Now I Remember

The Autobiography of Thornton W. Burgess

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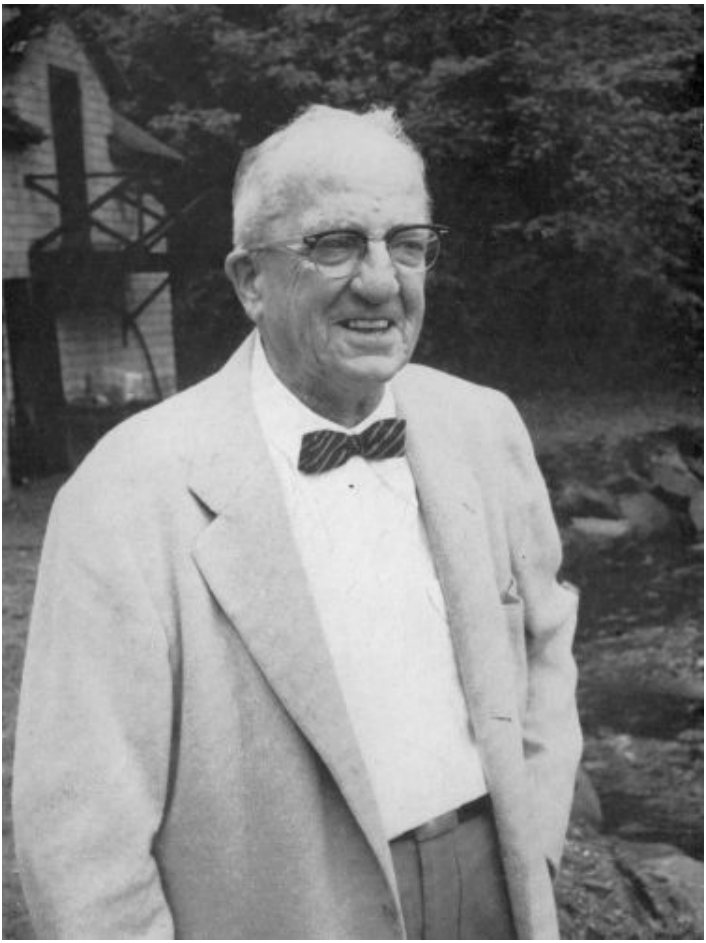

THORNTON W. BURGESS

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Now I Remember

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
AN AMATEUR NATURALIST

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FIRST EDITION

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To the memory of
ALFRED R. McINTYRE
For whose helpful advice
and guidance as my publisher
through many years I am
deeply indebted

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Now I Remember

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Striped Whales

A BIOGRAPHY is a life history as seen by others. An autobiography is a life history seen through the subject's own eyes. The one is written objectively. The other is introspective, lacking in true perspective. This I am writing is neither one nor the other, simply a record and review of things and events that memory brings to the surface now and again, and such part as I feel they have had in molding my life through more than fourscore years. It is simply a record by me, of me, for me, and perhaps of no real interest to anyone but me.

I was born on old Cape Cod on January 14, 1874. To a certain extent man is a reflection of his environment. It exerts an influence on his character and development that he cannot escape. He may not be aware of it. He may scoff at the idea of it. But it is there, working through his subconsciousness all through life. Especially is this true of the environment of his youth. If this has been spent in a fixed locality, say the land of his birth, he is for better or worse as much a product of his native soil as other living things that spring from it. The atmosphere of his surroundings is an intangible but powerful factor in his growth and development.

I am a Cape Codder by birth and by inheritance through a long unbroken line of ancestors back to Thomas Burgess, one of the founders of the oldest town on the Cape, Sandwich. Considerably more than half a century ago I left the Cape, yet in a sense I have never left it. It has been said that Cape Codders by birth rather than by adoption have salt in their hair, sand between their toes, and herring blood in their veins. Of these they never wholly rid themselves, nor do they want to.

Be this as it may, it is true that those who have spent the greater part of their lives far from the Cape return to it at intervals. They must. It is the homing urge of the herring that brooks no denial. They are subject to fits of nostalgia for which there is no known cure. It may be brought on by the high whine of wind around a corner of buildings; by the fierce spate of rain against a window; by the honking of wild geese in the airways above the city. Others may boast of their ancestry but the pride of the born Cape Codder is the land of his birth.

In this there is something elementary, something of pounding surf, of shifting sands, the taste of salt on the lips, the flash of sun on distant dunes, the mingled smells of marsh muck, salt hay, and stranded fish, the mewing of gulls, the whistling of shore birds, the restless rise and fall of the tides, the silvery gleam of fresh waters in emerald settings, the resinous odor of scrub pines. I am sure that no man who was born and grew up on the Cape ever doubts that having created the rest of the world, God made Cape Cod and called it blessed.

It is a land where the wind-whipped sand of the shore bites and stings, the beach grass cuts, and the facts of life are hard; but where the sky is blue, the air is soft, and the harshness of life is tempered by faith—it is where the real and the unreal meet, and the impossible becomes probable. One can believe anything on the Cape, a blessed relief from the doubts and uncertainties of the present-day turmoil of the outer world. If in truth there is a sea serpent, sooner or later it will be cast up on the shores of Cape Cod. If there are mermaids—when I am on the Cape I believe in them devotedly—it is there they will be found. I myself have seen there a red-and-white whale, striped like a barber's pole. And if a striped whale, why not a sea serpent and mermaids? Why not indeed?

In this atmosphere I was born and spent my boyhood. From it I have never wholly escaped. I can still close my eyes and see sea serpents and mermaids and striped whales. Though in my writing I strive not to deviate from the prosaic facts as Mother Nature presents them, I cannot avoid seeing them myself in the enchanted atmosphere in which I made my first field observation and whales became red-and-white for all time. Looking back through the years, I wonder if it was not then that the pattern of my life was set.

It was a Sunday morning in March, 1879. The church bells—Congregational, Methodist and Unitarian—were calling the faithful to worship. But this morning the faithful were few, for the sea also was calling and the voice of the sea was more persuasive than the sweetly solemn tones of the bells. A whale had come ashore on the beach directly opposite the village. Sunday worship was a weekly privilege, but a stranded whale the size of this one was an epochal event.

A day or two before, two whales had been harpooned off Provincetown, which lies many miles straight across the bay from Sandwich. Both had broken away, but were thought to be fatally wounded. They had headed inside the bay. All the fishing hamlets on the inside of the Cape had been alerted to watch for the stricken monsters. One had been sighted off Sandwich. It had grounded on a bar off the beach and the whalers at Provincetown had been notified. I was five years old at the time. With a cousin a year or two older and his grandfather, I went to see the whale, along with most of the village folk.

The way led past the famous old Boston and Sandwich glass works, then across extensive salt marshes cut midway by a wide creek, and rimmed on the outer side by sand dunes. Because these marshes were flooded twice daily by high tides they were—and still are—crossed by a boardwalk raised some four or five feet above the marsh, with no guard rails except over the creek. A stiff wind gathered force as it swept unchecked over a long stretch of lowland and marshes. We small boys clung tightly to the old man's hands lest we be blown off the walk. The latter ended in loose sand behind the barrier dunes. With faces and hands stung by flying sand, breath whipped away in half-fearful gasps by the relentless winds, ears assailed by a meaningless babble of sound from shouting men and clamoring gulls on the other side of the dunes, we struggled up through the yielding sand and coarse razor-edged beach grass to the top of the nearest dune. With startling abruptness a never-to-be-forgotten scene burst upon us.

In the immediate foreground, in the shallows of low tide, was the ocean monster we had come to see. Some distance offshore, sharply etched against the flattened gray-green sea—for the wind was offshore—rode the whaling ship. Boats were plying back and forth between shore and ship, those going out deeply laden while those returning were empty save for their crews.

But it was the huge, bulky mass of the monster in the foreground that challenged and held the wide-eyed gaze of the small boy clinging with one hand to his hat and with the other grasping tightly the elder's hand, catching his breath partly in awe at the strange scene and in part lest it be sucked away by the relentless wind. He was filled with awe and a bit frightened by the unexpected, unfamiliar, overwhelming sight of his first whale—a striped whale, a red-and-white whale. There it lay before his very eyes. I still can see it.

Since that long-ago day of my first field observation I have seen many whales, but in their black or gray drabness none has ever looked as a whale should look. None has ever appeared in what I knew to be the true colors, red-and-white stripes like a barber's pole. Even when I read *Moby Dick*, the whale was the wrong color.

The explanation? It is quite simple as are most explanations of the unfamiliar and the mysterious. The flensing knives of the whalemen already had been at work, exposing the white blubber. Much of this had been cut out in long strips down to the red flesh. It was all as simple as that. Yet, knowing this, whenever I am on the sea and hear the cry "Thar she blows!" I look with a feeling of half-expectation of seeing a living barber's pole. I almost still believe in striped whales. It would not shock my credulity in the least to see one. Not on Cape Cod anyway, for I am still a Cape Codder and vision beyond those not so blessed is my inheritance.

I am convinced that failure on the part of parents, teachers and others having to do with the guidance of the young to appreciate how extremely plastic is the child mind, how deep and lasting are the impressions for good or ill made therein by events and surroundings of daily life, is often at the root of many of the youth problems of today. There are countless striped whales among children everywhere. They are not to be ignored, denied or laughed away.

My first observation in the realm of Nature was completely in error. I found it out long, long ago. Nevertheless, whales never have looked right since. Always there is some gain in error if it leads to finding of truth in the end. It is sometimes pleasant, even helpful, to ignore the hard facts of science and exact knowledge and instead, gazing into the crystal globe of imagination, to see red-and-white whales. Who shall say that we are not the better for so doing?

The records show that that whale was no figment of the imagination. It was a seventy-four-foot Goliath, a sulphur-bottom or blue whale. It came ashore in March, 1879.

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CHAPTER

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When the Herring Ran

It was my very good fortune to be born minus the proverbial silver spoon and to spend my formative years in a lovely small village before the era of too much and too fast. For this I have long been thankful. In those days a penny was regarded with respect, to the unskilled a dime represented a full hour of honest work, and a quarter of a dollar was, to me, a small fortune.

My father died when I was nine months old. Mother and I spent the first few years in the home where she had lived from the time when she was left an orphan at four years of age until she married. An aunt and uncle had taken her in as a daughter, and they were, and in my memory still are, "Grandfather and Grandmother." He was Charles C. P. Waterman. He had come to Sandwich as clerk of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company soon after the factory was started by Deming Jarvis.

As a small, sharp point makes a deeper impression in a soft substance than does a larger, blunt point, so it is that the little things in early life, the unimportant and trivial, often are so impressed in memory that they remain as clear and fresh as yesterday, while events of importance and significance are completely forgotten, or become so blurred by time as to lose all detail.

It is so with my recollections of those very early years. I can still see Grandfather as early one summer morning he led me out to the old russet apple tree back of the house. There from a horizontal limb hung a new swing. And such a swing! What hours of pleasure that swing afforded a small boy and his playmates. It was the best swing in all the neighborhood.

It was Grandfather who tied one end of a string to my first loose tooth, the other end to a doorknob, then suddenly slammed the door shut.

I can see him now sitting at his old desk in the small room opening off the kitchen. It was his den, or perhaps, more properly speaking, his office. In those days dens were solely for the use of wild animals. The scent and feel of spring were in the air as he sat sorting seeds in preparation for planting, at the same time explaining to his small watcher as simply as he could Nature's alchemy whereby those tiny yellow and brown and white and black seeds would be magically transformed into rich red tomatoes, scarlet radishes, big-headed cabbages, yellow jack-o'-lanterns and lovely flowers.

Many, many years later I wrote for a magazine some stories of the "Fairies of Life" sleeping in all the tiny seeds, and how in the warm earth they would be awakened by sweet Mistress Spring to come forth in the sunlight and grow to enrich the earth and feed the hungry. As I wrote I could see Grandfather with his seeds, and the small boy standing by.

The kitchen stove was wood-burning. Although there was a housemaid, Grandfather was always up first to start the fire and in winter to "bring the pump," as priming it was called, declaring these things were not woman's work. At night he always "let the pump off." I suspect that in these effete days of running water and automatic heat few know what "letting the pump off" means. It is tripping or lifting the valve so that water no longer is held in the pump where it would be subject to freezing.

On a wall of the closed-in woodshed opening off the kitchen, hung one above another, were sticks of smoked herring, preferably those smoked by the Mashpee Indians. Each stick held a dozen fish, the stick thrust through the gills. Grandfather would lift the back covers of the stove, lay the fish on top of the oven, and replace the covers. With the draft of the stove open, most of the smell went up the chimney. When the skin had burned off and tails and heads had become charred, the fish were ready to take out, scrape and serve. A Mashpee smoked herring, especially one plump with roe, and good bread and butter—what a breakfast!

Alas, the smoking of herring as in those days is now more or less a lost art. From time to time I hopefully experiment with smoked herring from the market (I am warned to shut the kitchen door when I cook them), but they never taste the same. They do not even smell the same.

The herring has long shared with the codfish the honor, if such it be, of being called "Cape Cod turkey." The Cape herring is really an alewife. Its importance in the Cape's economy in the early days may be judged by one of the early statutes of the town of Sandwich. At that time the town included what is now the town of Bourne. In that part is a small stream known as Herring River. Up this the herring run in great numbers every spring to reach fresh-water ponds for spawning. The right to take the fish for bait for deep-sea fishing was auctioned off each year. The taking of the fish was limited to certain days in the week. On other days no fishing was allowed in order that a sufficient number of fish should reach the spawning beds. It was also provided that each head of a family in the town was entitled to at least a barrel of herring which he could claim from the holder of the fishing rights. Furthermore, it was provided that the Mashpee Indians were given special rights in taking the fish from the waters in their reservation adjoining the town.

In those days the householder rights never were exercised to my knowledge. Herring had long ceased to be sufficiently important as food. They were bought by the stick instead of being claimed by the barrel.

While the herring declined in gastronomic favor the lobster steadily climbed, and how! I still can hear Captain Hoxie's fish horn and see his covered wagon come down the elm-shaded street, a red boiled lobster nailed on the wagon top just above the driver's seat. The good captain had never heard of selling lobsters by the pound, nor had anyone else. What price? Ten cents each for the smaller ones and up to thirty cents each for the bigger ones. It is a nostalgic memory.

In those days tuna were "horse mackerel," the curse of the fish traps because of their great size and destructiveness, good only for fertilizer. No one ever heard of tuna. Even the fish horns are now but a memory, for the market no longer comes to our doors; we go to the market. Some years ago I had need of a fish horn for use on a radio program. It was a long time before by mere chance I found one.

The division of the town of Sandwich occurred when I was a small boy. This event of vital importance to the towns of Sandwich and Bourne left no impression whatever on my memory. I do not even recall hearing the all-important subject discussed by my elders. But I do remember vividly a very minor incident stemming from that division of the town.

Cranberry growing had become a rapidly increasing industry in both towns, and Jerry Muskrat and his cohorts had become a growing menace to the industry. The dikes built for flooding the bogs when the crops were threatened by early frost were much to the liking of Jerry and his family. They tunneled their homes in them. This weakened the dikes so that now and then one failed to hold back the water. In both towns the matter was discussed in town meetings, the two meetings occurring on the same day. Sandwich voted to place a bounty of twenty-five cents each on all muskrat tails presented to the town clerk. This in no way injured the skins, so the trappers could still get the market price for their pelts. At the town meeting in Bourne it was voted to offer a like bounty on the nose of each muskrat. Now Cape Cod is a part of Yankeeland and I have never heard that its sons are lacking in Yankee acumen and thrift. The astute boy trappers of the two towns got together secretly and exchanged tails for noses. Double bounty in addition to the price of the fur made trapping really profitable.

I suppose it was inevitable that there should be a leak. The town fathers in both towns learned what was going on, but they failed to get together. At the next town meeting Sandwich voted to offer the bounty on the noses and Bourne voted to put it on the tails. We boys were still in the money.

This reminds me of another incident, for the truth of which I cannot vouch, but which I had no reason to doubt when it came to me by boyhood grapevine. The town house in Sandwich was, and still is, beside the beginning of a stream which is the outlet of a pretty body of water called Shawme Lake. In my day it was the Mill Pond. A sharp-eyed laddie discovered that the windows of the town clerk's office opened above this stream and the town clerk, having paid the bounty on the tails, got rid of them by tossing them out of the window. Presumably he thought they would be carried away by the running water. However, he couldn't, or didn't, toss them far enough. They fell just short of the water. So they were discreetly salvaged and subsequently once more redeemed by the unsuspecting, co-operative town clerk. I have always felt that boyhood has certain very real and sometimes very peculiar advantages in a small country town.

So in the small mind of the child things of no consequence are impressed and permanently retained. Or is it that down the long vista of the years I am looking through the wrong end of the telescope and what now seems to be trivial was, through childish eyes, of vast and supreme importance and so registered deeply? I remember as it were yesterday my first robin's nest, a small boy climbing a Sweet William apple tree, taking out a blue egg from a nest to show a beloved aunt standing below and—dropping the egg. It was in a hole in the trunk of a neighboring tree that I first found a nest of the tree swallow. I can see it now as I saw it then, and the small white eggs that I counted by feeling. There were four. Since then I have found many nests of this bird, but I remember none.

It was that same aunt of the robin's egg tragedy who gave me the first real storybook I can remember. It was *Aim, Fire, Bang Stories*, really my introduction to the

four-footed and feathered folk of the Green Forest. They were true stories and I loved them for that. Fairy tales had little appeal to me. When a new story was read to me I invariably asked if it was a true story. When I learned that my aunt was personally acquainted with the author of that book I looked on her with awe little short of reverence.

In those days there were no pernicious "comics," so-called. There was the famous *Saint Nicholas* magazine for which many years later I was to write a series of stories to run through a full year and later to appear between covers as *Tommy and the Wishing Stone*. There was a competing magazine called the *Wide Awake*, and there was the *Youth's Companion* of blessed memory. Long since all three stopped their presses and closed their doors, to childhood's irreparable loss.

Yearly in October one issue of the *Companion* was devoted to a list of premiums offered for new subscriptions. It came in a reddish cover. The hours I pored over that wonderful list! Usually I secured one or two subscribers, therewith gaining a Christmas gift for Mother—a silver soup ladle, a pretty bit of tableware.

But one year I got something for myself, a long-wanted bow gun. It was before the days of the destructive air rifle. The propelling force was provided by stout rubber bands. It was the slingshot adapted to the crossbow wooden gun. Proudly I sallied forth to hunt. I shot a chickadee. Poor little Tommy Tit! I still see him held out in a grimy hand for Mother to look at, the mighty hunter flushed with pride at this proof of his marksmanship, while tears slowly welled from his eyes because Tommy's bright little eyes were dimmed forever, his cheery voice still, and his busy little wings quiet. How typical of daily life that incident was.

I think even then I loved the chickadee and that is why tears washed away pride. Today I love this little bird above all others. Through the years I have sought to expiate that tragic shot of long ago by striving to teach children to love and protect our feathered friends and those in fur. The living thing is a source of constant pleasure and interest. Both end with the death of the subject.

It took me a long time to learn this. As I grew older I loved to hunt. I devoured hunting and fishing stories. I was afield in woods or on the marshes at every opportunity, usually alone. Studying the wild things and their ways that I might better outwit and kill them, I was with complete unawareness laying the foundations for my lifework, which began happily when I put away the gun for camera and typewriter.

As it were but yesterday I remember the catching of my first big fish. It really wasn't very big except in the eyes of a small boy. It was a pickerel, a monster of perhaps two pounds. I was with a cousin a year and a half my senior and my looked-up-to and trusted guide in all such matters as concern small boys. The water of the Mill Pond was smooth and clear. In plain sight a little way out lay the big pickerel. In vain Billy dangled a worm-baited hook at the very nose of the big fish. Either it was completely ignored or the fish scornfully backed away just a little, a teasing, tantalizing, provoking little.

Then I discovered a small pickerel, perhaps five inches long, close to the wharf. This one snapped at my offering and was well hooked. I was for securing my prize and rebaiting, but Billy, after making sure that the hook was well set, suggested that I drop

the fish back in the water and watch it swim around. So I tossed the little pickerel out and it landed right in front of the big one. Wham! Splash! The monster was a cannibal! Instead of one fish I now had two on the hook! The alder stick which was my rod was almost jerked from my hands. That fish was twice as big in my gloating eyes as it was in actual weight.

Another memory is of standing in front of Grandfather's house and watching the famous one-man express passing through the village on the way from the lower Cape to Boston. In memory I can still see the lone, dusty figure marching in the middle of the elm-shaded street, disdainful of sidewalks, a placard GOULD'S EXPRESS across his chest.

He was Barney Gould, now almost a legendary character, who for an absurdly small sum would carry a message or small package to any destination between the Cape and Boston. He is reputed to have once bet a sea captain about to sail around the Horn to California that he, Barney, would get there across country first, and did, being on hand at the dock in San Francisco to greet the captain when he sailed through the Golden Gate. Be this true or not, I find some pleasure and satisfaction in having seen "Gould's Express," and knowing that this famous character really lived.

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CHAPTER

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Growing Up

MOTHER and I left grandfather's home when I was about six years old. Shortly before this an early attempt to dig the Cape Cod Canal was made. Several hundred Italian laborers were brought to Sandwich to dig the canal with shovels. The townspeople were mostly of fine old Yankee and Irish-American stock; the good-natured sons of sunny Italy were needlessly looked on with suspicion and distrust. Brass chains that would permit the opening of a door only wide enough for a cautious survey of the outside before permitting a guest inside appeared on some doors. This was especially true in some of the better homes.

It was for but a short time. Then the laborers shouldered their shovels and departed for parts unknown where the dollars came more frequently and more regularly. Thus ended this attempt to dig the Cape Cod Canal.

The next attempt was also made during my boyhood. A multiple bucket dredge was towed down from East Boston, and majestically ate its way from Cape Cod Bay through the beach and sand dunes into the Sagamore marshes. Slowly it gnawed ahead, the buckets on an endless chain, each one cutting off a slice of marsh muck to drop into the bucket below. By water pressure this was then spewed out at a distance on the marsh through a big pipeline that had to be moved ahead with the dredge.

By the time the dredge had dug inland for something less than a mile old Neptune had land-locked it with a solid beach, and wind and waves were well on the way to raising a sand dune of the most approved Cape Cod type where the entrance to the canal had been. It was a lovely and most effective gesture of defiance and contempt.

I caught many smelt from the stern of that dredge while it was in operation. Ultimately the marsh gave it indigestion, the financial remedy was insufficient, and so ended another attempt to dig the canal. It was long after I left the Cape that this important waterway was finally completed. Now instead of smelt huge striped bass are the lure of the fishermen in those waters.

Mother was not strong at the time, a semi-invalid. But somehow, with some help from my paternal grandparents, she managed to support us. At an early age I learned to look on both sides of a penny. I made such small contributions to our support as a healthy, willing small boy in a country village might earn. From the time I was ten years old I managed to earn enough to buy most of my own clothes.

Mother made candy and I peddled it from house to house and in the glass works. Now and then there was an errand to be run for a nickel or possibly a dime. Sometimes in winter there was snow to shovel. In the spring came the dandelion greens, which I dug and sold. In summer it was blueberries, most bountiful where forest fires had

burned two years before. These were the low bush berries. It was a matter of pride to get the first berries of the season, possibly a couple of quarts for a long morning's search. But they brought a small fortune, all of twenty-five cents per quart. This price held for no more than a day or two. Then the decline in price was rapid until the low of eight cents per quart for shipment to Boston.

Sometimes I had company. More often I went alone. Frequently I was afield a mile or two from town shortly after daybreak. I think it was then and on lone quests for arbutus in the early spring that my love for Nature was aroused and nurtured.

The arbutus came in April, loveliest blossoms of the spring, Nature's fulfillment of autumn's pledge of vernal awakening. I knew where grew the largest clusters and the pinkest blossoms with the longest stems. There always was a ready market for them. They were my favorite flowers and still are. A whiff of their fragrance unlocks a store of precious memories. Today the arbutus is protected as it should be and I am glad.

One winter day, January 7 to be exact—I remember the date because it was my chum's birthday—wandering afield with him, we found at the edge of a patch of snow on a bank beside an old wood road a lone arbutus plant. There in the midst of the dark green and the brown dead leaves was a spray of full-blown blossoms. It seemed then, and still seems, incredible. But there they lay as lovely and as delicately scented as if they were indeed the heralds of spring. What a birthday gift from the giver of all living things!

The following year, remembering that brave challenge to the season of bitter cold, I looked for and found in midwinter that same sturdy plant. There were no open blossoms, but two or three faded ones still clung to the stems. Often I have wondered what science might have done with that sturdy plant in developing a new strain of extra-early-blooming arbutus. The fact that it had blossomed in January in successive years, although in neither year had there been an unreasonable period of warm weather, indicated to me that this tendency to out-of-season flowering was inherent in the plant and not the result of local external conditions.

The location was not even sheltered. The plant was a freak. Or was it? Let us say that it possessed characteristics that gave it distinctive individuality. Long since, I discovered individuality may be, and is, found in most living things, including plants. It is from outstanding individuals that adaptation to changed conditions develops to the end that perpetuation and betterment of the race may be insured.

Sometimes when I watch thunderheads of a summer's day and hear the muttering of the threatening storm, a sort of mental television picture is flashed on memory's screen. I see a lone small boy picking berries in Great Hollow, hurrying to fill his pail before a threatening storm broke. He didn't like thunderstorms. Anxiously he watched the ugly threat in the darkening sky. With about four quarts of berries in his pail he began to run for the nearest house, perhaps a mile away.

The storm broke. The rain began in big drops. It became a wind-driven deluge. Panting, wet to the skin, his stockings coming down, still clinging to his pail and careful not to spill his precious berries, he stumbled out of the woods. When midway across a brush-grown old pasture there came a blinding flash of lightning and a terrific

crash of thunder, as if the sky itself had been split open. A terrified small boy fell flat, his pail rolling away, his berries a total loss. I never have enjoyed thunderstorms since.

That was a freak storm. There was but one bolt of lightning. It was forked, one tine hitting the famous, beautiful "Christopher Wren" spire of the Congregational Church, while the other straddled the village and ripped a great gap in one of the huge chimneys of the glass works.

I have another mental picture of that same small boy in another thunderstorm. From early colonial times until comparatively recent years Sandwich had a great public pasture bordering the sea near the present entrance to the Canal. Perhaps "co-operative" would be the more correct term, for this pasture was owned in shares based on the number of cows to be pastured there. From spring until fall village folk with one or two cows, and others on the edge of the village with small herds but no immediately available pastures, drove their cows to Town Neck, as the big pasture was called.

At four o'clock every afternoon the gate was opened, and the cows always gathered there to be let out. Owners, or those working for them, were supposed to be on hand to cut out their animals from the herd and drive them home. I was then driving two small herds from adjoining farms on the edge of the town. There were eight to a dozen cows. The distance was something over a mile. I drove them to the Neck shortly after six o'clock in the morning. At four o'clock in the afternoon I was at the gate to drive them home. The job netted me seventy-five cents a week to add to the home income.

On this still well-remembered day I was on hand at the gate when it was opened. But when I had cut out my small herd one of my cows was missing. There was nothing for me to do but drive the others home, then trudge back to look for the missing one. A tempest was brewing. I didn't like thunderstorms. In short, I was afraid. It didn't occur to me to turn back on this account. The rain fell, the lightning flashed, the thunder roared and crashed, and a small boy plodded on, wet to the skin, muddy and scared.

Town Neck was a vast, lonely place with patches of brush, swampy places, and two or three small ponds. Under the stormy sky it was dismal and gloomy. The dull booming of the surf beyond the dunes and the wild screaming of the gulls riding the storm added eeriness to the surroundings. I doubt that a more badly frightened boy ever slipped through a pasture gate.

Then as I topped a rise of ground the storm ended abruptly. The sun broke through and there against the retreating clouds a wonderful rainbow arched the sky from horizon to horizon. Framed in a break between distant sand dunes was a bit of blue ocean with blue sky above, and centered in the far distance the white sails of a ship caught the slanting rays of the sun.

The volatile spirits of a boy leaped as only a boy's spirits can. I shouted as I ran, beating the patches of brush, until at last I found the missing cow lying behind some bushes. Beside her was a newly born calf.

"So that's it, you old fool!" I shouted, but I suspect there was gentleness and perhaps something of wonder in my voice as I looked down on the helpless calf.

Then happily I trudged back to get the farmer with horse and wagon to take home the calf and lead the cow. Supper was late that night, but a happy one as I told Mother all about the adventure. A boy did a lot for seventy-five cents in those days.

It was on that same seventy-five-cent job that stark tragedy once occurred. Shortly before reaching Town Neck, the highway turned sharply at right angles and ran parallel to the railroad for a short distance to where the road to the Neck gate turned off and crossed the railroad. One morning I had reached the highway turn and my cows were slowly moving along parallel to the railroad. I heard the Boston-bound morning freight whistle. A girl had just pastured her cows and was at the crossing on her way home. I yelled to her to head off my cows. She did and they began browsing on both sides of the road while we waited for the train to pass.

At that point the railroad was on an embankment quite a bit above the level of the road. A rail fence separated the railroad right of way from the highway. Brush had grown up high on both sides of the fence so that it was hidden from my view. Idly I waited for the freight to pass. I was rudely startled by a sharp blast from the engine whistle. I looked up to see one of my cows just topping the railroad embankment. She had forced her way through the bushes screening the fence, found it down, and gone through the gap.

Instead of turning back, she started along the middle of the track, galloping in clumsy cow fashion, her arched tail held high, the iron monster at her heels with tooting whistle and clanging bell, the cars clattering and banging into each other as the brakes took hold.

All that cow had to do was jump off the track. She didn't. She was feminine. She wanted to reach the crossing and she meant to. She was terror-stricken, but her mind was set. She did reach the crossing. Alas, despite the engineer's efforts to prevent it, the engine reached her at the same instant. Even as she made a frantic leap off to one side the engine hit her hind legs and threw her high in the air. Both legs were broken.

The girl at the crossing took the rest of my cows to the Neck, and a shocked and desperately frightened boy, fearful that he would be blamed and might have to pay for the cow, turned back to tell the owner of the disaster. On the way he stopped at the home of the town's pig killer. If a man was a pig killer he probably would be willing to be a cow killer, and that cow with two broken legs had to be killed.

I had misjudged the owner of the cow. Instead of the anger and blame I feared and dreaded even though I knew I was blameless, I received only comforting words from an understanding and kindly man as we drove back to the scene of the disaster. Believe it or not, by the time we got there the fence was up. A section gang, whose negligence was the cause of the accident, had been at work not far away. Too late they had made haste to restore the fence.

The railroad did not protest the bill for damages and paid in full. Then my kindhearted employer, who had had the cow dressed out and properly hung, offered me a roast of beef and some choice steaks. Mother and I talked it over. It was seldom that we could afford beefsteak. It always was a treat. But this wasn't beef. It was my cow. When you daily drive cows to and from pasture they are *your* cows, regardless of who

owns them. We couldn't possibly eat a mouthful of *my* cow. We agreed on that. So we didn't. We were appreciatively grateful, but we just couldn't accept the offer. The owner of the cow understood.

So it was that through two cows, the missing one on Town Neck and the one killed at the railroad crossing, I learned the meaning of responsibility.

In addition to driving cows I added to the weekly income by delivering milk on a short route. In a child's express wagon I dragged the cans of milk from door to door, measuring it out in a quart measure to pour into a receptacle at each place. It was not pasteurized; it was not homogenized. It sold at five cents a quart. Eggs then were sometimes down to twelve cents a dozen.

Another source of income in summer was the delivery of mail and telegrams to a man living on the outskirts of the village who was a pioneer grower of pink pond lilies. From the post office to his place was about one and a half miles. There he had a series of small artificial ponds fed by a stream of spring water from which I took many a pink-fleshed trout. I wonder if any are there now.

The middle of each small pond could be reached with a long slender pole having a knife blade set at an angle at one end for cutting under water lily stems of sufficient length. The mature buds just ready to break open were cut, graded and packed in damp sphagnum moss. They were shipped to florists and private trade all over the country. Roots were also sold. As there was no telephone I was paid fifteen cents for taking Mr. Chipman his mail and telegrams. Usually I made but one trip a day, occasionally two. A round trip was about three miles.

When I was about twelve years old Mr. Chipman became worried by small snails eating the lily leaves, or pads as they are commonly called. He had an idea that striped perch would eat the snails. Now I am not a businessman—far, far from it. But I am a Yankee. It shows briefly at intervals. It did then. With my chum I contracted to deliver at the ponds three hundred live striped perch at three cents each, a total of nine dollars. Four and a half dollars each—a bonanza! And it wouldn't be work. It would be fun, for both of us loved to fish.

The Mill Pond (now Shawme Lake), the lower end of which comes down into the village, is connected at the upper end with another and deeper body of water called the Upper Pond. This teemed with small striped perch. We had a boat on each pond.

Our plans were carefully laid. At the lower end of the Mill Pond we placed two wheelbarrows with the sides removed. On each was an old-fashioned blue wooden washtub. Blue is, or was, the standard color on the Cape for washtubs, wheelbarrows, wagons and window shutters, the latter always called blinds. We borrowed the tubs from our mothers.

We rowed up to the head of the Mill Pond, crossed over a dam to the Upper Pond, and in another boat rowed to a place where perch usually were plentiful. They were there waiting for us and they were hungry. We used short poles with short lines and small hooks that could not injure the fish. To the stern of the boat we had tied a large vegetable crate made of laths. In the top at one end was a small trap door. The spaces

between the laths were not wide enough for the fish to escape but allowed free circulation of water. The crate floated submerged.

The perch were co-operative. They bit as fast as we could bait the hooks. It was exciting. It was fun. It didn't take long to fill our improvised fish container. We towed it to the place where we would carry it over the dam to the lower pond.

Each grasping a lath at one end of the crate, we lifted it between us from the water and with our frantically flapping load started to run as fast as we could to get the fish into the water again as soon as possible. Midway over the carry, a lath pulled free at one end and the crate fell, banging and scraping bare shins painfully. But those were not to be thought of then. There was no time for that. Flapping on the ground on all sides were gasping perch at three cents each.

Have you ever tried to pick up a flapping striped perch, let alone a couple of dozen of them? If you ever must do this I urgently advise you to first put on gloves. A striped perch has a dorsal fin which at such a time it most inconsiderately insists on raising and keeping raised. On it are needle-sharp spines set to meet the hands of the grabber whichever way he grabs.

With hands much the worse for mercenary greed we got the fish back into the crate before more than three or four had flopped from the profit column over to the loss column. Then, rowing with sore and smarting hands, we towed the crate the length of the Mill Pond to the waiting tubs. Hastily we filled the tubs two-thirds full of water and in each put twenty-five or thirty fish. Then we started for the lily ponds a mile and a half away and for three cents each for those fish.

Never again did I ever try to push a wheelbarrow on which was an old-fashioned washtub two-thirds full of water. It was midsummer and a scorching hot day. The loads were heavy. Our hands were sore. Almost at once we began to learn things we hadn't known about fish. We learned fast. We had known how to catch fish, but not until that day, as wet with perspiration as were the fish with water, with aching muscles and growing anxiety, did we learn that a fish must have oxygen just as we must, and there isn't enough of it in a tub of warm water for more than two or three fish at a time. With more than that all soon die.

There was too much water to wheel and not enough water for the fish. One turned his white belly with its pretty red anal fins up to the pitiless sun. Three cents gone! We tried harder than ever to hurry. The water slopped out of the tubs. The perch came to the surface gasping. Anyway they looked as if they were gasping. We hurried and sweated and ached and worried. More and more fish turned belly up.

The wheels squeaked, the water slopped, the fish died, but we got there at last. Half a dozen fish were still alive. We divided eighteen cents, then pushed the wheelbarrows with the empty tubs a mile and a half home.

But the live perch contract was not without profit. Far from it. We gained much in nature lore. We learned that catching fish is not all the reward of fishing, and many, many years later I collected the full contract price of nine dollars with interest many times compounded. I sold the story of the contract to a magazine for fifty dollars.

In the fall there were beach plums and wild grapes to gather and find a market for. In September and October came the cranberries. In those days we “picked” cranberries. Later they were “scooped.” In those days the scoop and rake were outlawed. It was a job for nimble fingers. Cape Cod cranberries were held by growers to be too high-grade to be touched by aught but human hands. Scoop and rake finally were no longer taboo, and now even these have given way to the machine.

I confess to a wave of nostalgia every time I see the crimson dish of cranberry sauce flanking the Thanksgiving turkey. I see again the bog lined off in rows by means of white cord, the kneeling figures, the girls and women sunbonneted and the men and boys for the most part in old trousers and flannel shirts. At the starting point at one end of each row was a crate. Each picker had a six-quart ringed pail called a “measure.” Each ring measured a quart. The pay for picking was ten cents per measure where the picking was good, and sometimes twelve cents where it was poor.

As a rule a low round pan, perhaps a milk pan, that could be held between the spread knees and over the edge of which the wiry vines could be pulled by the cupped hands filled with berries, was used. Then the vines were quickly spread and the few berries that had fallen on the ground were picked up. The picker hitched forward a knee’s length and again the cupped hands scooped in the berries. When the pan was filled the berries were transferred to the measure and when this was full it was emptied into the crate at the end of the row and there checked by the foreman. It often was good for a few extra cents to not quite fill the measure to the brim, letting it stand for the berries to settle while again filling the picking pan. Then a know-how toss of the measure before taking it to be checked would fill the pail to the brim and even more.

School did not open until October because at just that period cranberries were more important than the three R’s. Whole families went cranberrying. While fingers were busy tongues were busy too, and village news became cranberry gossip. Some bogs were not far back of the beach sand dunes, and the bracing air was salt on the lips. Some were in deep woods near the shores of ponds that in the years since have matriculated into the dignity of lakes.

Oh, those picnic lunches at the nooning while backs straightened and fingers relaxed! Mother made cold roast pork sandwiches of homemade bread and slices of chicken-tender meat from the sweetest pigs that ever grunted, and there was plenty to satisfy the cranberry bog appetite of a hungry boy. There was the spice of good stories and old-time familiar songs. Then the tally at the end of the picking and the long walk or ride home, sometimes a matter of several miles, a jarring ride on boards put across the sides of a blue truck wagon drawn by a plodding horse or a span that sometimes plodded and sometimes hurried with a jolting trot.

Cranberry picking was hard on the hands. We boys used shoemaker’s wax to protect the quick or base of each fingernail. Girls often wore gloves. But even though they beat us picking, we boys scorned the gloves. Cranberries on the Cape are a bigger and more important crop than ever, but no longer are they “picked” and all the romance and social life of long-ago days have been “scooped” away.

In the Christmas season I took orders for Christmas cards, canvassing the village homes, and sold Mother's candy. Mother had a reputation for her delicious candy. Even old Bruce, a neighbor's pointer dog, appreciated that candy. One day he slipped in the back room where Mother had left on the table a batch of molasses candy to cool sufficiently to be pulled. It was not hot enough to burn and Bruce took the whole batch into his eager jaws. It had stiffened enough to be chewy and to stick to the teeth. The old dog got more than he had bargained for. There was far, far too much to be swallowed and he couldn't let go of it. It was an open question whether Bruce had possession of the candy or the candy had possession of the dog. The odds were in favor of the candy. His jaws were stuck together and he struggled in vain to get them unstuck. On his face despair struggled with chagrin. That batch of candy was a dead loss to all concerned, but Bruce never again tried to turn thief.

Let no one scorn those halcyon days because we had no radio, no television. The phonograph was still in its infancy, the automobile a crazy man's dream, and the mere idea of man's flying was the folly of a fool. I still am glad I grew up in those benighted days.

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CHAPTER

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A Touch of Nostalgia

SELDOM is there progress without some loss, loss with the finality of completeness. I am acutely aware of this when looking back to boyhood days. I wonder if age of the future will look back to youth of the present with any such sense of something missing, or if it may be that life today is at too great a pace for anything that may drop from it to be missed.

Progress involves change. Cape Cod of today is progressive. Who would have it otherwise? The Cape is changed and is still changing. In terms of modern living it has changed for the better, but not without some loss. It is from such losses that stems the nostalgia we of a passing generation feel from time to time. In a single day the splendid highways of the present unroll to the speeding visitor the map of the entire Cape. But it is a pictorial map, nothing more. He has had only a bird's-eye view, seeing too much and too little. Certainly he has seen the Cape, but only as the gull, crossing it in search of more productive fishing waters, sees it. He has *seen* but does not *know* the Cape, its quiet hidden charms, the true way of life of its chosen people.

The sandy, rutted road and the horse and buggy are gone, but in their day there was time to see, to feel and to understand. In these days of too much too fast and too easy, I sometimes wonder if the compensations equal the all too often unnoted losses.

I love the Cape that is, but I think I love more the Cape that was. Among other things, I miss the bells of yesterday. Their communal tongues are stilled. This is not peculiar to the Cape, but somehow I am most conscious of the loss when I visit my old home town there. In the village of Sandwich were four churches: Methodist, Congregational, Unitarian and Catholic, each with a bell. The first three called to worship at the same hours on the Sabbath and in tones as distinctive as the denominations they represented. Each could be heard throughout the village and far into the surrounding country. Ringing at the same hours but not in unison, each called to its faithful own in subtly varied tones as befitted the day of rest and worship; not too fast lest an unseemly note of merriment creep in; not too slow lest it seem the voice of sorrow and mourning. Through long service the bell ringers had mastered the art of giving life and speech to the brazen tongues in the belfries high above them.

At other times those same bells swung furiously, clanging tongues flinging far and wide the alarm and call for help, as when an old lady had wandered into the woods and was lost, or when forest fires threatened the village and there was need of every able-bodied man and boy to fight the red terror. Again in joyous celebration those very bells pealed in wild jubilance and merriment. How differently they spoke in the hour of sorrow and mourning. I can still feel the sense of national disaster that swept over a

small boy listening to the solemn tones as they tolled for the death of President Garfield.

At seven o'clock every morning of the week but Sunday the bell on the Boston and Sandwich glass factory called most of the men of the town to work, and again at one o'clock after the dinner hour. At that period a day's work was ten hours and no one thought this more than fair for a day's wage.

Each morning of the school year at eight-forty-five the bell on the high school building on the hill above the lake warned reluctant feet they had just fifteen minutes wherein to avoid the black mark of tardiness. Outside the village in the little schoolhouse beside the road, long since a "ragged beggar sunning," the teacher's hand bell called us from the playground. At railroad crossings the bell on the approaching locomotive clanged a warning to "look out for the engine."

In winter sleigh bells filled the frosty air with jingled merriment. Even indoors daily life answered more or less to the dictum of bells. There were few electric bells. Doorbells carried honest tongues that in response to a pulled wire jangled an announcement of the waiting guest. It was not musical but never was it doubtful. In homes of modest affluence where a maid was employed she was summoned to wait on guests at the table by the silvery notes of a bell, often of the now coveted Sandwich glass. Some of these table bells were beautifully etched or engraved, and some were of the now priceless ruby glass.

Once each year the village boys had an outlaw claim on the church bells. The annual rebirth of the glorious Fourth of July was announced and saluted at midnight if possible, or as soon after as the more daring could outwit a church sexton and get their hands on the bell rope, or if need be climb to the belfry and there draw the rope up out of reach of restraining hands.

No more do the bells have authority or even take part in the communal life of the village. In 1884 the factory bell called the glassmakers to work for the last time. The glass works is but a memory to the townsfolk today, not even that to the younger generation. The three Protestant churches have united in one house of worship, to the financial benefit of the worshipers and especially of the one minister now needed, and two bells have been silenced with the loss of denominational individuality. The town schools have been consolidated in a fine, thoroughly modern schoolhouse. The high school bell is silent, the schoolhouse's as well. Today the children are *sent* instead of *called* to school. Pull doorbells have given way to knockers or chimes or press-button electric bells. The buzzer has replaced the table bell.

What has happened in my old home town is equally true in most other communities. They have lost their communal tongues. Something sweet, something precious and in no small degree important has disappeared or is disappearing from American life. If in the soft warm dusk on an evening in June you ever have listened to a village church bell in concert with the exquisite song of the hermit thrush or the wood thrush, and felt the spirit of rest and peace and tranquillity which they invoke, you will understand what I mean. Today there are few bells of any kind save possibly in the country—perhaps now and then a cowbell betraying a wanderer from the herd, or at the seashore the mournful, depressing moan of a bell buoy telling what has happened and may happen again in the fogbound restless sea.

The union of the churches and the consolidation of the schools were wise progressive measures, I know, but the bells are gone. For that matter, so are the schoolhouses of my boyhood. The modern building of the consolidated schools overlooks a cove of the onetime Mill Pond, now a lake, where with pole cut from nearby alders, a line tied to the tip of it, and an honest-to-goodness fishhook instead of the proverbial bent pin, I caught my first fish. It was a small striped perch, the sweetest fish I ever have tasted.

Near this place where the fish was caught was a spring of clear cold water. When I was in the primary school (grades were not known then) it was in a building perhaps two city blocks from the present school building. Daily in good weather two of us boys would be sent to get a pail of drinking water from that spring. It was there that I first became acquainted with Redwing the Blackbird and learned that the flower-bearing part of the sweet flag we called the kernel—why, I don't know—was good to eat, quite as good as the tender heart of the plant to a boy who knew the right stage in which to pick the kernels. I wonder if the spring is still there. I wonder too what the children using the bubbling drinking fountain in that fine school building would think if they were suddenly forced to take turns bringing all their drinking water from such a distance and then making common use of a tin drinking cup.

Some years ago the third-graders of this same consolidated school gave me one of those thrills that in vulgar idiom we call a "kick" and that now and then relieves the humdrum monotony of daily routine. I had word that their teacher had taken them on a tour of the village to visit points considered of local interest. Among these was the room in which I was born. I wrote these small folk that they knew something I didn't know and don't know now. I know the house in which that unimportant event took place but I don't know the room.

During the celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the incorporation of the town, points of interest were marked with identifying signs. Before going to the celebration I heard that one house had been labeled "The House in Which Thornton Burgess Lived." Apparently at that time no one knew in which house I was born, so they had selected one in which I had lived. I was curious to see which house had been so labeled, for Mother and I had at one time and another lived in no less than ten houses in the old town. It would have been better if the sign had read "A House" instead of "The House," for the house so marked was lived in for only the last two years of my residence in the town. However, I deeply appreciated and was grateful for the recognition and honor that had been paid me. It refuted so wonderfully the old saying, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country."

Yet it was all very embarrassing. It was intended as and really was recognition of a native son's success in the larger field beyond the town's somewhat narrow limits. As I was warmly greeted by old schoolmates and friends, some of whom I had not seen for so long that I failed to recognize them as they approached, I became fearful lest some to whom fortune had been less generous than to me might in their hearts feel that I was returning to the old home to parade such modest success as I had attained. Afterward in my own heart I apologized for entertaining such a thought for a moment.

It set me to wondering what this sought-for, fought-for indefinite thing called success really is. Some of those men and women had lived all their lives in the old

town, practically unknown beyond its boundaries. But they had made an honest living where a good living was hard to make; had maintained their independence, made homes of their own, educated their children and prepared them to enter the outer world to do their part in the work of it; they had taken a direct interest in the affairs of the town, shared in the responsibilities of home government, gone to the aid of neighbors in distress. Who shall say that each of these, making the most of the limited opportunities within his or her grasp, was not in the truest and the broadest sense of the word a success? Had I in the vastly wider field in which I worked made as much of the greater opportunities that were mine? It was a sobering question. Success is too often confused with self-advertising and notoriety. It is not to be assayed by publicity or adulation. It is not the sole perquisite of high places. The degree of success in life should be measured by the field of opportunity. Success is to be found, all too often unrecognized, in every village and hamlet however small. It is this that makes America great.

