BY REEF AND TRAIL

C. L. B.

BOB LEACH'S ADVENTURES
IN FLORIDA

by FISHER AMES JR.

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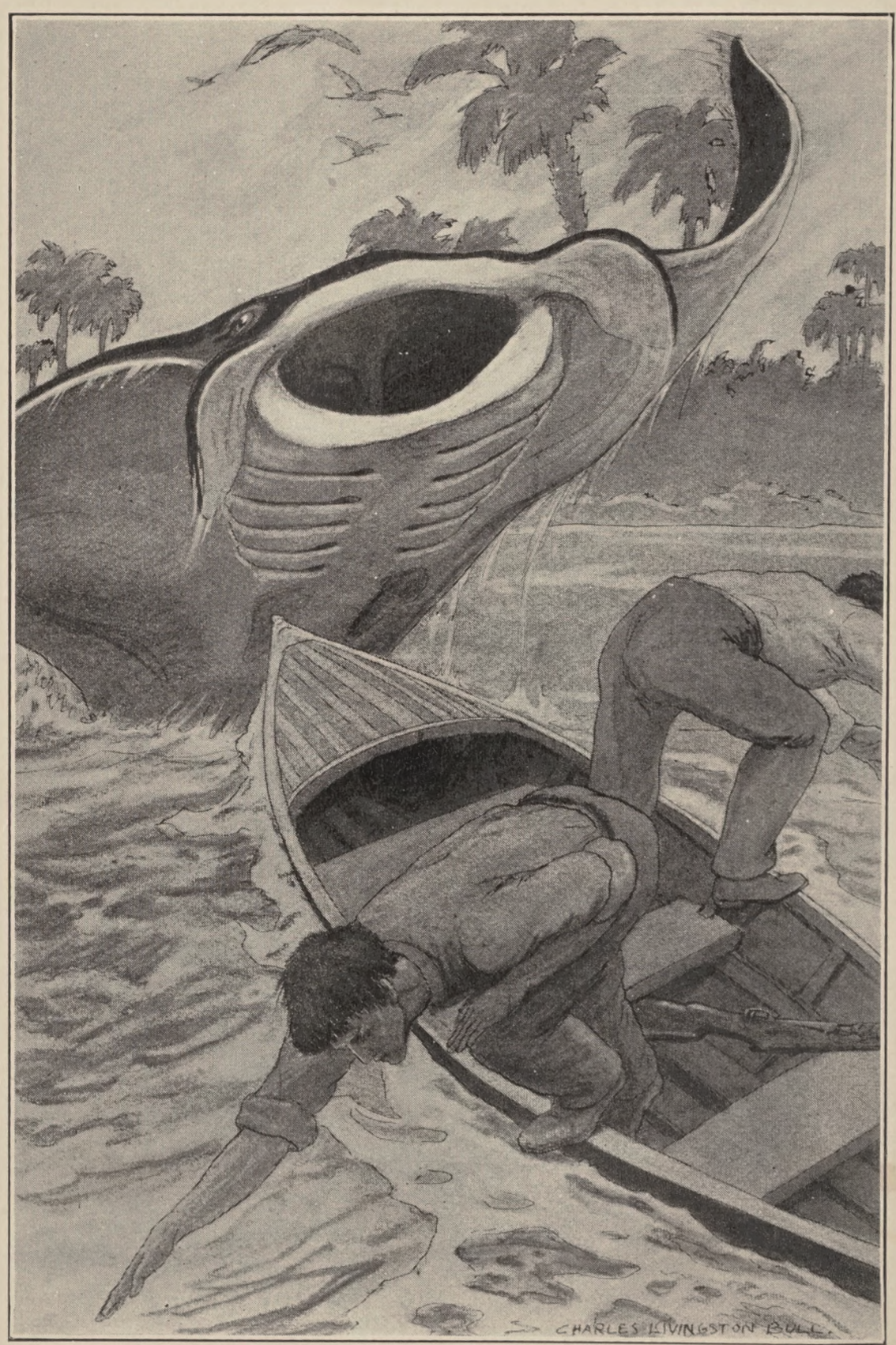

" CHARGING FURIOUSLY, IT SPRANG CLEAR OF THE WATER."

(*See page* 112)

By Reef and Trail

Bob Leach's Adventures in Florida

FISHER AMES, Jr.

Illustrated by
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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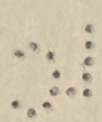

DEDICATED

To My Mother

PREFACE

To the boys who may read By Reef and Trail, I wish to say that I have spent many delightful months hunting and fishing among the scenes this book tries to picture. My friend Bob, for the character of the young hero of By Reef and Trail is drawn from real life, lives on the Florida coast and in many exciting expeditions he was my guide and instructor. He took me on my first alligator hunt, and showed me how the strange brown pelicans rear their young, and the keys where the giant loggerhead comes ashore to lay her eggs. I have never met a truer sportsman than Bob, or a keener student of wild life.

In the hope that some of my readers may be interested in this vital and fascinating subject, I have put some advice on outdoor life and a glossary concerning the natural history

appearing in this story at the back of the book in the form of an appendix. But though book knowledge is essential in its way the best advice I can give my young readers is to go afield themselves and see things with their own eyes. Learn to observe. It is an art that is not easy to acquire, but fortunately it is within everyone's reach, and once mastered no part of the world will seem narrow or barren. Bob has had little schooling, but as the plume-hunter, Braithe, said: "he has a pair of eyes."

Some day I hope to meet again the tall, brown young Floridian whose pair of eyes revealed so much to me that was new and instructive. I understand that Bob contemplates a prospecting trip to the little known Gulf of California. If he does I know he will see what there is to be seen, and perhaps I can persuade him to let me tell the story.

FISHER AMES, JR.

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BY REEF AND TRAIL

CHAPTER I

"YELLOW-EYES"

THE lean black boar wriggled the moist disk of his snout. "*Woo-oof, woof-oof!*" he warned. Then with a stamp he bolted, clearing a way through the rattling cane for his troop. But one tender little piglet was a fraction of a second too late, and his thin shriek of despair lent wings to the heels of the others.

The big cat stood with a forepaw on the suckling, and swept the tiny clearing with a menacing glance, the tip of his tail twitching. He shrank with a snarl and an upward look as a Carolina dove swung above the cane; then seizing the pig by the nape of the neck, he started back to his lair.

Usually the brake was moist and green, but

a dry autumn and drier winter had left it a yellow, dusty shell of its old self. The panther, lithe and stealthy as he was, made more noise in his retreat than he liked, and as the dry reeds chafed and creaked, he quickened his steps and growled uneasily. All his senses were sharpened by the kill he had made; but the wind was travelling with him, and he did not smell the odor of man until it was too late, and he stood on the edge of the cane-brake face to face with a tall boy.

The boy was more surprised than the panther. He had never seen one before, but he recognized the little spotted pig. It was his property, or had been before the panther appropriated it, and the boy felt a sudden fury at the theft. He swung his gun up to his shoulder and fired both barrels at the tawny head. When the smoke lifted he had the dead pig fast enough, but the panther, very much alive, was leaping back through the brake at top speed.

"Well, I swan!" said the boy, reflectively. "I didn't know there were any of those critters about here. Wish I'd had something besides snipe-shot in old Bess."

He turned the pig over and examined with interest the deep holes made by the cat's fangs.

"There's some roasting-meat on it, anyway," he thought. "But he would have been an awful fine pig if he'd had a chance to grow. He always was the fattest. Reckon that's why Yellow-Eyes picked him."

As he had hoped, his news created a great sensation at home. His two little sisters wept with fright at his description of Yellow-Eyes, and his mother scolded him for firing at the beast, but even more satisfactory was the impression produced upon his father.

Mr. Leach was a man who belied his name. He never stuck to anything, and very few things — money included — stuck to him. With high momentary hopes he had engaged in various occupations, one after another, but something had always happened to "settle" each and all. His favorite expression of defeat was, "That settles it."

"I came to this place to raise pigs," he said, mournfully. "It's a first-rate place for 'em; plenty of mast in the uplands, and roots and such in the brake. I did have hopes, ma, — I'll say

it now, — but Bob's seen a panther, and that settles it."

"Why should one panther settle it?" asked Bob, somewhat defiantly.

The news had so depressed Mr. Leach that he felt the immediate need of substantial nourishment, and it was not until "ma" had placed some "white meat" and grits and a cup of well-stewed coffee before him that he would speak about the matter. His information was really three parts superstition, but of that his audience were unconscious.

"Panthers," said Mr. Leach, "are peculiar. They move here and there," — he waved his knife to indicate the migratory habits of the creature, — "until they land on a place that has good food, like my pigs, and they'll stay there till they've eaten up every last scrap of it. Particularly pigs. When a panther finds a drove of pigs, you might as well give him the pigs at once and be done with it. This critter'll finish mine, and then he'll move on to Simmons's, and wind up with Hedge's. You can't trap 'em, and there isn't any use to gun for 'em unless you've got a trained dog. The pig business is settled

in these parts, and that's the long and short of it."

"Perhaps Clipper could smell him out," suggested Bob.

Mr. Leach laughed mirthlessly.

"Unless you're tired of Clipper, you'll leave him behind the stove," he said. "There's no sense giving that panther all our live stock."

"Well," said Bob, "I've met old Yellow-Eyes once, and I may again, and if I do old Bess will have something different to say to him. I'm going to make him work for our pigs, at any rate."

The work seemed mainly on Bob's side. He knew no more about panthers than his father had told him. In other words, he knew nothing at all of their real habits, except that they had an appetite for pigs. The beast had had its fright, and hunted with redoubled caution. At the end of the week it had killed two more young pigs, and the alarmed drove deserted the great canebrake for the upland. But the first day on the new feeding-ground saw another murder, and back went the pigs into the canes again, so distracted that they could not be driven home at all.

"What did I tell you?" said Mr. Leach. "He's

got three of 'em already. We might just as well say good-by to the rest."

When Bob came home one day and reported that he had found the remains of a fourth victim, his father was almost triumphant. He seemed to have acquired a kind of pride in the relentless cunning of the animal.

"When he finishes me he'll move on to Simmons's," he said, rubbing his hands. "He's a smart one, as Eben Simmons'll find out pretty soon."

Still Bob would not give up. He toiled through the brake and the oak-crowned uplands, and lay in wait for hours at a time near the deer-paths. He learned that migrating warblers travel in bands; that many birds never went into the cane, although they lived happily at its edge; that the cat-squirrels play games among themselves; that what little movement there is at noon is mainly confined to the ground-haunters.

These and many other interesting things the boy learned, but they were apart from his mission.

That would have seemed to have no place in the drowsy, orderly region if it had not been for the few red-smirched bones and the beans which

Mr. Leach dropped into a tumbler as a record of their losses.

It was like hunting a ghost. Bob gradually relaxed his vigilance and wandered farther away from the drove to secure some of the small game on which the family depended.

One afternoon, as he was returning from a longer trip than usual, he saw smoke hanging over the brake in the direction of his house. He stood in the edge of the woods he had just left, wondering whether it would be wise to take the usual short cut through the canes. The smoke was drifting toward him, but it was not heavy or wide-spread, and concluding to risk it, he began to jog along one of the numerous narrow hog-paths that threaded the dry swamp.

He had seen fires there before, and knew their violence, even in moister seasons than this. In his judgment, however, he had time to make the two miles across the brake before the conflagration was well started, but he had underestimated the force and direction of the wind. His error was soon apparent. When he mounted one of the little bare island-like mounds scattered through the brake and looked out over the split,

yellowed tops of the canes, he saw, leaning toward him, a long curtain of smoke whose base was pierced and reddened by up-darting flames.

As he watched it a young girl came into the small opening by the same path he had travelled. It was Nancy Simmons, barefooted and bareheaded, and carrying a little package of freshly dug roots.

"Hello, Bob!" she said, and joined him on the mound. "My!" she added. "It looks big, doesn't it?"

Bob regarded her gravely. Her presence complicated matters.

"It is big!" he said, irritably. "What in the world are you way out here for, Nan?"

She looked up at him with her clear blue eyes, and smiled.

"Oh, to get some roots for pap's ague," she said. "How are we going to get home?"

Frowning, Bob considered the situation, while Nancy, fearless and interested, watched the advance of the red-stained smoke.

"I reckon we'd better go to the pond and let it pass," said Bob presently. "I can carry you to the island."

Nancy tossed her brown head.

"I can wade as well as you," she said. "The water's mighty low. Come on!"

A few minutes of rapid running brought them to the pond. The water was very low, as Nancy had said, and in only one or two spots reached as high as their knees. But if it was low, it was wide, and a feeling of security cheered them when they stood on the small island, with its half-dozen rotting stumps and the single water-oak that reared its head high above the canes, a landmark for many miles.

"Let's climb the tree," suggested Nancy. "Then we can see things."

The fire was worth seeing now. From their seat on the lowest limb of the oak they commanded the whole scene. The smoke had drifted over and beyond them, and underneath it whirled gray flakes of ash. The dry canes were burning with a roar and a series of explosions, sharp as pistol-shots, as the air in their hollow joints became heated and burst through the thin walls.

On the east the leaping flames had almost reached the shore of the pond, and wheeling in a steady advance before the long red line were a

number of sparrow-hawks. The fire was beating the covert for them, and every frightened bird that rose above the canes found itself confronted by an enemy almost as savage as the element from which it sought to escape.

"The nasty things!" cried Nancy. "Please shoot at them, Bob."

"They're way out of range," said Bob, laughing, "and besides, I left old Bess down there on the stump."

He turned to look toward the west, where the flames were as yet more remote. There on the shore, his hind quarters still hidden in the reeds, stood Yellow-Eyes, his head turned toward the fire with an expression of fear and vindictiveness. The next moment the lean, long creature ran into the water, and half-swimming, half-wading, struck out for the island.

Bob was so taken aback that he sat there dumb, but with an impulse of protection, he caught Nancy by her round arm.

"What is it?" she asked, and then breathed a frightened "Oh!" as she saw the wading cat.

In fascinated silence they watched the animal gain the island, where it paused to shake itself

and give an intent, malevolent look at the sweeping fire. But when it trotted straight for the oak, Nancy screamed.

The panther dropped as if it had been struck across the face, and with flattened ears, glared upward at the boy and girl. It was so close that they could see the subtle change in the rigid form as alarm gave way to curiosity, and its naturally vicious and irritable nature gained control.

The broad fore paws began to knead the damp ground stealthily, the eyes widened and the flattened, snake-like look disappeared in a kind of expanding movement of the whole body. It feared human beings, but these young tree-dwellers did not seem to have all the awesome characteristics of men, and hemmed in by fire, the panther was in the mood to resent their presence.

Catlike, it hated to lie exposed on the bare island. All its instincts impelled it to seek the cover of the oak.

The still figures in the tree did not seem so very formidable, but they had the daunting human odor, and that was a check in itself.

It took a few gliding steps forward and glanced irresolutely about, its mind unsettled by the noise and fearful splendor of the fire. The flames had reached the lower part of the eastern shore, rolling like a wave through the brake, and tossing up a yellow spray as hundreds of blazing canes exploded. On the west the fire was coming rapidly. The growth was heavier there and the flames so fierce that the panther winced as it looked and glided nearer the oak. But at the moment it seemed about to spring, the old black boar and three sows of the scattered drove crashed through the canes and dashed headlong into the water.

They made a clumsy and grunting progress. At last they landed, the boar in the lead. He stamped upon the firm ground, flirted his ridiculous tail, and trotted forward; but suddenly he halted, and his little nervous white eyes grew fixed. He grunted hoarsely.

The panther had swung about and crouched upon the ground, head down. His hard yellow eyes gave the boar look for look, and a deep humming came from his throat.

"O Bob!" said Nancy, more frightened at

" THE BOAR BLEW ONE CHALLENGING BLAST, AND CHARGED."

the thought of a fight than at the possibility of an attack upon herself. "Can't you stop them?"

"Why? I hope the old boar will fix that beast." But Bob's tone was not optimistic.

The boar seemed for the first time to feel no fear of Yellow-Eyes. He blew into the hot, smoke-tainted air one challenging blast, and charged. His big, slab-sided body shot over the ground, and as the panther half-rose to meet it, the wedge-shaped head made a powerful upward and outward thrust that brought a squall from the cat. For a moment the two were locked, the panther wrapped about the boar's head, its claws rasping among the dense black bristles. Then it shot upward suddenly, its tail crooked. It fell upon its feet, but the black boar was upon it again with squeals of rage and the stained tushes slashed again and again.

"He's got him!" cried Bob.

But Nan hid her face in her hands.

With the vitality of its kind, the panther fought for its life, but neither teeth nor claws made serious impression upon the leathery hide of its opponent. There is no more wicked or dangerous fighter in the animal world than an enraged

boar. Frothing with fury and quick as the big cat itself, the pig thrust and slashed with such force and rapidity that the panther had no chance to turn. Soon its squalls died away, and it was tossed and flung about, a limp and harmless body. Nancy, glad that it was over, peeped through her fingers.

"My pap said your pap said we wouldn't raise pigs round here," said she; "but I reckon we can raise pretty good ones, don't you, Bob?"

"Old Blackey is all right," said Bob. "I wish he'd found his courage before, though. Look at him now! He's so proud he's telling the sows they needn't worry a mite about the fire."

The big boar with nape bristling and savage eyes was standing guard over the others, abjectly prone in the mud. Now that his pluck was up he seemed ready, as Bob had said, to fight the fire which was a red ring around the small lake. With such light inflammable material to feed on, however, it was passing rapidly. For a few minutes Nancy and Bob were almost suffocated by the heat and smoke. Then the circle of flames went roaring on and the wind cleared the air.

Instead of the tawny, swaying sea of reeds there was a still, black unfamiliar field with plumes of smoke rising here and there, and vivid red spots to mark where the thickest ranks had fallen. Across this sooty surface ran irregular, scar-like lines — old cattle and deer paths. Though obstructed in places by hot ashes and embers, Bob saw that he could pick his way along the widest without much difficulty.

"Come on, Nan," he said. "We'd better be going home. Your pa'll be scared 'bout your being caught by the fire."

Nancy did not like to be treated as if she were a little girl — especially by Bob.

"I reckon pa knows I can take care of myself," she declared, with a toss of her brown head. "I ain't in a hurry."

She settled herself more comfortably on the branch, locked her bare toes together and gazed blandly at Bob. Approached with proper respect, Nancy was a most obliging young person, but her dignity was curiously sensitive. It seemed to be growing more so every day. Perfectly innocently Bob found himself offending it constantly; but he had learned that innocence would

not be accepted as an excuse. Sometimes it complicated matters still more.

"Please come," he coaxed. "May be you ain't in a hurry, but I am. Just think what I've got to tell! Why, we can raise pigs now all right!"

The bland, grown-up look left Nancy's face. Since Bob put it on that ground, of course she was willing to leave the very luxurious seat in this interesting water-oak and descend to the commonplace exertion of going home. She drew her braid over her shoulder, inspected the curling tip of it with suspicion, and finding as many hairs there as usual she bit it thoughtfully.

"Well, I 'spose I might as well," she conceded, with an air of reluctant generosity. "The pigs are going."

Refusing to take Bob's hand she descended lightly to the ground. Together they approached the big cat and studied its stiffening muscles and fixed, snarling mouth with awesome interest.

"Ugh!" said Nancy, turning away with a shudder. "How glad I'd feel if I was a pig. A real pig, I mean."

Bob was smitten with a sudden doubt.

"I think pa'll be kind of sorry," he said.

"Seems like he'd got proud of putting beans in the tumbler. He'd just naturally made up his mind that Yellow-Eyes was going to get all our pigs and your pap's too."

CHAPTER II

A CHANGE OF HORIZON

MR. LEACH was not half so much impressed by the news of the panther's death as might have been expected. In fact his father was, as Bob had intimated to Susan, apparently somewhat disappointed by it.

"It's lucky for Simmons' pigs, that's all I can say," he remarked. "He'd have had 'em sure if old Blackie hadn't up and killed him. As for myself it don't make any difference."

Mrs. Leach put down her flat-iron and looked at him with round eyes.

"Doesn't make any difference, pa!" she repeated. "Why, what a thing to say. Of course it does."

Mr. Leach smiled and poured himself a large mug of steaming coffee. "Get me a couple of lumps of sugar from the pantry, Saphronia," he requested. "And don't finger 'em too much."

There was something in his manner that spoke of mystery, and the family waited impatiently while the sugar was slowly dropped in the cup and the sweetened beverage shaken by a careful circular motion of Mr. Leach's hand. Then, having taken a long, invigorating sip, he poised himself firmly on his stockinged feet and smiled again.

"No, ma," he said. "It makes no difference because I've disposed of this place and all that pertains to it, lock, stock and barrel, to young Archie Winans and his wife. Raising pigs is a low business and I'm done with it. That's all there is to do in this part of the world, so I made up my mind we'd pack up and move out to the coast where there's more opportunities for a man like myself. It's time Bob was learning to do things, too."

On the whole, after the first feeling of surprise had worn off, it did not seem such a bad plan after all. Raising pigs was not, as Mr. Leach had said, a very high order of business, and the family were all convinced that the head of the house needed only the opportunity to become a millionaire. It is true that so far he

had not stuck to one thing for any length of time; but that of course was owing to the fact that it was not the right thing. On the coast where there were thriving towns and an annual army of wealthy winter tourists, something really worth doing would surely turn up.

Bob and the twins found the preparations very interesting. It was a little hard to say good-by to the white leghorns and old Gabriel, the gobbler, and his flock, but the hens and turkeys were not at all sentimental over it. It was almost worse to leave the other things — the pecan trees and live-oaks, the big azalea bushes and all the silent companions of their romps and games for seven long years. The place was home after all, even if pigs had paid for it.

There were not many children of their age in the neighborhood. Houses were very few and far apart. Saphronia and Maria played mostly by themselves and often got very tired of each other. A small colored boy named Jeff sometimes joined them secretly, and then the twins had a delightful time; but they made him play such laborious parts in their games that he always had to take a rest of several days afterward.

Besides, he was much afraid of Mr. Leach, and would scamper off the moment he saw him. Except Nancy there was really no one whom the children felt that they would miss.

The day came at last when they were actually to begin their journey. Everything had been sold except a few household necessities, and Alice and Holly. Alice was a diminutive mule with a nose as white as frost and a sleepy eye that belied her temper. She was a little vixen when anyone asked her to do any work, and regularly every Sunday on the way to church she either ran away or balked.

Holly was a red steer not much larger than Alice. He was broken to harness and would pull very well when the ground was soft. On a hard, oyster-shell road he kept looking round to see why his feet made such a noise and then staring over his shoulder at his driver as if to ask him to do something about it. Because of this embarrassing habit he was never driven to church, but was used for plowing and farm work in general.

Early on the eventful day Bob hitched Alice and Holly to the two-wheeled cart, which was

already laden with the few household things left from the sale. Mrs. Leach and the twins climbed in and perched themselves recklessly on top of the swollen bags, and Clipper took his customary place under the tail of the cart.

"Get up, Alice!" commanded Mr. Leach, with a flick of his long rattan.

"Good-by, good-by!" screamed the twins. "Good-by, Jeff!" added Maria, whose sharp eyes had detected a familiar little figure lurking behind the sour orange trees on the outskirts of the place.

Bob's throat swelled strangely. The house where he had had so many happy times already looked so deserted. Its windows, from which the white curtains and the rows of potted geraniums had been removed, seemed to watch them depart with an air of pathos. But Bob was young and the little feeling of regret passed in a moment as he turned to follow the creaking cart wherein the twins sat jubilant.

Ahead lay the fascinating unknown, the threshold of the land lapped by that wonderful great ocean of which he had heard so much. There would be birds and beasts and fish there he had

never met. His father would find something better to do there than raising pigs. Bob, himself, would become a fisherman and live on the wide, blue water. He was firmly resolved on that.

At the first turn in the road Nancy popped out from among the pines, bare-legged as usual and swinging her sunbonnet in her hand.

"Howdy!" she said, as she joined Bob at the rear of the cart. "Thought I'd walk a piece with you-all."

"Wouldn't you like to ride?" called Mrs. Leach. "There's plenty of room up here."

Nancy shook her head.

"No'm, thank you," she replied. "I'd rather walk."

She and Bob trudged along in the sandy loam for some minutes in silence. Presently he felt a warm little hand touch his, which stiffened in embarrassment. Nevertheless after some fluttering the small fingers found a shy resting place at last, and Bob's thoughts of the sea faded away. Poor, little Nancy! She had so few friends that it seemed mean to desert her.

"Pa says it's a right mean place where you're going," observed Nancy suddenly.

Away went Bob's pity in a moment.

"It isn't either," he retorted indignantly. "It's a much nicer place than this. There's lots and lots of people there, and the ocean's there too."

"So pa said." Nancy's tone was calm, even commiserating. "He says it's all damp and windy and 'most everyone gets drowned, and it smells like Salter's old fish-boat on Bass pond."

It was just like a girl to be sorry for you when you considered yourself very fortunate. Bob withdrew his hand coldly and pretended to be interested in a buzzard which was sweeping over the pines.

"Don't be cross," said Nancy. "I hope you won't get drowned at any rate. Now I've got to go. Good-by everybody."

There was no hint of regret in her calm voice, and, smiling, she stood and waved her faded sunbonnet vigorously; but Bob suddenly felt sorry for her again and ashamed of his irritation.

"Hope you'll come out, too, Nancy," he shouted back.

He couldn't be sure, but he thought he saw a flash of impertinent red tongue. However, he had not committed himself very deeply, and he

consoled himself with the thought that he would have extended such an invitation to all those he had left behind except, perhaps, humble little Jeff.

They had passed the last house and were now fairly in the woods that stretched clear to the coast unenlivened by a single village. The growth as a rule was not heavy. The long-needled pines stood far apart and rose twenty or thirty feet before a branch sprang from their straight trunks. In between them the sandy soil was only half hidden by the coarse grass and the big fans of the palmetto scrub, whose roots ran sprawling across the trail like huge red worms.

Here and there were dense clumps of trees knit together with vines. They were called "hummocks" and were almost impenetrable except to wild animals and the half-wild hogs. Bob thought they looked like splendid places for game, and when the little cavalcade halted at noon, he tucked old Bess under his arm and set out to explore the nearest one.

It was not a favorable time to hunt and Bob saw nothing but a robin and a pair of mocking-birds singing in a magnolia. He listened to them a few minutes and then went back and joined

the family at their dinner of cold roast yams, hard boiled eggs and coffee. Alice and Holly dined frugally on the coarse grass and made less objection than usual when Mr. Leach harnessed them to the cart again. This hot, waterless country had no fascinations for them.

In the afternoon Bob took a ride now and then to rest his tired legs, and sometimes his mother dismounted from the jolting, creaking cart and walked a little way with him. On one of these occasions Alice, instead of being grateful for the lightened load, threw back her ears viciously and refused to move another step.

Mr. Leach tried persuasion and then a moderate form of violence, but Alice stood with her eyes closed and her four legs rigid as steel.

"It's no use," said Mr. Leach despondently. "We might as well make up our minds to sit here until Alice gets over it. Argument is wasted on her."

The twins got down from the cart and they all sat in the small disk of shade cast by one of the tall pines and stared crossly at the obdurate Alice. It was very hot and not a breath of air was stirring. The heat reflected from the parched

ground made a quivering haze through which a neighboring hummock looked like a stretch of solid dull green wall. It was a little island of dense verdure among the widely scattered pines and it spoke of heavy shade and moisture for such clumps usually spring up only around wet ground.

As Alice looked good for a prolonged fit of balking, Bob picked up old Bess and whistled to Clipper, who was panting noisily under the cart.

"I reckon I'll run over there and see if I can't get a cat squirrel," he remarked.

"Don't be gone long," said his mother. "You know if Alice starts we shall have to humor her and go too. You might not be able to find us."

"Oh, I can pick up this trail all right," said Bob confidently. "Come on, Clip."

Just then a rifle cracked sharply and the still air rang with the sudden baying of hounds. Two horsemen came dashing round the corner of the hummock in a glitter of sand dust, and the one in the lead fired again. It seemed as if he had aimed directly at them, and Mr. Leach jumped to his feet with unusual animation for him, while

Bob, puzzled and flushing, raised the muzzle of old Bess.

There was a fleeting glimpse of several dogs running silently toward them through the palmetto scrub, and then the cause of it all appeared in the form of a lank red lynx. The creature leaped into the road directly in front of the team and, confused by this unexpected encounter, halted irresolutely with its ears laid back and long fangs exposed in a spitting snarl.

Mrs. Leach and the twins screamed. Spunky little Clipper rushed to the attack, but old Bess forestalled him. The lynx was so near that Bob needed only a hasty sight along the brown barrels, and a quick touch on the trigger sent the charge of bird shot, compact as a ball, into the lank red side just over the heart.

The heavy report was still ringing in the air when half a dozen black-and-tan hounds burst into the road and threw themselves, yapping and growling, on the twitching lynx. Clipper sprang at the pack, quite beside himself at the increased number of his supposed enemies. The huntsmen dashed up with a great crackle and snapping of breaking palmetto fans. Their shouts to

"HOLLY AND ALICE SUDDENLY BOLTED DOWN THE ROAD."

the hounds added to the confusion, which reached its climax when, with a bawl and a bray, Holly and Alice suddenly bolted down the road, just grazing the heap of dogs struggling in the sand.

"Whoa, there! Whoa!" shouted Mr. Leach. Darting from behind the pine tree he started in pursuit of the runaways.

"Come here, Clipper!" bawled Bob. The safety of his pet terrier was more important than anything else to him. He was going to throw himself into the middle of the bunch, but one of the horsemen brusquely ordered him to stand back.

"Don't you mix in there, sonny," he said. "You let me talk to 'em."

He swung a black bull-whip round his head and brought the long lash down among the dogs with a tremendous crack. One of them leaped up as if he had been shot and whirled round to lick a raw, bleeding spot on his haunch as big as a twenty-five cent piece.

Down came the lash again and at its loud report and the ki-yis of its victim the fighting group melted apart and scattered in every direction, leaving little Clipper, dusty and trampled, but

still defiant, on the ground he had endeavored to defend.

"That's the kind of talk they listen to," grinned the man. "You got the cat, didn't you, son. Laid him out with your scatter-gun as neat as a pea."

"Won't you please help my husband stop our team?" interposed Mrs. Leach, half-tearfully. "If anything should happen to it I don't know what we should do."

The horseman looked at her, then at his companion.

"Blame if I didn't forget the team trying to save the pup," he laughed. "But that don't let you off. Where're your manners, Bill?"

"Forgot 'em, I reckon," said Bill tersely. "Same as you forgot the team, Ed."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Leach, "do please hurry!"

"Sure we'll hurry, ma'am," said Ed. "Won't we, Bill?"

"Sure." Bill gathered up the reins and spit swiftly into the road. "But a good pup's always worth saving, ma'am."

They clapped their spurs to the little saw-grass

horses and were off at the same wild, reckless pace they used in hunting.

"Did you ever see such men!" exclaimed Mrs. Leach.

Bob, however, could not quite agree with the implied condemnation. Anyone who could appreciate Clipper at first sight must have a bit that was good in him. He tied a string to the terrier's collar and clutched the other end firmly.

"It won't take those horses long to catch Alice and Holly," he said. "Let's follow them, mama."

On their way they picked up Mr. Leach, who was resting in a patch of shade. He was dusty and hot and out of breath, and his spirits had sunk to a low ebb.

"This is a mighty poor beginning," he said despondently. "I'm not superstitious, as you know, ma, but this looks like a bad omen to me. Perhaps we'd have done better to stay at home and go on raising pigs."

Mrs. Leach denied this cheerfully.

"Alice has often run away, pa, so it can't mean anything special. I only hope they haven't smashed the cart."

"I expect to find it in pieces — small pieces," said Mr. Leach gloomily.

Nothing so deplorable happened, however. Alice and Holly had kept to the rough road and had not even spilled one of the bags. They were a panting and repentant pair, and did not need the restraining hands of Bill and Ed who stood guard over them until Mrs. Leach and the twins perched themselves once more upon the luggage.

"You folks aiming to get to the coast?" asked Ed, as the cart began its dismal creaking.

Mr. Leach briskly replied in the affirmative. The fortunate termination of the incident had quite restored his courage.

Ed looked at him pityingly.

"'Tain't my business, of course," he said, "but I don't see how any sensible man can do it. There's too much water there, ain't there, Bill?"

"One side of it's all water," said Bill dismally.

"By gum, Bill's right!" exclaimed Ed. "What can you do in a one-sided place like that?"

"Want to sell the pup, son?" asked Bill abruptly.

Bob clutched the string tightly and shook his head.

"Well, so long then," said Bill, turning his pony into the scrub.

"So long," said Ed, following his companion's manœuvres. "Wish you-all were going to a better place than the coast."

Mr. Leach looked back at them with a smile that broadened as they loped farther and farther away.

"Well, there's one thing about the coast that suits me," he remarked. "Bill and Ed won't be there."

Late that afternoon the Leaches camped on the shore of a long, narrow lake. Their tent was composed of four sheets and the cart, under which was spread a thick layer of Spanish moss, as soft and elastic as the best mattress. While Mr. Leach was arranging these simple accommodations and the twins were gathering wood for the evening fire, Bud shouldered old Bess again and set out after some fresh meat for supper.

This time the hour and the place were both propitious. Sunset was not far off and the lake looked "ducky." Its shallow waters were fringed with reeds, irregular beds of which lay strung along the shore. The channels between these

small islets were thick with water bonnets and fleshy lily stalks, over which shining-winged insects played.

Bob rolled his trousers high above his knees and stepped out quietly from the shadows of the live-oaks. A tattler jumped from the oozy shore with a startled note, his long, yellow legs dangling, and offered a tempting target; but Bob was after bigger game.

Crouching and wading gently through the tepid, shallow water, he bore down upon the nearest of the little islets. This was nothing but a bed of reeds springing from a rise in the bottom of the lake. The crisp, green blades just covered his head and shoulders as he forced his way through them, but though hidden, he had to be doubly careful now, for it was almost impossible to make a noiseless passage. In fact, he had taken only a few steps into the reeds when a teal rose ahead of him with a vibrating whirr of wings, and set the whole marsh humming.

Beyond the islet a great flock of mud-hens roared up from the water, and hung for a moment like a vast black blanket before they streamed away up wind. Bunches of blue-epau-

letted teal skimmed swiftly above the reeds, and Bob could hear the heavy quacking of mallards and the lighter notes of pin-tail ducks as they rose, alarmed, from their favorite feeding places.

Half-doubled up, he waited tensely for a chance shot. The air seemed full of bullet-like bodies and the thin whistling sound of rapid wings, but nothing came within range. Flock after flock settled back upon the water; the quacking became spasmodic and finally ceased altogether. A brooding calm fell upon the lake, and the big dragon-flies flashed and quivered in the rosy light. With a grunt of disappointment Bob slowly straightened his cramped back and legs.

