

“Don’t talk now, my boy. Try to go to sleep. When you wake up next time you shall have some supper.”

Nelson viewed him suspiciously, but the face was rather a nice face even if it did extend up to the back of the head, and so he closed his eyes and forgot everything very quickly.

Later he awoke again to find the room in darkness. But even as he opened his mouth to demand attention a match was scratched and the room became so bright that he had to blink his eyes. A nice-looking woman came and sat on the side of the bed and stirred a spoon around in a blue-and-white bowl.

“Are you awake?” she asked. “Here’s your supper. Don’t get up, but just turn your head this way and I’ll feed it to you. It’s beef tea. Do you like it?”

“Yes,” answered Nelson. “Thank you.”

It tasted terribly good, he thought, and between spoonfuls he surreptitiously studied her face. He had seen her before, only—he couldn’t think where.

“Would you mind telling me your name, please?” he asked presently.

“I’m Mrs. Carey,” she answered smilingly. “Have you forgotten me?”

Then he remembered and understood.

“No, ma’am,” he answered. “That is, not now. I guess I’m in your house again, but I don’t see how I got here, do you?”

“Mr. Carey was watching you from the landing when your canoe was overturned, and he and Mr. Merrill and the skipper went out to you in a boat and brought you in. But you mustn’t talk. The doctor said so.”

“What doctor?”

“Dr. Ames. He came over from the mainland, where he has a cottage.”

Nelson pondered this between mouthfuls of hot broth. Then:

“Is Dan alive?” he asked.

“Yes; you will see him in the morning. Now, that’s all. You are to have some more at nine.”

“What time is it now, please?”

“Half past six.”

“That’s a pretty long time, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Oh, but you’re going to sleep now and you won’t know how long it is. I’ll turn the light down low so it won’t hurt your eyes. Is there anything else you’d like?”

“No ma’am, thank you. You—you won’t forget, will you?”

“Forget——?”

“I mean about the broth at nine o’clock,” he explained wistfully.

“Indeed I won’t,” she answered heartily. “And I wish I could give you some more now, but the doctor said——”

Nelson never learned what the doctor said, for he fell asleep just then. Later there was another brief waking spell and more hot broth. And then, in some strange way, it became morning, and the sun was shining in the window at the foot of the bed, and the birds were celebrating the passing of the storm. While he was still stretching his limbs and trying to recollect things the door opened and Mr. Carey came in.

“Well, how’s the boy, eh?” he asked. “Feeling pretty good after your bath, are you?”

“Fine, sir. Can I get up?”

“Surely you can. Breakfast will be ready in half an hour. I’ll send your clothes up; I guess they’re dry by this time. Take your time and rest off if you feel weak. I’ll look in again presently to see how you’re getting on.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll be all right. Mrs. Carey said you went out and picked us up, and I’m very much obliged—I mean —” He paused, at a loss for words to express what he did mean. “It sounds awfully foolish to say you’re very much obliged to a person for saving your life, doesn’t it, sir? But I don’t know quite what to say, and——”

“Well, well, don’t let it trouble you, my boy. What we did is what any one would have done, and I’m mighty glad we were here to do it. You did a pretty plucky thing yourself, and after that our little rescue doesn’t look like much.”

“I guess we wouldn’t look like much if you hadn’t come along, sir,” said Nelson soberly. “We’re not likely to forget it, sir, I can tell you that!”

“Well, well, we won’t say anything more about it, eh? All’s well that ends well, and—er—I’ll send your clothes up.”

CHAPTER XX

RELATES THE CONCLUSION OF THE TRIP AND WHAT HAPPENED AT CAMP

alf an hour afterward Nelson passed along the gallery and down the stairs into the arms of Tom, who hugged him ecstatically and stuttered his delight; and of Bob, who, if less demonstrative, showed his pleasure none the less plainly. Mr. Merrill shook hands in a way that brought the color into Nelson's cheeks, and the ladies when they appeared a few moments later were so attentive that Nelson's blushes threatened to become permanent. When they were seated at table only Dan was absent, and Nelson asked if he was not coming down.

"No," answered Mr. Carey. "The fact is, your friend had a pretty narrow call. It took us all of half an hour to bring him around. He had swallowed about a gallon of lake water and had played himself out pretty well besides. But he's all right now, and I'm only waiting for the doctor to come over before I let him up. 'Orders is orders,' you know. But of course you can go up and see him whenever you like. He's asked for you once or twice already."

Nelson wanted to go then and there, but consideration for his hosts led him to await the end of the meal. There were a great many questions to answer, and he had to tell his side of the adventure from start to finish. Then Mr. Carey and Bob began comparing notes, and pretty soon Nelson had a very good idea of what had happened.

"After I got back here to the house I began to worry about you chaps," said Mr. Carey, "and pretty soon I took the field-glasses and went down to the pier. From there I could see you pretty well, but those canoes looked mighty small, just the same! I happened to have the glasses on the nearest canoe when the accident happened. I saw Speede stand up and then stumble and go over. The glasses made it look so near that I yelled like sixty. Then when I'd found the place again the canoe was drifting along bottom upward and there were two fellows in the water. Well, I knew they'd never make the canoe in that wind, so I shouted for Mr. Merrill here and Barry, my skipper, and we had the skiff out in no time. But it was a long ways out to where you were, and I thought we'd never get there. And when we did get alongside I thought we were too late. Two deader-looking live men I never saw in my life! The waves were washing all over you two, Tilford, and you seemed on the point of sinking. But you had hold of Speede good and hard; it was all we could do to loosen your grasp on his arm, and I guess he'll have a black-and-blue bracelet there for some time. Hethington and Ferris got there in the canoe a moment later and helped us get you two into the boat. From the looks of them I guess they'd done some tall paddling."