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CHAPTER

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Sand Dollars

It was my first dollar, minted by the sea, a sand dollar, a Cape Cod sand dollar. Previously I had seen one in the hands of a playmate, a boy slightly older than myself. He had graciously allowed me to look at it but would not let me touch it. He had boasted of his wealth. He had taunted me because I had none and never had had one.

Boyish envy and the taunts drove me to long, patient, persistent, careful searches along the beach from the edge of the receding tide back to the face of the barrier sand dunes between the beach and the salt marshes beyond which lay the village. So at long last, far out on a bar of shining sand exposed by the ebbing tide, I found my dollar.

I picked it up in small boy eagerness and wonder. What was it really? Where had it come from? What was it good for? To my exploring fingers it felt hard, like shell, yet it had a different feeling. Back on the beach I showed it to another boy.

"Huh!" he exclaimed scornfully. "It's just a ol' sand dollar. I've found lots of 'em! 'Tisn't good for anything. 'Twon't buy nothin'."

Subdued in spirit, I took my prize home. When I asked why if it was a dollar I could buy nothing with it, I was laughed at. It was explained to me that "sand dollar" was merely a name given to any one of several forms of flat sea urchins, perhaps because of the shape, round like a silver dollar. This that I had found was a cousin of the familiar urchins shaped like small doughnuts of shell covered with prickly spines. I had often found these.

"What good is a ol' dollar that won't buy anything?" I protested.

"True enough, you cannot buy anything with it, but even if you could it would be nothing compared with what it has already bought," said my smiling mentor.

I gasped, "You mean it has already been spent?"

"Yes, in a way, a way you cannot understand now but will later," was the reply.

There the matter ended, for it was quite over my head. Anyway it was time for dinner and, as is the way with boys, appetite for food was greater than appetite for knowledge.

That was long, long ago. But to this day whenever I see a sand dollar in the spoils of a young beachcomber, a window in memory opens. Looking through it I see a long, curved white beach between irregular dunes of shining sand and the white-flecked blue waters of Cape Cod Bay. It is low tide. A long bar of wet golden sand angles far out. It is the very bar on which when I was five years old the great whale was grounded.

Beyond the bar up the coast I see a jumble of fully exposed black rocks where seals haul out and bark in the sun, the sound blending with the screams of gulls and the

strident voices of terns at their fishing. A flock of slim-legged little sandpipers —"peeps" we called them—run at the water's edge in quest of what the receding tide may have left for them. Fiddler crabs scuttle for their holes in the sand. A hermit crab hastily withdraws into the snail-shell house it has been carrying on its back and closes the door, postponing for a time the search for a new and larger house to accommodate increasing growth. I pick up and drag a devil's apron string from a heap of kelp stranded on the beach. At my feet are small holes in the sand and from one of these spurts a small stream of water. Now I know where to dig for clams. My lips are salt with the kiss of the sea wind.

The sand dollar of long ago could buy nothing. Instead it has given me freely of rich treasure in memory ever since.

Of what the first real dollars I ever earned bought, I cannot remember a single item. But what I got from them in the earning I remember, and the memory is very precious. When in early summer I see the first baskets of berries, blue as the summer sky, another window opens. I am in Great Hollow, fire-swept and purged some two or three years back. Now the soft green of new verdure, hiding the ugly black scars of scorched earth, covers the Hollow and low hills surrounding it. Here and there rises a gray or black ghost of a tree, a monument to disaster man-wrought through carelessness or criminal intent.

The green mantle with which Nature has covered the scars left by the red terror is made even more beautiful by the irregular mosaic designs in blue of the low-growing berries. As I fill my pail with the largest and the bluest, a towhee, often called cheewink, cries from the top of a low scrub oak, "Drink your tea! Drink your tea!"

A red-tailed hawk with widespread wings, so high yet so big that my untrained eyes are sure it is King Eagle himself, rides in soaring circles, the currents of warm air rising from the sun-baked surface of the earth. A ruffed grouse (I call it partridge) flops at my feet in seeming broken-wing helplessness. I know that somewhere near are fascinating little chicks in soft brown, heeding mother's warning cluck and now flattened close to the good earth beneath the brown dead leaves their own pretty coats so nearly match in color. They will not move until mother signals all is well.

A small green snake crawls sluggishly from under my busy fingers. His coat is dull, lifeless, and seemingly a bit loose. I know that under the bushes he has been trying to crawl out of it. He needs help and I give it. Like a woman's long glove, the unbroken old skin pulls off inside out. It is paper-thin, transparent, and every scale is outlined. The new coat beneath it is lovely and vivid green. My small serpent is a completely changed and lively brother of the wild. I let him go. He glides away.

Cranberries in the marketplace or on the table always open still another window. I see the rich dark carpet of the bog and on it a picturesque, interesting, and delightful local phase of New England life that if not now altogether of the past soon will be. The arbutus (we called them Mayflowers) I picked in the spring, and the wild grapes and beach plums gathered in the fall for small sums added uncounted riches to the store of precious memories. Even now after more than threescore years I could go to the exact spot where once blossomed the earliest and the pinkest Mayflowers, to the very bush, if

it still survives, that bore exceptionally large beach plums, and to the distant, partly fallen old stone wall smothered under the tangled vines that also climbed the neighboring tree and bore the biggest bunches of rich purple fruit to make the finest grape jelly in the world.

Minted dollars may buy pleasure, never happiness; flattery, never friendship; servility, never respect; excitement, never tranquillity; envy, never admiration; tolerance, never affection; notoriety, never honor; hate, never love; fine raiment, never character.

Sand dollars will buy nothing, nothing at all, but they may enrich life beyond measure. They are still to be found on old Cape Cod, but also along all walks in life by those who seek them.

CHAPTER

6

Out in the World

In 1891 in a class of nine I graduated from the Sandwich high school. I did not know then, for I had dreams of college, that it was to be my alma mater. Looking back, I find it of interest that of the six boys and three girls in that graduating class, two boys were to become authors of books, one a successful newspaperman, in time dean of the political reporters at the State House, one a local news reporter, and one of the girls a successful teacher in the local schools. Of these only one had the benefit of a college education.

Mother was unable to attend the graduation exercises, a bitter disappointment to both of us. In the years ahead she was to have a very large and vital part in such success as I attained. It was her faith, her never-failing encouragement, her constant self-denial that made possible our independence on a very meager income. Alas, she was not to live to share in the honors that ultimately came to me. Much as these have meant to me, and still do, they would have meant infinitely more could I have shared them with Mother.

The summer and winter following graduation I worked in a village grocery store, taking my turn on the delivery wagon far out in the country in all sorts of weather. The following summer I tried a business venture of my own. With rented horse and wagon I peddled fresh fruit obtained from a wholesale house in Boston. I just about broke even. But I had dividends of a sort. There was a lot of leftover fruit to eat, and I always was fond of fruit. Meanwhile Mother kept on with her candy business insofar as health permitted.

After long and prayerful consideration we agreed that our mutual dream of a college education for me must be given up. There were no visible opportunities for a business career in the home town. We had to face the hard fact that I must find a place for myself out in the world at large. The mere thought made us both homesick. I was of a somewhat bashful and retiring disposition, definitely not a go-getter.

Grandfather offered to finance a term at a commercial school in Boston. A retired successful country merchant, the dear old man could see little if any practical value in higher education. A school of business training was a wholly different matter. He was glad to help with that. Sometimes I wonder what he would have done had he had the prescience in those early days to foresee my inborn distaste for practical business and inability to grasp its fundamental principles.

Be that as it may, our household goods were shipped to Somerville, a suburb of Boston, where Mother and I started housekeeping in a small apartment. That winter I commuted to Boston by horsecar, the electric trolley not having reached Somerville.

Enrolled in a well-known business school, I spent the winter trying to master bookkeeping and learning to hate figures, of which I never was overly fond. Nor did my handwriting grow appreciably more like the beautiful penmanship I desperately but vainly endeavored to copy.

The net result was that at the end of the term I became the unhappy cashier and more unhappy assistant bookkeeper in a well-known Boston shoe store. The salary paid for my carfare and lunches and required no bookkeeping to keep track of.

A hectic summer followed. There were three partners in the business, all baseball fans. When home games were scheduled it was an almost daily occurrence for one or another of the partners to grab a five-dollar or larger bill from the till and rush off to the game, forgetting to leave a memorandum if I happened to be elsewhere. I would go home to fret and worry over the shortage in the day's account until the next day discreet and diplomatic inquiries would straighten the matter out. At the end of each month the books must be balanced and this meant an evening or two of extra work without overtime pay. There was, however, an allowance of fifty cents for supper. I learned at that time how much can be squeezed out of half a dollar. It was worth learning.

Sometimes when there was a shortage of salesmen I helped out on the floor. There I made another discovery—I disliked selling as much as I did trying to get the same answer twice to a column of figures. In short, the unpleasant fact that I was a misfit in the business world was rubbed into me rather painfully every day, and there seemed to be nothing I could do about it. I knew of no other activity that might permit me to make a happier living. I knew beyond any doubt what I didn't want to do, but got no glimmer at all of what I might like to do. All through the years since, I have had a deep and understanding sympathy for the boy who has not yet found himself when he starts out in the world.

Mother was not well enough to continue housekeeping. We were obliged to give up the apartment and she went to Springfield to live with her sister. For the first time we were parted. It was difficult and saddening for both. I secured a small hall bedroom in a private home in Somerville and of course continued to work in Boston. Those were lean days, lonesome days, to a considerable degree dark days. The period of distrustful seeking to find the as yet undiscovered self usually is a time of darkness.

About this time I began writing bits of verse, rhymes if you please, for my own amusement. From early years I had been a great reader and fond of poetry, but I do not recall that in school days I was much given to producing the doggerel that so often is a phase of adolescence. I do recall that in those early days I did some alleged humorous verses that were published in a house organ of a Boston concern that employed a cousin of mine, my first appearance in print.

Now in these days of floundering uncertainty I found a form of relief in turning rhymester, in seeking self-expression in verse. *Forest and Stream*, a well-known sporting periodical, published some verses of mine to a four-pound trout that I had yet to catch. Then *Recreation*, at that time in its early struggling days, gave an illustrated two-page spread to my "When the Scoters Fly." In each case the honorarium was a complimentary copy of the magazine. But that was compensation enough—it was recognition; I saw my name in type as an accredited author.

Business depression resulting in curtailment of help cost me my job. For weeks I lived on little, daily scanned the wanted columns in the papers, and made the rounds of the employment agencies. Somehow a copy of a small paper called *Brains*, devoted to advertising, fell in my hands. On impulse I bought a couple of inches of space in its columns and therein advertised in verse my services as a writer of advertising copy in verse:

Save Time, Labor and Trouble

"Get a good man
That can wield a good pen;
Let him advertise for you,
Tho' it cost you a ten!"

And in that way you will save all three. Try my work, and if not satisfactory, just return it. Ads in rhyme a specialty.

T. W. BURGESS,
12 Grand View Ave.,
SOMERVILLE, MASS.

It was preposterous. It was absurd. Of course. It was, and still is, inconceivable that that little investment drawn from my meager capital should pay off in hard cash, but it did. Moreover, it paid a tremendous extra dividend in that it definitely settled for all time the question of what I wanted to do. I wanted to write. From that time on I knew that I must somehow make my living with my pen. There was not even a shadow of doubt.

In looking back over a successful career there is a great degree of satisfaction for one to be able to say it was here, or there, that he made his start. I suspect that more often than not it is impossible to pinpoint this very beginning, the factual planting of the seed of success. In my case it can be done. It was that little advertising rhyme in *Brains*.

As soon as that issue of *Brains* was off the press, I received a request to call at once at an advertising agency in Boston. As requested, my response was prompt. In fact, I may say it was in some haste. Those were hungry days. As a stimulant to prompt reaction and endeavor I know of nothing equal to an empty stomach.

The agency was doing some advertising for the Miles Standish Spring Water Company. A booklet was wanted, a booklet in verse. Could I paraphrase Longfellow's epic of Miles Standish, reduce it to twenty short verses, and incidentally introduce the

discovery of a spring, *the* spring, by Miles Standish? Oh crass temerity of youth! I could and I would. Many times I have blushed at the memory of my audacity.

At that time my boyhood chum was studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He came to my room to spend the evening on the day I wrote the epic. He listened critically while I read it aloud. He nodded approval, then brought me back to earth with a practical question. "How much are you going to ask for it?" he wanted to know.

"I think I ought to get five dollars for it," said I.

"Man, you're crazy!" he cried. "Don't ask a cent less than fifteen."

"You're the one who is crazy," I retorted. "No one would pay fifteen dollars for this. I did it in about three hours. No one will pay any such sum for three hours' work."

Ernest was the better businessman. He argued so convincingly that the next morning when I started for the agency I was uncertain. Perhaps he was right and I had underrated myself.

At the office I found the president of the Spring Water Company had come in. My modest emulation of Mr. Longfellow (I blush again) was given him to read. He liked it. It met with his instant approval. The manager of the agency turned to me. "What do we owe you?" he asked.

The dreaded crucial moment had come. "What will you pay me?" I stammered.

"You're selling; we're buying; how much?" he replied.

This was business. I hated business. This sounded like bargaining and I never could haggle. I can't to this day. I thought of Ernest. "Fifteen dollars," I mumbled and half caught my breath at my brashness. Then I really did catch it at the celerity with which those three five-dollar bills appeared. How right my chum was! And how innocent we both were as to what that agency probably had expected to pay.

That was the first money I ever earned with my pen. It was a heady stimulant. I haven't a copy of that booklet. Perhaps it is just as well. Still, I would like to know the full degree of my youthful presumption. All I have are a few verses in time-faded ink that prove I did discover the spring for Miles Standish. At the same time I found one for my own lifework. Here are the few verses I have:

'Twas the Pilgrim's chosen leader,
Man of valor and of might;
Straight descended from Hugh Standish,
He whom England made a knight.

Kneeling there beside the water
Long he quaffs the laughing rill;
Feels with each refreshing swallow
Strange new life within him thrill.

'Til, all weariness forgotten,
Home he quickly wends his way,
Thinking of the maid Priscilla
And the message sent that day.

For though stout of heart and dauntless,
Ever ready for a foe,
He has proved a craven coward—
Feared to face a woman's "No."

The printer of this booklet was doing some work for a well-known dog food company. He told me they wanted a booklet in verse and asked if I could do it. Could I? Of course I could. So in time "The Tale of a Dog" appeared. Again it was twenty verses of four lines each. I asked twenty dollars. It was paid promptly and without protest. A dollar a verse! Oh the visions that opened up!

It was at about this time that Shredded Wheat was comparatively new on the market. Headquarters were located in Worcester, Massachusetts. Each package contained a flyer with "The Origin of Shredded Wheat" in verse. At my boardinghouse one of these fell into my hands. I thought I could do a better origin. For my own amusement I tried it. I had a copy of this version in my pocket when visiting the agency. Casually I showed it to the manager. At the time I had no thought of selling it. He said the agency was doing some work for the Shredded Wheat Company. In fact he was going over to Worcester that very afternoon. He would try to sell my verses for me. I appreciated his kindness and said so.

A few days later I again dropped in at the office. The manager told me that the Shredded Wheat people didn't think too much of my verses. However, they found one or two things in them that they liked and they offered five dollars for the poem. This he had accepted and he handed over to me a five-dollar bill. I was grateful. I said so. I wish that today a five-dollar bill looked as big to me as that one did then. In later years when I had become a bit more sophisticated I looked back and began to wonder just how large a commission, unmentioned, was paid for my version of the discovery of Shredded Wheat. You see, it had been immediately substituted for the original version and for a long time appeared in every package of the tasty cereal.

I had found the golden road to easy money. I was sure of it. Alas, like so many golden roads it was but a short one to a dead end. Those were hard times. The muse was no longer in demand. However, there were other gains. I knew beyond all doubt

what I wanted to do in life. I had found myself, even though I had not as yet found a place for myself. At length I found a job of sorts but I was still chained to columns of figures at eight dollars a week and could see small chance of bettering myself. But it was something to know what I wanted to do and the mere knowledge fanned the smoldering coals of ambition.

I still couldn't work happily, but I could work hopefully, whereas before I had had no objective and did not know what to hope for. Now I had something definite to watch for, an opening, be it ever so small, that would at least give me the smell of printer's ink, preferably on galley or page proofs. I continued to write verse and now and then a bit of prose in an effort to satisfy my growing desire to find a medium for self-expression. How I longed to discover a new spring or a dog needing a new tale!

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CHAPTER

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A Boy's Letters to His Mother

MOTHER abhorred debt. What we couldn't pay for we went without. From childhood she drilled me to always keep in mind that:

He who buys what he knows he cannot pay for is a sneak-thief.

He who assumes unnecessary debt has one foot in the mire.

He who lives beyond his means is stealing from his creditors.

He who is honest with himself will be honest with others.

He who masters himself commands his destiny.

So it was that in those difficult days I still clung to my independence and abhorred debt. I lived in the future. I have found that is a good plan when living in the present is difficult.

Playing back memory's record, one must of necessity find many places where the needle failed to etch deeply in the wax of yesterday, or where it made only a few scratches or left no trace at all. I found that often this happened at a period of seemingly scant interest or no consequence at the time, but later in the perspective of mature vision proved to be of supreme, perhaps vital, importance and significance in completing the final record.

A change in values has much to [do] with this. In the beginning, the very early years, the child mind is so easily impressed that the unimportant registers as deeply as the important. Memory retains both in equal degree. In the period of adolescence specific events and experiences become so sharply focused they throw other things out of focus. Thus only the overemphasized events are recorded with sufficient depth to be retained. A third period is that of adjustment between adolescence and maturity, when nothing seems of sufficient moment to register at all, or if it does it is only in spots. With me this period was the interval "betwixt and between," as Mother would say, when I had yet to find myself. It was the two years of maladjustment spent in Boston. Years later, when looking back, I found this a lost period, registering so faintly as to lose all detail except for a few things. All the time I had a feeling that could I but remember more I might find therein the hitherto unrecognized key to the future and my career as it ultimately developed.

Then, many years later, tucked away among Mother's personal effects, her treasures, I found an overlooked package of letters she had put away for safekeeping

sixty years before. They were the letters of a lonely boy, discouraged but still hopeful and determined, to a lonely mother whose faith and sustaining love never failed.

Extracts from these letters follow. They were written in that period of trouble and separation. They reflect some light on conditions at that time, 1894 and 1895. I like to think that in them I can trace the very beginning of finding myself. The first of these letters was immediately after the breaking up of the home. It is dated May 27, 1894.

> My precious Mother:
>
> Well, everything is over now and we must make the best of it. I've gotten quite nicely settled now and think I shall like it very well, but of course it is not a home. I told you I could get all my clothes in that washstand and I was right. It is exceedingly quiet here which I thoroughly appreciate. As small as the room is I don't know as I would care for a much larger one.

June 3—Yes, it is but very little more than a week since you left but it seems a long, long time ago we were breaking up the home that meant so much to both of us and where we were planning this and that for the future. However, you must keep bright as you can, dear, knowing that I am well cared for at present and that the future is in God's keeping only. My hall room being in the French roof, and a corner one, has two slanting walls, one in front with the window in it, and one on the left side. Of course no pictures can be hung on either but must be confined to the other two walls, one of which includes the door. I enclose $10 as you say you are short. Now I want you to take this and use it for I have no use for it at present, and it is not policy to draw money from the bank until one absolutely must. I realize this fact more and more. When I need money I will write and it will be time enough to draw then. I can get along first-rate on my $7 a week. If you need more can let you have $5 as well as not.

June 10—Last night when I reached home I found your ever-welcome letter and after a hard day's work it was most refreshing. What a blessing to mankind the art of writing is, and the vast system by which we may communicate. How little we appreciate it. But now as the old saw runs, "business first; pleasure afterward." The business in this case is the money I sent you. You are to keep that and use it when you have need. As to your having any feeling you are taking anything from me, the sooner you clear that idea out of your dear little head the better. You know, my dear Mother, we are partners as it were, and although you are the senior and I but the junior, as such my advice must have weight or there will be danger of a dissolution of the firm.

June 17—Well, the week has passed with all its haps and mishaps including the arrival (misery) and departure (joy) of my venerable relatives. They arrived at the store Tuesday afternoon and left in my care a big bag and some bundles. At 12 o'clock Wednesday they serenely bobbed up again with more bundles and appointed me guardian. At 3 o'clock that afternoon I beheld them darkening my horizon once more with more bundles. This time they put them down and opened and assorted the spoils.

Aunt C. (who was with them) got hers together and took the night train for the Cape, while the old folks were to stay over another night. At 5 o'clock that afternoon a local store added to my collection a huge parcel of Heaven knows what, and my joys and sorrows of that day were over.

But the first thing next morning comes a long clumsy bundle of curtain poles. At 12 o'clock Grandpa left his coat. At 12:15 I gave the kiss of peace to Grandma and my two aunts, after which they departed to do an errand leaving me to stow away, a cape and some more bundles. At 12:30 in they all trooped again to await Grandfather who arrived a few minutes later. I was thinking seriously of opening negotiations for the lease of an office upstairs to be used as a storeroom. But being much fatigued with many cares, and rather faint with the thought of what the future might hold in store, I decided to adjourn and refresh the inner if not the outer man. Hardly had I returned when I beheld my troubles once more appearing. But this was final, for taking their bundles with them (they would have none of them expressed) amidst the smiles of my fellow workers the four wended their way out of the store en route for the sandy shores of old Cape Cod. All I could think of was a train of Rocky Mountain burros loaded with supplies.

June 24—Letter day once more. Though I have not the bundles to take up a page or so, will rake over what news I have. My general washing costs me 28 cents each time while to have my shirts and collars laundered costs between 20 and 30 cents. Today is positively cold. As the Englishman said, "New England has no climate, only samples."

August 11—I am writing this letter at Winthrop and so you will please excuse pencil. Seated on the edge of a bluff I have the most beautiful view before me that it has been my good fortune to enjoy for a long time. I only wish you were here to enjoy it with me. Have some crackers and pressed ham for my supper and the whole thing, including my dinner, has cost just 23 cents. Pretty cheap racket, don't you think? Dan (the bookkeeper) starts on his vacation. He wants me to try to get off in time for the 9 o'clock boat the Saturday before he comes up and go down to Provincetown, spend the night with him, and come up Sunday afternoon. It would be a great trip but I can't afford it as it would cost $1.50. Never mind. All those things will come later on.

At that time a boy who had been in charge of stock at the store lived in Wakefield, a short distance out of Boston. This is the next town beyond where an uncle and aunt were living at that time. So it was that I had planned a double pleasure at the cost of one. I wrote Mother of this as follows:

> I left the store yesterday at 1:15 with 12 minutes in which to catch the train for Wakefield. By running all the way I did it. Louis met me at the train and we hired a boat to go on the lake. Had a very pleasant time rowing about the lake and afterward viewing the town. Leaving Wakefield at 6:30 by electric car I arrived in Melrose Highlands 20 minutes later and went directly

to Uncle Charlie's store. He had not returned from supper. On the way up to the house I met him. Well, to make a long story short, I kept on to the house and there was very shocked to see how miserable Aunt Mary is. She looks on the verge of nervous prostration.

Now all this has a comical side to it. It makes me laugh every time I think of it. You see, having had to run for the train I had not had time to get a mouthful of dinner. Knowing that I would be late for supper when I reached Aunt Mary's I had reckoned on asking for a cold bite. When I reached the house and found how very miserable Aunt Mary was I also found that their stove had so misbehaved that they had been unable to cook a thing and had been living on baker's food. Of course under these circumstances I said nothing about my dinnerless, supperless condition, but sucked my thumbs as it were, and chuckled to myself at the practical joke on myself of which they were so unconscious. Left there at 10:12 that evening and in Boston had just time to buy a couple of bananas before starting for Somerville. So my dinner and supper combined consisted of two bananas. Beforehand, knowing nothing of Aunt Mary's condition, I had thought it possible I would be invited to spend Sunday and by accepting would save enough on my board to pay for the expense of the trip. But as things turned out it has been very expensive. Twenty cents carfare each way and 40 cents for boat hire to make a total of 80 cents from which I can subtract 10 cents I would have spent for dinner. Can't go anywhere next Saturday.

November 4—I am feeling prime and looking so, they all tell me, but that may be a bit of sarcasm as I am rather fat in the face. The fat is all on one side, the result of an ulcerated tooth. However, that doesn't trouble me half so much as the fact that I have got to put $10 in my mouth instead of in the bank. Had a great deal rather put it in my pocket. There is one comfort—if the bank should fail I'll have my $10 anyway. Saw the dentist today and made an appointment for next Sunday. Pity the sorrows of a poor young man.

November 25—As I had planned I spent the day at Riverside and enjoyed myself very much. They seemed much pleased to see me and urged me to come again soon. In fact, I expect to handle the drumsticks there this coming Thursday [Thanksgiving]. Do you think it would be extravagant for me to take Cousin Lottie some flowers? Should like to show them some little attention, they have done so much for me.

November 30—Yesterday I spent as planned and had a very enjoyable time. Took a fine bunch of chrysanthemums to Lottie and she was much pleased. Won the flowers on a wager, so I was not a bit extravagant. Sunday I once more go to the dentist. Have pity on me.

December 2—It is snowing and all the world is in a shroud of spotless white. This morning I spent as was planned and with the filling of four teeth I parted with a five-dollar bill. It was a very painful affair, especially the parting with the aforementioned bill. This is a queer world and the philosophy thereof is hard to understand. I hire myself out to a man and at the end of five days I say to my employer, "Will it be quite convenient for you to let me have my salary for the last five days?" He hems and haws a few moments, then hands me a five-dollar bill. The next day I hire an employee and have a man do some work on my teeth. After four or five hours of torture to myself he announces that he is through. Then I, the employer, turn to this hireling and say with a tremor in my voice, "Well, what are you going to tax me this time?" Then he, this hireling, this employee, hems and haws, looks in a little book, looks at the clock, and finally says, "Well, I guess I'll let you off this time for $5." Justice! Justice! Justice! Where art thou?

Mrs. G. found a washwoman for me and we have tried her for a two weeks wash. It cost me 60 cents. I cried, "Woe, woe, woe is me!" Am afraid I cannot do any better for they all charge at the rate of 50 cents per dozen pieces. Hereafter, during cold weather, I shall wear my flannels and nightshirts two weeks without a change so as to keep the bill down. Sometimes I go up to Hotel Reynolds for lunch. There I can get a big dish of soup or chowder with all the bread I can eat for 15 cents. Don't worry about Xmas. We are poor but we can give the best of wishes and these are better than presents.

December 9—About that wager. I had a dispute with one of the fellows in regard to the name of a town. Healy sided with me. Finally the fellow offered to bet us each a supper that he was right. We took him up and won. Being much in want of those flowers, I told him I would let him off at that which was 25 cents cheaper than if he had given me a supper. Healy got his supper, a 75 cent one, last night. Just think, a little more than two weeks and Christmas will be here. Why, old Santa Claus himself must be filling his pack and catching his reindeer. Hope he will forget me altogether save in the matter of good wishes, for I have nothing to drop in his bag for others. So I would much rather that others will not drop anything in his bag for me. It is the loving thought, not the gift, that I appreciate. The poorest man has it in his power to give the best of Christmas presents if he would only look at it in the right way. A little sprig of holly with its vivid green and its bright red berries may mean far more, and give far greater pleasure, than the costliest present that money can buy. This worrying, fretting and denying of one's self, perhaps of necessities, so that when Christmas comes a few gifts that are far beyond one's means are given, is wrong. I, for my part, take far greater pleasure in the little simple sprig of holly than in the gifts which I know some friend had denied himself to give.

Now pray remember this, little sweetheart, and tomorrow put on that bonnet with the pink roses, go downtown, get a half yard of cheviot and make me a couple of string ties for next summer. They will give me more pleasure than any other gift, for they will be your own handiwork. I shall send you some simple little gift, but a whole heartful of love for a most joyous Christmas. And I know that you will receive it in the spirit in

which it is sent. I know, my dear little mother, all that is in your heart to do and that knowledge is enough.

December 16—Say, dear, do you remember how we used to go out to see the *city* the night before Christmas? First, down to Uncle Frank's store to behold the wonderful toys that were to make many youngsters happy the next day. Then down to Andrew Sherman's where was a most wonderful collection of fancy articles, then slowly upstreet looking in all the windows as we passed. What good times we used to have, you and I, in spite of all that was hard to bear! Well, dear, we must spend this Christmas apart, I'm afraid, but we will be as merry as we can and perhaps another year we can have things different.

Yesterday was the day for the dentist and I had a lovely time. Had a front tooth filled with gold and I—er—er—I paid $3. By the Lord Harry, this drawing gold from your pocketbook to put in your teeth is—well, I won't finish. Have paid out $8 now and next Sunday go again. Yesterday a woman had her pocketbook snatched here in front of the store and lost $175. Take warning and don't, like so many otherwise sensible women, carry your pocketbook in your hand. Supposing you had lost 175—cents. Think what that would have meant to us.

That Christmas I did get to spend with Mother after all. Then comes a gap in the letters to the following summer. That found me job-seeking. To complete the situation I suffered a serious attack of malaria. Under date of July 9, 1895, I wrote:

> I received a very nice letter from Grandma and with it $10. It was a godsend, for I never was so hard up in my life. Uncle Charlie also made me a present of $5 and would take no refusal. It hurts me to take it all. I must not be discouraged but must keep a good heart and will come out right, says Grandmother. She is very glad I am well and oh, remarkable, says that health is more to be desired than riches. I have had a haircut and shampoo. Oh luxury! Couldn't afford it before. Have no work as yet but am watching every chance. Am living on faith, hope and doughnuts. The first two are not very satisfying. The third fills space. Well dear, am trying not to be discouraged and am staving off the blues, though last week I was in a very tight hole. Keep a brave heart and all will be well.

July 21—I will write just a few lines to let you know, and I hate to awfully, that I fear my old friend malaria has returned though it may not be. However, I was taken yesterday while in the city, looking up a job, with about the same old symptoms and could hardly drag myself home. Had a pretty high fever yesterday afternoon and evening. Sent for doctor who would not call it malaria until he had waited a few days. Tomorrow will show. Am very much better today. Got track of a job which I hope to secure. Nothing that I want; rather long hours and lots of dirty work but it is better than nothing, $5 to start with. It is in a machine shop, work for which I have no taste. Shall

do bookkeeping and general work. That is, if I get the job. Unless I get over this at once, of course I shall not get it. If I could only get into a publishing house.

July 22—I am feeling very well today and have been down to the doctor's. It is malaria. The doctor hopes to break it up at once. I don't anticipate being kept quiet more than a week or ten days so don't worry. Am taking heavy doses of quinine. Oh dear, this has taken money for doctor's bills, medicine and provisions. I rather think I shall secure something soon now. Don't worry, for I shall come out all right.

July 26—Today is my bad day but I have taken so much quinine that I have broken up the chills but do not feel very smart. However, I am getting the upper hand of the disease. The amount now in the bank, dear, is $260.93. Now dear, don't worry for I am getting along fine.

CHAPTER

8

A Momentous Decision

THROUGH the summer of 1895 I fought the malaria and by fall was fairly back on my feet. At that time I secured a job, but again it was mostly the hated bookkeeping. It was with a German commission merchant handling furs and dress trimmings. When I was not at work on the books my duties included checking samples and at times delivering goods at some of the big retail stores. It was all done for eight dollars per week, a dollar increase over my former reward for daily distress.

I still dreamed of getting into a publishing house of some kind. From early boyhood I had been an avid reader of newspaper stories. Now I began to think of trying for a job as cub reporter, or even as a printer's devil in the composing room of a newspaper where there might ultimately be a chance to become a reporter. Then, just before Thanksgiving, out of a clear sky with no warning whatever, came opportunity. It was in the form of a special delivery letter from my mother in Springfield. I could not know at the time that it was to change my whole life, that opportunity was opening the door.

Living next to my aunt in Springfield, with whom Mother was staying, was the editor in chief of the Phelps Publishing Company. The office boy in the editorial rooms of that company had been discharged for dishonesty. If I came on at once I could have the job at the munificent sum of five dollars per week. That letter reached me the day before Thanksgiving. My employer had gone home and would not be back until the day after Thanksgiving. The letter asked that I report immediately on Saturday of that week if possible. This was Wednesday. My state of mind may best be shown by the letter I sent back special delivery to Mother that night. Here it is:

November 27, 1895—My dear Mother: Your special just received and I hardly know what to do or say. I don't see how I can be there before Monday, for my employer has gone home and I shall not see him again until Friday morning and it will not be the right thing to leave him that night. Then, too, I have a number of things to attend to. Oh dear, it comes very, very hard to come to Springfield. But if it is for the best I won't say one word.

Another thing, Mr. M. should see my handwriting before I come on there and throw up my job here. Don't show him this, but some of my poorer work. Don't see how I can come before Sunday. If my employer should make me an offer, which I don't expect, what shall I do? I leave it all to you, my dear, and you must telegraph me as soon as you get this. I ought to get a suit and some other things before I come, for I can save money that way. I must confess that I am all broken up, for I had hoped to secure

something here before I heard anything more from Springfield. Chance is "direction, which thou canst not see; all discord, harmony not understood; all partial evil, universal good." That is my consolation now. I want to do what is for the best, but confess that I am at a complete loss. If I had received your letter an hour earlier I could have arranged to come to go to work Saturday. As it is I don't see how I can. Telegraph me "come" or "don't come" as the case may be. Then mail me special delivery at once and try and give me some idea of the duties as I am jumping in the dark just now.

Whatever is, is right they say.
Mayhap the saying's true,
But when the is has double way
Which is is right to do?

Shall I give thanks tomorrow? If I do it will be on speculation. Have no invitation and shall spend it getting my things together in case I start for Springfield. God help me to do what is best. Love to all. In much perplexity. . . .

I went to Springfield. I arrived late Sunday afternoon. It had been a hard decision to make. I had walked the streets late the night I got Mother's reply. Was or was not opportunity knocking on the door? I didn't want to leave Boston. I dreaded to start anew amid strangers and in a strange place. I confess that also there was a slight feeling of humiliation at the thought of being a mere office boy at my age—I was then in my twenty-second year. Of course this was silly. But when finally I wired acceptance the die was cast and I felt better.

That Sunday afternoon I was introduced to the editor at his home. He told me how to find the scene of my future endeavors. I was to be there at seven-thirty the following morning. The editorial rooms were on the second floor. I was to sweep these, dust the desks and chairs, sharpen the pencils of all the editors, empty the wastebaskets, then go to the nearby post office, get the mail and distribute it to the various desks. By the time these things were done there would be someone there to further instruct me in my duties. For the remainder of the day I would be at the beck and call of the several editors.

There was no doubt about it, I was on the lowest rung of the ladder—janitor and office boy. But I was *on* the ladder. That was the important thing. The composing room adjoined the editorial rooms. I had to pass through it frequently. Always I smelled printer's ink and the smell was good. Much of my work was drudgery. Despite this I was happy. I was on my way and I knew it. I had no doubt whatever. I had found myself, and now I was finding a place for myself.

At that time the Phelps Company and the associated Orange Judd Company published *Farm and Home*, *American Agriculturist*, *Orange Judd Farmer* and *New England Homestead*, making them among the leaders in agricultural publications. The company also published an illustrated weekly newspaper called the *Springfield Homestead*. This was devoted to social news and activities with special articles of interest in Springfield and vicinity. Halftone illustrations were just coming into general use then and the *Homestead* was the only local paper using them. I was quick to see

that on this paper opportunity awaited me. Somewhat diffidently I offered items of news I had picked up, incidents of interest I observed from time to time. I can still feel the thrill that was mine when I saw on the front page my first printed contribution. It was a small item, but it was *mine*! I was an incipient reporter! What a glorious feeling that was! As time went on I contributed more and more. I was now not only editorial office boy and janitor but also cub reporter.

That first winter I eked out my five dollar a week salary by taking care of the furnace at the editor's home at night, taking up the ashes and so on. For this work I received a small but welcome sum. I was paying a dollar and a half a week for my room in a private home in that same neighborhood. This made the care of the furnace a comparatively easy matter. My meals I had downtown at a lunchroom, where I could get an egg sandwich and cup of coffee for breakfast for fifteen cents, and other meals in proportion. I walked the two miles each way between my rooming house and office. So I kept wholly within my income, but of course I was not buying any new clothes and few luxuries.

The *Homestead*'s photographer made use of the office boy to carry his big camera and equipment on various assignments. I began to do some of the stories to go with the photographs. So while still office boy, I became part-time reporter and was given a desk in the city room. That desk was a throne to me.

I began contributing verse and short articles to the household departments of the farm papers. Now and then a story for boys or for little children was accepted by the literary editor. It all went in on my office boy's salary. That was all right. The pleasure of seeing my stuff in print was sufficient recompense. Then, too, it was recognition. Time went fast. There was a new office boy and I was getting ten dollars a week. I was up a rung on the ladder and on my way.

Meanwhile, my good grandfather was disappointed. The dear old man could see no financial future for me in my chosen line of work. I strongly suspect he felt that his help in giving me a term at the commercial school had been money wasted. As to probable financial returns in the future, I was under no illusions myself. However, I was confident I could earn enough to make a living for Mother and myself. And God be praised, I was doing what I wanted to do. Even in the prospect of hard work and long hours for small pay I had substituted happiness for unhappiness. Many times since I have thought of Grandfather and wished that he might have lived to see how good a business proposition even from a financial point of view the writing profession may be.

All this was long, long ago, but my feelings have in no way changed. I still love words for what I can do with them, and still hate figures with one exception—when I see them on incoming checks. It was not alone the monetary returns that held me to my chosen work. These were indeed small for a long time. I still wonder how Mother and I lived on fifteen dollars a week. But we did—and paid our bills.

There were other considerations and compensations. No longer was I blindly groping for the ladder. My feet were on the lower rungs, to be sure, but they were firmly planted there. I might not be able to climb very high, probably wouldn't be, but the opportunity was there. What I could make of it was up to me. That in itself was compensation beyond price. For the first time I was finding happiness in my work. It was not that there was no drudgery in it. There was. Is there any work whatever entirely

free from the disagreeable? I didn't enjoy doing boy's work when I was on the edge of manhood's estate. But I found the happiness that results from having an objective to strive for.

Those were the days when the bicycle was the forerunner of the automobile. Everyone rode. Bicycle racing, amateur and professional, was a popular and major sport. Springfield had a famous half-mile track where each fall the final championship meet of the year was held. All through the summer men were in training there. I became sports editor of the *Homestead*, covering bicycle racing, the Eastern League ball games and other sports. I made weekly trips across the Connecticut River to gather news in the Boston & Albany railroad shops. A weekly column of news of the fraternal orders became my responsibility. When well-known local citizens died it fell to me to visit the house of mourning to solicit a photograph of the deceased and gather the facts for an obituary write-up. I didn't like this. Especially I disliked being invited in to view the body of the departed one, and this was of frequent occurrence. But it was all part of the work.

Assignments for special articles and write-ups began to come my way. In short, I was a full-fledged reporter. I was even allowed from time to time a special column of my own. All this was on the weekly *Springfield Homestead*. At the same time I had become editor of the correspondence departments of the agricultural papers and a regular contributor of verse and stories to the household departments of these papers.

The first automobile in America, the Duryea, was being tested on Springfield streets. I interviewed one of the two Duryea brothers, the inventors. In time I had in the *Homestead* what I think was the first automobile column in a newspaper. The Phelps Company took over the then defunct *Good Housekeeping* magazine. My field broadened. I became a sort of editorial utility man on that magazine. My uncredited contributions were many and varied—serious verse and nonsense verse, special articles on all sorts of subjects, original short puzzle-stories for use amid the advertising pages. It was all wonderful training. The salary was still low, but in due course I had the title of managing editor, a recompense that was no strain on the treasury but was aimed to make me feel good. Of course it did.

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CHAPTER

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Mug-up and Foghorn

It has been my good fortune never to have been seasick. It is largely due to this happy immunity from *mal de mer* that I made a lifelong friendship, learned to know and have profound respect and admiration for the men who "go down to the sea in ships," and to marvel at the ability and accuracy of a great writer in his pen pictures of scenes of which it is recorded he never had been an eyewitness. It happened in the fo'castle of a Gloucester fishing schooner on the Georges Bank, scene of Kipling's famous sea story, *Captains Courageous*.

From time to time since then I have reread with ever-increasing appreciation of a great writer's art this epic story of the everyday unassuming courage of the men who fish the underwater banks of the stormy and often fogbound North Atlantic.

What price fish? In truth only he can know who has clung to his bunk in the dimly lit fo'castle of a fishing schooner on a stormy night while the pitching ship seems trying to swap stem for stern in the tumultuous waters of the Georges Bank, and has listened to the matter-of-fact swapping of hair-raising experiences by members of the crew as they waited for the seas to go down enough to launch the dories for the between-tides setting of the trawls; or who has watched the dories cast off in a fog so dense that in broad daylight they completely disappeared within a few feet of the schooner.

It was in my early days with *Good Housekeeping* that my opportunity for this came. I was sent to Boston with notebook and camera to get material for an illustrated article on the fresh fish industry, which at that time centered in the Hub City. Gloucester was then the center for the salt fish business of the country. If the market prices for fresh fish were off in Boston, the catch was taken to Gloucester for drying and salting to later supply the base for two of New England's favorite dishes, codfish cakes, otherwise known as fishballs, and creamed codfish on baked or boiled potatoes.

Boston's old T Wharf of blessed memory was then one of the famous fishing piers of the world. On it I spent part of a Saturday in late spring, wandering in and out of many warehouses, all devoted to the fish industry in its varied phases. I made photographs of fish being unloaded from the hold of a ship just in from the fishing grounds; of fish being sorted as to kinds; of fish being iced for market; of screaming gulls on the tops of piles along the old wharf, or perched in the rigging of boats alongside, or fighting over a bit of offal in the water; anything and everything that might be of interest in the proposed article.

With landlubber questions I bombarded fishermen, warehousemen, even loafers. The latter seemed to know all about everything. All the time I was trying to absorb something of the atmosphere (difficult not to), a somewhat overpowering blend of fishy

smells compounded with the odor of bilge water pumped from hulls alongside, harbor refuse brought in by the rising tide, gas and oil fumes from tugs and motorboats. Cutting through all of it in an effort to cleanse and purify was the tang of sweet but salty wind straight from the ocean, the very breath of old Neptune.

I climbed down on the deck of a schooner preparing to set sail. I photographed a fisherman baiting a tub of trawl. His busy fingers impaled pieces of herring on hooks on short lines attached to a long line. This he skillfully coiled in the tub, the baited hooks centering in the middle. It was done with seeming carelessness but it followed an exact pattern. He looked up at the click of my camera.

"Why don't you go out with us an' get some pictures of catching fish?" said he.

"I would love to if you fellows were not gone for a week or two at a time. I have to be back in my office Monday morning," I replied.

The fisherman shook his head. "We don't go to the banks this time of year. No long trips yet. We sail late this afternoon and we'll be back late tomorrow afternoon. There's an empty bunk in the fo'castle. Why don't you ask Cap'n up there to take you along?" said he.

I climbed up on the pier. The captain was whittling as he talked with another man. He was thickset, broad-shouldered, and not much older than myself. I approached somewhat diffidently. At an opportune moment I drew his attention, introduced myself, explained what I was after, and asked if he would take a passenger for this trip. A pair of the keenest, bluest eyes I ever have encountered looked me over. His sun-bronzed face was smooth save for crow's-feet of fine wrinkles around the eyes, caused by winds and reflected light from long hours of looking far across uneasy waters. It was the unfailing stamp with which the sea marks her own. He refused to be hurried. Still whittling, he sized me up. I was beginning to fear a refusal when he asked in a pleasant but somehow authoritative voice:

"Will you be seasick?"

There it was. He had put voice to a question I had silently been asking myself and couldn't answer. I didn't know. There was that in those blue eyes that demanded the truth.

"I don't know," I confessed. "I never have been, but I never have been to sea in a fishing schooner."

For a long moment of suspense he continued to look me over. Then with a ghost of a twinkle in his eyes he said:

"All right. Put your duds aboard. We sail at four o'clock." He turned to his companion and resumed conversation.

I had no "duds," just my camera. There was barely time to get a wire off saying that I would not be home until the following night.

It was thus I first met Captain Frank Nunan of the fishing schooner *Sadie M. Nunan*, built for him on the Maine coast and named for his wife. It was the start of a cherished friendship that grew and strengthened through many years until his death.

When I went aboard most of the crew were still ashore. In the galley I found the cook. He was the captain's uncle, a veteran of forty years at sea. In the fo'castle he

pointed out the bunk I was to occupy. The discovery that we were both Cape Codders put us on a friendly footing at once. It developed that both the captain and cook, though then living on the Maine coast, were natives of Provincetown on the tip of the Cape. Right on the dot at four o'clock we sailed.

Insofar as deep water was concerned, I was a landlubber pure and simple in all but one thing—my stomach. Never had it served me better than now. Outside the harbor the *Sadie* began to dip and bow and curtsy to the long rollers sweeping in from the open sea. Now and then one was edged with white, a monster showing its teeth. As the crew of fourteen went about their work I caught the sidelong glances my way, and after a while saw the anticipatory doubt give way to pleased acceptance of the fact that I might after all qualify for admittance to the brotherhood of the sea. When with as good an appetite as the best of them I held my own in a mug-up, my place was won. My legs were still those of a landlubber, but my stomach was for the sea. There was friendliness in the fo'castle, the galley and the captain's cabin.

Fourteen dories were nested, seven on either side of the deck, as we headed for the fishing grounds some twenty-five miles or more off Gloucester. At daybreak Sunday morning I watched the dories launched and towed astern, each with two tubs of trawl and a crew of one. At the wheel the captain held the *Sadie* to a straight course. At regular intervals he ordered a dory to cast off.

At once an anchor was dropped. Attached to the anchor rope was the end of the trawl just far enough above the anchor for the short pendant lines, a fathom apart, to put the baited hooks close to the bottom for cod; haddock and halibut are bottom feeding fish. With a small sail set the fisherman stood in the stern handling the steering oar with one hand as he ran before the wind. With a short stick in the other hand he flipped the short baited lines overboard from the tub immediately before him. The perfect rhythm with which those baited lines were flipped out was something to see. It was all very simple because masterly skillful. Skill always is simple—to watch.

When the last of the trawl from the two tubs was down an anchor was dropped and the fisherman took it easy until the captain signaled to haul trawl. Anchors up, a good-natured rivalry began to see who would get to the schooner first with the most. Laying trawl was light work and skill. Hauling trawl was hard work and skill. As the fish were slatted off the hooks into the dory the trawl was coiled in the tub so as to keep the short lines from being snarled.

The fish dressed, stowed in the hold and iced, the deck washed down, the dories hoisted aboard, gear stowed, everything shipshape in the ordered clutter a fishing schooner's deck presents to the uninitiated, the *Sadie* was under way with every sail set, a bone in her teeth and scuppers awash. At dusk we were back at T Wharf with ten thousand pounds of fish. I caught an evening train for home, carrying with me an urgent invitation to make a trip to the Georges and become a real sea dog.

The opportunity came the next summer. With a friend I boarded the *Sadie* at Gloucester. The first day out we ran down the Maine coast, in and out of small harbors, in quest of bait. It was then that in the friendly eyes of the crew I won my final degree. The topsails were not set. All morning I sat on a masthead smoking a pipe while the *Sadie* rolled joyously in a cross sea. Once more on deck I met the captain. He nodded

approval. “A man who can smoke a pipe on the masthead in a cross sea will never feed the fishes,” said he.