Flying straight at him just above the tops of the reeds was a bunch of a dozen mallards led by a drake whose head glowed like a huge emerald. The surprise was mutual. The big leader threw up his wings to arrest his flight. The others crowded upon him with frantic flappings, and for a brief second the flock was massed together in confusion.

That second gave Bob the opportunity to steady himself, and as the ball of ducks started to ascend he levelled old Bess at the white collar

of the leader. Even before he pulled the trigger he felt that sudden joyous thrill that foreruns success. Through the spurt of the smoke he saw the big drake crumple in mid-air, and shifting his aim he sent a second charge of shot rattling into the thick of the bunch.

Three wilted mallards crashed into the reeds, while the rest of the frightened flock scattered in every direction. Ducks and mud-hens rose from all quarters of the marsh. A pair of fat pin-tails scooted by within easy range, but Bob resisted the temptation manfully. Ammunition was expensive and he had ducks enough for the family's supper. He retrieved the dead birds, and binding their legs together with a strip of tough marsh grass, returned to the camp under the live-oaks.

Everybody was tired, and at an early hour they crept under the improvised tent and stretched themselves on the heaped-up moss. Soon Bob knew from the deepened sounds of breathing that he alone was awake. In spite of his weariness he did not feel sleepy. The soft night sounds fascinated him. The lake played among the reeds along its rim as it had not done before sunset,

and the grove of live-oaks was full of gentle stirrings as if something had set the long beards of moss wagging on the branches. Now and then a mallard quacked raucously, or the peevish note of the rails sounded across the water.

Bob was sinking into slumber when he heard Holly snort and stamp uneasily. Something was moving in the little open space round the tent. There were stealthy footsteps and an odd puffing sound that seemed vaguely familiar to Bob, but did not reassure him.

He was, to tell the truth, a little frightened. Old Bess lay close beside him, and the feel of her long, cold barrels was wonderfully comforting. Yet even with the gun in his hands it required some effort to draw aside the flimsy sheet and look out into the pale moonlight.

Three black, bulky shapes loomed up close to the tent. In the distorting light they looked as big as steers, and for a moment Bob was puzzled. Then one of them lifted its low-hung head and pointing its snout at the tent, uttered an explosive "woof."

"Hogs!" exclaimed Bob. "Sic 'em, Clipper!"

Clipper squirmed under the side of the tent

and launched himself upon the hogs with a menacing bark. They vanished like magic, and after the terrier had returned from his dash Bob could still hear them crashing through the dry vegetation. He felt ashamed of himself for his lack of courage.

"Next time I reckon I'll know what it is before I get afraid," he confided to Clipper. He stretched himself pleasantly on the soft moss. The resolution made him feel suddenly comfortable, and with his hand on Clipper's rough neck he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

It was five o'clock the next afternoon when the travellers sighted the coast town of Ordville through the thinning pines. They had been on the road since dawn, but tired as they were, the glimpse of the friendly white houses and the caress of the sea breeze so invigorated them that they were all full of curiosity and delight immediately. Even Holly and Alice shared their pleasure, for the brutes seemed to realize that they had reached the end of their journey. They quickened their steps and emerged from the spicy shade of the woods on to a hot white road of crushed shell without the least objection on the part of the usually fussy steer.

Just ahead the road crossed a bridge of planks laid above a little stagnant stream. It did not seem as if any self-respecting fish would care for such thick, weed-choked water, but three

young anglers, pole in hand, were sitting side by side on the jutting ends of the planks, so much absorbed in their work that they hardly glanced at the travellers.

Bob, however, stared at them with all his eyes. Boys of his age were not common in the tiny, scattered settlement by the cane-brakes, and this liberal forestallment of the pleasures of town life struck him as most promising. He lingered behind as the cart rumbled across the bridge, candidly studying these possible playmates.

One was red-headed and lean, the opposite in every way from the tow-haired, good-natured looking boy who sat at his elbow. The third bore the stamp of his light-hearted, shiftless race in his sooty skin and loose lips.

"Whatcher doing?" asked Bob, addressing the motionless backs.

"Fishing," responded the red-headed boy gruffly.

"Catch any fish?" said Bob, with genial interest.

"Naw."

"Get any bites?"

"Naw."

Bob glanced along the plank ends swiftly.

"Got any bait?"

"Naw."

"Then whatcher doing?" he queried again.

"Fishing."

The red-headed boy closed his lips firmly to intimate that the discussion was ended. The other two had not moved so much as an eyelash, their whole beings concentrated in the rigid attention with which they gazed upon the water. Evidently a boy was no novelty to them. Bob was baffled and irritated. Suddenly the red-headed boy glanced over his shoulder.

"What's the pup worth?" he asked in a sneering tone.

Bob's eyes flashed.

"He's worth more than you could rake and scrape together, I reckon," he retorted.

"Is that so!" The red-headed boy leisurely put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a peculiarly dingy cent. "Well, here's his price right here, only I don't want to buy him."

He restored the penny to his pocket, and winked at his companions, a wink so full of insolent meaning that it made Bob's hands clench.

Ordinarily he was a peaceable boy, but there was something about the red-headed youth that filled his soul with anger. It seemed to him that he was face to face with a crisis, and that his future position in the town would depend largely on the way in which he stood up to this impudent fellow.

"You think you're smart, don't you?" he said. "For less 'n a cent I'd push you into that mud-hole."

This was being rather more violent than the occasion seemed to warrant, but Bob felt instinctively that the red-headed boy was a bully, and that sooner or later they must come to blows if both were to live in the same town.

Bully or not, the boy was no coward. He promptly laid his rod upon the bridge and leaped to his feet. His arms — they looked surprisingly long — began to revolve in a scientifically threatening fashion, and he danced a sort of jig-step that rapidly carried him down upon Bob.

This was more interesting than fishing. The two disciples dropped their rods and gathered behind their champion in joyous expectation. At first glance the odds seemed all in favor of the red-haired boy, whose reach and height and ex-

perience were plainly greater than his opponent's, but Bob had not worked hard in the open all his life for nothing. His reward was there in the firmly-knit, broad-shouldered figure, the muscles of which were beginning to show a hint of the unusual power they were to have later on.

"Yah!" cried the red-headed boy. "Cracker! You'll push me, will you! Yah!" He danced before Bob with an expression of deepening contempt as he noted the other's unskilful position. One of his revolving fists suddenly shot out and landed with a smack on Bob's cheek just below his eye.

The sting of the blow was all that was needed to drive Bob to action. If he was not a boxer like the red-headed youth, he was something more dangerous when fully roused, a natural fighter. Blindly oblivious of the jabs and swings that rained on his face and head he closed upon his opponent, both sturdy arms working like piston rods.

The red-headed boy was used to fighting and never had he fought better, but none of his blows seemed to count. Punches that would have made an ordinary boy weaken only served to nerve

Bob's arms. The red-headed one felt daunted. Such fierceness and ability to assimilate punishment was unfamiliar to him. It was like fighting a wild animal. And an animal that could give as well as take punishment. His body was sore with the battering and his breathing grew painful. He gave ground, but Bob bored in like a little demon, dealing his short-arm blows with undiminished fury.

Panic seized the red-headed boy. He retreated rapidly, trying only to defend himself. The two on-lookers suddenly raised a warning cry, but Bob, at least, did not hear it. Putting all his body into the blow he planted his fist on his opponent's chest, and saw him topple over and vanish. There was a rousing smack and a muddy geyser of water leaped up almost into his face. He had knocked the red-headed boy off the edge of the bridge.

All Bob's anger left him in a minute. He threw himself on the planks, and when the red-headed boy's dripping head and shoulders appeared he clutched him by the collar.

"Catch a hold of here, you two snipes!" he ordered peremptorily.

Very meekly the fat youth and the darkey precipitated themselves upon their stomachs and seized their fallen champion. The water was shallow and stagnant, and it was not very difficult to pull the red-headed boy from its depths to terra firma. He was as black as a horn-pout with mud, but otherwise undamaged.

"Had enough?" asked Bob mildly.

"What!" said the red-headed boy.

"Want to fight some more? We can go down the road a piece."

The red-headed boy turned a pair of pale, startled eyes upon Bob, and shook his head weakly.

"Sure?" asked Bob.

"Yes, I'm sure." His tone was shrill with conviction. He had never felt so certain of anything in his life.

"Golly, I don't blame you," exploded the fat boy. He stared at Bob with fervor. "Say, he can fight some, can't he, Rufus?"

The small darkey uttered an unctuous clicking sound.

"Hm'm! Same's one o' these yere raid lynx cats. Reg'lar bim-bam, don't care anythin' 'bout

nothin' fighters, dey is. Punched Hal Skillets right offen de bridge and pulled him on agin and wanted to punch him offen agin. Hm'm!"

"Shet your mouth," growled the dripping Skillets.

Rufus shut his mouth with a kind of liquid smack more irritating than words. Plainly Skillets's downfall was not a depressing incident to his friends. There was an awkward pause, broken by a shout from Mr. Leach far down the road.

"That's my pa," explained Bob. His telltale bruises suddenly felt as big as saucers. "Look here," he added to the red-headed boy, "were you fellows really fishing?"

The red-headed boy grunted an affirmative.

"And you had some bait?"

Skillets pulled a mustard box from his coat pocket and tilted it so that Bob could see its writhing contents.

"And did you catch anything?"

"Only a couple o' little cats, and we chucked 'em back," growled Skillets.

"Oh, all right," smiled Bob. "If you'd said

so right off there wouldn't have been any fight. So long, fellows."

He ran down the road to face the parental eye and take the lecture he knew would be forthcoming.

"I'm ashamed of you," said Mr. Leach sorrowfully, at the close of his rebuke. "I don't know where you get that temper. Not from me, I'm sure. It must come from your mother's family. I can distinctly remember how violent her father was on a certain occasion."

The twins whimpered when they saw Bob's swollen nose and discolored cheek, and his mother looked upon him sadly. Altogether he felt that he had cast a shadow upon the threshold of their new home, but though penitent, he could not help believing that the fight would have its redeeming consequences.

The next day brought some proof of this. The Leaches had spent the night in a vacant warehouse to the north of the three long, low brick stores that formed the nucleus of the little town. Holly and Alice were temporarily pastured in the plot in front of the building, and could be

seen from either end of the short main street as they browsed somewhat scornfully on the brown grass. The good-natured friend of Hal Skillets was leaning on the fence watching them as Bob emerged after breakfast, but it was evidently Bob and not the animals in whom the stranger's real interest lay.

"Hullo," he said. "Pritchard told me you-all are going to live here."

Pritchard was the town grocer and owner of the warehouse.

"Not right here," replied Bob. "But we reckon to get a house in this place."

"That's great," said the boy. "My name's Jim Murray. I live round the corner on Hybiscus street."

"Mine's Bob Leach," said Bob, advancing to the fence. "Going fishing again?"

Young Murray had a tapering cane rod and a squat, covered tin pail in his hand.

"You bet," he said. "Real fishing, too. Pritchard says the sea-trout have struck in, and he pays two cents a pound, undressed. Want to come?"

Nothing could have pleased Bob more, but he

had no rod and he was not sure that he could get the necessary permission from his family. In the unsettled state of their affairs it was quite possible there would be some tedious errands to do.

"This isn't play fishing, it's business," said the sage Murray. "You go and ask 'em and I'll skip round to my house for more tackle. Two cents a pound, remember."

Whether it was this consideration that influenced his father, or the fact that there happened to be no errands to do, Bob departed happily from the warehouse and joined Jim who had brought an extra rod and line.

"I reckon I've got bait enough for both of us," he said. "Any way we haven't time to catch more."

He raised the cover of the tin pail and displayed a mass of silvery little fish in a very meagre amount of water.

"Gudgeons," he explained briefly. "Sea-trout like 'em better than anything else. Fiddlers for sheepshead, gudgeons for trout, and mullet for the bigger ones; that's what I use."

Bob was duly impressed. Fishing seemed

almost as noble a sport as gunning, and he yearned to master its lore.

"I'm mighty glad I saw you," he said earnestly.

"Oh, I came round on purpose," said Jim. "Say, you're the only fellow that ever licked Hal Skillets. Golly, but it was great to see you do it. He won't dare to be so low down mean now, I reckon."

They turned into an avenue of mule-gnawed palms at the end of which was a long, ramshackle building with double galleries and a huge sign over the door bearing the words: *Coast Hotel.* It was the first hotel Bob had ever seen, but he gave it only a brief glance. Just beyond it lay the thing he had dreamed of so often of late, the great wide sea.

To be sure it was not so remarkably wide at this point, for a long outlying reef or bar a few miles from shore opposed its rounded, mangrove-crested bulk to the direct assault of the ocean. But even the lagoon looked to Bob a vast body of water, and beyond the bar an immeasurable blue expanse led his wondering gaze to the dim mystery of the horizon.

"It's fine!" he exclaimed, pushing back his straw hat.

"What, this hotel?" said Jim. "Well, it isn't so fine as it looks. There isn't anyone in it except Colonel Webber and the cook and slews of rats. Nobody comes now 'cause the food is so poor, and the Colonel gets full nearly every night. When there were boarders here I couldn't fish off the pier, so I'm just as well pleased."

The Coast Hotel stood close to the edge of the lagoon. A little path led from the rear gallery to the pier, a very narrow, wobbly structure that staggered on rickety legs nearly a quarter of a mile out from the shore. Bob wondered at its boldness, for it seemed as if a fair buffet from some youthful wave or a good puff of wind would strew it in fragments on the water. To his inlander's eye it looked shockingly unsafe and the lagoon uncompromisingly deep, but where Jim could go he certainly could follow. So follow he did, his nervousness increasing with every step away from firm land.

On the very tip, which swayed unpleasantly in sympathy with the ceaseless motion of the water, was an open-fronted shed protecting a

bench for such anglers as objected to the glare of the sun. Contact with many pairs of trousers had given this bench a dark polish, and busy jack-knives had decorated it profusely with initials and nautical symbols. These were repeated on the walls of the shed with fascinating additions in the way of fishes large and small, and records of notable catches. Altogether it breathed a very history of the sport, and even Jim, familiar as he was with it, showed himself impressed by its atmosphere.

"I tell you, this old shed has seen a lot," he observed, uncoiling his line. "Some time when I catch a big one I'm going to put his measurements on the wall with the rest of 'em. Don't you hope it'll be to-day?"

Bob hoped so decidedly, but he had small confidence in his own ability to catch anything. His line seemed unmanageably long, and the water very far away. Under Jim's supervision he impaled a slippery gudgeon on the hook, and swung the wriggling, flashing thing out into the twisting pattern of the current.

"Let it sink," advised Jim. "And jerk it so — see? Sea-trout like live bait and swift water.

The channel turns in here and runs almost under us. Then she swings out just below and keeps 'way off shore for miles. Don't you see her? Kind of like a dark band and all wrinkly on top. You have to know the channels in this shoal water; but you can always tell 'em by their color."

Bob listened greedily. His eyes were naturally keen, and he soon distinguished the deeper blue of the channel where it wound in long graceful curves between the flats. The gentle swaying of the pier no longer troubled him. Indeed it began to cause him a certain exhilaration, and made him feel in rhythm with the soft play of wind and water. He drew a deep breath of satisfaction, his rod lying neglected across his knees.

Close to the pier he suddenly observed a flock of scaups led by a vanguard of black-headed, gray-backed drakes. Evidently they had been feeding in-shore, and were now bound out to rest and doze on the broad bosom of the lagoon. Though he and Jim were in plain sight, the flock paddled fearlessly forward without swerving. As they passed the end of the pier Bob could have reached them with his fishing line, yet

only a few saucy yellow eyes deigned to notice him. They were wild ducks, certainly. In all his experience such behavior was new to Bob.

"Golly! Wish I had a gun here," he could not help exclaiming.

"You'd find yourself arrested right soon," chuckled Jim. "It's against the law to fire a gun within a mile of the courthouse, and the ducks know it. You can drop salt on their tails here, but wait till they get a little way out. You can't reach 'em with a rifle then. Ducks are wise sure. Hi!"

There was a sudden boil in the water. A series of rings spread away from Jim's line which straightened with such force that the rod bent in a fine curve.

"Pull your line out of the way," said Jim, tensely, and struck as he spoke.

Such a fish as Bob had never seen in the petty inland waters shot from the blue channel into the sunlight. Its long, lustrous body flashed with a pearly light, and it shook bright beads of spray from its polished sides as it curved downward and smote the surface in a violent effort to dislodge the hook.

"What is it?" he cried. "A shark?"

"Shark nothing," grunted Jim. "It's a trout. A big one, too."

"What's he doing now? Where's he gone?" asked Bob excitedly, watching Jim's mysterious manipulation of the rod.

"He's making out for deeper water. They always do," said Jim. "Steady now, old feller. Don't you be in a hurry. Hi, he's going to jump again."

The stiff line had fallen limp. There was a second of uncertainty, then up the big trout shot with a suddenness that made Bob start. The instant he struck he bounced high again, and this he repeated four times, so quickly that the froth that marked the first point of contact was still dancing when the final leap was over, and the frightened fish dove deep into the racing water of the channel.

"I reckon he's hooked good and plenty," exclaimed Jim jubilantly. "That's what you get by giving 'em time to suck the bait down. Now you'd have struck quick and only got a lip hold."

Bob thought it more than probable. He did not resent Jim's superior tone. He was too glad

to pick up such useful bits of information to care about anything of that sort. There was nó conceit in him, but always an earnest desire to master the work that he found interesting, and a complete self-effacement at such times that made him a most acceptable pupil.

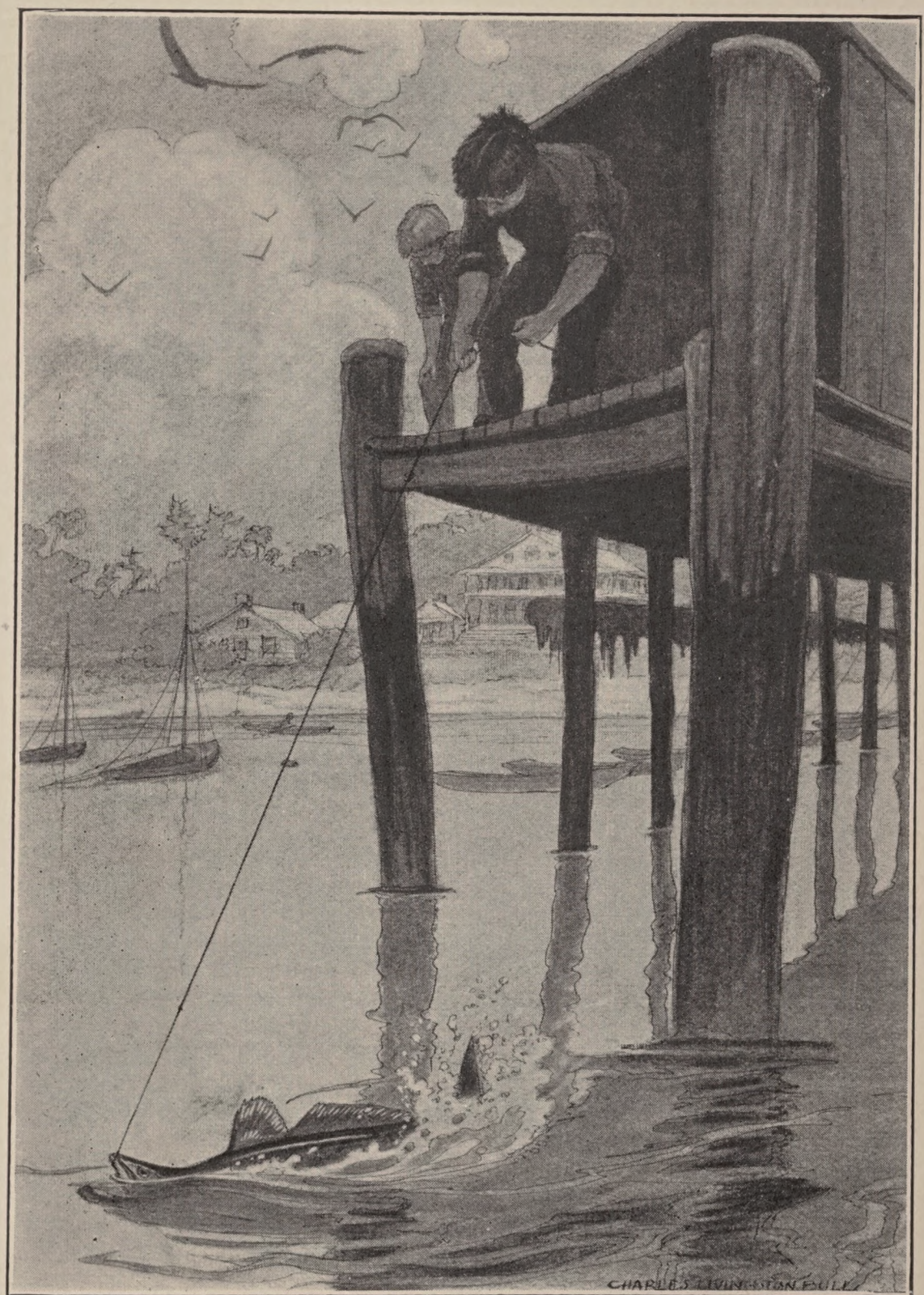
"You sure did the right thing," he said admiringly. "I don't see how you handle him like you do."

"Oh, I've had lots of practice," said Jim, squaring his shoulders. "Look at him now! Making off like a railroad train. Watch me slow him up."

The great trout was not visible but the stiff line ripping through the water betrayed his frantic rush. Jim pressed his thumb on the spinning reel, and lowered the butt of the rod. Slowly the strain began to tell. The line moved less swiftly, and finally swung rigidly back and forth while the water bubbled in a wide circle about it.

It was the beginning of the end. The big fish was still sullen, but with reel and rod Jim drew him inexorably toward the pier.

"Gee!" he said, as the dark back rose more and more above the surface. "He's a monster,



" RAISED HIM, DRIPPING, TO THE STRING-PIECE."

Bob. Don't know as I blame you for calling him a shark."

Seized with a generous impulse he held out the rod.

"Want to feel the heft of him? Catch hold; he's safe now."

Thrilling with pleasure Bob grasped the rod, and with awkward hands imitated Jim's manœuvres. For one delicious moment the captive awoke as the shadow of the pier fell on him and gave Bob the semblance of a fight. Then he lay inert with his long back exposed. Very carefully the two pairs of hands raised him, dripping, to the string-piece, and then Jim uncorked his enthusiasm with a wild whoop.

"Didn't I tell you I'd do it some day!" he said.

He pulled out a worn tape-measure from his pocket and carefully measured the length and girth of the great trout. These, with the date of the capture and his own initials, he cut deeply into a blank space on the shed wall.

"I wonder if I'll ever do that," remarked Bob.

"Well, you never can tell about fishing," said

Jim. "You've got to keep at it, that's one sure thing."

Noon came, hot and breathless, but no more fish. The boys reluctantly wound up their lines and Jim emptied the pail of gudgeons.

"It's a little early yet," he said. "When the schools really do strike in you'll have some luck, if you'll stick to it."

"I'll stick all right," said Bob simply.

CHAPTER IV

A SEA STEED

UNDER Jim's tutelage Bob soon became a successful angler. He was more persevering than his teacher, his judgment was sounder, and his love of nature unusually sympathetic. As the schools of trout, crevale, and sheepshead grew more and more plentiful in the lagoon, his rod brought an increasing supply of dimes and quarters, for though Pritchard was soon satisfied, Mr. Brown, the wholesale fish dealer, was always ready to buy any amount.

Mr. Leach had obtained a satisfactory position at the fibre factory, and Mrs. Leach found plenty of laundry work at good prices. Things looked so promising that the family moved from the warehouse into a bungalow at the northern end of the town; a place bright with roses and well shaded. Its front sloped to a narrow beach and

a little pier ran out to the channel. As yet they had no boat to complete their comfort, but Bob laid by every week a certain per cent of his earnings toward the purchase of one.

In the meantime, as often as the weather permitted, he cruised about the lagoon in Jim's skiff, a leaky affair with a much-patched sail. It was a good enough craft for a landlubber to begin with. She was broad and heavy, and, if the wind were not too violent, as safe as a small boat could be. One person could easily handle her. Her light draft enabled her to go anyway, and when she did run aground on some high shoal, it was no trouble for the boys to push her off.

It was a new and fascinating life to Bob. He took to the water as if all his ancestors had been sea captains. He explored every nook and inlet for miles along the shore and learned the channels so well that he could run them on the darkest night. But it was, in a way, tame sailing, and as his confidence grew he longed to try the outer waters, where the lonely reefs and bars lay.

For such enterprises Jim was the best companion in the world. He could swim like a South

Sea Islander, sail a boat with his eyes shut, and knew by actual experience the conditions of tide and current about many of the reefs.

"I tell you what we'll do," he said to Bob; "we'll go turtling on Loggerhead Cay. They're laying now and we can make a haul. What we don't want we can sell dead easy."

Bob jumped at the suggestion. He had never seen one of the great turtles. He knew that once a year they came in from the far seas, a silent, armor-clad fleet, to lay their leathery eggs in the hot sand of the cays. To go turtle egging added an unexpected joy to the exploration of new waters.

"When shall we start?" he asked.

"What's the matter with this afternoon?" said Jim. "It's about a two-hour sail. We can take our supper along. There'll be a good moon, and night's the best time to find the turtles laying. I'll bring a rope. If we catch one we can stake it down and get Capt. Simons to go over for it with us the next day."

"That suits me," said Bob quickly. "I'll go home now and get a snack put up. Might bring old Bess along if you say so."

"Sure," replied Jim, who had no gun. "I'll meet you at the pier at five."

There was a steady westerly wind blowing, which suited their purpose perfectly. The *Mud-hen,* as Jim's skiff was named, made good time across the lagoon, and rounding the bar, breasted gayly the bluer water outside. Though nicer sailing was required here, Jim's memory was good, and they threaded the rather tortuous channel to the cay without mishap, eating their supper before they landed on the strip of sand.

Jim had brought a couple of pointed sticks whose purpose he now explained.

"Wherever the sand looks soft or broken you poke your stick in," he said; "you'll know all right, one way or another, if there's eggs there. You'll feel 'em, or you'll see the point all thick and gummy with yellow yolk. Here, one of these pails is for you. Now we'll cross to the other side. That's where they land."

It was a soft yet brilliant Southern night. The far stars seemed to hang clear of the heavens like a penetrable veil of radiant dust. The swell of the great, orange-colored moon could be plainly seen, with some of those hazy veins which scien-

tists say are frost-cracks in her cold surface. Every dune and bit of wreckage on the broad bar stood out distinctly in her light, and a clump of frowsy-headed palms cast sharp-edged shadows on the sand. Those of the two boys walking along the hard-packed beach below high-water mark hobnobbed in front of them like two giant spectres.

"Now," said Jim at last, "here's where we split; you go north and I'll go south. We'll cover the ground in that way in less time. When you reach your end of the bar, come back and wait for me here."

He stood a few moments watching Bob's progress, then picked up his pail and stake and started toward the shelf of the beach. His round face was no longer smiling. There was a terrier-like concentration in its expression and in the forward thrust of his head, and as he zigzagged swiftly over the stretch of loose sand his movements had much of the nervous deftness of that gamy little animal.

As he trotted back and forth his stick tapped the sand like a blind man's staff. It had made perhaps a hundred little pecks, when presently

he checked, and lowering the stick as delicately as if pricking a blister, drew it up and inspected the tip. It was gummy and glistening, and would have offended most people's noses.

"O-ho!" he chuckled. "That's pretty quick work."

With deft, hollowed hands he uncovered the leathery eggs. In the moonlight they looked like fat milk pearls; one hundred and twenty-five of them in two layers, with a wadding of sand between. The clutch just filled Jim's pail and he set it well above high-water mark, and resumed his quartering.

He had no more luck, however, and reached the southern end of the cay with his hopes for a fine haul completely dashed.

"I reckon I started out too well," he thought. "Good beginnings don't mean good endings always."

The night was warm and windless, and he was sweating profusely under his loose shirt. With a sigh of resignation he threw himself down on the sand, his face toward the sea. There had been little wind for several days, and the sea hardly stirred in its sleep. Now and then

its bosom lifted in a slow breath that sent a swell rolling in, to die upon the beach with a draw. out sigh. A film of stale, iridescent oil seemed to blanket the water thinly, flickering and passing from green to saffron and from saffron to rose as the tranquil heaving presented new surfaces to the moonlight.

Right in the midst of this subdued glitter and close in shore something black and wedge-shaped presently appeared. It came without a ripple, like a sudden rise of a water-logged timber. Then Jim saw it sink in the same stealthy fashion, as if it had withdrawn to weigh its estimate of the prospect in secret. Only a few moments elapsed, however, before it reappeared nearer shore.

Jim lay as motionless as the sand itself, and the turtle, after a long and wary inspection of the beach, swished through the shallow water and began to ascend the slope.

It was laborious work for the huge creature, but at last it gained the shelf of the beach and looked round with blear and weary eyes for a suitable nesting site. Then it saw Jim rising from the sand, and shrank inward into its shell

in quivering apprehension. A long dismal hiss escaped from its horny blowholes.

"Hello, old camel!" mocked Jim. "I'm right glad I was in when you called." Then he rapped the shaking head smartly with his stick, and his voice broke to a threatening soprano. "You squat still now till I stake you down. I don't want to lose you. I'm mighty fond of you — well done."

He uncoiled the braided rawhide wound round his waist, and began to knot it about one of the big, musky hind flippers. The loggerhead's baggy throat pulsed. Its round, hard eyes gleamed with an indignation it could not express vocally, for the great turtles are mute. It spun suddenly on its broad breastplate, almost knocking Jim off his feet, and with a powerful forward hunch started for the sea.

Jim dropped sitting upon the beach, his heels jammed into the sand, and both hands clutching the rawhide, one end of which was still tied about his body. His weight crippled the flipper to which he was fast, but the loggerhead seemed quite satisfied with what remained. Without any ap-

"THE LOGGERHEAD PLUNGED INTO THE WATER."

parent increase of effort she dragged the boy steadily down the slope.

"Bob, O, Bob!" bawled Jim. "Come quick! I've got one!"

"Pshaw!" he muttered, letting go with one hand and groping in his pocket. "Bob can't hear me way off here, I reckon."

He took out his knife and opened it. The turtle was already at the lip of the sea, but Jim hated to cut. Economy was inborn among his people, and it hurt him to lose so much good meat. It was not yet too late for Bob to be of service if he should arrive upon the scene.

No Bob came, however, and the loggerhead plunged into the water with a joyous splashing. Jim drew the knife quickly across the line. The next instant he dropped it with a cry of pain as the brine struck bitterly into a gash in his finger. Clutching and tearing uselessly at the sand, he was jerked into the water, down, down, down, a crisp singing in his ears and cold fingers prying at his lips. By one of fate's malicious pranks the knife had somehow turned in his hand, and when he struck, it was the back of the blade that met the line!

At this part of the coast the sea lies warm and shoal above a great apron of submerged land fully half a mile wide. The loggerhead had hardly begun its dive when it reached bottom. Its flippers struck violently, and sent up a boiling cloud of sand. Confused and winded by the violence of its fright, it turned and slanted upward to the surface, where it lay puffing like a naphtha-launch, its limp flippers swinging with the sway of the water. A few seconds later Jim's streaming yellow head bobbed up close behind it.

The boy had the line tightly clutched in his hands, and hardly waiting to take the necessary breath, he pulled himself forward with a strong, quick pull. The fore part of the loggerhead sank instantly; but before she had gathered her trailing flippers under her, Jim was on her back, all ten fingers hooked about the thick front edge of the shell.

The loggerhead, for obvious reasons, has no enemy but man, and this particular loggerhead had led a long and pottering existence of unbroken peace. To say that she was frightened would do scant justice to her state of mind.

Down she went with a rush that tore white streaks through the water, but this time she did not strike the sand. She turned as she neared the bottom and skimmed along just above it. Her powerful flippers, working with a propeller-like motion, drove her along like the wind.

As she went she turned on her side, glancing this way and that like a scaling stone; but Jim clung to the broad carapace with the tenacity of a barnacle. He knew that if he were trailed again at the end of the rawhide he would soon drown. Three generations of coast dwellers had left him a legacy of pluck and coolness that made a man of him, and a strong one, in times of danger. Young as he was, Jim had been in peril before, but never had things looked so bad. Something cold and tense seemed to knot within his head. He must, if it were possible, draw up his knees to the centre of the shell and fashion his body into a sort of drag or breakwater. It was a trick which some of the "reefers" declared would invariably force a turtle to come to the surface.

It had sounded easy; but in the pens, if one failed, one had only to let go and come up with

no worse penalty than a derisive laugh from one's companions. It is different when one tries it out at sea, when life itself may be the price of a slip.

Something, however, must be done. Although in reality Jim had been below the surface but a few seconds, the force with which he was swept through the water and the efforts of the loggerhead to unseat him made it extremely difficult to hold his breath. A pair of iron hands seemed to press with terrible force against his lower ribs. His lungs shook like foul and sodden sponges within him. His legs, always hitching forward, were straightened again and again by the pressure of the water.

But Jim was almost as much at home in the sea as a fish, and at last, favored by a momentary slackening of the loggerhead's speed, his knees caught under him, and he straightened his body as much as the length of his arms permitted.

Either the trick succeeded or the turtle was again winded, for almost immediately she began a slow and grudging rise. Jim had enough spirit left in him to grin a tight-lipped, dimpled grin. Owing to the backward tilt of his body, he could

see the cheerful shimmer of moonlight on the surface. It danced like mercury, grew brighter and more dispersed.

Then his head shattered the silver film, and he shot the stale air from his lungs in a gulp that seemed to pull them into his throat.

"Um-n!" he panted. "I reckon we were right close to being late for *that* appointment."

The loggerhead, its dome just awash, moved seaward with a sudden accession of dignity. It was apparent that she did not intend to exert herself in any fancy diving until she was sure of deep water.

Jim glanced back over his shoulder, and the cabbage-palms seemed to him to have dwindled to the dimensions of hat pins stuck in a sand cushion. A lively and picturesque little wake of phosphorescence suggested that they might look even smaller in time.

Clinging to the shell with one hand, Jim picked at the knot with the other, but the swollen rawhide resisted his wet fingers. A sudden boyish outbreak of rage at his impotence swept over him, and he struck the loggerhead savagely on the head. The blows, aimed without intention, did

more than skin Jim's knuckles, for the creature swerved confusedly until its course lay parallel to the beach.

Jim's temper passed as quickly as it had come. Another blow might undo the good he had gained. As long as they held their present course he was within swimming distance of the shore.

His face, pale from fatigue and the cold moonlight, set precociously. He had nothing with which to cut the line nor could he use both hands at the knot and keep his seat. He turned his hot gaze downward. What if he gouged out those blear eyes with his thumb or tore open the baggy throat!