"We did," said Bob grimly. "It was Tommy who discovered you had gone. He looked around when we were pretty near land and let out a yell. Then we turned the canoe and started back. It was like pulling yourself up by your shoe-straps. The wind was almost on our quarter and we could just see that we were moving. Tommy paddled like an Indian. And all the time he kept yelling to me to hurry up, just as though I wasn't breaking my back at every stroke! As

it was, though, he pulled me around several times; I was in the bow. I thought we'd never get to the canoe; we could see it now and then over the waves; and when we did we found you two weren't there, and had to start off on another course."

"Tommy was like a crazy man; kept crying that you were both drowned and that it was our fault for leaving you. And I was—was pretty well worried myself. Then we saw Mr. Carey's boat, though we didn't know then who was in it, and we made toward it, and pretty soon we saw you two chaps floating around in the water like a couple of logs. And Tommy was for jumping over and swimming to you. Nel, you certainly had the pluck. If it hadn't been for you Dan would have drowned before we could have turned around or Mr. Carey could have started out there."

"But I don't understand about Dan," said Nelson. "He can swim like a fish. I never thought that anything was the matter with him until I looked back and couldn't see him."

"Cramps," said Mr. Carey. "He told me this morning that he couldn't seem to move himself below the waist. He got pretty warm paddling, I suppose, and then when he went overboard the shock was too intense. He had a close shave of it, and he owes his life to you, Tilford."

"And we both owe our lives to you, sir. If you'll excuse me I'd like to go up and see him a minute."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Carey. "I'll see that cook keeps some waffles hot for you."

"He's in the room next to yours, further along the gallery," said her husband.

Nelson didn't knock because he thought Dan might be asleep and he didn't want to wake him. But when he had cautiously opened the door and peeked in he saw Dan sitting up in bed and smiling broadly at him.

"Hello, Life Saver!" called Dan.

Nelson bounded across and seized his hand.

"Dan, are you all right?" he asked eagerly. "Gee, I'm glad to see you, you old chump!"

"I'm feeling right as a trivet. What's a trivet, anyway, Nel?"

"Oh, a thingumbob with three legs," laughed Nelson.

"Well, I'm glad I wasn't one of them yesterday. Two legs were all I wanted. They ached like thunder and I couldn't swim a stroke. Nel, you saved my life, and——"

"Cut it out! If any one says anything more about saving lives, I'll—I'll hurt them!"

"I dare say it is a bore," answered Dan soberly, "having folks talk about it, but I want you to know that—that I'm mighty grateful, old fellow, and that if the chance ever comes for me to even things up, why, you can count on your Uncle Daniel. It was a swell thing to do, Nel, stand by me like that, only I wasn't worth it and you might have got drowned yourself. That's all. I won't bother you with any more thanks, only—only—" Dan's hand found Nelson's on the coverlid and squeezed it until Nelson winced. Then: "Where's that fussy old doctor?" he asked. Nelson, relieved at the change of subject, laughed.

“He will be along pretty soon. If you’re all right he’s going to let you get up. Then we can get the afternoon train back.”

“Of course I’m all right; right as a three-legged thingumbob. Say, won’t Clint be waxy? He’ll never let us out of his sight again.”

“I suppose he’ll have to be told?” said Nelson ruefully.

“I guess so; it’s up to us to tell him, Nel. Not that I want to, you know, but—well, it’s more honest.”

“That’s so; I guess we’d better. Say, Dan, these Careys have been mighty good. We’d ought to do something for them. Do you think we could?”

“I’d like to, but I don’t see what we could do. We’ll have to think it over. Maybe Bob can suggest something. He’s got a heap of sense, that chap.”

Then Mr. Carey and the doctor came in and Nelson left the room. Dan was pronounced able to travel, and at two o’clock, after thanking the ladies and promising to come again when they could, they loaded their canoes on to the steam-yacht—the overturned craft had been recovered the evening before—and, with Mr. Carey and Mr. Merrill accompanying, were taken over to The Weirs in time to catch the afternoon train for Warder. At the landing more good-bys were said.

“I want you boys to promise to come and visit us here some time, this year if you can; if not, next. And when you’re in New York look us up. Both Mrs. Carey and I will be delighted to have you. We feel a sort of proprietary interest in you after yesterday’s little incident and don’t want to lose sight of you completely. I’ve written a line or two to

Mr. Clinton, so I guess you won't get lectured very hard. Good-by and good luck, boys!" And Mr. Carey shook hands all around, was followed by Mr. Merrill and the skipper, and at last the train pulled out, the Four waving from the car steps until the crowded platform was a speck in the distance.

"He's a swell fellow," said Dan, as they sought their seats. "And we've got to make him a present or something."

"Good scheme," said Bob heartily. And they talked it over most of the way up to Warder, and finally decided that a silver loving cup with a suitable inscription would be as appropriate as anything they could afford.

"We'll put her name on it too," said Tom.

"Mrs. Carey's?" asked Bob. "You bet we will!"

"Sure!" said Nelson. "I'll never forget that beef broth she fed me!"

They caught the five o'clock launch, as they had planned, and climbed the hill to camp just as the last supper-call was blowing.

"That sounds good," muttered Dan. "It's like getting home."

When they entered Poplar Hall and sought their seats at the tables it was at once evident that the news of yesterday's escapade had preceded them. Such a hand-clapping and cheering as burst forth was quite disconcerting, and Nelson, at whom the most of it was directed, poured milk into his bowl of cereal until it overflowed and ran into his lap. After supper the Four were mobbed and made to give a public recital of events; but long before Bob, to whom the task of

narration fell, had finished they were summoned to the office. After all, it wasn't so bad. Mr. Clinton had some forcible things to say to Dan on the subject of standing up in a canoe during a wind, but after that he demanded the story and became so interested that they began to take courage. And afterward he complimented Nelson and shook hands with him.