The next day, close reefed, the *Sadie* stood straight out to sea in the face of a rising storm. To me the waves were mountainous, but no one else appeared to notice them. Lying in my bunk way forward in the bow that night, everybody below but the man at the wheel and the watch on deck, I fully appreciated for the first time the meaning of the familiar phrase “the ups and downs of life.”

By midmorning the storm had blown itself out. A heavy sea was running. No land was visible, only a vast expanse of leaden sky, like an inverted bowl, over an equal expanse of tumultuous leaden water. In time a sail appeared on the horizon. It seemed no larger than a man’s hand. One of the fishermen looked intently, then remarked that there was so and so. Had it been an acquaintance across the street, he could not have been more casual. Three or four hours later the boat passed almost within speaking distance. He had been right.

Late that afternoon a swordfish was sighted. A man went aloft to watch the fish and call sailing directions to the man at the wheel. Captain Nunan took his stand in the pulpit at the end of the bowsprit, where a harpoon was kept lashed in readiness for just such opportunity. All eyes were on the black fin cutting the surface of the water. The captain held the harpoon ready to throw. All on the boat but the two guests had an interest in that throw, a financial interest. All shared in the sale of the boat’s catch.

There was no sound but the lap of water against the hull and the directions to the man at the wheel. There must be perfect co-operation between the man at the wheel, the man aloft, and the captain on the pulpit. Judgment and timing must be exact. At most, the distance the harpoon could be cast was short.

The harpoon was thrown. Instantly the deck was a scene of intense activity. A keg buoy with a fifty-fathom line attached to the harpoon was thrown overboard. Almost by the time the skipper was back on deck a dory with two men in it was overside.

“Handle him easy, boys. I hit him a shade too far back,” shouted the captain.

I still can see that dory silhouetted against the gray sky as it rode the crest of a wave. Then it disappeared from view completely as it slid down in the trough of the sea to reappear on the crest of the next roller. The two men were rowing standing and facing the way they were going. This was in order to keep the harpoon buoy in sight. Meanwhile the skipper had taken the wheel. By the time the *Sadie* had come about the dory had been lost sight of temporarily. When we did sight it again the men were seated and rowing toward the ship.

“That fool Louis would take anything into his dory up to five hundred pounds in any kind of sea,” grumbled the captain, but in those keen blue eyes was a look that belied the implied criticism. Sure enough, when the dory was alongside we looked down on a four-hundred-pound fish.

How they did it I don’t know. It seemed to me that it would have been something of a feat had the water been smooth, for the dory must have been tipped with the gunwale almost on a level with the water while the great fish was rolled in, and this was done in a heavy sea. But to the fishermen it was all in the day’s work.

And so to the Georges Bank. I was living a chapter out of Kipling's *Captains Courageous*. I lay in my bunk listening to fo'castle yarns and gossip. Most of the men were in or sitting on their bunks, for there is little waste space in a banker's fo'castle. We were jogging under just the foresail, waiting for the period between tides when the tide would not be running too strong to get the trawls down. It was nearing midnight. To the fisherman on the banks the clock has no meaning. He is an opportunist. His daily labor and the hours of it are governed by the ebb and flow of the tide. So we idled as we waited. Perhaps some of the tales I heard were designed specially for landlubber ears, but mostly the talk was exchange of news and experiences.

An oil lamp on the butt of the foremast afforded a somewhat dim light, sometimes smoking or flaring a bit as the ship rolled. There was dampness, for there had been no chance for a thorough airing out. There was the blended smell of fish and bilge water and the odor of human bodies confined in a narrow space. Now and then we got the pleasanter smell of coffee from the galley where Cook was preparing a mug-up for the men on their return from setting trawl.

Outside, the dense fog blotted out everything. The slap, slap of water against the bows punctuated the talk for me, my bunk being farthest forward, where the slap of the water seemed to be in my very ears. From the deck above drifted down through the open companionway the dismal moan of the small hand-worked foghorn. Abruptly the talk ceased. The feeble moan from above was drowned by the deep, arrogant, hoarse blast of the foghorn of an Atlantic liner tearing through the fog at supposedly reduced speed, but no less fatal to any ship in the way. Again the blast, and again; then in gradually diminishing volume.

Cook put his head in from the galley. "She's past," said he. "Sort of near, she was. Never hear one of them things in a fog like this but it brings back the time when nine men were drowned behind me as I crawled out of the fo'castle of a boat cut square in two by one of those terrors." Then followed the story in full and we all knew it was true. The momentary hush was broken by the moan of the small horn on deck coming down through the companionway in a swirl of fog.

Cook brightened the gloom. "Any of you fellows want a mug-up before you start out?" he asked.

It was 2 A.M. when the tide became right and the dories were cast off, each with a torch, two men to a boat, and with a single tub of trawl. Thus was measured the increased danger, and the time the rushing tide permitted a trawl to be down, compared with the offshore fishing I had witnessed the year before.

An hour later two fishermen came aboard for a mug-up. "What brings you fellows back?" I asked.

"Shark bit us off," was the laconic reply, as if this was of minor importance, and no special consequence was involved.

Shortly after daylight I saw this pair getting in their dory. The fog was as dense as ever. "Where are you going?" I asked.

"To look for our trawl," was the nonchalant reply as the dory vanished in the mist.

I thought of the proverbial needle in a haystack. But they brought that trawl back. What had happened was of not infrequent occurrence in setting the trawls. The first

hooks had reached bottom while much of the trawl was still in the tub. Some fish had struck at once. A shark had taken one of these and in doing so had cut the main line. One end of the piece bitten off was fastened to the anchor line and a buoy marked this. Find the buoy, pull up the anchor, and the lost piece of trawl would be salvaged. All the time the schooner had been jogging back and forth in the fog. Finding the needle in the haystack seemed to me a simple problem in comparison.

Three days and nights we jogged this way and that under just the foresail without opportunity for the captain to take an observation. Then came the order to set all sail. We were going home.

"How do you know where home is?" I asked.

The blue eyes twinkled. "I reckon I can find it," he replied.

He did. The next forenoon we broke out of that dense wet blanket into sunshine, and with a good wind and a white-flecked blue sea. With every sail drawing full—this was before the advent of the auxiliary engine in fishing craft—scuppers under, forty thousand pounds of fish in the hold, we raced for market. Nor did we break tack until we reached Boston Harbor.

Over fifty years later, long after the captain and most of the crew had reached the home port of no return, I visited the *Sadie* at a pier in Gloucester where it was planned to recondition her and make her a floating museum in memory of the fishermen who had sailed out of Gloucester never to return, and of the once great fleet of matchless schooners of which she was one of the best.

Two years later the *Sadie* burned where she lay at the pier. She was nearly the last if not the last of the beautiful sailing schooners that made Gloucester one of the great fishing ports of the world.

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CHAPTER

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Small but Vital

Two of the shortest words in the dictionary are two of the most important. In meaning and significance they may be diametrically opposed, but the choice between them may be unbelievably difficult to make. Countless times has history been written and rewritten because of decisions reached through choice of one or the other of these two words. More than once the fate of a nation has been decided by such choice.

From them have sprung pain for some and disaster for others. At times the choice has seemed of small consequence, but has proven of vital importance. Success or catastrophe all too often have hung in the balance between them. The longer I have lived, the more I have come to regard them with something like awe, these words so small that one is of two letters and the other of three. When I consider what effect the right or wrong choice between them may mean in human affairs it is sometimes appalling. The two words are “no” and “yes.”

All too often the shortest of the two is the easiest to say or write. The exception is when facing temptation. Too frequently that little word closes the door to opportunity. It blocks the way to success. It is proof of a form of cowardice, the fear to face possible failure. It puts an end to initiative. It destroys self-confidence. Alas, in the face of temptation the reverse is all too often true. Then of the two words “no” becomes far the most difficult to say.

I have found opportunity is the open door to attainment. If you fear to enter, if you say “No” to the invitation, the door is closed. If you say “Yes” and boldly enter, even though fearful, you gain though you may fall far short of full attainment. Aside from time and effort the cost is negligible and you do gain experience. Ultimately this may prove to be the very cornerstone of success.

At the time my weekly salary was raised to the munificent sum of fifteen dollars per week, the head of the company for which I worked stipulated that for the first year I should do no outside writing. All the long years since I have wondered why he made that stipulation, for up to that time I had done no outside writing, nor had I considered doing any. Be that as it may, shortly after the expiration of the stipulated year a wire from a friend connected with our New York office called me to the big city. He told me that a new magazine had recently been started there. The editors, with one or two of whom he was acquainted, had been looking for a writer to do a special line of work they had in mind but had failed to find one who could do it just the way they wanted it done. He had told them he knew someone who could do it, had made an appointment, then wired me to come down. The magazine was *Country Life in America*, the most beautiful pictorial magazine of its day.

It was a somewhat awed young man who was admitted to the inner sanctum of the editorial rooms and introduced to the editor in chief. Briefly, but clearly, he outlined to me an outdoor calendar to be run monthly. It was to cover all outdoor interests and activities—bird life with approximate nesting and migrating dates based on the latitude of New York; wild flowers, when and where to look for them; gardening activities month by month; outdoor sports of all kinds in their given seasons. It was breath-taking, a bit overwhelming. I was neither naturalist, botanist, agricultural expert, nor sports authority; merely an unknown writer with feet as yet on the lower rungs of the ladder.

"Can you do it?" The question was direct and blunt. It called for an equally direct and blunt reply.

Common sense, with complete comprehension of the enormity of the task and my utter lack of authoritative and technical qualifications for it, whispered "No." But opportunity was holding open the door. Without hesitation I said "Yes." Many, many times since I have wondered at my temerity.

"Good," said the ruling power. "Now, what about price?" It was all as simple as that.

At the mention of price I really did hesitate. My ignorance of prevailing rates for literary work of any kind was on a par with my ignorance of the subjects I was undertaking to write about. Save for the advertising verses I have before mentioned, no writing of mine had ever been paid for directly. All that I had ever written for the publications with which I was connected—verse, stories, special articles—had come within the compass of my meager salary.

My hesitation was noticed. "How will a cent and a half a word do?" I was asked.

Had I been asked, "How will a million dollars do?" I doubt if I would have been more flabbergasted. In my inexperience I had never dreamed that writing was ever paid for by the word. I had a momentary vision of receiving a cent and a half every time I used even the shortest preposition. Selling words! It was a completely new idea to me.

Perhaps my hesitancy was misconstrued. Anyway, the suggestion was made that I go home and do the first installment. If it was satisfactory and the work seemed to warrant an upward adjustment of the suggested price, this undoubtedly could be arranged.

I returned home in something of a daze, a dreamlike mental fog. Truly the impossible had happened. It was incredible. Then I began to take stock of the situation, of what I had committed myself to do. I began to realize the enormity of my presumption. The work must be done outside of business hours. Evenings, Sundays and holidays afforded the only available time. Although the year for which I had agreed to do no outside writing had expired several months previously, it seemed best that the powers controlling my weekly stipend should not know for the present of my outside efforts, always supposing said efforts were a success. So I wrote under my own name reversed, W. B. Thornton.

The work ahead involved in that little three-letter word "yes," spoken so easily in New York, was tremendous, to say nothing of its impact on my future career. It meant seemingly endless hours of research, of checking and rechecking. In its field *Country*

Life was authoritative. There could be no slips. All my bird work would pass under the critical eyes of Dr. Frank Chapman, world-famous ornithologist of the American Museum of Natural History. All my botanical and horticultural work would have to survive the scrutiny of Dr. Liberty Bailey of Cornell University. No, there could be no slips. In selection of material and presentation I was given a free hand.

In due course, with inward quaking and trepidation, the first installment was entrusted to Uncle Sam for safe delivery. Then suspense, dragging intolerable suspense, was broken by the return of the installment. It was the same, yet it wasn't the same at all. It was wholly and completely changed. It had gone out as the two-fingered hunt and punch product of the typewriter. It had come back in four full page proofs of the printer's art, beautifully illustrated. But the context was unchanged, practically word for word as I had written it. When later the check in payment arrived, my first check for bona fide literary work, the cent and a half had increased to two cents a word.

From the start the calendar was a success. It was widely quoted. I had arrived. Rather, W. B. Thornton had arrived. His reputation as a nature writer grew. Other magazines began asking for articles. Meanwhile *Country Life* was taking more material than the calendar. I recall that in one issue there were, besides the calendar, three articles under three different names and all from my typewriter. Then came a letter from *World's Work*, at that time a magazine of note devoted to world affairs and problems of the day. Could W. B. Thornton write for it an article on the part agricultural machinery had had in world development by the increase of food supplies through its use? Presumably the editors knew that I was connected with a house publishing several leading farm papers, so probably was well posted on the subject. The fact was, my editorial work was in the literary and household departments of the various publications.

I did know a plow, a mowing machine, a hayrake, a toothed harrow and a disk harrow when I saw them. Never had I seen a reaper, binder, threshing outfit or other modern farm machinery save in pictures. Here was a subject of which I literally knew almost nothing. What should I say? Common sense said "No." Opportunity said "Yes." I said "Yes."

Again nights, Sundays and holidays were devoted to research. The magazine spent a year getting photographs from various parts of the world to illustrate the article. Following its publication I received an inquiry from the Department of Agriculture in Washington asking if I could suggest anyone to head a department on agricultural machinery about to be established.

Meanwhile, the powers that ruled at home had discovered the identity of W. B. Thornton. I was then on the editorial staff of *Good Housekeeping* and had done much writing for it, all of which had appeared without credit. Now the name W. B. Thornton began to appear. It was pleasing. It was a form of recognition. It gave a certain sense of satisfaction even though it added nothing to the salary checks.

Often in the years since I have wondered just what the result would have been in my life and career had I said "No" instead of "Yes" on those two momentous occasions. "No" is a word of finality. It is conclusive. It is the end. On the other hand, "yes" is inconclusive. It guarantees nothing, but it holds the door of opportunity ajar. Nothing is lost. Much may be gained. It is up to the individual. All too often "no" is the word of

the coward, the quitter. “Yes” may well be a dare to attainment and success. Life has taught me that he who dares nought wins nought.

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CHAPTER

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I Become an Author

WHEN does one become an author? Webster's dictionary defines the word "author" thus: "The maker of anything; creator; originator. One who composes or writes something, as a book; composer; writer."

That is fairly comprehensive. However, it appears to me that to the lay mind it is not until one's work appears between covers that a writer is truly an author. Until then one is merely a writer. There is glamour in being between covers. Why, I do not know. A manuscript is not truly a book until it is bound. But let the brain child appear so dressed, then, regardless of size or format of the volume, the proud parent becomes a sure enough author, bona fide beyond all question. It is a step up from being merely a writer, even though the product may be a step down in quality of the work.

Years ago, after publication of many books, I was asked in a radio interview the title of my first book. I was about to name the first volume in the series of books for children on which such reputation as I may have attained has been built when the interviewer said, "Was it *The Brides' Primer*?"

It was. I had forgotten there ever had been such a book. In my time with *Good Housekeeping* I had written a few lines of humorous text illustrated by F. Strothman that had appeared on facing pages as a monthly feature of the magazine for a full year. It had been well enough received for the publishers to put it between covers with credit to me as the author. Until then I had been just a writer.

However, I have always felt that I really became an author with the publication of *Old Mother West Wind* in 1910. This was the first of my numerous books about Peter Rabbit and his friends of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest. The stories in the first volume were not written for publication but for my motherless small son, who with one of his grandmothers was visiting in Chicago for a month. Every night after dinner I wrote a story or some verses and mailed them to him. Later two or three of these stories were published in *Good Housekeeping*.

One day an editorial representative of one of the oldest publishing houses in America—Little, Brown and Company of Boston—visited our editorial rooms to call on my superior, the editor in chief. In course of conversation the latter said, nodding in my direction, "Burgess over there has some interesting stories for children."

The visitor came over to my desk, introduced himself, and asked to see the stories. He read one or two, asked how many I had, then urged me to get them together and send them to Little, Brown for consideration as a possible book. This I agreed to do, but with no enthusiasm. I was under the all too general impression that to obtain favorable

consideration of a manuscript an unknown writer must have friends in court, or some personal influence. I could not have been more wrong.

I sent the stories, fourteen of them, all I had. Somewhat to my astonishment, within a week or two the unbelievable had happened—I had signed a contract that would make me a bona fide author. It was for *Old Mother West Wind*. Two more stories were needed to fatten the small volume. On two successive nights I went back to the office and put a story on the dictaphone to be transcribed the next day. When these were mailed, a total of sixteen stories, I told my home folks that I had written every last animal story I knew, that I was written out. It was true—then.

Little we truly know of our own abilities until put to the test. That book, *Old Mother West Wind*, was published in the fall of 1910. Since that long ago time of being all written out I have written and had published over fifteen thousand of these short nature stories. And I have been "all written out" many times. A spring bailed dry, if it be a true spring, will always refill.

In its first year *Old Mother West Wind* sold over two thousand copies and I was congratulated on having a successful book for children. My royalty was two hundred and ten dollars. It was an eye opener for me. The road to fortune via children's books dwindled to the narrowest of paths, hardly worth following. Anyway, I was an author. That was fifty years ago. *Old Mother West Wind* is still being published and is still contributing its share to the royalty checks as it has all through the years.

When the publishers asked for another book the following year, I realized this was proof that despite the small sales for the first year I had written a modestly successful book. Meanwhile the spring had been refilling. So *Mother West Wind's Children* came from the press in 1911. Then I felt that beyond all question I was an author, especially when in numerous reviews I saw that magic word coupled with my name.

Why it should be I do not know, but there seems to be a sort of aura that surrounds the person of any author. I think it always has been so, but why I do not comprehend. I understand it where a notable work is concerned, a truly great novel, a history, a work of science or philosophy, for the truly great creative power is at once manifest. The author is fully entitled to a cloak of mingled admiration and reverence. But why should the bare fact that one has written a book, or books, set one aside from, or, to a degree, above the crowd? It shouldn't, but often it does.

Presumably in essence this attitude is a form of hero worship. This is especially true with children. It can be both stimulating and embarrassing. Once when I was in knee trousers an author was pointed out to me on the street. Who he was I do not know. I doubt I ever did know. Nor do I remember what book or books he had written. Probably I didn't know. It didn't matter. I loved books and here was a real, living, walking writer of books! It was exciting. I dimly remember trudging in dumb-doggie worship a respectful distance behind him.

In time, an author myself, I began to experience from the opposite viewpoint this curious attitude on the part of children and often their elders. I found myself on a kind of mythical pedestal, a most precarious position. It embarrassed me with the uncomfortable feeling of a constant danger that I might be rudely jostled off in a grand crash of shattered reputation.

I still cannot understand this attitude toward one who merely writes. Towards a fine musician or artist, yes. I cannot carry the simplest tune. A minor discord leaves me unmoved; I simply have not been aware of it. A drawing pen or a brush in my hands ruins the paper. But writing is so completely different. It is merely putting thoughts in words. Anyone can think. As for words, there is always the dictionary open to all, yet the most important of all books because others are wholly dependent on it.

Long ago I discovered something that is vitally important in successful writing, the vast difference between the spoken and the written word. It is the difference between sight and sound, between printer's ink and the human voice. The most successful storyteller may be, often is, a flat failure when putting that same story on paper, word for word. On paper a story succeeds or fails by its presentation through the eyes to the mind of the reader. The story itself—the plot, the setting—is wholly dependent on the structure, the choice of words, the phrasing and to some degree on the punctuation. Whatever it holds of interest, clarity, strength and charm lies in these things.

This is not true of a story told by a good storyteller. Indeed, the story in itself may be of small interest, loosely and poorly put together; yet through the colorful magic of the human voice, the gestures and facial expressions of the teller, it may be a great success with the listeners. The work of the story writer is creative use of words without the aid of props of any kind. The narrator of stories may not even be creative except in the matter of the aforesaid props, the story itself being the work of another.

How often I have had to explain this difference between the written and the spoken word to disappointed storytellers who have failed to find a publisher for their tales. The letters are much alike. The writers have been telling stories to children for a long time. The story hour always finds the little folk eagerly clamoring for more. I never question this. Then I read the stories submitted and find, as I know I will, that they are hopeless for publication. The personality of the narrator is wholly lacking. A good storyteller can make a story of slight interest delightful to listen to and can double and triple the charm of a well-written story. Rarely is a good storyteller a good writer and the reverse is equally true. This is why readings from their own works by famous authors all too often are a disappointment to the audience.

I have the utmost respect for words. I suppose a mason has a like respect for the bricks and stones with which he works. They are the materials with which he may build a plain but sturdy warehouse or a great temple of lasting beauty. They must be chosen individually to fit a given place exactly. It all depends on how he puts them together. It is just so in writing. Words are the writer's bricks. They must be chosen with care for the precise meaning he desires to convey. They must be put together so as to express a thought forcefully or beautifully, but always clearly.

Frequently I am asked "Do you have regular hours for writing or do you write when the spirit moves?"

Yes, I have more or less regular hours for work, preferably in the forenoon. However, under pressure I can write at any hour of the day or night, and almost anywhere. I have written a story while traveling in a railway coach and I have found a

temporary sojourn in a hospital bed an admirable time for doing the lyrics for some songs that were wanted.

The professional writer practices his profession much as do those in other professions. The spirit always moves when my secretary holds up one, two or three fingers indicating that I must do the designated number of stories before lunch. I never miss my lunch.

I had supposed that being an author, especially the author of stories for children, involved nothing more than writing the stories and depositing the royalty checks if any. I could not foresee that the actual writing of the stories would prove to be the easiest part of the price I would pay for being an author. I couldn't foresee that the typewriter would click many, many times more answering letters than in writing stories. It never entered my head that I would, in a manner of speaking, be on exhibition most of the time, visitors, mostly strangers, constantly appearing unexpectedly, often at the most inopportune times. I never dreamed that I, who hated to write with pen or pencil, would ever have to literally scribble my autograph—with elbow jostled by crowding small folk—on papers of all sorts, even the wrappers of chewing gum, being thrust at me by eager hands until I was threatened with writer's cramp. How often I have wished I had a short name such as Bill Nye or Sam Jones. What's in a name? Sometimes a lot of real work if it is a long one. I know.

But there are compensations quite aside from monetary returns, even beyond monetary values. They are worth all the extra work of letter writing; all the intrusions, real or perhaps fancied; all the petty annoyances; all the extraneous demands on time and energies. They are in the freely expressed and always sincere love from little children who come to see me, and more, many, many more who write me, many from far places, and whom I never have seen and probably never will see. They are in the letters of gratitude from parents for helpful influence that, quite unaware, I have been privileged to exert. They are in the letters of commendation from teachers and leaders in the educational world who have found my work of some aid in their chosen fields of endeavor. They are in the feeling that it may possibly be true that the lives of the so-called wild things who often are our unseen neighbors have been made easier and better through my stories as many humanitarians have declared.

All these things and much more I have discovered with gratitude since I became an author. The writing of a book is but the beginning.

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CHAPTER

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On My Own

In the summer of 1905 I was married to Nina E. Osborne of West Springfield, Massachusetts. Her belief in my abilities and faith in my future success were a never-failing source of inspiration when I most needed it. In her love and faith, which in full measure she shared with my mother, I found such stimulation and encouragement that the added responsibilities I had assumed were a joy, in no sense a burden. Together we planned and schemed to stretch the small salary to cover increased costs of daily living and still leave enough for simple pleasures that would require small outlay.

She had grown up in a New England environment and atmosphere similar to my own. From early training she had convictions and attitudes toward debt and social obligations like those that had brought Mother and myself thus far free of debt and independent. Freely and fully we talked over each new situation and problem as it appeared. She knew exactly my financial situation and was aware that my prospects along those lines, while not discouraging, were hardly likely to ever put her in the mink stole social stratum.

To her, as to me, money was to be desired but was the least part of the success we dreamed of. A forty-dollar-a-week salary on which to support three people involved real problems. We talked them over together. We agreed we would go without rather than run in debt for anything not absolutely necessary. We worked out a code for happy living that many years later I formed into a series of precepts. As I wrote them it seemed almost as if she were looking over my shoulder in approval. I know that had she in verity been there she would have endorsed them fully. They were as follows:

The integrity of a man is the measure of his character.

A man's honor is a possession without price.

A bad reputation travels too fast and too far to be caught up with.

He who cheats another cheats himself more.

A liar is too yellow to face the truth.

The worth of a man's honor cannot be evaluated.

A man without honor is a social outcast.

Contracting bad debts is the coward's way of stealing.

Though in the present it is difficult to live up to high standards, it will be more difficult in the future to live down a bad reputation.

A good reputation built slowly deed by deed may be destroyed by a single act.

The integrity of today will not be lost tomorrow, for tomorrow never is.

We had been married a little less than a year when our son was born and his mother gave her life for his. It was a crushing blow. However, I still had my mother and my baby son to work for. In my work I found refuge, and through God's mercy sustaining strength.

Good Housekeeping was growing and in proportion demands on my small talents increased. I had become what might be called general utility man, pinch hitter if you please, in both editorial and advertising departments. I supplied fillers in verse, special articles, short stories, bits of humor. I may not have realized it, probably did not, but these varied demands were giving me priceless opportunities to develop such abilities as I might possess, together with experience in versatile writing that would be of inestimable value in years to come.

With this work on *Good Housekeeping* I was also literary and household editor of the Orange Judd Weeklies, all for the munificent salary of forty dollars per week. It meant many evenings in the office and no overtime pay.

In 1911 I married Fannie P. Johnson of Ithaca, New York, who was to be for thirty-nine years my best critic, constant adviser and help. I now had my wife, two stepchildren in their teens, my small son and my mother for whom to assume responsibility.

A few months later came an unexpected blow. Of a Friday night I learned that *Good Housekeeping* had been sold and was to be published in New York. The following Monday morning I found a memorandum on my desk: "T.W.B.—Two weeks from date your services will be dispensed with." It was signed with the initials of the president of the company, the man who had given me the job of office boy in the editorial rooms a little over fifteen years before. There was no word of regret that the long association was to be severed, no sentiment whatever. It was all straight cold-blooded business. I never have liked business.

Had I been single, or had I possessed an adequate reserve fund, the situation would have been less drastic. I had long wanted to break loose on my own to see what I could do as a free-lance writer, but with my obligations to those dependent on me I had not dared make the attempt. Now I was out, with the long-wanted freedom, but afraid of it just then. It was swim or sink and I was not at all sure that I could swim without a life preserver. The forty dollars assured each week had been the life preserver.

I had wanted independence. Now I had it, with all its uncertainties. No salary. No fixed income of any kind. No adequate reserve. Through no volition of my own I could now put to final test my abilities and dreams, find out definitely if I really was equipped to stand squarely on my own feet, unaided, dependent on no one but myself.

In a sense I was once more at the foot of the ladder financially and in the accepted measurement of success. However, though facing greater responsibilities and

uncertainties than ever before, I did have certain assets which I had lacked previously —experience, knowledge of certain proven abilities, a degree of confidence born of self-knowledge, and such recognition as two moderately successful books afforded. These things would be of material help could I but find a way to make them pay off.

Almost at once I had the temporary good fortune to connect with a local advertising agency. For a few months I drew a salary as a copy writer, in free time writing children's stories and verse and learning at first hand how limited was the magazine market for such material, and how little was paid for it when it was accepted.

The advertising connection lasted for several months. The period that followed was difficult, a struggle with uncertainty through which the loyalty and encouragement of my wife never failed me. The going was rough. One week there might be twenty-five dollars from the sale of a story and the next week nothing.

With ever-increasing regard for a fixed regular income I assailed the market for stories, verse, special features and advertising copy. I found said market completely materialistic, unsympathetic, and with no consideration whatever for an author's desire to eat regularly. It also was prodigal in the use of rejection slips.

One thing I learned at this time was that an author writing to sell should never regard his work as a brain child. He should look on it strictly as a piece of merchandise. When the work is regarded in this way, rejection slips no longer affect the heart with stabs at the ego, but become a challenge to salesmanship. I discovered that it was futile to offer cotton to one who wanted silk, or silk to one in quest of cotton. The market should be studied before the sales approach.

All authors in their early efforts receive many more rejection slips than checks. Properly regarded, those same rejection slips may prove a greater aid to ultimate success than do the early checks. One becomes more critical of one's work before sending it out. They stimulate determination. Success is not to be bought with a check, but may be and often is the direct result of a rejection slip.

So, despite light fare in the cupboard, I refused to be completely disheartened. I carefully reread each rejected manuscript. If it still suited me and I could not improve it, it was sent forth again. However, I first tried to make sure that I was offering it in the right market. No salesman, however good, sells to everyone he approaches.

I had had my first lesson along this line back when I was editorial office boy. One morning I left several letters on the desk of Miss G. She was a contributor to several magazines. Later I entered her office just as she opened one of those letters. Her face lighted with pleasure as she drew a check from the envelope.

"Thank goodness that's sold!" she exclaimed.

"What is sold?" I asked.

Then she showed me the letter. It was from a well-known but now defunct magazine accepting a story of hers and enclosing a check for sixty dollars. Then she opened a small record book and showed me the list of publications to which that story had been sent. It totaled nineteen. That story had been making the circuit of editorial rooms for three years.

I never forgot that incident. When the time came that I began collecting rejection slips I often thought of Miss G. and promptly started my offerings on their travels again. However, I never did have the patience to equal her record of nineteen.

It was during that momentous year of struggle and uncertainty that Mother died. She had lived to see the publication of my first two books and recognition of her son as an accepted writer for children, but she did not live to see the broader field which was soon to open for me and which would have meant so much to her.

During the first months of being wholly on my own I chanced to read in a local paper some syndicated stories for little folk. They were pleasantly wholesome entertainment, nothing more. Why not equally entertaining stories with an educational value as well? Why not amusing, entertaining short stories of our friendly neighbors in fur and feathers, that would at the same time open for young readers the beautiful wonder world of Mother Nature? I experimented. I shortened some stories to what appeared to me to be accepted newspaper length. I submitted six of these to the George Matthew Adams Syndicate in Chicago as a sample of what I thought I could do as a syndicate feature writer. I received a pleasant letter from Mr. Adams saying that he liked my stories, but as he already had an established story feature for children he could not take on another.

That was that. Discouraged, I dropped the matter and tried to forget the idea. Why I did not try other syndicates I do not now know, unless it was because I had had no contact with newspapers at that time and knew of no other syndicates.

I found temporary employment with the advertising department of the J. H. McFarland Company in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This company specialized in horticultural and agricultural advertising. I spent the summer and fall there doing catalogues, magazine and mail order copy.

Late that fall I heard from Mr. Adams again. He had been called to New York to help organize a new syndicate for a group of nationally known newspapers. These were the *Chicago Daily News*, *Kansas City Star*, *Philadelphia Bulletin*, *New York Globe* and *Boston Globe*. Each of these papers had special features of its own. It was proposed to pool these, add such other features as might be needed and obtained from time to time, and sell to other newspapers a unit, a complete service. No single feature was to be sold separately. The new syndicate was the Associated Newspapers.

Mr. Adams had remembered the stories I had submitted to his syndicate. Would I resubmit them to Associated Newspapers? I would. I did. I signed a contract to write six stories a week for six months at thirty-five dollars per week. At the end of six months if the stories had made good, the contract would be renewed at fifty dollars per week.

Despite the smallness of the starting salary, I felt that there was now ground for my feet to stand on. What a blessing to have a fixed sum, even so small a one, coming in every week! It was a solid nucleus around which to build. I was so elated and so trustingly innocent of the fundamentals of sound business that it did not occur to me to seek legal advice on the contract. It looked right to me, especially that fifty-dollar clause. I couldn’t sign too quickly.

That proved to be an expensive signature. Verbally it was stated, and mutually understood and agreed, that the syndicate was buying only first serial rights, all other rights being retained by me. This meant that the stories could be published through the syndicate but once, publication rights then reverting to me.

There was a joker in that contract and in succeeding contracts based on it. It took me nearly eight years to find this out. One little word, a terribly expensive little word of five letters, had been omitted from all those contracts. It was the word "first." It should have preceded the words "serial rights." That omission cost me many thousands of dollars in potential income. It made me my own disastrous competitor, threatening to put myself out of business.

This omission may have been made inadvertently. However that may be, when at the end of eight years another syndicate offered me a contract that would net me more than double the remuneration I was then getting and I gave the syndicate I was with an opportunity to meet this, the then manager pointed out that the word "first," supposed to precede the words "serial rights," was not in any of my contracts. He claimed that Associated Newspapers had bought *all* serial rights to my published stories for eight years and could reprint and sell them as often as desired, doing it with no recompense to me. He was holding a club over me to prevent me from going over to the other syndicate.

I tried to be fair. I gave the management the opportunity to meet the offer I had under consideration. This it failed to do. When my contract expired I went to the New York Tribune Syndicate (Herald Tribune later) for what was to prove a continuous run of thirty-six years. I confess to what I think is pardonable pride in that record. Thus my work appeared daily, Sundays excepted, in New York City papers for forty-four years.

In due time the threatening club fell. It hurt. My new material would be sold to a paper at a good price. My former syndicate would offer a rival paper my old stories at a ridiculously low price. Eight years old, these were practically new to the present generation of young readers. The paper paying a good price for my new work expected, and rightly, the exclusive use of my name as author. Failing to get this, there would be immediate cancellation of the contract. Thus contract after contract was canceled. Of course this was reflected in my income. Meanwhile my early work was reappearing in an increasing number of papers with no recompense to me, and there was nothing I could do about it. At one time nearly one hundred papers were printing my old stories, and I had no legal redress.

Thus, too late, I learned two important things: the sometimes value of single words, and the always sound practice of seeking the best legal advice when drawing a contract. Competition with others is good, but competition with self is financial suicide.

The first syndicated story appeared in February, 1912. Little did I dream that this was the start of what was to be the work of virtually a lifetime, a total of fifteen thousand stories without a break. At the start in those early syndicate days I was practically unknown. However, I was in good company, that of writers and artists who already had made names for themselves. Dr. Frank Crane, widely known for his editorials, was one. Believe-it-or-not Ripley was another. He was just a sports cartoonist then. And there was the creator of Caspar Milquetoast, H. T. Webster, with whom I was to be associated in newspaper work for many years. Webster was primarily

responsible for my going with the *Tribune*. He was the first to break with the old syndicate.

The modest salary of those early syndicate days was helped out by doing advertising copy for the Harrisburg agency. In the spring of 1912 I was sent to Florida for a month's tour of much of the state to make photographs and secure material at first hand from nurseries and land development companies for the preparation of catalogues, booklets and other forms of advertising. It was a valuable experience. This was before the first great Florida land boom. The Florida of that day was radically different from the Florida of the present time. I liked it better. Conditions in many places were somewhat primitive. Miami then was wholly lacking the glamour of today. I recall being wakened at dawn in my hotel in what is now the heart of that city by the crowing of a rooster.

Returning home from that trip, I was engaged for some time in preparing advertising copy from the material obtained. I could not then foresee that this was to be the end of my career in advertising.

It was in 1912, while the spur of necessity was still the goad to endeavor, that a publisher approached me to ask if I could and would write a book for Boy Scouts and other boys in the Scout age. Up to that time I had done only short stories, my books being collections of these. Such a book as suggested would be in the nature of a juvenile novel. Under the prick of the aforementioned spur I became bold. What was there to lose? I said I could and I would. I did. *The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp* was an immediate success. A companion volume was wanted for the following year.

So by 1913 I was devoting all my time to the daily stories and books. Much research was necessary, so I was kept fully occupied. That year brought out another volume in the West Wind series, the first two in the Bedtime Storybook series, which was destined to run to twenty volumes, and the second Boy Scout book in a series of four.

I became accustomed to seeing my name in print. I began to get used to fan letters. These can be of great help to a writer, especially when he is just getting started. Later, as a degree of success is attained, they increase in volume and often become a burden, though still helpful.

Now I was truly and wholly on my own. In succeeding years, each with one or more new books, the entertainment field began to open up. I, who in school days had dreaded and hated "declamation day," now had increasing calls to the lecture platform, sometimes talking to two or three thousand children in a single audience. This work brought me in direct contact with schools, women's clubs, and libraries, until one year I had no less than fifty such engagements. More and more I realized and understood the basic importance of the story in educational work.

In 1916 it was suggested that I write a bird book for children. I hesitated. At that time there were bird books and bird books, as there have been ever since in increasing numbers. It seemed to me doubtful if there was place for another, even though written specially for young readers. Finally I agreed to undertake the work. It involved much research to select the birds most likely to be seen by the greatest number of children throughout this broad land of ours, then to portray these accurately in appearance and

habits and to arouse and stimulate the interest of young readers and the small folk who were still being read to. It required a new approach to the subject matter and a new presentation.

Children everywhere knew and loved Peter Rabbit. The more familiar birds were Peter's neighbors. Who could be better able to find out and tell about them? I enlisted Peter's help.

The book, beautifully illustrated by America's great and beloved naturalist-artist, the late Louis Agassiz Fuertes, was published the next year. Almost at once it became a best seller. Now after more than forty years it still sells well. I cherish the review of it by Dr. William T. Hornaday. It is to me a priceless tribute. He wrote: "It rings true and is by far the best bird book for children that we have ever seen. In fact it is the very book that anxious mothers, the children, and the booksellers have all been waiting for for twenty years."

The *Bird Book* was followed by the *Animal Book*, *Flower Book* and *Seashore Book*, all following the same pattern, presenting accurate natural history in entertaining story form.

From the start my stories were as popular in Canada as in the States. I was no longer at the foot of the ladder, but well on my way up. I was proving that I could make good on my own. It was a wonderful feeling. It still is.

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CHAPTER

13

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An Idea Is Born and Sold

It was during this period of struggle and hope, when every dollar was looked at twice before being spent, that three stories, now between covers of one of my earlier books, were sent the rounds of such magazines using similar material as I had managed to make a list of. Uncle Sam took good care of them and all returned home safely without a mishap. Then I sent them to a literary agency in New York. They were sold to a long-established magazine, the *People's Home Journal*, now only a pleasant memory but at that time having wide circulation, especially in small towns and rural communities.

The check received from the agency was disappointingly small; in fact, discouragingly small. But when the first story appeared, this was forgotten in my pleasure with the illustrations. They were by Harrison Cady, drawn with that inimitable humor which has for so long been characteristic of his portrayal of living subjects from insects to Buster Bear, Hooty the Owl and all their neighbors in fur and feathers.

At this time he was on the staff of the famous old *Life* and had been for some years. He had already won wide recognition as an illustrator. He had arrived. I, on the other hand, was still trying for a foothold. Being familiar with his work, I was so thrilled and delighted by his having illustrated a story of mine that I wrote him a note telling him how I felt. I sent it in care of the magazine.

I was not given to letter writing and this time acted wholly on impulse. From that impulse sprang a close and precious friendship of almost half a century, a record of co-operative creative work that I doubt has ever been surpassed, if equaled, by author and illustrator working together. Through most of that period Mr. Cady illustrated my stories in the daily press, a total of nearly fifteen thousand drawings for these alone. In addition his fascinating drawings in black and white and in color have had a large part in the popularity of my books. The characters I created in text he visualized and then on his drawing board made lovable, each with a touch of that quaint humor in which his gifted pen and brush are ever dipped.

Beatrix Potter of England named Peter Rabbit when she found him in Mr. McGregor's garden. With fascinating text and talented brush she made a classic of the event in the delightful little volume children everywhere know and love. I believe they always will. When I began writing stories for my own small boy, a rabbit was already Peter and there was no changing the name. I like to think that Miss Potter gave Peter a name known the world over, while I with Mr. Cady's help perhaps made him a character.

That note of those long-ago days found Mr. Cady summering in East Gloucester on the Massachusetts coast. Now as I write this there lies before me the letter he wrote me

in reply over forty-seven years ago. In it he expresses his pleasure in the stories. Then he adds: “Some day if we happen to be rightly placed we must get together and have a personal meeting, for I should enjoy meeting you very much. I think we have a good many views in common on the small things about us.” Again, referring to the drawings in the *People’s Home Journal*, he says: “I only hope I am to have the pleasure of making many more of them as time goes on.” How that hope has materialized!

Near the end of his letter he asked me to be sure to get in touch with him the next time I was in New York. That fall I made a business trip to New York and did call him up. He insisted I have lunch with him at the Salmagundi Club. There we met for the first time. There was immediate mutual liking. In the course of conversation Mr. Cady turned to me and asked:

“Have you seen Mr. Gates yet?”

“Pray who is Mr. Gates?” I inquired.

“Why, he is the owner, editor and publisher of the *People’s Home Journal*. He liked those stories of yours and I think you could sell him some more. When are you going home?” said Mr. Cady.

“Tonight,” said I.

“Don’t do it. Stay over and see Mr. Gates. I am sure you will find it worthwhile,” said he.

He continued to urge me so strongly that I decided to stay over for another day. The next morning found me an early caller at the offices of the *People’s Home Journal*. However, there were others ahead of me, probably by appointment. For a full two hours I sat in suspense, racking my brains in a futile effort to think of a plan by which I might sell a series of stories instead of merely one or two. I hadn’t even a definite idea for a single story, let alone a series. It was getting on toward noon. I was beginning to wonder if I was to be granted an interview. At long last a smiling secretary admitted me to the holy of holies. To any struggling writer trying to get a start, the editorial sanctum of a large publication is nothing short of this. I entered with a feeling of mingled uncertainty and trepidation.

A rather short man with a smooth smiling face greeted me as the door was closed behind me. I don’t know just what I had expected. Certainly it was not to be put at ease instantly and completely, as if we were old acquaintances meeting casually on a matter of common interest. I had been kept waiting a long time. Now it was my turn and Mr. Gates gave me his full attention as if he had nothing else on his mind.

He told me he was glad I had come in. He liked the three stories he had bought and had thought of getting in touch with me to find out if I had more. Together we looked over the children’s pages in several copies of the magazine and discussed stories and features of interest to boys and girls in the various age groups.

I soon had no doubt that I could sell Mr. Gates at least one or two stories, but I wanted more than this. As we talked I groped mentally for an idea that might lead to a series of stories. I needed the money, and how!

I noticed that there was a monthly puzzle with prizes for correct solutions. Also a column of letters from little folk. The whole layout was not materially different from

departments of like character in other publications. I mentioned this. The fact was admitted.

"Look," said I, "why don't you have something really original for this page?"

The keen eyes watching me twinkled. "Such as?" prompted Mr. Gates.

All my brain cells were activated now. "A Green Meadow Club," said I. Right then and there, as simply as that, the idea was born. There were no labor pains whatever. In my mind the plan was complete to the last detail.

"I never heard of such a club," said Mr. Gates.

"Neither did I," said I, "but it is like this: each month I will write a story around my animal and bird characters. These stories will be instructive as well as entertaining. With each story you will offer prizes for the best letters from children between certain age limits about the animal or bird which is the chief character of the story. They will tell of its habits, appearance, and points of interest. Membership in the club will be open to any boy or girl who will promise to be kind to birds and animals and protect them from their enemies. Each letter or postcard bearing this pledge is to be signed by the writer with full name, age, and address. He or she will then be enrolled as a member of the Green Meadow Club."

Mr. Gates smiled. "That sounds all right," said he. "What is it going to cost?"

This paved the way for a question of my own that I had been itching to ask. "Do you mind telling me what you paid the agency for those stories of mine you bought?" I asked.

"Not at all," said he. "I paid twenty-five dollars per story."

This confirmed something I had suspected. Agencies of that kind were supposed to do business on a fifteen per cent basis. Instead of this my agency had deducted fifty per cent. I had received twelve-fifty per story. Probably I deserved the experience for not first looking into the matter and making sure of the terms on which material was handled. But I never was a good businessman.

We discussed the Green Meadow idea thoroughly. The more we talked it over the better it looked to me. It was stipulated that I should judge the prize winners each month. This would involve considerably more work than the writing of the stories alone. We agreed on a price satisfactory to both parties and I went home with a contract for a story each month for a year. The contact thus established developed through the years into intimate association in a business way, and a warm and close personal friendship.

The Green Meadow Club was an immediate success. As a matter of interest it continued for twelve full years—a total of one hundred and forty-four stories instead of the two or three I had first hoped to sell. Throughout that period Mr. Cady made the illustrations. Those Green Meadow Club stories eventually added four volumes to my Mother West Wind series.

During World War I a campaign for the establishment of private and public sanctuaries for the protection of birds because of their value in control of insect pests was conducted through the Green Meadow Club. The response was amazing. Sanctuaries, little and big, totaling several million acres, were established in all parts of America as a patriotic aid in the production of food in the war effort.

Thus through that note written on impulse so many years ago not only was a financial crisis relieved at the time, but for nearly half a century my life has been enriched by two true and deep friendships that have become ever more precious in the test of time.

I have often thought how wonderfully this demonstrates the sometimes great importance of the seemingly insignificant.

CHAPTER

14

A Great Naturalist Becomes a Friend

AMONG letters which I greatly cherish is one that starts thus: "My dear Thornton: When I call a grown man by his first name it is a sign that in my affections and esteem he has been given a front seat in the orchestra apart from the common herd."

When as a boy in knee pants I had looked up with something very like awe to Dr. William T. Hornaday, one of America's truly great naturalists, I little dreamed that I ever would meet him, let alone come to know him intimately enough for him to call me by my given name, as in the above salutation that heads a long letter in his own handwriting. I had known him through his books and occasional articles by or about him. I had admired him greatly, but he lived in a sphere beyond my most ambitious dreams.

Through my syndicated newspaper column and my monthly Green Meadow Club in the *People's Home Journal* I was gaining some reputation as an entertainer of children. This was encouraging and stimulating, but what I most craved was recognition of the underlying purposes of my work. This could come only through endorsement from educators and leaders in the various fields of natural science. With the advent of World War I, the Green Meadow Club, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, hit on the idea of a nationwide movement to establish bird sanctuaries large and small as a war effort, the birds being natural protectors of the food supply by their destruction of insect pests. It was suggested that we try to get the endorsement of the plan by Dr. Hornaday, at that time director of the New York Zoological Park. With this purpose in view I went out to the Park to interview the good doctor, and I confess that it was with a very real feeling of trepidation.

When I got to the Park I found I was out of luck. Dr. Hornaday was entertaining friends from out of the city. For a long, long time I sat in the anteroom of his private office. The longer I sat the more uncomfortable I felt, the more like an intruder. At last, while his visitors were inspecting some paintings, I was granted an interview. Briefly I sketched the plan and asked for the doctor's endorsement. It didn't take more than a moment for me to see that he had never heard of my stories and was a bit impatient at my interruption. The stories at that time were running in the old *New York Globe*. It was evident that he had never noticed them. He was, to say the least, brusque. He was glad I was trying to interest children in Nature and hoped I would continue doing so. Also he was glad that I was interested in trying to protect the birds. However, he was much, much too busy to thoroughly investigate the plan I proposed, and he would endorse nothing without thorough investigation. It was painfully plain that he was not at all interested and in five minutes I was on my way with nothing to show for my trip to the

Park. Perhaps that statement is not quite true. For the first time in my life I had met a great naturalist, one whom I had long admired and had never thought to meet face to face. That in itself was a thrill quite worth the trip and the seeming waste of time.

I was chagrined, yet all the way out of the Park I laughed to myself as I thought over the smooth finality with which the good doctor had disposed of another pest. I resolved that given time the pest would in some way win his recognition at least.

Little did I dream then that the next time I saw him it would be as his guest at lunch, and that for a whole afternoon he would conduct me on a tour of the Park, cementing a treasured friendship that lasted through the years until his death and that to this day is an inspirational memory.