Something desperate Jim was prepared to do. He leaned forward, his face drawn like a weasel's, when suddenly the inspiration came. He caught up the line, and thrusting it under the sullen beak, rasped it viciously back and forth.

"Bite, you mossback!" he snarled, reckless of the danger his fingers ran.

The loggerhead did bite, with a quick venomousness that was uncanny. A gush of fat bubbles gurgled up, and the keen, horny jaws sliced through the rope as if it were kelp. The next

moment the turtle dived and Jim unprepared, found himself gasping, but alone in the water.

He fell into the stroke, the long side-stroke he could maintain for an hour at a time, laying his course by the prim palms. He heard a faint "Halloo!" from Bob, returning down the beach, and grinned abstractedly.

It never occurred to him to ask for assistance. Such a swim was mere play in his two-piece costume, but a mischievous wish to frighten Bob made him lift his voice in a tremulous: "Coo-ee!"

He shook the water from his ears and listened for the answer.

"Halloo!" It came faintly. "Where are you?"

"Out here! In the water-r!"

A black blot was visible against the pallid gleam of the sand. It moved forward and was merged suddenly with the dark water. Was Bob, who couldn't swim a stroke, going to risk his life for him? Alarmed at the possible results of his foolishness Jim shot forward like a scared fish.

"I'm all right!" he shouted. "Stay where you are."

He made the water boil as he swam, and soon his feet touched sand and he stood up and waved his arms. There was Bob, yards out from the beach, half wading, half floundering toward him.

"Go back, you chump," said Jim. "I could swim home from here if I wanted to."

"You sure scared me," said Bob, up to his waist in the water. "What have you been up to, anyway?"

He was full of wonder and admiration when Jim explained.

"Golly, but that must have been fierce," he said. "You've got grit."

Jim laughed.

"Why, a thing like that's nothing to me. It's you that's got grit, trying to come out to me when you can't swim a stroke. It reminds me of the way you put your head down and butted into Hal Skillets. Have any luck?"

Bob had found two nests. His coat, tied together by the four corners, was fat with eggs. With the two full pails they had, Jim declared, a decent mess; enough to pay them for the trip.

"I reckon we might as well hike back to the skiff and go home," he said. "But I just would

like to pick up an old mossback on the way. I hate to be licked."

They saw nothing on the return walk, however, and, having packed the eggs safely in the bow, they spread the sail to the light breeze and began the long beat home.

Once a school of porpoises rushed across their bows, disturbing the silence with their loud puffing, and the swishing of agitated water, and one lonely drum-fish hugged their wake for a mile or more uttering his melancholy, booming grunt at regular intervals. It was a tedious trip. Both boys were tired and half asleep when they saw the pier stretching out its friendly length to them. They tied the painter to a bolt in the string piece and stumbled wearily to land.

It was the kind of weariness, however, that was very pleasant to Bob, at least. Every fresh experience in this new world tucked away in his retentive mind a bit of knowledge that seemed worth any amount of fatigue.

CHAPTER V

THE SILVER KING

"I'd give fifty dollars down for a hundred and seventy-five pounder, in good condition!" declared the host of the Anglers' Anchorage.

"Poof! I'd give five hundred!" laughed the New Yorker, who owned several electric roads and was a director in one or two banks.

"On your own hook and line, sir," amended the host, suavely.

"Of course. On my own hook."

The Bostonian dropped a bead of oil on the axle of a dismembered reel, and delicately smeared it over the steel with his finger-tip.

"I had a good one on yesterday, but —"

The New Yorker and the man who favored an eight-ounce rod exchanged the glance of cynical brotherhood.

"We know that one," they said, wearily. "The one that might have been!"

"But my reel was gummy and the line parted," continued the Bostonian, with characteristic calm. "I think he weighed at least one hundred and thirty. One of the Salem Kents caught a hundred and ninety pounder last season. But that happened at Tampico."

"There's no doubt that Mexican fish run heavier," said the man who always felt a desire to apologize for the Bostonian. "But these are big and gamy enough for me — when I get one. Three days without a bite!"

"It's a little early," reassured the host. "The main body hasn't struck in yet. When they do there'll be fishing."

The Bostonian, tenderly assembling the oiled bits of steel, smiled coldly.

"Yet you offered fifty dollars for a hundred and seventy-five pounder a minute ago."

"Sure. And I expect to pay the money," said the host. "If I had time, I'd go out and win the reward myself. I want a nice fish for the hall mantelpiece, that's all."

As he bustled indoors, the New Yorker and the man with the eight-ounce rod exchanged another glance of understanding.

"His fifty is safe," said the New Yorker.

"Wish I could feel as sure about my little pile," said the other. "This place is too far up. Only the light scouts will ever get here. Wish I hadn't exchanged old camps for new."

Here were grown men from the North, men of reputation in the business world, who took fishing with solemnity, and rose with the sun in order to spend a full, active day at it. Bob and Jim, anglers too, basked in this company, which threw an unwonted dignity upon the craft. They had both made up their minds that wealth could be spent in no better way than was exemplified at the Anchorage. That it required exceeding great wealth to live in this creation of red tiles, Moorish columns and latticed balconies, was beyond a doubt.

The hotel had sprung up before their wondering eyes like an Aladdin's palace. The cellar was scooped out in a day by an army of imported laborers. Another army ran up the framework in an incredibly short time. And every train brought more workmen, who swarmed over the structure like bees upon honeycomb. It was a modern tower of Babel; a confusion of rappings

and tappings and shouting. But when the clouds of workers suddenly rose and trooped away they left smooth, luxurious order behind them; a complete, modern hostelry painted, plastered, furnished, electric-lighted, in the midst of newly made gardens flashing with fountains. Perhaps there was more show to it than durability, but Bob and Jim accepted it on its face value. It was a marvel and a delight to them and made the rest of Ordville look drab and dreary by comparison.

Whenever they had a chance they hung about the verandah of the Anchorage, absorbing the extremely interesting conversations that passed between its guests. They were actually sitting on the steps when Mr. Simpson, the host, made his extraordinary offer. Fifty dollars for a mere herring! They exchanged looks that recorded a common vow.

"But where are we going to get the tackle!" mourned Bob. "I haven't got anything that will hold one as big as that."

Neither had Jim. As he was considering the problem, the host reappeared and called to him, "Here you, Jim! Take Mr. Worthington out,

will you? It's no use waiting for that lazy darky," he added, to the Bostonian. "Like as not he won't come round, and the boy knows where the fish are all right."

The man from Boston studied Jim through his glasses. The eyes behind them were sharp but kindly. "Perhaps you'd like to try for that fish of Simpson's," he suggested. "I've several extra rods, and you may use one."

Poor Bob! He could not help feeling envious as he watched the joyous Jim tuck the rod under his arm and sally forth. One by one the other gentlemen, accompanied by their negro boatmen, went down to the landing. No one noticed him sitting there on the step. The clear blue of the sky and the flashing water mocked at him.

"I s'pose it's because Jim's more of a kid," he thought. "They think I'm big enough to go out by myself, that's why!"

It was not much of a consolation. It was none, in fact. He sat there trying hard to be manly, but seeing the little scattered flotilla of boats through a mist.

Again the host came to the door, and his eye rested on the rather forlorn figure. "Hello,

young man!" he said. "How are you — pretty quick on your pins?"

"What, sir?" asked Bob.

"Good with your legs? Can you use 'em? Make 'em move faster than a darky's? I want an errand done at the village, and I want it done quick."

"I reckon I'm quick, sir," said Bob as a plan darted into his mind.

Tough as an Indian from much outdoor work, he made the trip to the village and back in less than half an hour, surprising Mr. Simpson exceedingly.

"What, back so quick!" he exclaimed. "You're all right. I'll have to use you again."

He held out a bright quarter, but Bob, flushing, put his hands behind his back.

"I'd be mighty glad to run errands for you, sir," he said, breathlessly, "any time, sir. But I don't want money. If you'd let me have — if you'd —"

"If I'd what?"

"If you'd lend me an old rod, I'd try to catch that tarpon for you."

Mr. Simpson slowly pocketed the quarter.

"You think fifty dollars in the lagoon are better than a quarter in the hand, eh! Well, I don't know." He eyed the boy meditatively. "Ever used a rod?"

"Lots of times. I've caught sea-trout and cavally and king-fish and tarpon too. But they were small ones," Bob added truthfully.

"I don't know," mused Simpson. "Well, all right. I'll let you have a rod and fixings if you'll promise to do more errands. A rod costs good money."

"I'll promise," said Bob.

After a man is tired of trout, and has come to be a match for the skilful salmon, he is likely, if he is a consistent angler, to turn to Southern waters for new conquests. There he will find among the hordes of strange fish eager to take his bait a giant herring, that for weight, agility and cunning is the king of all game-fishes, with the possible exception of the huge leaping tuna. Men who have found salmon-fishing an easy sport have had their pride lowered when they came to cast a tarpon line in some placid lagoon. Here there are no running waters or eddy-encircled rocks to complicate the battle; nothing but

the big fish himself to fight, but the chances are that he will beat you.

Bob had his own logy bateau, a recent purchase, and his particular friend and admirer, Rufus, who stood ready to do menial labor for him at any moment.

Rufus jumped at the chance to go fishing for such game, and fifteen minutes after meeting Bob he appeared at the landing with a brand-new rag round his perennially sore toe, and the left hind foot of a rabbit in his trousers pocket.

"She'll shore bring us luck," he confided as they rowed out upon the pellucid bosom of the lagoon. "She's de same what Yaller Jack bruck de las' dry spell with."

Bob sniffed. He had not much faith in such charms, at least, when it came to fishing. He put a pop-eyed, slippery, one-pound mullet on the hook, and swung it overboard. The velvet cluck of the big reel was inspiriting music. He had never held such a perfect rod in his hands before, and his pulse stirred bravely.

There was not a ripple on the dead blue surface. The scattered boats from the hotel lay off to the north, as motionless as if glued there. Bob

had chosen new ground near a narrow inlet, where the tide ran in from the sea in long, pulsating jets, like blood in an artery.

He had dropped anchor there at slack water, but the iridescent film that gathers on the surface at such times was now beginning to break up into lines and darkening feathers that glided slowly toward the head of the lagoon. Soon it was all gone. Then the first clean gush of sea-water came, lifting the boat a little and letting it sink gently as it rolled on.

With this green water came predatory fish. Few of them were visible, but now and then a porpoise showed a slice of fat, muddy back, or a piratically slanted fin ripped the surface. In the lagoon there was plenty of gentle prey.

When the tarpon came, it was a descent of Norsemen. Boring their way up the inlet, their bright backs rising and falling, they came in rushing fleets — eager to be the first on the feeding-grounds. They stretched from shore to shore of the narrow cut like the metal plates of a steel corselet, racing so close to the boat that they cast spray into it, but not one noticed the hooked mullet. He was too insignificant all by himself. They

wanted a school to charge and devour, worry and scatter. In a few minutes they were gone with the inflow that had brought them.

"We's too far down!" wailed Rufus, in despair. "Dey's gone up to de boats, and Jim'll catch our fish, sure. Pull up de anchor, Mister Bob. Pull him up!"

"Pull up nothing," said Bob sturdily, although he was somewhat pale. He had never seen so many of the great fish before. "I've watched this place, and if you can't catch one here, you can't anywhere."

He drew in his line and put on a vigorous mullet from the bucket. The "bait" scooted here and there, feeling the danger. In every way it did its best to draw that danger down upon its defenceless head; but the sun passed the zenith and sank slowly toward the west, and the reel hung silent on the rod.

The fish "were not biting," as the anglers say. They were there and at work. Patches of shadow and patches of foam mottling the blue of the lagoon showed that the mullet and small fry were being harried, but no silk line tautened. Anglers are patient folk, but they have their superstitions,

and one of them is that when fish show a disinclination to bite they cannot be made to. One after another, as the sun sank, they quietly took their rods apart and stole back to the landing; all but Bob and the Bostonian, who had made it a principle to combat all conventional conclusions.

It was high flood. Six hours had passed. The drowsy Rufus came out of his cat-nap suddenly, and with an inarticulate exclamation. Something had surged in the water close by. The drooping line took life and straightened mysteriously.

But before Bob could strike, the water boiled and broke noisily; and a wide dorsal fin cut it like a knife. On the hook were the staring head and bleeding shoulders of a tarpon, the rest of whose body lay in the maw of a thievish shark.

"I reckon we-all better go on home," said Rufus shudderingly. "I doan' like fishing fo' sharks."

Bob put on another mullet and cast it clear of the cloudy spot on the water.

"This is where we get action," he said. "Some of 'em are going out hungry."

The bait had hardly sunk below the surface before the same uncanny upheaval occurred. Again

the line crept out and out, stealing away from the boat. Then Bob struck, and with a shower of drops the line straightened like a steel wire, and the rod creaked under the dead weight. It was a dead weight only for an instant. After that it was so much alive that the rod shrieked high to the fierceness of its rush. One hundred feet from the boat the tarpon shot out of the water. Up he went, his cheeks flaring from the red gills till he seemed all enormous head. Still he rose, foot on foot of blinding silver, and at the great length of him Rufus gasped and pulled the rabbit's foot from his pocket.

"Conjure him! Conjure him!" he yelled, and shook the little hairy pad at the fish as it curved in a high arc and fell back, driving foam to the boat.

Now he rushed steadily and straight for the head of the lagoon. The raised tip of the rod put its strain upon him, but a tarpon six feet long is not to be turned or tired by such tricks. Foot after foot of the line spun from the reel. Bob had no finger-stalls, and the thin silk ate hot into the flesh of the thumb with which he tried to brake the line.

Two hundred and fifty feet ran out, and the fatness of the reel was gone before the tarpon swung. He came straight for the boat. Bob reeled frantically. It would not do to give the fish too much slack. There was a dreadful droop to the line when the second leap came and the tarpon rose, higher than before, and slatted his great head vigorously. When he turned in mid-air he bent like a steel bow, and snapped out straight again with a jerk that tossed the line high. But in the heart of the suds and broken water the line stiffened, and Bob knew he had the fish well-hooked. Well-hooked is far from being safely landed. A tarpon can perform more acrobatic feats than almost any other game-fish in the sea; and a straight rush, if not stopped in time, will inevitably end in a broken line.

Not once did the tarpon sulk. It was straight fighting every minute. With rod and reel and bloody fingers Bob fought back, and the hour that passed seemed a dozen. He was bathed in sweat, and every muscle ached. Even his teeth ached under the dogged pressure of his jaws. Rufus chewed on his precious rabbit's foot with savage disregard of its value. He might

have ground it up if the tarpon had not intervened.

During the first half of the second hour the fish seemed as fresh as ever, but a series of huge leaps and their smacking falls tired him. For the first time Bob was able to gather in a hundred feet of line, the tarpon yielding sullenly to the strain. He lay now within a few yards of the boat; dorsal fin out, his six feet of silver gleaming through the water.

"Coax him, Mister Bob!" pleaded Rufus, gaff in hand. "Lemme get jus' one jab at him with dis yere pike."

Bob touched the reel with numbed fingers, but gentle as the pull was, it roused the tarpon to a last fury. Out of the suddenly swirling water he rose, open-mouthed, and before the boys could move he was upon them with an impact that sent Rufus and the oars flying, and thrust the gunwale of the boat beneath the surface. It was not an attack. The great fish was merely trying to free itself and in his blind terror he landed squarely in the boat.

Bob and the tarpon and the broken halves of the centre seat thrashed about on the flooded bot-

tom. The boy's length was less than that of the fish, but he thrust his hands into the wide gills and wound his legs round the slippery body, and fought with shut eyes. He was fighting in his own element and the tarpon was not. The muscular body ceased to heave under him; and when the streaming Rufus cautiously appeared at the gunwale, the rabbit's foot protruding from his lips, the real struggle was over.

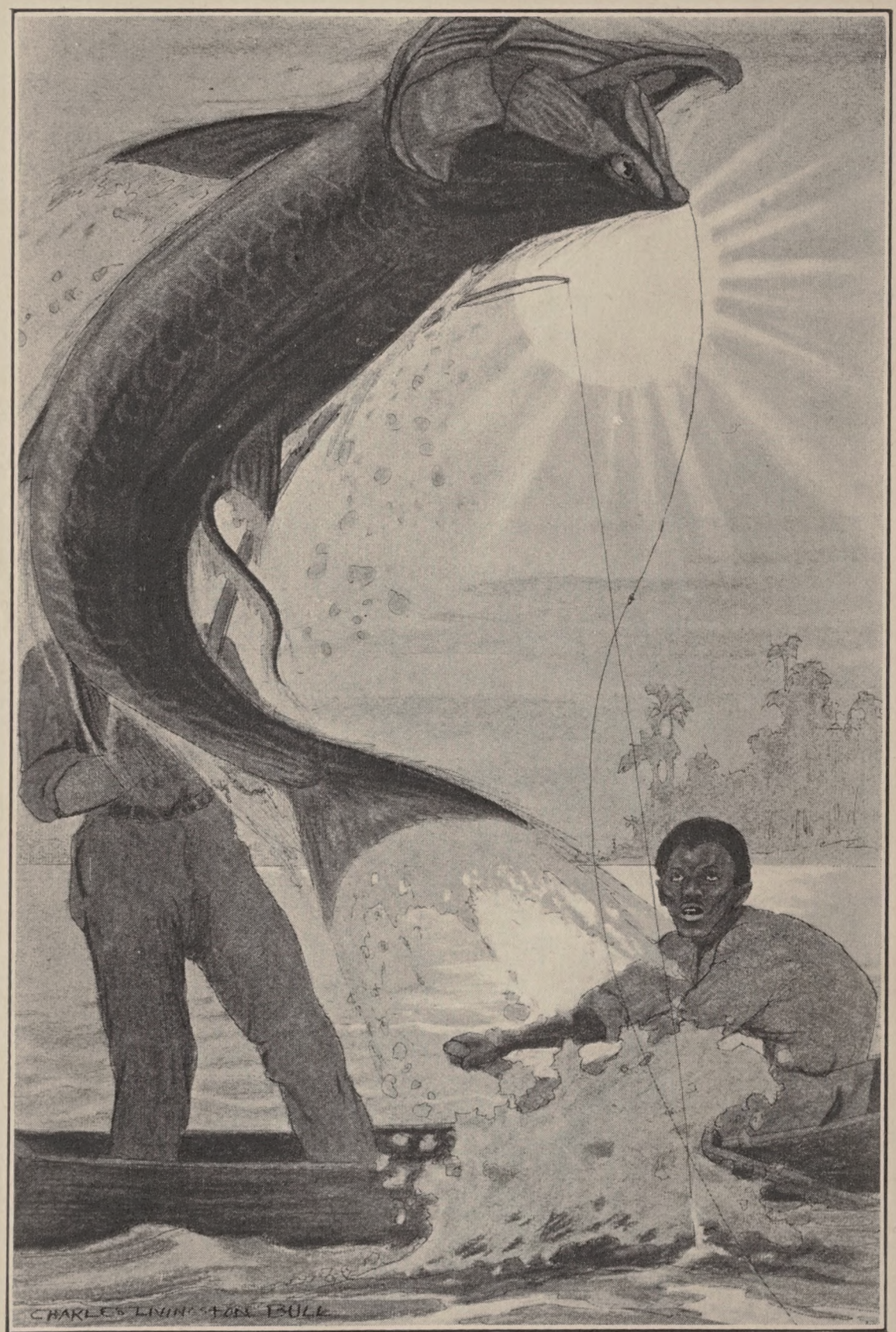
"Mm-mm!" said Rufus, removing his talisman from his mouth. "Ain't he jus' de nickel-plated son-of-a-whale! Lemme get at him."

Very valorous now, he climbed into the boat and pike in hand, assaulted the dying tarpon.

"Hold on Rufus!" expostulated Bob. "Mr. Simpson won't give a red cent for it if you go knocking the scales all off."

Mr. Simpson did, however, pay the fifty dollars he had offered, and though the handful of crisp bills was something never to be forgotten, Bob's keenest pleasure came from the congratulations and compliments showered upon him by excited anglers.

The tarpon, stuffed and varnished, was in due time hung over the hall fire-place of the fashion-



"BEFORE THE BOYS COULD MOVE HE WAS UPON THEM."

able Anchorage, and under it was placed this inscription: "The Silver King. Caught by Robert Leach, June 3, 1908. Weight 204 pounds."

CHAPTER VI

THE GIANT RAY

In marching order the professor presented a complex appearance. A greenish veil hung from the rim of his swollen and spotless helmet to his shoulders, which were clad in a coat pitted with an extraordinary number of pockets. On the lower half of his person he wore tweed knickerbockers and cloth puttees with white spats. A minnow net and a camp-stool with a pneumatic seat were bound upon his back, and in his hands he carried a sheaf of rods and a repeating rifle.

By his side young Leach, with a bit of sharkline round his waist to keep his shirt down and his trousers up, and with plenty of tanned skin visible, seemed a figure of barbarism, but the contrast was only external. The Boston professor and the brown Floridian were pupils at the same school, and youth knew at first hand some of the

wonderful facts that age had met only in text-books.

The professor was not an angler in the sporting sense of the term. Sport for sport's sake was quite beneath his learned notice. He had come to the Anchorage to study the marine life of the lagoon, and he cared not a whit for the glitter and gaiety of the hotel, immersing himself in his books of an evening, and sallying forth every day immediately after an early breakfast for his lonely trips along the shore.

On several occasions he met Bob, who was on his way to the hotel where he was now often employed as guide to the tarpon fishers. The tall, strong boy whose eye was as keen as a heron's impressed the scientist agreeably, and one day he stopped him on the beach and rather abruptly offered him three dollars a day for his services.

Five dollars would not have been enough to banish the scorn Bob felt at first sight of the green veil and white spats, but when the professor, picking up a shell at their feet, told undreamed of wonders about it, he surrendered completely. This man was a lover of nature like himself, and had the knowledge that Bob longed

for. He would have gone with him for nothing.

Those were pleasant days. They explored reef and shore and pothole, and gave each other of their knowledge and learned new lessons together. One day they dropped anchor on a shoal between two mangrove points, where the yellow glint of sand quivered up through the water. It was warm there and protected, and many smaller species of fish swam busily about in its comparative quiet. It was good collecting-ground. The professor, with eyes snapping behind the green veil, dropped a close-meshed seine over the side and began to draw it through the water at the end of a long bamboo rod.

Perhaps the light disturbance of its passage was the attraction. At any rate, he had made but two or three attempts when a broad under-water shadow drew down upon the launch and paused below the net, which the professor in his curiosity held motionless.

"What is that?" he asked, and pointed.

Bob looked over the gunwale with no more than idle interest.

"What did you see? Where?" he said. The

shadow stirred at the moment, became more distinct and opaque, and the professor gazed down with startled eyes at the rising bulk of the most repulsive fish he had ever seen.

"It's the devil!" exclaimed Bob, stepping back from the gunwale.

The professor had lost his ruddy color.

"*Manta birostris!*" he breathed. He caught Bob by the sleeve. "What are those big spots? What — they're eyes! Look at them!"

The gigantic ray rose until a scant film of water protected its back, and peered upward with cold eyes set shallow and wide apart. For a moment it lay there, undulating like a sail in light air; then with a supple folding of its huge pancake body, it curved downward and became a shadow again, that drifted over the wavering yellow bottom and disappeared.

The professor drew a long and satisfied breath, and looked up at the sun, then across the topaz-hued water.

"Nature is wonderful!" he said, gently. "We must get that fellow."

"Get the devil-fish!" cried Bob.

"Certainly," said the professor. "I've seen

pictures and read descriptions, but —" He waved the memory of them aside contemptuously. "Bob, I never imagined anything like that since I was a small boy afraid of the dark. Look here."

He held out his hand, and his fingers danced like the prongs of a tuning-fork.

"Um! You-all are scared," said Bob appreciatively.

"Interested, Bob! Excited!" cried the professor. "I don't know whether I'm afraid or not. It's immaterial. A ray twenty feet across! I must get that fish, dissect him, know every inch of his monstrous body before I do anything else. Will you help me?"

Bob's eyes suddenly glowed.

"Sure I'll help you! You're game, all right, professor. This shoal would be a heap nicer if we beached that old devil somewheres."

The ray, apparently so open in its movements, proved a difficult quarry. It seemed to have none of the activity, the daring impetuosity of the game fishes. Bob and the professor, quartering back and forth across the shoal, with the engine down to the quietest notch, saw nothing

rise to their mullet and glistening squares of pork but an occasional dull sand-shark. Somewhere, basking placidly upon the bottom, lay the devil-fish, and doubtless, with more or less regularity, it moved about in the search for food, but the occupants of the launch failed to detect its presence.

Day after day went by. The professor's face grew longer behind the green veil. His time was limited, and in this paradise for collectors there was much that he was neglecting.

Every slow crane croaking overhead, every necklace of drops flung up by a leaping fish, every prolific patch of sea vegetation roused impulses that he had to quell. The devotees of science must be dogged.

"There is so much, so much!" sighed the professor. "Bob, boy, I envy you all this. What a field to work in!"

Bob yawned. He was lolling in the stern, his fingers clutching the cord, on the farther end of which a mullet was fastened. It seemed such fruitless business.

"We ain't doing much now, sir," he said, lazily. "I reckon that old devil's gone up No'th;

just keeping his left fin close to shore, so's he can kind of feel where he is. No trunk to carry and no ticket to — to — get!"

He broke off, every flaccid line suddenly stiffening, and eyed the water close abeam, which had grown opaque, as if struck by a slant of wind. But there was no wind and the surface was glassy.

Very quietly Bob leaned forward and stopped the engine. The dusky patch darkened, grew sharp in outline, and then the devil lay awash upon the surface, staring at the launch. Its huge, wing-like appendages stretched beyond both bow and stern.

"Give it to him!" said Bob, in a shrill whisper, and rose, harpoon in hand.

It was impossible to miss so big a mark. The lance struck the fleshy back, and sank as if into blue mud. The professor, with his feet wide apart, rattled out a couple of shots from the magazine rifle.

The ray struck out with one great wing and then with the other, lashing the water white and throwing spray clear over the launch. Before the eddies had smoothed, it was gone. The

next moment it shot up ahead, broad as a sail, the harpoon-line streaming behind it. As it hung for a second, flapping, the professor fired again.

"Look out for a rush!" cried Bob, and reversed the engine.

The ray fell back with a resounding slap, and instantly the line leaped over the bow. The professor hardly had time to brace himself before the shock came. The line snapped taut, and the launch, in spite of her reversed engine, sprang forward, two sheets of water flaring from her depressed nose.

"He'll tear the bow out of her!" bawled Bob. "She won't stand it, sir."

The professor, soaked with flying brine, roared back at him:

"I'll buy a new one! Sit tight there, Bob!"

It was smooth in the shallow cove, and fortunately the great ray did not try to head toward the sea. In rough water the launch must have filled or capsized in that terrific rush.

The devil-fish drove straight for the mangrove point, as if to hurl himself upon the sedgy flat — a half-mile in less than a minute. And then, as suddenly as it had bolted, the line fell slack.

The launch, half-full of water, steadied to the kick of her propeller. Bob stopped the engine, and she lay drifting and spent.

The professor shook himself and peered cautiously about.

"I don't like this," he said. "Where is he?"

"I'm glad we're near shore," said Bob.

The bottom here was muddy and the water opaque. They could not see below the surface. The line hung over the bow limp and motionless. A heron rose from the sedge and flapped away, trailing its long legs. A drum-fish boomed solemnly; but the giant ray gave no sign.

The professor moved uneasily.

"There's plenty of horse-power left in that brute yet. This waiting's unpleasant."

"Look at the line!" said Bob, softly.

It was moving, almost as if caught by some quiet current. It ran out very slowly from the bow, then swung to starboard and passed astern, lengthening foot by foot. It was so gentle, so unlike the former evidences of the huge fish's power, that it chilled the nerves of the watchers. It seemed as if the creature were meditating some

crafty plan and working it out with human cunning.

The professor followed the moving line with the muzzle of his rifle.

"I think I hit him that last time," he said. "Big as he is, I don't see how he can digest three of these long bullets. They'll rip their way through a foot of solid oak."

"Here he comes! Look!" Bob pointed with a shaking finger.

The line had swung back abeam and slackened. Bloody bubbles were rising and cracking on the surface, and the water itself seemed arching upward with the quick rise of the huge bulk.

But when the ray appeared, it backed off and began to circle the launch, rasping the tightened line along the gunwale.

"Cut away, Bob," said the professor. "If that line catches on anything, he'll upset us in a minute."

Bob severed the line with his clasp-knife, but the ray continued to circle. Round and round the launch it swam, like a tiger creeping upon its prey. Four times the professor fired at it,

and the vicious spat of the bullets told that he had not missed.

"Toss me that box," he said. "I think that beast means to rush us."

He tore open the fresh box of cartridges, and hastily filled the magazine.

"I reckon we'd better run for it," said Bob, with a white face, and opened the engine to her highest speed.

The launch surged forward, heading for the near line of sedge. At the moment the ray was astern, moving very quietly; but as it heard the swash of the propeller, and caught its meaning, its tactics changed. It shot forward with tremendous rapidity, passing the boat as if it were anchored. Then it wheeled, with an uptoss of water, and seemed to gather itself for a rush.

Bob threw over the tiller, but before the sluggish launch could turn, the ray was upon them. Charging furiously, it sprang clear of the water, outspread like a gigantic bat, its enormous mouth distended and its two great fleshy fins flapping. As Bob and the professor sprang overboard, the

ray fell upon the launch, smothering it and beating its broken timbers under water.

Bob had taken a long dive over the side. When he came to the surface there was no trace of launch or devil-fish except the violent agitation of the water. But the professor's head was visible, minus hat and veil, and it nodded at him. Without a word the two turned and swam in toward the sedge close by, and crawled, dripping, among its crackling stems.

The professor wrung himself out sadly.

"What a pity he got away from us!" he said.

"Why, I reckon we got away from him!" Bob's tone was rueful as he stared at the spot where the launch had been.

The professor smiled in spite of his disappointment.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "But I've lost a specimen I wanted very badly. And now I've got to pay our friend Brown for his launch."

"It wasn't worth much," said Bob, walking out on the firm sand. "He couldn't get a regular fisherman to use it at any price."

Getting no reply, he turned round and saw the professor rooted in the sedge, glaring through his wet spectacles at an agitated patch of water close in shore. Bob took one quick look at it.

"Better come up here," he called. "It looks like that was the old devil again."

The professor stood for a moment motionless. Then he suddenly wheeled with a startled exclamation, and came tearing through the water to the beach. Spinning on the surface in what were evidently its death throes was the great ray. The flapping of its huge membranous wings drove a series of waves through the bending sedge, and up the beach to Bob's feet.

The professor had hardly reached firm land when the spinning ceased abruptly. The ray seemed to rise higher out of the water, and they could see it shudder as if the end were near. But the huge organism was not to accept its quietus without a last struggle. It leaped ahead, blind to the direction in which it was going; mowed a wide path through the sedge, and rammed itself hard and fast on the foreshore, where its vast, dusky bulk lay almost entirely exposed as the wave carried forward by its rush

receded. Its cavernous slit of a mouth opened and belched forth a foamy mass of water; its great fleshy wings rose and fell in a long quiver. Then it seemed to spread itself flaccidly on the mud, as loose and boneless as a dead jelly fish.

The professor slumped down on the sand as if his legs had weakened under him.

"By Humbolt!" he exclaimed, and rocked back and forth. "If I don't make a report out of this that will wake up the Ichthyological Society then I'll resign. The old devil jumped right up on the operating table, so to speak. I'll know the color of his inside before tonight. How far are we from home?"

"Not much of a piece," said Bob. "I reckon about the biggest end of an hour if we take the high beach and cut across the necks of those two points yonder."

"Well, I'm going back for my tools," said the professor, rising. "But first we'll shake on our luck. Bob, my boy, this has been a great day."

They shook hands warmly. The professor cut a humorous figure, hatless and bald, his odd clothes dripping salt water and one putty in a

coil about his ankle. But Bob thought only of the man's pluck and of the charm of his genial, scientific mind. He dreaded to think that their delightful days were almost over.

"You must come down again, sir," he said, wistfully. "I'll be your boatman any time."

The professor gripped Bob's hand firmly.

"We'll shake on that, too, my boy," he said.

CHAPTER VII

THE PESTS OF THE SWAMP

One day as Bob was returning from the Anchorage Mr. Brown, jogging home in his green road-wagon, hailed him with a:

"'Lo there, Leach. Want a lift?"

The fish-dealer was, according to his neighbors, "as close as the bark of a tree, 'n the inside bark at that." Giving lifts of any description without sufficient recompense was certainly not his custom, and even a small friendly act like this struck Bob as unusual. He accepted the invitation, however, and climbed to the well-cushioned seat, wondering whether it was due to any special reason. Mr. Brown did not leave him long in doubt.

"I hear you're getting to be quite a fisherman," he remarked genially. "You're sure getting to be some of a man, and you look like you could do a man's work."

He stole a sidelong glance at Bob, whose broad shoulders overtopped his own by several inches.

"I reckon I'm growing some," said Bob, sliding down a little in the seat.

"I never saw a boy grow faster." Mr. Brown's tone implied a compliment. "And what's more, there's nothing weedy about you. You hold it. You thicken as well as lengthen, and that's what I like to see in boys or fish. I like 'em deep-bodied."

Bob was too embarrassed to reply, and after a short pause the fish-dealer resumed.

"What I'm after is this: Fish never was so high, or fishermen so scarce. Why, there's four boats quit running within a week, for some fool reason or other. Seems like the more folks can make the less they want to work. Now you're a worker if I've heard right. How is it?"

"I reckon I'm ready to make money in the right way if I have a chance," said Bob.

"You've got the chance," said the fish-dealer, laying a mahogany-colored hand on Bob's knee. "I've got a boat that's doing nothing but growing grass on her bottom. All the fixings with her, too. Now you take her off my hands on

shares or hire her straight out; I don't care which so long's you get busy and bring in some fish. You've been mulleting, I reckon?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Bob.

"Well, then, you take her. Pick up a good man to go second, and we'll both make a smart thing out of it. You won't find me hard to make terms with."

In spite of this agreeable assurance Mr. Brown did what he could to get all the best of the bargain; but Bob was no fool. His quiet manner covered a good share of shrewdness and a great deal of determination. At the outset he named the sum which he was willing to pay for a season's use of the boat, and no arguments could budge him. Finally the fish-dealer, rather than lose a promising customer, yielded, and not without some admiration for what he considered to be a piece of sharpness almost equal to his own.

"Well, you can have her at that," he said. "Come over and sign the papers tomorrow. I always like things down in black and white. The boat's ready and waiting. You can take her on the spot."

Bob had said nothing about a helper but there

was no doubt in his mind as to whom he wanted. If Jim would take the place, it was his. Jim had been his loyal friend ever since that first meeting on the bridge, and Bob was not the boy to forget his friends. He was as pleased at this opportunity to do Jim a favor as he was in realizing his own long-cherished hopes of engaging in the fishing business for himself.

