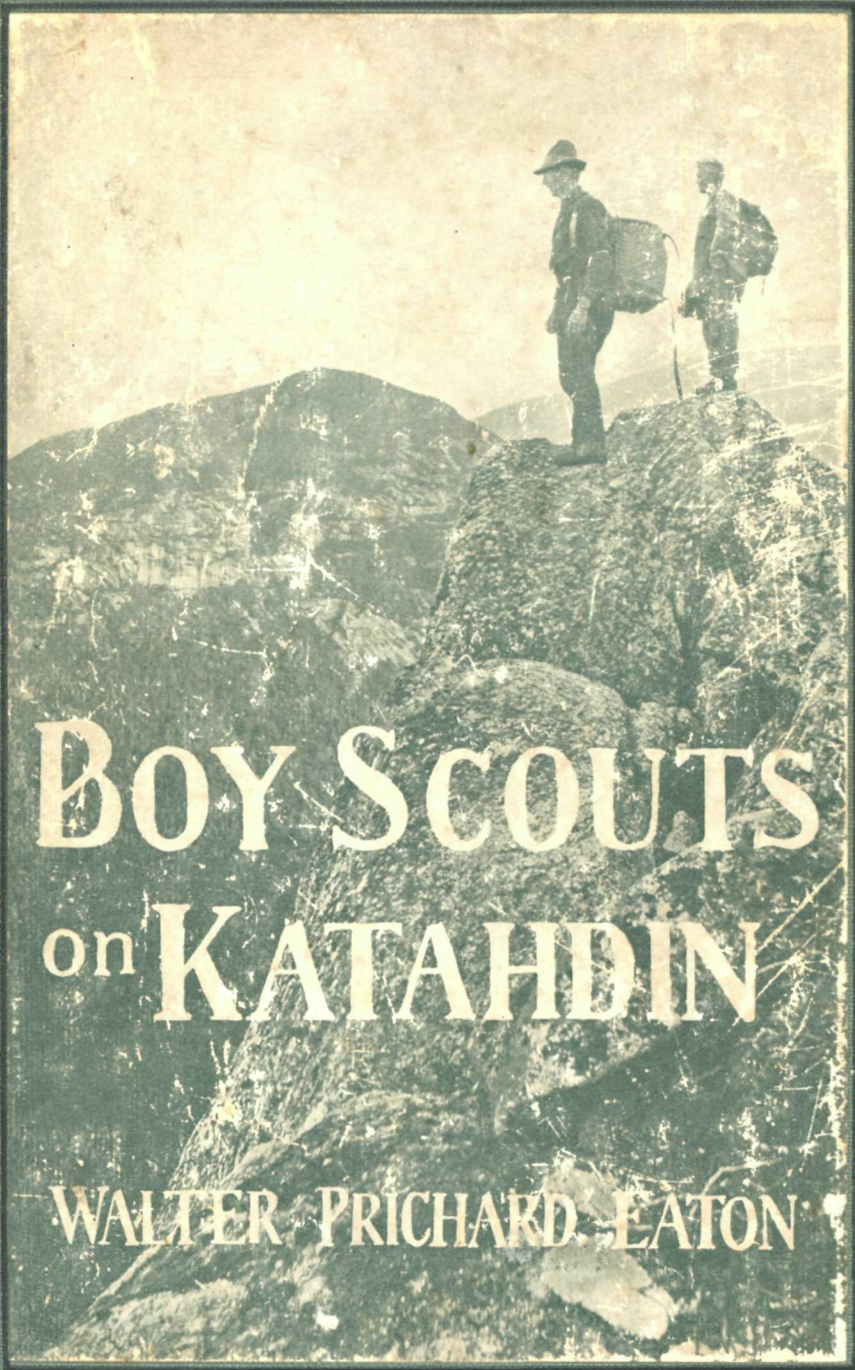

BOY SCOUTS
on KATAHDIN
WALTER PRICHARD EATON

BOY SCOUTS ON KATAHDIN

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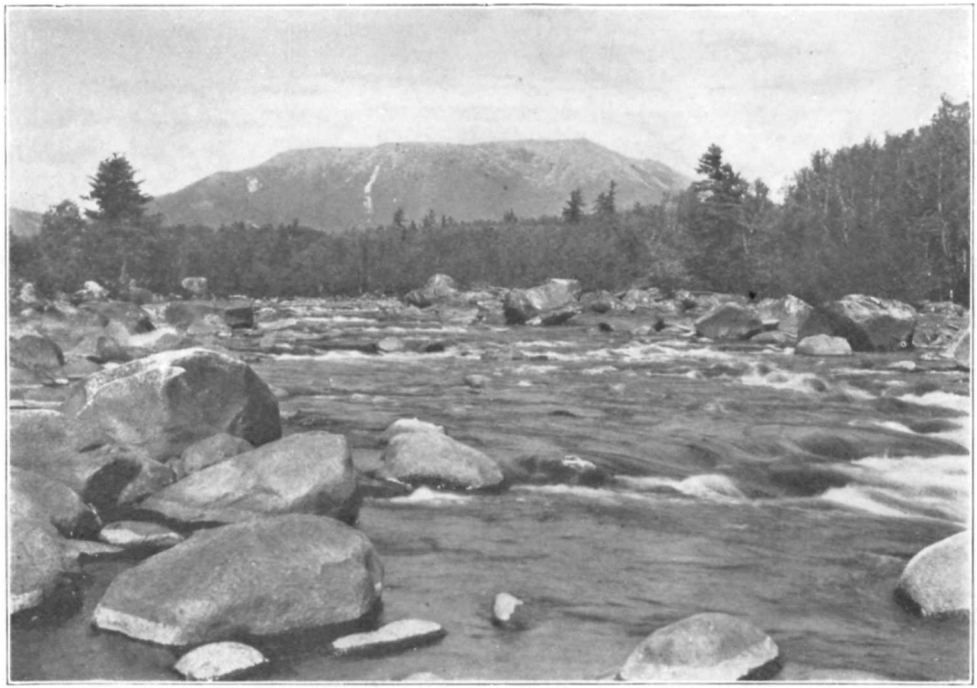
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KATAHDIN FROM THE WEST BRANCH—THE LONG WHITE SCAR IS ABOL SLIDE

Boy Scouts on Katahdin

A STORY OF THE MAINE WOODS

By

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

ILLUSTRATED BY
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Boy Scouts on Katahdin

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A PREFACE FOR PARENTS

OF course, not just for parents. You may read it if you want to, but when I was your age, I never read prefaces. I got a running start, cleared the preface at one jump, and dove head first into the opening chapter. Prefaces are for older folks, who dip a finger into the story to test it, and then wade in gingerly. This preface is really for your father. I want to ask him if when he was a boy he didn't sometimes dream about the mysterious Maine woods, and long to go there, and if he didn't wonder what old Katahdin looked like, rising alone above the wilderness a mile into the air, and long to climb it. I did, at any rate. All through my boyhood the word Katahdin spelt mystery for me, and the few men I knew and could talk to who had fished or hunted in the Maine woods, or had run the West Branch rapids or gone down the Allegash, were heroes in my sight, favored of the gods. It was far harder to get deep into the Maine woods in those days than it is now, and I knew I could never penetrate them until I, too, was a man. So, for years, I cherished the dream; for almost thirty years, in fact.

Well, I have penetrated them at last. I have run the rapids of the West Branch, I have climbed Katahdin and camped on its granite flanks. I found the Maine wilderness, and especially Katahdin, all that I had dreamed, which is rather remarkable, really, for

few things in this world come up to our boyhood expectations. I found this wilderness, and this mountain, so wonderful that I felt obliged to write a book about them. It would have been much harder *not* to write a book about them, in fact. I wanted, and I have tried, to write a book that will show to the boys of today what the Maine woods and Katahdin are really like, that will give them some idea of the fun and the excitement and the strenuous, healthful life they can really find there. I hope I haven't put anything into the book which they cannot find in Maine, for I don't believe in mixing romance into a story which pretends to be real. It only confuses a boy's sense of the actual world. I should like to hope that my book might make some boy beg his father to take him on a camping trip to Maine (without any gun but with a good camera!), and that it might make his father consent to go, where he will find just as much beauty and fun and strenuous, healthy excitement as his boy will, even if he can't climb Katahdin quite so fast, and wisely keeps out of the Chimney altogether. The Katahdin Chimney is no place for a father who isn't in condition. Scouts, keep your dads out of it unless they can chin themselves at least six times!

W. P. E.

Twin Fires,
Sheffield,
Massachusetts.