This second meeting came about through the organization of a new society for conservation purposes among the teachers of New York and vicinity. It had the endorsement of Dr. Hornaday. Also the *Globe*'s Bedtime Stories Club offered its co-operation. This irked me a bit because it was done as if the club was original with the *Globe*. It was not. It originated out in Kansas City. It came about in this way: The popularity of Little Stories for Bedtime syndicated in many newspapers throughout the country had become marked. An editor of the *Kansas City Star* capitalized on this growing popularity. He originated the idea of a Bedtime Stories Club as a feature of the children's department in that paper. I received a wire from the *Star* asking for my signature to be reproduced in facsimile. Whoever would promise to be kind to the birds and animals and protect them from their enemies and wrote in to this effect would thus become a member of the club and be given a big red Bedtime Stories Club button with Peter Rabbit's head thereon and an engraved certificate of membership carrying the pledge and signed by me in facsimile.

All Kansas City suddenly blossomed out in red buttons. At the end of three weeks there were fifty thousand members and the cost to the paper for buttons, certificates and clerical help had run into four figures. Other papers took over the idea, the *New York Globe* among them.

The *Globe* was quick to see the value of the club in building circulation. It was promoted vigorously and the club finally attained a membership of two hundred thousand. It was this club that offered its services to the new conservation society.

I wrote Dr. Hornaday expressing my pleasure that this new society had been founded and that the co-operation of the Bedtime Stories Club had been offered. I added that it might perhaps interest him to know that the *Globe*'s Bedtime Stories Club was not the only one of its kind. I mentioned several others with large memberships. This was my first contact with the doctor since my futile call on him. His reply was prompt and most cordial. I knew then that he had discovered my stories and approved of them. His letter concluded by urging me to ring him up the next time I was in New York.

It was not long after this that I had occasion to go to the big city and I did call Dr. Hornaday. The result was an insistent invitation to lunch with him in the Park that very day. It was a memorable fall day. As we went from exhibit to exhibit he explained in detail the interesting facts about each. While making ready to leave late in the afternoon, I was deeply conscious of the honor he had done me by putting aside

completely his work for a full afternoon. As I rose to leave he turned to me and said, "Young man, I want you to make a note that you are to be here in New York on January fourteenth and bring dinner dress."

I was not merely surprised but a bit flabbergasted. "What for?' " I asked, rather lamely.

"Of that you will be informed later" was all I could get from him. It was indefinite to say the least.

In due time I received an invitation for Mrs. Burgess and myself to be the guests of the New York Zoological Society at its twenty-fifth annual meeting in the Waldorf Astoria. Of course we accepted. Even when we entered the great banquet hall I had no intimation whatever of what was in store for me. It was not until I was seated on the platform looking down at an audience of several hundred that I realized something more was afoot. After the business meeting I was asked to come forward and was presented by Dr. Hornaday with the beautiful gold medal of the Wild Life Protection Fund for distinguished service to wild life. I believe it was then only the fourth time the medal had been awarded. Later it was awarded to my good friend Mr. Gates for the grand work his magazine did in establishing the private bird sanctuaries I have already mentioned.

Coming off the stage, I said to Dr. Hornaday, "This is very different from the first time I met you."

"How's that?" he asked.

"You showed me out of your office the smoothest way and in the shortest time I ever experienced," said I.

He fairly snorted. "Never did any such thing," he declared, and he never believed that he had.

An odd circumstance in connection with that event was the fact that unknown to my good friend he was helping me celebrate my birthday. There have been many birthdays since, but none that has ever given me the thrill of that public recognition whereby I knew that I was accepted by leaders in the field of natural science as one seeking to teach the truth, not a "nature faker."

From that time until his death Dr. Hornaday was one of my stanchest friends. I still owe my debt to him for the helpful encouragement he gave me in unstinted measure. At the end of that memorable day in the Park I asked what I might do to be of service to him. At that time he was engaged in a bitter fight to save at least enough of the once vast duck population of America to prevent extermination of certain species already reduced in numbers almost to the vanishing point by the ruthless ever-increasing guns of so-called sportsmen.

He said he didn't know just how I could aid but he would be grateful for any help I might be able to devise. Immediately I started in my syndicated newspaper column a series of stories portraying the life of Mrs. Quack the Mallard Duck, with the daily natural dangers to be met and avoided, and stressing the dreadful things she saw and experienced as she and her flock ran the gantlet of the terrible guns during migration. I tried to make clear the utterly heartless treachery of baiting waters, and the use of live decoys. The stories were later published in book form under the title of *The Adventures*

of Poor Mrs. Quack. Dr. Hornaday was delighted. What he had to say gave me the warm feeling that perhaps I had been of some real service in the cause of conservation.

For a long time Dr. Hornaday stood almost alone against the vast and constantly growing army of gunners who were truly blind to, or refused to read, the writing on the wall. His was a lone voice crying in the wilderness and few would listen. He was a fighter. As he battled for protective legislation in behalf of the ducks, a shortened open season and reduced daily and seasonal bags, he gave no quarter and asked none. Lifelong friends turned against him bitterly. Among them were leaders in the field of natural science, men who were supposed to be working for the preservation of natural resources, naturalists of note, museum heads. Some of these were themselves duck hunters and would not or could not see the situation objectively. Others may have yielded to the tremendous pressure of the so-called sporting fraternity and vested interest in guns and ammunition. Dr. Hornaday was called all sorts of opprobrious names. In his turn he didn't hesitate to call a spade a spade.

He formed a Committee of One Hundred. This committee was composed of those on whom he felt he could depend to back him and aid him in his fight. I felt honored to be included on that committee. I was bitterly assailed for so doing. Men whom I had long looked up to, and whose regard and good opinion I cherished, turned against me. Pressure was brought in many ways. It was an unpleasant business all the way. Dr. Hornaday was right. He knew he was right, and nothing could change him from his stand. He foresaw with clear vision what was happening and what would happen unless drastic steps were taken in behalf of the rapidly shrinking duck population.

He did not live to see the full restricted legislation he fought for. But the time came when some of those who were most bitter in their attacks on him were advocating and working for the very things he had demanded from the start. It is a matter of personal pride that I had some small share in the fight which Dr. Hornaday led. He was a fine naturalist, a great fighter, a loyal friend.

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CHAPTER

15

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Happy Jack Does His Bit

As it was with many others, World War I found me wanting to do my part but, through circumstances over which I had no control, unable to participate in active service. I was unhappy and distressed by a feeling of inadequacy. Perhaps I should join the ranks of unskilled labor in factory or other war work. I did not know. Like everyone else I bought Liberty bonds to the limit of my ability, but this seemed distressingly insufficient. It was not service in the accepted meaning of that word. I could and did do something with my pen, writing slogans and propaganda, but that was not enough. I was not happy, not happy at all.

Then came opportunity in a most unexpected way, though at the time it was not recognized as such. A nationwide vigorous campaign for the sale of war-savings stamps and thrift stamps among school children and those whose incomes would not permit the purchase of Liberty bonds had been started. The chairman of the War Savings Committee in my home city came to me to ask my co-operation in the local campaign. The five-dollar war-savings stamps and the twenty-five-cent thrift stamps were not going well at all in the local schools. There was a general apathy on the part of the children. They simply were not interested. Apparently they had failed to grasp the real meaning of those stamps. They were bored by the constant appeals made by the teachers and others.

The chairman was keenly aware of the value of a story in arousing interest in any subject. He suggested that it might be possible to take advantage of this. He proposed that I write five stories keyed to patriotism, or thrift, or both. Just how this could be done he had not the vaguest idea. That was up to me. He would arrange with the morning and evening local newspapers to run one of the stories on each of five consecutive days of a school week. Through the co-operation of the school committee these stories would be read by the teachers in all the lower grades of the public schools. The expressed hope was that if through these stories the interest of the children was sufficiently stimulated, some kind of follow-up to promote increased sale of the stamps could be worked out. My visitor smilingly suggested that the writing of these stories could be my special war effort.

I thought the matter over after the chairman had departed. It didn't seem to me like much of a war effort. The stories were not too much of a problem. True, thrift stamps and animal stories seemed to have little in common, to be a long way apart. They were not. The word "thrift" was the bond between them.

Most folks know that of all the thrifty folk in the Green Forest the squirrels are perhaps the thriftiest. I chose Happy Jack Squirrel to be the character around whom to

build my stories. Happy Jack starts a Thrift Club in the Green Forest. Only those truly thrifty in saving food in time of abundance against the days when food is to be obtained with difficulty were eligible for membership.

Peter Rabbit hears of the club. Naturally he wants to be a member. Of course. He wouldn't have been Peter not to have wanted to. Alas, Peter is not thrifty. On the contrary he is notoriously thriftless. This is pointed out to him. He thinks it over and decides to do something about it. He cuts a little clover and some tender grasses and makes a small pile of these under a bush. Then he takes a nap. Later he adds a little more clover and a little more grass to the pile, then naps again. This is repeated for several days—Peter doing little work and much napping. Then he goes to Happy Jack and tells him that now he can become a member of the club, for he has saved up food and is thrifty.

Sammy Jay goes to inspect the evidence of Peter's thrift. He finds the little pile of clover and grasses under the bush, but all is mildewed and completely spoiled. Peter is no better off than he was before because, as is pointed out to him, doing useless work never is thrift. Discouraged, he starts for home. He finds a fat acorn. It is of no use to him, so he turns it over to Happy Jack. This is repeated several times. As a result Peter is made an associate member of Happy Jack's Thrift Club because he helped someone else to be thrifty.

Judged by my own standards, the five stories were good. I had no doubt at all that the children would like them. But I had no illusions. Interest in thrift might be and probably would be aroused and there might be a flurry in the sale of stamps, but it would be temporary. Interest in anything, with adults as well as children, must be sustained in order to endure. I contacted the committee and persuaded the members to finance a stock of small Happy Jack Thrift Club buttons, Happy Jack himself wearing a bright red coat appearing thereon. I also asked that a supply of engraved certificates of membership be furnished. The committee went a step further. It had the five stories with illustrations bound in small attractive booklets.

The newspapers co-operated. Both morning and evening papers printed the story each day. The teachers in all the lower grades of the city schools read the stories to the children day by day. At the conclusion of the final story the teacher in each room announced that there was a Happy Jack Thrift Club right there in that room. To become a member all that was necessary was to buy a twenty-five-cent thrift stamp. With it would go a Happy Jack Thrift Club button to show that the buyer was a member of the club in good standing. If and when a war-savings stamp was bought, an engraved certificate of membership and a copy of the booklet containing the stories would be given the purchaser.

Results were immediate and astonishing. We had started something. We had put Happy Jack and Peter Rabbit in the war. The thrift fever swept through the schools. There were Happy Jack parades, Happy Jack charades, Happy Jack plays and parties, and other activities. The sale of stamps zoomed. I arranged with one of the morning papers to give us a Happy Jack half column three times a week. This purported to be written by Happy Jack himself and was credited to him.

As a columnist Happy Jack was a success beyond my hopes. The plan was based on such understanding of child psychology as I had acquired through long experience. I

simply put it to practical use, as I have done many times since and in many ways. The children would accept from Happy Jack Squirrel, and with approval, what they would not have taken from me, from their teachers, parents or anyone else. Without giving the effect of preaching, Happy Jack could and did tell the children what they could and should do to help their country in the time of its great need. It was taking advantage of the intuitive knowledge, the birthright of all children, that they are superior to any and all folk in fur and feathers, large or small. Thus there was no resentment when one of these, even an imaginary one, talked to them frankly and plainly. What Happy Jack said they accepted and heeded because out of their own superiority they felt they knew even better than he did the truth of what he said.

As the sale of war-savings stamps and thrift stamps in the city and vicinity mounted rapidly, other cities and towns took over the plan. I was asked to serve on the State War Savings Committee and help introduce the plan throughout Massachusetts. It was introduced in other states as well.

Doing the Happy Jack column in the newspapers was fun. I found many ways in which both patriotism and true thrift could be taught and the need for both stressed, always with the full understanding and approval of the young readers. A boy of my acquaintance was in the trenches in France. I wrote him about the plan and enclosed a button. I asked him to wear that button the first time he went over the top into no man's land, then to drop me a line saying he had done this. The very night after receiving my letter he voluntarily took that button out into no man's land and wrote me about it and his pride in wearing the button. Of course Happy Jack used this letter in his column and said: "This soldier did this for you. What will you do for him? Buy thrift stamps!" They did.

Letters to Happy Jack poured in telling of Happy Jack parties and other activities. These helped to fill and make interesting the Happy Jack column. When Happy Jack proudly announced that President Wilson was a member of the club and in recognition of the fact had temporarily worn the button, the enthusiasm was all that could be desired. Other high officials in the national government wore the button, as did the Governor of Massachusetts. All of this gave the club official standing, or at least recognition.

Thus were two of the most important attributes of good citizenship, thrift and patriotism, bound together with a little of the cement of imagination so that they were accepted as one and the same thing. They were accepted because they were interesting, whereas in the abstract both had been dry subjects for preachments. Happy Jack took thrift out of the abstract, endowed it with life and exciting interest, and made the meaning of it so clear that a small child could understand it and the reason for it. The wisdom of it became at once fully apparent. No child would admit that a squirrel was or could be wiser than he or she. I realized as never before the educational value of animal characters in storytelling.

These experiences brought home to me the power of the written word for both good and evil. It can be as destructive as atomic energy, and equally constructive.

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CHAPTER

16

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On the Air

My initiation to the air waves was abrupt. It left me feeling as foolish as ever I have felt in my more than fourscore years. At that time radio was in its toddling infancy. There were but four broadcasting stations of any size in the country—in Pittsburgh, Chicago, New York, and Station WBZ at the Westinghouse plant in East Springfield, Massachusetts. Those were the days of crystal sets and earphones.

At that time radio meant nothing to me. I had read of it, I had seen a few scattered aerials on housetops, but I had never come in contact with it in any way. I suspect that I regarded it solely as a sort of scientific plaything.

One day I was telephoned by a representative of the Westinghouse Company. Would I at seven o'clock on a specified evening tell one of my stories for children over WBZ? A car would be sent for me and would take me home. There would be no remuneration. There were no paid programs in those days, but the company gladly furnished transportation for those who would contribute their services for evening programs.

I was completely ignorant of what lay ahead of me. I never had seen a receiving set, not even a crystal set. I never had seen a microphone. I was taken to the great Westinghouse plant in East Springfield and there guided through one of the big buildings to the top floor. There, in what I may call an embryo studio that contained all the transmitting equipment, I made myself known to the lone operator. He was also the announcer. He was too busy to talk and left me to stare at this gadget and that and wonder what they were for. I didn't know what the microphone was when I saw it. All the time I was a bit anxious. I wondered if I should shout as some folks mistakenly do when telephoning.

Presently the operator turned to me and said, "Well, it's time for you to go on now." He sat down at the microphone, made a brief statement that Mr. Burgess would now tell one of his stories for children, motioned for me to take his place at the mike, and turned away to attend to other matters.

I had had sense enough to note the approximate distance between his mouth and the microphone, and I had made mental note that he did not raise his voice when speaking. So with these things in mind I started in. The temptation to shout was almost irresistible. However, I kept my voice down, trying to speak slowly and distinctly. Fortunately I had previously made some phonograph records. That experience helped me now.

My first broadcast was the flattest experience I ever have known. Had I been in a vacuum talking to a blank wall, it could hardly have seemed flatter. I really felt silly.

The longer I talked the more silly I felt. I was talking to a gadget that did nothing in return. It neither listened nor talked back. It didn't even click or purr or hum. I did not have stage fright for there was no visible audience to cause it, and at that time my ignorance of radio prevented imagination from visualizing the vast body of listeners that later would become familiar to me.

From the corner of one eye I could see the operator busy about something. Apparently he was not listening. Of course he was, but it didn't seem so to me. A couple of entertainers who were to follow me on the program came in. They listened. That helped some. When at last I signed off, the whole affair seemed to me absurd, absolutely absurd. I could not believe that anyone outside that little room had heard a word I had uttered. I had simply been talking to myself. In fact I had the feeling that I had made a fool of myself, or been made a fool of. I wasn't sure which.

The following morning I was in the smoking compartment of a train on the way to Boston. A man who lived in the town across the river from Springfield came in. He knew me by sight. "Hello!" he exclaimed. "I heard you last night."

"Did you really?" I cried.

"Lord, yes, I should say we did! We could hear you as if you were right in the room," said he.

A greater feeling of relief I have never known. I had no inkling then of what radio was to mean to me for a considerable period in my life.

The rapid advance in broadcasting was spectacular. A soundproof studio was opened in a downtown hotel. Evening programs became continuous and had some regular features. One of these was the reading of one of my stories at the children's hour daily except Sunday. Two trained readers, one called the Dream Fairy and the other the Sleep Fairy, alternated in reading them. Came a time when I was asked to give a brief talk about birds and animals following the reading of one of my stories. Requests for more of these talks resulted in their becoming a regular weekly ten-minute feature. Letters poured in from listeners demanding that I be given more time and it was increased to fifteen minutes. Eventually it went to twenty minutes and finally to a full half hour.

Then in January 1924 the Radio Nature League was born and with it began a labor of love that was to continue for nearly a decade. The purpose of the League was to preserve and conserve American wild life, including birds, animals, flowers, trees and other living things, and also the natural beauty spots and scenic wonders of all America.

Whoever would make a simple but comprehensive conservation pledge was invited to send me name, age and address and would be enrolled as a member of the Radio Nature League. As the names rolled in they were card indexed. By this simple method I was able to form a mental picture of my unseen audience. In announcing the birth of the League I stated that the first to enroll from each state would become a charter member. The program had hardly ended when by phone the first charter member was enrolled from another state. Before I left the studio three states were represented. By noon the next day there were fourteen charter members.

Applications came in floods. Whole families were enrolled from baby to grandpa. All walks in life were represented. The popularity of the program increased week by week. Now when I look back I marvel that I should have been listened to for a full half hour week after week. But radio was new then.

The success of the program was, of course, due in part to the subject matter plus the open-meeting form of presentation. We, speaker and listeners, were just a big gathering of neighbors with common interests, each one free to contribute his or her observation or comment or to ask for information.

I early discovered that interest in some form of nature lore is practically universal. Laborers on the street would stop to tell me how they would split a headset so that two members of the family might listen in. As the membership continued to grow, a cross section showed farmers, day laborers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, teachers, members of other professions, college students, and children of all ages in my audience. Housewives on distant lone farms and in crowded city flats enrolled. My mail became something of a burden, but was interesting in the extreme. Some letters asked for information while others volunteered it.

Gradually I realized that I had in my charge an instrument for education with undreamed of potentialities. It was in the nature of an unsought for and unexpected personal trust. That the programs should be entertaining was of course a first essential. At the same time they must be educational. Possible sponsors approached flatly refused to believe that an educational program could be sufficiently entertaining to attract a large enough following to have any advertising or commercial value. So it still had to be a sustaining program, a labor of love without monetary compensation. It was for nearly a decade, save for one year when it was sponsored and nearly ruined by interference on the part of the sponsors.

However, there were other compensations. I became a neighbor in countless homes. Almost invariably each of the never-ending flow of letters began “Dear Neighbor.” A wonderful and precious word is “neighbor” in its full and true meaning. Contrary to the commonly accepted understanding of it, distance has nothing to do with it. I first began to appreciate this when I received a letter from a dear old lady on an isolated farm in the Midwest. She wrote that she and her husband were old folks and much alone, for their children had left home. Once a week I was a good neighbor who dropped in and sat with them beside the fire telling them of things in which they had been interested all their lives. After that when I was at the microphone I often kept before me a mental picture of the dear old couple to whom I was a neighbor. It helped.

Meanwhile, Station WBZ had moved to Boston and WBZA opened in Springfield, the two being synchronized. This made it possible for a program to be started on one station and completed on the other with no break whatever in the continuity.

Very early in my broadcasting I realized that the weekly meetings of the League were far from being one-sided; that the more freely I gave of such knowledge as I possessed the more generously I received from those listening in. I would read from a letter an interesting anecdote or experience bearing on some phase of Nature. Immediately letters relating similar incidents, or perhaps going it one better, would come in. If someone asked a question to which I could not find a satisfactory answer I

would put it on the air. It seldom happened that the answer was not forthcoming, often by phone before I had left the studio.

People who would not dream of reporting to an institution of any kind an unusual experience or observation would write to "Neighbor Burgess" at considerable length. Thus I accumulated a mass of interesting and valuable material, some of which I turned over to museums or individuals who could make good use of it.

A trapper up in New Hampshire wrote me asking if a sixty-pound bobcat (bay lynx) was of unusual size. At that time the record weight for that species was forty-five pounds. At once I wrote him asking if he had weighed the big cat or merely estimated the weight. At the same time I wrote the Boston Museum of Natural History enclosing the trapper's letter and suggesting that the museum contact the writer on the chance that he really had an exceptional specimen. The reply to me from the trapper was prompt. His scales could weigh only up to fifty pounds and he was sure that the cat was a good ten pounds heavier than that. Eventually the museum obtained the skin and skull. That it was a world's record specimen of the species there was no question. It is too bad that the actual weight could not have been obtained. The point is that but for the Radio Nature League there would have been no record whatever of this great cat. The trapper would not have thought of reporting it elsewhere.

The noted ornithologist Dr. Alfred O. Gross of Bowdoin College was making a study of diseases and parasites of the ruffed grouse in an effort to determine a possible cause for the alarming decrease in the numbers of this famous game bird in the Eastern states. He was seriously handicapped by lack of a sufficient number of specimens. On the air I told what the doctor was doing and why. I asked that any dead grouse that might be found be sent to him. Also I asked that hunters who might shoot any grouse that appeared to be in any way diseased send them to him. At his suggestion I asked hunters in the open season to aid the investigation by sending him the intestines when they dressed the birds they had shot. In this matter wives often proved to be better sports than their husbands, the latter proving too uninterested to co-operate in preserving their favorite sport.

The net result was that the Radio Nature League proved to be far and away the most important source of supply of needed material, contributing some two thousand specimens for the doctor's good work.

Through the co-operation of the Boston Museum of Natural History I was privileged to present on the League's programs a number of talks by noted naturalists. They spoke from the Boston studio while I introduced them from the Springfield studio. At the time it seemed and still seems to me presumptuous that I, a mere amateur naturalist, should insist on editing the talks of famous scientists, each at the top of his own peculiar field, sometimes one about which I knew little or nothing. But I knew radio and the radio audience, and I knew how meaningless and exasperating many words and terms commonplace to the scientific mind can be to listeners unfamiliar with them. So all their talks were sent to me to be edited before they were presented. I blush when I think of it.

These talks were a great success and led to an interesting test of interest in the programs and of radio as an aid in collecting material. I was in the office of the Boston Museum of Natural History talking with the director, the late Dr. Edward

Wigglesworth, when the head taxidermist came in. He said he was ready to go ahead with a weasel habitat group—all but the weasels. Dr. Wigglesworth explained to me that they were planning a habitat group of weasels in their winter coats of white, at which time they are commonly known as ermine.

"I'll get the weasels for you," I said.

"How do you propose to get them?" he asked.

"I'll ask for them on the air," I said.

That brought a laugh from both men. I suspect they thought me a bit naïve. In the end the laugh was all mine. At the next meeting of the League I spoke of the fine co-operation of the museum in providing the noted speakers who had given us so much of pleasure and profit. I expressed the wish that the League might in some way show its appreciation. I told about the proposed weasel group at the museum and suggested that if any farmer or trapper happened to trap a white weasel and would send it to the museum it would be a tribute both to the museum and the League and it would be greatly appreciated. The result? From three states the museum received seven white weasels, one of them a species very rare in New England.

After nearly ten years of this labor of love I could no longer afford the time to prepare the scripts and take care of the correspondence. Regretfully I disbanded the League. At that time it had a card-indexed membership of fifty thousand, all in the territory covered by Station WBZ. I have always felt that could I have had a coast-to-coast network, properly sponsored, I could have built up a most effective conservation organization. Anything I ever asked members to do along conservation lines they did promptly and effectively. Frequently they enlisted the co-operation of others.

After more than twenty years from the date of the last meeting of the League, I still get a letter now and then expressing the wish that I might come back on the air.

Interest in Nature in some form is almost universal. Often people are unaware of it until it is by chance stimulated. I once had a letter from a man who had accidentally tuned me in. He wrote that he had said to himself, "I'll give the nut a minute, then tune in something worthwhile. At the end of the minute I decided to give the nut another minute. I was with you to the end and will be with you on the air next week." That man had discovered that he was interested in something with which he had not been familiar in the past.

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CHAPTER

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The Caterpillar Parade

To me nothing is more beautiful than a New England landscape in the spring unless it be that same landscape in the autumnal glory of its cloak of brilliant colors. But all too often the immediate, delicate, transient beauty of the spring, especially along the roadsides and the edges of woodlands, is first marred by the appearance of the glistening silver white webs of the tent caterpillars on bushes and young trees. Then later the beauty is wholly destroyed by the unsightly skeletons of those same bushes and young trees completely denuded of their lovely green foliage. From the bare branches are flaunted the disgusting dirty tatters of those once silken tents.

The favorite foods of these roadside pests are the leaves of the wild cherry and the apple. The former often are numerous along fence rows and roadsides. Well-kept apple orchards are kept free of the caterpillars by spraying, but few towns have funds available for roadside spraying. Furthermore, all too many communities appear to have no sense whatever of the value of attractive approaches. These can be made a community asset worth many times the cost of maintenance. An ugly approach to a village can and often does create prejudice in the mind of the chance visitor. Since the time of which I write community spraying by airplanes has been very effective in controlling the tent caterpillar with other pests in many areas.

In my early radio days I saw, or thought I saw, an opportunity for boys and girls to render a great public service and perhaps have a lot of fun in doing it. I did some studying of the life history of the tent caterpillar. I found that the eggs are deposited in small clusters on the twigs of the favorite food trees. Each cluster is encased in a varnished-like covering that hardens. Then the cluster looks like nothing more than a slight swelling of the twig. Through the winter when trees are bare of leaves these clusters are easy to find. In the early spring, simultaneously with the bursting of the brown leaf buds, the caterpillar eggs hatch. With the birth of the delicate green leaves the work of defoliation begins. The tiny worms at once begin spinning their silken communal tents wherein to spend the cool nights and find shelter in bad weather.

The leaves that survive from day to day grow fast. So do the caterpillars. When the latter are fully grown they are about two inches long. By this time a large branch of a big tree or all of a small tree may be completely stripped of leaves. It seemed to me that control should not be too difficult. Simply collect the egg clusters and burn them while the trees and bushes were bare and the clusters easily seen. Here was work for my Radio Nature League.

In the late winter I devoted one radio talk to roadside beauty and the tent caterpillar. I pointed out to the children the opportunity for real public service and did my best to

make clear to the young listeners the appearance of the egg clusters and where to look for them. I announced that through the month of March there would be a tent caterpillar campaign in the form of a contest open to girls and boys below high school age. I had available for prizes a limited fund from contributions that had been sent in to the League.

In addition to individual prizes for the boy and girl collecting the greatest number of egg clusters there were prizes for the best records made by a school, a Boy Scout troop, a Girl Scout troop and similar organizations. The collected egg clusters were to be delivered to teacher, Scout head or leader of any other group, who would count and burn them and report the totals to me. In my weekly talks that followed I stressed the public service being rendered and the community welfare idea.

The success of the first campaign against the tent caterpillar was far beyond my most sanguine hopes. As a result the campaign directed by the League became an annual spring event. Women's clubs, garden clubs, granges and other organizations got behind it. Some offered local prizes in addition to the general list. A Connecticut newspaper annually offered one hundred dollars to be competed for by children of the Nutmeg State. The Department of Agriculture in Massachusetts offered cups and other prizes for Bay State girls and boys. All these were in addition to the prizes offered by the Radio Nature League.

The children were warned not to invade private premises without permission of the owners, and to take care in cutting off the egg clusters to avoid breaking branches, lest the damage thus done should be worse than that wrought by the caterpillars.

To lend color to the campaign I suggested an imaginary parade of the caterpillars. I proposed that we start the parade at the State House in Boston and head it straight west, marching the caterpillars two by two. Allowing two inches for the length of a fully grown caterpillar and taking the average number of eggs in a cluster, it was an easy matter to compute the number of feet potential fully grown caterpillars in couples, and marching head to tail, would occupy and then how far the army would reach, assuming all the collected eggs were allowed to hatch and the caterpillars allowed to attain maturity. During the four weeks of the contest I reported week by week how far west the parade had reached according to such early returns as I had received. I had high hopes that the head of the parade might reach Chicago or a little beyond.

At the conclusion of the contest the tabulation of the final returns was exciting. The parade not only reached Chicago but kept on going, on and on and on. It got to the Pacific coast. It didn't stop there. It kept right on out into the Pacific Ocean.

The total distance covered by the imaginary parade of voracious pests two abreast was 3859 miles. Imagine the amount of foliage that would have been devoured had all those eggs been allowed to hatch.

The group winners were selected by dividing the group total by the number of members of the group. This placed a small group on an equal footing with a larger group. The total rolled up by a large group might be several times that of a small group, but the average per member of the smaller group might be far above that of the larger group. This would represent a far greater achievement. Thus a twenty-five-dollar prize went to a small school of 29 pupils who turned in a total of 21,758 clusters, an average

of 750 per pupil, whereas another school of 542 pupils had scored a total of 37,359 but an average of only 69 per pupil.

Whole towns were virtually cleared of the pest that for years had sadly detracted from the good appearance of their roadsides. I had the feeling that if nothing else was accomplished this work alone justified the League's existence. It was not only the control of the caterpillars that made the work so worthwhile and gave me so much satisfaction; civic pride was aroused and stimulated in the children of both town and country and in adults as well. A wholesome competitive spirit and community interest were developed. Girls had equal opportunity with boys to co-operate. Keen youthful eyes were trained to observe more closely in their search for the egg clusters and thus they found many other things of interest to wonder about and investigate.

As an example of what could be accomplished by one pair of sharp eyes and sustained interest, one boy alone working in the Metropolitan Park area of Boston collected over 45,000 clusters. What a service to his community and all who made use of the parks.

The success of the tent caterpillar campaigns over a short term of years is a striking and gratifying demonstration of what can be accomplished in practical education through understanding and carefully directed use of the airways. Because of recognition of this I especially treasure a small silver cup I most unexpectedly received from the Department of Agriculture of my home state for public service in the caterpillar crusade.

Because of the vastness of his audience plus the fact that it is composed of voluntary listeners in all walks of life, the speaker before the microphone is likely to soon find that as he gives he will receive. He may not be rewarded in cash but nonetheless he is compensated and richly. I found it so. The listeners were as eager to contribute information as to receive it. Unknowingly they furnished me with much material in which I found ideas for my own work. It was during one of the caterpillar campaigns that a policeman on the beat covering the studio used to drop in to listen to my broadcasts. He was a farm boy who had had the city urge, but his heart was still in the country. One night I met him on his beat. He stopped me. He was seeking information. His question was rather abrupt.

"If you should be sprayed by a skunk, what would you do with your clothes?" he asked.

I laughed. "You have me; I really don't know," I replied. "I have always heard that the only thing to do with clothing Jimmy Skunk has perfumed is to bury it."

He shook his head vigorously. "No need to do that," said he. "All that is necessary is to make a small fire of pine or spruce or hemlock, a smudge-fire, and hang your clothes in the smoke. It will take out every bit of the skunk odor."

I took this for what it might be worth. Months later a woman in another state wrote me that she had two pet skunks that were exactly opposite in temperament—one of even disposition, unhurried and not easily startled, the other was nervous, excitable and easily frightened. One day the latter, startled, let go with his scent gun and caught his mistress full in the face and hair.

After thoroughly washing her hair in strong soapsuds she tried everything she could think of to kill or offset Jimmy's too pungent perfume. Nothing worked. Then she happened to notice a bottle of turpentine. Diluting this with plenty of water to avoid burning, she once more washed face and hair. Presto! Jimmy was defeated! No hint of Jimmy's smell specialty remained.

At once I thought of my policeman friend and his smoke treatment of clothing. The connection was obvious. Turpentine, a product from a species of pine, and smoke from burning pine or related woods were both effective in neutralizing Jimmy Skunk's offensive scent. It suggests a chemical reaction from some source peculiar to coniferous trees. I passed the information on for what it might be worth and made a mental note to remember turpentine and pine smoke, should my friend Jimmy ever misconstrue my good intentions when we chanced to meet. I never have had occasion to test the remedy. While he is wholly independent, I have always found him considerate of the rights of others.

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CHAPTER

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A Precarious Seat

"NEVER make a positive statement that an animal cannot or will not do a certain thing," my good friend Dr. Hornaday once told me. I have thought of this many times when I have listened to positive statements affirming or denying actions or habits of certain forms of wild life. Sooner or later those who are prone to make positive statements are likely to have to admit that they are in error, unless they are too stubborn to admit the truth when previously conceived ideas are upset.

Does any species of snake swallow its young, or take them into its mouth for protection when threatened with immediate danger? "No!" say the herpetologists to a man, and most emphatically. Anyway, I never have found one who didn't. And who am I to question a trained observer in his own special field?

On the other hand, who am I to say that a correspondent who writes me in detail of having seen little snakes voluntarily run into the mouth of a big snake when danger threatened, and then run *out* again when the danger was over, is a fabricator or the victim of hallucinations? When this question of the snakes is brought up I promptly climb up on the fence. I may be uncomfortable there but I am safe.

I read these positive declarations of the herpetologists that mother love is sadly lacking among most serpents and that under no circumstances whatever are baby snakes taken into the maternal mouth unless it be to satisfy a healthy but cannibalistic appetite. Of course the scientists know, for they are trained in this special field. It must be as they say.

Then I read a letter from a correspondent flatly contradicting the scientists. When the writer was a boy he and his brother discovered a snake on a flat rock with a number of small snakes around her. The boys started for the big snake with intent to kill, but when they saw her hurriedly take the babies into her mouth they decided to catch her and see what would happen. This was done. A pen was made for her near the barn and in this she was placed, the babies still presumably in her apparently capacious interior. The boys then went up in the haymow, where from an open window in the gable end they could look down on the pen and watch the snake. When no one was about, insofar as the old snake could determine, she opened her mouth and out ran all the little snakes to squirm and wriggle about and around and over her. The approach of a horse or cow caused no alarm, but at the approach of a human being the little snakes all glided into her open mouth as if at some sort of signal. When everything was quiet again they all reappeared.

This was repeated several times in the course of a few days, the boys watching from the hayloft. Then the father of the boys took a hand. He asked them if they knew where

those little snakes were when they disappeared. Their natural guess was that they were in mother's stomach.

"No," said the father. Thereupon he killed the snake, opened what appeared to be a long pouch or pocket along one side of the snake's throat, and from this took nineteen squirming snakelets. "Are these all?" he asked.

The boys hastened to explain that there had been approximately as many more. Thereupon the father opened a similar pocket on the other side of the neck and there were the remaining members of the brood.

With my tongue in my cheek I filed that letter away. It bore every indication of having been written in good faith. But there were the herpetologists. I could hear them shouting in unison, "Impossible!"

Then from another state came a letter from a man who was a graduate of a well-known New England agricultural college. He stated that while he was a student he had collected snakes for study at the college. He had always supposed that it was common knowledge that certain species of viviparous snakes protect their newly born young by means of throat pouches into which the young retreat in times of danger. It was his theory that when the need for these safety throat pouches was over they disappeared, much as the milk glands of some animals vanish when no longer of daily use. But of course the herpetologists are right—there ain't no such thing.

It is common knowledge that many species of snakes are cannibalistic. In fact, some species live almost wholly on other snakes, including smaller specimens of their own kind. So, undoubtedly many reported observations in which young snakes were believed to have been taken into the mouth of the supposed mother snake for protection were in reality cases of cannibalism. The little snakes were swallowed for dinner, not for their protection.

On the other hand I have a number of records of snakelets apparently voluntarily running into the old one's mouth, she making no move whatever to pick them up. "Do you mean to tell us that you think those babies were deliberately committing suicide?" demanded one indignant woman when I reminded her that authorities unanimously agreed that there is no real mother love in most of the serpent tribe.

Of course the fact that some species are viviparous, giving birth to living young, accounts in part for the widely held belief that mother's stomach is a haven of safety for frightened young. A snake is killed for no other reason than that it has the misfortune to be a snake, which is just too bad. Living babies are found within. The almost invariable conclusion on the part of the killer and other observers is that the infants were swallowed to protect them. The truth is, they were just about ready for birth and had not yet seen the light of day.

So I sit on the fence. I do not like it. But if I get down on either side I lose faith. I cannot prove that the eyes of science are infallible, nor can I prove that the lay observers—I have had observation reports from scores of them—have not been looking through the spectacles of imagination.

Until recently all ornithologists insofar as I am aware believed that the little spotted sandpipers, who bow and bob and teeter on their slim little legs as they run along the water's edge, mated and shared domestic duties and care of their young after the

approved ways of most feathered homemakers—both sexes sharing in the care of the precious and somewhat precocious babies who run, swim and dive the very day after chipping their way out of their shells into the great world. Then a few years ago Dr. Alfred O. Gross, making a life-history study of the species, made the amazing and somewhat startling discovery that woman's suffrage has not yet obtained the degree of emancipation for the weaker sex that little Mrs. Teeter has long enjoyed. The most militant suffragettes never even dared suggest a goal long since attained by demure little Mrs. Sandpiper. She has won her freedom to go her happy way as soon as the eggs have been laid. It is *he*, not *she*, who is the homemaker. He and he alone is the baby sitter, or shall I say egg sitter? When the eggs hatch and the babies start out in the great world, it is he alone who watches over them, assumes all responsibility for their welfare and leads their busy little feet in the paths of sandpiper knowledge so essential for successful growing to maturity.

If keen-eyed ornithologists could for so long be completely fooled by one of our most familiar little shore birds, partly because both sexes dress so exactly alike, why should not the herpetologists be mistaken? Of course I don't think they are, but I feel safer on the fence. My correspondents were honest. Of this there is no question. Their testimony was both forthright and sincere. They saw what they saw, but perhaps they didn't see enough.

It reminds me of my experience with Bluffer the Hog-nosed Snake. He was big, as hog-nosed snakes go. I had cornered him and he fought me viciously, or seemed to. Hissing like red-hot iron dropped in water, he struck at me savagely, as ugly-appearing a reptile as ever crawled. Picking up a stick, I beat the ground around him, taking care not to hit him. I would strike first one side, then the other. For a few minutes he stood it nicely, striking back and keeping up his bluff. Then it happened. He had a convulsion. It was as if he had been mortally hurt. Finally, with a few spasmodic twitchings of the body, he rolled over on his back, his head and neck flattened as if he had been hit with a heavy object. His mouth was a little open, his tongue protruding from one corner.

When I picked him up by the tail he hung limp and lifeless. He was a pathetic sight, as death always is. Now, had another person, unfamiliar with the species and perhaps with some natural aversion to snakes, been in my place he probably would have been convinced that he was looking at a dead snake. The chances are he would have left without further investigation and nothing could have changed his conviction that the snake was dead. He had seen and he believed what he had seen.

To all appearances he *was* a dead snake until I gently put him back on the ground on his belly. In a flash he rolled over on his back, then lay there as dead as before. Seemingly he felt that only on his back could a snake be properly dead. I took him down to the house for Mrs. Burgess to see. She got me a big earthenware crock. In it he lay motionless on his back. Then we stepped back. We could see him but he couldn't see us. Instantly he came to life and began gliding around, seeking a way out. I stepped forward. The instant he saw me he rolled over on his back. It was a grand exhibition, perfectly performed.

The first time I ever encountered a snake of this species he won out. It was when I was a boy on Cape Cod. I came upon the snake lying on the sand. His head and neck were spread so that they were flattened. I thought someone had preceded me and had

killed the reptile. I didn't investigate further but left him there. It wasn't until years later that I realized I had been completely fooled. Often the keenest of observers misses some vitally important thing that is the key to the situation.

Then there was the case of Houdini. While the Radio Nature League functioned, my mail at the studio was at times surprising, not to say embarrassing, even startling, in contents. Some of the packages of all sizes that came to me in care of the studio were condensed lessons in natural history. I learned things about old Mother Nature and her ways that no textbook could have taught me. Nothing would have induced any of the studio folk to open one of those packages, but all were eager for me to open them, and gathered around—at a respectful distance.

One evening I was a trifle late in getting to the studio. A package that had come by parcel post awaited me. It was about the size of a two-pound candy box. With it resting on the palm of my left hand I cut the string. The wrapping paper fell open revealing a box with a telescoping cover such as a note paper or candy box sometimes has. It was securely tied both ways and the cover was perforated with pinholes. This suggested something alive inside.

Slipping the blade of my knife under the string, I was just about to cut it when I discovered what was supposed to be in the box was not in it at all. From between the bottom of the box and the outside wrapper was thrust out a pretty little head with bright staring eyes that never blinked while a delicate forked tongue darted out and in, feeling the air. It was a little milk snake eighteen inches long and about the circumference of a slender pencil. A more harmless little creature could hardly be imagined.

Regardless of size, a snake is a snake. No one in the studio would touch the little fellow. Only five minutes was left before I was due to go on the air. It would have been useless to put the snake back in the box he had come in. He had gotten out of it once and probably could do it again. The announcer got me another small box. I tucked the little reptile in this, tied it carefully, made little holes for air and placed the box on a corner of the small table at which I sat while broadcasting my half-hour program.

At that period there was no separate control room. The operator was established in a corner of the studio. I had been on the air about five minutes, talking about owls, when I chanced to glance over to where the operator was. He was just getting to his feet. Taking off his earphones, he tiptoed toward me, pointing downward at my table. He couldn't speak because the microphone was open. I looked where he pointed. Gliding across the table was the little snake, but the box on the corner appeared to be tied just as I had left it.

I asked my listeners to excuse me for a moment as there was a snake loose in the studio and I must catch it as no one else would go near it. Having picked the little reptile up, I told my audience I was holding the snake while I finished my talk. I knew that most of those listening in undoubtedly saw in imagination a five- or six-foot reptile. Who was I to disillusion them? That program made a hit.

I took the little snake home and asked my long-suffering wife, who never balked at anything I brought home, to get me something to put it in. I said that ultimately I would take it to the local Science Museum, where I felt sure it would be a welcome addition to the display of Mother Nature's children. Mrs. Burgess got me a two-quart glass

preserve jar. “You won’t need to put anything over the top of this because he can’t possibly climb up the smooth sides,” said she.

But I was taking no chances. With great care I folded a piece of stout brown paper over the top of the jar after putting the snake inside. With a piece of string I securely fastened the paper in place. I made pinholes in the paper for air, then placed the jar on a shelf over the kitchen sink.

The next morning when I came down to breakfast the maid greeted me somewhat anxiously. “Mr. Burgess, did you take that snake to the museum as you said you were going to?” she asked.

“No,” said I. “Why?”

“It isn’t here now,” she said.

It wasn’t. The jar was empty. What is more, the paper tied so carefully over the top was not disturbed. It was exactly as I had left it. So for the time being we all turned herpetologists and organized a snake hunt through the lower rooms of the house. The little reptile was found in a corner of the bathroom. He was as saucy as ever, darting his threadlike tongue out in the most approved serpentine manner.

So far he had escaped from two boxes and a glass jar. Remembering the late famous magician who never was successfully locked up or tied up for any length of time, I said, “This is the Houdini of Serpentville.” I took him to the museum. With him I took the box he had arrived in and the glass jar from which he had escaped. Both were still securely tied. Houdini was put in a small reptile box with a glass top that fastened with screws at the four corners. Then with the box and the jar he was put on display with a big placard telling the story of his several escapes.

On a Monday morning a week or two later I was called to the phone. “This is the curator at the museum. Would you like to hear from Houdini?” said a familiar voice. Of course I said I would.

“So would we. He was here when we closed yesterday afternoon, but he isn’t here this morning,” said the curator.

Some weeks later Houdini was found in the basement of the museum, where a cricket had sung daily through the early winter, but for some time now had been silent. We wondered if Houdini had anything to do with it. This time he was successfully kept a prisoner until spring. Then in congenial surroundings he was given the liberty we felt he had earned.

As for me, I never have ceased to wonder at the marvel of anatomy that enabled that little snake to so flatten his vertebrae that he could slip through a seemingly impossible opening. Of course that is what he did. Or did he?

Do baby snakes ever run into their mother’s mouth for protection? I sit on the fence. The herpetologists undoubtedly are absolutely right. They *know*. My correspondents are absolutely honest. They have *seen*. I am still on the fence. Don’t ask me to get down.

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CHAPTER

19

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Pickled Snakes and Singing Mice

My experience of several years as an amateur naturalist on the air waves was a liberal education in the wide acceptance of, and belief in, folklore and ancient myths in the broad field of natural science, and at the same time the almost universal interest in Mother Nature and many of her ways.

Every mail brought its quota of questions, all written in good faith but some so naïve as to seem absurd until I considered how little the great majority of people know of the living things in their immediate environment and the proneness of the human mind to ultimately accept as unquestioned fact a statement frequently reiterated. So a myth, coming down through many generations of nonobservers, becomes an established belief until proved otherwise, and the proof must be absolute. Thus the myth of the hoop snake taking its tail in its mouth and rolling like a hoop persists in some places to this day. A firm belief coupled with an active imagination is, even without the aid of alcohol, quite capable of enabling one to see hoop snakes. A man once told me he had seen one, and I believe that he believed that he had.

The work was not without a humorous side. In reply to a question as to how many young a snake may have in a single brood, I explained that some species are oviparous, laying eggs, while other species are viviparous, giving birth to living young, the latter having the greatest number in a brood. I named two of our most common snakes, the water snake and the garter snake, that sometimes give birth to very large families, broods of over fifty having been recorded.

The day after the broadcast brought me a letter from a man who stated that years before he had counted over seventy baby garter snakes in one brood, had captured all of them, and had preserved them in a jar. To prove to me his statement he was sending me the jar of infant snakes. When I had seen for myself this record family he would like the snakes back.

Alas, Uncle Sam didn't know what had been entrusted to his care and perhaps had been a bit careless in handling the package, or perhaps the trouble was in the packing. Anyway, when I opened the package I found a broken glass preserve jar and a mass of pickled infant serpents scattered more or less in the packing material. I carefully gathered them as best I could, put them in another jar, and returned them with a note explaining the condition in which they had been received. I did not count them. That was my mistake. By return mail came a reproachful and grieved protest. Two of the snakelets were missing. A treasured collection was ruined.

I still get a laugh when I think of the alacrity with which the announcer got out of the studio when I put a live rattlesnake on the air. It was done not as a stunt, but in the

cause of safety education. I was fully aware of how very many people are unfamiliar with the sound of this deadly serpent's unique warning of danger, so would not recognize it if they should hear it while afield. In fact, in all my own roaming of field and wood I have myself heard that whirring rattle but once or twice.

I heard of a lad who had, barehanded, caught a four-foot rattler. I arranged with him to bring the reptile to the studio for one of my programs. The boy was in his teens. He was accustomed to handling snakes and had caught this one before it could coil to strike. He had taken his captive home in a paper bag on a trolley car. I have tried to imagine what the other occupants of that trolley would have done had they known what was in that paper bag.

Two mikes were used, a table mike on the floor in a corner of the studio for our protesting guest, and another in the middle of the studio for my use. A herpetologist friend with a snake hook steered the rattler to coil in front of his mike. The announcer, outside the studio, watched through an observation window until preparations were completed. At the last minute he hurried in and almost stuttered in his haste to introduce the program and get out of the studio.

The snake did his part and his whirring rattle over the air waves brought many letters of thanks from listeners who never before had heard that ominous sound and who now felt better for knowing what the so-called rattle is like.

A pleasanter sound that I once put on was the whistled tremolo call of the little screech owl. It brought a letter from eighty miles away stating that the writer's radio was before an open window and when I put on the screech owl call an owl in a tree just outside the window answered.

But it was left for a mouse, the familiar little nibbler of the pantry, to let me down completely and give me a moment of nationwide embarrassment. In an institution in Chicago a singing mouse had been caught. Because to most people a mouse that could sing was almost unheard of, Minnie, as this mouse was named, got a lot of newspaper publicity all over the country. A singing mouse was news.