"It was a bad business," he said gravely, "but it's happily over with, and there's no use denying that you all acted in a sensible, plucky way. I've had a letter from this Mr. Carey in which he begs me to go easy with you. I don't think I should have been very hard on you anyhow. It was an accident arising from a piece of foolhardiness that none of you are likely to repeat. It will probably be worth all it has cost as a lesson to you. It is a good thing to learn the limitations of a canoe. You'd better get to bed early to-night, all of you, and I'll ask Doctor Smith to have a look at you, Speede, and see if you need any medicine. Good night."

"Good night, sir," they chorused. And outside they heaved sighs of relief.

"I think," said Dan thoughtfully, as they picked their way across the darkening clearing toward Birch Hall, "I think it's about up to us to settle down and be good for a while."

CHAPTER XXI

TELLS HOW THE FOUR LAID PLANS AND HOW BOB PREPARED FOR A VICTORY

 elson awoke the next day to find himself a hero. Being a hero has its discomforts, and Nelson encountered them. The smaller boys dogged his footsteps and were proud and haughty for the rest of the day if they succeeded in getting a word from him. The older boys had less transparent ways of showing their admiration, but show it they did, and Nelson, naturally somewhat shy, suffered much annoyance. This state of things, however, lasted but a few days, for the end of the vacation was almost at hand and the inhabitants of Camp Chicora had many things to occupy their minds. The water sports were almost due and on the next Saturday but one came the final game with Wickasaw, to decide the summer's supremacy in baseball. On the following Monday the long trip began for all save Bob, Nelson, and Dan, who were to return home on that day.

During his three days' absence from camp the nine, minus their captain, had met defeat at the hands of a team from a near-by resort, and Bob regretted the fact and resolved that nothing should deter them from winding up the baseball season with a decisive victory over their particular rival, Camp Wickasaw. With this in view he began morning practise, by which there was a good three hours a day of batting, fielding, and base-running instead of two as heretofore. The preparations for the water carnival interfered

somewhat with the work, for Dan and Joe Carter, as well as a couple of the lesser baseball lights, were to take part in the sports. But Bob put in substitutes from the scrub when necessary and kept at it, having set his heart on final success.

The carnival came on Saturday afternoon and was held in Joy's Cove, on the shore of which Camp Trescott was situated. Chicora, Trescott, and Wickasaw were the contestants, and the audience numbered fully three hundred persons, friends of the boys of the three camps, visitors from neighboring hotels, and residents from near-by towns and villages. Chicora went over in the steam-launch, the motor-dory, the skiffs, and the canoes, after an early dinner, with flags flying. Wickasaw followed them across, and the rival cheers echoed over the lake. Camp Trescott was in holiday attire, the camp colors, green and white, being everywhere displayed. The pier and adjacent shore were thronged with spectators, and many boats floated on the waters of the cove.

The events started off with the four-oared barge race. Only Chicora and Trescott entered. The course was a little under two miles in length and led to a buoy near Evergreen Island and return. Chicora's four got the better of the start, and when the turn was reached they were two lengths to the good. But poor steering around the buoy lost them almost all of that advantage, and the Trescott four were quick to profit. On the return course they overtook Chicora's boat, passed it a few hundred yards from the finish, and crossed the line a good three lengths in the lead. So first honors went to the green and white, and cheers for Camp Trescott awoke the echoes.

Chicora did better in the race for steel boats, her entry, manned by Joe Carter, finishing a hundred feet ahead of the Wickasaw boat, which in turn led the Trescott skiff by many yards.

The fifty-yard swimming race for boys under sixteen brought out a large number of entries, Chicora offering seven of the number. Her hopes rested on "Kid" Rooke. With such a large field there was lots of crowding and splashing at the line, and many a good swimmer was put out of it at the start. Rooke luckily had the forethought to swim under water for the first eight or ten strokes and so avoided some of the youths who, with little hope of winning themselves, were anxious to get in the way of dangerous rivals. It was a pretty contest from start to finish, Rooke fighting it out to the very end with Peterson of Wickasaw and White of Trescott and only winning by an arm's length in fifty seconds. The race over the same course for the elder boys proved a walkover for an eighteen-year-old Wickasaw youth, who never had to hurry, and finished in forty-seven seconds.

In the half-mile event Tom entered for Chicora and found himself opposed to two Wickasaw and three Trescott fellows. The course was laid straight out from the landing to a boat moored off Bass Island. The swimmers were to round the boat and return on the same course. The six contestants lined up on the edge of the landing and at the word from Mr. Powers of the Wickasaw Camp dove head foremost and struck out for the stake-boat.

Tom wasn't much at sprinting, and so when half the distance out had been covered he was several yards behind the leaders. But the pace had been a fast one, and Tom knew

that sooner or later it must slow down. And it did. As the six approached the boat, the leaders, two Trescott fellows, were swimming at ordinary speed and were making hard work of it. They turned homeward first, but after that dropped rapidly behind. A quarter of the way back Tom, still swimming the same stroke he had started with, passed them and pulled himself into third place. Twenty yards farther on he came abreast of the Wickasaw crack; while, still maintaining a good lead, sped the third Trescott entry.

On the landing and along the curving shore of the cove and out on the point scantily attired youths were jumping and shouting encouragement to the swimmers. Cheers for Chicora, for Wickasaw, and for Trescott mingled. A hundred yards from the finish it seemed that Trescott had the race beyond a doubt. But Tom, twenty yards in the rear and well past the Wickasaw rival, still swam steadily, hand over hand, burying his face in the water at every stroke, and putting every ounce of strength into his work. Not quite every ounce, either, for when some eighty yards from the finish his arms began to move just a little faster but not less regularly, and the distance between first and second men slowly lessened. Chicora saw this and her cheers took on a more hopeful note.