CONTENTS

I. In Which Bennie Invents a Slogan - 11

II. Bennie and Spider Start Their Campaign - - - - - - - 18

III. Getting Ready for the Winter Sports —The First Try at the Ski Jump - 29

IV. The First Attempt at Ski Jumping - 42

V. Getting Ready for the Carnival—The Prizes—Fireworks Arrive - - 52

VI. The Carnival Takes Place—Bill Wins the Ski Jump - - - - - - 61

VII. Bennie and Spider Acquire a Canoe - 75

VIII. Conditioning the "Mazama" for a Trip - - - - - - - - 82

IX. The "Mazama" Is Wrecked in the Rapids - - - - - - - 86

X. The Boys Get a Chance to Go to Maine, and Start Off in a Ford - 103

XI. The Boys Get Almost to Katahdin and Are Introduced to a Tote Road - - 124

XII. The Ascent of Doubletop and an Encounter with a Bear—At Long Range - - - - - - - - 143

XIII. In Which the Boys Are Introduced to the Genus, Maine Guide - - 148

XIV. Up Abol Slide to the Cabin—Footprints in the Tote Road - - - 153

XV. The Tale of How Old Man Sewall Fit the Cat Owl - - - - - 168

XVI. Over the Knife Blade in Cloud and Gale - - - - - - - - 174
XVII. How to Get a Dog Down a Precipice - 191
XVIII. Up Katahdin Chimney—the Hardest Rock Climb in the East - - - 196
XIX. A Strange Adventure with a Moose - 210
XX. The Hat-Rack that Ran Away - - 221
XXI. The Boys Start Down the West Branch, and Bennie Carries a Canoe 227
XXII. The Tale of the Porcupine, or Sam White's Revenge - - - - 240
XXIII. In Which Syd Turns Out to Be the Hero - - - - - - - - 247
XXIV. Two Men Lost on Katahdin in a Storm—Bennie Hikes All Night to Spread the Alarm - - - - 257
XXV. The Search Begins—A Wild Night on the Mountain - - - - - 267
XXVI. Spider and Bennie Find the Lost Men, One Almost Dead, and Bennie Rushes for Help - - - - 282
XXVII. The Rescue—Spider Keeps Going Till the Job is Done - - - - - 298
XXVIII. The Boys Refuse the Reward and Start Home - - - - - 309

ILLUSTRATIONS

Katahdin from the West Branch—the Long White Scar is Abol Slide - - - - *Frontispiece*

PAGE

The Main Summit of Katahdin from the Granite Cliffs of the Great Basin - - - - - 143

Looking Across the Basin to the Knife Blade. The Chimney is the Deep Cleft in Center, Slanting to the Left - - - - - - - - - 184

Looking into the Great Basin—Pamola on the Left 195

Maine Moose Drinking at Twilight - - - 216

Lily Pad Pond—Doubletop Mountain in Background - - - - - - - - - 228

Hello! Who's Taking My Picture? - - - 255

Katahdin from Daicey Pond—Basin on the Left is the Little Klondike - - - - - - 279

Boy Scouts on Katahdin

CHAPTER I

In Which Bennie Invents a Slogan

BENNIE CAPEN and his chum, Bob Chandler (better known as Spider), were juniors in the Southmead High School. But they were still active and loyal Boy Scouts. Spider, in fact, was an Eagle Scout, and Bennie, although he had never achieved enough merit badges to become an Eagle, was a great help to Mr. Rogers, the Scout Master, in leading the younger boys. It was sometimes hard, however, in winter to keep the small fellows interested in scouting. The snow was particularly deep the season when our story begins, making hikes impossible without skis or snowshoes, and many of the smaller Scouts had neither. They all had sleds, of course, but Southmead, like most towns nowadays, kept its streets broken out so the automobiles could run, and that made coasting in the roads unsafe. In fact, the Selectmen forbade anybody to coast down the one long hill in town. There was nothing left but the fields, and here the snow was so deep and unpacked that sleds weren't much use. To add to the difficulties of Bennie and Spider, Mr. Rogers had to go to New York at Christmas time, leaving the two Scouts in charge of the patrols, with nobody to help them.

"I tell you what it is, Spider," Bennie declared late one Saturday afternoon, when he and Spider had attempted to take both the Rattlesnake and the Bob Cat Patrols for a hike into the deep woods, on all the snowshoes and skis they could borrow, and only six Scouts had showed up, and three of those six had got discouraged before they had gone three miles and turned back, largely because they had no proper harnesses and their skis kept coming off; "I tell you what it is—we've just got to organize some real winter sports, and get regular skis for the kids, and teach 'em how to use 'em."

"That sounds good," Spider answered, "but there are a couple of catches in it. First place, how can we get 'em all skis? Skis cost money, and lots of the kids can't afford 'em. Second place, how are we going to teach 'em how to ski? You and I aren't any world beaters, you know. We couldn't jump six feet."

"That's 'cause we've never tried," Bennie answered hopefully. "I bet we could jump if we had a place to practice. But I know there's nothing in this game of trying to take the kids on hikes when their borrowed skis and snowshoes keep coming off, and they haven't any ski poles, and nobody knows how to dress right to keep warm, and all that. If we all had regular skis, and built a jump, and had races and jumps and things, I bet the kids would take more interest. Maybe we could start a winter-sports carnival, the way they do up at Dartmouth!"

"Dream on, Bennie; dream on," Spider laughed. "You're right, though, about the kids needing sports

and games. Long hikes in winter are too much for 'em now. They don't know enough about handling themselves, and they get too tired. We could build a jump all right, out on that steep pasture on the side of Monument Mountain. But how on earth are we going to get skis for 'em all?"