It was pleasant to see Jim's delight after he realized that the offer was not a joke. His round face shone, and he fidgeted to be off on the *Emmie E.*

"You're right good to me, Bob," he said. "I'll work hard for you, I will."

Bob slapped him affectionately on the back.

"You talk like you think you are the crew," he laughed. "There ain't any on this boat, only a couple of captains."

It so happened that the fishing fleet had come home with their fares that evening, and when they put forth in the fresh morning the *Emmie E's* brown sail was well in the van. She was in perfect trim. What is more, she proved herself a good sailer. Bob and Jim, happy and hopeful, ignored the gradually darkening sky and

the increasing vigor of the wind. In comparison with the *Mudhen* the new boat seemed as stiff as a church.

Towards noon, however, as they neared the head of the lagoon they were forced to take in a couple of reefs. The run was nearly at an end, but the wind was blowing a gale, and the shallow water was ridged with sweeping, foam-capped waves. It was exhilarating, but it was ominous weather for fishing, and as the boats came one by one into the small cove in front of the camp the owners snuggled them down with unusual care, and some of the wise ones bridled their crafts with a pair of anchors.

"Looks like she'd started in to blow a norther," remarked Reese when they had all gathered in the long bunk house. "I didn't like the look of things when we came along. Nary a duck in sight."

"No use to go out tonight, anyway," said Red Simonson. "We might's well get the fire going and take it warm and easy. This wind's sure cold."

The big stove soon drove the chill from the bunk house and the men gathered round it with

glowing pipes. The heat brought out a few torpid mosquitoes, "just to make things seem more natural," as big Sandy Goulden remarked with an oath. Sandy was always a grumbler, and the prospect of bad fishing weather had put a keener edge to his temper.

"Seems to me you're powerful fussy, Sandy," drawled Jeppson. "You ought to walk across Black Point after a spell of rain if you want to know what mosquitoes mean. That's their earthly Heaven, sure."

"They say you can't range cattle there," remarked one of the men. "The skeeters just naturally eat 'em up."

"I reckon that's true enough," said Jeppson. "I went there once with a fellow from New York and they pretty near ate me up, and I'm plumb full of quinine, too. The other fellow wouldn't have got out alive 'cept for me, I reckon."

"Go ahead," "Tell the yarn," cried several smokers.

"Well," began Jeppson, "I was guiding for this New Yorker, as I told you. His name was Cobb. He had an idea that he must kill a b'ar

before going back North. B'ars stay pretty well hid up during the winter, but along about spring they begin to stretch and come out of their holes, yawnin' and hungry. When the turtles start to laying along the beaches, b'ars is busy folks. That's the best way to get 'em. Jes' dig a blind in the sand, near where the turtles have been nesting, and lie out in it on a moonlight night. If you don't get a shot at a b'ar then, I reckon there ain't any in that county.

"I told Cobb that sometimes, between the heat and the mosquitoes and the sand-flies, b'ar-hunting meant more trouble than fun, but he didn't care. He was a right gritty chap. What he wanted was a b'ar's skin — never mind the cost.

"It began to rain about then, and kept it up for ten days on end. We didn't try to go out. Jes' lay round our camp on the river shore, catching a few fish now and then, and spending the rest of the time drying our clothes before the fire.

"When the rain broke, Cobb fretted to be off. We started right after supper, and sailed down the river into Broadbill Creek. She's a

pretty wide creek, and runs back into the marsh for two miles or more without a turn. Then she bends quick to the left, like a doubled-up arm, and runs three miles farther, ending in a round pond, like a clenched fist.

"We left the sailboat at the turn, that being as near to the beach as we could get by water. It was a cloudy night, and looked as if it might rain again. It was hot, though. Hot and sticky. And the walking was bad; all niggerheads and wallows with tall saw-grass, that kept you from seeing where you were stepping.

"Cobb kept slumping down into the muck-holes and almost leaving his rubber boots behind when he dragged his feet out. That marsh mud's just like glue — and smells about as bad. I wore leather shoes. I'd tried a rubber pair once, and knew when I had enough.

"We did three miles of this, and then the ground began to grow firmer and the grass shorter. Presently we struck sand and felt the wind off the ocean.

"We crossed a couple of dune ridges, and came out on the beach. The tide was coming in. We could see the white rim of it a long

way on either side of us. There was just enough moonlight peepin' through the clouds to show us that, and to touch the tops of the waves with a whitish glare. But it looked pretty dark to shoot b'ars.

"'This is fine,' said Cobb. 'It's so mysterious and — and sort of uncanny. Jes' hear those herons off in the marsh! Like horns!'

"It didn't take long for us to scoop a shallow hole in the sand, jes' deep enough to lie in comfortable. I'd been up and down the beach a little way and seen plenty of turtle sign, so I knew we were well placed. I was sure of it a moment later when something black and round loomed up at the edge of the water. I pointed it out to Cobb.

"He gave a jump and grabbed his rifle.

"'Is it a b'ar?' he whispered.

"'No, not exactly,' said I. 'It's a loggerhead, and she's bigger than any b'ar you ever saw. She'll weigh eight hundred pounds if she weighs anything.'

"You wouldn't believe how cautious that old loggerhead was. She lay just at the edge of the water for ten minutes, pretending, probably,

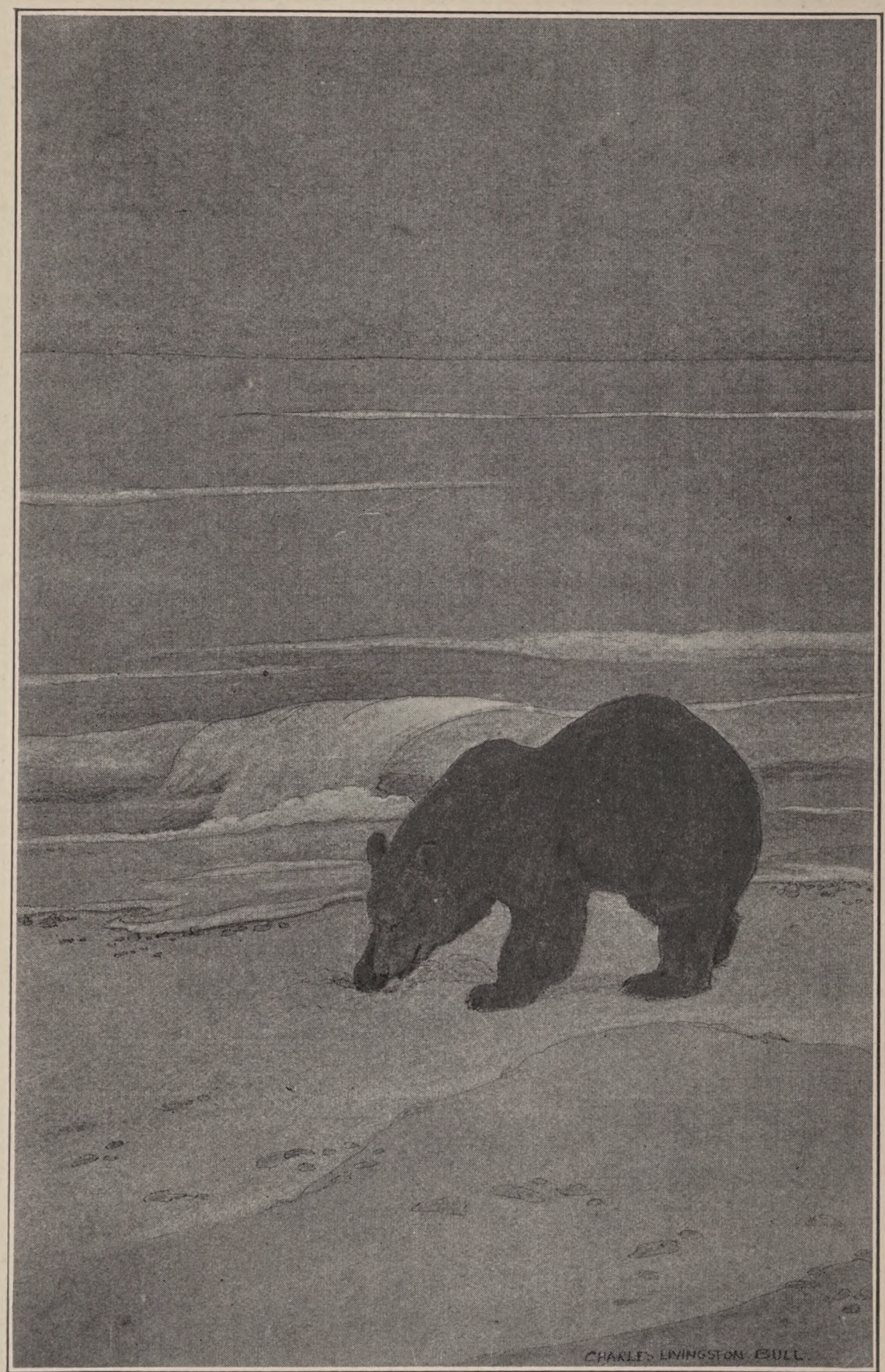
that she was a bit of driftwood. By and by she began to move up the slope, like a haystack being pushed along by jerks. We could hear the hiss of her slow breathing and the scrape of her flippers on the sand.

"Presently she found the right spot, and round she went like a wheel, scraping out a hole about as big as our blind. It took her half an hour to lay her eggs. After she got one layer down, she'd scrape sand over it, and then lay another on top of that.

"'This is better than b'ar-shooting,' said Cobb. 'Ouch! That's the second mosquito that's got home on the back of my neck. There goes Madam Loggerhead. She ought to have a numerous family.'

"'If a b'ar don't get 'em,' I said, 'she's liable to have some progeny, sure.'

"And then I heard something pad-padding along in the darkness. It wasn't the loggerhead. She made a swishing with her flippers like a broom on a floor, and besides, she was close to the water when I heard it. The next moment I saw her big shell slip into the sea and disappear.



"THE BEAR HAD UNCOVERED THE FIRST LAYER OF EGGS."

"It was a b'ar I'd heard, and probably he'd been watching the loggerhead's performance for some time, for he made straight for the nest. Cobb saw him, and drew in a sharp breath. The critter looked as big as an ox in the moonlight.

"I nodded to Cobb, and we stuck our rifles over the blind. The b'ar had uncovered the first layer of eggs, and was sweeping them into his mouth with both paws, making a noise like a hog at a trough, as the warm yolks ran down his throat. B'ars are wild over turtle eggs. I've seen 'em clean out one nest, and then, when they happen on another, vomit the first meal up, so's they could have room for the second. Leastways I suppose that's why they did it, though it may have been because their stomachs were overloaded.

"When I thought the time was right, I nudged Cobb with my knee and we fired. We hit the b'ar sure enough, but the light was so poor we didn't hit him in the right place. He came plumb for us the next moment with a nasty snarl. Cobb fired another shot at him, which turned him off to the right, and we heard him go into the reeds with a crash. I was using a single shot rifle,

and couldn't slip in another cartridge in time to fire, myself.

"'There goes our b'ar,' said I. 'Only he ain't ours.'

"'Come on,' said Cobb, and he jumped over the edge of the blind like he weighed no more'n Jim. 'We'll get him yet. I'm pretty sure I hit him with that last shot.'

"'I'm not chasing any b'ar into that swamp,' I said.

"Cobb was brushing away the mosquitoes with one hand and holding his rifle with the other.

"'That ain't the way we hunt b'ars in the North,' he said. 'When we wound 'em we follow the tracks until we get 'em.'

"'It's too dark to follow him,' I said. 'We couldn't find a drove of cattle in there to-night. And then there's the mosquitoes. They'll be bad enough going back to the boat, let alone tramping out of our path to wake 'em up.'

"'We're not afraid of a few mosquitoes where I come from,' said he.

"'Ain't you?' I said. 'Perhaps you think things in this swamp are the same as up North.'

"'There's one thing that's the same everywhere, and that's pluck,' said he.

"I ought to have known better, but I flared up then and told him to come on. He didn't make any reply, but followed me into the reeds with an air that as much as said he wouldn't be the one to give up first.

"For the first few yards it was easy to follow the track, but as the grass got higher and the ground more broken it came to be pure guesswork.

"I reckoned the b'ar would head for a big hummock about three miles to the south, and I laid my course for this, without paying much attention to signs by the way.

"I've been in some places where the mosquitoes were pretty thick, — the Everglades, for instance, — but I never saw anything like the way they were that night in that swamp. As we went slumping and slashing along, our feet stirred them up by millions from the soggy ground, and our shoulders brushed more millions from the reeds. At first they didn't bother me much, but by and by one or two bit me, and that seemed to set

the others on. It was as if they'd got a smell of blood.

"They pelted against me like dust driven by a wind, pricking at my face with their little hair-like stickers. Of course I used my free hand, but it was like fighting smoke, with your face over the fire.

"They were all over my back and shoulders, too, where I couldn't reach 'em. We wore the thinnest kind of cotton outing-shirts, which didn't protect our skins any more than if they'd been nets.

"I wasn't going to cry baby, though, before Cobb. I kept on as straight for the hummock as I could, with the swarms of insects blinding my eyes. I could hear Cobb splashing and puffing behind me, and I knew he was having a bad time. Sure enough, he stopped presently and called to me.

"'I'll own up I'm a fool,' he said. 'There *are* a few mosquitoes here, and that's a fact. I'm about eaten alive. Let's go back to the boat.'

"I was about ready myself, so we changed our course and headed for the bend of the creek. The ground was very bad, and I had to walk

slowly so that Cobb, who was a heavy man, could keep up with me. The niggerheads didn't seem to have any necks to 'em. When we stepped on one it would twist like a ball under our feet. Sometimes we kept our balance and sometimes we didn't. When we didn't we'd slip off into a bit of knee-high mud and water that sucked so you could hear it.

"Pretty soon we struck a patch of reeds seven feet high. It was like going down into water. I began to have little prickles run up and down my back, and fought the reeds jes' as if I was swimming. It was foolish to waste my strength that way, but I wanted to get my head out. It seemed as if I'd choke if I didn't.

"My head and shoulders were always in a cloud of mosquitoes. Dark as it was, I could see the swarms of 'em, like black nets, hanging about me. I couldn't stop to brush 'em away, and it wouldn't have been any use to try. They stung me everywhere. The skin was drawn tight on my face, and my neck and shoulders burned like fire.

"I felt my nerve giving way. I suppose it was the poison in my blood, but I had hot thrills,

jes' as I have when the 'shakes' come on me, and I began to run. In about a minute I was so turned round that I didn't know where I was.

"I don't know when I dropped my rifle, but I've never seen it since. You could hardly call it running, for I was on my hands and knees in the slime half the time. I tried to keep my mouth closed and breathe evenly, but what air there was in those thick reeds was hot, and I had to gasp to get my lungs full. In a short time I was spitting out little wads of mosquitoes. After a while I jes' swallowed 'em.

"I'd clean forgotten about Cobb until I heard him shout. I reckon he called several times before I stopped. Then I went back to where he was, up to his knees in mud, without the strength to pull himself out. His big, fat chest was heaving under his shirt, and he was making a noise like a clogged engine.

"'I'm blind,' he said. 'Jeppson, I can't see a thing.'

"I pulled him out of the mud and tried to encourage him.

"'Say, have the mosquitoes gone?' he asked.

"That gave me a chill right there. I thought

he was losing his mind. The humming of 'em sounded like the singing of a lot of telegraph wires in a gale.

"'Don't you hear 'em?' I said.

"'Why, I thought that was the wind,' said he. 'I can't feel 'em any more.'

"I touched his face with my hand, and it felt wet and hard as stone. His eyelids were puffed and closed.

"'Be game!' said I.

"'Game! I'm like that down to the waist,' he said. 'I'm through. I can't go another step.'

"He sank down on a niggerhead, and the mosquitoes swarmed about his head and shoulders like flies about a piece of raw meat.

"An idea came to me to set the reeds afire. The smoke would surely drive away the pests, I thought.

"I felt through my pockets, but there wasn't a match in any one of them. Then I overhauled Cobb's, but he hadn't one, either.

"There was only one thing to do, and that was to get Cobb to the boat somehow. The poison in his system had so sapped his strength and dulled his brain that he wouldn't make an

effort of his own accord. But the trouble was I didn't know which way to turn. I was twitching all over and had lost all sense of direction. One of my eyes was closing, and I was afraid I'd go blind any minute, like poor Cobb.

"I stood there trying to think for what seemed a long time, but couldn't concentrate my mind on anything. I felt as if I'd been skinned, and had salt sprinkled on the raw flesh. But somehow I didn't mind that so much as I did the deep, steady hum of those bloodthirsty swarms. That drove me nearly crazy. It went through me like a fever, and I reckon I got some queer in my head.

"All of a sudden I heard Cobb speaking.

"'Who are you talking to?' he asked.

"'I haven't been talking,' I said.

"'You've been yelling like a madman," said he. 'And I thought I heard somebody answer. Ah, hear that! Lead me there, Jeppson. Where there's voices, there must be human beings.'

"It was the deep bellow of an alligator he'd heard. The sound came rolling over the swamp in gusty grunts, and mighty glad I was to hear it. I knew it must come from Broadbill Creek, for

there was no other body of open water — except the sea — anywhere near.

"I ripped off my suspenders and tied one end of 'em about Cobb's wrist. His hands were so swollen he couldn't have gripped it. Then I led him toward where the old bull 'gator was bellowing.

"Thank heaven, it wasn't far before I saw the black shine of the water! Cobb was like a drunken man. I don't think he could have gone another hundred yards. When I told him we were close to the boat he pitched right forward, and would have fallen if I hadn't caught him. I had to carry him in my arms the rest of the way.

"I tell you I felt better when I had the screen doors of the cabin shut behind us. I bathed Cobb with kerosene oil, — his flesh was as white and hard as marble, — and poured some cold coffee down his throat. We had to lie there until nearly morning. Then a breeze sprang up and I sailed the boat home. Cobb was too weak to help me, and it was a couple of days before he got back his strength.

"'Jeppson,' he said to me, 'I'm going back home as quick as the next train will carry me.

It'll be a luxury jes' to sit on my seaside piazza and let those futile little insects they call mosquitoes in the North sting me.' "

There was a short silence as Jeppson held a lighted match to the bowl of his pipe, which had smouldered out during the relating of his story.

"That's a good one," said Reece, looking around the semicircle of listeners with a grin.

"Plumb artistic," observed Jed Jenkins, smiling still more broadly.

The others laughed; but Jeppson sat unruffled, drawing placidly at his pipe.

"You asked for it and you got it," he said tersely. "Did you want a poor one?"

"You're all right, Jeppson," laughed Red Simonson. "When we do want a poor one I reckon we'll know better than to come to you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ILL WIND

The men had been confined in camp for two days and a half. It would have been useless to venture out, even if the boats could have stood up under such weather, for fish take to deep water during these three days' winds. So they lay there on the beaten-down wire grass in the lee of the bunk-house, swapping yarns and listening to the everlasting crackle-crackle of the cabbage-palms, and the plaints of the wind-blown cranes that tried to tack out to the purplish flats of the lagoon.

It was dull sport. The men knew each other too well for amusement, and it was quite natural they should try to extract entertainment from Jim, the greenhorn.

With the exception of Sandy Goulden, they were not really malicious. If Sandy took any pleasure in his cross-grained life, it was when he

was making someone uncomfortable. He began to "pick on" Jim the first day, tentatively, with an eye on Bob, whose long, clean limbs and broad shoulders suggested unpleasant possibilities.

Bob sat in the lee of the bunk-house, apparently absorbed in plaiting a fish basket. He had brought Jim into a rough school, and he knew his friend must stand his initiation if he ever hoped to amount to anything. So, although his gray eyes flashed now and then, and the spade-cut over his nose grew deeper, he did not interfere.

On the afternoon of the third day the wind let up a little. It was too late for the fishermen, however. They were out of grub, and the norther had blown the water off the flats, and swept it away down the channel to the southward. The camp had never seen it so low. They made up their minds that if they were to anchor within half a mile of the wharf, they would have to start for home before sunrise the next morning. The thought of running back with empty boats made them sore.

"I reckon I know what's the trouble with this yere trip," announced Sandy, suddenly. "We've got a Jonah along, and his name is Jim."

He rose to his feet and strode slowly up to where Jim sat. Jim had made up his mind to stand anything rather than involve Bob in a quarrel, but it seemed to him that he could not bear much more. His nerves were twitching like the float-line of a net when it is full of crazy fish.

"And his name," repeated Sandy, unctuously, "is Jim."

He reached down a hairy hand, clutched the boy by the bosom of his coat, and lifted him to a position limply upright. For a moment he looked into the eyes of his victim, and the dumb patience he read there made his own glow with a sudden rage.

"You miserable little yellow pup!" he snarled. "Why don't you yap?"

With a single swirl of his powerful arms he swung Jim from his feet, and threw him headlong to the ground ten feet away. Fortunately for the boy, he landed on his shoulders in a heap of dead palm leaves, where he lay white and shaken.

Bob put down his basket deliberately and walked up to Sandy.

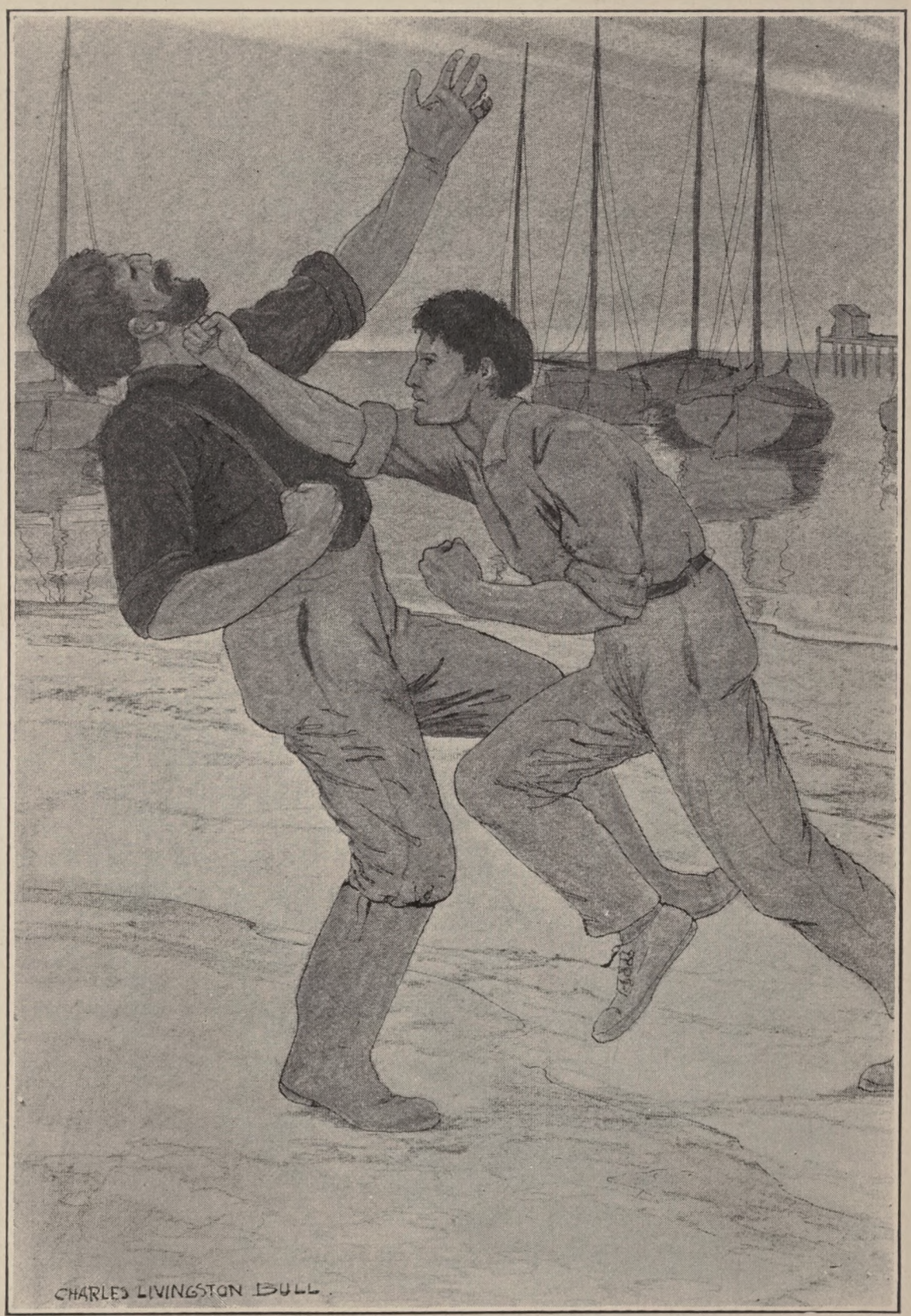
"You'd better try me," he said, quietly, his gray eyes steady, his voice softly persuasive. "I reckon Jim's plumb tired playing."

Sandy paused and put down the foot with which he had been about to favor Jim. Then with an oath he struck at Bob.

The hulking bully was far heavier than his slim opponent, but somehow his slashing blows failed to score. Bob, cool and agile, ducked and gave ground, and when the right moment came he drove in his hard fist as critically as a woodman strikes a line with his ax. His muscles were not so big as Sandy's, but they were more limber and unweakened by dissipation, and every ounce of his weight went behind his blows. He knew instinctively when and where to hit and he was as fearless as a bull terrier.

When Sandy went down for the third time there was no more fair fight left in him. As he got up stiffly, fumbling at his hip pocket, two of the nearest men jumped at him and wrested away the knife he had half-drawn.

"This is where she stops," said Red Simonson, scornfully. "Any more of this kind of play, and you'll have the gang to fight."



"EVERY OUNCE OF HIS WEIGHT WAS BEHIND HIS BLOWS."

He flung the knife into the scrub as he spoke. Sandy shot a furtive look round him out of swollen eyes. There was not a glimmer of sympathy in any face; even his partner, Little Joe, wore a dubious, half-pleased grin.

"You wait, you —" Passion checked further utterance, and with his wild black hair streaming about his bruised face, he turned his back on the group and strode down to the jetty.

Jim put a timid hand on Bob's arm.

"I'm right sorry, Bob," he gulped. "Maybe I am a Jonah, like Sandy says. There's this norther and — and this fuss with Sandy. He's a mighty mean man. I feel he'll do something to even up on you."

"You hush up," replied the other, smiling. "Everything that's happened was just naturally bound to happen. Don't you go to setting yourself up on wheels. You ain't of that importance."

But Jim was not to be so easily diverted.

"I'd like to bring you good luck," he said, wistfully. "I ought to, sure, taking me in the way you did."

The camp retired very soon after supper. Sandy was the last man to enter the shanty. The

lantern had been blown out and the rest of the men were half-asleep when he slouched sulkily in and threw himself down on his bunk, which was close to the door.

Sometime in the small hours of the night he awoke, sore and unrefreshed. The shack was filled with unmelodious sounds of slumber. Lifting his head, Sandy identified the various bunks, one by one, with his ears. Satisfied finally that all the occupants were asleep, he threw aside his quilt and stepped softly to the door.

Like a shadow he moved down the bank toward the jetty. The string of boats lay with their sterns shoreward, their rigging cobwebbed against the thin starlight. Sandy's trained eyes quickly distinguished the one he wanted, and sitting down, he drew off his shoes and stockings.

The *Emmie E.* was filled with nets from the tiny deck forward to the raised platform under her tiller, a condition of affairs that Sandy noted with satisfaction. She was an old boat, and though recently cleaned a few barnacles remained on her bottom. He scratched his fingers on the sharp cones more than once as he swept his hand below her water-line. He had to wet his arm to

the shoulder before he struck a promising seam. Then he went to work patiently to loosen the caked paint and oakum with his fish-knife.

It was a childish piece of revenge, but Sandy was no Machiavellian plotter. In reality, he showed some skill in the execution of his plan. He did not want the *Emmie* to sink at her moorings. It would be more artistic and less suspicious to have her spring a leak after she was well under way, when the strain of her drawing sail would spread the seams with which he had tampered.

When he had finished his pleasing occupation it was almost time for the camp to be astir, but he had the undeserved good fortune to gain the shanty and creep into his bunk before Red, sometimes called "Clocky" Simonson for his ability to keep track of time, awake or sleeping, gave a final regretful snort, and awoke.

Jim stretched himself on the yielding pile of nets, with his face toward the stars, while Bob controlled the tiller from his seat in the stern. There was enough wind to make the run exhilarating. An agreeable sense of unmeasured speed was present, which the light of day, disclosing the familiar landmarks on the shore, would have

destroyed. The water gushed by the bow with a crisp singing, and ran away in writhing lines of phosphorescent light in their wake. Overhead guttural-voiced, unseen herons were passing.

Jim was in an apathetic state, half sleepy, half-melancholy; but Bob, none too cheerful himself, began to glance down at the water with a puzzled interest. He peered at the ghostly rim of the shore, hauled in and then slackened the main-sheet, and fidgeted with the centreboard.

"I reckon she must be rolling up the bottom 'long with her!" he exclaimed at last. "She's sure sailing like a sponge this morning."

Jim nodded absent-mindedly, watching the roseate smear in the east pulsate and grow against its curtain of cloud. Already it was send-ing out level films of light to which the surface of the water responded with a steely twinkle.

"Ain't she rather low?" he asked suddenly. Bob looked up from a perplexed consideration of the *Emmie E.*, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, the water's blown clean to the south-'ard!" he said. "I never saw it like this before."

After a moment of staring, with a look ahead

to assure himself that the channel still existed, he returned to his study of the *Emmie*. Jim was now conscious that something ailed her. The springiness was gone from her lift, and when she fell away in a trough she sank soggily with none of that sensitive vibration that shows the life of a stanch craft. Suddenly Bob whistled. He had been poking among the nets with his foot.

"She's drinking like an oyster at flood-tide," he said.

He cast a quick look about him.

The dawn was radiant now, filling the atmosphere with soft color. On the east the sedge was yellowing, mile on mile of vacant marsh, while in the west the Florida coast drew its straight line of hard green.

"We'll run her into Mallard Bend — if we can get her there," he said.

"Think there's any danger?" asked Jim.

"Not after we quit the channel."

Bob pushed the tiller over and hauled in on the main-sheet. The *Emmie* responded listlessly, and Jim saw the water swash back over the platform on which Bob's feet rested.

He dug his fingers tensely into the pile of nets,

staring over the side with uneasy speculation. Presently he saw the opaque water lighten as the glimmer of yellow sand struck up through it.

"I reckon we're out of the frying-pan," said Bob. "But it looks like we couldn't run her in. Ain't there a bar across the Bend?"

Flats and ill-smelling patches of mud that he had never seen before gleamed copper-colored under the rising sun. Quantities of dead and dying fish lay stranded on the mud, their white bellies prodigiously swollen. Ospreys and buzzards were feeding amicably on the profusion.

Jim stood up and gazed, with his hand on the mast. A grayish streak was drawn across the entrance to the cove.

"There ain't more than a couple of inches on her," he reported.

The *Emmie* struck bottom almost as he spoke. She hung a moment and then slid on a few yards farther, trailing a muddy wake. At last she came to a full stop, and Bob let the main-sheet go with a run.

With his arms heaped with nets Jim walked disconsolately ashore. As he stepped on the little bar a tearing sound went up from the Bend,

like the roar of a distant flock of scaup ducks lifting. A huge, dark patch appeared on the surface, and drifted rapidly toward the farther end, as if a squall of wind had struck the water. It sank as suddenly as it had arisen. Instinctively Jim felt that he had made a discovery.

"O Bob!" he exploded. "Fish! The Bend's alive with 'em!"

Bob came up leisurely. "Gudgeons," he said; but he picked up a conch-shell and started along the strip of mud that bordered the reedy bank. Something wavering, almost imperceptible in the water checked him. He cast the heavy shell toward it.

Instantly thousands of silvery bodies darkened the water in an aimless rush, and several gleaming shapes leaped wildly into the air and disappeared again with a splash.

"Mullets!" he exclaimed, and in a dozen wide, splashing leaps he was back on the bar. "Yes, I reckon you *are* some kind of a Jonah, Jim."

He seized an end of one of the nets and plunged with it into the water on the inner side of the bar. Jim, quick to catch his idea, sprang to aid him.

It was plain how the thing had happened. The Bend was a deepish blind pocket of water running back into the marsh four hundred yards. Some time during the gale a band of greedy porpoises had struck the huge school and driven it into this haven. The larger fish had not dared to cross the shoal entrance, and the frightened mullets had lingered until the falling water had cut off their return.

"There!" exclaimed Bob, straightening his back. "We've got 'em bottled, and we can catch 'em whenever it suits us. Fifteen thousand pounds, if an ounce. What'll the mother think now?"

Jim laughed excitedly. Fifteen thousand pounds, and the price of fish sky-high!

"Let's fix the *Emmie* and take a load back," he suggested eagerly, with visions of a triumphal home-coming.

A few strips from an odd square of canvas and some rope ravelings made the old boat fairly tight. Bob's forehead puckered as he worked, and he made a shrewd guess as to the origin of those leaks; but he kept his own counsel.

They launched the light tender in the Bend

and swept down upon the mullets with the gill-net. It was an experience to be remembered.

The place was actually alive with fish darting furiously on every side, their dark dorsal fins cutting the water with a sound as of ripping cloth. Many leaped the barrier of nets and fell squirming on the bar. Some actually landed in the boat in their blind fright. The net ballooned and tugged at its ropes as it swelled with quivering life. The salt drops flew in showers. It was tremendously exciting.

It was hard work, too, although the rising water made each trip easier. At last the *Emmie* was flush to her gunwales with the silvery dark-eyed fish, and Bob spread her brown sail to the wind.

The stars were out when they dropped anchor in the channel off the gray, spidery wharf, but the evening was warm and a full quota of fishermen sat lounging on the benches against the fish-house. Jocular voices hailed them as they rowed in.

"Thought the *Emmie E.* could sail some!"

"How's walking, Bob?"

"Stopped to fish, likely?"

The sally provoked a laugh, but lean, saturnine Brown, the dealer, uttered a snort.

"You-all make me tired," he said. "There ain't a man among you smart enough to capture a minner, and a fish-famine on."

"I don't know about that," drawled Bob, looping the painter round a pile. "If you'll send some of your men out to the *Emmie* you'll find a few."

"What's that!" exclaimed the dealer. "You ain't got any fish, have you?"

"All she can hold," said Bob. "And it's only an instalment. Can you use a matter of fifteen thousand pounds?"

"Can I use — Say, don't you know there's a fish-famine North?" and Brown, effectually aroused from the sulks, bawled sharp orders to his henchmen.

Bob's gaze wandered to the stricken line of loungers. In their various expressions of astonishment and chagrin he was tasting the sweets of triumph when suddenly he missed a familiar face.

"Where's Sandy?" he inquired, casually.

Red Simonson cleared his throat.