If Tom couldn't sprint, at least he had wisely saved something for just such an emergency as this. It wasn't so much that he increased his stroke as that he put more power into it. With fifty yards yet to cover he had cut the twenty yards in half, and he was still gaining. Trescott's cries grew frantic, but her representative failed to respond. He had made a long, hard race, had set the pace all the way from the turn, and had used himself up in striving to beat the Wickasaw swimmer, whom he had believed to be the only dangerous

opponent. And now he had nothing in reserve. The nearer he fought to the finish line the weaker grew his strokes, and Tom, swimming like a piece of machinery, moving arms and legs slowly but powerfully, came abreast of him sixty feet from the line, and without raising his dripping head from the surface or altering his stroke a mite drew steadily away from him and won by ten or twelve feet in the creditable time of seventeen minutes and nineteen and two-fifths seconds. And Chicora laughed and cheered as Dan walked into the water up to his knees and, lifting Tom bodily in his arms, brought him ashore in triumph.

Meanwhile Trescott had won the fifty-yard underwater race and Wickasaw had come in first at the same distance, swimming on the back. Chicora again triumphed in the canoe race for doubles when Carter and Dan drove the former's crimson craft across the finish fifty or sixty feet ahead of the opponents. And again, in the diving contest, Dan excelled. But after that the blue and gray was forced to take second and third places. Trescott won the relay race, the tilting and the fancy swimming contests. Wickasaw won the canoe race for singles and the tub race. As only first places counted, the sports came to an end with the question of supremacy still in doubt, Chicora and Trescott each having won five events and Wickasaw four.

It was dusk by this time, and audience and competitors hurried away for supper, to reassemble at eight o'clock for the fireworks and boat parade. The latter, at least, was well worth seeing. There were over forty boats in line, the Chicora leading, and each was gay with Chinese lanterns and colored fire. In and out across the lake they went, rounding the islands, skirting the shores, and tracing strange patterns

on the dark surface of the water. On the point sky-rockets and bombs sizzed and boomed their way upward in trails of fire, and from the Chicora and the Wickasaw Roman candles spilled their colored stars into the lake.

In Joe Carter's canoe he and Bob paddled along near the end of the parade, while Tom, attired in a hastily improvised costume of Turkey red, impersonated a rather stout Devil and flourished a pitchfork, while at his feet red fire burned in a tin plate and made his round face almost as lurid as his costume. They had lots of fun out of it, but the crowning glory of their enjoyment came when they accidentally ran into a Wickasaw canoe and spilled two boys and a councilor into the lake. They worked heroically at the task of rescue—when their laughter would allow them to—and none of the three unfortunate "Wicks" sustained further damage than a good wetting. After that the fun was tame until, shortly before ten, they reached their landing and the "Devil" slipped on the edge of the wharf and went down to his waist in water and sputtered and stammered as no Devil ever has before or since. Joe said he was sure he heard the water sizzle when Tom struck it.

They took their lanterns up the hill with them, such as were still burning, and hung them about the trees in the clearing so that the place looked like a garden set for an outdoor party. Long after Nelson was in bed and he and Bob had ceased their whispering he could see the mellow lights among the branches. Perhaps that is why, when he did finally fall asleep, he dreamed that Dan was the proprietor of a Chinese laundry next door to the post-office at Crescent and that he (Nelson) had lost his check for a pair of "sneakers" which he had left there to be waterproofed and could not get

them back. To add to his annoyance he was quite certain that the "sneakers" on the counter, in which Dan was growing Chinese lilies, were his. Unfortunately he couldn't prove it, and Dan refused to give them up, offering, however, to share the lilies with him. This offer Nelson indignantly refused, and Dan said:

"Wake up, you lazy dub! Second bugle's blown!"

And Nelson, opening his eyes dazedly, found the sunlight streaming through the window and painting golden silhouettes on the gray blanket, while Dan, attired principally in a bath towel and having got rid of his queue, was impatiently tugging at his arm.

Followed a wild race down the hill, a scramble to the diving platform, and a long plunge into cool green depths. Three dives and it was time to be out, for they had overslept. A brisk rubbing in the tent until the body glowed, a race up-hill that brought them panting and laughing to the dormitory, a hurried dressing and a brief toilet with brushes and comb, and—breakfast! Blueberries and cream, cereal, chops and potatoes, hot muffins, and milk administered to hearty appetites. And so began the last week of camp-life, a week that, like all that had gone before, passed wonderfully quickly and brought the fellows with disconcerting suddenness to Saturday afternoon and the final contest with Wickasaw.

During that last week at Chicora Bob and Nelson and Dan and Tom stuck together like brothers. The realization that in a few days' time they must part with small likelihood of getting together again before next summer, if then, made them anxious to see as much of each other as possible in the

time remaining. Two months is a long time in the life of a boy and in it he can make undying friendships. Whether such had happened in the present case remained to be seen, but certain it is that the Four had grown extremely fond of each other. Tom was quite forlorn over the parting.

"It's all well enough for the rest of you," he said. "You're going home together, and Bob and Nel will have a dandy time at St. Louis. But I've got to go on this beastly trip all alone!"

"You'll have a fine time, Tommy," said Bob consolingly. "And then you'll be going back to Hillton. And you'll have Nel with you there. If any one has a kick seems to me it's me. You three chaps will see each other pretty frequently, but I'll have to dig along all by my lonesome."

"Don't forget your promise to come down for the football game," said Dan.

"I'll come, but I sha'n't know who to cheer for."

"Hillton," said Nelson and Tom in a breath.

"St. Eustace," said Dan.

"I wish we didn't all live so far away from each other," said Tom. "You're away up in Portland, Nel's in Boston, Dan's in New York, and I'm out in Chicago."

"You ought to live in a decent part of the world," answered Dan.

"Cut it out, you two," said Bob. "Don't get started on one of your arguments about New York and Chicago. They're beastly holes, both of 'em. Come to Portland."

This suggestion brought forth three howls of derision.

“Anyway,” said Dan, “I wish we might go to college together.”

“Why can’t we?” asked Nelson. “You fellows all come to Harvard!”