It happened that at that time I knew of several of these four-footed little songsters. In fact, for a few weeks I had one left with me for observation purposes. On my own program over WBZ I told about singing mice, explaining that these were simply gifted individuals among common house mice and whitefooted wood mice, sometimes called deer mice, less rare than generally thought. I pointed out that some investigators thought it possible that all mice sing at a pitch too high for the human ear, and that the occasional one that is heard is a contralto or baritone, perhaps a basso, so to speak.

A news story stated that Minnie Mouse was to be guest artist on a then very popular coast-to-coast program, five hundred dollars being paid to the institution she represented for her radio debut. I received a press wire asking if my mouse, Tinkle Mouse, would be listening to Minnie Mouse when she made her radio debut. It was all very amusing.

But the absurdity went a step further. The National Broadcasting Company announced a contest to select the best singing mouse in America to meet the best in Europe for the championship of the world. The nationwide fifteen-minute program was to go on of a Sunday afternoon. There were entries from Chicago, from Portland,

Oregon, from Memphis, Tennessee, and from Atlanta, Georgia. I was asked to open the program with a one-and-a-half-minute talk about singing mice, and to furnish and introduce a contestant to represent New England.

For some unknown reason my Tinkle Mouse had stopped singing. I heard of a singer in a town some forty miles distant. With traps I made a trip there in a futile effort to catch the mouse. The papers carried a story about the forthcoming contest, stating that Burgess was roaming the Berkshire hills with a backload of traps and pockets full of Limburger cheese. The story wound up with the statement that Burgess always gets his mouse.

Burgess didn't that time. Came the Saturday before the contest with no mouse to represent New England. Then the noon mail brought a letter from a man in Amesbury, Massachusetts. He had a mouse he wanted to enter in the contest. WBZ in Boston was telephoned, the station contacted the man in Amesbury, and arrangements were made to have the singer in the studio in ample time for the broadcast at three o'clock the next day.

When I arrived at the studio the mouse was there, singing and in good voice. The song was continuous, seemingly without pause to take breath. The furry diva had a mike to herself, to be opened as soon as I had made the introduction. The sound would then be amplified. Thus interference and possible confusion would be avoided. It was a tight fifteen-minute schedule, Boston to Chicago, to Portland, to Memphis, to Atlanta, to New York for the signing off. Every second counted.

As I gave my talk I could hear the mouse singing in back of me, but this did not register in my mike. Then as I said, "And now I take great pleasure in introducing Miss Ripple Mouse of Amesbury, Massachusetts" her mike was opened and—there was dead silence. The mouse, to my coast to coast embarrassment and a laugh of the same extent at my expense, had stopped singing. Perhaps she had mike fright. A wait of two seconds, then a hasty switch to Chicago. Too late Ripple Mouse resumed singing and kept it up.

As to the winner of the contest, I never did hear who won, nor did I hear any more of an international event.

Another time I had a happier experience in broadcasting the songs of some of Nature's sweetest choristers. With the co-operation of Mr. Edward Avis, the noted whistler of bird songs, I conducted a radio bird walk. As I described the various locations we visited, Mr. Avis gave the songs of feathered folk we might expect to find in each. Prizes were offered for the listeners who recognized and named correctly the largest number of species whose songs were rendered. The total was thirty-two species. To my thinking it was a wonderful tribute to the artistry and accuracy of Mr. Avis in his rendition of those songs that two listeners sent in perfect scores. Some of those songs were of warblers somewhat rare on the lists of most bird watchers. This was the most successful bird walk I ever took.

At times the amateur naturalist feels like throwing up his hands in despair as he reads the descriptions of the unknown and impossible that come to him for identification.

One autumn I received a letter from the office of a manufacturer in the northwestern part of Massachusetts. Migrating ducks often stopped over in the pond that furnished power for the factory. The writer described an unfamiliar visitor then on the pond as a long-legged, pink-legged duck. What kind was it?

I was reasonably familiar with most of the species of ducks using the Eastern flyways during migration, but I knew of no long-legged duck. Short legs are one characteristic ducks have in common. Nor had I ever seen a duck with pink legs. Red legs yes, but not pink. With regret I acknowledged my ignorance.

Those legs bothered me. That I could not identify the possessor of such a striking pair of legs was mortifying. The rest of the description of the bird was meager, lacking in detail. Weeks passed. Winter set in. Came a letter saying that the pond was frozen over, all but a small space. The long-legged, pink-legged duck was still there in the little open water remaining. If it could be caught would I like to have it sent to me?

Of course I would. In due time the duck arrived, alive and in good health. It really was long-legged—for a duck. And the legs were pink. Therefore to an untrained and casual observer those legs were the most outstanding and characteristic feature about the bird. It proved to be a South American tree duck. How it happened to be so far north and so far inland is still an unsolved mystery.

Another stray from the tropics, not alive, arrived parcel post from New Hampshire. It was one of the big members of the lizard family, an iguana. It had arrived at the New Hampshire plant of a manufacturer of knives in a hollow log of balsa wood used in making knife handles.

Mrs. Burgess drew the line when a flea was sent me with a note asking if it was a dog flea, a cat flea or one addicted to the genus Homo. She really put her foot down when a pill-box contained a bug. There was no trouble in identifying a bedbug.

Those years on the air were an interesting experience from which I gained as much as I gave and perhaps more. And they were not without humor.

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CHAPTER

20

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The Last of His Race

In the early days of New England a game bird commonly known as the heath hen, a member of the grouse family, was found in such numbers in Massachusetts and was so easily killed that around Boston, according to old records, servants and laborers are said to have stipulated in making agreements with their masters that the meat of this bird, toothsome though it might be, should not be served to them oftener than a few times in a week. It seemed incredible that the numbers ever could be reduced to a point where the species would be threatened with extinction. Nevertheless the heath hen was doomed to follow the passenger pigeon into oblivion. And it was the tragic experience of Dr. Alfred O. Gross and myself to hold in our hands the last living member of its race, knowing as we banded the bird that there was not another of its kind in all the world.

This was on Martha's Vineyard. It was there that the species made its last stand and was commonly called "hethen." The state established a reservation for it there and spent many thousands of dollars in an effort to save the species from extinction. It was in vain. The heath hen was the pinnated grouse (*Tympanuchus cupido*), the Eastern form of the prairie chicken or prairie hen, so-called. Once numerous in parts of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Long Island and in some open areas along the Atlantic coast as far south as New Jersey, and in the Pocono Mountains and some parts of Pennsylvania, it disappeared from the mainland about the time I was born.

The island of Martha's Vineyard, with its large areas of flat land more or less covered with scrub brush, was suited to the needs of the bird and there in fluctuating numbers it held its own for many years. On the state reservation on the island the birds were given adequate protection from hunters and furred and feathered predators of all kinds. There came a time when the annual spring census showed a heath hen population of approximately two thousand birds. The future of the species seemed assured. Then in the nesting season a disastrous fire spread through the breeding grounds. The hens would not leave their nests. When the fire was over few birds remained and most of these were males. The few hens became sterile and the doom of the race was seen. Previously an attempt had been made to re-establish the species on Long Island, but the experiment was a failure.

It was shortly after the fatal fire that I was first privileged to see the birds I had known of and read about since boyhood. In the spring of 1928 I was invited by Dr. Gross to join him in taking the annual census of the heath hen. This task had been in his charge since the reservation was established. Making an accurate count of the birds on

such a large area as the Vineyard, with much of the terrain covered with scrub oak, might seem a herculean, not to say impossible, task. This was not the case.

Through a peculiar habit of the birds, it was quite easy to get an accurate count of the numbers. The courting activities of the birds were, in a manner of speaking, communal. There was what might be called a public courting ground. This was a large open field edged with brush and woodland. As the nesting season approached, all the male birds on the island would gather in this field for the competitive display of their charms to win the admiration and hoped-for love of the bright-eyed hens shyly hiding in surrounding cover, but watching every move of the lovelorn gallants. Just what process of heath hen mental telepathy led to the selection and acceptance of this particular field as a public and co-operative courting ground for all the heath hens on the island no one knows. But so it was and so from a strategically placed blind it was a comparatively easy matter to make an accurate count of the birds.

We were in the blind before daylight. At break of day the birds would appear and begin to gather to dance, parade, fight, call and display all their peculiar charms. The blind was, in effect, a huge wooden box roofed over to keep the interior dark so that no keen suspicious eye could chance to catch through one of the small observation openings some movement within. There were two or three of these small openings on each side; the largest just big enough for a camera lens to get an unobstructed view. Corn was scattered around the blind to provide a free lunch for the ardent wooers when they became in need of rest and refreshment. In this way they were kept within good camera range. A sliding door covered each opening.

The year of my first visit only four birds, all male, appeared. The year before there had been six. Obviously the tragic end was not far distant. It was a sobering thought. But those four birds went through all the courting ritual as ardently as if the bright admiring eyes of love were in truth watching every move.

In 1929 the four had been reduced to one, a heartbreaking picture of utter loneliness. In 1930 he still haunted the old courting ground, apparently as hopeful and ardent as ever. In a somewhat long life I can recall no other experience in my study of wild folk with such depth of utter tragedy as those early spring mornings watching from the blind on Jimmy Green's farm on the island of Martha's Vineyard.

From the blind or hide, as some would call it, we watched the last thin stars slowly fade and the first bright shafts of the rising sun touch the distant treetops. The trees were still bare but somehow no longer with the bitter nakedness of winter. The light quickened and warmed the brown carpet of dead grass of the field which here and there was beginning to show small touches of light green. The cawing of a crow broke harshly the peace and stillness of the dawn, yet its very harshness seemed to amplify this. At the same time it was softened by a note of joy. Black though he was, and harsh his voice, he was no harbinger of disaster or ill fortune. Rather he was the herald of the wonderful annual miracle of the resurrection of life and beauty which we call spring.

At a distance a robin searching for the early worm was so magnified by refraction of the low-angled light that for a moment or two we mistook it for the bird for which we were waiting. Near at hand a pair of horned larks were looking the ground over with homemaking intent. They appeared to be twice their natural size. A song sparrow rang

his tinkling silver bell. A white-throated sparrow softly but with exquisite clearness warned Peabody it was time to sow wheat.

Then in the strengthening light we saw the heath hen emerge from the thick cover of the scrub oak at the upper edge of the field. In this safe shelter he had spent the night. He did not fly. He walked, ran a few steps, walked again, then stood looking and listening, the picture of alertness. Manifestly he was well aware of the increased danger in these open surroundings. In this manner he continued to advance, watchful but without real hesitation. It was as if he were keeping a tryst, as indeed he was, a tryst with fate.

In front of the blind and only a few feet from us he picked up a few grains of corn. Standing still, he stretched full height, bright eyes searching on all sides. Then, spreading his tail fanwise in the same manner as his cousin the ruffed grouse, he dropped his wings until the tips all but or quite touched the ground, erected the long pinnate feathers on the sides of his neck so that they stood straight above his head like the ears of a rabbit, swelled out two bright yellow sacks like miniature oranges on the sides of his neck, took a few curious hopping steps, a sort of ritual dance, and followed this with a peculiar tooting love call. Then he stood at attention, looking and listening for some sign of recognition that we, watching him, knew could never be. The display, dance and call were repeated many times, the bird occasionally stopping to pick up a few grains of corn.

It was sheer, stark tragedy. Watching that lone bird displaying all his charms, calling for a mate after the manner of his race down through thousands of years, and while I knew that nowhere in all the world was there a mate or even a companion for him, that I was watching the very end of one of Nature's creative experiments down through the ages, bathed with infinite pathos a scene that should have been fascinating and delightful. A form of wild life had failed utterly in adaptation to changed conditions brought about through the advance of civilization. Man the destroyer had once again overcome Nature the creator.

In the spring of 1931 we made our last pilgrimage to the Vineyard for the annual heath hen check. It was no longer a census, for we had known for two years that there was but one bird. Now we wondered if that lone survivor of his race was still living. It was a full year almost to the day since we had last seen him. In that interim he might well have fallen victim to a hunting cat, a hawk, an owl, or other predator. He might even have died from natural causes, for the bird was old, presumably well past his prime. Would we ever see him again?

We were in the blind before daylight a bit tense with anxious anticipation. Somehow it was difficult to believe that lone bird could have survived another twelve months. Day broke, and then shortly we witnessed again that indescribably pathetic scene of love and longing for companionship.

That evening we talked the situation over with the keeper of the reservation. More than once the suggestion that the bird be trapped and cared for for the remainder of its days had been made. The last passenger pigeon of which there is a record died in captivity. We did not want this to happen to the heath hen. There had even been suggestions that the bird be collected and mounted for preservation as a museum exhibit. We knew that the end of the species was near. We wanted that end to come in

complete freedom under natural conditions as Nature intended. At the same time it was extremely desirable that there should be a record of the final chapter in the life history of this bird if possible.

So it was decided to trap the bird, band him, release him, and hope that someday the leg bones, or one of them, might be found still banded. Then the band could be returned to the bird-banding division of the Biological Survey in Washington (succeeded by the Fish and Wildlife Service), where the numbers on the band would be registered.

So on March 31, 1931, at daybreak Dr. Gross and I set a net trap baited with corn. Then we retreated into the blind with hope and a long cord with which to spring the trap. It was a beautiful morning. The bird appeared on time. He did all his stunts, fed close to the blind and all around the trap, but failed to so much as look inside it.

The following morning, April 1, All Fools' Day, we were on our way to the Green farm while it was still dark. The weather had changed. There was a raw damp wind and heavy mist with a threat of rain. By the time we reached the farm rain was falling. We parked the car in Jimmy Green's dooryard and sat for a few moments deciding what to do. From an experience of nearly twenty years of annual studies of the birds, Dr. Gross felt that he really knew their habits.

"I doubt that it is worthwhile to get out of the car. That bird won't appear in such weather as this. The heath hens never have come out of the shelter of the brush in bad weather," said he.

"But we have driven several miles and now that we are here we may as well stay on the chance that the weather may clear. We have nothing else to do. We will be dry in the blind," I said optimistically.

It was agreed. We debated if it would be worthwhile to take our cameras to the blind, finally deciding to do so. Through the peepholes in the blind we could see through the mist but a short distance. It was discouraging. I knew that Dr. Gross felt that it was hopeless. However, we had been in the blind but a short time when without warning and close to the trap an unfamiliar form materialized in the mist. It looked as big as a barnyard fowl. All the feathers were fluffed out, making it a forlorn-looking ball of a bird. It was the heath hen. Deliberately, with no sign of suspicion, no hesitancy, he walked beneath the raised hoop of the trap. There he began to pick up corn. It was unbelievable but it was true.

With the pull-string in my hand, I hesitated. I looked questioningly at my companion. We wanted pictures of the banding and this was anything but photographic weather. However, the real and important purpose of that morning's trip was to band the bird. Dr. Gross nodded. I pulled the string. The trap fell.

Hastily Dr. Gross crawled out through the low doorway at the rear of the blind, scrambled to his feet and rushed headlong around the corner of the blind to secure the bird before it might injure itself in attempting to get out of the trap. Meanwhile my movie camera was whirring away. Despite the unfavorable conditions, the results turned out fairly well.

Then, while I held the bird, Dr. Gross adjusted a band on each leg, an aluminum band on one and a copper band on the other. The numbers of the bands were afterward

sent to the Biological Survey and a reward was advertised for the return to the Survey of either band, should one be found. The reward never has been claimed.

The bird was seen once or twice after the banding, but never again after the early summer of 1931. So passed into oblivion the last of a race of beautiful birds, because it could not hold its own with “civilized man.”

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CHAPTER

21

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On the Labrador

"Hello, Peter Rabbit!"

Never have I experienced a greater or more pleasant surprise than this unexpected salutation from a pleasant-faced woman one June morning in 1931 in acknowledgment of an introduction. It was tactful, delightful recognition where I had not dreamed I would find it, on an island off the rock-bound coast of the Canadian or Inner Labrador.

With my good friend Dr. Gross, his son William, in his early teens, and one of the doctor's students, I had come to this rugged land, much of it desolate, to study bird life of the North, especially the life history of the eider duck, a species that under the protection of the Canadian government was making a splendid comeback from dangerously reduced numbers. Our small expedition (we liked to call it that) was temporarily located at Harrington Harbour, well up toward the Strait of Belle Isle, where is located the southernmost of the famous Grenfell hospitals on the Labrador coast.

This morning we were photographing the nest of a white-crowned sparrow immediately back of the small square-framed building which was the hospital. "Don't you think we should call at the hospital?" asked Dr. Gross.

I agreed that we should. Cameras and notebooks were put aside and we went around to the main entrance. The matron came to the door in response to the doctor's knock. He introduced himself, then turned to me. "This is Mr. Thornton Burgess," he said.

Instantly the matron turned to me and with a twinkle in her eyes and a broad smile saluted me as above. Sometimes I find it difficult to select exactly the right word for what I seek to express, but in this case "flabbergasted" is the word. The association of my name with that of Peter Rabbit was so instantaneous that there could be no doubt of her familiarity with my stories. And this on the Labrador coast.

Later on that same trip we moved some miles out to St. Mary Island, a small isolated island on which is located St. Mary's light. It was inhabited only while navigation was open and then only by the lightkeeper and his assistant with their families. On our arrival two small boys could hardly wait to drag me up to the house to show me two of my books among their treasures. It gave me a queer feeling, this discovery that in this bleak northern land I was now visiting for the first time I was not received as a stranger but as a friend and familiar acquaintance. It was a peculiar feeling, but withal a most gratifying sensation. It gave me as no other experience ever has a sense of attainment, that I was in fact a citizen of the world.

From early boyhood the Far North held a peculiar fascination for me. I had read avidly such books on arctic exploration and adventure as I could obtain. While this was not the true arctic it was on the edge of it—the land of dog sled and trap line in winter, where in summer, along the rocky wind-swept coast, a hardy race of fisher folk wrest an uncertain living from the ice-chilled waters, and where sea birds in countless numbers nest. Primarily it was the birds that had drawn us there, particularly the eider ducks, of which we planned to make a life-history study.

We had been fortunate in getting passage on a small coastal steamer making the first trip of the season from the city of Quebec to the Strait of Belle Isle. It was a sturdy boat, primarily for freight, with limited rough but clean accommodations for about forty passengers. The mixed cargo for small winter-starved ports of call included everything from food to spare parts for engines and motors, gasoline and, of all possible incongruities, a motor car of the famous Model T breed bound for a roadless land, the first automobile ever seen along that coast.

The captain and crew were French and the passenger list was drawn from many walks of life—lumbermen, fishermen, trappers, businessmen, salesmen, a small group of wealthy sportsmen from the States going up for the early salmon fishing, and a few women returning to homes or summer camps after a winter of city comforts.

It was a wonderful seven-day trip down the great river and along the shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, stopping at small, often picturesque villages. In some we heard only habitant French spoken, and the French influence was everywhere apparent from buildings to horse-drawn vehicles, harness, and the dress of the people. At times it was difficult to believe we still were in America.

The coast became more and more rugged, the villages farther apart. At each stop some passengers disembarked. Now and then one bound farther along the coast came aboard. At Mutton Bay it was a nurse. She brought aboard seven big rangy dogs of mixed breeds. In some was a trace of Husky. She told us that she had spent the winter on a small island farther up the Gulf. An epidemic had wiped out all the dogs on the island. This was a disaster of the first magnitude. For many months of the year those isolated islanders were wholly dependent on sled dogs for communication and transportation with the outside world. With the going out of the ice she had secured transportation in a small boat and had gone in search of dogs. These, paid for out of her own slender purse, she was now taking as a gift to members of the stricken community too poor to buy dogs for themselves. For the first time we began to dimly realize the place the dog holds in the lives of those hardy folk who somehow sustain life in the pitiless land of the Far North.

It was from this pleasant young woman that we obtained our first somewhat glimmering insight into the daily lives of the folk to whom the Labrador, despite its bitter hardships and at times desolation, still is home with all the depth of meaning that precious word holds. From her we also heard at first hand much about the work of Labrador's great and justly famous missionary-physician, Sir Wilfred Grenfell. She laughingly told us how, leaving the luxuries of everyday life in the city and things which she then considered absolute necessities, she had learned through rough experience how few and simple real needs are, and how adaptability is the secret of successful living under primitive conditions and in like surroundings.

"When I first left Montreal I liked my afternoon tea as most English folk do. I was fussy about it. It must be of just such strength and brewed just so," she laughingly declared. "Now I can, and often do, go into a cabin, sit down with a wrinkled and toothless old grandmother, and over a cup of tea nearly as black as the stove on which the teapot sits, never empty, twenty-four hours a day, listen to her mumbled troubles, or enjoy a bit of spicy gossip with the black bitter brew." She made it very clear that this is the land wherein the simple life is good in proportion as you forget to be fussy. Also that she loved it.

Day by day there was more of a chill in the air. Birds of the arctic fauna became more and more numerous—auks, murres, gannets, puffins, eider ducks. We saw a school of belugas, the little white whales belonging to the dolphin branch of the family. Now and then a small mass of drifting ice was sighted. Once in the dusk of early evening as we sat with backs to the low rail we were startled by an explosive sound as of a steamer blowing off steam alongside. It was a whale, a whale of a whale, or so it seemed to us. It had come up to blow just a little way out from the ship, nearer than I had thought ever to be to one of these monsters of the deep. It was a blue or sulphur-bottom whale, largest of all living mammals. During the next two or three days we saw several whales at a distance. None was red-and-white striped like a barber's pole, but had one been it would have seemed quite all right to me.

Leaving the boat at Harrington Harbour, the first stop on the return trip, we stayed for a few days with a fisherman's family on a small island in the harbor. Then Eli, our boatman, took us in his motorboat along the coast and out to St. Mary Island, where for nearly three weeks we spent most of the hours of daylight with the feathered hosts nesting on this and nearby uninhabited islands. For this amateur naturalist these were days of constant excitement and endless interest.

Among the tumbled rocks above reach of the tides and the pounding surf were colonies of nesting razor-billed auks, two species of murres, puffins, called parakeets by the natives, and guillemots, called sea pigeons. Perhaps nesting is not just the right word, for there were no real nests, nor were any needed. At one place the large greenish-mottled eggs, big at one end and, toplike, small at the other end, were haphazardly scattered about, here one on a flat rock, there one on a small shelf. To human eyes there was no appearance of selectivity. It was as if each bird at the moment of need had laid her egg wherever she happened to be. However, it is probable that to murre eyes there were, in each location, some fine points of advantage that we missed. We wondered at the odd shape of the eggs until we flushed a sitting bird. In her startled haste to take wing she accidentally kicked the egg she had been incubating. It was then we understood and appreciated the foresighted wisdom of Mother Nature in shaping that egg. No nest was needed for its protection. It didn't roll from the flat rock on which it lay near the edge as an egg of the usual shape would have done, and been broken. It couldn't roll. It merely turned top-fashion with the small end the axis. It would be there when mother returned. Incidentally, it is said that no two murre eggs are marked exactly the same. In any event, each murre knows her own egg though it be among dozens, and never makes a mistake in returning.

The auks, puffins and guillemots often made use of holes and deep openings or cracks in the rocks. The lightkeeper's small boys took delight in locating these for us.

One of them, flat on his stomach, his arm down in an opening for its full length, called to me to come see what he had found. In unsuspecting innocence I took his place and thrust a hand down to feel for eggs. I literally yanked it out, to the glee of the small prankster. Stout-billed Mrs. Auk was at home and not entertaining visitors. Until then I had not noticed that Donald was wearing a thick leather glove. I had none.

The auks and the murres in black coats and white waistcoats reminded me of gentlemen in dinner dress. Or perhaps they belonged to the Waiter's Guild, for now and then one would arrive with a fish course. A few feet from our hide or blind was a large lone rock on which they delighted to pose for their portraits. Good-naturedly and with the utmost seriousness they took turns in waddling up to the top, there to pose for a moment or two. Now and then a puffin, the feathered comedian of the North, did a solo shuffle dance on this same rock, then solemnly stared at our blind, from which I suspect he may have heard stifled laughter.

One landed there straight from a deep-sea fishing trip. Held crosswise in his parrotlike bill of red and yellow, almost the only bit of color among the feathered sea folk, were five small fish. How did that dapper little fisherman catch and hold four more fish after catching the first one? Don't ask me.

Back of a big boulder near the lighthouse an old puffin refused us so much as a glimpse of her eggs until, vigorously protesting, she was lifted from them in the well-gloved hands of the lightkeeper. They were old acquaintances, those two. It was the seventh successive year in which that old bird had come to that exact spot for her annual contribution to the perpetuation of the race. The numbered and registered band on one leg was the third put there by the lightkeeper, the numbers on two previous bands having been worn away by rubbing on the rocks.

At the edge of a small fresh-water pond on a neighboring island we found the nest, or, to be exact, the eggs of a loon. There was not even the semblance of a nest. The two large brown eggs were on a smooth plat of mud at the very edge of the water. On this and successive visits we did not once see the wary bird, despite the utmost care in making our approach. So we set up our blind just twenty-one feet from the eggs and for two days did not even visit the island. Taking us over early on the third morning, the lightkeeper asked us when he should return for us. In view of the extraordinary wariness of the bird we thought it would take most of the day to get the pictures we wanted, so told the keeper to return for us just before sundown. We had brought a lunch with us.

With cameras we settled ourselves in the blind for a long patient visit. In less than half an hour, to our somewhat startled surprise, the big bird appeared as if by magic at the water's edge beside those precious eggs. From the other side of the pond she had approached under water. For several moments she sat on the water in a strained attitude, looking and listening. Then clumsily she climbed out to settle herself comfortably on the eggs. As she looked a bit suspiciously at the blind it seemed as if those keen eyes must see right through the burlap covering.

The cameras whirred and clicked as we made movies and stills. She took no notice of the faint sounds. We even talked in low tones. But at the mere suggestion of movement of any kind she instantly and soundlessly slipped into the water, leaving hardly a ripple as she dived and swam away under water. At the end of another half

hour we had all the pictures we wanted of the beautiful great bird, a red-throated loon (*Gavis stellata*), swimming, diving, climbing out to sit on the eggs, changing her position from time to time.

It was on this same small island that we had an experience that perhaps more than any other brought home to us the fact that we were in truth in the land of northern romance and adventure. We had pitched a small tent, for we were to spend a couple of days there. It was the lovely hour of early evening dusk. I was squatting beside a small cooking fire broiling lobsters. Happening to look up to the top of a low ridge a little back from the camp, I discovered that the island was not as deserted of all but bird life as we thought. Silhouetted against the softly tinted evening sky was a fox. It was not Reddy, about whom I had written so many stories, nor was it his cousin, Gray Fox. This little fellow watching us so intently wore a white coat. He looked more like a small dog than any fox of my acquaintance, a spitz perhaps. It was an arctic fox. His attitude as he stood motionless, watching us, and no doubt savoring with longing the smell of the broiling lobsters, gave us the feeling that we were intruders. This was his domain, not ours. He must have wandered out there on the ice in winter and lingered too long when the ice broke up in the spring. The distance to the mainland was too great for him to swim. So he was trapped and would have to remain there until winter again bridged the Gulf with ice.

He may have been lonesome but he was living well, perhaps better than he would have lived in his homeland. Eggs and young birds were to be had for the taking at this season of the year.

On the precipitous face of a cliff with a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more to the water, every shelf and projection big enough held the nest of a cormorant, the “shag” of the fishermen. This is the bird the Chinese have trained to catch fish. These nests were well made and substantial. It was necessary in the exposed situations of most of them.

Climbing cautiously along the upper edge of the cliff where a slip might mean a fatal plunge into the chill waters below, we secured movies and stills of cormorant nurseries in all stages of occupancy, from freshly laid eggs, newly hatched young in naked ugliness, others in pin-feathered greater ugliness, on and up to fully feathered hissing youngsters daring us to touch them. These were about ready to make the first brave test of their wings. We soon had all we wanted in the way of pictures and of the smell of fish in all stages of freshness and lack of it.

All this work with other birds was fascinating, but it was in the eider ducks that our greatest interest lay, the birds whose down our great-grandmothers prized so highly for pillows that extinction of the species was threatened.

We found the first nests in the “Green Forest,” but not the Green Forest of my stories. Far, far from it. There trees forty to fifty years old, I was told, were little if any more than three feet high if that. Beaten down by prevailing winds, flattened by the crushing weight of snow and ice for the larger part of the year, they formed a sort of thick green mat. Outside this, birches were for the same reason not trees in appearance but vines along the ground. So it was that almost literally I walked on, instead of in, the forest.

In this tangle the ducks were nesting. There was no trouble in finding nests. The real trouble lay in making satisfactory photographs of them. The only way was for one of us to pull apart and hold the branches as best he could while the other shot the nest and eggs. To get more than this was impossible. We were forced to give up the attempt.

Then abruptly fortune came to our aid. On another part of the island at the base of a big boulder perhaps three feet high and standing alone out in the open, I spotted a mass of soft gray down. Disturbing it as little as possible, I felt beneath it. A full clutch of eggs was there.

A few feet from this, just far enough to get the whole rock and nest in a picture, I set up a pup tent, anchoring it with stones. Then, with cameras set and focused, I lay down flat on my stomach on what I verily believe was the hardest ledge of rock the Creator ever made. For two of the longest hours I can recall I lay there. Madame Eider appeared soon enough, but in the distance, and in the distance she remained. She was wary. She was suspicious. That tent was something new and anything new was suspect, to be studied from the safety of distance, and then to be approached only with discretion and distrust.

So her advance was slow, to me painfully so. There were long periods of waiting and looking. Just out of camera range she squatted down and considered that pup tent from all angles. Then she reconsidered it. Patience! She had it. I was learning it.

At long last my aches and pains were rewarded in some degree. She jumped up on top of the boulder and there she squatted down in perfect photographic range and light. The finder framed in beautiful composition the big boulder with the duck on top and at the base the mass of down which was the nest that as yet Madame Eider appeared to be wholly unaware of. A few feet of film of this, and then began a contest between comfort and discomfort. She was at ease. I wasn't, and with every passing moment was growing less so. I began counting the bones that ached. Never before had I realized how many bones are in the human body, nor the full meaning of the words cramps and stiffness.

In the end discomfort won over comfort. The duck got to her feet, stretched her wings, shook her feathers into place, hopped down from the rock and waddled around to the nest. With her bill she deftly opened that thick soft blanket of warm down pulled from her own breast. She carefully inspected the precious eggs. Perhaps she counted them. If she didn't the cameras did. Then with a little typical feminine fussiness she settled herself on the nest and seemed prepared for an afternoon siesta. I hated to disturb her, but I had what I was there for in the way of pictures. I was stiff, cramped and—well, to this day when I look at those pictures I still feel the hardness of that rock.

Meanwhile Dr. Gross was equally fortunate and far less unfortunate. He had located a nest in tall broad-leaved grass where he could work in comfort. One of the eggs had just begun to hatch. Beginning then, and continued on successive days, the hatching of the eggs and the development of the ducklings and their short home life under mother's watchful eyes until she proudly but anxiously led them out into the great and merciless world was fully recorded on precious film. All the time from strategic points big black-backed gulls patiently watched with predatory cruel eyes for those ducklings to appear from under cover.

That was nearly thirty years ago, but a bit of my heart is still up there on the Labrador. That is what this Far North with its bitter, merciless cold and hardship does to those who visit there. It grips and holds and never lets go. There always is a yearning to go back there.

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CHAPTER

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I Tell a Story

It was on this memorable trip to Labrador that I experienced a few moments of the most acute embarrassment I have ever known. Some two or three hundred miles from the city of Quebec a small salmon river, the Matamek, flows into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. For many years the fishing rights of this stream had been owned or controlled by a wealthy American of Boston and Washington. He maintained a large, thoroughly equipped, very comfortable and pleasant camp near the mouth of it. It was on the edge of a vast wilderness. For many miles along the coast there were only a few scattered homes of French habitants, some of whom were employed on the place, especially in summer when the camp was occupied. At other times they eked out a living by logging, trapping and fishing.

The owner of the camp was keenly interested in the welfare of his employees and the families of the neighborhood. He had observed that there was more or less fluctuation in the annual catch of fish. A year when fish in great numbers were easily taken, affording a bountiful food supply, often would be followed by a long period of steadily diminishing supply until it seemed as if there wasn't a fish left in the sea. Sometimes the disappearance of the fish would be quite sudden. Of course these lean years meant a period of severe hardship for those dependent on fish for a large part of their food. In time the conditions would be reversed and the fish steadily increase in numbers until once more plentiful.

These life cycles also prevail with certain species of birds and animals, notably the ruffed grouse and the varying hare, commonly called the snowshoe rabbit. The length of the complete cycle differs with different species. Could a scientific study of these life cycles determine the cause or causes and so make possible accurate forecasts of years of maximum and minimum numbers of a given species? It would or could mean much to those of mankind dependent on fishing and hunting to provide them a living, especially the fisher folk along that rugged coast.

The owner of the Matamek camp arranged for a conference of scientists at his camp there on the edge of the wilderness. It was unique in that it brought together for a full week in that remote place on the edge of the Labrador scientists from Scotland, England, Germany, Canada and the United States, leaders in several fields of science that might contribute directly or indirectly to the solution of the problem to be considered.

I did not belong in that galaxy of mental giants. Most assuredly I did not belong. But I was there. I was there on sufferance, feeling small, insignificant, wholly out of place and character. I was there because I was already on the Labrador coast with my

good friend Dr. Gross, and he was to contribute a paper on the ruffed grouse, a subject on which he was an accepted authority. Our small exploring party could not be split. So I was invited and tagged along, feeling forlornly out of place. Unrecognized at the time, it proved to be one of the incidents of very great good fortune that have been mine more often than I have deserved. To me it was all too obvious that I, merely a writer of little tales for small folks, could contribute nothing to the deliberations of pure science. I had the feeling that I was a sort of parasite, to be tolerated because I could not otherwise be disposed of. How mistaken I was!

Our little party, returning up the coast, reached Matamek a few days before the date set for the opening of the convention. We found already there Dr. Harry M. Kyle from Scotland, a world authority on fish, an English authority on ecology, Charles Elton, and Professor William Rowan, zoologist, from the University of Alberta, Canada. Of necessity we were for several days brought together rather intimately. It was then I discovered that the inflexible rigidity of fixed purpose in the minds of apostles of pure science yields most happily to discreet and gently applied essence of humor, especially when on vacation. During those few days of pleasant companionship much of my awe of pure science evaporated. It has never been recovered.

Came the day when the main body of guests would arrive by special steamer. Dr. Gross had been so sure that so few of the invited guests would come the long distances necessary to reach that isolated place on the edge of the Northern wilderness that he had not even prepared the paper he was to deliver. More than once he expressed to me the regret he felt for the bitter disappointment our good host would surely suffer. So it was with mingled feelings of curiosity and anticipated disappointment that we watched the steamer drop anchor quite far out.

For a distance the water was so shallow that only a small boat could approach the shore, and then if heavily loaded it could not be beached. So for the last few rods the passengers must wade or be brought ashore on the backs of the sturdy boatmen to the hilarious humiliation of dignity. It was picturesque and exciting, for the number pouring off the steamer seemed endless. However, it developed that many had come from Quebec just for the day. That afternoon when the steamer sailed she left in the pleasant camp in the little coastal clearing some twenty-five or more men of distinction in various fields of science, each an authority in his chosen field. In a sort of happy chagrin my good comrade admitted that our genial host had in the matter of attendance already scored an outstanding success. He at once got busy on that neglected paper.

Some of the guests I knew by name and reputation, especially several naturalists of note. Two or three of these I had met previously. There were others whom I didn't even know by name, my work and studies never having touched their fields of activity. I felt like a small boy in knee pants shaking hands with a group of grownups. It was then I made an astounding discovery. Anyway it was astounding to me. While most of these men were strangers to me, to most of them, excepting the European delegates, I was not a stranger at all. They greeted me as an old friend. They were familiar with my stories and approved of them. They understood and appreciated the dual purpose of what I was trying to do for children and for wild life through my little nature tales.

It was heart-warming. For that matter it still is when I am introduced to strangers and find that they know me, or at least know of me. I still have a pleasant little shock of

surprise, despite the many years of such recognition I have experienced. I like to think it always will be so. Being told that I am an old friend invariably gives me a feeling of embarrassed pleasure.

It was on the opening day of the convention that I received what at the time I considered, and still consider, one of the greatest compliments I ever have received. At that time prohibition was in force in the States. Many of the guests were from the other side of the international boundary and presumably thirsty. My host led me to a certain closet. “This,” said he, “is my wine closet. I want you to take charge of it and see that my guests have at all times what they may desire insofar as it can be supplied. I am leaving the matter in your hands entirely.”

With this he handed me the key to the closet. There were no restrictions, but he did express the hope that I might be able to save two or three bottles of a certain rare old liqueur of which there was a limited stock. Looking at the key in my hand, I felt keenly the responsibility and the compliment. What I did not at first realize was that it would unlock more than the door to the wine closet. It was also the key to good fellowship, and for myself to a very real if temporary personal popularity. I had the feeling that perhaps after all I was going to “fit in,” though in a wholly unforeseen manner.

Along that northern shore the building in which the boats are kept through the long winters is called a factory. The factory at Matamek was some distance from other buildings and had been made over into a temporary convention hall. Our host had had built a huge long table around which the daily sessions of the gathering were held. Each night at nine o’clock a bell on the factory would ring. No, it was not curfew. On the contrary it was a summons. All would promptly adjourn to the factory for refreshments and a social hour. For the time being, sunspots and other contributing factors to various life cycles were forgotten. I discovered that science was not so coldly analytical in its search for truth as I had thought; that sunspots did not so affect the eyes that they were blind to the dancing bubbles in a glass of beer flanked by a plate of crackers and tangy cheese.

There was much swapping of experiences in remote places all over the world; telling of anecdotes and adventure. As unobtrusively as possible I listened. I had a growing feeling of foreboding. I know of nothing more unpleasant than this feeling of foreboding. It attacks one at the pit of one’s stomach and there is nothing to do about it. My beer lost its flavor and my cheese its tang. I felt increasing dread of what I was sure was inevitable. It was. Finally one evening the blow fell. I was drawn forth from a quiet corner and a bedtime story was demanded.

It was useless to protest. I was keenly aware that so far I had contributed nothing whatever to the splendid cause that had brought about this communion of keen minds. I knew nothing about life cycles beyond the humdrum cycle of events in my own small sphere. In this sunspots had no place as apparently they had here. The nearest approach to anything having to do with celestial bodies of which I was aware was a statement once made to me that I was born under a lucky star. I didn’t even know which star. Right then I was sure it was not a lucky one.

Did you ever try telling a child’s bedtime story to assembled science of the first magnitude? When I looked around that room there were spots before my eyes, but they were not sunspots. Indeed, no! Each spot was a blurred face of distinction and high

attainment in some field of research of which I knew little or nothing. At the moment I much preferred sunspots.

I had faced many audiences of children, sometimes several thousand at a time, but never with such embarrassment, such an all-gone feeling, as I now experienced as I looked over that small group. To refuse to do what was asked would be to lose face completely. Yet to tell a story designed for children of tender age to a group of men in the highest academic range seemed impossible. The very idea seemed absurd. I could see but one way out of the dilemma and that was not too hopeful. I would try to invoke co-operative imagination. I would try to imagine this distinguished group was in reality just a lot of small boys begging for a story, this being conditional on my listeners doing the same thing.

"Gentlemen," said I, "as you are well aware I write for little folks. As a rule I talk to children only. I know that in certain ways imagination is anathema to the truth-seeking, straight-thinking scientific mind. However, I now ask of you the indulgence of making use of co-operative imagination. I ask each and all of you to imagine you are not over ten years old. If you can and will do this, I in turn will try to imagine the same thing and will tell you a story." Agreement was prompt. None would be over ten years old.

Now it was one thing for them to pretend they were small boys, but a very different matter for me, looking at those upturned faces—many of those heads crowned with gray hair or having none at all—to visualize small boys. My imagination was not equal to it. It simply could not be done. My only salvation was to put everything but the story out of my mind and to tell the tale exactly as I would were the pretended age a reality.

I chose a bear story which in many tellings always had proved very popular. It had been my custom to precede the actual story with a brief talk about bears and their ways, opening this talk with a question. I did this now.

"Can any little boy here tell me how big a baby bear is when it is born?" I asked.

Sitting across the table from me so that I was looking directly at them were Dr. H. E. Anthony of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, one of our most distinguished mammalogists, Dr. W. Reid Blair, then directing head of the famous New York Zoological Park, and Dr. Charles Townsend of the old New York Aquarium. Without a trace of a smile Dr. Blair put up his hand in true small boy fashion. I recognized him:

"The little boy whose head is almost bare will tell us how big a baby bear is when it is born," I said.

The good doctor came through splendidly in the spirit of the occasion, telling us that for the size of Mother Bear a cub is at birth among the smallest of babies, weighing but eight ounces or a little over if there are twins, slightly more if only one; that a cub's birthday falls in midwinter when the mother is in a state of so-called hibernation, which in her case is not true hibernation; that the baby does not open its eyes for forty days, and is nearly three months old before venturing from the den to follow mother out into the great world. He added for good measure that at birth a baby porcupine actually is larger than a baby bear.

I followed with the story of "Buster Bear's Sugar Party." When the mutual strain on imagination ended, the flavor was back in my beer and the tang in my cheese.

There was an interesting aftermath to this storytelling incident. In the fall of that year the late Dr. Ellsworth Huntington of Yale University brought his family and some children of his neighbors to see me at my home in the country. Before leaving, he asked me to tell the bear story. We gathered around the big fireplace in the long living room of the two-hundred-year-old house and I told the story. When I finished Dr. Huntington turned to me.

"I wanted to see if you would tell that story just as you did in Matamek," said he.

"Did I?" I asked.

He nodded. "You did," he replied. I felt that was an accolade.

The result of that never-to-be-forgotten week of intimate association with brilliant thought and scientific investigation was on my part vastly increased respect for, but less awe of, science.

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CHAPTER

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Teaching and Taught

To be honest with myself, it would be a bit altruistic to say that in the beginning the primary purpose behind the stories I wrote was specifically anything more than making a living in a congenial line of work. They were simple little animal stories written for the sole purpose of entertaining small readers. However, from the start they were based on truth, the facts in regard to habits and characteristics of the characters involved. They were designed to entertain, education being wholly incidental.

As the success of the stories grew my own education began. Gradually I awoke to the understanding that entertainment was in truth incidental, merely the means to an important end; that I was in possession of the master key to education along many and widely diverse lines; that Nature is the universal teacher. In 1922 by request I wrote for *Natural History*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, the official magazine of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, an article entitled "Nature as the Universal Teacher." The following excerpts from this article will perhaps throw some light on what I discovered through experience, or think I discovered in regard to the psychology of the child mind and how to make use of it.

Nature was the first teacher of the human race. With this statement no one can take issue. It was not until our prehistoric ancestors began to observe the workings of nature and tried to discover the laws governing the manifestations which they observed, that they began to rise above the animals surrounding them. Every upward step since is traceable directly to increased knowledge of the laws governing life, and these laws are the laws of Nature and have existed from the beginning. Nature was the first teacher and still is the universal teacher.

This being true, it seems to me a fatal defect in our present educational systems that nature study is given so small a part. In the curriculum of the average public school nature study has such a minor place that it becomes almost negligible. Yet it should be the foundation on which the educational system is based.

This statement is broad and I am aware that it is likely to be vigorously challenged. Nevertheless, in my own mind there is not a shadow of doubt that it is true. I make the statement out of an extended experience which is constantly driving home to me the fact that in the study of Nature lies the key to the most successful mental, moral, and spiritual development of the child.

When I began writing animal stories for children, it was with the sole purpose of teaching the facts about the forms of animal life most familiar to American children. I

endeavored to do this by stimulating the imagination, which is the birthright of every child, at the same time holding absolutely to the truth so far as the facts concerning the subject of each story were concerned. As the stories grew in number, surprising discoveries were made.

The first of these was the universal interest in animals and birds. It is not confined to children. I question if there is another subject which can even approach animal life in universal appeal to young and old. Whether the child be of the country or the city, he or she is at once interested by animals. This interest is instinctive. It goes back to the day of the "dawn man." By force of circumstances his sole interest in life must have been in the animals and other creatures surrounding him. His very existence depended on constant observation of them. Such intelligence as he had was constantly concerned with them. The larger forms were an ever-present menace to his existence and the lesser forms were his chief source of food supply. This interest has persisted ever since, and probably always will persist.

The second discovery was that nature study is unequaled as a vehicle for conveying information of all kinds. The driest of facts if embedded in a nature story written so as to appeal to the imagination will not only be unhesitatingly accepted but will be permanently retained. Intuitively the smallest child is conscious that he is superior to any animal. He knows that he is a higher being. No child will admit that any animal knows more than he does, and this is especially true in regard to the smaller animals. Much as the adult looks down to the level of the child, the child in turn looks down to the level of the squirrel and the rabbit.

This attitude has been singularly illustrated in the matter of moral lessons. The old-time story with an obvious moral aimed at the reader will not be read by the average child of today. The child has no greater liking for a preachment than the average adult. A story containing an obvious moral and centering around human characters immediately becomes personal. There is instant recognition that that moral is intended for the reader. It is resented.

On the other hand an animal story may have a moral introduced in the very beginning without giving the slightest offense. I have written hundreds of animal stories, each with a conspicuous moral, without bringing a single protest from my readers. Yet should I write one of these stories with no change whatever save that of substituting human characters for the animal characters, the story would not be read. The psychology of it is that those morals are pointed at the animal characters and not at the children. The latter not only do not resent those morals but heartily approve of them. If Peter Rabbit has done that which is wrong or foolish, they desire that he should be taught his lesson. Unconsciously they absorb these morals themselves as I have abundant proof in very many letters from teachers and parents.

I had at one time written a series of stories concerning Jerry Muskrat and the building of his house. I was at some pains to explain that provision is made in the roof of the house for the foul air to escape from the interior and fresh air to enter. At the time of writing I had no thought save that of explaining how Jerry builds his house. Immediately after publication I received a letter from a mother who stated that she had a small boy with whom she had had no end of difficulty because he objected to leaving his window open at night in cold weather. He had whined and cried and complained of

being cold despite plenty of bed clothes. “It is one thing,” she wrote, “for me to tell him that fresh air is necessary and that he *must* keep his window open. It is entirely another thing for me to read him the stories of Jerry Muskrat and how he provides for fresh air in his bedroom. Now my small boy refuses to go to bed unless he has the window open because if fresh air is good for Jerry Muskrat, it is good for him.”

That boy would not admit that a muskrat knew more than he did.

A similar incident concerned a child who had a great fear of the dark. No amount of argument on the part of the parent succeeded in effecting a cure. It was accomplished, however, through a series of stories of timid little animals who find the dark friendly. All fear vanished.

Country boys have written me that they have given up trapping. To these boys trapping meant not only a genuine source of pleasure but a source of needed income. No one asked them to give up trapping. In none of my work had I ever asked boys to give up trapping. But I had used a series of stories in which were told the experiences of Jerry Muskrat and Billy Mink with traps.

By the simple expedient of giving these animals names they became personalities. From their own knowledge of the habits of these animals the boys recognized that the stories were true. They were not the experiences of any one particular muskrat or mink, but of all muskrats and minks. The moment these animals were given personality they became a part of the world of these boys and infinitely more interesting alive than dead. Furthermore, the sense of justice which is inherent in every boy was aroused, and that instant the desire to add to the sufferings and difficulties of the animals ceased.