"Sandy? Well, I ain't particular fond of Sandy, but I'm due to admit it's tough to take a licking and come home broke, and find your kid down with the diphthery all in one day. But say, tell me where you found the fish?"

Bob's little self-gratulatory smile died out. "That story'll keep till to-morrow," he said, "Jim and me's too ravenous to talk."

As the two picked their way cautiously over the rudely laid flooring of the wharf, Bob tucked an arm under Jim's.

"We're going to make a nice thing out of this," he said. "It's been a lucky trip for us — luckier than it has been for Sandy, for instance. That kid of his lit on a bad time to take the diphthery, Jim."

"Yes," said Jim, soberly. He knew what sickness meant when it took every dollar in the house to meet doctor's bills.

"I was thinking we could afford to give Mrs. Goulden a little something," continued Bob, carelessly. "But of course that's just as you say. He picked on you considerable at camp."

"Oh, I don't mind — now," said Jim with the same pretence of indifference. "His kid's sick. Let's do it."

Bob laughed and squeezed Jim's arm. "And now that's settled I don't mind telling you we might consider it like taking out a sort of marine insurance policy," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so," grinned Jim. "But it was lucky for us the clumsy old fool tried to scuttle her. You needn't think I didn't catch on, Bob."

Just then Jeppson came up behind them and clapped Bob on the shoulder.

"You ran into a nice piece of luck, didn't you?" he remarked. "How much do you reckon to make?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob. "At a rough guess we've got ten to fifteen thousand pounds tied up in Mallard Bend."

Jeppson whistled. "Well, well," he ejaculated. "I didn't know it was anything like that. I reckon you'll feel too biggerty now to listen to my small proposition."

"Why no sir," said Bob, smiling. "Jim and I don't think we're going to be lucky like this all the time."

"Well, it's only this," said Jeppson, his voice assuming its natural tone of importance. "I liked the way you handled Sandy yesterday, and I said to myself then, 'there's a young fellow that'll make a good deputy for you if you happen to want one.' Sometimes there's trouble when you try to round up a gang of plumers and an extra pair of hands comes in useful. I just thought I'd speak to you and get your idea. It ain't every young fellow I'd ask, you know that."

Jeppson had recently been appointed game-warden, an honor that was not allowed to languish in his hands. He was a burly man, as strong as an ox, and thoroughly conscientious, but self-complacent to an extraordinary degree.

That Jeppson should make such a request of him was indeed a compliment. Bob was pleased as well as surprised. To be deputy game-warden even for a few days was to do public service, and the phrase had a big sound in his young ears. But in view of the work he and Jim were engaged in, the thing did not seem feasible.

Jeppson, however, overcame his objections. He explained that Bob need not bind himself

in any way. He should act only if it was convenient for him, and he was to understand that deputies received pay for their services. Under such circumstances Bob could not refuse, and the warden left them with a satisfied good-night.

The big catch in Mallard Bend netted the boys a round sum, but the season as a whole was so poor that without that they would have made little more than their expenses. Storms were frequent and fish shy and scarce. More than once Bob wondered if Jeppson had forgotten the talk on the pier. The hard work and the inadequate returns left him dissatisfied and restless, and he was ready to anchor the *Emmie E.* and seek new adventure. But months passed before Jeppson had any need of his services.

At last one day the warden sent for him.

"How is it? Too busy for a little trip?" he asked.

"No," said Bob. "I'm ready to go on a big one if you want me to."

Jeppson had received word that a gang of plume hunters were raiding the rookeries on a certain cluster of islands.

"We can take my boat and run down there

in a day," he said. "There's no telling how long we'll have to stay. Those fellows are crafty. Maybe it'll take a week to locate 'em. You can cook, can't you?"

Bob assured him that he could.

"Well then," said Jeppson. "Be ready to start at sunrise tomorrow. We'll run down to Flamingo Islands and make that our headquarters. There's a queer sort of a stick there called Braithe. He's lived there some years all by himself. Perhaps he can give us a clue."

CHAPTER IX

A DEPUTY WARDEN

It was not, however, until early morning of the day after the start that Jeppson and Bob reached Flamingo Island. There had been no air at all, and most of their progress had been accomplished by hard work at the sweeps. They were thoroughly tired when dawn broke and revealed the heavily-wooded island close ahead.

"There's Braithe now," said Jeppson. "Seining a few mullet for breakfast I reckon. I could get away with one or two myself."

Braithe, up to his knees in the water, saw them at the same moment and straightened with a jerk. Letting the net swing away in a long line, he stared fixedly at the boat, as interested as a wild animal is in some unfamiliar object. But, when the distance between them had lessened, and he was able to recognize Jeppson, he took an easier posture and drew in his net. There were fish

in it, as the breaking out of quick swellings and flashes of half-veiled silver testified.

"Hello, Braithe!" called Jeppson. "Can you spare a few of those? We're hungry as sharks."

"Sure I can and welcome," said Braithe. "What brings you-all down this way?"

"The plumers have been up to their old tricks," said Jeppson. "Haven't seen any suspicious characters round, have you?"

Braithe turned, with his net bagging behind him, and followed the slowly moving boat as Jeppson steered her toward a narrow lagoon that ran deep into the heart of the islet.

"I did see a small white craft the other day, with a patched jib," he said. "There was two men in her so far's I could tell. Going over to the rookeries today?"

"We'll have a bite and a smoke first," said the warden. "This afternoon 'll do I reckon. We'll take the tender and row over to Crooked Island. That's the nearest. Better come along."

"Don't know but what I will," responded Braithe. "Company ain't so common I want to get shut of it the first day."

The bite and the smoke were followed on the

warden's part by a solid nap; but, tired as Bob was, the novelty of the place and of their quest kept him wide awake. He waited impatiently for the heavy-eyed Jeppson to bestir himself. It was past the hour of three before this happened, but at last the tender was unhitched and drawn alongside. Bob and Braithe sat at the oars while the warden, as became his superior station, directed their course from the stern.

It was one of those windless afternoons when sky and sea are as opaque and hard in hue as paint. The skiff with its three occupants slid along without a feather in her wake toward one of the outer clumps of mangroves. A flat of pinkish blue mud ran out like a lip from the stained sedge to meet the deeper blue of the water, and on this threshold the rowers presently drove the boat.

As it ran deep into the viscid substance the tops of the mangroves bristled with what seemed a spike-like bloom, which unfolded to a floating cloud of herons so dense that wing touched wing. The birds hung a moment in confusion, then drifted off in the direction of the mainland.

"Little Blues and some Reddish," said Jeppson,

skating forward over the ooze. "Not a pair of Snowys there so far's I could see."

"That means they've been here," said Braithe. "You're a day behind the fair, sheriff."

"I can't arrest a man before he's committed a crime, can I?" Jeppson snorted. "My job's just begun. Phew! I smell their work."

A mat of decaying fish and other offal is always one of the most salient features of a large heronry. But here the odor was more arresting than usual. It was choking in its rankness. Once through the collar of sedge that ringed the grove the cause was visible. Scores of rotting egrets lay scattered over the punk and stained ooze, vivid and ghastly in their dead whiteness.

Jeppson picked up one long body and silently inspected the back. The filamented plumes, the characteristic ornament of the big snowy bird, were gone. He tossed the body back among the roots. It was unnecessary to examine the others. It was evident that all had been shot and shorn by the same greedy hands.

"Oh, lovely woman-folks," said the warden with amiable cynicism. "When you're marching down Fifth Avenue I reckon you-all don't know

the whole price of the new hats you're wearing."

Braithe picked up a black limb, and thrusting it up into a mangrove, overturned a matted platter of twigs. Two dead and fuzzy fledglings spatted into the mud.

"There's two items in the bill," he said. "Plumb starved to death."

Bob stirred them gently with his foot.

"Well, the account ain't settled yet." Jeppson's tone was official again. "You see the damage, you-all. This job's about three days old, seems to me."

Braithe and Bob sniffed appraisingly.

"Yes, sheriff, and maybe four," said Braithe. "Old enough sure so this place couldn't be called a pleasure resort."

"She ain't really fragrant. Well, I reckon we've seen enough. Three or four days. Hm! They may be off to the coast by now to get clear of the plumes. Those milliners' agents will likely meet 'em there. But they'll be back for the rest. There's some good colonies they haven't touched. Two men you say in a white boat with a brown jib?"

"Running to westward day befo' yesterday," said Braithe. "I took notice because boats ain't so thick as they might be about yere."

"There ought to be footmarks in the mud," ventured Bob. "It's low course tides now and it hasn't rained for a long spell. We could tell whether it was two, or how many."

Jeppson winked at Braithe.

"How's he for a deputy! Ain't he a Sherlock Holmes?"

"Deputy for you? Is that so!" Braithe looked with amused interest at Bob, whose cheeks were bright with sudden color. "He's sure husky, anyway."

"Yes, sah, he's deputy warden, deputy cook and deputy dish washer," laughed Jeppson. "You're all right, Bob, and there's something in your idea, but I don't see as it would pay us to go back. It was those fellows with the brown jib sure enough."

Bob could stick to an idea in a diffident way. He said no more about it, but as they rowed back to the sloop it returned persistently to his mind that it might be a good plan to examine the flat. He had been so pleased and proud over his

appointment, and he wanted to be something else besides deputy cook and deputy dish washer.

After supper he sat in the cock-pit, leaving Jeppson and Braithe below in the little cabin foul with tobacco smoke. He could hear the warden questioning his companion concerning his lonely life on the key, and he judged from the answers that Braithe led a lazy existence, fishing and shooting and occasionally dredging for sponges and other marketable products of the sea which he could exchange on the mainland for such luxuries as coffee and tobacco.

But the talk did not long interest Bob. The sloop lay in a small bayou screened by mangroves, a place more intimate and fascinating than the wider water outside, and especially so at night, when it was so full of phosphorescent life that it seemed trembling on the edge of ignition.

The least disturbance of the surface kindled a dancing ring of sparks, and now and then a porpoise or a crevalle rushed by trailing a wake so vivid that it dazzled Bob's eyes. And once some predatory fish gave chase to a school of mullet. Their swift movements etched on the black surface a maze of glittering lines and pools of greenish

flame that broke out now here, now there, with the uncertainty of tropical lightning, and made Bob tingle from head to foot with a pleasure he could not define.

This was only one of its phases. In the screening dark the ducks chattered under the banks; sociable talk, quite different from the flock calls and alarm signals of the day. Coons came down among the mangrove roots and cried tremulously. Subdued splashings made the shadows doubly mysterious. It was nature free from the repressive influence of Bob and Company.

By and by Braithe went home, stilling the cove by his foot-falls on the bank. Then Jeppson, yawning, suggested that they turn in.

It was a different world the next morning in which Bob was important again. After breakfast the warden swung himself to the mangrove knees to which the sloop was made fast, saying that he meant to search the key and would not be back before dinner. The prospect of freedom sent Bob energetically to work, and when the dishes were dried and the cabin tidied, he got into the skiff and slipped down the cove.

Beyond the mangrove walls light and warm

color met him. The sea sparkled cheerfully and the clean keys stretched away on either hand like a school of sunning leviathans. The bright, barren region had been once the favorite rendezvous of pirate vessels. The undisturbed sand of its keys had been trampled by the bare feet of hundreds of buccaneers and lighted by the fires at which they roasted their beef and counted their rich spoils.

The color of those days still lingered for Bob. As he rowed along he conjured up one picture after another; the rakish schooners scudding in with black flags flapping; the bands of bullies leaping in their rough games; the bonfires painting the night skies; the wild carousals in which fortunes passed from one reckless hand to another; and finally the rapacious seaward plunge again. Against this background of faded history Bob himself and Jeppson and the lazy Braithe seemed dull and wooden figures.

The shock of the skiff grounding on the flat scattered the pictures and Bob stepped out smiling half regretfully. Those had been stirring if dangerous days. Life was a little too placid now.

The flat, full of small animalculae, was good feeding ground for shore birds. Near the edge of the water a band of footprints made an intricate lace-like pattern, but higher up there were no tracks in the sun-crusted surface until Bob reached the place where they had walked the day before.

The marks were unmistakable and Bob passed on toward the eastern end of the flat. There was nothing in that direction. Turning, he retraced his steps, and west of the skiff he found a single line of prints defined in the firm mud.

He looked around, conscious of a buccaneerish feeling, and humoring it while his gray eyes twinkled. His imagination made the moment dramatic. But after all, this might be the trail of some harmless fisherman drawn to the swamp by the need of firewood, and he followed it with soberer second thoughts until he reached a crushed and yellowish break in the reeds strewn with empty cartridges.

The cartridges told the story. He picked up one and examined it. The plume hunter had used black powder and a twelve gauge gun. Such a load and such a bore were so common that the fact was of small importance. If the swamp could give

no further clue to the identity of the law-breaker Bob would have little news for the warden.

The swamp gave out nothing but the bitter odor of the slain egrets, but on retracing his steps Bob noticed that the right boot of the hunter had a bar-shaped patch across the sole that left a distinct impression in the mud. Here at last was something significant. It was a broad, thick patch. Bob, with forehead wrinkled, could see it in his mind's eye; but somehow he could not rise above it. Study the tracks as he might he could construct no figure of a man from them.

"I reckon that fellow Holmes could have made something out of this," he thought. "It wasn't the men with the brown jib, anyway. Leastways there was only one at this job. He used a twelve gauge and had a patch on his right boot and stepped kinder long. Hm!"

He scratched his puzzled head.

"And I can't figure out the answer any better than what I could this morning."

It was still two hours before noon when he reached the sloop again. He stopped only long enough to tie the skiff to her stern and then swung himself across the mangrove knees to firm soil.

Here he struck upon a path which wound like a deer trail through the cabbage palms and scrub, and brought him presently to Braithe's shack of whitened driftwood thatched with a thick crust of palmetto fans.

He drew the pin from the staple and stepped in. It was a man's nest. Everything there spoke of a life reduced to the simplest terms; a life of physical effort purely. With a cutlass and a pile of pieces of eight on the table it might have passed as the retreat of some buccaneer, Bob thought. But those picturesque days had gone.

The room was lighted by a large rectangular opening in the wall opposite the unkempt bunk, which had the stale and matted look of the form of a hare. As Bob stood examining the place with curious eyes the doorway was suddenly darkened by Braithe's figure. He had a cast net and a string of mullet in his hands, and a handkerchief tied about his black hair.

"Hullo!" he said with an air that dispelled Bob's sudden consciousness of being a trespasser. "Hit's lucky I got back early. Where's the sheriff? Got any more ideas about those fellows yet?"

"Haven't had much time," replied Bob. "Been fishing?"

Braithe tossed the string on to the greasy table.

"Hit's mullet, day in and day out, with me. There ain't much variety in any way to this place. You fellows are a Godsend. Set down. The bunk's as soft as anything, I reckon."

He himself took one of the rough stools and crossing his legs began to unlace his boots. After much tugging and grunting he relieved himself of the salt-dampened leather.

"D' you mind tossing me those moccasins, under the bunk there? At the foot. Thanks. Hm! Hit shorely does feel good to get your feet into light gear. I'd wear 'em right along this weather, but I cut my toe on a horse-winkle and I have to favor it."

He kicked the heavy shoes into the centre of the floor and stretched out his legs luxuriously.

"So the sheriff ain't got any new ideas. Where'd you say he was?"

"Somewhere round here," said Bob. He got up and stared absently about the room. "He said he'd patrol the island and be back to dinner. You've got a right smart house here."

"She holds me alright and no taxes to pay. Sit down, suh, and make yo'self comf'able. Don't you fret about dinner. We'll eat hit right yere and I'll cook hit. The sheriff'll shorely drop in bye-m-by."

Bob looked at Braithe's hospitable, smiling face and his eyes flickered.

"Alright, sir," he said; but instead of resuming his seat he moved slowly about the room examining the implements with which its walls were decorated. He paused finally in front of a pair of well-oiled guns, and Braithe, though his back was turned, hit instinctively upon the attraction.

"You won't find another pair like that in South Fluridy," he boasted. "That top one she can crack bone at seventy-five yards. I don't have to do no stretching when I fire her. She just naturally reaches out to 'em. Yes, sah, she throws shot plenty hard."

His face softened with the true gunner's love for his implements, and the little stir of pleasurable emotion sent his hand into his pocket for pipe and tobacco.

Bob lifted the gun from its peg and threw the top-lever over. The breech tilted and he saw the

brass bases and undented caps of a pair of cartridges.

"Look out, she's loaded," said Braithe. He held a match to the black tobacco and glanced over his shoulder. "I reckon I wouldn't be good for much if I got her charge in the back at this range."

"You ain't good for much right now!" Bob's tone, oddly raucous, stripped the words bare of any possibly humorous suggestion.

Braithe's hand with the dead match in it hung over the bowl and the lips that had started to curve amusedly round the stem of the pipe flattened with a twitch. Bob closed the gun gently. The resonant click of the breech falling into its bed rang in the silence with something of the solemnity of a clock striking in the night.

"What!" cried Braithe in a rather high voice. His hand dropped limply. Everything save his eyes expressed a sort of numbed wonder, but they were fixed and very bright.

"There's a patch on your boot," said Bob, shaking a little. "I saw it right now. And I found this on the blanket."

He opened his hand and displayed a silvery

barb from an egret's plume, hardly coarser than a hair.

"I went back to the flat this morning and I found where you walked. I know it was you now, 'count of the patch. There were forty shells there — and what have you got to show for 'em here? 'Hit's mullet, day in and day out, with me,' you say. You wasn't after meat. It was plumes!"

He paused, breathless. Braithe's throat pulsed.

"You lie!" he said. "You —"

"Sit still!" The dropped muzzle of the gun lent emphasis to Bob's order, and Braithe, rigid, sat poised on the stool. The frank and welcoming warmth had been struck from his face, leaving it as hard and aggressive as the beak of a hawk. His coarse hair looked longer and blacker than before; the yellow handkerchief bound about it seemed all at once barbaric and completed the resemblance dawning in Bob's mind. Yesterday and to-day had their likeness after all, and Braithe was at heart a buccaneer with as little regard for anything except weapons or superior strength as the men who had once divided their violently acquired gold here on this very key. Bob's anger rose.

"You'd have jumped at me, would you! It's lucky I had the gun. And you'd pretend you ain't the man we want!"

"Pretend!" Braithe's voice was harsh with scorn and indignation. "I don't have to. Put up that gun. What — Ha! Yere's the sheriff. He'll — "

"He'll listen to me," said Bob, as Jeppson stepped into the room. "Warden, I've got our man. The plumes are here somewheres. In this room. Look for 'em, warden. Try the bunk first."

Jeppson blinked from one to the other, his puckered face showing the effort of his slow mind to grasp the situation.

"What right have you-all to search my house?" said Braithe. "Where's yere warrant for hit?"

"Warrant!" The familiar word seemed to bring the warden out of his fog. His expression assumed some of its customary placid self-conceit. "I don't need a warrant to search a squatter's house."

He stepped to the bunk and tossed back the wad of blankets and mattress.

"Hold on there!" snarled Braithe.

"Hold on yourself," replied the warden.

He drew out a long, stiff pasteboard box and threw the cover aside. His cheeks puffed out like apples.

"Ha! Ah ha!" he exclaimed, and his big face expanded in a sort of ogreish enjoyment. "Keep the gun on him, deputy."

There they were, the delicate, spraying plumes. The box was full of them, some so fresh that their nibs were still as white and waxy as clots of milk.

"You're shore a cute one," said Jeppson, shaking his head. "The ladies of New York, God bless their unthinking little hearts, will miss you some."

He drew a pair of steel bracelets from his pocket and advanced majestically toward Braithe. The detected culprit winced when he felt them snap about his wrists, but he tossed his head defiantly and pressed his lips together.

"The last item on the bill, my man," said the warden. "So you thought you could snap your fingers under my nose, eh!"

Braithe looked at him with a wry grin.

"Yes, and so I might have," he said. "But that deputy dishwasher of yours has got something on each side of his nose, and that's eyes."

CHAPTER X

IN PIGEON HAMMOCK

THE warden dropped the letter beside his chair and stretched his bleached and unsteady hands before the pitch-pine blaze.

"It's mean to be laid up when there's a call like this," he complained. "Sandhill cranes never did seem like game to me and quails is ondignified little birds, but you can't find fault with a turkey whether you sleep well or not. It cuts right acrost the grain to hear that some ornery fellows are trapping turks and shipping 'em to the Tarragonia — to fat up a lot o' rich Yankees!"

"How long do you cal'late to be sick?" asked Bob.

The warden hitched his chair somewhat nearer to the blaze.

"It'll take about a cord o' wood to thaw me out this time, Bob. I'm chilled clean to the marrer."

"Well," began Bob with some hesitation and

eyes bent upon the red coals, "it seems like I might run down there and look 'round while you get warmed up. It wouldn't do any harm, would it?"

Jeppson lifted his drooping head and eyed his young assistant, half-amused, half-irritated. But it was not in him to be jealous. A blind confidence in his own abilities effectually prevented him from seeing or feeling those of others, and he looked upon Bob as a tool, useful only when he chose to make him so.

"H'm!" he said. "You did all right last month with that fellow Braithe we caught plume hunting, I'll allow. But without me you'll find it mighty different. If you go careful and don't say nothing or do anything, I dunno's you'll do much harm — or much good either. I'll join you soon's this chill's gone."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob, as pleased as if the careless permission had been a command, and after a few moments more of talk he left the sick man shivering over his fire.

He was respectful and even diffident, was Bob, in the presence of his superior, but he had a mind of his own and something moreover that the war-

den never would have, a pair of observant eyes and a love for nature. A knowledge of the ways of birds and beasts seemed to Jeppson of no value in his profession, and there he erred, for the trail of the hunter is closely correlated to that of the hunted.

The brisk, complacent warden, radiating an atmosphere of officialdom, seemed to thrust aside the shy advances of nature; but this time Bob was to make his entry, at least, alone. Where Jeppson would have been conscious of nothing but the jolting wagon and the length of the pale road, his assistant felt the mystery of the life, hushed yet virile, that thickened about him with every additional mile beyond the disturbing borders of the little town. The gregarious pines seemed sentient creatures standing in watchful ranks, their tops thick with conjectures about him. Some of them were stately and dignified; others almost threatening, and some were weak, unhealthy or actually deformed. But lusty or ailing they were the lords of this soil and looked down upon the rank palmetto scrub as upon a coarse and permanent peasantry.

Occasionally the uniformity of the open forest

was broken by a "hammock," a clot of renegade trees crowding blackly together as if conspiring against the rule of the pines. One of these, or rather a series of such matted groves united under the name of Pigeon Hammock, was Bob's destination. Long before it was reached the road faded to an indefinite strip of cleared soil, so little travelled that the plump red roots of the palmetto roughened its surface. Ignorant, poor and lawless the crackers of the hammock took small interest in the outside world and resented any expression of its curiosity in their direction.

To Bob's relief the gun and bag of cartridges together with his youthful appearance suggested no unusual possibilities. At least when he applied for board and lodging at the first house he came to, the only concern of the owner, Mr. Gale Travis, was over the matter of remuneration, and that satisfactorily settled he was all hospitality. At the conclusion of the bargain a woman with sagging hair and dress appeared in the doorway, her arms somewhat truculently akimbo. Behind her peeped a row of circular-eyed children.

"My wife, sah," announced Mr. Travis, proudly, but without removing his feet from their

elevated position on the verandah post. "And the young-uns — Millicent, Mabel and Mortimer!"

Bob's bow was met with a hard stare. He turned to the man.

"You ain't Fluridy born, I reckon," he said.

Travis was surprised and pleased.

"Huccome you to guess that, sah? I reckon book-learnin' shows on a man. No, sah, I'm from Car'lina." Then looking with new interest at Bob he added: "How old might you be, sah?"

"About old enough to be brother to Mrs. Travis, I reckon."

This naked flattery was received with appreciation. The woman thawed into a sudden laugh, and her husband, smiting his bony knee, exclaimed:

"You're smart enough to find the turks, I reckon!"

"I hope so," said Bob, smiling. "Can you tell me where to look?"

Travis's manner became dignified.

"No, sah. My time's took up keeping hogs out o' this yere truck patch." He picked up a short-

handled whip and with a deft turn of the wrist sent the long, heavy lash swinging out in a flight that ended in a report as sharp as that of a rifle. "I'll bust 'em wide open if they come trifling round yere," he added belligerently.

Mr. Travis's labors were a fair sample of the activities of Pigeon Hammock. Bob had never seen a place so poor and apathetic. The dozen shacks were all falling slowly to pieces and weeds and bushes were gaining ground in every garden patch. The gardens and a common herd of gaunt hogs furnished practically the sole sustenance of the village, though occasionally a lank cracker sauntered forth into the woods in a half-hearted pursuit of game.

From the beginning Bob was made to understand that his presence was not wanted on these hunting trips. And he was quite willing to go alone. He knew that these surly, suspicious crackers would hide any evidences of law breaking from him whether they were satisfied that he was a market gunner or not. They were as clannish as mountain men.

It was a turkey country, but the birds had been hunted so much that their ordinary craftiness was

doubled. Day after day Bob crept through miles of stiff palmetto and thickets of live and water-oaks. Sometimes he shot a few quail or a string of wild pigeons for the sake of appearances, but of the royal game he found no trace until he gave up still-hunting and took to "calling."

His place of ambush, a grove of water-oaks, was selected after much thought. In it he built a screen of boughs behind which he sat and sucked upon a hollow wing-bone, imitating now the prideful yelp of the gobbler, and now the demure clucking of the hen.

One afternoon he got an answer. Softening his note with his hollowed hand he drew the bird nearer until he could hear his stealthy tread among the dead ferns. Suddenly he appeared, a great gobbler, swollen and broad of tail, with wattles as ruddy as Christmas berries. Boldly he looked about him for the hen whose soft invitation had brought him. Then he heard Bob stir and perceived his danger, and his puffed plumage sank. The scrub shook under the beating of heavy wings and with a glint of brown and bronze the great body rose and hurtled off among the water-oaks.

Bob threw down his screen to get a clearer vision. The gobbler thundered through the grove and out into the open where the sun struck metallic sparks from his burnished back. On he flew over the still palmettos, a burly figure, straight for a distant clump of oaks at the edge of which the big wings set stiffly.

After an hour's work Bob marked down the flock of which the inquisitive gobbler was a member in a plain of scrub a half mile beyond the grove. As the sun sank they came together and moved rapidly off in single file, rising at last for the short flight to the roost. Bob was close behind them, and collecting a heap of grass and ferns he burrowed into it and was soon sound asleep.

He awoke before daylight and lay peeping out of his nest while the east grew warm. With the first red gleam of light the turkeys began to gobble and bubble gutturally, mincing back and forth along the live-oak limbs. Then the old gobbler leader launched himself quietly into the air and the whole hungry flock followed. Unconscious that they were watched they proceeded straight for the ground on which, morning after morning, they were accustomed to look for their breakfast.

Sure of this important fact Bob, decidedly hungry himself, started back to Pigeon Hammock. The mist so common in this region still clouded the woods and gemmed the coarse grass with drops of moisture, but the sun was fast dispelling it. Only a few pearl-colored pennons drifted wanly in the daylight when he saw the chimney of Rufus King's house sending up the black smoke of a new fire.

King had seemed to Bob an unusually surly man, and he turned from his course to avoid passing through the unkempt yard. But as he went by he saw the cracker sitting on the doorstep with his head in his hands and such a forlorn look about him that instinctively he stopped and asked him if anything was the matter.

King raised his head and stared at him a moment, not resentfully but as if he had not heard.

"My 'Gusta's sick," he said. Then with a sudden intensity of gaze he added, "Do you know any doctoring?"

Bob walked up to the door.

"Not much. Can I see her?"

King led the way into the house. Like all the

rest in the hammock it had only two rooms, a combined kitchen and living-room and a bed-room. The girl lay on a corn-shuck mattress, flushed and bright-eyed. Bob threw open the small window and then touched the hot little forehead with his fingers.

"I reckon it's malaria," he said. "Pore little kid. She wants the right kind of good grub and a doctor. She's pretty."

"She favors her mammy." King's tone was harsh.

Bob looked up inquiringly.

"She's where we-all won't never see her," said King. "I reckon you know where that is. The chills and fever took her, too."

"Get a doctor for the young 'un. She's sick, but he can fix her."

With unnecessary caution they had stepped to the door. The child, tense with fever, was quite oblivious of their presence. King laughed strangely.

"A doctor and good grub! Hit's easy enough fo' you to say hit. Where's the money to come from? Hit costs a dollar fo' the doctor and I hain't got hit!"

Bob himself had none to spare, but he felt a thrill of pleasure that he had, at least, the necessary sum.

"Will you take this?" He held out two silver coins. "You can pay it back. But it's no time to talk about that. The young-un needs it."

King took the money mechanically. Then his expression so changed that Bob, embarrassed, looked away.

"Her mammy's buried under that live-oak yonder, suh. I reckon hit'll be thar over her when some rich folks' gravestones won't be standing. She never had no money, but she seemed to get a heap out'n life. She laughed right easy, and she gave a heap, suh. I've been thinking of what she gave me. I reckon hit was all a man really needs. There ain't anything mo' fo' me now, 'cept 'Gusta — and she's her mammy's baby.

"I ain't aiming to trouble you, suh, but I have to say hit. Hit was two months ago she died and the doctor 'lowed he wouldn't come no mo' 'cept I paid him fo' waiting on her. I sold most everything, but hit ain't all paid yet. I reckon this dollar'll bring him though. Thank you, suh."

"If it don't," said Bob gently, "I know one it will bring."

The next day Bob was up before sunrise and on his way to the feeding ground of the turkeys. Everyone in the little community seemed still abed. Some hogs that had taken advantage of the hour scampered from the gardens, woofing with astonishment. This time Bob knew just where to go, and it did not take him long to reach the place; but the turkeys had got there before him. His footsteps sent them booming off in all directions.

As he watched them vanish the heavy throbbing of their wings seemed to linger with curious insistence in his ears. But the sound was more muffled and irregular than that made by a free flying bird, and immediately he guessed the reason.

He had not expected such luck. Guided by the sound he ran forward until he came upon the trap, an old fish seine hung upon low posts, with an entrance like that of a lobster-pot. Two frightened turkeys bounced about in it with a tremendous flapping.

Some palmettos furnished a heavy cover close

" THE GREAT BIRD HURTLED OFF AMONG THE WATER-OAKS."

by and Bob slipped into them and waited with pounding heart for his man. The denouement was at hand and he hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. This was his own success, but what would the warden say? And who was the trapper? It might be Travis himself.

The daylight strengthened and the mocking-birds began to sing. A cardinal, rich as a flake from the eastern sky, alighted on a branch above the trap and looked at the prisoners with a whistle of astonishment. Across the brightening spaces visible between the tops of the oaks a buzzard wheeled, the under coverts of his wings as dense as black velvet against the steel-gray flight shafts. In an adjoining hammock a squirrel chirred. And as the gold tinge grew, the mysterious daytime hum of the woods rose and trembled in the air.

A myriad small sounds combine to make this hum, but they are all homogeneous. It is easy to detect a foreign note, however faint, among them, and presently Bob was aware of such a note. He could hardly hear it, but he knew it was not made by bird or wild animal. A ground-dove heard it and whirred off on wings

as fluted and rosy as sea-shells. Then the sound became a light steady crunching, accompanied by the crackle of scrub and ferns as the man forced his way through them.

Bob, unable to see plainly, heard the turkeys thrash as the man approached. There was a wild and pitiful scrambling in the trap for a few moments, followed by silence. Then Bob jumped out of the cover and faced — King.

The cracker, half crouching over the trap, stared at him without moving.

"What do you want here?" he said.

"You!" said Bob. Mechanically he threw back his coat and displayed the little nickel shield.

King's eyes glittered as brightly as the bit of metal.

"You want me? What fo?"

"I'm a game warden," said Bob, "and I've caught you in the act." But there was no triumph in his tone. Taller by half a head and broader of shoulder, he looked down upon the pale, underfed cracker with pity.

"Sho!" breathed King. "I reckon you will get your dollar back and mo' too."

Bob flushed.

"Yes, you'll pay it back. I ain't worrying."

"You'd get half my fine if I could pay hit!" cried King. "Yes, suh, I've trapped a few turks to pay the doctor fo' tending her when she died. I ain't sorry. Seems like it isn't no great harm. But I'm sorry you caught me, 'count of 'Gusta."

"You might 've thought of her before," said Bob. "You've broken the law, but it don't seem such a terrible bad break. Game laws ain't like some laws. Perhaps it's wrong, but 'Gusta needs you and every honest cent you can get. If you will swear to quit trapping we'll jest forget it all."

King straightened slowly and dropped the dead bird.

"You ain't going to arrest me?"

"No, I ain't," said Bob. "It may be wrong for me to do it, being an officer, but — there's 'Gusta."

King's face turned dead white.

"I swear I never will trap any mo'," he said huskily.

"That'll be all right," said Bob.

There was a moment of silence. After the manner of men, both King and Bob felt shy be-

cause their hearts had been touched. Then King with a half-audible "Thank you, suh," turned away, leaving the dead turkeys on the ground.

Bob heaved a sigh. What was his moment of success? The warden would account it as failure; but it was not wholly ashes in his own mouth.

For some time after King left, Bob sat by the dead turkeys thinking hard. He was in an awkward situation: officially he had not done his duty; and, though he did not regret that fact, it was to be supposed that Jeppson would. Bob did not entertain for a moment any thought of concealing his breach of trust, nor could he see any way of bettering King's case. There was nothing for him to do but tell the whole truth and resign from his office.

Strengthened by this resolution he picked up one of the dead birds, and slinging it on his shoulder, started on the back trail. The knowledge that his brief career as Jeppson's deputy was over was rather pleasing than otherwise. Somehow this tracking down of men, law breakers though they were, was depressing work. He had felt sorry even for the rascal Braithe. To

confine such a man was like caging a liberty-loving hawk; both were children of nature to whom the freedom of the wild places was as necessary as the breath of life.

When he arrived in sight of King's shack the door stood wide open on its leather hinges as if the owner, in his perturbation, had forgotten to close it. Knocking on the lintel Bob stepped inside. There was the clink of a pan in the tiny kitchen and King appeared with a piece of raw bacon in his hand.

"Hello!" he said, and looked from Bob to the turkey in awkward surprise.

"I thought the girl might like this," said Bob. "What's done's done, and there's no use leaving them both to rot. A little soup from it won't hurt her."

King took the bird, and mechanically tested the plumpness of its breast. His drawn face lightened.

"Come and set," he said, and moving quickly into the kitchen, drew a stool from against the wall and flicked his sleeve across it. "I'm going for the doctor directly, but this will hearten her a heap, I reckon. She don't seem to relish bacon.

Sick folks want different grub from what's common to 'em other times."