“I couldn’t,” Dan replied. “My dad went to Yale and he’d scalp me if I told him I wanted to enter Harvard.”

“And I’m booked for Chicago,” said Tom mournfully.

“Poor chap,” said Dan commiseratingly. Whereupon Tom flared up.

“It’s a gu-gu-gu-good college, and you know it. Only I-I-I-I’d like to be with you fu-fu-fu-fellows!”

“That’s easy,” said Bob. “You all come with me to Erskine.”

“It’s such a little place,” objected Dan.

“It’s got as much land as Yale, and more too, I guess.”

“I mean there are so few fellows there.”

“Well,” answered Bob thoughtfully, “maybe there aren’t very many people in heaven, but that’s no sign it isn’t a good place to go to!”

“Do you mean,” laughed Dan, “that Yale is—er—the other place?”

“Or Harvard?” asked Nelson in mock anger.

“Or Chicago?” added Tom.

“Well, now, as to Chicago, Tommy,” answered Bob, “you said yourself you were going there, and you know what you were Saturday night!”

After the laughter had subsided they discussed the subject seriously and at length. In the end it was decided that if their parents would consent Nelson, Dan, and Tom were to join Bob at Erskine College three years from the approaching month—examination boards permitting. Incidentally it may be announced that their parents did consent, that examiners did permit, and that their plans succeeded. But that is a story all to itself and has nothing to do with the present narrative.

Mr. Clinton had been called in to aid in the matter of the silver loving-cup for the Careys and had attended to the selection of it on one of his trips to Boston. On Friday it arrived. Lack of funds had prohibited the purchase of anything very elaborate, but the gift was quite worthy of acceptance. It was a plain cup, in shape like a Greek vase, seven inches high. The handles were of ebony, and there was a little ebony stand for it to rest upon. The inscription had caused the Four not a little worry. As finally decided on it read:

To Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Carey
a token of esteem
and gratitude
from
The Four
August 18, 1904

Robert W. Hethington
Nelson E. Tilford

They were hugely pleased with it and kept it a whole day to admire and exhibit. Then it went off by express, and in due time there came a reply which, as the Four had scattered, went from Chicago to Portland, to Boston, to New York, to Chicago, and from there came east again in Tom's trunk to Hillton.

But, lest you make the mistake of thinking that final week a period of laziness, it should be said that the baseball diamond was worn almost bare of grass. Every morning and every afternoon the nine practised in preparation for the Wickasaw game. As for eight of the nine, they didn't feel that life would be ruined even if Wickasaw did beat them. But Bob was of another sort; he had set his heart on winning and would go home feeling that the summer had ended in disgrace if Wickasaw again triumphed; and so the others caught some of the infection from him and labored zealously in the hottest kind of a sun morning and afternoon until Friday. On Friday there was only a half hour's easy work, for Bob had his ideas on the subject of training. That night, about the camp-fire, the prospect was talked over and it was generally agreed that if Wells, who was again to pitch, didn't go up in the air Chicora was pretty certain of victory. That, as events turned out, was a big "if."

CHAPTER XXII

NARRATES THE PROGRESS OF THE CONTEST WITH WICKASAW, AND WITNESSES THE DISINTEGRATION OF ONE WELLS

Tilford, c.f.
Speede, 1b.
Carter, 2b.
Ridley, r.f.
Loom, ss.
Bryant, l.f.
Hethington, c.
Van Roden, 3b.
Wells, p.

 hat's the way the names were written in the score-book by the Official Scorer, Mr. "Babe" Fowler, who sat on a soap-box and looked and felt vastly important. Behind him and about him—sometimes, much to his wrath, interfering with his view of the proceedings—sat and stood the boys of Camp Chicora. Across the plate were the supporters of Wickasaw, while here and there, wherever shade was to be found, were spectators from the Inn, the village, Camp Trescott, and the smaller hotels and boarding-houses around. Behind Bob stood one of the Trescott councilors, Mr. Downer, who was to umpire. Mr. Clinton,

and Mr. Powers of Wickasaw, watched the contest side by side from under the latter's big linen umbrella.

The afternoon was roasting hot, and by mutual consent the beginning of the game had been postponed from three until four. But even now, as Mr. Downer called "Play!" the sun beat down on the meadow in a manner far from pleasant, while not a breeze stirred the leaves along the lake. But the players were too much interested to notice such a small matter, while as for the lookers-on they good-naturedly made the best of conditions, cheered by the knowledge that they could seek launches or rowboats whenever they pleased and speedily find a cooler spot than this low-lying meadow with its encompassing walls of forest. Under a near-by apple-tree Tom and Mr. Verder were fanning their faces and munching the half-ripe apples that lay about them.

"I wonder if Wells will last out," mused Tom. "He's a queer dub. He told me this morning that he couldn't stand hot weather and asked if I thought Bob couldn't have the game postponed."

"Yes, he is a bit funny," answered Mr. Verder. "Well, they're starting. I'm glad we've got our last innings. That's Bremer, one of Wickasaw's councilors, at bat. I used to know him at prep school. He didn't know much about baseball in those days."

"I guess he doesn't know much now," chuckled Tom as Bremer struck at a ball so wide of the plate that Bob disdained to even attempt to stop it. Bremer went out on strikes, the next man popped a tiny fly into short-stop's ready hands, and the third batsman was thrown out at first by Wells.

"No safe hitting there," said Mr. Verder.

"Wonder if there'll be any in this inning?" said Tom.

There wasn't. Nelson struck out ignominiously, Dan failed to reach first ahead of the ball, and Joe Carter sent up a fly that seemed aimed at the third baseman's big mitten. And so things went, with slight variations, until the first half of the fourth. Then Hoyt, the Wickasaw captain and first-baseman, found Wells for a long drive into left field that netted him two bases. Bennett, a councilor and the rival pitcher, followed this with a scratch hit that took him to first and sent Hoyt on to third, and the next man up, although he went out at first, brought in the first tally of the game.