It is as natural for the average boy to throw a stone at a bird or to chase a rabbit or squirrel as it is for him to draw his breath. To tell him that it is wrong and cruel is a waste of breath. Kindness and mercy cannot be implanted from without. They must spring from within. But in that same average boy is inherent a peculiarly strong sense of justice. Arouse his interest in the daily lives of the lesser creatures and that sense of justice is at once aroused. He at once becomes their friend and champion.

The lives of our four-footed and feathered neighbors run parallel to our own. What we experience they experience, only in lesser degree. Keeping this in mind together with the fact that the child intuitively understands and recognizes his superiority, it becomes a simple matter to convey to the child any desired lesson through the medium of a story concerning a member of the lesser orders. But always there must be rigid adherence to truth and fact in regard to these characters. It is because the child recognizes that the stories are true in all essentials that the lesson is at once taken home. Thus the story that humanizes the animal to the point of the impossible is bound to fail in its purpose from an educational standpoint. It is permissible for Peter Rabbit to talk because the child understands that in all probability there is some form of communication between animals. But it is not permissible for Peter Rabbit to climb a tree or to ride a bicycle. The child instantly senses the lack of truth and this of necessity weakens any lesson which the story may seek to convey.

I have at various times on request written stories to emphasize the need of personal hygiene, the obligations of neighborliness, the necessity of fire prevention, the importance of safety first, the rules of health, the necessity of honesty, and many other

subjects which at first thought seem far removed from nature stories. But they are not. There is little affecting human life which has not an analogy in the lives of the lower orders. It is because of this and my conviction of the universal interest in animals plus the universal attitude of the child mind in regard to its superiority that I am convinced of the truth of the premise of my earlier statement that nature study should be the foundation of all education.

The child mind is colorful. Dry facts make no impression. The young mind cannot retain that in which it has no interest. Present those facts in such a way that the imagination may seize upon them and they will be impressed upon the memory forever. Nature presents an interest which is inherent. It remains but to capitalize this by presenting that which it is desired to impart in such form that the imagination becomes but a setting for the truth.

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CHAPTER

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How to Write a Story

UNDOUBTEDLY most successful writers have at times been assailed with a barrage of questions about the gentle art of writing. I suspect that in most cases there is behind it a more or less prevalent idea that writing is an easy and pleasant way to earn a living, or some extra spending money; perhaps to acquire a degree of recognition of sorts. This—or the writer of such a letter—is naïve to the last degree.

The letters are all of a pattern. Where do you get your ideas? Do you dig them out or do they just come to you? Do you plan your stories far ahead? To do your best work do you have to be off by yourself? Do interruptions upset you? Do you have regular hours for writing? What time of day do you prefer for writing? Do you write longhand or on a typewriter? Do you ever dictate a story? How far ahead do you have to write your daily stories for the newspapers? Do you first make an outline, a plot or plan? Do you write only when you feel in the mood? So on and on.

Taking the last question first, the answer is no. Why not ask the carpenter if he works only when he feels like it, or the accountant if he balances his books only when the spirit moves? This pinpoints what seems to me a peculiar attitude on the part of very many people. They seem to not regard professional writing as work, as a business. How very wrong they are.

Writing is my business, or should I say profession? But after all, what profession is not in effect a business? As a rule it provides the daily bread and the luxuries that go with it. The demand on time and the effort, and the rules governing it, are the same as in any other line of so-called business. When a columnist has to meet daily a deadline, mood has no place whatever. How one does or does not feel doesn't enter into the situation. The goods must be delivered. Had I waited to feel in the mood, most of my more than fifteen thousand stories would not have been written, or if so, by the time that number could be reached I would be crowding Methuselah hard for the age record.

So as a rule I go to business every morning even though I do not leave home. I keep fairly regular hours. I find I write most easily in the forenoon, so most of my creative work is done then. But I can write any hour of the twenty-four if I must. I have found that under the stress of necessity, as the pressure to meet a looming deadline, some of my best work has been done. I am a born procrastinator. With all the time in the world to do a story or special article, I put it off until it is a matter of *now*, or else. I need to feel the prick of the spur. This biography was promised my publishers ten years ago. So much for mood.

How long does it take to write one of my short stories? That depends. I have been half a forenoon writing one, and I have dictated one in ten minutes. Oh yes, I dictate

practically all my work except verse and the two-line maxims that head each story. These two simple lines sometimes take longer to write than does the story that follows them. My secretary types as I dictate. When she takes the last sheet from the typewriter I have only to read the story over for minor corrections and it is ready for the printer.

There is no rewriting. This does not mean that I think a story so good it could not be improved. A more gifted writer might rewrite it to its decided betterment. But not me. I know that it is the best of which I am capable; that reading it over a year hence I would at most change no more than a word or two here and there. Usually we average half an hour to a story. As a rule when we start I have no idea what the stories are to be. We have done up to twelve stories in a day. Of the thousands of my published stories, less than fifty were first written longhand, and then only because a typewriter was not available. When I do my own typing, it is by the tried and true two-fingered hunt and punch method, and the story unfolds as I type.

Do I first make an outline? As already stated, I do not. However, I do have a recipe for children's stories which I follow more or less closely. It is my own special recipe worked out and proved through the years. It is as follows:

> INGREDIENTS—One fact, a liberal amount of imagination with truth, a moral lesson, plenty of good action, adventure or lively dialogue, humor or pathos as desired, sometimes both, and a reasonable amount of simple English.
>
> These are best compounded on paper by means of a typewriter, preferably one that is old, dusty, and rich in service. Use the fact as the foundation. Stir in the imagination blended with truth, taking care that the latter is not dissolved in the former. Spice highly with action adventure or snappy dialogue, whichever best suits your purpose. Add a dash of humor or pathos or both. Pour the whole over the moral lesson and serve at bedtime in short sentences composed almost wholly of simple words. One or two big tongue-rollers may be introduced occasionally. A judicious amount of repetition is desirable.

For many years I have used this recipe with a fair degree of success. As every cook knows, all recipes are susceptible to variation according to individual tastes. The one I have given above I have found basically satisfactory. However, I am in a way a law unto myself. I am fully aware that what I may find acceptable or desirable others may not approve at all. Perhaps I am something of a Philistine. I plead guilty to certain deliberate violations regarded as basic by those in authority on written English. They have been, I confess, very tolerant, withholding justified criticism and not using me as a bad example of doing things the wrong way.

In school I was taught that in writing a story I should first make an outline, a plan or plot, developing this as I went along. A good story must have a good plot preceding the writing of it. I agree with this all but the "preceding." When I write a story it has a plot —*afterward*, not before. Of course I am wrong, but I am right—for me. When I have one end of a ball of twine and want to get the other end I simply unwind until I get to it. That is the way, *my* way, to write a story.

I begin with the title and unwind. There isn't any plot—yet. That develops for me as I go along just as it will for the reader, and with like interest, only a bit intensified because I am the creator. I know no more than the reader what is going to happen, and there can be no skipping ahead to find out. I keep on unwinding, not knowing where it will lead me, until suddenly there it is—the end.

I gather that to the average writer a good preliminary plot is what a blueprint is to a builder or engineer. To me it is but a stumbling block. It gets in my way. It trips me up. Or it is lost sight of altogether and I have to go back to find it again. Usually this is time wasted. Of course I have a general idea what a story is to be about, but this is all.

You say to yourself that this method may possibly do very well for short stories such as my nature stories, but how about a long story, a novel for instance? I never have written a novel, not a grown-up one anyway. I have written books for boys that in length and treatment were essentially juvenile novels. They were written *my* way. Just for the record, from the reader's point of view as reflected in sales, they were a success even if in writing them I was a literary "Wrong-way Corrigan."

At the time I was asked to write a Boy Scout book, I had had in my mind for some time a general idea for a book for boys, a book about the kind of a camp I would like to go to if I were a boy. It was based on personal experiences in canoe cruising in the Adirondacks with occasional camping in deserted lumber camps. I even had a title, *The Boys of Woodcraft Camp*. Now why not *The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp*?

Right there is where I picked up the end of the ball of twine and began to unwind. With the title settled on, the next thing was to open Chapter I in a way to catch a boy's attention at the start, then hold his interest. This meant action and plenty of it. What could be better than a fight? Hal, a Boy Scout from the city, is waiting in a lumber mill village on the edge of a lake for the camp launch to come for him. Wandering about, he comes across a boy of about his own age but somewhat bigger. He is tormenting a smaller boy, a cripple. Hal interferes. The scrap that follows is inevitable. Because Hal has been taught in the YMCA gym how to box, how to use his fists in self-defense, he gives the big bully, Pat Malone, a thorough shellacking.

Pat Malone was introduced solely for that fight, then I was through with him, or so I thought. I was mistaken. Never was I more mistaken. Pat had come to stay. There was no getting rid of him. He developed into a Scout himself and became one of the strongest characters in four volumes. I have often wished I had done a fifth book in the series and devoted it wholly to Pat. He became as real to me as any boy in real life I have ever known.

The first six chapters were sent to the publishers for approval. They liked these and asked for a synopsis of the rest of the book. For two days I sweated over a synopsis of sorts and sent it to them. Then I resumed unwinding my tale and never did find therein anything at all like that synopsis.

One of my great disappointments in life was to forego a college education. With my mother depending on me I had to go to work instead of college. Now, looking back, I can see that had I gone to college I might have fallen under the influence of professors who would have changed my whole train of thought, leading me to conform to their accepted and unquestionably correct rules governing self-expression and good writing.

Thus might have been destroyed, or been sidetracked, such originality as I possess. As it was I was forced to work out my own salvation in my own way. In so doing I developed a style peculiarly my own. Anyway, I have frequently been told that I have a distinctive style. Personally I can see nothing about my work that can be so defined. For the life of me I cannot see why anyone who can write at all cannot do the simple little tales that have brought me so generous a measure of success.

I have done, and still do, things that are in direct violation of the rules of accepted authority. A given name is a proper noun and the first letter is in upper case as it should be. Peter Rabbit thus becomes an individual among other rabbits. But "rabbit" without a prefix is a common noun and lower case is used. I contend that this is placing an unwarranted limit on the practical and effectual use of capital letters. There are many Peters in the world just as there are many Rabbits, and it seems to me that in writing for children the latter is of no less importance than the former. So the group name should be capped whenever used. It instantly catches the eye and automatically fixes in the mind of the child who or what you are writing about. It tends to make instantly clear the context. There is less likelihood of temporary hesitancy or confusion. It is an aid to the eyes in quickly transferring to the brain the full and exact meaning of the written words.

If I write "the dog was chasing a rabbit" instant and automatic recognition of the animals by the small reader is not as likely as if I write, "the Dog was chasing a Rabbit." Then recognition is instantaneous and clear. To my mind this rule of lower case for common names is a distinct weakness in written English. In an article on salt-water fishing I once read of a "permit." I had to reread that sentence to be sure I understood the meaning of the word permit as used. I never had heard of a fish by that name. Had the first letter of Permit been capped I would have known instantly that it was the common name for a species of fish.

Being fully convinced that the most effective use of capital letters has been overlooked or ignored, I am grateful in the extreme to editors who have so universally condoned my misuse of caps according to what is taught.

In choice of material, adventure affording whole, clean excitement holds a large and important place, but stark tragedy has no place and at all times is to be avoided in stories for little children. At best tragedy comes into real life too soon. At worst the active imagination can, and is very likely to, make a fearsome thing doubly fearsome. Tragedy in a story can produce a shock, even terror, in a young reader. There are enough pleasantly exciting things, beautiful things, interesting things, humorous things to write about without deliberately introducing tragedy.

So all my familiar characters of the Green Forest, the Green Meadows, the Old Pasture and the Smiling Pool are of necessity ageless. They may be in seemingly hopeless peril but they will escape. My little readers know they will and would not have it otherwise. Many, many letters from parents and teachers have expressed gratitude for this avoidance of tragedy in my stories. Frequently children have written me their grateful thanks that I have never allowed one of their beloved friends in fur or feathers to be killed.

This was once the subject matter of quite a lengthy editorial in the famous old *Outlook* in the days of that magazine's powerful influence in molding public opinion.

The editorial was headed: When Does Old Man Coyote Eat? It poked good-natured fun at my stories because Old Man Coyote, Reddy Fox and other predatory folk among my characters always just missed catching the dinners they were seeking. With no idea of publication, merely to make my position clear in regard to needlessly bringing tragedy into the lives of children, I wrote the editor. I ended the letter by pointing out that in any event I could not afford to have any of my characters killed or it would be a case of when do I eat. To my surprised pleasure my reply appeared in the next issue of the magazine. Who the writer of the original editorial was I did not know.

Years later there was a curious coincidence in connection with this incident. Down on the Maine coast I was out with a friend, an ornithologist, bird-looking. Some distance from the town we stopped at the home of a friend of his. After the introductions our host turned to me and said, "When does Old Man Coyote eat?" He was the author of the editorial in the *Outlook*.

When I sit down to write a story I am in much the situation of the painter at his easel. Before he touches brush to canvas he must select the paints he thinks he may use, the colors and the shades of color that may be produced from these. The selection of these is as important as his skill or method in applying them, perhaps even more so. It is much the same in the use of words in the spoken or written language. Words are the writer's paints. Good descriptive writing is painting a picture in words. There may be as many shades of meaning drawn from a basic word as varying shades from a basic color. Effectiveness and success of a word picture are dependent wholly on choice of words and their use.

I say, "Peter Rabbit ran." It is a flat statement seemingly complete. But is it? Did Peter run fast, slowly, by leaps and bounds, boldly, hesitatingly, headlong, doubtfully? Peter's running needs to be qualified. To say simply "Peter Rabbit ran" is to leave the picture incomplete, but to say "Peter ran lipperty, lipperty, lip" completes the mind picture, for no one runs like that but Peter, or one of his relatives in a rather large family.

When I turn to my dictionary, and I turn to it rather often, it is with a feeling of something of awe and reverence. Between those covers lies all we know of human life. It is the greatest of all books. Without it there could be no printed Bible as we know it. It is the mine from which is obtained all sorts of material for written expression. All words are there between those two covers. According as we select these, and the order in which we place them, is recorded all of history, all of human progress, faith, hope and aspirations. Words can mean all things to all men. They can and do express every human emotion. They are the materials with which the writer must work. With them he can create laughter, sorrow, success, despair, love, hate, every human passion.

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CHAPTER

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Inspiration

AMONG the letters that I—and presumably most writers—are subjected to, with questions as to plans and methods, is sure to be the statement "What a wonderful thing inspiration is."

I am sure it must be, but how wonderful I can only guess. I have had little experience wherewith to judge. Through many years of continuous writing, the only form of true inspiration, as I understand it, with which I have become at all familiar is very simply defined—hard work. I may and do enjoy doing it, but it is work nevertheless. I do not mean by this to convey the impression that I do not believe in inspiration in the generally accepted meaning of the term. Far from it. Beyond question poets, artists and musicians frequently are inspired. A beautiful thought takes sudden possession of the mind. It is complete in all the strength and beauty of its ultimate expression so that this requires no conscious effort. It is truly inspired. It comes from without rather than from within.

In my early days as a reporter and space filler on a local paper in Springfield, a pianist in a popular vaudeville house sometimes sought my aid in writing verses with a local flavor for topical songs when a visiting song-and-dance team was in need of such. Insofar as schooling was concerned, Jimmy had had little education. However, he was a born musician to his fingertips. One day he came to my office keyed to a high pitch of excitement. He had written a song. That is, he had written the music for a song. I must write the lyrics. He was sure it would be a smash hit.

He sat down by my desk and whistled the song through. This meant exactly nothing to me beyond sounding rather catchy. I couldn't read a note of music. What is more, I couldn't carry a tune in my head. I still cannot. My sense of rhythm in verse is excellent, but of music I literally know nothing. A musical sense was left out of my make-up.

Jimmy's one stipulation was that the title of the song should be "Eva." The lyrics must be written around that name and the chorus must start, "E-E-Eva." He gave me a copy of the score. I took it home with me. Mother was ill then and I helped what little I could about the house. After dinner that night I went across the street to the home of a friend and on her piano she played the piece slowly while I scored the rhythm by means of dots and dashes. Then I returned home to do the dinner dishes, stopping now and again to jot down a line as I worked it out. So the dishes were washed and the lyrics completed.

In due course "Eva" was sent to one of the leading publishers of popular songs on famous Tin-pan Alley in New York. There it lay for a long time. Hope deferred shrivels

in ratio to the lapse of time. It was approaching the vanishing point when we received a letter from the publishers offering us three hundred dollars for all rights. If we accepted, the song would be published soon and pushed. Otherwise it would be accepted on the usual royalty basis and there was no certainty when it would be published.

We took the three hundred dollars. The song was published at once. It was introduced to the public by a noted minstrel troupe of those days, Primrose and West Minstrels, then playing at a theater on the famous boardwalk in Atlantic City. It was an immediate hit. It became one of the popular songs of that year. It was on every street piano, the hurdy-gurdy of those days. I heard it so often that I could recognize it and almost carry the tune.

Now there was no inspiration in the writing of those lyrics. The lines were worked out as methodically as the dishes were washed and dried. “Eva” was born the hard way.

A few months later Jimmy appeared in my office with another song. This one was complete with lyrics as well as music. It seems that he had waked up at two o’clock in the morning with the whole thing complete in his head. He had then and there gotten out of bed and transcribed both music and lyrics, then gone back to bed. He wanted me to go over the lyrics to make sure they were correct. They were. The song was “Good Morning, Carrie.” It proved to be another hit. I think I must concede that in this instance Jimmy experienced true inspiration. Or was it after all the result of extra good work on the part of his subconscious?

I do not recall that any one of my thousands of published stories and nearly a hundred books was inspired. Many were born of suggestions arising from events or experiences, but these were produced by real and painstaking work, not through inspiration. A fully lighted Christmas tree on the masthead of a Norwegian freighter in a Venezuelan port suggested the idea for a successful small book, *The Littlest Christmas Tree*, but I do not call that inspiration. It was suggestion. The incident gave me the idea, but the story had to be developed bit by bit.

A story is not born. The idea for it may be but not the story. It does not suddenly come into being all complete in the author’s mind ready to be transcribed on paper. It has to be developed, built if you please, as a mason lays stone on stone until the building is complete. It is just so with my work. Facts in regard to my living characters must be painstakingly dug out, checked and rechecked; facts relative to their physical appearance and characteristics, their habits, their food, their enemies, their neighbors, their natural environment and place in Nature’s plan. There can be no deviation from the truth if the stories are to be what they are intended they shall be, educational as well as entertaining. Those stories are not born of inspiration. They are the result of methodical, sometimes irritating work.

True inspiration is a blessed gift, if I may so express it, to a specially endowed individual. Call it spiritual if you will. Certainly at times the magnitude of the resulting achievement is so great that seemingly it must be inspired by a supreme intelligence.

However, far more often so-called inspiration seems to come in reality from what I will term a mind within a mind, the subconscious mind. True inspiration knows no limitations. It seems to me to be a manifestation of divine intelligence through which all things are possible. On the other hand seeming inspiration, no matter how brilliant it

may be, even startling in its presentation of a great truth, often is but the result of the orderly working of the subconscious mind within limits clearly defined and impossible to exceed. It does not, cannot draw on the vast reservoir of mystery in the unknown for material wherewith to solve a given problem. It is wholly dependent on such store of facts as the normal mind knows or has known.

The subconscious may be compared to a huge computing machine, the "mechanical brain" of today. It is fed data of all sorts with a bearing on the problem to be solved. This is automatically sorted and filed, ready to be assembled at the proper time, each bit falling into place for the correct solution of the problem. If more data is needed the machine cannot of its own volition supply what is lacking. It must be given to it.

In like manner the subconscious mind files and stores away for possible future use all the facts that come through to it from the conscious mind. There they are held, even though that part of the mind we call memory fails to retain even the faintest impression of them. If and when the time comes for use of this forgotten knowledge, perhaps in a wholly new way, the subconscious returns such facts as are needed for the completion of the work in hand, and in such manner that they can be applied to the problem of the moment. So the work goes forward smoothly.

I have an idea for a story about Johnny Chuck. It starts well but after a few paragraphs it stalls. It comes to a dead end. Try as I may I can get no further with it. Perhaps the idea is not so good after all. When I reach that point the time has come to put the whole matter out of my conscious mind; to stop thinking of it altogether. If I try to go on with it my thinking will be in circles, always returning to the starting point, getting nowhere and building up a feeling of futility and frustration.

So then I concentrate on other things, correspondence, business matters, recreation, anything that keeps my mind occupied and a complete blank insofar as the dead-end story is concerned. I endeavor to be as free from thought of it as if I had no such story to write.

That night just before I go to sleep I run over in my mind all the facts I know in regard to woodchucks—their appearance, their way of life, all I have learned about them. It is done with no thought of the unfinished story. After breakfast the next morning I sit down at my typewriter, read the last paragraph of the stalled story, and from there go on smoothly and without too great effort. While I slept my subconscious mind took over, sorted through the stored information regarding woodchucks and found the missing key to the completion of the story.

Were I dependent on inspiration alone, few, very few, of the many stories I have had published would have been written. Frequently I am asked, "Don't you ever get written out?" Of course I get written out. I have been written out more times than I can recall. But it isn't inspiration that has filled the spring again. It has been drained many times.

When in 1912 I signed a provisional contract with a newspaper syndicate to write six stories a week for one year I made the mistake of counting up the grand total. It was 313. I was appalled. I sat down to list as many titles as I could think of. I reached a total of less than twenty. For an hour or more I struggled to add to it, but ideas were nebulous. It was hopeless. Then I made one of the wisest decisions I ever had made. " 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' " said I to myself. I sat down at my

typewriter and wrote the first story. I gave no thought to the stories yet to be written. Time enough on the morrow to think of the next story. For nearly fifty years of daily stories that has been my rule, save that sometimes when the going happens to be very good I write three or four stories at a sitting. But always when I get up from my machine there is no more thought of stories until I sit down to it again.

At the end of each story I must write the title of the next story. That is as far into the future as I look and that is plenty far enough. Often I am hard put to it to think of a title, so often that when I next sit down to write it is commonplace for me to have to look up the last story written to find out the title of the one I am now to write. Frequently at the end of a period of dictation I have remarked to my secretary, "There isn't another story in sight." She doesn't worry, nor do I. Both know that when the deadline is close and a set of stories must be put in the mail that day to meet that deadline, Uncle Sam will get them in time.

Worrying has never added a cup of water to a dry spring, so why worry? It is a corroding, destructive force that clogs the mind and prevents all constructive thinking. It solves nothing. The answer to a difficult problem seldom is found by constantly turning it over in the mind. The glass clouded by steam and wiped clean is the clearer for having been so clouded. It is much the same with the mind. Put the troublesome problem aside, not partly but completely. Think of other things and thus wipe the glass clear. In due time you can return to your bothersome problem with almost a certainty that you will see it with a clearness impossible before.

I am fully aware that many think of a writer as being blessed with an easy way of making a living, of having it soft. They cannot conceive of mental concentration as being a form of labor in the accepted sense of the word. Yet writing at high pressure can be as tiring as hard physical labor. At the end of long hours at my desk I have been so fatigued physically that my feet ached, although I had been on them hardly at all. This is not a figure of speech. My feet really ached.

Physicians understand this. Some years ago I suffered a touch of cerebral thrombosis, probably the result of shoveling heavy snow at an age when I should have known better and did know. When I recovered I was warned against overexertion of any kind. This included overtaxing mental activity. I could continue my writing but must do it with moderation. I am certain that many a successful writer has worked, and I use the word in the accepted meaning of tiresome labor, harder than any day laborer in his neighborhood.

One may be inspired to attempt an undertaking, but usually that is as far as the inspiration goes. The carrying out of the idea, developing and implementing it, is a matter of work, often of the most intense, fatiguing kind. Alexander Graham Bell was inspired with the idea of transmitting the human voice between places far apart, but the telephone became a reality only after a long period of hard, persistent constructive work. The idea was truly an inspiration. The completed instrument was the reward of faith, hope and work. It is just so with most successful writing.

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CHAPTER

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Peter Goes to Court

It is an old and well-known saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." I do not like the use of the word contempt. It is too drastic. It is a form of complete condemnation. Instead let us say familiarity destroys perspective, or familiarity warps judgment. There is no question but that familiarity does make it difficult to judge values in their proper relation. For this reason I never read over or edit a story immediately on completion unless it is to meet a deadline for publication. I let it lie until it is not too fresh in my mind. Then when I reread it and edit it I can pass on it with reasonably good judgment. If it suits me then I know it is as good as I am capable of writing it.

In the same way when writing over a long period of time it is difficult to judge if one's work of the present is maintaining the standard established by earlier work. There comes a time when I find myself becoming a little tired of my work. I wonder if readers are not likewise becoming fed up with it. It is then that a word of commendation from an unexpected source is like a shot in the arm in its immediate reaction. Stimulation for renewed endeavor invariably follows. Appreciation always is a tonic. There are few in any line of work who are not from time to time in need of such a tonic. To neglect to make appreciation known is a common human failing.

I recall a period when my Nature Stories were being featured in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Without warning the feature was dropped. My spirits dropped also. Was I unconsciously slipping, unable to hold the interest of the paper's readers?

Just one week later the stories reappeared in the paper. My spirits rebounded. They soared higher still when I received a letter from the editor. "We wondered," he wrote, "if the public might not well be tired of a daily feature such as this which had appeared daily for twenty-nine years. The easiest way of finding out was to drop it. Never in my newspaper experience have I known such a feature to come through such a test as this one did." Letters and phone calls had poured in in such volume that there was no question as to the public's reception of the Nature Stories.

Through nearly five decades of writing there have been many times when I have wondered if my work had anything more than transitory value as temporary entertainment. In short, were the stories worth anything more than the stipend that they earned? Invariably at the most opportune time I have received recognition of some kind from unexpected sources, sometimes most unusual in character, to restore my faith and renew my enthusiasm and determination.

It was just so when I first learned that Peter Rabbit, unknown to me, had had a part in one of the great trials of history. All through the trial of the eleven Communists in 1949 before Judge Harold R. Medina in New York I had followed the case from day to

day in the newspapers. That I personally had any connection whatsoever with that famous trial I had no inkling until long afterward. Then, in the biography of Judge Medina by Hawthorne Daniel, I read:

> There were few light moments during the long drawn months of that trial, but each morning, during the short recess the judge regularly ordered, an amusing little program was regularly re-enacted. Leaving the courtroom and going to the judge's room adjacent to it, Medina chose a comfortable chair and opened the morning edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Headlines almost always referred to the case that was before him. Not infrequently editorials did the same, and cartoons now and again touched upon the subject.
>
> But none of these caught his attention during those midmorning recesses. Instead he opened the paper to the pages on which the Thornton W. Burgess' Nature Stories appeared, carefully read of the adventures of Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox, of Grandfather Frog and Jimmy Skunk, of Sammy Jay and Old Mother Nature, and Buster Bear and the rest.
>
> Not a day passed without the morning recess and not a morning recess passed without a Thornton Burgess story. Here was real help for a tired and troubled judge—clean and simple little stories for little children to bring relief of the constant pressure of the courtroom.

I have received many tributes, but none greater if any as great as this. I feel, and I always will feel, humbly grateful that it was my very great privilege through my stories to have in some small measure temporarily eased the tension under which the great jurist was held for such a long period.

Again, in a similar way and as unexpectedly, Peter and I were connected with another famous Communist trial. In *Champagne Before Breakfast* the author, columnist Hy Gardner, explains why protection of sources of information is an honored tradition with all newspapers. He then tells how he once was served with a subpoena to appear at the United States Courthouse in New York and give evidence in one of the many delaying actions put before the Court in behalf of the atom bomb spies, the Rosenbergs. He tells of what happened thus:

> On Monday, April 2, 1951, while the Rosenbergs were awaiting sentence I had run an item in my column predicting that for the first time in the peace-time history of the United States not one but two American citizens would be sentenced to death—that the only way the Rosenbergs could avoid the hot seat was to talk. My scoop was confirmed in banner headlines three days later, but that fact was ignored by the Communists' lawyer; he merely used it to harass me and thus gain another few days reprieve for his clients.
>
> Bloch started off pleasantly enough, smiling benignly. He asked me to identify a *Herald Tribune* column as mine, and then demanded to know where I got the information about what was going to happen to the clients. It had all the earmarks of an inquisition. My character, my professional standing, my intelligence, everything about me, was challenged by this

shabby-mannered, raucous-voiced mouthpiece for the Commies, anything to get me to snitch on my informants. I tried, patiently, to explain that the expression "intimate sources" in column terminology may not be taken too literally; that it doesn't necessarily indicate that there was any official or unofficial leak. In this instance it represented the thinking of the average outraged citizen. I explained, when I was told that I had "endangered" the lives of two "innocent" people by such a prediction, I thought those two treasonous people had endangered the lives of 160,000,000 decent Americans with their treachery. And I was told that my opinion wasn't wanted; that I must answer "yes," or "no" to all questions.

Not being the yes or no type I went on to recall that I was a one-country guy and that America was my country, which was more than my antagonist's clients could say. The temptation to step off the stand and smack the blustering barrister clean in the snout mounted by the minute, and I know I must have flushed with the thought, because the kindly John C. Knox, presiding judge of the United States District Court, interrupted my mental maneuver and halted the verbal clash.

"Hy," said he, "Is Thornton W. Burgess still writing those beautiful stories for the *Herald Tribune*?"

I looked up at the bench surprised but grateful at what I will always remember as the most unexpected but timely irrelevancy I ever heard uttered.

"Sir," I answered, "I believe he is. But I don't believe he is very well. I'll be glad to find out for you."

"I wish you would please," Judge Knox nodded, "and when you find out let me know."

The interruption rocked the Rosenberg lawyer momentarily and took some of the vim and vinegar out of his system.

Insofar as I am aware these are the only occasions on which Peter and his friends of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest have been directly or indirectly concerned in any way with a court of law, but they have been admitted to court circles of a wholly different character and far higher order. They have the distinguished honor of once having been presented to a princess, later to become England's lovely and gracious queen.

Among many letters of special personal interest that I have kept through the years, partly as documented proof of success and partly perhaps for admitted vanity, are two which from time to time I have reread with a very special feeling of gratification. They were written in 1931 to my London publisher, who had offered to send a set of my books to the then Princess Elizabeth. The first letter is dated November 4 of that year and is written in longhand. It is as follows:

Dear Sir:

Mr. Hodgson handed me your letter of the 29th inst. with the volume of Mr. Burgess' *Bedtime Stories*, and I submitted both to the Duchess of York.

Her Royal Highness desires me to say that, as a general rule, she has to decline gifts offered from business houses and firms. But in your case she would like to make an exception, and I am to say therefore that it will give her Royal Highness much pleasure to accept in behalf of Princess Elizabeth the set of Bedtime Story books that you are good enough to wish to present.

Yours truly,
HELEN GRAHAM
(Lady in Waiting)

With this permission from Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York, later to become the Queen Mother, the books were sent and brought the second letter, dated November 10.

Dear Sir:

I am desired by the Duchess of York to thank you for the set of Thornton Burgess Bedtime Story books which you were good enough to present to Princess Elizabeth, and am to say your kind thought is appreciated.

Yours truly,
HELEN GRAHAM

Queen Elizabeth was then five years old.

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CHAPTER

27

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Aunt Sally

THE most unforgettable character I have ever met was Aunt Sally of my own home town. For many years before her death at ninety-four she was my beloved aunt and I her beloved nephew as truly as if the ties between us were of blood instead of just sentiment. Her name was Alice R. Cooke and she was of double Mayflower descent, being in straight lines both Cooke and Conant.

As a boy I knew Miss Alice Cooke by sight. I can still see her riding up to the village on her horse, sitting straight with an air of distinction which now, looking back, seemed a bit puritanical. Presumably she knew me by name at least. Anyway, she knew to what family I belonged. But in youth a difference of thirteen years is vast. It precludes even a speaking acquaintance.

The Cooke home was outside the village. Nearly her whole life was spent in the house in which she was born. For many years after her father's death her sister and mother (the latter lived to be over one hundred) shared the home with her. After their death she lived alone.

When my early books were published I sent copies to the home town library. These brought about my first direct contact with Miss Cooke. She was one of the trustees of the library and wrote to thank me in behalf of the trustees. When I first saw that fine characteristic handwriting, I didn't realize how large a part the dear old lady was to have in my life in the years to come; that those two or three notes were to be the first of a long and precious correspondence that continued until her death.

It was some years later that I met her. Mrs. Burgess and I had heard that she and her sister collected antiques and sometimes had some for sale. We stopped at the house to see if they had anything of special interest to us. When my identity became known we were made most welcome. It was then that I was first told about the skunks who were their nightly visitors and pensioners. Miss Cooke became most enthusiastic as she talked about them. The skunks came and went through the "cat hole" in the small closed-in woodshed opening off the kitchen and were so friendly and unafraid that they unhesitatingly climbed into her lap to drink milk from a pan which she held. All through the warm weather it was Miss Cooke's greatest pleasure to entertain the wood's kittens that most people ran away from.

The very fact that anyone should be on such friendly terms with skunks intrigued me. I wanted to see them in her lap and to get pictures if possible. I promptly received an invitation to come down some evening and see what could be done about getting photographs. We accepted the invitation. At that time the house was not wired for electricity and I knew the only way of getting photographs would be by flashlight. I

was not then on speaking terms with Jimmy Skunk and his family and I wondered what might happen when the flash was exploded. It was adventure—to me.

Miss Cooke seemed not to be the least bit worried. She had a low chair and beside this three boxes made steps up to the level of her lap. After she had comfortably seated herself and arranged things to her satisfaction we did not have long to wait. Presently in came a great skunk through the cat hole. Without any hesitancy whatever he walked up those three steps, settled himself comfortably in Miss Cooke's lap, and began to drink milk from the pan which she held. Two or three minutes later in came another big skunk, and I mean big. Again there was no hesitancy. The big black-and-white fur bearer walked up the steps, pushed the other skunk a little bit to one side, then stretched out across Miss Cooke's lap, and the two side by side drank amicably from the pan of milk while Miss Cooke stroked them and talked to them.

It was an unforgettable picture, but I confess it was with some trepidation that I set my camera and prepared to fire the flash. I held my breath. The flash exploded. Nothing happened. Those two skunks didn't lift their heads. I doubt if they even blinked. The photograph turned out to be all I could ask for.

After the visitors had departed I was told the story of the start of this lovely friendship. It seemed that in hot weather the sisters sometimes cooked their supper on a kerosene stove in the woodhouse. One evening they were doing this when they heard a scratching sound at the screen door. They turned to find five baby skunks clinging to the screen. It was the sound of their little claws on the wire that they heard. The babies were too hungry to be in the least afraid. They were taken in and fed. The next evening they were back. It was evident that they were motherless, orphans as yet too young to look out for themselves. All summer and late into the fall they came every night. When cold weather set in they semihibernated under the barn. When spring came it brought all five back with it. It was two of these first visitors that I had photographed.

Apparently the skunk grapevine passed along the word and in time no less than fifteen skunks were nightly visitors in the woodhouse. Then a raccoon tapped the grapevine and after a careful survey of the situation ventured in. It was the first raccoon Miss Cooke ever had seen in the neighborhood. She was excited. She wrote me a long letter about that experience. The visit was repeated a few times and then ceased. The two sisters were worried. Could something have happened to their masked and ring-tailed visitor?

Then came a return visit and with it a profound shock for the tenderhearted sisters. Undoubtedly this was the same coon, but what a change in appearance! She was distressingly thin and with but three legs. She had fallen victim to a merciless steel-jawed trap. It was her right hind leg that was missing. This she had torn or gnawed off to get her freedom. Once free, but sadly crippled for life, she had been lying quietly until Mother Nature had started the healing process and had it well under way. Pitifully thin and suffering from lack of nutrition, in her disabled condition unable to search for food, she had remembered the woodhouse and the bounty therein. From that night on she was a regular visitor. On the regular food and extra tidbits provided especially for her she rapidly gained weight. With regained strength she adapted herself to changed conditions resulting from her handicap and asked no favors in the struggle for survival. The following spring she reappeared and later, to the delight of her hostess, brought

several babies with her. For six years she returned every spring and brought a family with her.

In frequent letters the doings in the woodhouse were chronicled for my benefit. When her sister passed away Miss Cooke was left wholly alone. More and more her so-called wild neighbors in fur and feathers entered into her daily life. The house had been wired for electricity and now I could try to record in motion pictures the fascinating scenes in the Woodhouse Night Club, the most exclusive night club in America.

The first time I undertook to make movies there were two mother coons, each with five children, in the little woodhouse. One of the mothers was another victim of the merciless steel trap. A front leg was missing. It had been taken off close to the shoulder and Mother Nature had healed it beautifully.

Many times after that I sat from dusk to broad daylight in the night club with my cameras. It was at this time that Miss Cooke became Aunt Sally. In my newspaper column I told the story of what I saw in that little woodhouse, also on the radio. It was to save Aunt Sally the annoyance of having too many visitors that I knew would result from too much publicity that I never used her own name but called her Aunt Sally. Nor did I ever tell where she lived. There was still another reason for keeping her personality and location a secret. The dear old lady was desperately fearful that should hunters and trappers in her home town learn of the night club her beloved guests would be shot or trapped on land surrounding her own. So for a long time not even her nearest neighbors knew of the “clan” in black-and-white coats and the “gang” with masks and ringed tails holding nightly revels in the small woodhouse of the old house beside what was then the main highway down the Cape.

The club membership grew rapidly until the “clan” and the “gang” were about equal in numbers. Then the clan membership began to grow less while the gang increased. Finally the quiet-loving skunks withdrew entirely, despite their complete and dominant independence. They could not endure the frequent stampedes on the part of the coons because of their high-strung nervous systems. The coons would run at the least motion while the skunks would pay no attention at all.

Aunt Sally was very fond of the skunks. She missed them greatly. However, the increasing number in the gang kept her too occupied to waste time mourning over the desertion by the clan. One memorable night twenty-two coons were crowded together in the little woodhouse as they squabbled over the food pans. That was the largest number ever in at one time. As Aunt Sally said, you couldn’t see the floor for the coons. Another night eighteen were in at one time. They must have come from a wide surrounding area.

The dear old lady was scrupulously neat. Every morning the newspapers with which the floor of the woodhouse was covered for the opening of the club each night were picked up and burned. The food pans were washed and scalded, then the banquet for the coming night was prepared. This was no small job. Often eighteen or nineteen full-size loaves of stale bread left by the baker were sliced and the slices cut into small squares. These were sweetened with sugar or molasses. Often thinly sliced frankfurters were mixed in. Any leftover soup, gravy or meat juice was added, also bits of stale cake and cookies from the baker’s cart. The menu varied from night to night. Then daily there were the birds to feed. Aunt Sally had a large feeding station and like the

woodhouse this was kept immaculate and was always well supplied with seeds despite inclement weather.

Living alone outside the village, which she seldom visited, Aunt Sally was still the town's most distinguished citizen. To her door there was a beaten path made by feet from all walks in life—doctors, judges, educators, humanitarians, men and women of wealth and high attainments in many fields and "just folks." They were drawn by a personality as strong and vigorous as it was understanding and sympathetic. She had a rare sense of humor that softened the vigorous expression of firm opinions formed slowly but with unshakable finality. Hers was New England character at its broad-minded best. This was before as well as after she became known and loved as Aunt Sally by thousands all over the country when they learned of her wonderful humane work that endeared her to all who love animals.

Her admiration for my work was manifestly prejudiced, but it was honest and the vigor of its expression in her letters gave me much needed and appreciated stimulation. Often as I read her fine script I had the feeling she was putting into words just what my dear mother would have felt had she lived to share in my success. My debt to beloved Aunt Sally for her constant encouragement, for her belief in me, and for a great amount of material drawn from her experiences with beloved neighbors of the wild was and still is very great. My association with her is one of the treasured memories of my later years.

There came a time when the dear old lady could no longer sit up to entertain her guests in the late hours. Also the work became too much of a burden for her fragile strength. Regretfully she was forced to give up entirely the nightly entertaining. She was quite heartbroken over the virtual closing of the club. She missed her pets. "If only I could see them in daytime," she would say.

Then a rather wonderful thing happened. Up in the pasture back of the house lived Polly Chuck. Polly discovered that there was bounty to be found at the foot of the steep bank just back of the house and she and Aunt Sally became on the best of terms, so much so that Polly would come down and scratch on the screen door. Aunt Sally would open the door and Polly would unhesitatingly enter to eat breakfast with her. By means of empty boxes Aunt Sally arranged steps that would bring Polly up to the level of the table and there the two would breakfast together, one on one side and one on the other. It was something to see. I recall that on Aunt Sally's ninetieth birthday I was privileged with others to share a piece of the birthday cake with Polly and Aunt Sally at the table. Two members of my family were with us and Polly Chuck was not at all bashful.

The following spring Aunt Sally was in the hospital. She worried because it was time for woodchucks to come out of hibernation and she was fearful that Polly Chuck would forget her. When finally she was able to go home she had no idea that she would ever see Polly again. But the very first morning after her arrival home she happened to look up on the top of the bank and there she saw a woodchuck. She couldn't be sure it was Polly. She went to the door and called, "Chuckie, Chuckie, Chuckie!" The chuck sat up, looked down the embankment, then raced down as fast as her short legs could bring her. Straight into the kitchen she came to breakfast with her beloved hostess. She had remembered that voice. It was a voice to remember. I can still hear that "Chuckie, Chuckie, Chuckie" of Aunt Sally's.

What did Polly Chuck eat? It would be easier to list what she didn't eat. She loved bread. She would eat slice after slice. She loved pastry of all kinds. Cake, cookies, pie —whatever Aunt Sally had was acceptable and eaten with relish. Here is one actual meal of Polly's: two slices whole-wheat bread, one Swedish coffee roll covered with sugar and candied fruits, one-half big sugared doughnut, a large piece of fruitcake.

In the beginning of this friendship Aunt Sally had assumed that her new visitor was Johnny Chuck. It was only when a couple of babies were brought in and introduced that Polly was recognized. I am greatly beholden to dear Aunt Sally.

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CHAPTER

28

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“Eyesight Is Mental After All”

So wrote, at the conclusion of a cheerful heart-warming letter, a man who had lost his eyesight four years before. At the time it seemed to me a significant statement. After many years I find it no less so. It sums up in one brief sentence a wonderful philosophy of life.

Through a rather long life I have from time to time met people of note, of high attainment in their chosen fields of endeavor. Such contacts always have been a source of inspiration, a spur to sometimes lacking or reluctant endeavor in my own work. Through them I have become indebted for inspiration to men and women whom I have never been privileged to meet in person, but whom through correspondence I have come to know and admire and love. They have given me a broader outlook on life; a better understanding of its problems as they affect the individual; a deeper appreciation of a philosophy that while not pretending to deny, makes light of, or ignores, handicaps and afflictions; a philosophy that sees the glory of the sun behind the clouds.

From the time when as a small boy I first saw “Old Blind Joe” in my old home town until I was well into mature years I pitied the blind. It seemed to me that to be denied eyesight was an affliction little less than monstrous. There came a time when I realized how very wrong I was in this feeling in its commonly accepted meaning. To express sympathetic regret for the afflicted, yes. Beyond this limitation, no.

Through much correspondence stemming from my stories and radio work I have come in rather close contact with many who have been denied, or have had taken from them, visual use of the eyes. In nearly every such contact I have been led to admire rather than pity my correspondent. Commiseration and admiration cannot coexist. Not in a single one of very many letters from those without physical sight has there been so much as a hint that pity was desired. Reading those letters over many times, it has invariably seemed to me that the attitude always was that the blindness was a handicap rather than an affliction demanding pity.

On my radio program when replying to questions it was my custom to answer directly, giving name and town of my correspondent. The day after a program during which I had answered a question from one whom I will refer to as Miss V., I received two letters from two of her neighbors who thought that I should know something about Miss V.—that she was blind, but despite this was interested in many things. She was socially active, a fine musician and a lover of flowers. These she could distinguish by their odor and somehow had a way of knowing their color.

“Oh, how I do wish you could know the charming personality of this wonderful woman,” wrote one of Miss V.’s neighbors. “Picture if you can a person without sight

who knows no handicap, whose every move is an accomplishment; whose mental vision for the good things in life and all the worthwhile things in nature has no obstruction, and whose face is ever a reminder of the freshness and beauty of springtime."

I let Miss V. know that I was aware that she was blind, but I was careful to avoid a suggestion of a feeling of pity. I told her how I rejoiced that she still found so much to enjoy in Nature. Her reply was prompt, typed by herself and with fewer typographical errors than I, with perfect vision, made in typing an average letter. This led to a correspondence which has long been a source of stimulating inspiration as from time to time I reread her letters. Also it made me aware of how great had been my misunderstanding in pitying the blind.

She wrote:

> Your beautiful letter came while we were eating supper and I was so delighted, and so absent-minded, that when mother asked me to bring her a drink of water I crossed the room, took the drink myself and went back to the table. Not until I said "Thank you very much" and everybody else began to laugh did I realize what I had done. You see, it goes to my head to receive letters from famous people.

Right then and there were the blinders removed from my eyes. Mother had not gone for the water for the blind one. Evidently she was accustomed to being waited on by the latter as would have been normal with a daughter having sight.

People without sight do not want, they even resent, pity. In that same letter Miss V. made this very clear.

> No one in his proper senses who has given thought to the difficulties which a blind person has in adjusting himself to the world, and the humiliation he must always endure from being a little less than normal, and in being considered a great deal less, can help having the deepest sympathy for him and he needs every bit of it. But to the man or woman who has been blind from childhood it gets to be so much a matter of course that he or she thinks very little about it, particularly if their heads are full of other more interesting things; if they have health, a comfortable home and the opportunity to work, play and enjoy life for all it is worth. They never think of themselves as poor afflicted persons unless others constantly keep the fact before them.
>
> As a little girl I was taken to a friend's house where her father had become blind late in life. The poor old man held out his uncertain hands and felt of my face and person greatly to my disgust, then said that he knew I could sympathize with him as no others could because to me as to him the day was exactly like the night, and there was no difference between the darkness and the light. Well, so far from sympathizing with him I did not understand him in the least and I horrified the family by exclaiming, "Why, how silly you are! Can't you tell when it is morning by the way the air feels?

And can't you hear the rooster crow?" The idea of day and night being just alike to anyone living in the country was simply beyond my understanding.

One great misfortune of some blind people is that, being denied the sky, the mountains and the largeness of the landscape, they are apt to dwell too much within themselves, become super-sensitive and interested in the wrong kind of things. They indulge in the wrong kind of thoughts, fall in love with the wrong kind of people and think themselves terribly abused by the world.

Right here is where Mother Nature comes in and quietly does some of her best work. No amount of taking these poor unfortunates out to parties, or getting them into society, will cure the unwholesome introspection, for you know how desperately lonely one can be in lively company. But those who can get out of doors can get the thrill of the springtime and the morning, the beauty of the summer, the bracing resilience of winter, and all the large and small details which are a part of them. They never fall into evil ways for long. And if they have to fight their battles now and then they are always sure of victory with such a friend and ally as Mother Nature.

Miss V.'s love of Nature was a source of never-ending joy to her. Her letters were filled with entertaining accounts of her own observations, if I may use that word for one who saw without use of eyes and apparently missed little that went on about her. Because I know exactly how she felt and had many times shared in that feeling, I love the following from a letter written in the spring:

They say that a woman can never write a letter without a postscript, but I must tell you that about ten minutes past five o'clock I heard the wild geese go by, ever so many of them. I had just come downstairs and started the coffee when I heard music in the air and ran out to *see* what was happening. Wordsworth tells us that his heart leaped up when he beheld the rainbow in the sky. Mine surely does something of the kind when I hear those wild geese every spring. Is it not remarkable that they can fly and squawk at the same time, and do both so well? I'm sure you and I could not.