Evidently the first sight of Bob had aroused the cracker's suspicions; but when he realized that sympathy alone had inspired the visit, his cramped nature expanded in a rare glow of hospitality. He brought Bob a dipper of water sweetened with the crude juice of the sugarcane, lowered the rag across the window to keep the sunlight out of his guest's eyes, and kept up a flow of frank talk concerning himself as he shuffled about preparing dinner for the sick child.

It was plain that he was bursting with gratitude and eager to express it in some practical form; for, as he moved about, he picked up in turn his gun and some poor little belongings that passed as ornaments and seemed to weigh them, with one meditative eye on Bob. But the right combination of feeling and gift was not reached till he took a small glass jar from the cupboard. A look of relief and determination came over his face and he stepped up and thrust it into Bob's hands.

"Here's a little present I want you to have, suh," he said. "Maybe you can make some-

thing out of hit. The nigger that gave hit to me swore hit was worth a pot o' money."

Bob looked at the jar. It was perfectly plain, originally of a bottle-green color, but so worn and glazed by time and other agents that it was as lustreless as ground glass. Its stopper was broken to a mere stub. It looked as valueless as an old tin can.

"Open hit, suh," said King. "There's writing inside."

Bob removed the stopper and drew out what seemed to be a small roll of parchment. It was thick and stiff; but by pressing it on his knee, he was able to keep it spread and read the following words, evidently written with something broader than a pen:

— — Beef Island — —
From the Four Palmetoes 400 Feet North East by North. The Top of the Liveoak then Lies due North. From this Point It Lies East 100 Yards.
M.

"Ha!" cried King. "That's hit. Buried gold, old black Henry said hit was on his death-bed.

Hit was all before his time, but he got hit from a sailor-man who knew."

"Do you believe it?" asked Bob smiling. "I never heard of any Beef Island."

"I'm not a coast man," said King. "I couldn't tell you about the island, but I reckon hit's off there. Old Henry said hit was and he'd sailed a powerful lot. I dragged him home after the tree fell on him, and he pulled this bottle out of his trunk and give hit to me jes' before he died. 'There's a mess o' gold in that for someone,' he says; 'and I'd like for you to have hit 'cause you brought me here to die decent in bed.'"

"Why don't you try to find it yourself?" asked Bob.

King shook his head dispiritedly.

"I'm not a sea-faring man and I don't know one end of a boat from t'other," he said. "I've got my 'backy and I've got my house, and — she's buried out under that liveoak like I told you. No, suh, I reckon to stay right yere long's I last. But I want for you to find hit, suh."

"Well," said Bob, "it seems some late to hunt for it now. But thank you just the same. If anything comes of it I won't forget you, King."

He held out his hand which the cracker pressed gratefully.

"I know you won't," said King. "And thank you for what you've done for me and mine."

CHAPTER XI

TO CAMEL CAY

HALF-WAY back on his return to Ordville, Bob met Jeppson, and inducing him to leave the wagons and walk beyond the range of the drivers' ears, he told him what had taken place. Without waiting for any comment, and indeed astonishment seemed to deprive the warden of the use of his tongue, Bob humbly requested leave to tender his resignation.

Jeppson, still somewhat shaky from his attack of malaria, mopped his forehead, blew his nose, and loosened the collar round his thick throat. Having cleared himself for action, he looked Bob sternly in the eye.

"If you'd arrested that fellow King," he boomed, "I'd have taken your resignation hand over fist, Bob Leach. Law be swizzled! You did a good thing by the law when you refused to do your duty, and a better thing by human

nature. That cracker won't trap any more turkeys, or shoot out of season either, I reckon, and if he'd been fined or jailed, like as not he'd be at it again, harder'n ever, soon's he got clear. You send your man back and we'll go home."

"Of course," the warden resumed when Bob was seated by his side and the team turned toward Ordville, "of course, the sick kid makes all the difference. It seems to me, speaking unofficially, it was a case that called for discretion, and discretion pretty often means mercy. I reckon I'm allowed some latitude in this business, and I say you did about right; but it's just as well to keep it between us two. Let some folks know you're human and they think you'll swallow any old story. Now what's this stuff about a bottle?"

Bob produced the glass jar from his pocket and removed the little scroll of parchment. Jeppson studied the inscription with a sceptical smile, and smacked it with his open hand.

"Don't think it's worth much?" asked Bob.

"Not the thing it's written on," said the warden.

"I never heard of Beef Is. myself," commented Bob, disparagingly.

"Well, as to that, there's a Beef Is. all right, or there was. That's a kind of old-time name for it, and I reckon it's true enough that there was cattle on it once which the pirates used to kill and barbecue. The island's down on the charts now as Camel Cay, owing to the hump on it. But as for any gold being buried there, I'll eat all you or anybody else 'll find."

With a contemptuous laugh Jeppson popped the scroll into the bottle and handed it back to Bob.

"Better heave it into the scrub," he advised. "It'll unsettle your mind to no purpose."

But Bob put it into his pocket instead. Now that he knew there was a Beef Island the thing assumed a different aspect. A longing began to grow in him to visit the place and see whether or not there was a clump of four palms there.

"I reckon I'll keep it just for fun," he said. "Of course somebody may have done it for a joke; but it seems like they would have made it plainer. Seems like they would have signed it with a whole name too, and not just an M. Folks would hardly bite at such blind bait as that."

Jeppson mused a moment.

"Well, maybe it was clear enough when it was written. M. now, could stand for Morgan, couldn't it? Everybody knew him in those days, and the story of the booty he took and buried. Why, that rascal got barrels of gold and silver, I reckon. It is strange, what became of it. But I don't want to hunt for it myself. Might as well look for the ships he sunk out at sea, I think."

This was undoubtedly sound common sense, but by recalling the name of the famous pirate Jeppson closed Bob's ears to everything but the insistent small voice within him. Morgan! Why hadn't he thought of him at once? — the boldest, wildest rogue of all that predatory band. Barrels of gold and silver certainly had fallen into those bloody, greedy hands, and, as Jeppson said, what had become of them? Buried some of them must have been, and why not on the lonely, outlying Camel Cay. Pirates had gathered there. They had given the cay its early name. Morgan, as well as the rest, must have shared in its fierce hunts and fiercer feasts, and what more natural than to bury his surplus there before taking to the perils of the sea again?

Jeppson would have seen only folly in such imaginings, so Bob kept them to himself for the present. Jim would rise to them he knew, and Jim should share the treasure, if treasure there proved to be.

The trip seemed endless. At last they emerged from the woods into the glare of Ordville, and dismounting from the wagon, Bob set out in search of Jim. He was not at home nor at his father's hardware store. No one knew where he was till Bob met Rufus sauntering down the dusty road with a string of cat-fish. Rufus "'lowed" the missing one was busy at Brown's pier; "An' I 'spect he's got dat ole wharf jus' bending wid cats," he added.

"I might have known he was there," said Bob, smiling, and started for the pier, taking the short cut along the shore of the lagoon.

The narrow strip of muddy sand was alive with black-breasted plover, willet and tattlers, but though they ran and wheeled before him within easy range, Bob felt no inclination to return to the bungalow for his gun. In fact he hardly heard their pipings, or observed their graceful evolutions on the wing, in which each flock veered

and twisted as one bird. The mystery of the glass jar had taken firm hold of him. In imagination he was already on Camel Cay, digging for Morgan's gold.

At the anchorage by Brown's pier were several bateaux. All but one had their sails furled, and Bob, familiar with the cut of every local boat, saw that this one was a stranger. She was a large craft with a narrow jib and a filthy mainsail. A couple of men were lolling in her cockpit, but Bob could not distinguish their features. He gave them only a brief glance, and waved his hand at Jim who was sitting on the end of the pier, patiently bobbing his cat-fish line.

"I reckon he'll lose interest in cats when he sees what I've got," thought Bob. "Jim's enough of a sportsman to jump at a game like this."

Jim, indeed, jumped in more senses than one as Bob told his story. He let his line fall into the water, and leaping to his feet, joined Bob in the little shed when the latter produced the jar with a flourish. Side by side on the bench they bent over the yellowed bit of parchment. Jim's tongue was in his cheek as his gaze devoured the writing, and his bare toes worked on the

planking. There was nothing sceptical about Jim. He was positive that their fortunes were made. He wished to hear the story all over again, for in his first state of rapturous wonder his mind had not been able to linger delightfully on the various details.

So Bob began his recital again, the parchment spread on his knee. He was interrupted by many questions from Jim, and at last brought it down to the talk between himself and Jeppson, when the warden had supplied the name of the writer of the pamphlet.

"It was Morgan, all right!" exclaimed Jim positively. "The stuff's there if we can find it, and we'll start to-morrow, in the *Emmie E.*"

A doubt suddenly clutched Bob.

"Perhaps it's been found already," he said, "It's years since Morgan put it there. Morgan, himself, Jim, may have gone back for it."

Jim's enthusiasm was not to be dampened by any such supposition.

"I don't believe it," he declared stoutly. "What would the bottle be kept for, then? You can bet that those old niggers knew more than what's written here."

"It's strange they should have believed in it and never looked for it," said Bob.

"Maybe they did," replied Jim. "A nigger's stupid that way. Maybe they couldn't read and only knew what was on the paper by hearsay. And whoever told 'em mixed it up more than likely, so the niggers never did know the right place to look."

It was impossible not to feel cheered by Jim's stout confidence.

"It's reasonable," mused Bob. "Like as not it was just as you say. At any rate we'll start to-morrow in the *Emmie E.*"

"Hurrah!" cried Jim, tossing up his hat.

It struck the roof and came down behind him, falling through the gap between the bench and the rear wall. Jim turned and thrust his hand down to recover it. As he did so a sudden shaft of sunlight streamed through a broad crack as if a shutter had been opened. Jim clapped his eye to the crack and instantly his round face sobered.

"Sh!" he whispered, turning toward Bob. "There's a couple of fellows out there."

If there were eavesdroppers it was rather late

to think of caution. The cat was out of the bag now. But Bob was not inclined to take the thing seriously.

"Come on," he said. "Let's be going." As Jim rose he added in a lower voice: "Take a look at them as we go out."

The men — there were two of them — were total strangers to Bob. They stood close to the thin wall of the shed, smoking their pipes in a matter-of-fact way, though both of them stared pretty hard at the boys.

"They're from that boat," said Jim, as they passed out of hearing. He pointed to the craft Bob had previously noted. "Hard looking gang, I call 'em. Brown said they were turtlers from some place to the south'ard. Do you reckon they heard us?"

"No, I reckon not," replied Bob. "A word or so, maybe, but I'm not worrying."

The end of Brown's pier was a common lounging spot for fishermen, and it was natural enough that the turtlers should walk out there for a glance up and down the lagoon. They had not looked "hard" to Bob, and he thought no more of the incident at the moment. He walked back

with Jim, arranging the details of the trip, which in all probability would extend over several days. To be on the safe side they decided to take enough bacon, hardtack and coffee to last them a week. Fish and fowl could be counted on to add to the bill of fare whenever wanted. A pickaxe and shovel apiece were absolutely necessary, and a blanket to sleep in. With their guns, these would constitute the bulk of their baggage.

"To-morrow at eight, then," said Bob, when their plans had been completed. "I shan't sleep a wink. Jim, suppose we-all really find something!"

"Something!" cried Jim. "We'll find gold, Bob! That's the kind of something it'll be."

His round face shone with earnestness.

"I hope those fellows didn't hear," he added. "A gang like that would do anything for money."

"Pooh!" laughed Bob. "Get the money first, Jim."

"*When* we get it," said Jim, "we'll hold on to it, I reckon. I'll meet you at eight with my kit."

Neither of the boys slept well that night. As soon as daylight came Bob, tired of inaction,

dressed and gathered together his part of the equipment. Though it was not yet six o'clock he hastened toward Brown's pier, thinking to have the boat in readiness by the time Jim appeared.

Jim, however, had been even more restless. He was waiting at the wharf, and the *Emmie's* spread sail and the neatness of her rigging testified as to his impatience. His own kit was stowed aboard, and as soon as Bob's was put away, they hauled up the anchor and pointed the *Emmie E.'s* nose down the lagoon.

"We're off, Bob," cried Jim exultantly. Hardly a word had been exchanged during the hurried embarkation. Now Jim's spirits bubbled over. "This is a great day," he said. "It'll be a bigger one, though, when we come back."

"We'll see," smiled Bob. "We've got a fair wind anyway, and that's a good omen. The *Emmie's* a good boat before the wind."

The breeze was not strong but it was steady. There was little motion on the lagoon. The *Emmie* drew away from the fleet of fishing boats rapidly, and began to drop the cluster of white houses behind her. As she passed the southern

limit of the town Bob glanced back with a little thrill. How would he return? Ashamed of a fool's errand, or with pockets full of Spanish gold? At least, no one was in the secret, not even his family or Jim's, and their failure, if they did fail, would not be common property. Jeppson, of course, knew of the parchment, but in all probability would never think of it again.

Just to make sure that their departure had not been noted, Bob looked back again. The gaff of one of the boats was jerkily ascending her mast. All the other craft lay bare and motionless, their noses cocked into the wind. The sail crawled up and swung out, revealing two long streaks of mildew from gaff to boom.

"Hm!" exclaimed Bob. "Those turtlers are getting under way."

Jim frowned.

"I don't like it," he said uneasily. "They heard us, Bob, you can be sure of that. You take my word for it, they'll follow us."

"Let 'em," said Bob. "If they try to stick to us all day we'll know what to expect. We'll give them a run for it, anyway."

He drew in on the mainsheet and the *Emmie E.*

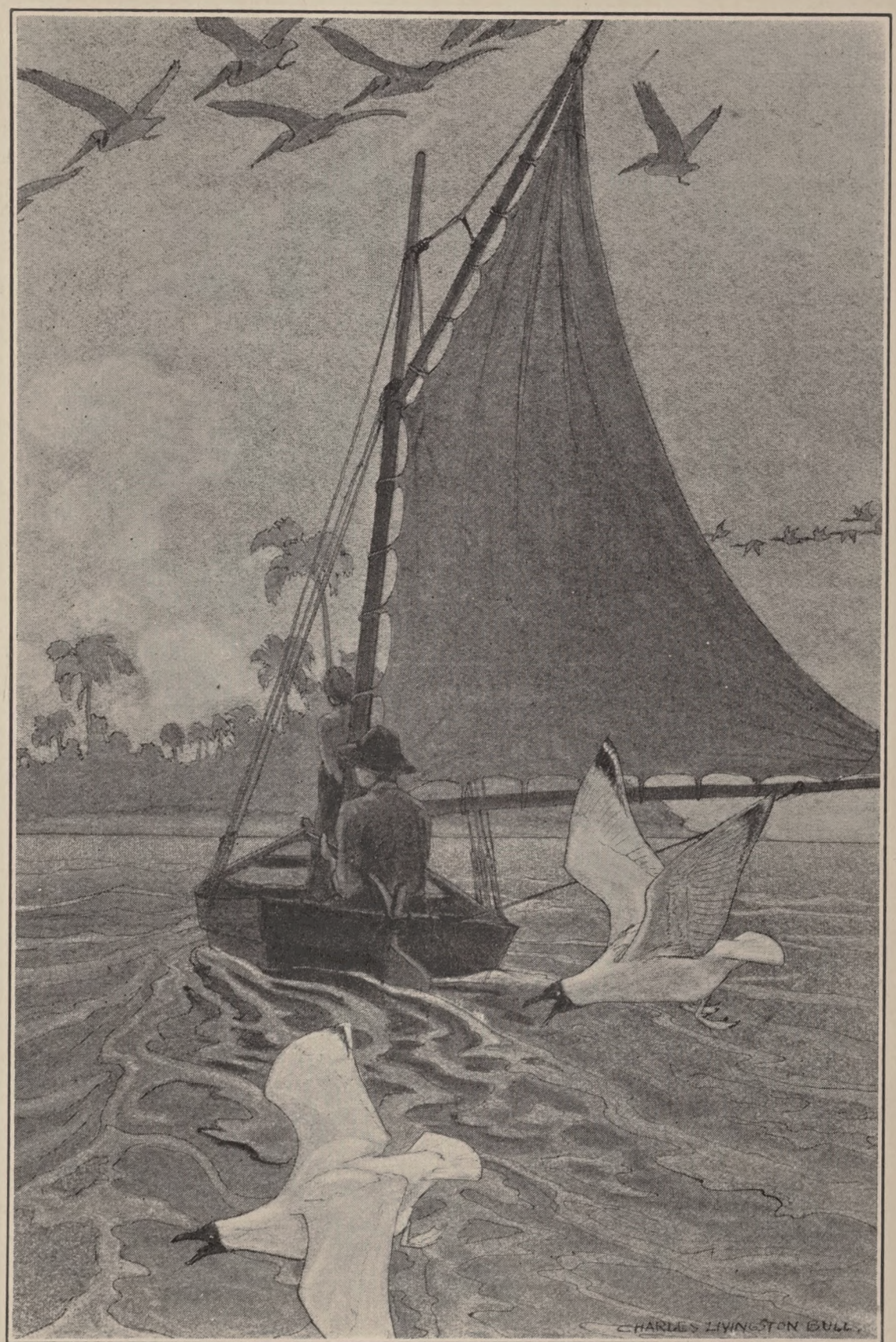
swooped forward with more life. The dark green of the shore slipped by with reassuring quickness; Ordville dropped out of sight behind, and by and by the sail of the turtler's boat was lost in the pearly haze that hung over the water. The craft had not left her anchorage so far as the boys could see.

"Maybe they were only drying the sail," said Bob. "The dew was thick as cream last night."

"What do they care about dew," retorted Jim scornfully. "Look at her; all barnacles and mildew! When they hoist sail they're going to get out. If they heard us talk they won't be in any great hurry. They know where we're going and that's enough for them."

"I don't think they'd follow us if they did hear," said Bob. "It would seem like a wild-goose chase to them."

For six miles it was a straight reach down the lagoon; then the *Emmie E.* was brought about and headed on an eastward course, out among the reefs and mangrove covered islets that lay like green velvet against the rich purple of the water. Not a sail but their own was in sight. Flocks of gulls and terns, blindingly white in the sun,



"FLOCKS OF GULLS AND TERNS CIRCLED AROUND THEM."

circled lazily round them. Long lines of ibises and herons rose from the island rookeries and drifted away like strings of gray and blue smoke. The beautiful and placid scene seemed to receive them with gentle confidence; but nature was not quite as trusting as she looked. Under the sparkling waters she hid sharp-backed reefs and great shoals that lay as so many defences round the islets where her wild children nested.

Fortunately the air was light or the *Emmie E.* would soon have found herself hard aground with miles of mud and water between her and Camel Cay. She touched often, but by quick work and an occasional use of the long sweeps the boys kept her slowly forging ahead, and the strangely humped island lay at last close abeam.

It had a thin white beach and for the rest seemed all wooded. From where the boat lay no tree stood out above its neighbors. Branch locked with branch in an impenetrable union, and the leafy tops formed a uniform coverlet of green.

"How are we going to find the four palms among all those trees," said Jim thoughtfully. "I reckon we've got work ahead of us."

"We can tell better when we land," said Bob, but he, too, was disturbed by the uncompromising aspect of the island. "In the first place we must find some good place to hide the boat in case those turtlers do follow us. A little caution won't do any harm."

To this Jim readily agreed, and the *Emmie E.* slowly skirted the island while the boys scrutinized the shore for a favorable spot to anchor. A number of little coves and lagoons indented the cay, some narrow and deep, others mere scallops in the beach, and presently they passed the mouth of one that instantly appealed to them.

The *Emmie E.* was put about and headed for the opening. It was so narrow that the boat had to be steered with the nicest care to avoid striking the limbs that stretched out over the dark water. Dense ranks of pine and palm and button-wood stood on either bank, their branches heavy with orchids and other parasitic plants. Cactuses and broad ferns grew thick as grass among the tree trunks. It was dim and hushed and cool on the strange little stream, which wound about through the wood and seemed to penetrate to the heart of the island.

The entrance had disappeared; lost behind the rank foliage in which they were buried. The *Emmie's* sail hung motionless in the windless place, and dropping it, the boys forced the boat ahead with the sweeps. It was warm work and they soon had enough of it. Satisfied that they were thoroughly screened they tossed the anchor over. It seemed to fall into the black water with a chuckle, and the noise of the rope rasping the *Emmie's* bow was uncannily loud in the deathly silence of the spot. But the boys' spirits were too high to yield to the gloom of the island.

"It isn't too late to have a look over the place before dark," said Bob. "What do you say?"

"Do you think I could sit here as if it was a doorstep!" exclaimed Jim. "Of course we'll take a look around. Bring the bottle along and I'll carry my gun. We might pick up something good for supper."

It was only a few yards to either bank, and jumping into the tender they drove it ashore with a couple of strokes of the oars. Then tying her painter to a mangrove root and hiding the oars in a thicket, they began to force their way through the ferns and palmetto scrub toward the centre

of the island. Of the two humps or hills that rose there the one to the north was considerably the higher and would undoubtedly afford them a better view. Accordingly the boys directed their course toward it, without stopping to examine the woods by the way, for the sun was low and they wished to get back to the *Emmie E.* before dark.

It was not long before they realized that this would be impossible. The distance to the hump was greater than they had estimated, and the going much harder. The ferns and scrub were dense and tall, and several times they were obliged to cross swampy stretches where muck and water lay knee deep, and the sprawling knees of the mangroves tripped them at every step. Venomous moccasins hissed at them from the clumps of grass rising above the water, and the fear of a close encounter with one of the hideous reptiles made them proceed with the greatest caution.

At last the wet, lower portion of the island was passed, and the ground began to rise before them. The soil rapidly grew dryer and firmer and the undergrowth sparser. The trees stood

much farther apart and wide patches of sky could be seen between their tops. As they mounted the last sharp rise they saw that the summit itself was almost bare, an oval of coarse grass about two hundred feet long, and that the eastern slope was not half so heavily wooded as the side by which they had come. A narrow strip just back of the beach, however, was thick with trees, and as they looked down a great concourse of birds suddenly rose from them and streamed off to the south with clanging cries.

"It's almost sundown," said Bob. "We can't get back before dark and I don't fancy walking among those moccasins at night. I vote we go down this side of the hill and walk round by the beach. It's a little longer but it's open going."

"I'd rather walk twice the distance than go back through those swamps in the dark," agreed Jim. "I wish we had time to do a bit of hunting for those palms."

That was plainly out of the question, however. The lower rim of the sun had touched the sea in the west and already the quick, semi-tropical dusk was gathering round them. It was important that they should gain the beach before the

sun set, for there would be no twilight as in the north, and night would be upon them at once.

Without further delay the boys began to descend the eastern slope. It was a comparatively easy task for the ground was clear and firm, and its slant helped them to keep a rapid pace.

"I reckon this was where the cattle used to browse in the old times," remarked Bob, thoughtfully. "There's good feed here, and none on the other side. It makes me think that this is where we want to look for our marks."

Jim stopped short and looked round in a sudden excitement.

"You've struck it, Bob," he exclaimed, almost solemnly. "You never made a better guess than that in your life. The cattle must have fed here, and the buccaneers would have camped as near 'em as possible. This is the side toward the sea, too, and that's another reason why they would have chosen it. It's my opinion we needn't consider the other side of the island at all."

"We'll bring the *Emmie* round to-morrow and tuck her into one of the coves," said Bob. "I think I'm right. At any rate we can't do better than work over this side first."

Filled with enthusiasm they crossed the space between them and the strip of woods back of the beach in quick time. The sun was more than half down. As they entered the thick growth of trees they lost what little light the sky still held, and it was almost necessary to feel their way along. Instinctively Jim allowed Bob, who carried the gun, to lead, but he kept close upon his heels. So close that when Bob suddenly paused the two boys collided forcibly.

"What is it?" asked Jim in a tense whisper.

"There's water ahead," said Bob. "A sort of a lagoon, I reckon, like the one where we left the *Emmie.*"

Jim breathed a sigh of obvious relief.

"Oh! is that all. Don't scare a fellow for nothing."

"We'll have to work round the edge of it," said Bob, and went forward again, feeling his way among the arched mangrove roots.

Jim stumbled along behind, his head cocked to catch the warning hiss of any moccasin that might lie in their path. His spirits rose as they neared the beach, and he began to hum Dixie;

but before he had finished the second verse a hand was clapped across his mouth.

"S-sh!" said Bob. "Keep still."

"What is it? More water?" mumbled Jim against the hand.

"Look out there!" said Bob.

His voice was low and imperative. Jim's eyes followed Bob's outstretched arm and saw through the trees the pale, metallic sheen of the little lagoon on which a vague black blot rested. As he gazed this took on a familiarity of outline, and shadow separated itself from substance. It was a boat. Who manned it, and what was it doing at this lonely cay which had no attractions for anyone except an occasional band of plume-hunters? And the nesting season was over and neither snowy heron nor egret now wore the ornamental feathers so ruthlessly sought.

As if to answer Jim's outspoken question a match suddenly spurted on board the boat. Some one touched a loose roll of paper to it, and a broad yellow flame sprang up and shed such a radiance into the dark that Bob and Jim shrank behind a tree. The man with the blazing paper leisurely lighted the wicks of a couple of lan-

terns, quite unconscious of the revelation he was making. The boat was so near the bank that every detail of her was distinct, and the features and dress of two of the four men were clearly revealed. Then the fellow with the paper tossed it overboard, and in the dim glow of the lanterns the figures sank to formless shapes. But the boys had seen enough.

"It's the turtlers!" breathed Jim. "They've followed us."

"They must have overheard us after all," said Bob gravely. "I can't imagine any other reason for their coming here. I'm afraid we're going to have some trouble."

CHAPTER XII

THE RIVAL SEEKERS

"WHAT shall we do?" asked Jim anxiously.

Bob considered a minute.

"Well," he said, "we came here to look for that treasure. That's our job. We must find it, and be so careful about it that these fellows won't suspect we're working under their noses. I'm glad now we left the *Emmie* on the other side. They'll never find her there, I'm sure, and that gives us an advantage we may need."

"Then the only thing to do is to go ahead — and keep out of trouble if we can," said Jim.

"That's it. I'm not going to worry till I know just what there is to worry about. These fellows may be peaceable, though I doubt it. We'll sure give them a wide berth. I reckon we'd better go back and get some sleep now, so we can get an early start in the morning."

The boys were up before the sun the next day,

and after a hasty breakfast they set out for the hill. Bob carried old Bess and a pickaxe, while Jim took the shovel and his gun. Thus burdened it was not an easy matter to thread the heavy thickets in the dark, but the fact that they had been over the ground before was of much service to them. They made good time in spite of their awkward implements and reached the drier slope of the hill before sunrise.

Jim was so well fagged that he wanted to rest on the spot, but Bob was anxious to reach the summit. Up they toiled, panting and soaked in perspiration. It was choking hot under the trees; but as they topped the rise a cool wind from the east blew refreshingly upon them. They threw themselves down on the bare grass too tired to speak, their faces upturned to the paling sky.

It seemed only a minute when dawn came with a sudden flaming of red in the east, and they could hear the herons below them croak gutturally as they left the rookeries. Bob sat up and grasped his gun.

"Let's get at it," he said. "We can hide the shovel and pickaxe here till we need them. We'd better keep together at first."

They stood up and studied their surroundings. The top of the hill was as bare as a board. Its western slope they had agreed to leave unexplored at present. On the east the wood was much more open; little groups of trees were scattered about, and in the clear places a few fern tufts grew, but there were many spaces bare of everything except grass.

Starting down the right side of the slope the boys moved slowly along, studying the tree clumps. When they reached the belt of wood that covered the low bottom lands they made a wide turn and ascended the hill till they reached the crest again. Then they descended as before. Thus they zig-zagged up and down the slope, avoiding the open stretches as much as possible. Not a tree escaped their notice, but "Morgan's grove," as they now called the four palms of the scroll, did not materialize. There were single palms in plenty, and groups of anywhere from six to a score. A group of four palms only there was not, however.

Noon was at hand and hot and somewhat discouraged they sat down in the shade of a small pine to eat the lunch they had brought with them.

They were on the lower edge of the slope facing the heavy wood that separated them from the beach. The lagoon in which the turtlers had anchored lay a quarter of a mile off to the south, and as the boys were well screened by a thicket of ferns they disposed themselves to rest and eat in comfort.

They were half through their lunch when a little blue heron came flapping and squawking out of the woods and passed directly over them. While he was still in sight another appeared, and under him a blue cloud of birds lifted with loud cries.

"Something's frightened them," exclaimed Bob. "Get down in these ferns, Jim, and keep a sharp lookout."

Peering through the green fronds they saw a man step out of the wood and glance cautiously up the hillside. He was hatless and the sun shone directly in his face, illuminating his ragged tow hair and causing his broad tanned nose to gleam like polished oak. It was the man who had lit the lanterns the night before. There was no mistaking him.

After a few moments spent in scrutinizing the

hill he gave a clear, birdlike whistle. This he presently repeated, and then drawing a pipe from his pocket he began to cram its bowl with tobacco. But before he finished his three companions emerged from the wood behind him, and one of them, creeping stealthily up, knocked the pipe from his hand, crying out with a hoarse laugh:

"A nice scout you are, Mack! If your eyes ain't any better than your ears we'll have to look for the kids ourselves."

The tow-headed man seemed about to make an angry rejoinder, but thought better of it and picked up his pipe.

"I've looked around enough to see that they ain't here," he said gruffly. "Find any signs of 'em?"

"Nary a sign," said one of the others, a tall man with a white handkerchief round his neck. "If I hadn't heard 'em myself I'd say this was a waste of time, but what we heard was plain enough, wasn't it, Joe?"

Joe was the man who had performed the playful feat with the pipe. He was bull-necked and long-armed, and of the four his countenance was decidedly the most vicious. Bob wondered that

he had not noticed his hang-dog face on Brown's pier.

"Plain!" snorted Joe. "You'd have said so if you'd been where we was, Mack. Camel Cay was the place they named, and no mistake, and we saw 'em sail for here yesterday. Only this place is so full of holes and pockets you could hide a fleet of boats here."

"What seems funny to me," said the fourth man, who had hitherto listened in silence, "is that hearing so much about the gold and Morgan and Camel Cay, you heard so little about where the stuff was buried. That's what seems funny to me."

He thrust his thumbs in his belt as he finished, and favored his companions with a stare that did not betray much amusement.

"That's so, Eben," said Mack. "They cuss other people's ears and eyes, and don't half use they own, so far's I can see. Why was it you didn't hear the important parts, Rafe?"

He looked at the tall man with the handkerchief round his neck, but the fellow, who had a certain jauntiness about him, shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"Didn't I tell you they had that writ down on a piece of paper?" he said. "They were looking at it with their heads close together. I could see that through a crack in the boards, but I didn't know what was on it because they didn't read it out loud. Perhaps if they'd known I was there they'd have obliged me by doing so."

"Well," said Eben harshly, "we've got to get hold of those kids, that's plain. And standing here talking like parrots won't do it. Spread out now, boys, and we'll beat the side of this hill."

The plan seemed congenial to all of them. Without another word they separated and advanced toward the hill in a line, the tall man on the extreme left, Mack and Joe in the middle, and Eben on the right. With fast-beating hearts the boys saw that the latter was headed directly for the patch of ferns in which they lay. In a few minutes he must inevitably run upon them, but to retreat seemed almost as dangerous as to remain where they were. The ferns, unfortunately, were an isolated group, shaded by half a dozen pines. On every side the ground was more or less open.

"I think we'd better run for it," whispered

Bob. "We're bound to be seen sooner or later, and the bigger start we have the better. If we can make those trees over on the left we'll have good cover."

Jim was shaking with excitement, but his pluck was undiminished.

"Come on," he said. "I'm ready. At any rate we've got guns and they haven't."

They crept to the edge of the thicket.

"Keep right round the hill," advised Bob, "and head for the *Emmie*. If we have to separate we'll meet there. Now!"

The bull-necked Eben was close to the opposite edge of the thicket as the boys dashed out. For a moment he was too startled to utter a sound, but when he did find his voice he raised it in a bellow that reverberated against the hill, and brought his companions up on a run. They saw their quarry darting across the open and grew as noisy as a pack of hounds.

"They won't have much wind left if they keep that up," said Bob, glancing back.

The turtlers were strung out behind them in a ragged line, with Eben well in the lead. He was running fast, but not with the long, steady stride

that tells in a stern chase. He had hoped to run the boys down in one fierce rush, and now he was coming on head down and arms thrashing, expending more energy than he should have. Bob decided that there was nothing to fear from him, but Rafe, the long-legged man, looked dangerous. He had already passed Mack and Joe, and was rapidly overhauling Eben.

"Put on a little more speed if you can, Jim," cried Bob. "We'll drop them all right in the woods."

"Sure," panted Jim. "Come on."

The ground over which they were running was too open to afford them any cover, though there were a number of trees scattered about. A quarter of a mile ahead were visible the first spurs of the heavy western woods, creeping round the northern end of the hill. If they could gain these Bob felt sure that they could escape from the turtlers, but the spurs looked a long way off and the ground was growing rougher with every stride.

The turtlers, who were neither as young nor sound of wind as the pursued, soon showed the effects of the hot chase. Joe and Eben had

dropped so far back that they were practically out of the race. Mack was plowing sturdily along, but there was no spring to his stride. Rafe alone had not lost an inch. If anything he had gained upon the boys, and his long legs were swinging easily and his face was set in a sneering smile. It was evident that he knew how to run, and had considerable energy in reserve. It was Rafe whom they had most to fear.

Bob was not greatly alarmed concerning himself, but the way Jim was panting began to frighten him. In spite of his confidence Jim was not holding the pace. His face was commencing to look drawn, and his open lips were rigid. Now and then he stumbled.

"Only a little way farther," cried Bob encouragingly. "We'll be safe when we strike the woods."

He was far from feeling as brave as his words, however. He glanced back and a thrill of alarm shot through him. Rafe was much nearer than before. The sneer on his lips was more pronounced, and it was plain he had noticed Jim's condition. In fact he seemed to think victory was within reach, for he suddenly dropped his

methodical stride and plunged forward in a fierce spurt.

Before Bob could make up his mind how to meet this charge, the thing was over. The tall man's foot encountered a protruding root and he crashed forward on his face with sickening violence. The quickness with which he rose testified to his grit, but one step was all he could take. He uttered an oath and, stooping, clapped his hands to his wrenched ankle.

"We're all right now, Jim," cried Bob exultantly. "No need to break your heart over it."

Then something startlingly unexpected happened. Rafe whipped a pistol from his hip pocket and fired point-blank at the boys. Fortunately his hand was unsteady from the effects of his run and the hard fall, but even then the bullet whirred unpleasantly near Bob's head, and a thunder-clap from a clear sky could not have startled Jim more.

At the sharp report he stumbled and almost fell. If Bob had not heard the bullet whistle by he would have believed that Jim was wounded. He had him by the arm in a minute, sustaining him and urging him forward. It was more neces-

sary now than ever that they should reach the woods.