And the score remained 1 to 0 until the last of the sixth. In that inning Chicora developed a batting streak, Dan, Carter, and Ridley each finding Bennett for singles, and the bases were full when Loom sent a long fly into right field. Dan scored, Carter went to third, and Ridley to second. Loom went out. Bryant retired after three strikes, but Bob, who followed him, hit safely for two bases, and the score was 3 to 1. Nothing happened in the seventh, and it looked as though 3 to 1 might be the final figures. But with the beginning of the eighth inning affairs took on a different appearance.

Wickasaw's center-fielder went to bat, waited for a pass to first and got it. Bob called out for the infielders to play for second. As expected, the next man attempted a sacrifice. Had Carter not muffed a good throw from Van Roden all might have been well, but as it was there was a man on second and one on first with none out. Wells looked worried and the coaching across the field added to his discomfiture. The immediate result was that the Wickasaw third-baseman

received the ball on his elbow and trotted to first base. Bob informed the umpire persuasively that the batsman had not tried to avoid being struck, but the umpire couldn't see it that way. Things looked bad for Chicora; the bases were full and not one of the opponents was out.

The next man was Bremer, a councilor, and he should have been an easy victim. But Wells seemed unable to pitch a decent ball, and after four efforts Bremer went down the line and the man on third trotted home amid the wild applause of Wickasaw. Bob walked down to Wells, keeping a close watch on the bases, and strove to put confidence into him.

"Take your time, Wells," he whispered. "There's no hurry."

But Wells had become sullen and stubborn.

"I can't help it," he muttered. "I told you I didn't want to pitch to-day, that I couldn't do anything. The heat——"

"Oh, never mind the heat," answered Bob soothingly. "Just put the balls over; let them hit; we'll attend to them all right."

"That's easy enough to say, but I'm not feeling well," grumbled Wells. "My arm's tired, and it's so hot——"

"Well, try your best, that's a good chap. Get them over the plate; never mind if they hit them."

"All right," answered the pitcher despondently.

The Wickasaw captain found the first ball, but it went up in an infield fly. The next man, too, went out; Loom pulled down his liner head-high and the man on third scurried back to his base. Then came the Wickasaw catcher—and Wells kindly presented him with his base, and again the "Babe"

was forced to score a tally for the enemy. The honors were even now, but the inning was not yet at an end. Wells went thoroughly to pieces. A two-base hit by one of the rival nine's councilors brought in two men and still left second and third bases occupied. Wickasaw's supporters kept up a continuous shouting, hoping doubtless to add to the discomfiture of the Chicora pitcher, while back of first and third bases the Wickasaw coachers screamed and yelled with the same end in view. Naturally enough, Wells's wildness eventually proved contagious, and it was Bob himself who let in the next run, missing a throw to the plate after a hit. But if he was accountable for that tally he was also accountable for the termination of the inning. For he managed to toss the ball, while lying flat on his back, to the plate in time to put out the next ambitious Wickasaw runner. And so the rout finally came to an end with the score 6 to 3 in Wickasaw's favor.

Bob was an anxious-looking youth when the side trotted in and threw themselves about the ground to rest and cool off.

"I don't know what the dickens to do," he said to Dan and Nelson. "There's no use putting Wells in again, even if he'd go, and he says he won't. Little Morris can't pitch on account of his ivy-poisoning. Van Roden has done a little of it, but he can only pitch a straight ball, and it isn't even swift. Who's up, 'Babe'?"

"Ridley up, Loom on deck!" piped the "Babe."

"For goodness' sake, Rid, hit the ball!" called Bob. "We've got to get four runs this inning." And after Ridley had nodded and stepped to the plate Bob went on: "The worst of it is we've got our tail-enders coming up. After

Loom there isn't a man can hit. However—" He turned frowningly to watch Ridley, chewing savagely at the blade of grass between his teeth. Ridley made a safe hit and went to first, and Chicora applauded wildly.

"Joe, coach at first, will you?" Bob called. "You're up, Loom. You know what to do, old chap. We need runs, you know." Then he turned to Dan and Nelson again. "Look here, what do you fellows think? Shall I give Van a chance?"

"No use," answered Dan gloomily. "He's no pitcher. Isn't there any one else?" Bob shook his head.

"Not a soul that I know of. I'll try it myself, if you say so," he said with a feeble effort at humor.

"You cu-cu-cu-couldn't do mu-mu-mu-much worse!" stuttered Tom, who had long since left the shade of the apple-tree and was now hopping around wide-eyed with excitement. "Why du-du-du-don't you mu-mu-make Nel pu-pu-pu-pitch?"

"Can you?" cried Bob.

"No; that is, mighty little, Bob," answered Nelson. "I pitched one season on a class team. But I'm willing to try if you want me to. Only don't expect much; I'll probably be worse than Wells was the last inning."

"Find a ball," said Bob quickly, his face lighting up with hope, "and pitch me a few. Where's my mitten? Say, Nel, why didn't you tell me you could pitch?"

"I can't, not enough to call pitching. I can get a ball over now and then and I used to be able to work a pretty fair drop, but that's about all. You'll have to explain signals to me."

"All right. Say, Van, run over and tell Kendall I want him to play center field, will you? There he is talking to Clint. Scoot!"

There was a yell at that moment, and Bob and Nelson looked up in time to see Loom drive out a pretty liner toward first. He was out without question, but the sacrifice had advanced Ridley to second, and Chicora's little group of cheerers made themselves heard. Bob ran over to speak to Bryant, who was next up, and then came back to Nelson. The signals were quickly explained, and Nelson began throwing into Bob's big mitten, slowly at first, then increasing in speed as something of the knack came back to him. Bryant offered at a close ball, and Ridley, who was ready and waiting, shot out for third. Catcher lost a half a second in getting the ball down, and the umpire waved his hand downward; Ridley was safe. Dan took Bob's place in front of Nelson, and Bob hurried over to Ridley's assistance, relieving Loom on the coacher's line.