Again:

How sorry I am for those who cannot enjoy the spring as fully and deeply as I do. Though you may not, and most folks do not know it, the intensity of one's enjoyment depends very little on sight or the lack of it after all. I know there are people tearing around and acquiring indigestion and rattled nerves in the busy and ever speeding life of New York and Chicago who do not have half the fun that I do up here in this corner of New Hampshire. I have not seemed to know enough to be afraid of snakes, toads, spiders or even hornets until the latter resented my society. When a little girl I was horrified to *see* an ear of corn that had been "blowed" by flies. It was as disgusting to the touch as to the eye. I declared it was a cancer.

The disgusting "blowed" ear of corn probably was the result of a disease known as smut. The italics in the above paragraphs are mine. I have found this same natural use of the word "see" frequent in correspondence from other blind folk. To me it is significant. It proves how completely a physical handicap can be overcome, and what fully normal lives may be lived by those who have the desire and the will power to overcome what is commonly regarded as one of the greatest of physical handicaps. Always with these brave hearts, instead of crying there is singing in the darkness. Who, reading this closing paragraph of one of Miss V.'s letters, would presume to pity the writer!

> Early this morning I made mincemeat, a job I love as I can do nearly all of it without help. Now I must make a chocolate cake for supper, then listen to a girl out in Minneapolis who gives us fine practical recipes and a lot of sensible advice to those who have not fully kept house; a most wonderful girl who dictates so slowly I can take them down in Braille without trouble.

Miss V. attended the famous Perkins Institute for the Blind near Boston. This institute has done me the great honor of transcribing into Braille a number of my books. It was once my privilege to talk to the children there at the Institute and tell them a story. It was an experience I shall never forget and do not want to forget. In a way it was one of the most difficult audiences to judge that I ever have faced, and I have faced many. There was an almost total lack of expression on those young upturned faces, a vacant look that is peculiar to some born blind. I wonder if this may not be in part due to never having seen facial expression. Anyway, I was at a complete loss to know if I was getting across to those young listeners. Somehow I rather doubted it. Then came the question period. No longer was I left in doubt. I faced a barrage of sharp intelligent questions such as I have seldom experienced from any other group of children of like ages. It was truly a heart-warming experience.

I had stepped out on the platform with a feeling of profound pity for those sightless little folk. Perhaps I was guilty of a little feeling of smugness, thinking I was doing a kindly deed. I left the platform with the feeling that I had been granted a great privilege; that I had received more than I had given. Humbly I felt that I was richer for a revelation and a new conception of my own blessings, and for inspiration that would remain with me all through the years ahead.

That a number of my books have been made available for, and given pleasure to, the blind has been for me compensation beyond price. Some have been published in Braille and others made available in Braille at libraries. During World War II, I received a letter from the secretary and librarian of the National Library for the Blind in London, England, saying, "We are very anxious to possess *Bob White Bedtime Story* in embossed type and should be most grateful if you would permit us to transcribe this by hand."

The letter was dated August 22, 1940. Of course permission was sent promptly, not only for that book but for any other books of mine as well. Late in November of that same year I received the following letter:

I have to acknowledge with very sincere thanks your kind letter in which you give us permission to transcribe *Bob White* and any other of your books. We endeavor to carry on the work of the library because we realize how much these books mean to our blind readers. They depend so much on them when they have to pass long hours in air raid shelters. Unfortunately we have had to close the library on two occasions. There was a time bomb in the immediate vicinity and we were not able to use the building until the bomb was safely removed without damage. We were just getting things straightened out and had resumed circulation when a bomb was dropped just outside and all our windows were blown in. We again had to close until necessary repairs were made, but now we are at work dealing with the enormous arrears which awaited us.

I like to think that in those dreadful, fateful days a book of mine may have given some slight temporary pleasure to someone sitting in double darkness during those awful days of London's trial by fire.

Then there was Mrs. W., whose letters over a period of several years were an unfailing delight and help to me. Blind, she like Miss V. was a gifted musician and writer as well. One of her letters opened with a prayer for the birds and animals which she had dedicated to me.

God bless the birds and animals. Protect them with thy might
From wintry storms and hunger, and from danger day and night.
Oh heal the little broken wing and ease the racking pain;
Oh heal the little injured foot and make it well again.
Protect the birds and animals from lasting ice and snow;
Teach man to cease his cruelty and tenderness to show.
God bless the birds and animals and comfort to them bring.
I ask it in the name of him who loved each living thing.

Mrs. W. was an ardent member of my Radio Nature League, never missing a meeting if conditions permitted her to get the program. She lived in Ohio and this was before the advent of the short wave. She never referred to her lack of sight save now and then in the most casual and matter-of-fact way, not in any sense whatever as an affliction. I know she would have deeply resented pity. Here is Mrs. W.'s attitude:

Many thanks, Mr. Burgess, for your good wishes for my good time during the summer. You are quite right, I get heaps of enjoyment out of life. I wonder how you know. It takes more than a little thing like blindness to defeat the great majority who are without sight. Ours is a very steep hill to climb regardless of talents and ability, but we are willing to climb the hill all right. Helen Keller states it rightly when she says, "The blind man's greatest burden is not his blindness but the lack of an opportunity to earn an honest living." I believe you are of the type of sighted folk who can forget one's handicap. And it is those who can forget who really do blind people the most good. As I have stated we are willing to climb the hill. But they who stop to weep on our shoulders usually are the last ones to help us ascend.

In my various letters I have mentioned being so very busy. Now, Mr. Burgess, I should not want you to think I belong to that class who are always so very busy they have no time for themselves or anyone else, and you might think it from my references. The fact is, I have very little time for my own strictly personal interests. I belong to several organizations, among them the W.C.T.U., the Canton Sorosis, a big literary club, the D.A.R. and church, not mentioning the offices I now hold in state organizations for the blind and membership in our National Association. I do nearly all my own housework. I am employed as social worker and home teacher for the blind of Canton. This I feel sure will show you why my true talents for literature, if I have such, and for music, have to be sadly neglected. My work as a teacher is among those whose ages range from twenty to ninety-five years, teaching various lines of industrial work, reading raised type, etc. I now have a pupil learning to read who is eighty-eight. Occasionally I give a recital of my own musical and literary compositions.

With all these activities I found this busy woman was keeping in touch with what was going on around her and with thorough enjoyment absorbing sustaining inspiration from Mother Nature. Some of her "observations" were as fascinating as they were unusual. And I learned from her quite as much as she learned from me. She wrote:

Mr. W. and I have very keen musical ears, and oh the sounds in Nature that we catch! When we go to my people 150 miles south we hear the birds, especially robins and red birds, singing in a different pitch. Their pitch is lower than the pitch of the birds here and we wonder why it is. The rule has never failed and we always notice it. . . .

I must tell you of our little natural thermometers, the crickets that come in July. If we were not conscious of the changes in temperature we could judge very safely by the pitch in which those crickets chirp. We speak of the weather as "G" weather or "C" weather, etc. G is the lowest pitch in which we have heard the crickets chirp. When it is cooler than that they are silent. The warmest evenings are when they chirp at the pitch of F sharp, a major seventh above the G. Thus their chirping pitch is within an octave and varies with the temperature. Sometimes a cool breeze will come and lower the pitch as much as a lower third. Then the pitch often changes just as suddenly and goes higher, but never above F sharp.

I soon discovered that her interest in Nature was by no means confined to sounds. Indeed, her range of interests seemed limitless and every letter contained some contribution of interest. "Last summer," wrote she, "a large tree was cut down on our farm. Immediately after it was felled it was measured and a live blacksnake was found in a hollow that would have been eighty feet above the ground. Is there anything unusual in Mr. Blacksnake thus seeking a mansion in the sky?"

I wrote her that while blacksnakes are good climbers, and in the nesting season of birds are frequently found in trees in quest of eggs and fledglings for which they have a voracious appetite, in my own experience I had never found this species of snake more than half as ambitious as this one of hers appeared to have been, and that the "mansion" probably was not his, he being of the earth earthy. It was all too likely he was sleeping there while digesting a meal of babies of the rightful owners. The following incident she vouched for as true in every respect:

> My father was once dressing snapping turtles. Thoughtlessly he threw one of the heads down to old tabby cat. She grabbed the head greedily, expecting a feast. Instead of her eating the head it, although severed from the body, grabbed her. And it was not until that head had been chopped in two pieces that the cat was released. This is positively true, Mr. Burgess.

Could any seeing person who had witnessed the incident have told it more convincingly? It is to Mrs. W. that I am most grateful for one of the most beautiful of many tributes I have received. She wrote: "I thank you for many inspirations. Your books are so beautiful that their very beauty is sometimes quite pathetic. As evidence of my admiration, since I cannot read them, I have given music lessons to a friend who has paid me by reading your books to me."

Through youth on to mature years I had taken it for granted more or less that nature lore and the study of it was something of a closed book to the blind, that Nature in her many aspects must be seen to be fully understood and loved. I could hardly have been more wrong. John T. was another to add testimony to this.

> It may interest you to know that I am blind, but even with my affliction I try to study Nature as much as possible. I love and study the different birds and their habits. I especially love the purple martin and have erected a number of houses containing two to one hundred and two separate rooms for these birds. I have written a number of articles on birds and on other outdoor subjects. I am a very close observer of the weather and I write special weather forecasts for several Sunday papers. I go by what I learn through Nature. Nature is an open book if only one knows how to read it.

When the above was written this man of vision though blind was sixty-three years old. It must be in some ways easier and in some ways harder for those who have had sight and lost it, easier because they can mentally visualize things through memory, and harder because of a deeper sense of what they have lost. It was one such who, writing me, ended his letter thus: "I met you once during the war and because I have been blind four years I remember how you looked then. *Eyesight is mental after all.*"

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CHAPTER

29

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Somewhere

We have so many words in common usage seemingly of such small significance that we seldom give them a passing thought in our free employment of them in speech and writing. The adverb "somewhere" is one of these. It is not specific in its meaning and we use it with careless or thoughtless indifference. A misplaced article is "somewhere," or a missing person has gone "somewhere." It was not until during World War II that I realized, and in a measure came to feel and understand, the poignant depth of meaning the word may at times hold, and all too often does.

In August, 1944, as the result of some publicity on the occasion of the publication of my ten-thousandth story, *Life* magazine carried a feature article about the author. It brought me letters from completely around the world. Among these were two in the same mail one November morning. One was from "Somewhere in Eastern France." The other was from "Somewhere in the Pacific." The one from France was written by a captain of cavalry. Here it is:

> My dear Mr. Burgess:
>
> A copy of *Life* for August 28 has reached this Front and in reading the article about you many happy memories were brought back to me. One of my earliest recollections is of my mother reading to me about Peter Rabbit, Jimmy Skunk, Bobby Coon and the rest of their many friends. It helped a great deal in developing in me a love of Nature and its animals. I kept, through the years, a complete set of your many books, and until the war sent me overseas I would read those stories almost every night to my own children. That has been almost two years ago when finally embarkation took me to England, and later to the beaches of Normandy in June.
>
> My children love and know your stories well, and in that connection I would like to ask a favor. It would prove a wonderful Christmas gift to them if you could see fit to write just a short story about Peter Rabbit and his friends for my children and send it directly to them. I am sure their happiness would be complete. With your wealth of understanding of children I'm sure you know just what I mean. For your information their names and ages are as follows:

Isabel Kathleen	—9 years
Dorsey H., Jr.	—6 years
Philip K.	—5 years
Peter.	—2½ years
Raymond.	—1 year.

I will feel most grateful if you can see fit to do this for me. May you and yours have a very Merry Christmas in those wonderful States of ours.

I wrote a Christmas story and sent it to the children. With it I sent a special letter from Peter Rabbit. I wrote their mother explaining how it happened I was sending these. Also I wrote the captain "Somewhere in Eastern France" that it had made me very happy to comply with his request.

No acknowledgment, no word whatever was ever received from that precious family in Virginia. No further word ever came from "Somewhere in Eastern France." Something somewhere was amiss. The captain's letter was dated October 22. I have thought of it much and have wondered. Perhaps my letters never were received. But they bore my return address and never came back to me. Or might it be that between the date of his letter to me and the Christmas holidays, tragedy "Somewhere in France" so overwhelmed with grief that lovely family that all else was forgotten? I'll never know.

The letter from "Somewhere in the Pacific" I still cherish as one of the loveliest tributes I have ever received. Here it is in full:

Mr. Burgess:

I hope you will bear with me for a few minutes and that I am not taking too much of your valuable time. I really mean not to annoy you, but hope to pay my respects.

Until the other night I had never really seen the unknown friend that made my childhood imagination soar to unknown heights. I cannot tell you to what depths my morale had dropped prior to that evening, nor can I say the reason for the low spirits. But I can say they were very low. Then I saw your article in *Life*, which set many long forgotten memories in motion, memories of animated wood folk who came to life at the tip of my unknown friend's magic pen. Came to life and spoke; told me of their joy and happiness in living; gave me little bits of philosophy that even today I remember.

I spent many hours with "our" friends and know now, as I knew then, that they are as real as the Japanese empire. Many authors have tried to portray their imaginative animated characters as real living symbols. Some have succeeded to a moderate degree. But none have really captured the color, dignity, and beauty of true animation as you have.

Yes, even Lewis Carroll, acclaimed by Oxford professors, American literary critics, and children throughout the world "Emperor of Nonsensical

Literature," had not the art of making his people come out of the book to sit on the edge of the bed and become your friends for life. I enjoyed Lewis Carroll's works and even now remember poems I had memorized when I was nine or ten. He is another of my unknown friends with whom I have spent many happy hours. Though he is gone I know he is your friend too.

After I had read your article and spent a few hours just thinking, I felt better. Our old friends seemed to parade before me, each telling a little tale of adventure that made me laugh and cry in turn until I was a little boy again, propped up with one of your books and at peace with the world. I just had to sit down and humbly write my great appreciation and many thanks.

I have never heard of an autobiography of yourself. I am sure many faithful readers would cherish it as I would and my children. Is there such a copy available? It may sound odd, but I consider the author as important as the book. To know the author is to know his style; to know his style is to better understand his books.

For myself I am Eddie Hardy, 21, aboard one of Uncle Sam's destroyers, seeing to it that more people like you can write for more people like me. I guess I have taken enough of your time and I sincerely hope that I have brought myself closer to my unknown friend.

Sincerely,
EDDIE

I wrote Eddie immediately. I told him how greatly I appreciated his letter and that I hoped I would hear from him again. I never did. Perhaps he never received my letter, or perhaps he wrote me and I failed to get his letter. I have through the years often thought of Eddie and wondered if somewhere in this troubled world he had found a place for himself and happiness, or if it may be that he is still "Somewhere in the Pacific." Again, I will never know.

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CHAPTER

30

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The Fullness of Joy

"I HAD a wonderful Christmas. When I came home from work I had an armful of presents, a pocketful of money, and a heartful of joy. The money is all gone and one of the presents I sent to the sweetest woman in Springfield, Mass. [Mrs. Burgess] But the heartful of joy? That I still have. The more joy I give away the more comes back to me. The measure of joy is always full. It's running over."

It is with a feeling of reverence that I head this chapter with the above excerpt from a letter received nearly thirty years ago, shortly after the Christmas holidays. The writer was one of the richest women I have ever known, yet she had so little of this world's goods that although she was nearing the summit of the Great Divide, she and her invalid husband were dependent on her meager earnings as a cleaning woman in an office building. Living in one of the poor sections of a great city, glad to get extra work on Sundays, "The measure of joy is always full. It's running over." We sometimes hear of the poor rich. We have with us also the rich poor. Of these Mother Mohr was one of the richest.

I never saw Mother Mohr, nor even a photograph of her. Yet in the brief period of our correspondence I felt a growing intimacy that created a mental portrait of her more accurate than any photograph possibly could be. I felt her personality as if I had known her always. Rereading her letters from time to time, that personality has not only persisted, but has grown clearer, become more deeply etched, until today I feel that I know Mother Mohr as I never could have known her had I been privileged merely to meet her in the flesh. A word portrait? Can you not see her in the few lines of the opening excerpt from her letter? To me it is a perfect character sketch.

Dear Mother Mohr. This biography would be incomplete without a tribute of loving respect and admiration for one of the most unforgettable and inspiring characters I have ever been privileged to know, and this only through letters for a period of less than a year. The shock of the telegram with the news that she had been called "home" gave me a feeling of personal loss that has not lessened through the years. Would that I possessed the gift of expression to portray in words my impression of the beauty and strength of character of this humble woman with a great heart so "running over" with joy in daily living, sharing that joy with those having less than she, that there was no room for complaint of burdens that at times must have been grievous and discouraging. I hope that in extracts from her letters that follow other folk may see her as I see her—her indomitable spirit; her love of Nature; her love of children; her love of God and belief in His infinite understanding and goodness.

It was in midsummer of 1931 that I first heard from Mother Mohr. At that time my stories were running daily in a St. Louis paper. Evidently Mother Mohr had read some of these and one had been especially pleasing to her. She had tried to contact me through the newspaper, but after a protracted delay the letter was returned to her. When at long last she obtained the address of the syndicate for which I wrote she sent me the following letter:

> The little Salvation Army children are asking me again and again, "Mother Mohr, did you ever find Farmer Brown's Boy's storyteller?" Of course I've been telling them no. Now what do you know, Farmer Brown's Boy's storyteller lives in New York, too far for us to see you. If you lived in Saint Louis the Outpost gang would come to see you and sing you a few of their Salvation Army songs. You would be surprised to hear them sing. I can hardly wait for Wednesday to come to tell them that I have found Farmer Brown's Boy's storyteller. Won't they be happy! Maybe someday you will find a little time and write us a letter. Oh my, but there would be a big time at the Outpost if you would. So I say, please Mr. Burgess, sometime write us a letter.

The letter was written. Enclosed with it was a pamphlet listing my books and containing a brief sketch of my life and a photograph. The response was immediate.

> I am writing to let you know we received your most looked-for letter. How we waited day after day! You can then imagine the excitement at receiving a letter from you. As soon as your letter got to my home they opened it, read it, then telephoned me. When I got home that evening everyone wanted to read it to me. I wouldn't have it. I wanted to read it myself. Oh joy! How my heart thumped! It thumped so loud I could hear it. It had been worthwhile waiting for it. The reward cannot be told in words beautiful enough. Thank you so much.
>
> That evening I told some of the Salvation Army children that I had a letter from Farmer Brown's Boy's storyteller. They made big eyes, jumped up and down. "Oh, is he coming to the Outpost?" I told them that you lived too far away. I wish you could be with us on a Wednesday. I know the children would fairly tear the house down. While I am writing you more and more comes to my mind. It just makes me feel like I have found my long-lost son and I have so much to tell him, which is almost true. I had been looking for you for a long, long time and at last I found you.

Then she told me how she became interested in the Salvation Army and its work:

> Not everyone can see the beauty in things. I can find it though. That is how I got acquainted with the Salvation Army. Captain Brewer held a meeting in the street right in front of my home. I could hear the beauty of his work in his speech. The little children were all sitting in the gutter listening to the word of God. Then cold weather set in, cold and rainy. The captain said,

"Does anyone know where we could get a room for Wednesday nights to hold our meetings?"

No one answered. After some time I said, "Captain, you may have my room." My daughter called to me, "Grandma, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm doing the right thing. They can't sit outside. I don't need the room until bedtime."

The next time it rained I took all the things out of my room. All the children sat on the floor. It was no time until that room was too small. As time went on the captain talked to me about doing something for the Kingdom of God; about the little children out there in the streets. I knew at once what he meant. But I am poor. I have only what I earn. I figured out what I could do, so I said I would help start the Outpost. I rented three rooms in the next block, bought some used folding chairs, and everything was lovely. We held Sunday school and Wednesday evening meetings. I could be with them only on Wednesdays; I paid the rent with my Sunday earnings. The people for whom I worked on Sundays were always ready to give me a little extra. It is wonderful how little it takes to make children happy.

When the weather got warm I gave up the school and they had their meetings in the street. Then of course fall came along and cold weather. But I had no more Sunday work. Brother Jackson, the preacher, kept saying, "I wonder what we are going to do when it gets too cold?"

I was thinking very hard. I remembered a certain family. They are very poor and have eight children. I asked the mother if she would let me have her front room on Wednesday nights. "I should say so," she answered. "For good work like that, take the whole house." So we started a year ago and had meetings there all year.

I would give much could I have seen Mother Mohr telling a story. I say "seen" rather than "heard," because I suspect she was one of those born storytellers with the God-given gift of bringing to almost visible life the printed and spoken word. I suspect those children from St. Louis's streets almost *saw* those stories. It is a form of magic, a spell cast in magic, possessed only by the born storyteller:

We had a big night at the Outpost Wednesday. Over ninety people were there. I told them the story about the fox and his grandma. Billy, the fox lover, took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and stood up so he could see and hear the storytelling from my mouth. Billy is seven years old.

Again she writes:

The children climbed on the table to look in my mouth. When I tell a story I always make the motions to it. Just now Prickly Porky is in a tree and I am looking up at the tree showing them where Prickly Porky sits. Some of the children look up also, and some are smiling very wicked. I know in their

hearts they think if Mother Mohr can see a tree on the wall we can't. It makes a better impression when making motions with storytelling.

The Outpost celebrated your birthday last night. We wish you could have been with us. I tell you we had one good time. Oh, it was glorious! I cannot say it on paper. We had a good meeting, about eighty children and many adults. We had a nice young man to take your place. When he put the fifty-eight pennies in the tin box, all the children were counting them. You should have been there. All the shouting! Then we all looked at your picture and sang, "Happy Birthday dear Story Man! Happy Birthday to you!" Then I put my hand on your face. Great shouting! Then I threw a kiss at you and the bottom nearly fell out. Stamping and laughter! We had the time of our lives. I had candy for all.

Then the story. You must come out and see for yourself just what your story does for all. You could hear a pin drop it was so quiet. I wish you could have seen those big eyes they made. Not one was sleeping. Then Farmer Brown's Boy brings the food for the fox and the fox comes from behind the barrels. I tell you I was some fox. I was all wet when the story was finished for the room was very warm and I was all worked up with joy.

At first Mother Mohr had known only my syndicated stories in the newspaper. When she saw a list of my books in the pamphlet I sent her she wrote: "I see in your booklet all those pretty storybooks you have. At once I was thinking of the Outpost children. Those books would be fine for Christmas. Tell me more about them."

This was my opportunity. I sent a complete set of my Bedtime Storybooks. The reward was prompt.

Dear friend of the Salvation Army Outpost children, you are a real Santa Claus. I am overjoyed. I cannot write a letter of thanks long enough to express my sincere appreciation. All I can say is, "thank you dear Story Man!" I would never think of giving such fine books to little children. No, sir, never! I am going to take good care of them. I will take one at a time and let a big boy or girl read aloud every Wednesday. That way they will hear all the stories. When I came home last night my family were all smiling. They said they had a surprise for Grandma. I looked all around but couldn't see anything. They said I should look on the chair. There lay a package. So smooth and fine it was. "For me?" I asked. "Yes, for you!" they answered. I could not think of anyone who could have sent it. All of a sudden I said, "Books from the Story Man! Oh! Oh! Oh!" I opened the package and there were the books, so neat, so clean, wonderful! I am overjoyed. Tomorrow is the Outpost meeting. What will the children say?

An artist at the office where Mother Mohr worked had made a large drawing of me from a small print.

We celebrated Halloween last night and you were with us. Mr. Witti had made a wonderful picture of you. I wish you could see it. It is 8½ by 11

inches in size, wonderful in color. It is beautiful! The little animals are all in pretty colors and the flowers are pretty, pretty, pretty! When I held it up there was a long "Ah-h-h-h-h-h." I said, "Who could this be?" You should have heard the voices call, "Farmer Brown's Boy's Story Man!" Can you imagine the clapping of about a hundred people? Your picture went from hand to hand. Then your story. It was a good one. "The Homecoming of Farmer Brown's Boy." It made a double hit. I am wondering if you could sleep last night. Did you not dream of a bunch of children having a party and you were there?

Mother Mohr's understanding of the child mind was complete. In dealing with the children she put that understanding and knowledge to good use in thoroughly practical ways.

Mr. Burgess, you mention the word inspiration. It is true that it helps wonderfully. When I want the children to learn something by heart I tell them the ones who know the lesson best will get presents. You should see how they learn. The promise I make is their inspiration. The other Wednesday evening I had candy for all of them. A child is so easily satisfied too.

The children are singing a song. "Satan Your Kingdom Must Come Down." Boo! They shoot him. Their little legs come down with a wallop. Of course lots of them are behind in timing, so if the first shot doesn't hit the devil, one of the last ones surely will. I wish you could see those little kiddies in the summer when we have an open meeting. They sit alongside the gutter, one hundred of them singing, "Fare-thee-well." There is so much joy in everything.

The Outpost children take your stories better than anything else. I used to tell the story before the Bible reading. Then some of the children went home. So I said to the preacher, "Read the Bible before the story." He did and everything went fine. Last Wednesday he was very late. We had much singing, prayers and more singing. The children kept asking for the story. It was then eight o'clock. I started telling the story. The preacher came in. I was then too far along to stop, so I finished it. We had some more singing. The preacher took out the Bible to read. Half the children walked out. Preacher got red in the face. More children went out. Preacher said, "I think I will have to lock the doors to keep you in."

This Wednesday the meeting went on fine. After the Bible reading the preacher started the singing. The children kept asking for the story. Preacher kept on with the singing. Some of the children were getting sleepy. I was getting kind of sore. Finally the meeting came to an end. Then he said, "If Mother Mohr wants to tell the story it is all right with me. I'll sit down and listen!" He did. The children clapped for the story. Do you know what happened? Not a child left the place. Yes, sir, they all stayed until ten o'clock. I think Preacher was a little jealous. A lot of those children are too small to understand the Bible teaching. A story about little animals? Sure, they know

what is being talked about. I don't read the Bible to them. I read it for myself, then tell it to the children like a story. It is better this way.

A letter two or three days later ended, "I thank the Lord the preacher came to his senses. We sure had a good time last night."

Mother Mohr was born in Germany and spent her early years there. I judge she was of peasant stock, for in her letters is mention of wooden shoes and living on the edge of a forest where she early became acquainted with the furred and feathered folk living therein, and where was developed and nurtured an inborn love of all living things. This love of Nature she brought to America and it had no small part in the joy with which her heart appears to have been running over in her later years.

Mr. Burgess, I must tell you something I love very much. Have you ever heard of the Chain of Rocks? This is a park in Saint Louis. It is a most beautiful place. Near it are many beautiful homes. The people for whom I worked on Sundays lived near it. The home was in a very beautiful place, on a hill. Below is the Mississippi. There I could stand for many hours just looking and looking. I could see many people on the road up to the Chain of Rocks and I could see things that other people could not see—the beautiful vines, trees, brush, birds, squirrels, rabbits, a turtle and a toad. In the summer Mr. and Mrs. H. would go away and I would stay there all by myself. I had the time of my life. I would look out the window at night and see a dark shadow. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Perhaps it is a bear!" It was only a big dog. I would sit and look at God's work of beauty, and I cannot tell you my feelings on paper. I wouldn't have changed with a millionaire. Now Mr. H. has passed away and Mrs. H. has gone to France. My beautiful hill, however, I go to see often.

I visited it yesterday. Everything is beautiful. The trees in all colors, the bushes crimson-red. I went to see a lady I used to work for. I told her about the Story Man. She knew all about you. Did I swell up! Yes, just like Peter Rabbit when he saw the soft eyes in the bramble-tangle. The lady had a little flower pot with hanging vines in it. She asked if I would like to take it with me as she had no place for it. Of course I would take it. Then I went around to see all my "love spots." I came down the road where the gully is. It is a beautiful spot. Two men and a woman were chopping off the underbrush. I saw how they were destroying God's beautiful work. I was looking all around and up in the trees. When I came to them they paid no attention to me but after I passed one of the men came to the edge of the road and looked after me. I could see him over my shoulder out of the corner of my eye. I wondered why they looked at me as they did. Then I thought of the little vine and the little pot hanging on a chain. There I was walking along with that little pot hanging from one hand, a bag of lunch in the other, looking up in the trees and all around, then standing still to look down in the gully. Now I know what they thought was the matter with the old lady—loony! I saw the beauty in God's Nature, but all they were there for was to destroy all they could lay hands on. Such nice young trees lost their lives.

> When I was on the hill one evening in the garden I saw something move right where I was standing. The ground was moving. I picked up a stone to throw it. Just then something popped out. It was Mrs. Toad. After that I looked for her every day. She looked just like the ground. At five-thirty in the afternoon she came out of her hole. At five-thirty in the morning she crawled in. I watched her bury herself, all but her head. She could see every move I made. She was my partner while I was there.

Referring to the teaching by an old friend with whom she used to work in a laundry, she wrote, “Before, I could see nothing but a hard life. But now, thank God, I have sunshine, only sunshine, in my heart and I want the whole wide world to know it.”

And again, “You know that this is the fall of my life. A very dear friend told me, ‘Partner, the end of your life is going to be a beautiful one.’ ”

I like to think it was so, for it came just a few months later on the most beautiful day of the most beautiful season of the year. “Mother Mohr of Salvation Army Outpost, Number 4, passed away Easter Sunday” was the message that told me that she had entered into the fullness of the joy she had so long striven to share with others.

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CHAPTER

31

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Dead but Living

An autobiography has only two basic sources of material—personal correspondence, notes and scrapbooks kept through the years, and memory. Unless carefully trained the latter is not to be wholly trusted. Time files smooth the rough edges of bitter experiences and hardship. It magnifies and colors bygone happiness and simple joys. So it is that through the haze of long ago the perspective is less accurate than colorful.

My memory is not trained. I am not methodical. Therefore I have few notes for reference. Long ago I gave up keeping scrapbooks. However, there are certain indelible impressions on the memory that time can never efface and for this I am grateful. One of these was my brief but inspiring contact with Mother Mohr of whom I have already written. Another, also brought about through my stories, was the meeting on paper with one of the most lovely and lovable characters I have ever known. Her letters over a period of all too few years became an inspiration to me. Stark tragedy ended a beautiful life. I say ended, but that is true only in a physical sense. Her gentle spirit is still alive, still exerting a beneficent influence for good, still an inspiration for me personally as from time to time I read over her letters of long ago. I shall call her Mother J.

In her family were four children, two in college and two small girls at home, Jean and Taddy. It was a modest home in a city of the Midwest. Mother J. was a widow. The four children were adopted. It was long before I learned this, for in her wonderful letters to me there was such an outpouring of love for her children that there was no hint at any time that they were not of her own blood. Just how it came about that I was admitted to the heart of this lovely family I do not now recall, but I was admitted through correspondence, and it was a God-given privilege. I think that it was through Mother J.'s letters that there was brought home to me as never before the latent power in children's stories; the responsibility that rests on the writer of such; the opportunity that is his to influence for good the character of a generation, perhaps more than one.

I still have nostalgic memory of the Christmas that first brought me a box of most delicious cookies, a treat repeated in succeeding Christmases and at Easter. To the two youngest I sent books at Christmas. Mother J. wrote:

> I was asked to tell Santa to put Peter in Tad's stocking and Mrs. Peter in Jean's, "the very top so we will see them first." Jean handsomely conceded to Taddy because she has big brown eyes and absurd lashes and can make tears well up 'til your heart would just burst with aching for her if you did not know that she would be laughing before the tears could dry. You made their Christmas so much happier with your little woodland folk that we just had to

have a share in yours. So we took our courage in both hands. We were all so excited when your letter came this morning. We all love the thought of your nibbling and absorbing inspiration. The children just love that word nibbling, and go into giggles of delight every time we use it.

At this time the two oldest were in college. Almost the only time Mother J. ever mentioned that the children were not her own was in a letter I received shortly after one Christmas. She wrote:

> How you spoil us and how we love it. The new book is so beautiful and made so precious by your friendly inscription. The children will not admit it could not be any better than last year's but they give it the highest praise possible by saying it is "just as good."
>
> How good you are to give them so much happiness. I do not think of it consciously and never talk of it, but I know the fact that they are adopted makes me more desirous of their having all the kindness they can receive, especially during their early years. I believe outside things will not hurt them as much if they are secure in their knowledge of the love and kindness that are the fundamental things of life. There is so much for children to learn, and the final attitude they are going to take toward life is something they must work out for themselves. I believe they are better able to build if they have a feeling of security and love during their early years. The book knowledge is so small a part of it all. Marge wrote the other day, "I've come to the conclusion that unpleasant or hard things don't happen just to torment us. There is some reason, or rather purpose, to it all. Somehow, we don't know how, it fits in that pattern which is ours or others'."
>
> It gave me such a feeling of security for her future. Words are so empty until they, the children, have experience to help them to understand. She is old enough now to have had experience and to judge. Someday your books and all the kindliness of your reaching out to the children and giving them of your friendliness and your love for the little woodland folk are going to have their place in helping them to adjust themselves sanely to life. I am so anxious for them to have these things that strengthen them.

Again:

> I do want to tell you how opportune your letter was in your mention of how you had longed for a college education. Duncan, my junior in Michigan, came home for the holidays all set to leave college this semester and get a job. He has had such hard growing pains. I realize that most of them came from his keen sense of responsibility. He did not come to us until he was nine. He had had a hard childhood but he has had the fineness to put that behind and take root here at an age that must have made it very difficult. I did not argue the returning to college for that is apt to strengthen opposition. I do dislike a head-on collision for it is an empty victory if it is a forced one.

> When Marge came home she read your letter aloud [I had written Marge at college] for us all to enjoy together and I noticed that Duncan looked very thoughtful. He had said his roommate was stopping also and I ventured that perhaps his family would not approve. "Oh yes," he answered. "Whatever Dave wants is all right with his family." Such a soothing thought for me to clasp to my heart.
>
> Just after your letter was read in family conclave a card came from Dave. "I have met the enemy and I am theirs. On to Michigan!" Together you and Dave have nipped the urge to drop education, and my thanks went out to you both.

Came a holiday season with no Christmas cookies, no cards or letters. I wrote two or three times but got no reply. A year and a half passed. Then came the following letter from Marge at the old address.

> I condemn myself for not having written you long ago. The nature of the letter I must write led me to procrastinate as also has a very weakened and nervous condition which has made me neglect everything that ordinarily would have taken first place. I lost my darling mother as the result of an automobile accident caused by an intoxicated driver. She never regained consciousness and did not suffer. I was with her at the time of the accident and was mercifully unconscious for many days as the result of a fractured skull and brain concussion. I was not maimed and I am almost well again.

She then told me of her marriage and the breaking up of the home with the adoption by outsiders of the two little girls, Jeannie and Taddy. They were taken into different families, one of which perhaps thought a complete break was to be desired. So it was that Taddy was lost track of.

The curse of liquor! A drunken driver had shockingly destroyed a beautiful life that was sorely needed, had caused a young woman to spend weary months in physical and mental suffering, had completely disrupted an unusual and lovely home life, and had tossed out on the mercy of a too often heartless world two little girls at an age when they needed most the tender understanding and mother love that had been so richly theirs.

At the time I thought a very beautiful chapter in my own life had been abruptly and sorrowfully ended. I was mistaken. I heard from Marge again, and a new correspondence began that has continued down through the years. It sometimes seems as if the spirit of the lost mother is dictating, or at least inspiring, the beautifully expressed thoughts in the letters I receive. I am grateful for these for Marge is a busy homemaker. As I write this there lies before me on my desk a lovely photograph of her three little girls, so much alike that no one could possibly mistake them for other than sisters, and one of them is holding a baby brother. How their grandmother would have rejoiced to see the fulfillment of her dreams.

But it is not Marge alone who has kept the spirit of the beloved home ever alive in my memory. Almost as soon as she was located in a new home, little Jeannie wrote me.

She continued to write me at intervals all through the years as she grew up to womanhood. Now she too is a homemaker and beside that photograph of the three little sisters and the brother is one of Jeannie's little girl.

It was Taddy, she of the big brown eyes that welled to tears so easily only to dance with laughter, from whom I heard nothing. The years rolled on. Then my publishers forwarded me a letter they had received from a woman in Pennsylvania. She asked about me and where I was. She wrote that when she was a small girl I used to send her books at Christmas and concluded the letter by saying, "Mr. Burgess knew me as Taddy."

A third photo, that of Larry, Taddy's boy, is beside the other two on my desk. A Christmas book now goes to three widely separated homes in each of which the spirit of Mother J. blesses the recipients, I feel sure. This is compensation far beyond money, compensation without price. I have been signally blessed with such through the privilege of knowing, though never seeing, two women of such lovely characters that they have been a helpful influence in my life all through the years since they were taken to their eternal home. I like to feel and believe they are still living: Mother Mohr of the Salvation Army and Mother J. of the great mother love.

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CHAPTER

32

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The Aura of Greatness

FROM time to time through life an event will be so impressed on the retentive part of the mind that it can never be erased. The relative importance of it has little or nothing to do with this. A trivial event is remembered in detail while a notable event becomes blurred, indistinct, or is lost altogether.

I can still see Peter's Pond. It is a lake now although no bigger than before. At one end was an open area, a big sheep pasture. The shores around most of the rest of the pond were heavily wooded. With two other boys I had camped for a week of fishing, at the pasture end of the pond, which was well stocked with small-mouthed black bass.

For most of the week we had had the pond to ourselves. Then one morning we discovered three other boats on the water, each with a man rowing and a fisherman in the stern. We knew at once who two of those fishermen were. Of one of them we had seen pictures too many times not to recognize him on the instant. Another we had had pointed out to us during one of his frequent visits to the village. His summer home was in a neighboring village. Later we found out who the third fisherman was. To youthful eyes he was less important than the others. Actually he was as great in his chosen field as were the others in theirs. Two freckled-faced boys were staring in round-eyed awe at greatness, perhaps not fully sensing it, but *feeling* it. We were sharing in the free fellowship of fishermen's luck with three of the most distinguished fishermen that in a long lifetime I have ever seen together. And the bass were no more impressed by their lures than they were by ours.

In one boat was former president Grover Cleveland, whose status at that time was controversial, but whom history now numbers among our truly great presidents. In the second boat was Joseph Jefferson, beloved Rip Van Winkle of the stage; perhaps not a great actor in the dramatic sense but great in the gentle art of comedy and in winning the loving memory of all who ever had the privilege of seeing his dear old Rip of the twenty-year sleep. In the third boat was Richard Watson Gilder, at that time editor of the *Century* magazine, then at the zenith of its fame and influence in molding public opinion.

I have no recollection if anyone caught a fish on that memorable day, but I do remember vividly the curiously mingled feelings of awe and triumph with which I rolled up in my blanket that night—I had cast my line in the same waters with the lines of greatness and the fish had known no difference.

Today Joseph Jefferson lies buried in the cemetery in Sandwich in which my father and grandparents are buried. A great boulder of glacial age marks his last resting place. It was by his own request that he was laid away in the old Cape Cod town which he

loved, and which he was reported to have once called the loveliest town outside of old England.

Three great fishermen because they were successful fishers for the betterment of their fellow men.

Many years later I was invited behind the scenes at the American Museum of Natural History in New York as the guest of a man of whom I had heard much, and whom I had admired with a depth of feeling very much like the hero worship of adolescence. He was a small man, at a superficial glance looking almost frail. Yet I knew that here was a man of indomitable courage; a man who in the African jungles had, unaided and barehanded, killed a fully grown leopard. I knew too that he was one of the very few human beings ever to survive an attack and mauling by an enraged elephant. Small in stature, he was a giant mentally. He was Carl Akeley, sculptor, scientist, naturalist, explorer, inventor, father of the present method of mounting large mammals for museum display, thus substituting art for stuffing in taxidermy.

In the immediate foreground loomed the bulk of the seemingly threatening huge gorilla that now dominates the great gorilla group in the African hall which long since was dedicated to the memory of this unassuming host, who was so earnestly explaining to me how grossly misjudged in character were these great apes. This always had been so and to a lamentable extent still was.

In no sense whatever did he look upon this magnificent specimen as a trophy. His look, if not of affection, was at least a friendly look, and there was an expression there of regret, deep-seated and suggestive of remorse. Without being told, I knew that this great ape had been shot with no sense of elation of the so-called sportsman, but with a deep sense of obligation to science, the education of the general public, and the very future of the race itself. How faithfully and well that obligation was carried out has long been fully recognized by Akeley's fellow naturalists the world over and by the millions, young and old, who in the African hall have been given a glimpse of the intimate home life of these long misnamed "monsters" of the African jungle. The race itself has benefited through the gorilla sanctuary in the Belgian Congo secured through Akeley's untiring efforts to insure the perpetuation of a race threatened with extinction. It was there that on his last expedition Akeley died. It is most fitting that he is buried there.

I count among my most precious memories that first meeting with Carl Akeley. As I sat listening to the quiet voice of my companion, the great gorilla seemingly listening too, I was conscious of a feeling of unreality that in memory persists to this day. Simply, so simply as to seem matter-of-fact, as if merely incidents in the day's work, he told me of his battle with the leopard; of how he had been tricked by the wise old elephant and had saved his life by remembering and doing what he had many times planned to do in such an emergency, throwing himself on the tusks of the great bull; of a wounded elephant being helped away by his comrades; of the killing of a lion by natives armed only with spears; of many other experiences all told as a mere record of interesting happenings.

It was a precious experience. But more precious was his expressed appreciation of my own work and complete understanding of what I was endeavoring to do. He could never know what that meant to me. That was the beginning of a friendship that was cut all too short by his untimely death. In time I had the temerity to send him an autographed copy of my *Animal Book for Children*. All through the succeeding years his note of thanks has been a source of inspiration that has never lessened. He wrote:

> My dear Burgess:
>
> It is of no use. I was going to write a little note thanking you for the book. No matter how fine it is the inscription on the front leaf will always give me infinitely greater pleasure than the body of the book. I may not read it until I am off on my African trip. I am going to take it with me.

If he did this I do not know, but I like to think he did; that I went with him to his beloved Africa, the dream world of adventure to the average hero-worshiping boy. That letter I still cherish as one of the finest and most inspiring tributes that I have ever received, and I have received many.

From the days of the earliest explorers Africa has been known as the Dark Continent. Akeley resented this, making plain his protest through the title of his fascinating book *In Brightest Africa*. I wrote him a note of appreciation and added that when next I visited New York I would bring with me my copy and beg him to autograph it. I received a prompt reply:

> I am sending you an autographed copy of my book so that you will have one book to give away, thereby spreading the gospel, and will not be under the necessity of bringing yours to New York. But this is not intended to keep you from my studio. I shall be disappointed indeed if I hear that you have been in New York and have not come in to say "howdy."

A great naturalist. A great artist. A great friend.

It was at Harrington Harbour on the Inner Labrador coast that I first met Sir Wilfred Grenfell. The meeting was delightful and as unexpected as it was delightful. For years I had heard and read of the famous medical missionary and his work along the Labrador coast, but never had I dreamed that I ever would meet him, much less that that meeting would be on his own boat with the rugged shores he knew so well as a background.

But it was not "*Sir* Wilfred Grenfell" whose exploits and humane relief work for a hardy race, almost completely isolated along one of the most rugged coasts of the North Atlantic, had become world famous. It was "*Doctor* Grenfell." Up there the title "Sir" meant little beyond the honor of deserved recognition of great achievements in behalf of his fellow men. But the term "Doctor" meant everything.

As Sir Wilfred he was regarded with the respect due a title awarded by the King. As Dr. Grenfell he was looked upon with deep affection born of tested skill in times of seeming hopeless emergency; of sympathetic understanding of the problems of home life in a merciless wilderness; of heart-warming friendship tested over and over again in

the travail of acute danger, suffering and despair. “Sir” was a token of honor and respect. “Doctor” was an all-inclusive title of faith, respect and affection.

It was my good fortune and very great privilege to be introduced to Dr. Grenfell on the deck of his own boat, the *Strathcona II*, off Harrington Harbour. Our small birding expedition of four described in Chapter 21 was returning from our study of eider ducks and other water fowl on St. Mary’s Island. As Eli, our boatman, cautiously felt his way through the heavy fog, he electrified us with the announcement that Dr. Grenfell was fogbound on his boat in the very harbor in which we were to make our headquarters on a small island. Fervidly we prayed that the fog would hold the *Strathcona* until we got there. It did, and that very afternoon we were invited aboard.

It was then as we climbed over the rail that I was once more conscious of what for the lack of a better definition I have termed the aura of greatness. There was nothing in the doctor’s surroundings, appearance or attitude to suggest that he was not an ordinary yachtsman welcoming visitors aboard. Yet always I have had the feeling that had I been blindfolded, not knowing whom I was to meet, I would have been fully aware that I was in the presence of a personality of distinction. I like to remember him as I first saw him standing there on the deck, a tall, commanding figure of a man, clad in rough clothing befitting place and season, his kindly weathered face alight with the warmth of the smiling greetings he extended to us.

My feelings then—and looking back they are much the same today—were in the character of small-boy hero worship. There before me in the flesh was an almost legendary hero, the reality intensified by the setting of the scene—the fog-shrouded coast of Labrador with which the hero’s name had so long been closely associated. Indeed, the two names, Labrador and Dr. Grenfell, had become so linked, the mention of one suggesting the other, that they had become almost synonymous and both a bit mystical. Now here were both in living, forceful reality. I use the word forceful to convey a true sense of the feeling of which I was fully aware without conscious thought. A stone’s throw away was part of one of the most threatening coasts of the North Atlantic, while here immediately before us was the man who through many years had successfully fought the combined threat and strength of that pitiless coast and the mighty storm-lashed seas of the North Atlantic. Those clear, kindly, almost gentle eyes smiling into mine reflected the force of indomitable will and complete fearlessness that lay behind them. One could and did have the feeling of force, and was more or less conscious of it when in his company. Yet on his part there was no smallest suggestion that he was aware of this. A strong man. A fearless man. A gentle man. A man who could and did command; one who could dominate others while he served. This was my first impression of Dr. Grenfell, Sir Wilfred if you will.

The *Strathcona* was fogbound four days, four privileged memorable days for us. It was one thing to read about the adventures and exploits of this master mariner salvaging valuable cargoes from wrecked and abandoned ships amid tumultuous seas off a threatening, merciless coast, or salvaging human lives as wrecked physically and spiritually on that same merciless shore. It was altogether different to sit on the deck or in the cabin of the doctor’s ship and hear at first hand the story of these exploits told as mere interesting incidents in the daily routine of this great and good Samaritan as he described the humane work to which he had devoted his life. One could almost feel the

thrill of personal participation, a thrill the written tale could never produce. Some of those stories were dramatically harrowing in the telling. What must they have been in the actual experience!

Later I was to hear Sir Wilfred on the lecture platform and to meet him anew in the social atmosphere of receptions in his honor. But I like best to recall him as I first saw him that day on the deck of his beloved boat as over some freshly caught lobsters we discussed the gastronomic superiority of those Labrador shellfish over those from waters to the south.

Harrington Harbour is a small community. However, at that time it had two Protestant churches, both holding Sunday morning service. The word was passed to us that in one of these Dr. Grenfell was to deliver the morning sermon.

We very much wanted to hear him. Allowing ample time, we rowed ashore through the fog and inquired which church should be our objective. We made our way there and were ushered down to a front pew. We waited. Our first thought was that he had been delayed, possibly by the fog. Then slowly suspicion crystallized into certainty—we were in the wrong church! Alas, there was nothing we could do about it. Had we been in a rear pew we could have quietly slipped out and gone over to the other church. But to get up and leave from right under the pulpit would have been a direct insult to the minister and to his sparse congregation. The disappointment I then felt has persisted through all the years since. I never did hear Dr. Grenfell preach.

To complete our chagrin on that memorable Sunday, we became completely lost in the fog while rowing back to the small island on which we were staying at Eli's home. The boys were rowing, sure that they knew the way. Actually they did not know if they were heading for our temporary home, back whence we had just come, or out to the open sea.