Seeing their leader resort to extreme measures the rest of the turtlers followed suit. Every one of the rascals had a revolver, and a fusilade of shots rang out while bullets hummed round the boys like great bees. Now they were glad indeed of the thickets of tall ferns. Plunging into the nearest they ran with heads lowered, the green fronds waving about their shoulders.

They were close to the first tongue of wood now. Its black aisles, choked with scrub, seemed the most attractive spot on earth to them. With a final burst of speed they reached the shade flung forward by the outermost branches. The moist coolness of the wood closed round them, and still they ran on, staggering, slipping, drunk with weariness.

At last Jim could go no further. He dropped his gun and sank at the foot of a tree, gasping for breath. Bob was not much better off, but he stood listening for some moments, ready to keep on if necessary. He heard no sound, however, except the rapid thumping of his heart. For the moment they were safe, and the clumsy turtlers

could not approach them through the scrub without giving some warning.

"I reckon it's the wisest thing we can do — to rest awhile," he said, and sat down by Jim's side.

"Do you think those fellows meant to kill us?" asked Jim.

"It looked like it," said Bob. "They're the lowest of white trash, and vicious and ignorant enough to do anything. Who would know it if they did, off on this out-of-the-way place? We've got to be mighty careful now, Jim. We don't want to be cornered, but if we are I reckon we must do some firing ourselves."

"I reckon so," said Jim, thoughtfully, "but I hope we won't have to. Do you think we ought to stay here any longer?"

"No," said Bob. "We'd better work round to the western side. We'll be safer there."

He rose and stretched himself.

"That's a strange palm," he said, looking at the one against which Jim was leaning. "See those queer swellings! And one side of it's been blazed deep. They all look about a thousand years old. I never saw such big ones."

"Hullo!" he added sharply. "There are four of them! Jim, four palms!"

Jim leaped to his feet.

"One, two, three," he counted aloud. Then with a hushed voice: "Four!"

"And no more!" cried Bob. "See, they stand like the corners of a square. And they've been standing for years and years. All this trash in the middle has grown up since."

Excitedly he began to walk round the square, examining the trees.

"It's just as I thought," he said presently. "They've been blazed. Do you know what that means, Jim?"

"It means that this is Morgan's grove," said Jim, solemnly.

The boys looked at each other, almost in awe. The spirit of the dead buccaneer seemed to hover over the spot. The croak of a passing heron made both of them jump, and glance nervously round. But as the bird passed all was still again in the damp, sunless woods. Somehow this absolute stillness had never seemed so uncanny before.

They drew together, speaking in whispers, as

if unseen listeners might be crouching in the thicket round them.

"Four hundred yards to the northeast," said Bob.

He produced his little pocket compass, and held it in his palm, but his hand shook so that the needle danced like a live thing.

"Pshaw!" he said. "I'm as nervous as a minnow."

He pressed the side of his hand against one of the trees, and the little blue-black needle slowly steadied into place, its thin point toward the north.

"Fix the line to this tree," he said. "Hurry, Jim! It would never do to let those fellows find us now."

Jim pulled a big tarpon reel from his pocket. There were six hundred yards of tough silk fishing-line wound on its axle, and every ten feet was marked by a ring of red ink. Its loose end was fastened to a stout tack, which Jim drove into the north side of the palm with the butt of his gun. Then, with Bob in advance, compass in hand, they slowly and silently started through the wood. The low click of the big reel as the

line ran out sounded to them as loud as the blows of a trip-hammer.

They had not gone many yards when they perceived that the spur of wood was very narrow. The trees and scrub grew scarcer, and the sunlight came pouring down in broad shafts. Very soon they saw a strip of bare, grassy ground ahead, and beyond that the beach, its white sands shining like silver against the intense blue of the water.

"Three hundred and fifty feet," announced Jim in hushed tones. "Only fifty feet more, Bob."

Excited as they were the boys now walked as softly and slowly as if they expected the ground to yawn under their feet. Each step was taken more reluctantly than the last, while their eyes roamed swiftly round, searching for something that would suggest a natural terminus of the line, but compelled to follow the slim, pointing needle. And when Jim cried out: "Four hundred feet!" it found them standing in a little open spot between the scattered trees. The sandy soil about them was flat and thinly covered by coarse grass. No stump or stake protruded from the level surface.

They looked at each other blankly for a moment. Both were conscious now that they had been expecting to reach some definite guide-post or mark which would assure them that they were on the right course.

"Well," said Bob, swallowing his disappointment. "We must mark this spot if Morgan didn't."

He broke the stems from three or four fallen palm leaves and thrust them into the soil at Jim's feet. On the upright stakes he impaled the great, tough leaves, and the whole made a landmark that could not well be overlooked.

"I don't see any live-oak," said Jim, who had been staring toward the north during these operations. "I don't see anything but palms and a couple of button-woods. An old live-oak would show his head if there was any round here."

"It ought to show," agreed Bob, and swept his eyes slowly over the thin woods before them. "But I'll be shot if it does."

"We must be on the right trail so far," said Jim. "There couldn't be two groves like that, and the four trees were all blazed too."

Bob nodded emphatically.

"That was Morgan's grove all right," he asserted. "I feel sure of it. And we've come northeast four hundred yards by the compass. That live-oak is somewhere and we must find it."

"But suppose the turtlers follow us up," said Jim. "I don't fancy playing target again."

"We've got to take some risk in this," said Bob. "And I don't think they'll bother us just now. They know we can outrun them, especially since their best man wrenched his leg. They'll try to ambush us, I think, and we must keep our eyes open. What do you say? Shall we give it up or take the risk?"

Jim scratched his nose with a wry smile.

"I'm not a quitter, old chap," he said. "I'll hunt for that stuff till my shoes are worn out, but I wish the turtlers were in Kansas just the same."

"So do I," said Bob. "You take the compass, and old Bess and I'll look out for 'em. If it comes down to shooting I reckon she'll have a word to say this time. With BBs she can bite as well as bark."

The very thinness of the woods at this point was in their favor, for though it might reveal

them to spying eyes, it provided no cover through which the turtlers could stalk them. In this stretch it was an easy matter, too, to mark the various trees, and there was no live-oak among them. There was still the heavier growth ahead, and towards this they directed their steps.

Half an hour's search along the course indicated by the compass brought no satisfactory results and they were a long distance from their starting point. In fact further progress toward the north would be of no value as the land beyond dropped sharply toward the shore, and no tree growing on the slope could be seen from the mark Bob had constructed. They concluded, therefore, to work back again, extending their search through the woods on either side of the line on which they had come.

This time they separated, though keeping within hail of each other. Half way back Jim raised a joyful shout, that was broken off abruptly. When Bob ran up, he was standing with his arm dramatically pointing at the object that had roused his enthusiasm.

It was a live-oak in truth, and as dead and wormy as a piece of aged driftwood. A ruck

of fallen branches lay round its massive trunk. What had once been the giant of the island was now a broken, leafless thing, whose thick stubs were lower than the surrounding tree-tops. In Morgan's day the great oak must have been a conspicuous landmark. That it was the tree they sought the boys had no doubt. So far as they had seen it was the only one of its kind on the island.

"It's off the course, as we made it," said Bob. "But that's not strange. Now the thing to do, it seems to me, is to lay a course straight south from here. It will intersect our line from the four palms to our marker somewhere. That ought to give us the truest point we can get."

"I'll point her south," said Jim, compass in hand. "There, she's on the mark. Straight now as the crow flies."

They had no detours to make or thickets to force. It was easy to follow the course, and soon they were back again in the park-like open where their marker lay. This was not so far out of the way as they had supposed. They struck the fish-line a few yards beyond it, and drove a stake to mark the point of intersection.

"This is as near as we can come to it," said Bob. "It's pretty rough measuring, but it may be near enough. Now for the one hundred yards east."

But an unforeseen difficulty arose immediately. They were on the extreme eastern edge of the point of wood. A few steps would carry them into the treeless, grassy strip above the beach, to which it was plain the last measurement must take them. The treasure, then, was buried in the sand of the beach, where it would be folly to dig for it in broad daylight. Such a proceeding would inevitably bring the turtlers down upon them, and the rascals would have all the advantage of the ground.

There was nothing for it but to hide in one of the nearby thickets until the sun set. First they climbed the hill after the pickaxe and shovel. There was no sign of the turtlers either on land or sea, and a strong uneasiness began to take possession of the boys at this mysterious disappearance of the enemy. It seemed to forebode a plot of some consequence, and on their return trip down the slope they crept from shadow to shadow, their guns held in a position of readiness.

Nothing happened, and entering the thicket they had chosen they settled down to await the setting of the sun. Fortunately for their patience it was not far off. Presently the nighthawks appeared, sweeping above the tree-tops with their strange twanging cries. The light faded in the west and bats began to scurry about. Cranes and herons and egrets came flocking back to the rookeries, and as darkness fell a profound silence enclosed the island.

Like wild rabbits the boys crawled out of the thicket and looked cautiously round in the pale starlight. While Jim held his hat over the compass Bob studied it by the light of a match, and when their direction was clear they stole out across the open almost on hands and knees. Luckily there was no air stirring. Jim kept the matches burning so that the compass was never in darkness, and by and by they felt sand grind under their feet and knew they were on the beach. Bob had tied a hundred yards of line to the stake and this now came taut in his hand. They had reached the end of the course. If their rough reckoning was right Morgan's gold lay under them.

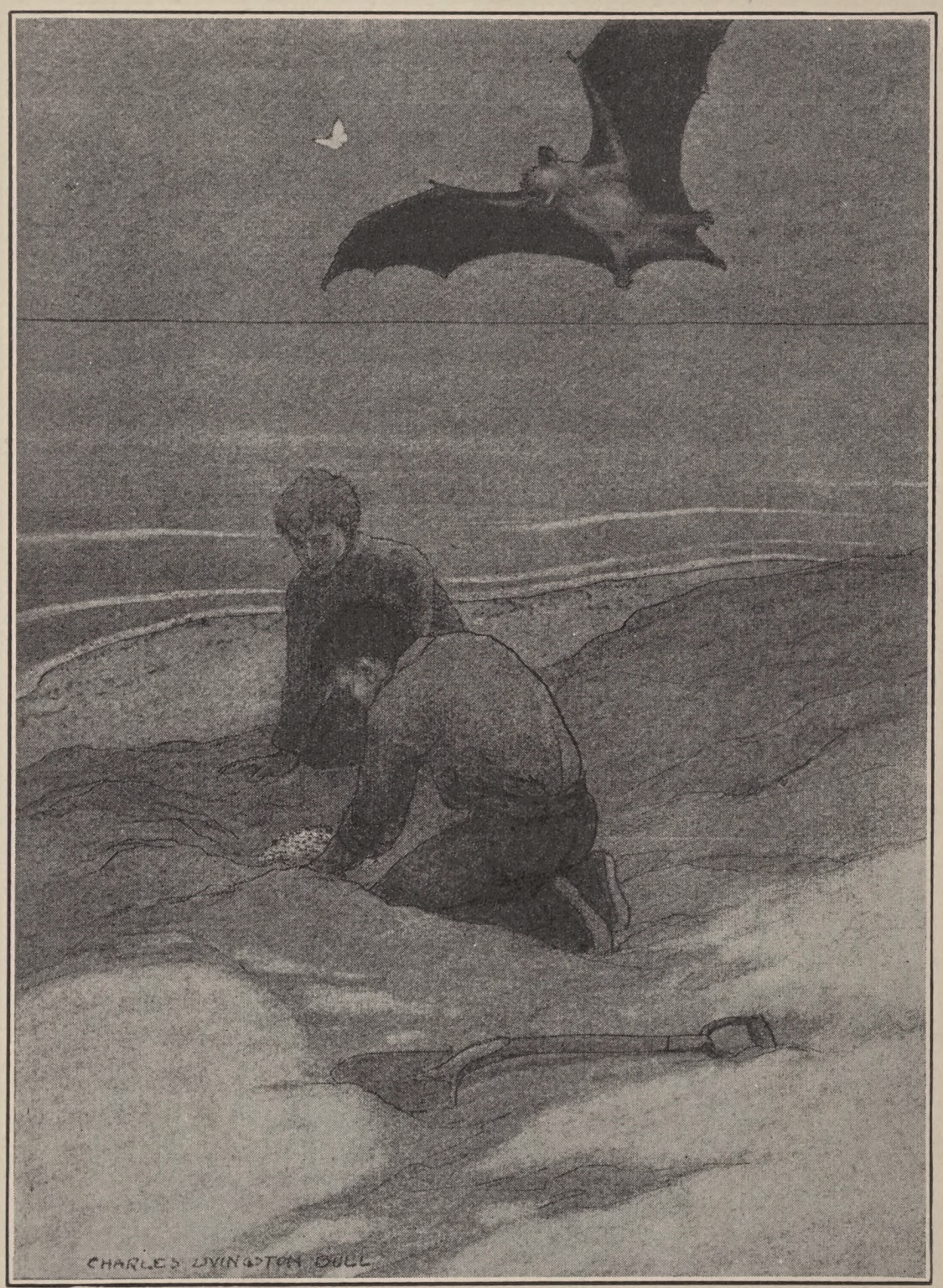
They marked the spot with their hats weighted with sand, and returned for the implements. They were too excited to speak. With pick and shovel they fell to work, digging as if their lives depended on it. The light sand flew and sweat ran down their faces. The turtlers were completely forgotten.

The place was well above the usual high water mark, and lay close to a steepish bank. As the moon rose and poured its light upon the beach Bob noted this bank with growing interest. Its face was abrupt and ragged, and large lumps that had fallen from it lay on the beach.

"Jim," cried Bob, suddenly. "Some big storm has hit this end of the island, and the water has eaten off the top of the beach. Before that it was several feet higher where we are standing. Don't you see, Jim!"

"Yes, I see," said Jim, leaning on the pick. "What of it?"

"Why, this," said Bob excitedly. "It's saved us a heap of digging down. It's shovelled away at least four feet for us, and if it hasn't swept the treasure away entirely, the stuff can't be far below the surface. Instead of digging a deep



"FELL ON HIS KNEES AND DUG WITH BARE HANDS."

hole at this one spot we can dig a shallow one that will cover ten times the space. See!"

"Sure," said Jim, and stepped out of the hole they had been excavating. "We'll leave this well and spread ourselves."

Using the hole as the centre of a circle they carried their operations over a wide area. Suddenly Bob, who was digging close under the bank, uttered a sharp ejaculation.

"I've struck something," he said.

"Something?" exclaimed Jim, in a voice that quivered. "What does it feel like? Don't stand there dumb as a clam. What does it feel like?"

"Wood," said Bob. "It may be a bit of drift but it sounds — it sounds sort of hollow."

Jim ran up, the pick raised high over his head, and brought it down with all his force at the spot where Bob's shovel was embedded. There was an audible dull sound of breaking wood, and Jim fell on his knees, scratching the sand away with his bare hands. Bob, more calm, pushed him aside.

"Let me use the shovel," he said. "I'll have it out, whatever it is, in no time."

It was hardly two feet below the surface, a

rectangular box with the pick fast in its lid, across which stretched three iron bands, one broken in halves, the others so eaten with rust that a blow with the shovel shattered them. The wood was in a condition nearly as bad. The splintered lid was soon forced open. On their knees they wrenched it off and flung it on the beach. Then they bent forward, almost sick with excitement.

The moonlight fell full on the contents of the box. Tarnished as the stuff was there was no mistaking it. It's shape and the clink of it as they thrust their hands in spelled the magic words. The box was full of silver and gold.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TREASURE

Bob paused with his hands buried among the coins.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"What?" said Jim. "Did you hear anything?"

"I'll swear I did. A low whistle like."

"A sandpiper," scoffed Jim, but he spoke under his breath and glanced apprehensively toward the shadowed land.

"We left our guns in the ferns," said Bob, "fools that we were. There it goes again!"

Jim scooped up a handful of the coins and dropped them into one of the pockets of his coat. His teeth were chattering."

"They're around us!" he cried. "I feel 'em. Quick, Bob!"

Four frantic hands clutched at the gold and silver. Clumsy from fear and haste they spilled half what they seized. Jim was almost sob-

bing, but his hands flew back and forth with greedy rapidity. The sense of imminent danger shook them. In the blackness that lay upon the land they knew there were eyes watching them, evil bodies creeping toward them as they knelt there unarmed; but the magic of the buccaneer's gold held them in spite of themselves.

Then what they had been expecting happened. There was a rapid thud of feet. Black shapes came charging down the bank, terrifying in their silence. If the boys had not been in a measure forewarned they would certainly have been caught on the spot, but now they wasted no time in confusion.

"Up the beach!" cried Bob, and sped along the one avenue of retreat with Jim close beside him.

The turtlers sprang from the bank. For a moment they seemed in doubt as to what to do when a shout from the foremost one brought them running to the uncovered box. All four fell upon it like wild beasts on a bone, and their shouts of exultation rang along the beach.

"Oh, Bob!" wailed Jim. "To think that those fellows should get our treasure!"

"They might have had us too," said Bob. "It's lucky they found the box. We'll have time enough to get away with what we have now, and my pockets are pretty full."

The boys indeed were so heavily weighted with coins that a fast pace was impossible. But Jim was torn with unsatisfied cupidity.

"We must have left half of it," he panted disconsolately. "And there may have been other boxes. I know there were other boxes. Morgan wouldn't have taken all that trouble over one small one like that."

"Let's get away with what we have," repeated Bob. "'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.'"

Jim could not deny the truth of it, especially under the circumstances. They were two unarmed boys against four armed men whose natural depravity was roused by the sight of gold to a pitch that would drive them to any villainous deed. With a deep sigh of regret Jim relinquished all thoughts of reprisal at present.

The beach was not the safest course for them, and as soon as they had put a fair distance between them and the turtlers they turned inland

and plunged into the woods. Here it was so pitch dark they could not see one foot before their noses, and they were obliged to skirt along the edge to get what moonlight they could. There was no danger of getting lost. All they had to do was to hold a course parallel to the shore and it would eventually bring them to the lagoon where the *Emmie* lay.

After an hour's wearisome tramping they reached the lagoon, and stepping into the tender, paddled her across to the *Emmie,* who lay in so profound a darkness on the narrow, tree-shadowed stream that anyone unacquainted with her presence there would never have seen her. The strip of canvas flung tent-wise over the boom was in place as they had left it that morning. Drawing the edges closely together so that no ray could escape they lighted the lantern, and tumbled the contents of their pockets on the cock-pit floor.

Bob had spent an hour with the dictionary the evening before they sailed, and in the heap before them he felt sure of the identity of two coins, the big doubloon and the piece of eight. It was surprising to see how much the pockets of

their shooting coats could hold. The pile was an impressive one and the gold doubloons far outnumbered the other coins. The value of the silver could only be guessed at, and after much counting and figuring Bob placed a rough estimate of two thousand dollars upon their spoils. The magnitude of the sum made them gasp.

"A thousand dollars apiece, Jim!" cried Bob. "We can help the folks at home and set up as fishermen for ourselves."

"It'll be our start in life," said Jim with shining eyes.

"And we mustn't forget King," added Bob. "We'll see that his little girl has all she needs."

Jim nodded.

"I can't help wishing we had the rest of it," he said. "Not just for ourselves, but we could do a lot with it. It's ours by rights for the secret was given to you, and it was we who found it. Those turtlers are just thieves, and what good will the money do them? It will go for rum and gambling stakes, that's all."

Bob began to sweep the pile of coins into the burlap bag which had held their provisions.

"It's my idea that we haven't seen the last

of those fellows yet," he said. "We'll tuck this under the planking forward and stow ballast over it. Somehow I can't seem to think clearly while the stuff is in sight."

When this was done Bob insisted that they eat supper before they discussed the matter further. Impatient as Jim was he had to yield to the other's firmer will. Grumbling and fidgetting he fooled with the food till Bob was through.

"Now," he said. "Tell me what we are going to do. I for one don't want to go back without a try for the rest of Morgan's treasure."

"Nor I," said Bob, "but we have got two thousand dollars and mustn't risk that or our skins foolishly. And I want to get old Bess back too. I should never care for another gun as I do for her.

"I've been thinking that we might run the *Emmie* out to-night," he added, "and put her in some cove near where those fellows are. Probably they have scouted about enough to know we're not in that vicinity, and they'll never expect us to walk into their hands.

"I figure it out like this. They'll carry the stuff back aboard the boat to-night. Then they'll

begin to fret and fume about our share. They won't know how much we took, but they won't underestimate it, you may be sure. I reckon there was some hitch in their plan or they'd have swooped down on us before we had time to get a dollar. They'll come, as soon as they get to thinking about it. If they sail round we'd better not be bottled up in here. If they walk, why — "

He looked steadily at Jim who blinked and nodded understandingly.

" If they do, why we may call on them while they're out."

" So you've been thinking it all out!" cried Jim. " I'm with you, Bob. Who cares for sleep to-night. Up with the anchor now, I say."

They had to turn the *Emmie* about with the sweeps and pole her out to the entrance before her sail could draw. But once outside they found a fair little breeze had risen, and stretching themselves comfortably in the cockpit they started on their course round the southern end of the island.

This carried them directly away from the beach where Morgan had sunk his treasure chest. The turtlers might still be thereabouts, and though the *Emmie* might slip by undetected, dis-

covery would upset all their plans. By the southern course the boys could approach the turtlers' retreat by the back-door, so to speak.

Rounding the end of the island they bore up along the shore with the sheet well eased. Jim took the helm while Bob, crouching before the mast, studied the indentations in the beach as well as he could in the moonlight. At last he whistled warningly, and Jim promptly brought the boat up into the wind.

"I think they lie just ahead," said Bob, as he crawled back to the cockpit. "The cove isn't far off I know. It wouldn't be safe to go further. We'll run into this pocket here and get out of sight."

The little opening into which they ran the *Emmie* was not deep, but it was pouch-shaped and by anchoring close to the bank they were practically out of the direct range of vision of anyone passing the entrance.

"Now for a scouting expedition," said Bob. "We'll take the tender. With two pairs of oars you and I can outrow them without half trying. Theirs is a pot-bellied old tub, and leaks like a sieve, I'll wager."

They took their places in the light skiff, and passing out of the entrance, sent her along the shore with quiet strokes. The night was clouding up. The moon was seldom clear. Long wisps of torn vapor drifted across her yellow face, and dimmed her light. In keeping with the clouds the wind had begun to assume an increased steadiness and force, and the boys could hear the stir of roused water upon the beach.

"We're in for a storm, I reckon," said Bob.

"Let her blow," replied Jim. "We're in a snug harbor."

"Provided we're not driven out." Bob glanced up at the shrouded moon and sniffed the air. "The wind's cold and full of salt," he said. "There'll be a norther on to-morrow."

They were rowing so near the shore that in spite of gathering clouds they could make out their surroundings quite clearly. They had walked this stretch of beach the day before, and presently they noted a familiar point of sand. The entrance to the turtlers' cove lay not far beyond this, and dropping to a slower stroke they ran in close upon the land and crept forward at a snail's pace.

A narrow wooded point now hid them from the cove. It was a question whether they should row round this and into the cove itself, or anchor the tender there and creep through the woods. As they lay there debating, the creak of oars against new thole-pins came across the little point with startling clearness. With one thrust of his oar into the shallow water Bob drove the skiff under the impenetrable shade of the mangroves. Grasping an arched root he held her there and Jim and he crouched low, not daring to move.

The boat swept round the point with a clumsy swash and seemed about to follow the course over which the boys had just come. But immediately a loud protest arose from her crew.

"Where are you steering her, Rafe?" one cried out.

"This is no way to go," said another, and the rowers lifted the oars and let the boat drift.

"What do you want, then?" asked Rafe impatiently. "Isn't this course as good's another?"

"We might as well row plumb out to sea, I reckon," said one of the objectors. "Didn't they go the other way when we jumped 'em? Worse

luck for our being such fools as to let 'em get off with the money!"

"You!" cried Rafe, angrily. "Who let 'em get away? If I hadn't half broke my leg this afternoon I'd have overhauled the two of 'em myself. Mack knows that."

"Oh, I ain't saying you can't run," replied the other rower, "but that chance is passed and gone, and the question is now where'll we row her to. I figure hit out with Eben we'd ought to go the other way."

"Swing her round then," said Rafe sulkily, and the water gurgled as he threw the tiller over with a jerk. "There's one thing certain. We'll row plumb round this island and hunt hit so a duck couldn't hide from us if you-all have got any grit to you. Those kids have walked off with the biggest half of the stuff right under our noses."

"We'll hunt as long as you," said one of the others grimly. "Hump your back, Mack. We've wasted time enough now."

The oars dug the water viciously and the boat passed out of sight beyond the point. Bob stuck his fist in Jim's ribs and laughed silently.

"I reckon they spoke the truth when they said they'd row plumb round the island," he chuckled. "This is what I call a wonderful piece of luck."

"It wasn't luck that moved the *Emmie,*" said Jim. "It was your good sense, Bob. First and last everything's owing to that."

"Quit that," said Bob seriously. "This expedition's had two heads, and we've put them together. Now what do you say to a call on our friend Joe?"

"I reckon that's in order," replied Jim. "But remember he's armed and we're not."

"We'll take our time about it," said Bob. "We may catch him asleep. He's had a long day of it and I'll wager he won't think it necessary to be on the lookout for a couple of kids."

They circled the point on which little waves were beginning to lap, and let the wind drive them into the cove. They were in no hurry. If Joe were awake and watchful his pistol would make him a bad customer to face. So shipping the oars they lay flat in the skiff while Bob kept her close to the bank by an occasional touch on the tiller.

The wind, increasing steadily, blew straight into the cove with sufficient force to waft the skiff gently onward. The moon was now almost wholly obscured, but to be on the safe side Bob kept the boat under the overhanging branches. The cove was fairly wide, and the water gave out a certain pale sheen. By and by they made out the dark bulk of the turtlers' craft, and as they drew opposite it a lighted lantern was visible, screened by a piece of canvas thrown over the jaws of the boom.

Bob pushed the skiff ashore and fastened her in place with an oar driven into the mud alongside.

"We're safe here," he said. "Joe's awake, worse luck. I reckon we'll have to lay siege to him."

Joe was sitting astern, his back against the shears. He was awake sure enough for the boys could see the dull glow of his pipe whenever he sucked hard upon it, and when that pleasure was exhausted he began to sing some long-winded ditties in a hoarse bass voice. Evidently Joe was in good spirits.

"Confound him," growled Jim. "He's a regular owl. Is he going to sit up all night!"

Presently the man stopped singing, depressed, perhaps, by the sound of his own voice in the profound night stillness. He stepped into the cockpit and thence into the small cabin forward, and for a moment the boys' hopes rose. But he soon reappeared, and began to walk about the boat, and once he stooped and examined the anchor rope. Immediately afterward he stared at the sky which was as black as ink.

"I reckon he's glad he was left aboard," said Bob.

The mangroves were beginning to creak overhead. The chill wind sighed through the leaves, and wrinkled the surface of the cove. Outside they could hear the low swash of water, and a vague, faint pulsation from the distant open sea.

Joe proceeded to snug things down methodically. He looked to the lashing of the lantern, pulled the jib neatly inboard, and tied several stops round the slovenly furled mainsail. Then with a long yawn he disappeared into the cabin. This time there was no doubt as to his intentions, and the boys waited restlessly till they thought the fellow had had sufficient time to fall asleep.

Muffling the thole-pins with their handkerchiefs Bob rowed softly out toward the sloop. It was a nervous moment when they reached her stern. As Jim fastened the painter of the tender to a cleat, Bob whispered his last instructions.

"When I jump on him, Jim, go for his legs and wrap this bit of rope round them. With his legs tied he'll be as easy as a baby to handle. Remember, Jim! Stick to his legs whatever happens."

Jim nodded. They crept cautiously up over the stern. The reassuring sound of snoring came from the cabin, and they dropped lightly into the cockpit. But at the next step Jim's toe encountered a bucket and sent it clattering along the flooring. It sounded like a thunder-clap to their tense nerves, and it was sufficiently loud to rouse Joe.

They heard him stir, and then he said in sleepy tones:

"Hullo, boys! Did you get 'em?"

"Now!" said Bob, in a shrill whisper.

With Jim at his heels he dove forward into the cabin. Joe, stupid with sleep, half rose from his blanket on the floor, but the next moment he

was flat on his back again with Bob's strong arms around him.

He screeched like a wild-cat, and in his first superstitious fright he seemed about to faint away. But realizing immediately that it was something warm and as human as himself that had attacked him, he fought fiercely. The three rolled from side to side in the dark, ill-smelling little cabin. Tin and crockery fell clattering about them. A pot of soup was upset and the greasy contents seemed to spread over everything.

But Joe was no match for his two agile young opponents. Jim got a twist of the rope about his ankles at last, and the rest was easy. They soon had him trussed like a roasted fowl, and tucked into one of the bunks out of the way. Then Bob cut down the lantern and they began their search.

In the tiny space forward of the cabin they unearthed a goodly lot of coins, but not the full amount they knew the turtlers had taken. Where the rest was they could not imagine. They explored every nook and cranny, and looked into every pot and can in vain, while Joe's eyes watched them fiercely.

"Let it go," said Bob at last. "It's dirty work and we've enough. Good-night Joe, and let this be a lesson to you. If you or your fine friends ever show your faces in Ordville again you won't get off so easy. We haven't forgotten you tried to shoot us down in cold blood."

The man ground his teeth in impotent rage.

"I wish I'd got you!" he cried with an oath, and strained at his bonds.

"Good-night, Joe," said Jim sweetly. "I hope the gang won't be too hard on you when they get back."

The boys stepped into the tender and unfastening her started down the cove, but before they had taken a dozen strokes they heard with alarm the sound of oars ahead.

"In with her to the left," whispered Bob. "Keep her still now. Don't move for your life."

There was no mistake about it. The turtlers' crew were coming up the entrance. Why they had returned so unexpectedly the boys could only guess, and presently they found that their surmise was correct.

"Confound the wind!" cried one of the men.

"We'd have had the kids to-night if it hadn't started to blow a gale."

"Well, they won't dare to cut and run in this weather," said another, "and we'll hunt 'em out in the sloop at daybreak, wind or no wind."

"If that Joe hasn't let the light go out!" he added. "The sleepy-headed fool! Where does she lie?"

The boat passed on, a faint dark smudge against the water.

"Out with her, Jim," cried Bob. "They'll find it all out in a minute, and then nothing can hold 'em. They'll have the sloop out after us for they'll know we must be anchored near by."

Bending to the oars with a will they shot through the entrance and round the point. The wind was singing wildly across the water, and the sea had such a heave to it that it was no wonder the turtlers had given up the chase. The light skiff swooped and dove like a whistler duck, throwing the spray from her nose and charging through it as the wind whipped it back.

"Pull, Jim, pull!" encouraged Bob, and Jim pulled with a vigor that showed he was awake to the seriousness of their situation.

When they reached the *Emmie* there was no abatement of their energy. Bob triple reefed the mainsail while Jim got the anchor aboard. It was a wild night and growing worse, but it was better to face the wind than the rage of the revengeful turtlers. There were many chances among the reefs and keys to find a snug lee berth, and Bob believed in the heels of the *Emmie E.* If they could get away in time he was sure they could outrun the turtlers' craft, and it would not be difficult in that case to slip away from them in the darkness.

They poled the boat out to a spot where the wind began to belly out the sail.

"Haul her in!" cried Bob. "There, that will do. Keep your hand on the mainsheet and cast it off quick when I give the word."

The *Emmie* dashed out into the deeper water with a joyous plunge. Instantly Bob thrust the tiller hard over and she reeled and swung with a sickening list and a solid sheet of water poured over her lee rail. There was the turtlers' boat close upon them, but the *Emmie,* righting stanchly, swept away from under her nose.

A broad white bolt of lightning cracked the

sky from zenith to horizon. In the roll of thunder that followed the pistol shot from the turtlers' deck sounded like the popping of a cork. It was wasting ammunition to expend it in such thick darkness and no more shots were fired. It was a case now of boat against boat in a wind and sea that would test their qualities to the utmost.

CHAPTER XIV

TRIUMPHANT

THE *Emmie's* course lay due south for the matter of a mile before she could turn the lower end of the island. Consequently she had a fair wind for that distance, and there was wind enough to satisfy even the boys. With their booms well out and clipping the foam from the frothing waves with every roll, the pursued and the pursuer swooped forward through the night.

The turtlers knew well that the boys could play them no tricks here. There was only one course for both and that was straight ahead. Reefs and keys and shoals hemmed in the narrow lane of water on both sides, and the least trifling with the tiller would result disastrously.

The storm was playing into the hands of the turtlers. Their sail was not reefed down as close as the *Emmie's*. The wind fairly hurled their heavier craft through the broken surface of the

water. By the incessant play of the lightning which crackled in a net of blinding lines across the sky they could see the *Emmie* clearly, and gauge with accuracy every yard they gained.

"Do you think we can make it?" shouted Jim through the wind. He was crouching in the cockpit with the loose end of the mainsheet in his hands. It took Bob's superior strength and coolness to handle the tiller in such weather.

"I reckon we can if the wind don't blow any harder," said Bob. "I wish it would rain."

"It might as well be daylight, with this lightning," acquiesced Jim. "We're not far from the end of the island, though."

Much as he wished the blurring rain would come the lightning was useful in one respect. By its glare Bob could see the island spring out of the blackness as clear as print on a page, and these sudden glimpses enabled him to get his bearings. In every interval of dark his heart seemed to crawl up his throat at the thought that the next plunge might crack the *Emmie's* bottom on some shoal. With the eager seas behind her she could not live long if once she struck.

He did not share Jim's eagerness to reach the

"THE NEXT PLUNGE MIGHT WRECK THEM."

end of the island. Though the turtlers had gained upon them the *Emmie* was far from being overtaken, and Bob believed that as the wind lessened she could more than hold her own on a straight course. Once they had rounded the lower end of the island they would have to beat a wearisome way home, and here skill and luck and a knowledge of the ticklish region would count heavily. The turtlers, who lived on their boat the year round, were almost as cunning and skilful in the water as wild fowl.

The end of the island drew near. Bob clenched his teeth and braced himself for what was coming. Now he was glad of the three reefs in the *Emmie's* sail. Stiff as she was she could not have faced such a wind with all her canvas.

"Ready!" cried Bob. "Now, in with her!"

He bore upon the tiller and the *Emmie* swooped in a great curve, the seas swashing over her high weather rail. With all his strength Jim hauled upon the mainsheet. It was as much as he could do to get the boom in, but presently Bob cried out for him to make fast.

This was a short leg and a swift one. The turtlers almost came to grief as they changed

their course, and for a moment the big sail threw their craft over at a perilous angle. But she righted without mishap, and by the next flash Bob could see her crew perched on her weather rail, holding her down to it with their weight.

Though they gained here the hardest part of all was to come. Fortunately there was room to spare, and the *Emmie* could make quite a run of it before coming about. She tore across the seas like a mad thing, her lee rail under, and sheets of cold spray drenching the boys to the skin.