Nelson felt some of his old power returning to him and slammed ball after ball into Dan's hands in a way that made that youth grin with approval. Once or twice he essayed a drop with but indifferent success; somehow, he couldn't yet make that work.

Bryant connected with a straight ball over the plate, which, had he allowed it to pass, would have been the third strike, and lit out for first. At the same instant Ridley started for home. But Wickasaw's short-stop smothered the ball on its first bounce and lined it in to the plate. Ridley doubled back, slid for the base, and got there an instant ahead of the ball. Bryant was safe at first. Chicora's shouts were deafening.

The audience had gradually edged toward the infield until now the paths to first and to third were lined with excited partizans of the rival teams. Bob trotted in and selected his bat, pulled his gray cap firmly down on to his head, and went to the plate. Nelson stopped his work to watch. There were two on bases; a home run would tie the score.

CHAPTER XXIII

PROVES THE SCORE-BOOK IN ERROR AND CLOSES THE STORY

s the first ball left the pitcher's hand Bryant trotted along to second, secure in the knowledge that catcher would not throw down there with a man on third. Chicora clamored for a home run. Bob watched the pitcher calmly. The first two balls were wasted, but the next sailed over the corner of the plate and was a strike. Bob refused to offer at the following one, and the umpire indorsed his choice. The score was three and one. It looked as though a base on balls was to be given in order to get Bob out of the way. But, whether that was the pitcher's plan or not, Bob was not satisfied with so easy a victory. When the next delivery came to him he reached out for it, caught it on the end of his bat, and sent it sailing down the line over first-baseman's head.

For a moment it looked like a home run, and the wearers of the blue and gray leaped and shouted. In raced Ridley and Bryant and around the bases flew Bob. Out in right field the ball had fallen untouched to the ground and was now speeding back to second-baseman, who had run out to relay it in. Bob passed second and reached third just as second-baseman turned and threw, and Loom held him there. The score was 6 to 5 and only one man was out.

Van Roden stepped to the plate looking determined. But he had no chance to distinguish himself very greatly, for the

Wickasaw pitcher was pretty well rattled and four successive balls sent him to first at a walk. Kendall, who followed him at bat, was a substitute and owed his position on the team to his fielding rather than his batting ability. But even Kendall managed to connect with the second ball offered him, and might, with speedier running, have beaten it out to first. As it was, he made the second out and Bob's hopes began to fall. Nelson was the next man up and Nelson had all day been unable to bat in anything like his real form. Bob decided that if the score was to be even tied in that inning, risks must be taken. "Two out, run on anything!" was his order, while Wickasaw's catcher reminded his men to "play for the runner!"

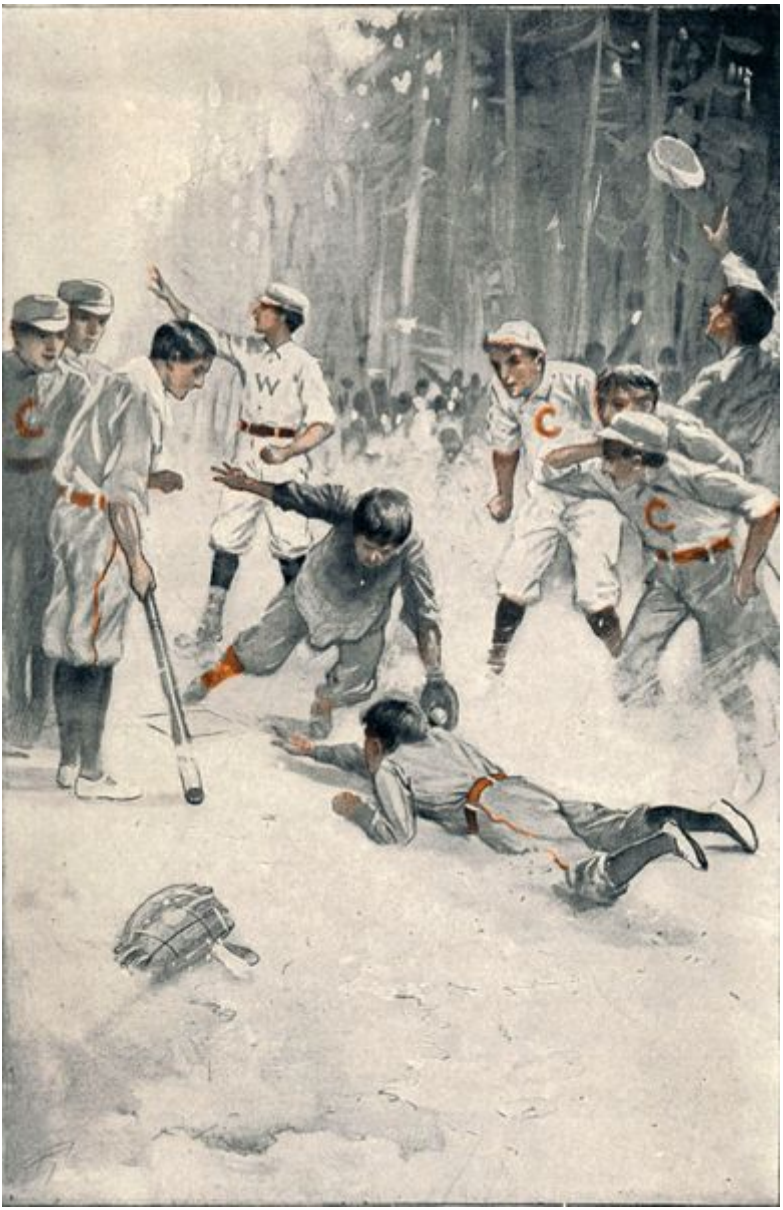
Nelson went to bat resolved to do the very best he knew how, but not at all sanguine of success. The thought that with him probably rested the fate of the nine worried him. To be sure, Chicora might be able to do something in the next and last inning, but that wasn't to be depended upon. The time was now, when, with two runners on bases, a clean hit would put them in the lead.