After what seemed an interminably long time shore abruptly loomed close at hand. We followed the shore line looking for some familiar landmark. Finding none, we decided to go ashore and seek the cottage overland. One of the boys chose to remain with the boat while the rest of us explored the island. It was eerie work in the thick mist. It was discouraging. Moreover, we presently became uncertain of our way back to the boat. We had about decided that we were on an uninhabited island when we heard a rooster crow. It was faint through distance and the smothering fog. It was Eli's rooster. We were sure of that. It had to be. But it was on another island! However, it was comforting to know that we were within crowing distance of home. Still, we were in difficulties. We could not agree as to the direction from which the sound had come and the rooster didn't crow again. We were lost and marooned.

With some difficulty we made our way back to where we had left the boat. It was still there but there was no one with it. Had the boy become tired of waiting for our return and gone to look for us? In that case it might well be that he was himself lost in the fog. A lot of shouting brought no response. We were worried. Stumbling about in that rough terrain, he might have fallen and been badly injured.

Hallooing at intervals, we set about preparing a place to spend the night. Then the chug-chug of a motorboat relieved the tension. Guided by our shouts, Eli came to our rescue. Our missing one was with him.

It had developed that while we were on the other side of the island another motorboat had happened along close to the shore; had taken the boy off and back to Eli's to report our predicament. We were fortunate, for along that part of the Labrador coast Sunday was observed as a day of rest. Nets were not pulled by the fishermen. Boats were used only for attending church service. The party in the rescue launch was returning home from the service we had missed. So ended happily the day we did not hear Dr. Grenfell preach.

Of course we visited the hospital in Harrington Harbour. The small plain building, hardly more than a cottage, was simply but well equipped. In no sense whatever was it a charity institution. The word "charity" was anathema to the founder. This was in part recognition of, and respect for, the sturdy independence ingrained in the character of the fishermen, woodsmen, trappers and their women folk of the Labrador shore and wilderness. So a small fee was charged. If my memory is not at fault it was at that time fifty cents a day—anyway, it was very small. Ready cash was, and presumably still is, scarce. So payment could be made, and was, in any medium of value or possible use the patient could offer—fish, firewood, lumber, furs, hooked rugs and other home handicraft work for which there might be a potential market, anything whatever of value to square the debt.

While the large sums solicited elsewhere and contributed for the maintenance of this great work might be listed as deductible on the income tax returns of the givers, the taint of charity was carefully avoided for the recipients.

Ultimately it was my very great privilege and honor to know Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the good "Doctor" of Labrador, on the basis of personal friendship. To this day I think of him always with a very real sense of that aura of greatness of which in his presence I always was conscious.

I still cherish my first letter from him. It was written in longhand just before he sailed after that memorable meeting with him on his boat. In it is this paragraph:

> Men of science are "rare birds" in Labrador ornithology. Rarer still are men with that courageous love for their fellows that is the real crux of Christian faith. To love birds should be natural and is more general because it doesn't involve too much venture itself. I think to sit down and say "I will love my fellow man" is a far greater venture than going out into the fog. I am delighted to know men who are contributing to the happiness of their fellows and the world.

He lived up to his belief. The truly great "Good Samaritan" of the Labrador coast.

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CHAPTER

33

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Thrills Never Repeat

THRILLS may take many forms and do. They may be shared or they may be exclusive to the individual. One thing they have in common, however—the effect of a first thrill never is repeated. Until one becomes accustomed to it this is disappointing, but it is true. Consciously or unconsciously all through life most of us are seeking thrills, the pleasant reaction to new experiences. This is especially so in the earlier years when the dreams of youth have not crystallized in fact, nor yet been proved to be only dreams. Then every day is an adventure, and adventures lead to thrills. Anyway I have found it so.

A true thrill in its full measure of excitement comes only with a first experience. Repeated in every detail it is but a reflection. Repeated again it is without substance and meaningless. Always it is this way, be it the thrill of adventure, of success, of applause, of recognition, of honors conferred. The achievement that produces that first nerve-tingling thrill may be bettered, and bettered again, but the thrill will be lacking.

How well I recall the thrill of seeing and handling my first book for children, *Old Mother West Wind*. I leafed my first copy through from cover to cover; put it down only to pick it up again and do it all over. How eagerly I looked for the illustrations! I looked that little volume through the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. That book was mine, my very own, every line of it. It was the child of my brain. I was an author, accepted as such. Not only had I written a book, it had been published by one of the most famous publishing houses in America. It was a small volume, but there it was in my hands, visible, tangible evidence of a dream come true. How I gloated over the title page! How eagerly I read the book reviews! How I tingled all over when I saw window displays of *my* book, and *my* name in big type! Over and over I would say to myself, “That is mine. I wrote it. I wrote it.” It was my first really great thrill. I have had several since but none greater.

A year later a second book was published. How I looked for its appearance and the thrill that would come with it! When at long last I picked up the book for the first time, the reaction was not at all what I had anticipated. True, there was a sense of pleasure and satisfaction, but the thrill, if it could be called such, was a minor one. It lacked the former soul-stirring intensity, the sense of arrival. I had already arrived. I suspect I was a bit blasé.

After a while the publication of a new book meant little more than a to-be-hoped-for increase in royalty returns. There is now no thrill at all. Perhaps it is just as well. In its place is a deep satisfaction and rich content in the feeling that I am still an author in being, not one who has been. For this I am humbly grateful.

There was the thrill of the first direct recognition of my work by authorities in the field of natural science. And what a thrill that was! It was exceeded perhaps only by the above-mentioned publication of my first book and by the award of an honorary degree by a great institution of learning. Working alone, lacking acquaintance with any naturalist or scientist of note either through personal contact or through correspondence, striving not to allow imagination to overstep the exacting bounds of truth and fact with the inevitable penalty of being branded a "nature faker," I received a long distance call that gave me a thrill I can still feel down through the years.

It was from the late Dr. Clyde Fisher of the educational department of the American Museum of Natural History. It seemed that that great naturalist and author, the late Ernest Thompson Seton, of whose work I was, and still am, an admirer, had been forced to cancel an engagement on the Museum's lecture program for the children of members. Would I substitute for him on the following Saturday afternoon? The honorarium was one hundred dollars.

Although I needed it, the money meant little. I, the struggling unknown, the violator of scientific exactness by clothing fact and truth with imagination, by daring to put a coat on Peter Rabbit and an apron on Mrs. Peter that the children might tell them apart, had been invited to the lecture platform of the American Museum of Natural History—what a thrill!

I suspect that my acceptance over the phone was a bit breathless. It was not because of the enormity of my presumption in trying to fill the place of the great and beloved naturalist. It was because of the recognition and acceptance of what I was striving to do. And it was in part because I realized that opportunity again was knocking at the door.

I went. I found the hall packed with children and their parents. I found more. I found the scientific mind as open to successful presentation of knowledge as it was adamant in demanding exactness and adherence to fact and truth. I met men whose names I had long revered, and whose criticism I feared because my animal characters talked and wore clothes. But it is generally recognized that animals do have some means of communication. As for the coats, skirts, aprons, hats and bonnets, these were merely personality badges and as such were acceptable as long as characteristics, habits and surroundings were kept in strict accord with known facts, the truth. That is why Reddy Fox never drives an automobile and Polly Chuck never sits in a rocking chair knitting. I knew then that what I was trying to do—open the doors to the wonders of Nature in a way acceptable to the child mind—was understood and approved. I was the accepted kindergartener in the field of natural science, preparing the way. That first lecture was followed by many more at the Museum, these in my own right, not as a substitute. But none gave me the thrill of that first one.

Radio brought me several very real thrills, but not my first appearance before the microphone. My complete ignorance of radio at that time cheated me of any thrill whatever.

Later, however, I did get a thrill when I was asked to broadcast Christmas messages from home folks to men in the farthest north posts of the Hudson Bay Company of

Canada because my voice carried exceptionally well. At that time short wave had not arrived and WBZ with long wave reached the arctic regions better than other stations. The messages were sent to the studio at Springfield from the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company in Canada and I had the honor of putting them on the air.

The first time I broadcast from coast to coast brought a thrill, but perhaps my greatest thrill on radio was when my voice crossed the ocean some years before I crossed in person. It gave me a feeling of being disembodied. This too was before the advent of the short wave. For some time I had had a weekly program of nature talks. Knowing that a large part of my unseen audience was of children, it occurred to me to try to give them a thrill. The one human character in my stories who was familiar to children everywhere was Farmer Brown's Boy. I had had many letters asking where he lived, what his name was, how old he was, etc. I found a boy of the right age who was not too self-conscious and wrote his part into the script. I opened the program as usual. After talking a few minutes I said to my listeners, "I must ask you to excuse me for a moment. Someone wants to speak to me."

The boy took his cue promptly. "Hello, Mr. Burgess!" said he.

"Well, well, well, see who's here! It is Farmer Brown's Boy!" I exclaimed, then added: "What do you want, laddie?"

"I want to know what is the largest animal in the world," said he.

"That is an easy question to answer," said I. "It is the sulphur-bottom or blue whale. Not only is it the largest of all living animals but it is believed to be the largest that ever has lived."

"How big is it?" came the next question.

I explained that it varied in length but had been taken over a hundred feet long and such a one might weigh a hundred and fifty tons.

"Gee, some animal!" exclaimed Farmer Brown's Boy, and in the next breath popped another question: "What is the smallest animal in America?"

"One of a family of small animals called shrews. The so-called common shrew is so tiny that it weighs only thirty-seven to forty-seven grains, and one grain is one seven-thousandth part of a pound," I explained.

"Gee, what a lot of shrews it would take to make a whale!" exclaimed the laddie.

"Yes," I laughed. "Now a lot of people are waiting, so I cannot talk with you any longer. I see you have paper and pencil. Put down the weight of a whale at a hundred and fifty tons and of a shrew at forty grains. The next time we meet you tell me how many shrews it would take to make a whale."

I turned back to my listeners, told them a bit about whales and shrews, and in concluding I repeated the figures and suggested they work out the problem. I knew that many already had reached for paper and pencil.

At home I told Mrs. Burgess I had given the children a thrill, for they had heard Farmer Brown's Boy. But the really great thrill was mine rather than theirs. The next evening I answered the phone. A voice said, "This is WBZ. We have a message for you as follows: 'Broadcasting Station, Springfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Burgess: 52½ million shrews equal whale. Signed Cory, Withington, Manchester, England.' "

It was a cablegram. My voice had crossed the Atlantic! What a thrill! Bear in mind that this was before short wave. It brought me letters from all over England. A minor incident now, but then a thrill that never has been repeated.

There was a thrill, sad but a thrill nevertheless, in holding in my hands the last living heath hen, of which I have told in Chapter 20.

Then again there was a nerve-tingling thrill in a feeling of adventure the first time I heard the voice of a timber wolf in his wilderness domain, the "bush" of northern Ontario. We were making camp in the late afternoon when our presence was challenged, or perhaps merely protested, from no great distance. I had heard a wolf in a zoological park howl. Even there the sound gave one an indescribably creepy feeling. But this somehow was different, intensified many times. It was the voice of freedom and independence, and there was with it an implied threat. The creepy feeling became little chills. At the same time there was a distinct and pleasant thrill, the thrill of adventure.

It was all too short-lived when my guide Pete informed me that he so little feared these big predators of the Northern wilds that he carried only a knife and an ax in the way of weapons on the ninety-mile trap line he ran every winter, often alone. He confirmed what I had heard but had had difficulty in fully crediting; namely, that these big wolves, though they may follow and threaten a man, will not attack him while he is on his feet. Pete showed me the teeth of a big wolf he had trapped, and said that more than once he had heard the rustling of the feet of the pack following him on the trail. He told it nonchalantly, but he did add that if he had happened to trip and fall at such a time it might have been just too bad. So the big bad wolf of childhood, while still holding his size, was much reduced in badness. Even so his howling still starts the little chills.

A much longer sustained and even more exciting thrill followed the encounter with my first moose. I met this young bull on a long portage around rapids we could not run. The trail was narrow, over a ridge covered with thick, small second growth which was little more than brush. There wasn't a tree big enough to climb or to find shelter behind.

With startling abruptness the bull stepped out into the trail. My companion and I retreated. It was our first meeting with the Lord of the Forest in his own domain, and though he was young he still was big enough to be awe-inspiring. So we retreated, trying to avoid undue haste that might be misconstrued. He followed. On a high bank at the river's edge grew a huge yellow birch. We scrambled up behind it and hugged the big trunk and each other. In the most deliberate manner he sauntered down the trail and up to within perhaps six or seven feet of the tree and looked us over. I suspect there must have been something like disdain in that look but I was too busy looking myself to take note. Apparently satisfied that we were harmless and beneath his notice, he moved across the trail and began to browse. We grew brave. We got out our small cameras and photographed him eating, drinking, going, coming, so close that all we could get on the film was his head. Yes, that was a thrill, perhaps as exciting as any I

have experienced. Later we heard that shortly after our experience this moose chased another party into the river.

It would be absurd to pretend that I wasn't thrilled when at the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the New York Zoological Society I was presented with the gold medal of the Wild Life Protection Fund for distinguished service to wild life, and when another gold medal was awarded me at the New York World's Fair by the National Conservation Society. But the greatest thrill came to me in a far less spectacular setting. Indeed, the setting could hardly have been more commonplace. It was the modest sitting room of my own home.

Perhaps the very simplicity and familiarity of the surroundings enhanced the thrill. Perhaps the very unexpectedness of it was a contributory factor. However, I don't think so. It was the impact of a sudden realization that the impossible had become fact; that the undreamed of had become reality; that I had attained that which had hitherto seemed so far beyond me that the possibility of it had never even entered my thoughts. And it all happened in such a matter-of-fact way.

That morning, taking a long distance call from Boston, I heard a pleasant voice. The speaker introduced himself as Dr. Frank P. Speare, president of Northeastern University. Could I and would I spare him a little time later in the day if he motored to my home in Springfield? I was wary, with suspicion born of experience. For what did he want an interview? I had learned that as a rule when representatives of public and educational institutions wanted an interview with me they were seeking something, usually financial aid. However, I granted the doctor's request and some three hours later he arrived at my home.

After an exchange of greetings the blow fell. Literally it almost stunned me. He had not come to ask, but to give. He had come to tell me that the Board of Trustees of the University had voted to award me an honorary degree to be conferred at the annual commencement exercises. He asked me to be there to receive the honor.

I have used the word stunned. No other word quite conveys the state of my mind at the time. Mrs. Burgess was not at home and did not return until after Dr. Speare had left. I judge that I was a bit incoherent in giving her the great news.

"You say you have been awarded a degree; what degree?" she asked.

I didn't know. If it had been mentioned, as probably it had been, I didn't catch it. It didn't matter. It was doctor of something or other and that was sufficient. It gave me the right to do something I never had dreamed I might do legitimately: use the prefix "Dr." before my name, should I so desire. In fact it wasn't until that memorable day when in cap and gown, before a great audience, I received the greatest honor of my life that I learned what the degree was—Litt.D., Doctor of Letters. That was a thrill I feel even to this day, the climax of attainment. How I did wish my dear mother could have lived to see her son so honored. I wonder if in spirit she was there.

Among others honored in like manner with me was Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, already in the public eye, who since has become one of the best-known figures in national life.

Recognition must, I think, always give something of a thrill. It was so when my name first appeared in *Who's Who in America*. It was soon lost through repetition in succeeding volumes and appearance in other *Who's Who's*. It was revived in a small degree when I was asked by Burke's *Dictionary of the Landed Gentry* of England for a biographical sketch.

Finally there was, and to be quite honest there still is, a very considerable thrill in an unexpected and in a way startling discovery of undreamed of recognition. I was looking through the biographical section of Webster's unabridged *International Dictionary* for a name I have now forgotten when my attention was caught by my own name. I was momentarily dazed. That couldn't possibly mean me. There must be another of the same name. It couldn't be possible that my name was included in that long list of noted names down through the centuries, some of them the most famous in all history. But there it was and is, "Burgess, Thornton Waldo, 1874—. Am. Writer."

In some respects this is perhaps my greatest honor. Not only was the thrill intense at the time of the discovery but it has endured. I feel it still whenever I realize the unbelievable fact that I am in the dictionary. Again I think of Mother, how she wanted me to have a college education and to be a minister of the gospel. I think she would be satisfied with the dictionary. I am.

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CHAPTER

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Always in Debt

MOTHER, as I've mentioned, had a horror of debt, and I inherited this feeling. Yet all my life I have been in debt and I now know it will be so to the end. It has been at times unconscious indebtedness but not the less real for so being. It is a condition that is universal and unavoidable. It is a fundamental part of the social structure in man's relations with his fellow men. We cannot be in contact with others without soon or late being in debt to them and they to us. We may not be aware of it at the time, but later when looking back and bringing the past into true perspective, we realize how much we owe to others for unsolicited help through encouragement freely given when most needed, heartfelt sympathy in dark hours, appreciation of real endeavor, good wishes, material aid in times of stress, and honest criticism.

So now, looking down the long vista of the spent years I begin to realize in some measure the constantly mounting debt of gratitude I owe so many who, often unconsciously, have contributed largely to, and had a very real part in, my success.

Writing with more or less definite altruistic aims is in truth casting bread upon the waters, or tossing tiny seeds for wandering winds to scatter far and wide. Will there be any returns whatsoever? Will even one tiny seed ever bear fruit? Day after day I, an unknown writer, sent my stories forth, not even knowing if they were widely read. Then came a letter from Kansas on the letterhead of a big milling company. I can still recall and in a measure again feel the uplift that followed the reading of that letter. In part it said:

> I wonder if you or any of us realize the lasting good you are doing, lasting good, for what is so far-reaching in effect as the impressions made on the young mind? The seeds of good sown then are those bearing the richest harvest. I believe your little simple stories are doing more real good in the world than the work of any living writer today, a sweeping statement perhaps, but my honest belief. If the writer could have the privilege of knowing any of those who are doing, or are able to do, any of the big things I would rather know the author of the *Bedtime Stories* than them all. No day is so full that I do not find time for your daily story, and it never fails to rest and refresh; never fails to give me some good thought.

What a lift that letter gave me! I think it was right then that my work began to have more than a dollar value to me. The latter, still important, no longer was the primary incentive. All at once it became distinctly secondary.

Other helpful letters followed from time to time, each one putting me further in debt to hitherto unknown friends. One was from the State Forester of Kentucky. Would I grant him permission to use in connection with the State's celebration of Arbor Day a chapter from one of my books? It dealt with a forest fire which in my stories is always the "Red Terror." Of course permission was granted, and the feeling that something I had written was being put to practical public service added to my morale.

In a series of the daily stories Johnny Chuck was being led through some exciting adventures such as are a part of the life history of most woodchucks when a letter came from down in Texas:

> Please do rescue little Chuck soon. There are two of us children who cannot stand the strain of waiting much longer for his rescue. We sit down every evening before we go to bed and the older child reads to the younger and both enjoy your little stories on the woods and fields. But please remember that folk in their first and second childhood should not have their emotions kept at high tension very long. So hasten to rescue the little Chuck and relieve the heart strain of
>
> One child, age 7 years.
> One child, age 70 years.

Promptly I rescued Johnny Chuck and from that time on was careful not to put too great strain on the emotions of tender years at either end of the life span.

There was the "big medicine" letter. It came from Pennsylvania. "Your stories about Old Mother Nature and her creatures to me are great medicine. I certainly do agree with you, and I quote you: 'The heart of a child knows nothing of the passage of years, and is as responsive to the truth at eighty years as at eight.' That to me is true Christianity. Thank you so very much for your gems concerning good Mother Nature and life."

That letter was "great medicine" to me, for it was unsolicited proof that what I was trying to do was understood and approved. Equally full of meaning for me was a note from the editor of one of Canada's largest newspapers: "You may be interested to learn that a number of hard-boiled newspapermen read your stories to their as yet unboiled children." A tribute indeed!

In the reconstruction days after World War I, the period of uncertainty and struggle and feverish anxiety, came this lift from a retired clergyman of seventy years: "In these delirious times I cannot tell you what rest and pleasure you give us in your stories. You don't preach or sentimentalize; you are sane, discriminative and discerning. You do have, and you do give in these stories, vision. I congratulate and thank you. You have a real gift and are earnestly using it and doing real service."

Another such stimulating letter came in the early days just when I most needed to know if there was any real recognition of the underlying purpose of my work. It was heart-warming. It was ample compensation for many discouraging hours of uncertainty. "If you could have lived a hundred years ago and through all those years up to the present time, there would be no use for prison houses for men, women or children," wrote a child of nearly fourscore years. It was an extravagant and to that extent an

absurd statement, but the sincerity in it gave me the feeling that it might well be true that my work might be doing something more than merely entertain.

As the years rolled on and the stories rolled up into the hundreds and on into the thousands, I had a growing awareness that there was danger of what might be called going stale; of unconscious failure to hold the interest of my readers, and through their familiarity with the objectives of my work to make it less effective. In the beginning I had needed encouragement. I still needed it to assure me that the standards I had early set were being maintained. So it was that my debt of gratitude steadily grew as from time to time I received such helpful letters as follow:

Wrote a busy New Yorker: "Whether God wills that you reach your hundred-year goal for retirement or not, you can be sure right now that your stories have had a gentling influence in thousands of lives, and I am sure this realization should give you a warm feeling of accomplishment."

This was a heady draught for a writer's ego, but how it helped! And equally did this one at Christmas from a small boy. It was in most careful print. "I think your books are the best I have ever read. I would like to know how many grandchildren you have. I think you are making children all over the world happy with your books. You should have a big reward for doing that. I think you are the best children's book writer in the world."

Bless Johnny's heart! What greater reward could I have than his letter? And I have had many, many others like it.

A little girl fell from a swing and sustained a compound fracture of a leg. Complications made her condition very painful and dangerous. Her mother wrote: "I have spent hour after hour rubbing Leslie's aching foot with one hand and holding a Thornton Burgess book in the other. One particular night her condition was indeed serious. In the wee small hours she began to improve and I was amazed at the question she asked me. 'Mommie, is Thornton Burgess still alive?' I replied that I did not know anything about you, but you must be a man well on in years for one of your books was copyrighted in 1910 (thirty years before). She retorted that she would cry if she thought you were dead." There was the smart of unshed tears in my own eyes as I read.

There have been many letters to touch deeply the emotions. There was this from a brokenhearted father in Missouri: "Our little Buddy died on New Year's Day. I can hardly realize it yet. Oh how he did love Peter Rabbit and his animal friends, especially Grandfather Frog. We used to talk of you as the man who knew all the little woodland people. In my mind's eye I can see him now up in Heaven and no doubt Grandfather Frog and Peter Rabbit are there with him. He had pneumonia and lived only a week."

Then there was the letter from Lindley's mother. It told me how he loved my stories and that he was now very ill. Would I write him a personal letter for his birthday some weeks ahead. Of course I would and so wrote her, promising to send it in time. Then she wrote: "Our little lad is failing and we don't know how long his strength may hold out. Will you please not wait to send him a letter for his birthday but send it before if possible?"

The letter was written immediately. It was not an easy letter to write. A few weeks later I received full recompense and more. "We shall be grateful all our lives for your

letter to Lindley," wrote his mother. "We pray God's blessing upon you for the delight you brought into his life and the sparkle to his almost sightless eyes. Your letter is now his choicest possession."

What a blessed privilege to be able by the God-given power of mere words carefully chosen to help others in time of stress and trouble. I am humbly grateful that I have been granted from time to time the use of that power in some degree, often with complete unawareness.

A New Jersey physician, Dr. J. S. Wolfe, wrote me that he had been making scrapbooks of my stories clipped from the *New York Herald Tribune* for his grandchildren. He had two thousand consecutive stories, lacking one. He had had to go to a funeral one day and the home folks had forgotten to save the paper for him that day. I wrote him asking for the missing date. He sent it to me. In my files I found I had a duplicate proof of the missing story and sent it to him, making his two thousand complete.

He thanked me and I heard nothing further from him until some years later he wrote: "Today I pasted in my Nature Story Book (43rd) the 7573rd story without one missing." That anyone should have thought enough of the stories to take the trouble to cut them from newspapers and save them over such a long period was a tribute indeed. At that time Dr. Wolfe was eighty-four years old and was starting his sixtieth year practicing medicine. In 1948 he was awarded a gold medal by the State Medical Society as the outstanding medical practitioner in New Jersey.

A delightful letter from the Middle West reads: "My husband, a writer of detective and mystery stories for the past seventeen years, will not even kill a wasp, and hunts for nothing but hickory nuts, all due to the influence of your stories." And I am supposed to be writing just for children of tender years.

The two-line couplets, sometimes four-line verses, that for many years have headed all my stories were born of the desire to add something to make them appear a bit different from what they had been. This was at the time I left the Associated Newspapers and went over to the New York Tribune Syndicate. As I said before, the writing of those two lines sometimes takes longer than the entire story they head. My plan was to drop these couplets as soon as my column had become established in my new connection. I tried it. It couldn't be done. Letters of protest were too numerous and insistent to be ignored. One reader wrote:

> The aphorisms which head the stories are of great import. I have a small book I call my rosary in which I put down quotations from here and there, the Bible, Oriental philosophy, etc. Many of these aphorisms find a place there, such as the wisdom of Jimmy Skunk who says:
>
> *Troubles come to one and all,*
> *Be they big or be they small.*
>
> And the advice of Old Mother Nature:
>
> *When things go bad and life is rough*
> *Advantage lies in being tough.*

Indeed this is so. And Old Mother West Wind says:

However hard may fall the rain
The sun is sure to shine again.

But the gem of them all is this:

On earth below, in Heaven above
The one most precious thing is love.

If this statement of truth could be universal in this world what a different world it would be.

I am not sure that I should use these unsolicited, frequently astonishing tributes. Reading the original letters to make selections is almost too stimulating. Many had been filed away and forgotten for years. Now and then one gives me a jolt like a not too heavy electric shock. It leaves a pleasant, exciting sense of attainment.

Starting with but one audience, children, in mind, and with but two primary objectives—to open the doors for little folks to the wonders of Nature all about them, and make an honest living while doing it—I gradually discovered that the golden key to the treasure chest of knowledge along several diverse lines was in my hands, and age put no limits to the use of it.

Psychology is a big word, too big for the understanding of small listeners to, or readers of, Little Stories for Bedtime, but it has a vital part in the stories' success. Recognition of that fact brought me this: "Your stories are a daily delight and I'm nearer my second childhood than my first. For years I've been interested in psychology, hoping to learn to understand human nature, and I assure you I have learned more from your animal stories than from many of the learned books."

A joint letter to my illustrator, Mr. Cady, and myself says: "I want to thank you both for your wonderful nature stories and illustrations, to me equally well done. I am not what is classed a religious mortal. My religion is that there is an infinite mind that inspires and guides if we will let it. You two positively *let it*. I started reading the articles through curiosity but found them so wonderful, so educational, that I buy the paper for these alone." Who says that entertainment and education cannot run in the same channel?

When doing a thing day after day, year in and year out, it is not easy to keep the morale high, the enthusiasm undiminished. Both need a stimulant now and then. I have been most fortunate in this respect. When it was most needed, the mail brought me this from a teacher of biology in a high school: "Reading your books when I was in grade school was one of the big reasons I early developed a love for Nature and the animals and plants around us." And this from a mother: "You moralize without seeming to. You entertain with exquisite fantasy. You have delighted the young in heart for years. Your books have given me some of the enchantment from my own childhood to share with my children."

Could a writer ask more for his efforts? Again when the morale was most in need of help it came from a scientist of note: "As I am going through page after page and story after story I recognize the positive genius which you possess in personalizing the little

animals and in letting them teach us real lessons. One of these is to treat every living creature with consideration, and to recognize every living creature as an evidence of God's handiwork. Certainly your nature stories during the years have checked many a cruel hand and stopped much needless slaughter."

Nothing is more difficult than trying to evaluate tributes and criticisms. Of necessity the sauce has much to do with it. This is especially true in my chosen field, where truth is dependent on close observation and understanding of what is seen. So the commendation of an old Cherokee ranchman meant much to me. He wrote: "I would rather see and talk with you than any man in our nation. I am an old Cherokee ranchman, seventy-seven years old; served eight years in the Oklahoma Senate and am known over the state as the friend of the hunted." It was Sid Graham, himself an author.

Now and then, not too often, this wine of sincere flattery is modified or diluted with equally honest criticism as in the following: "In my home lives my grandson, age five, who gives me no peace until he snuggles up beside me to hear the daily nature story from your pen. Although some of the lines are for his age a bit abstruse I translate into his vocabulary. If I failed to do so he would repeat every new word and demand the definition. I don't want him to acquire the use of your word 'folks,' so I always transpose it into 'folk' to keep his English in proper form. I was briefly delighted in a recent story to find that twice you had written it in the dictionary form, but my heart sank when I found you had slipped again. Please watch your step. Thank you."

I wrote my critic that the "thank you" was misplaced. It should and did come from me. He gave me a like aid to that given me by others in their kindly praise, then doubled it by his kindly criticism. Undoubtedly I have slipped and made his heart sink many times since, but I have tried not to, even though the dictionary does give the plural "folks" as well as "folk." And I have tried to watch my step in the correct use of other words that are commonly misused. An honest critic is an author's best friend even when there is no intent to be so. I welcome sincere criticism.

Once in a while I slip. So does my illustrator. One such slip brought me two letters I have long cherished. They were from boys about twelve years of age and were from widely separated locations. I was running a series of stories about Mrs. Quack the Mallard Duck. The illustration for one of these showed her in a single column cut. It was this that brought the two letters. They were alike in that they had been written with the greatest care not to hurt my feelings. It was clear that both writers felt that I should be told of a gross error, and this they did in the most delicate manner, evidently thinking I was responsible for the drawing as well as the story. Most diplomatically they pointed out that it is Mr. Quack's tail, not Mrs. Quack's, that has two upcurled feathers in the tip. I looked up the newspaper with the illustration in question. Sure enough, Mrs. Quack sported two tiny upturned feathers in her tail. They were so small I had not noticed them at all. Thus I learned anew that no error can be so small as to escape the sharp eyes of children.

Once I was taken to task severely and in no uncertain terms by a pen that certainly did not have a ball point. I was advised that before I wrote any more stories about Chatterer the Red Squirrel I better go out in the Green Forest and get acquainted with him. I was then told most emphatically that I was all wrong in my account of certain habits; that he did not do this and did not do that. I was bothered. If there was any one

animal above others whose habits I was sure of, it was Chatterer. I checked and rechecked in the works of recognized authorities the habits of the red squirrel in all subspecies from coast to coast. In general they were such as I had given Chatterer in my stories.

Some weeks later out of the blue a possible solution came to me. My critic lived in a part of the country where the fox squirrel is fairly common. Probably it was the red-coated phase of this species that was familiar there and it was locally called red squirrel. My critic had confused it with the true red squirrel whom I call Chatterer. This being true, his criticisms were justified from his point of view, and I was under obligation to him even though he was mistaken. His criticisms brought about a more intensive study of the red squirrel than I had hitherto given the subject with the happy result that I dug up some facts I had not known or had forgotten, all grist for the story mill.

Again an engineer who had spent many years in the wilderness of the Canadian "bush" wrote me how much he had enjoyed my stories of Jerry Muskrat, study of the muskrat having been a hobby with him. He had written a small book on this big water rat and its habits. He thought I was mistaken in saying that when he dives Jerry often slaps the water with his tail, pointing out that that is the danger signal of Paddy the Beaver.

I was puzzled. From boyhood I had known Jerry Muskrat. Often I had both seen and heard him slap the water with his tail. Yet here was a man who had made a special study of this little fur bearer saying that he didn't do this. Again I carefully checked with authorities. All agreed with my own observations.

The explanation? It sometimes happens that a widely distributed species may vary greatly in habits according to location. It is quite possible, indeed probable, that the muskrats with which my critic was familiar do not have this habit.

So for most of my life I have been in debt and still am. In proportion to the advance in years the debt has increased. It is a mounting debt, impossible for me ever to repay. Yet it is not a burden. To the contrary, it is an inspiration.

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CHAPTER

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From My Scrapbooks

LOOKING through my scrapbooks filled with letters and clippings collected through the years, I realize anew how often we are wholly unaware of influences set in motion by some word or deed of our own, and the results for good or ill that follow; how great and lasting is the power of the written or printed word, and how often we are unconsciously negligent in recognizing and expressing appreciation of what others do for us. A word of commendation we know to be honest and sincere received in an hour of distress and discouragement may mean the difference between failure and success.

A man may be the architect of his own success, but the actual builders of it are his appreciative fellows along the way. Sometimes, too often I fear, I have failed to recognize this obvious fact that my scrapbooks now make all too clear. Thus, some years ago an editorial in the Sunday *New York Herald Tribune*, coming at a time when I was endeavoring to be of some real service to the humane work of the S.P.C.A., was recognition that was an effective spur to further effort. It was in part as follows:

> How deep does human education by vivid fiction go? It must arrive at good, one feels sure, when it is so honest as that of Mr. Burgess. He makes the animals no more deceptively human than our ignorance of their talk and meditations and motives obliges him to do. Defects in the amiability of Grandfather Frog and Hooty are not permitted to appear as moral flaws. They have to eat what they can and neither pity nor family affection restrains their hunger; but they do not kill as weasels, cats, and men and women do for perverse pleasure.
>
> Such straightforward ethics and natural science, though, would never account entirely for the reality and poetry of the cosmos illumined by Mr. Burgess, now here, now there, from day to day. He feels in his own bones the desperate mercy of the winter sleep, the delicate delight of early spring, the pleasures of having enough to eat in summer, the loneliness and uncertainty of a young animal's first autumn. He makes the hasty reader even feel these with such primordial intensity that many probably would say that they are better men for having briefly been Johnny Chuck.

How that helped!

In 1944, my ten-thousandth consecutive newspaper story was published. It was carried as a news item by many newspapers and occasioned considerable editorial comment. The following is from the *Springfield Republican*:

> Years ago when Theodore Roosevelt was President and he was periodically denouncing those with whom he disagreed, one of his famous controversies was with those whom he called "nature fakers." He protested against what he termed their romantic and inaccurate descriptions of animals which did things that animals never could do. Mr. Burgess has observed such a careful regard for the facts of natural history that, while he has attributed speech to his animal friends, who certainly know ways to communicate much to each other, he has escaped bitter controversies of that sort. Not the least testimony to his care in this respect and to the accuracy of his observations is the fact that with the passing years a large part of his audience—not less than half of it he reports—has come to be composed of adults.

The reference to our great naturalist President reminds me of a note I once received from him and which I cherish. Before the First World War, I wrote and edited a small four-page paper called *Mother Nature's News*. It was designed for circulation in the schools. Knowing the former President's keen interest in everything pertaining to Nature and outdoor life, I sent him a copy with a note saying I thought he might be interested in this effort to arouse and stimulate the interest of children in Old Mother Nature and her ways. I did not ask or hint that I would like an endorsement. I received a prompt reply typed on a half-sheet. It was brief and to the point. In a few words he explained that a man in his position could not endorse anything and wound up: "Never-the-less this is a mighty fine little paper." It was signed in his characteristic hand, *Theodore Roosevelt*.

What more could I have asked? *Mother Nature's News* was one of the casualties of the war. Years later I was told that Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt was one of my regular readers and a loyal follower of Peter Rabbit's adventures.

A mutual friend wrote me that I had an ardent fan in Captain Bob Bartlett, the famous arctic explorer. Aware that the tough old salt was a confirmed bachelor, I thought I was being spoofed. Then happily I met Captain Bob and he informed me that for twenty years he had read the stories whenever he was where he could get papers containing them. And I thought I was writing for little children.

The *New York Herald Tribune* also commented editorially on the ten-thousandth story achievement. From it I quote as follows:

> To think that 10,000 is a large estimate of the adventure experienced by the small folk of field and wood would be to betray the most urban provincialism. But it is a good round number just the same and we think that Mr. Thornton W. Burgess is entitled to congratulations on having achieved it in his day by day accounting of the lives of the wild folk of the country ways.
>
> For more than thirty years he has been doing this, happily combining entertainment with enlightenment for both young and old. Without a doubt he has awakened the minds of countless youngsters to a realization of the fact that the lives of squirrels and rabbits, owls and blue jays, are not placid affairs spent mainly basking in the summertime or seeking shelter from the

rain, but lives full of awareness of danger ever-present and a constant need for vigilance and cunning in the preservation of life itself.

Mr. Burgess has made Peter along with Sammy Jay, Jimmy Skunk, and all the rest familiar figures in the imagination's dooryard. He has done a real service to the animals and to his readers of all ages in awakening them to the complexity and adventures, the industry, often the tragedy, of the lives of wild folk through the changing seasons.

This from the *Springfield Union* at that same time:

Mr. Burgess is one of Springfield's one-man industries that have been unaffected by good times or bad. An unhampered flow of imagination and a typewriter are his stock in trade. Given these and supposedly a certain amount of seclusion, his output is certain. Contemplation of Mr. Burgess at his daily grind, if one may so term it, inspires the average person not only with wonder as to his continuing ability to produce, but a certain sentiment of awe that the literary machinery should so long continue in action without breakdown or serious creaking.

It hasn't broken down, but I suspect it is getting worn and may creak a little. So with the publication of the fifteen-thousandth story, Peter decided to retire.

Scrapbooks kept through many years are nostalgic. It could not be otherwise. But in their records of achievement they are inspirational as well to one who looks back through them from time to time. And always there are bits of half-forgotten humor it is pleasant to recall.

In the burdensome, dread war days it was helpful to clip from a metropolitan paper this bit of nonsense by Al Graham in tribute to my stories:

Zounds to Europe's game of Grab-it!
Tell me, first, of Peter Rabbit!

Read me, from my favorite paper,
Jerry Muskrat's latest caper;

Skip Herr Goebbels's line of bunk;
Tell me, how is Jimmy Skunk?

Rather than of Russia's snatch,
News I yearn of the Briar Patch!

Mighty though the Finn's dismay,
My concern's for Sammy Jay!

Reddy Fox and Mrs. Reddy—
They're the Reds I go for steady.

There was more than a mere laugh in the reading. Could it be that there was a basis of truth in Mr. Graham's amusing lines? That perhaps my stories were relieving tension here and there? Could it be that after all I was or could thus be of some small but real service in the war effort? I liked to think it was true. I worked better for the thought that it might be so.

What is news? How does one recognize it? In a newspaper television interview in St. John, New Brunswick, I was asked when Reddy Fox would catch Peter Rabbit. I replied that he never would. That was news. I didn't know this until clippings from widely scattered newspapers began coming in. Some were single-column, but boxed. Some were double-column. Some were editorial comment. Even *Time* magazine carried the *news*. It brought many letters of relief and gratitude. An editorial of some length in the *Knickerbocker Press* bemoans that the element of surprise that through many years has prevailed in the stories of Peter and Reddy now has been removed. It gently chides me for this. It concludes thus: "Mr. Burgess, we must not see that clearly ahead. To know the best means we must also know the worst of life, and that we never could endure. If you will not take back your words, at least qualify them with 'maybe,' for we cannot sacrifice so lightly the spice of danger that is the reason for our faith and hope."

I still get a kick from a postcard from Canada addressed: *Thornton W. Burgess, Peter Rabbit's Godfather, U.S.A. God knows where*. Uncle Sam knew and delivered it without delay. It reminds me of a story I once heard John Kendrick Bangs tell. Some friends of Mark Twain were gathered at the Players' Club in New York. Someone remembered that it was Twain's birthday and suggested they write him a round-robin letter. This was done. Then it was discovered that no one knew where the famous author was beyond the fact that he was somewhere in Europe. So the letter was addressed simply: *Mark Twain, God knows where*. It was dropped in the mailbox at

Gramercy Park. One month later Bangs received a postcard from Vienna. It was brief. "Dear Bangs. He did— Mark."

A little girl in Florida addressed a letter to me at *The Dear Old Briar Patch, Massachusetts*. Uncle Sam knew that one too. These scrapbooks bring home to me anew how often we know not what we say, or putting it more exactly, we know not *all* we say. It remains for others to discover things of which we have been wholly unaware, or the importance of which we have failed to consider. Thus we are given credit beyond that we have consciously sought. For this very reason it is valued the more.

Noah Webster defines conservation as "a conserving, preserving, guarding, or protecting; a keeping in a safe or entire state."

This is good, but I have in addition made up my own definition of the word as applied in its broadest meaning to the work and aims of true conservation of the day: To re-establish and maintain Nature's fine balance among all living things, and to hold as a sacred trust the obligation to make only the best possible use of natural resources, to the end that the inheritance we of today have received from the past may be passed on unimpaired, even improved, to future generations for the betterment of mankind through all time.

Believing this, I have from the start been a conservationist to the extent of trying to lead my young readers to love and try to protect their lesser neighbors in fur and feathers. I never had thought of this in the broad terms of the desperately needed national conservation movement of today.

Then, on the publication of my ten-thousandth story, came a still cherished letter from the late Dr. Willard Gibbs Van Name, at that time Emeritus Associate Curator of the American Museum of Natural History, himself a great conservationist, of whom it has been said he was "a militant champion of wild life and forest." He wrote, "You surely have done more for wild life and for arousing sympathy for the wild creatures about us, and taught people more about them, than anyone I know of."

With that letter is another also from a member of the American Museum staff, the late Dr. Clyde Fisher, long active in the educational work of the Museum: "What an achievement! It would be difficult if not impossible to overestimate the value of your work in nature education and in conservation. You have made a great contribution."

Those two letters are on facing pages in the scrapbook. They are a personal tribute that has been an inspiration through many years, but I value them greatly for far more than this. They are recognition of the latent forces in children that through stories and other educational means today can be unlocked and channeled for better things tomorrow. They are more a tribute to the stories than a personal tribute.

In this same vein is another letter, this one from the Pacific coast: "I am now seventy-six years of age and have studied the causes and motives of human behavior all my life. Upon this basis I feel justified in venturing the statement that you have done more than any other individual to mold the character of America's children along the lines of honesty, kindness and justice. I feel a personal debt of gratitude for what you have done for some small boys whom I have known and loved."

These statements may verge on the extravagant, but they have been helpful to me beyond measure and I am humbly grateful. It is always heartening to be told that one's

work has been of help and service to others in ways you have not dreamed of, as in the following from an educator:

"The beginning-reading texts presently used in the schools have been made up by educational engineers, not created by writers of juvenile literature. As a result they lack both literary virtues and adequate appeal to juvenile imaginations. It has been with mounting excitement that I have been checking your books for imagination appeal, awareness stimuli, scientific accuracy, and vocabulary. I was not surprised to read in the autobiography of Orville Prescott that that eminent book-reviewer of the *New York Times* had taught himself to read with your *Bedtime Stories*. I am building a two-year beginning-reading course around your books."

A letter to my publishers has a place in one of my scrapbooks. It is from a mother seeking information about me. She says: "I am the mother of an eight-year-old daughter who has used his books and morals as such an inspiration that I am very interested in obtaining anything I can find to help her become better acquainted with him. She received a letter from him" (she had written me) "and it would be impossible to explain to him what it has meant to her. She has become by far a better person through her interest in him and his stories. She has changed from a self-centered intolerable youngster into a little adult of considerable depth, due largely to Mr. Burgess."

That was several years ago. Ever since, the lassie and I have been sort of growing up together through Uncle Sam's mail service. Then there is the letter from an American nurse in Hangchow, China, before the days when the Red Dragon swallowed the mainland. She wrote that she dearly loved the little Chinese children, but that to her great distress she found them cruel to lower forms of life. She felt that it was not innate heartlessness but a complete lack of understanding that birds, animals and lower orders suffer fright and physical pain just as human beings do. There seemed to be no way of reaching them through explanation, argument or command. As an example, the very morning of the day the letter was written when she had entered her compound she found suspended from the clothesline a small bird fluttering helplessly, hanging by a thread drawn through the nostrils. The child who had hung it there regarded it merely as an animated toy. The enjoyment was not in the suffering of the bird, but in the motion of the wings just as a mechanical toy bird would have been enjoyed.

Sure that these dear little folk with the slant eyes and winning smiles were at heart no more cruel than other children, the good nurse wondered if the key to true understanding and humane thinking might lie in direct approach from the animal's viewpoint. Would I be willing to allow her to translate or have translated into Chinese one of my books? I was only too happy to grant permission, as were my publishers. So in course of time there arrived in a woven straw container a paper-bound volume, *Old Mother West Wind's Animal Friends*. On the next to the last page I read the title, my name, credit to my American publishers and the fact that this little volume was printed in Shanghai. From there on I merely turned the pages from back to front scanning them up and down instead of across from left to right, all the time wondering if it could be possible that I was, in a way of speaking, truly in those strange black characters, and with me Peter Rabbit and his friends, the dear Old Briar Patch and the Green Forest. I am told that I have a style in writing peculiarly my own. This collection of strange black characters certainly isn't it. Is the context any less changed?

A letter from Stockholm informs me that Old Mother West Wind is at home in Sweden, even though I am not. How can I be when my long-time friend no longer answers to the name of Jimmy Skunk? Instead he has become Olle Skonk. Looking further, Peter Rabbit is now Peter Hare, but can it be that Moje Murmel and Mickel Räv are Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox? I can only guess, and then wonder if my stories in Swedish are as changed as the names.

One of my great-grandfathers was a Frenchman. I wish I could consult him to find out why in some of my books published in Paris I find Reddy Fox adventuring as Patterrouse le Renard, while the same stories also in French but published in Brussels present Reddy as Roux le Renard, and in the Canadian French translation of the same stories he is Goupil le Renard. Perhaps it is in keeping with his crafty character. Peter Rabbit on the other hand is Jeannot Lapin all the way through. Now and then I look these little volumes over, not without some pride I confess, but also with a deep sense of futility and chagrin that I can speak and read but one language and am far from being a master of that.

I sometimes wonder just how those translations retranslated back into English would appear. Would there then be any of my so-called style left? And in those foreign tongues is there any style at all to make them distinctive in association with my name? Single stories have been translated into Italian, Spanish, German and other languages. Years ago my London publishers received a letter from the government of the Irish Free State asking permission to have *The Adventures of Grandfather Frog* included in a list for possible translation into ancient Irish for educational use. Whether this was done I do not know, but I like to look at the letter now and then and try to twist my tongue around the dateline of that letterhead, *An Roinn Oideachais, Baile Atha Cliath, 8th January 1932*, and wonder how Grandfather Frog would say “chug-a-rum” in the ancient tongue of the Shamrock Isle. These translations are appreciated recognition and give me a sort of pleasant feeling of being a man of the world, instead of the homebody I am and always have been.

I have written too much about what I have done, but the ego is difficult to submerge in a self-record. If others find something herein of helpful interest the writing will have been a privilege. As for myself, the long look back has brought into true perspective how great is my debt to others. It is good to look back to one’s successes. It is equally good, or should be, to look back to one’s failures and in so doing to discover how often a success is built on a failure.

The child of today with plastic mind is the citizen of tomorrow with fixed ideas. The time to make sure that the ideas are right is before they become fixed. World peace and the future of the human race are in the children of today. The story is the most acceptable and effective way of conveying knowledge and guidance to the child mind and establishing them therein. The animal story, because of the psychological factor involved, the intuitive feeling of superiority on the part of the child, is the most effective form of story. Thus I much, much prefer to write for children. In so doing I feel a greater sense of real power than could ever be mine were I a writer for adults or in high political office.

Peter Rabbit's oft repeated advice to the children the world over who know and love him is:

With open mind go on your way,
And add to knowledge every day.

This is most easily and effectively done through the story. I think I have proved it.

So now I close my scrapbooks and this record with this quotation from Proverbs 27: "Let another man praise thee and not thine own mouth; a stranger and not thine own lips."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Now I Remember: Autobiography of an Amateur Naturalist* by Thornton W. Burgess]