"Let go the sheet!" cried Bob, and obeying her tiller the *Emmie* swung up into the wind, echoing like a drum under the blows of the waves. For one horrid moment she hung there wallowing, but as the mainsheet snapped taut and the gale caught her sail again, she headed bravely into the smother.

The turtlers came about the next instant and made as if to cut the *Emmie* off. But their heavier craft did not respond with sufficient quickness, and her large spread of canvas hampered her. Still, when she began to forge forward she had cut a third off the *Emmie's* lead.

Bob dreaded the repetition of these tactics in the narrowing waters ahead. In the long throat of the lagoon the turtlers, absolutely reckless as they were, might succeed in running them down.

Close to the lagoon's throat on the east was a wide shoal, an under-water continuation of the outer bar. Ordinarily there was enough water on it to let the *Emmie* slide across, but very little more. Under the drive of a norther the water was always lower there than usual, but nevertheless Bob determined on the desperate expedient of crossing this dangerous place.

If they struck, the water was not deep enough to drown them and they might be able to escape to the bar in the tender. If they succeeded in passing over there would be heavy seas to face until they could reach an opening in the bar two miles north, but Bob was not afraid of the seas. The question was, could they reach the bar before the turtlers, if the *Emmie* struck. And then another possibility dawned upon him.

The turtlers could not be so familiar with the water round the lagoon as they were with those farther south. It was quite possible that they did not know of the existence of the shoal, and

it was highly improbable that their sloop could pass over it.

"Jim!" cried Bob. "I'm going to cross Broken Point shoal on the next tack."

"We can't do it!" gasped Jim. "We'll strike as sure as guns!"

Bob set his jaw firmly.

"I think we can get over," he said. "Ready now! About she comes!"

The *Emmie* pounded furiously in the black waters, and heeled as the wind struck her till it seemed as if she meant to go on her beam's end.

"Shall I loosen the sheet?" roared Jim, clinging to the rail with one hooked arm, the water rushing over his feet, which were braced against the lee wall of the cockpit.

"No," cried Bob. "She'll straighten out in a minute. And she won't draw so much water, sailing on her ear."

Jim comprehended and smiled grimly. As the sky burned in a furious darting of electricity they saw the turtlers' boat swooping behind them like some monstrous storm bird. How the craft had gained upon them so, they could not tell. There

she was, and it was nip and tuck now for Broken Point shoal.

With his eyes fixed unwaveringly ahead to catch every glimpse of the point, Bob steered the *Emmie* for the best there was in him.

"We're almost there, Jim," he cried at last. "Bring up the stuff into the cockpit. If we strike we must have it ready to put in the tender."

It took strength and grit to crawl along the lowered side of the little cabin and remove the heavy burlap bag from its nook forward, but in spite of slips and tumbles Jim presently appeared with their treasure.

"Now for it!" cried Bob. "Haul the sheet in a bit more."

"She'll turn over!" said Jim, alarmed.

"No she won't," said Bob. "We're close up in the lee of the point. But just take a turn round the cleat and be ready to let go like a shot."

The *Emmie* went down with a sickening give as Jim yanked her boom inboard. Down she went till her little cockpit was half filled with water. If the wind had increased by a breath she would have gone over, but in a moment she was under the lee of the point and in calmer waters. That

danger was passed. If she did not strike all would be well.

Jim looked back over his shoulder, striving to pierce the darkness. He could distinguish nothing, not even the hissing heads of the waves racing alongside. But he knew that the flashes had revealed their course, and that the turtlers were close behind unless they had suddenly abandoned the chase through fear of the shoal.

A long streak of lightning flared and the pursuing craft stood out clearly on the weirdly lighted water. The flash had hardly vanished when three huge, dazzling rents seemed to tear the sky apart. It was as light as day for a moment, and Jim, gazing astern, saw the turtlers' boat pause suddenly in her downward swoop. Over went her mast, cracked short off at the deck, and her sail beat upon the water like the broken wing of a goose. Darkness engulfed her the next instant, and peals of thunder rattled a mocking requiem.

Awed by the catastrophe Jim forgot to feel triumphant.

"They've struck, Bob!" he cried. "I saw the mast go clean overboard."

"What!" said Bob. "Hurrah! Ease her off now. We're as safe as if we were at home in bed."

"They're not in any real danger, I reckon," said Jim, letting the mainsheet out.

"Not a bit. The water isn't over three feet deep here if it's that, and they're only a short way from the point. They can row there in three minutes — or walk if they choose. Trust a turtler to take care of himself. But they won't get their old boat off Broken Point shoal in a hurry."

"Think it's safe to ease her off?" asked Jim. "I didn't take my bearings that last flash."

"She's begun to deepen," said Bob. "We'll strike plenty of water in a minute. There, feel that!"

The *Emmie* plunged violently and tossed the spray over her bows, but in a moment she steadied to the longer swing of the waves. The motion was a relief after the short pitching on the shoal, and though the wind now bore upon them with more force it was easier to meet it in this deeper water. Nor was there any need now of sacrificing safety to speed. Worn out as the boys

were from their strenuous day and night their spirits rose exultantly.

"It'll be morning when we get there," said Bob.

"Yes," said Jim. "It seems almost like a dream, Bob." He drew the bag to him and spreading it open, feasted his eyes on the heap of tarnished coins. How much blood and violence those dull disks had seen since they left the mints of Spain. Their reappearance after decades of oblivion had found the world as lustful for their possession as of old. They had roused all that was selfish and cruel in man, and the thought of their history sobered the spirits of the boys. A great responsibility went with the possession of them. There was good and evil in them. So far their power had been largely used for evil, and it seemed to Bob and Jim that it was for them to wipe out the stain upon Morgan's gold.

As they passed through the cut in the bar into the lagoon the sun was just rising behind the black pines on the mainland. The wind still blew with force, but the clouds were breaking and in the west was a patch of clear soft blue below which the sun rose glorious. Its light shot over

the black pines and touched the white houses of Ordville. Bob saw the little bungalow among its azaleas, and the thought that he was bringing some relief into the lives of the sleeping inmates swelled his heart and flushed his tired face. And back in the pines was a sick girl. He was bringing aid to her too. In truth Bob realized then that in peace of spirit the doer of good has his reward.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

ALLIGATOR

The alligators differ from the crocodiles in having shorter, broader heads and more numerous teeth. A true American crocodile has been found in Florida. The habits of both creatures are much alike. The alligators hibernate in winter, burying themselves in the mud. The female lays from twenty to forty eggs on a mound of earth, moss, and grass about two feet high. It has been known to attack and kill men in the water, but it cannot turn quickly on land.

BEAR

The black bear is quite common in Florida, but is seldom seen. He keeps to the densest brakes and hammocks on the mainland, but on the larger islands and the great bar lying off the east coast he often takes midnight rambles along the beaches in search of fish and turtles' eggs. The usual method of hunting them is with a pack of hounds trained for the purpose. Some sportsmen say that the Florida black bear is fiercer than his relatives in the North.

BOAR

In most of the counties of Florida the hogs colloquially known as razor-backs, are allowed to run wild and forage

for their living. When needed for food they are caught or shot, but many of them of course live and die in the woods like wild animals, among which in truth they might be included. Generations of forest-bred ancestry have resulted in an animal a good deal like the densely bristled wild boar of Europe, with a temper often as vicious.

BULL-WHIP

This is the long lashed whip referred to in the definition of cracker. The handle is very short, hardly more than a foot long, while the lash is often fifteen or eighteen feet long, made of braided leather or deer skin. There is great art in swinging it, as it is apt awkwardly handled to come back on the face or body with painful results.

BUZZARD

The turkey-buzzard belongs to the vulture family, which ranks at the bottom of the list of the birds of prey. Although it has strong talons and a strong beak, it kills nothing, and feeds on dead animals. The enormous heights to which they soar, and their marvellous quickness in finding the body of a dead animal, are the most interesting and striking things about the vultures. The buzzard is an ugly creature seen at close range, but when it is sailing and circling far up in the heavens on wide spread motionless pinions, there are few birds that can equal it in beauty. Its wing spread is about six feet. Its plumage is blackish brown; head and neck naked and red. It ranges temperate North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

CABBAGE PALM

One of several species of palm of which the great terminal bud is eaten like cabbage, and also bears nuts of which the kernel is sweet.

CANE-BRAKE

A tract of land thickly overgrown with a kind of tall, woody grass allied to the bamboo. The cane grows in rich river bottoms and swampy places and reaches a height of from ten to forty feet. It is used for fishing-rods and various other purposes, and cattle and hogs are fond of the young plants and the seeds.

CARAPACE

The shell of a turtle or tortoise. Specifically the upper shell, the under shell being called the plastron.

CAY

Same as key. A low island, a sandbank, near the coast. The name is used especially on the coast of regions where Spanish is or was spoken: as the Florida Keys.

COON

The raccoon is about two feet long, with a stout body, a bushy, ringed tail, short limbs, pointed ears, broad face and a very pointed snout. It is of a general grayish color, with light and dark markings on the face. It is common in the Southern parts of the United States and feeds on fruit and other vegetables as well as animal substances. Its appetite is omnivorous, it being particular only in soaking its food in water before eating it. Its favorite dwelling place is a hollow tree and its yearly family consists of four or five young.

CRACKER

One of an inferior class of white people in some of the Southern United States, especially in Georgia and Florida. The name is said to have been applied because cracked corn is their chief article of diet. I have also heard it said that the name came from the fact that

these people use a peculiarly long lashed whip which they crack with such violence that it sounds like the report of a rifle.

CRANE

The cranes are nearly all powerful birds with long necks, long legs and powerful wings. They migrate in large flocks, flying up a great height and like geese in a V-shaped body. Cranes use their bills as a weapon of defense, attacking the eyes of an assailant. The whooping and sandhill cranes build nests of roots, rushes, and weed stalks in some marshy place. The two eggs of each are four inches long, olive gray in color, spotted and blotched indistinctly with cinnamon brown.

CRAVALLY

Closely allied to the mackerel family. It is a handsome silvery fish bound in blue and yellow, and can be found in and about the inlets and tideways. In rare instances it reaches twenty pounds in weight, but is usually taken from two to ten pounds. Ordinary black bass tackle is suitable for this fish, with a sinker adapted to the strength of the tide. For baits, any small fish will answer, while shrimp and cut bait can also be used. Gaudy flies are the best for fly fishing, which can be done from piers, boats, or points of inlets. The most popular way of fishing is by trolling in the channels, when a spoon with but a single hook should be used.

PIN TAIL DUCK

Sometimes called the water pheasant on account of its beautiful plumage. Its correct name comes from its seven-inch long finely pointed tail. It ranges over nearly all of North America, but its favorite breeding grounds are in the sub-Arctic regions. It is as much at home on fresh water lakes and rivers as on the salt water inlets

of the Atlantic coast. Like the mallard, it does well in captivity, but is not such a good breeder.

GROUND-DOVE

A dove or pigeon of terrestrial habits. It is one of the smallest birds of its kind, being only six and one-half to seven inches long. It has short, broad wings and tail, no iridescence on head or neck, and blue-black spots on the wings, the male being varied with grayish olive, bluish and purplish-red tints, and having the wings lined with orange brown or chestnut. This pretty bird is found in the Southern United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, especially along the coasts. It nests on the ground or in bushes, and lays two white eggs.

MOURNING DOVE

(Called also Carolina dove and turtle dove.)

It breeds throughout the United States from Canada to the Gulf and migrates as far South as Panama. From the peculiarly mournful sound of its call note comes the name by which it is commonly known. Another interesting fact about this bird is the musical note that is sounded by the vibration of its wings as it rises from the ground or flies overhead.

DRUM FISH

Found on the Atlantic coast of America from Cape Cod to Brazil. It gets its name from the emission of a peculiar sound resembling the beat of a drum, and thought to be caused by the movement of the air in its complicated air bladder.

GUDGEON

A small fish easily caught which is used for bait. The word gudgeon is applied to persons who are easily cheated or deceived.

HERON

Herons are gregarious birds and nest and roost in flocks in favorable localities, but solitary birds are seen feeding on the shores of lagoons, rivers and lakes. In Florida one meets herons constantly, fishing on the beach or wading in the lagoons. The little blue heron goes northward beyond the Canadian border when its duties in the southern rookeries are over. The snowy heron, once so abundant in the southern marshes, has almost disappeared. The beautiful plumes that it wears in the nesting season have attracted the plume hunters who supply the milliners with this coveted decoration. The parents are destroyed, and their destruction means the death of thousands of fledglings. It is said that some of the plume hunters evade the law against shooting this heron, by cutting the plumes from the living bird, leaving it to die.

HERRING

An important food fish. They are generally caught in gill-nets or scoop-nets. The annual catch probably amounts to many hundreds of millions. They are smoked, dried, pickled or eaten fresh.

TO HIKE

A colloquial term, meaning to travel.

IBIS

A wading bird, with a long, curved, blunt bill grooved along the sides. The wood ibis, in reality a member of the stork family, is not uncommon in the Southern United States. It is like the turkey buzzard a graceful flier. When procuring food it dances about in the shallow edges of a lagoon, stirring up the mud, which brings the fish to the top. A sharp stroke from the heavy beak leaves the fish floating about dead to serve

as bait. The ibis then waits for other fish, frogs and lizards to approach the bait, when he strikes here and there for the choicest food. The white ibis is yet found in Florida.

KING-FISH

Second cousin to the Spanish mackerel. It is found along the reefs from Cape Florida to Boca Chica. It is one of the principal food fishes of Key West and is taken by fishermen trolling with a piece of bacon, which is something of an indignity, for it is a splendid game fish on the rod.

LAGOON

An area of shallow water, or marshy land, bordering on the sea, and usually separated from the deeper water outside by a belt of sand or of sand dunes.

MAGNOLIA

A big laurel or bull bay. A fine forest tree sixty or eighty feet high, evergreen, with fragrant flowers. A smaller variety is the magnolia glauca. In the South this is a moderate sized tree, in the North a shrub. It grows in swamps from Massachusetts to Florida. The leaves in the South are evergreen.

MALLARD DUCK

This is one of the largest ducks, and one of the handsomest. The male has a brilliant green head and neck and gray body. The female is brown, streaked with black. It has a large range, covering practically the whole North American continent down to Panama. In captivity it thrives and is prolific.

MANGROVE

A low tree of most singular habits. The stems put forth long aerial roots which extend down to the water:

the seeds germinate in the fruit and send down a long and heavy root, and thus the mangrove spreads thickly over the tidal mud forming impenetrable malarial bogs. The wood is used for fuel, for piles, etc. The bark is valuable for tanning.

MAST

The fruit of the oak and beech or other forest trees, acorns or nuts collectively serving as food for animals.

MOCCASIN

A venomous snake of the United States. It is small, commonly about two feet long; dark olive brown above and yellowish brown below, with blackish bars and blotches. The top of the head is mostly covered with scales like those on the back, instead of large regular plates as in harmless serpents.

The water moccasin somewhat resembles the copperhead. Another variety very similar to the water moccasin is found on dry land and is called the high-land moccasin. A third, known as the cotton-mouth in the Southern States, is particularly feared.

MORGAN

Sir Henry Morgan (1635?-1688), buccaneer; commanded a privateer, 1663; sailed with Edward Mansfield and was elected "admiral" of the buccaneers on Mansfield's death, 1666. Attacked Porto Bello and sacked it; ravaged the coast of Cuba and the mainland of America; captured the city of Panama, etc.

MOSQUITOES

In many parts of Florida, such as the larger swamps, mosquitoes are so numerous that it is practically impossible for white men to live there. It is well known that, during the Spanish Invasion, the Indians often tied Span-

ish prisoners in places where they would be exposed to these ravenous insects whose stings would often bring the victim near to death before morning. Of course the warden's story was somewhat embellished in order that it might have the desired dramatic effect upon his hearers.

MUD HEN

The coot or mud hen is found in reedy, shallow lakes or creeks. It is extremely common in Florida, gathering in enormous flocks. Its bill is more like a pigeon's than a duck's, and its foot instead of being fully webbed has scalloped membranes along each toe.

NIGGERHEAD

A round tuft or tussock of grass in swampy lands.

LIVE OAK

Florida is called the Live Oak State. The wood of this oak is very heavy, hard, strong, fine grained and durable. It is much prized in ship building.

WATER-OAK OR PIN OAK

This oak loves a moist, rich soil, and is found on the borders of swamps and in river bottoms. The name of pin oak seems to refer to the great number of tiny branches, which are so intermingled with the large ones that at a distance it has the appearance of being full of pins. Oaks are very long lived trees. There are in England now oaks which are said to have been old trees in the time of William the Conqueror.

OAKUM

Junk or old ropes untwisted and picked into loose fibres resembling tow, used for calking the seams of ships. That made from untarred ropes is called white oakum.

OSPREY

The American osprey or fish hawk is seen in summer on the seacoast from Alaska and Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico, but in winter it migrates to Southern Florida, the West Indies and northern South America. The osprey is a veritable light weight athlete, all bone and muscle. It is a bold fisher, and thinks nothing of dropping from a great height into ice cold water and seizing a fish of nearly half his own weight. The osprey builds its nest in a tree, on a rock or on the ground, and the nests often acquire enormous dimensions from yearly additions and repairs.

OYSTER-SHELL ROAD

As stone is very rare in Florida, oyster shells are frequently thrown on the sandy roads, where they are crushed by the passing teams, and reduced to a more or less hard level surface. It is a rude method of macadamizing.

PALMETTO SCRUB

A shrub with huge broad leaves, which, trimmed and dried, form the palm-leaf fan of commerce.

BLACK-BREASTED PLOVER

This bird appears in the South in the beginning of April. Unlike the southward migration in the autumn when they congregate in great flocks, they come in small numbers, but at such short intervals as to form an almost continuous line. After dark their well known cries give note of their passage, but by day they are silent, even when forced to betake themselves to flight. They nest on the ground. The great body of these plovers pass beyond the limits of the United States, but some remain to winter in Florida. In winter, as long as they are on the coast they feed on marine insects, worms and

small shell fish. When in the interior, grasshoppers and other insects as well as various kinds of berries, fatten them, so as to make them fairly good eating. The plumage is mottled black and white.

PANTHER (PUMA)

Also called mountain lion and cougar, is found not only in Florida, but in all the great western mountain ranges of the United States, in Wyoming, Montana, and British Columbia. It is the most widely known cat animal of North America. It is of a brownish drab color, and a large specimen from seven to eight feet in total length will weigh 225 pounds.

PECAN TREE

The pecan tree is a North American tree, abounding from Illinois southward and southwestward. It sometimes reaches a great height, but its wood is of little use except for fuel. The nut is olive shaped, an inch or over long, smooth and thin shelled, with a very sweet oily meat. Raising pecan nuts is becoming quite an industry in Florida.

PHOSPHORESCENCE

Phosphorescence is frequently observed to a very marked degree in sea water. It is believed to be connected with the presence of minute organisms from which the light is given off.

PORPOISE

The porpoise is eight or nine feet in length and differs from the dolphin in not having the fore part of the head prolonged into a distinct beak. They go in shoals sometimes containing many hundreds, and are found in nearly all seas and usually not far from land. A fine oil is made from its blubber, and the skin is made into leather.

QUAIL

The quail or bob-white is the longest-known and most widely known game bird, and is almost wholly a United States bird. The Florida bird has rather darker, richer coloring than the other varieties, with heavier black markings and a longer jet black bill. Both parents take turns in covering the eggs, and after they are hatched the young run through the brake and cultivated fields, learning from both parents what seeds and berries are safe to eat. Farmers have reason to bless them for the number of weed seeds and insects they destroy.

RAIL

Rails are birds of medium or small size, the breast thin and the body wedge-shaped. Their wings are short and rounded and their legs rather long. In general their plumage might be described as a mixture of brown, black and gray. There are several kinds of rail, the king rail being the biggest and the Virginia rail the most widely distributed. They spend their lives hidden in the sedges of the marshes, where their presence might be unknown if their voices did not betray them. They are shot in quantities in the autumn after they have fattened up on the wild rice or oat fields. "As thin as a rail" is an appropriate expression at any other time of the year. They are expert ventriloquists, often seeming by their voices to be far off, when in reality they are close at hand.

RAY OR DEVIL-FISH

The devil-fish is the largest of the rays. Maximum size across the wings, twenty feet. Many years ago harpooning this gigantic creature was a favorite sport of the planters on the South Carolina coast. Now they are rarely seen and more rarely captured. They are found on the coast of Southern California, but its centre of abundance seems to be the Gulf coast of Florida.

RED LYNX

The red lynx or wild cat is found in nearly all of the States east of the Mississippi where there are large areas of forest. Florida is one of the States where they are most numerous. The color of the fur is a mixture of rusty red, gray, and blackish brown, with the red so marked as to have given the animal its name. It has not the ear tufts of the Canada lynx. Mr. Hornaday, the well-known authority on natural history, says that the largest specimen that ever came into his hands weighed eighteen pounds. Mr. Roosevelt's party in Colorado in 1901 killed one which weighed thirty-nine pounds.

SAND-SHARK

The voracious gray or sand-shark is common on the North Atlantic coast of the United States. It is a wide ranging species about six feet long.

SAW-GRASS

A marsh-plant with stalks from four to eight feet high, and long, slender, saw-toothed leaves. Found in southern United States.

SCAUP DUCK

The greater and the lesser scaup are hardly distinguishable one from the other, unless one is near enough to note the difference in size and the slight difference in plumage. There is no great difference in their habits, except that the lesser scaup shows a preference for inland creeks and fresh water. It is by far the most abundant duck in Florida waters in the winter season. There seems to be some uncertainty as to whether the name comes from the harsh discordant noise the bird utters, or from the broken shell fish it feeds on when other better liked food fails. It has many names, one of them being raft duck, which comes perhaps from its

readiness to dive under a raft rather than swim around one. They are not easily secured if only wounded, as they dive, skim over the surface backward and forward, and have even been known to cling to a rock or bunch of sedge under water.

SEA-TROUT

The sea-trout is not properly a trout, but is akin to the Northern weakfish. It is called a trout on account of its black spots. It is a game fish, and will afford the angler plenty of exercise with a light rod before it is landed. Unlike the sheepshead, which makes strenuous efforts to get to the bottom when hooked, the sea-trout fights on the surface of the water.

SHEEPSHEAD

A stout, very deep bodied fish, found in abundance on the Atlantic coast of the United States, and highly esteemed as a food fish.

STRING-PIECE

A heavy horizontal piece of squared timber carried along the edge of the front of a wharf to hold the timbers in place and strengthen the whole.

SOUR ORANGE TREES

Orange trees which have been neglected and become wild. The fruit is very tough, has little pulp, and is so sour as to be practically uneatable.

SPANISH OR LONG-MOSS

A plant with gray thready stems and leaves, forming dense hanging tufts, which drape the forests of the southern United States. Also called longbeard.

SPARROW HAWK

Smallest and most beautiful of American hawks. Length, nine to ten inches. Its cap is dull blue, its throat white with black side patches, and its upper neck and back are bright rusty brown. Its breast is salmon color, somewhat spotted, legs and feet bright yellow. Occasionally when rearing its young it catches chickens, but this may be overlooked when its great value as a destroyer of noxious insects is remembered. It may safely be ranked with the birds which are most useful to man. It is found all over the United States.

TATTLER - YELLOWLEGS

The yellowlegs are noisy, sociable, restless birds, keeping themselves well advertised in the marshes and about the bays where they feed. In spite of this they are vigilant and wary, and are first to give an alarm. In length they measure from thirteen to fourteen inches. Their legs are long and bright yellow. The bill is two inches long or over. Both male and female are dark ashy speckled with white; breast white heavily spotted with black, tail dusky with numerous white bars. They range all over America.

TARPON, SILVER KING

A large fish reaching the length of six feet and a weight of over two hundred pounds. It is found in the warm parts of the Atlantic Ocean, and is common on parts of the Florida coast, where it has come much into vogue, since, in spite of its great size, it can be taken with rod and line, furnishing rare sport from its vigorous leaps and fine fighting qualities.

BLUE - WINGED TEAL

This bird is so common and so small that it is not much prized by sportsmen. Like other teal, it likes quiet inland waters. The blue wing is known by the conspic-

uous white crescent in front of and half encircling the eye, and by the bright blue patch on its wing.

TURKEY

The turkey is the largest of the game birds, being about four feet long. The male has a plumage with metallic bronze, copper and green reflections, the feathers tipped with black. The wild turkey is distinguished from the domestic bird chiefly by the chestnut instead of white tips to the tail and the upper tail coverts. A long bunch of bristles hangs from the centre of the breast. The bill is red like the head; legs red and spurred. The wild turkey has become very cunning and wary from much persecution, and the most inaccessible mountains, or swampy bottom lands, are not too remote for them. Unlike the quail, he leaves all the domestic duties to the female, who is somewhat smaller than her mate, duller of plumage, and without the breast bristles.

WATER-BONNETS

Large lily pads common to Florida inland waters.

WEASEL

A small carnivorous animal, with an extremely slender, elongated body, of a reddish brown color above and white below. In northerly regions it turns white in winter like the ermine, but has not the black tip to the tail. It is cunning and wary, and one of the most bloodthirsty of the carnivorous animals.

WHITE-MEAT

A term applied by "poor whites" and negroes to the fatty parts of pork.

YAM

A tuberous root containing a large amount of starch, and therefore highly nutritious. In tropical countries it

largely takes the place of the potato of temperate climates. The Southern negroes use it as a cure for rheumatism.

WILLET

A North American bird of the snipe family. It is a large, stout tattler, with semi-palmated toes, stout bill, and a much variagated plumage, especially in summer. It abounds in temperate North America, and winters in the Southern States, and southward to West Indies and Brazil. It is a noisy bird, but very wary, not coming to a decoy easily like the majority of its confiding kin.

APPENDIX B

OUTDOOR ADVICE

At most good hunting and fishing places on the coast of Florida it is possible for the sportsman to stop at a hotel or boarding-house. The prices will vary from one to five dollars a day with extras, such as charges for guides, teams and boats. If one is quite ignorant of the country and has no experienced older person with him, it is safer and better, all things considered, to engage room and board at one of the cheaper hotels. There he can probably procure advice and help in whatever form of sport he is most interested, and any word from me would be superfluous.

Personally I avoid hotels as much as possible. Camp life costs much less and brings one into a much more intimate relation with nature. There is pleasure in the very difficulties and discomforts that arise, the pleasure of using one's hands and head against new forces with the certainty that courage and common sense will triumph. With success in surmounting difficulties is bound to come a feeling of self-respect which is not vanity, but something much more healthy. It drives back that hampering sense of dependence that often makes cowards of us all. There is nothing more satisfying to the ordinary, manly boy than to feel that he is not helpless without a shingled roof over his head and parents or servants at his beck and call. To realize in a small

way that he can live without the butcher and the baker and all the mechanical contrivances by which the ways of civilized life are made smooth is certainly worth while. It gives him some of the sturdy spirit that won the great West for us.

Camping out is not just sleeping in a tent and doing without the comforts of life. Everyone can do that if they have to, and some can do it without grumbling; but if the wish to grumble is there the experiment is a failure. I should advise no one to try it who can not start with a sincere love of nature. Given that, there will always be a redeeming feature to the most awkward situations.

Camping calls for cheerfulness and unselfishness. Every man or boy must do his share and do it willingly. He should aim to get more than bare food and shelter. It should be his pride to pit himself against nature and show his strength and ingenuity in wresting all he can from her. When you hear a man say that he does not like "to rough it," you can generally put him down as stupid or lazy, or both. If he finds it too "rough," let him smooth it. A little patience, a bit of energy, and the use of one's eyes will show the way out of practically every difficulty the camper may meet.

There are many ways of camping out. There is the way of the lone trailer, who packs everything on his own sturdy shoulders, and lies at night under a square of waterproofed silk or canvas, or a rude roof of branches. As he is always on the move, his equipment must consist of what he can easily carry. One must be experienced before he takes to the woods alone, and the trailer's way is not what I wish to recommend to my young readers.

There is so much game in Florida that desirable camping and hunting sites can be found in the near vicinity of almost every town. Consequently everything needful can be carried to the spot in a wagon. But don't let

this lead you into taking too much. The fewer things you have — provided they are the right things — the better. A lot of truck complicates rather than simplifies camp life. It is always in the way and an eyesore into the bargain.

The first essential is, of course, a tent. Its size must depend on the number in the party, but if there are a number of people to accommodate it is better to take several small tents rather than one large one. A large tent is hard to transport and difficult to erect, and a proper site for it in the woods is not always easy to find. The biggest tent I should advise is a 10 x 12 wall tent. This will furnish sleeping-room for four people. A smaller party would do well to take an A tent, which is very easily handled.

The tent should be made of waterproofed material, provided with a fly to protect it from the rain. It should be of khaki or brown canvas. A white tent is an abomination. It shows the dirt, and as soon as the sun is up its white walls fill the interior with an irritating radiance that effectually banishes sleep. Along the bottom rim of the tent sew, or fasten with grommets, a strip of canvas or cloth about two feet wide, and when the tent is pitched turn this in so that it lies along the ground inside. This will protect you from draughts and keep out a good many insects. In addition to this it is sometimes a good thing to lay a square of canvas on the floor overlapping the turned-in edges just referred to.

As to a camping site, do not pitch your tent too near a stream, or you will be troubled with dampness and mosquitoes, and perhaps a flood. Do not camp in narrow valleys for the same reasons. Choose high, dry ground, and no matter how high and dry it seems, if your camp is to be a permanent one, dig a shallow ditch completely round it.

In such countries as Florida some protection against

insects is a necessity, especially in the fishing season. Mosquito netting is too coarse of mesh and tears easily. The best thing is cheesecloth, and be sure to take enough to cover the front of your tent, and to protect meats, game, etc., from flies. While hunting ducks in some swampy localities I have often used a bit of cheesecloth as a veil, and been thankful for it.

As to beds, you may take folding cots if you wish, but personally I consider them a nuisance. With the floor cloth already referred to, and a mattress of small twigs and branches to lay your blanket on, you can make a bed that, in my estimation, is unequalled, and does not have to be transported. Be sure to make your mattress thick enough — make it twice as thick as you think is necessary. Good blankets are as important in Florida in winter as at home, though you will not need so many of them. Two per man is about the right number. A rubber blanket is often very useful if the locality is at all damp.

CAMPING OUT

The most important thing in a camper's kit is his axe. Buy a good one and have it ground before you start; they never have a sharp edge as they are sold in the stores. Also, if your camp is to be a permanent one, take with you a hammer, a handsaw, and some long nails. A good coil of rope will also be found very useful.

The choice of cooking utensils is largely a matter of taste. Personally I prefer as few as possible, as I do not like to wash dishes. A knife and fork, spoon and tin cup per man, is all that is really necessary, with a coffee pot and frying pan for general use. Good plates can be made of bark or the leaves of the palm, and they can be thrown in the fire after meals.

Every camper should take two suits of clothes and two

sets of underwear. Add to this a couple of gray flannel shirts with plenty of room at the neck, and a sweater. Don't take a coat. In bad weather wear a thin khaki or "duxback" jacket over your sweater. The old idea that one must wear heavy, high shoes on a hunting trip is exploded. Wear light shoes, such as moccasins, over thick woollen stockings. If you intend to do much ducking and dislike the idea of wet feet, buy a pair of hip-rubber boots, and be sure that they are roomy. Your woollen stockings will fill up the space. But take your light shoes too.

The tent that I have spoken of is meant for sleeping purposes only. Your kitchen must be a separate establishment, and the simpler the better. Stretch a piece of canvas among the trees as a roof, cut a hole through it to let out the smoke if you do your cooking over a camp-fire, and there you are. There are a number of small portable stoves on the market made expressly for campers. I have never tried them, though I daresay that they have their merits. The open fire is my choice.

The novice is apt to build too large a fire, one that smokes and burns his culinary efforts, and is so hot that one cannot stand near it without being scorched. The experienced woodsman makes a very small fire, just a handful of twigs and a few sticks about the size of a lead pencil. Of course you must feed it, but it is much easier to feed a small fire than a big one, and it will cook all right. Two or three little fires are better than a rousing large one. In gathering your fuel remember that the dead limbs on a living tree are drier than those that have fallen to the ground and been soaked by rain and dew.

If you are going into an unfamiliar country you will need a pocket compass. A topographical map of the region will prove very valuable, and this you can probably secure at the State land office, the county seat, or at the United States land office. Locate your camp on the

map. It is wise to pitch your tent near a stream, lake or road which will serve as a landmark.

If the general course of the road or stream is east and west and you are to hunt north, you will only have to travel south to get back to your base line or camp. If your course varies to the east of north you should make the same distance west of south to get back to your starting point. Consult your compass often. Otherwise you may swing so far from your course in going only a short distance that you will be inclined to doubt the accuracy of the instrument. If you get bewildered and forget which way to go, always remember that a straight course in any direction will take you somewhere. Level your compass and as soon as the needle stops vibrating take a sight on some object in exact alignment with your course and as far ahead as you can see. Walk to it and repeat the operation. A little practice will enable you to run an accurate line.

A word about the shot-gun and the way to handle it may not be amiss. Never keep a loaded gun in camp; remove the cartridges as soon as you are within a hundred feet of the tent. Keep the gun well oiled and covered in camp, but wipe it carefully with a dry rag before starting on a hunt. Slippery guns have been responsible for some bad accidents. Never carry your gun cocked, and keep the muzzle lowered. Remember that what you have in your hands is a *gun,* and under no circumstances use it for any other purpose.

To accustom yourself to the noise and recoil practice shooting at a mark. This will not make you a good shot, but will give you some idea of holding and sighting the gun. After you find you can send the centre of your charge into the centre of the target, practice on a moving mark, such as a tin can tossed into the air. The knack of hitting this is soon learned, especially if the can is tossed straight up. Then you will be ready for real field-work.

To the novice in field-work my advice is: aim carefully, fire seldom. That is easy to say and hard to do, but the slap-bang style is out of vogue and never was beneficial to anyone in my estimation. It is all very well to talk of snap-shooting. To snap-shoot you must first learn to take aim and judge the swiftness of your bird and the direction of his line of flight.

Therefore I repeat, aim carefully. I think the very best plan for the novice is to go into the field with shells loaded only with powder. I have tried it myself and know how it steadies a man's hand and heart to realize that he has no shot in his cartridges and cannot possibly bag anything. At the same time there is plenty of interest left, the interest of accurate sighting and the belief that, if shot were present, certain birds would have come whirling down to the ground. In no other way can a beginner acquire so easily the necessary calmness that goes toward making a good shot.

The next step is to use shells loaded with shot; but do not take more than half-a-dozen with you. You may fire the first two or three in a flurry, but the thought that you have only three left will steady you surprisingly. Unconsciously you will find yourself doing something you failed to do at first, that is, taking a careful aim. Do not be afraid to be called "pokey." It is much better to do some conscientious sighting — and let the bird go unshot-at — than to blaze away haphazard while the game is still hanging before your face and eyes.