The first delivery looked such a palpable ball that he let it go by, discovering too late that it was an in-curve and a strike. Van Roden trotted to second and went on to a position half-way between that base and the next. Bob was ten feet away from his bag, on his toes, watching pitcher and catcher intently, ready to be off on the slightest pretext. Another ball went across the plate, and again a strike was scored against poor Nelson, who mentally called himself names and gripped his bat more fiercely. Bob decided that it was now or never. As the catcher, with a glance in his direction, threw the ball

back to the pitcher, Bob started calmly up the line toward the home plate at a walk.

The pitcher was walking back to the box, and for three or four seconds Bob's leave-taking went unnoticed. Then the third-baseman discovered his absence and yelled wildly for the ball. The pitcher, wheeling about, looked here, there, and everywhere save in the right direction, ran a few steps toward second, thought better of it, and finally obeyed the frantic injunctions of half the players to "put it home," although he didn't see why it was necessary, since Bob, who by that time had increased his pace slightly, looked like any of the other gray-and-blue-clad fellows behind him.

But Bob had been watching from the tail of his eye, even if he had seemed so unconcerned, and the instant the pitcher raised his arm to throw he dashed for the plate, now only fifteen feet away. For the last ten feet he was in the air and when he came down and slid across the plate in a cloud of dust he had beaten the ball by just a fraction of a second. He picked himself up, patted the dust from his jersey, and stepped back to where he could watch Nelson, while Chicora went wild with delight, laughed and shrieked and tossed its caps in air. There followed a delay during which Wickasaw strove to find some rule which would nullify that tally. But there is no law prohibiting a runner from becoming a walker if he so pleases, and finally, much disgruntled, Wickasaw went back to the game.



He dashed for the plate.

As may be supposed, Van Roden had not neglected his opportunity, and now he was on third. But his chances of getting any farther seemed very slim as Nelson stepped up to the plate again with two strikes and no balls against him. A

hit would make the score 7 to 6 in Chicora's favor, but he doubted his ability to secure it. The Wickasaw pitcher had suddenly become very deliberate. He eyed Nelson thoughtfully for quite five seconds before he wound himself up, unwound himself, and sped the sphere forward.

"Ball!" said the umpire.

Catcher returned to pitcher. On third Van Roden, coached by Dan, was eager to score, and was taking longer chances than even Bob approved of. As the pitcher poised himself to deliver again Van Roden made a dash up the line. His plan was to rattle both pitcher and catcher and secure a passed ball to score on. But although the pitcher threw wide of the base the Wickasaw captain refused to muff the ball, and Van Roden, sliding head foremost for the plate, felt the ball thump against his shoulder while he was still two feet away. But the crowd was close up to the line, and the umpire, back of pitcher, had not seen it very well. He shook his head and dropped his hand. A howl of angry protest arose from the Wickasaw players who had been near enough to see the out. In a moment Mr. Downer, the center of a wrathful group of players, had called "Time," and was listening patiently to the protests. Van Roden, grinning with delight, climbed to his feet and walked off. Bob, in front of whom the affair had taken place, walked out to the center of the diamond. As soon as he might he gained the umpire's attention.

"Could you see that very well, sir?" he asked.

"Not very, I'll acknowledge, because of the crowd about the base. But it looked to me as though the runner touched base before he was tagged. And that's my decision, boys."

Again the protests arose. Bob raised his hand.

"Just a moment, please," he said. "I was there, Mr. Downer, and saw it——"

"Well, so was I there!" cried the Wickasaw catcher and captain angrily. "I tell you I caught him two feet off base!"

"That's right!" cried the pitcher.

"I was there and saw it," repeated Bob dryly. "The runner was out."

There was an instant of silence during which the Wickasaw players observed the captain of the rival team as though they thought he had gone suddenly insane. Then:

"Their own captain says he was out!" exclaimed the pitcher, turning eagerly to the umpire, "and if he acknowledges it——"

"I'm satisfied," responded Mr. Downer, with a smile. "Out at the plate!"

Almost an hour later Chicora, cheering as though after a victory, steamed home in the launch or trudged back through the woods, while Wickasaw, apparently no less elated, took herself off across the lake to Bear Island. It was almost dark. The game had come to an end after thirteen innings with the score 6 to 6. Time and again Chicora had placed men on bases only to have them left there. For five innings Nelson had held the opponents down to a handful of scratch hits, none of which yielded a score. It had been a hard and well-

fought contest and only darkness had brought it to a close. Although the score-book, sedulously guarded by the "Babe," pronounced the game a tie, yet there were many among those that knew how the eighth inning had ended who credited a victory—and a gorgeous one—to Chicora. Scores do not always tell the whole story.

Two days later, while the sun was just peeping over the hills, Bob, Dan, and Nelson stood on the deck of the Navigation Company's steamer, their trunks on board and their bags beside them. On the landing was assembled Camp Chicora in a body, and well in front, in momentary peril of an involuntary bath, stood Tom, a rather doleful Tom, whose eyes never for an instant left the faces of the three on deck.

The line was cast off, the propeller churned impatiently, and the head of the launch swung toward the foot of the lake, the railroad, and home. The departing ones had been cheered separately and collectively, and as the boat gathered way only a confused medley of shouts and laughter followed them. Only that, do I say? No, for as the boat reached the point and the group on the pier was lost to sight there came a final hail, faint yet distinct:

"Gu-gu-gu-good bu-bu-bu-by!"

THE END

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Transcriber’s Notes:

Except for the frontispiece, illustrations have been moved to the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the illustration may not match the page number in the Illustrations.

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

[The end of *Four in Camp* by Ralph Henry Barbour]