"We could have a tag day," Bennie suggested.

Spider shook his head. "No, Mr. Rogers doesn't like tag days. He says they're too much like a hold-up. I know what he means, too. It makes the Scouts look like beggars, going around the street and tackling everybody."

"How much do you suppose it would cost for skis?" Bennie asked.

"Well, we've got about twenty Scouts, maybe a few more, who'd really come out and do something if we had winter sports. Let's see, there must be eight or ten pairs of skis in the crowd now, but most of 'em haven't got the right kind of harness ——"

"I'll say they haven't! Babe Daniels slips out of his and goes back down the hill without 'em every time he tries to climb," Bennie laughed.

"Yes, and Tom's and Sam's are just the same—nothing but a strap over the toe. Of course, they can't control 'em at all, and think skiing isn't any fun. Well, we need ten pairs of skis, and about sixteen pairs of harnesses. The kids could make poles out of old rake handles if they had to."

"How much is that going to cost?"

"My father would buy 'em wholesale, and sell 'em to us at cost, I'm sure," said Spider. "I was looking

up prices the other day. It would cost about thirty dollars for the skis and thirty dollars or so for the harnesses. They wouldn't be the best skis, of course, —not white ash,—but they'd do."

"Wow!" exclaimed Bennie. "Sixty simoleons! Say, Mr. J. P. Morgan, how are we going to raise all that?"

"We wouldn't have to raise it all, Mr. John D. Rockefeller," Spider answered. "A lot of the kids could help out and pay part of it. We could make each kid that gets skis or harness earn a dollar, say. That would cut it down to fifty dollars or so. I bet we could raise that much around town, if we asked for it; not a tag day, but just some of us go to a few people like your father, and mine, and Mr. Owen, and tell 'em what we need."

"A few of us is good; you mean if you and I go," said Bennie. "But I sort of hate to go ask somebody to give me a pair of skis. Seems as if Mr. Rogers wouldn't like that any better'n a tag day. Isn't that like begging?"

"I s'pose it is," Spider admitted. "But what can we do? If we get up a minstrel show, or something, it will take so long the snow may be all gone. And here we are with two patrols on our hands, and we can't keep the kids interested. Gee whiz, I wish Mr. Rogers would come back!"

"I got it!" Bennie suddenly cried.

"Well, hang on to it! What's the great idea?"

"Let's think up a slogan first ——"

"A which?"

"A slogan, you poor dumb-bell. Don't you know what a slogan is?"

"I'll be the goat. What is a slogan, Mr. Bones?"

"A slogan is a—is a—a slogan's a—a ——" Bennie stumbled.

"Yes, dear old thing, I'm waiting," Spider laughed.

"Well, I'm trying to put it into simple language that your childish brain can understand," Bennie retorted. "A slogan's a kind of catch phrase that people remember, like—well, like 'Say it with flowers'——"

"Oh," Spider laughed. "I get you. 'Say it with skis'!"

"No, not that, but you got the idea. 'Put the Scouts on skis—put Southmead on the winter map'—that sort of thing. I mean, get our scheme into a snappy line, and then go to these men and make 'em see that if they help us to get skis, we'll come across and give the old village some real winter sports. We can build a toboggan slide, and a ski jump, and have races, and maybe give prizes, and—and ——"

"And who's going to teach us how?" Spider cut in.

"We'll learn how, all right. Mr. Rogers has got a book on skiing that he'll lend us if we write to him, and you and I can practice up with that, and I know how to build a toboggan slide ——"

"How'd you learn so much?"

"Never you mind—Papa knows all right. I was ten years old when Peanut Morrison was a Scout, remember? He built a toboggan slide then, and a ski jump, too. Everybody says the Scout movement has been fine for Southmead because it has given the kids

something to do, and kept 'em from loafing around the post-office and the depot. Well, it's up to us—you and me, Spider—to see that the kids don't go back to loafing around the depot. And it's up to the town to help us. 'Put the Scouts on skis—put Southmead on the winter map'—that's our slogan. What do you say, shall we use it, and go out after the dough?"

"My goodness, Bennie, I believe you are getting ready to go into the advertising business," Spider laughed.

Bennie looked hurt. "What's hit you, anyway?" he demanded. "All you do is laugh at me."

Spider laid an arm on his shoulder. "Sure, I'm with you, old Scout," he cried. "It's a fine idea. I believe we can sell it—as the drummers say who come into Pa's store. I'm laughing, though, because I never saw you get so excited before over an idea."

"Well, gee whiz, I don't have many," Bennie grinned. "But, honest, I think this is a good one. It will help the Scouts, and it will help the town, so it's not just begging for our own crowd. Why, darn it, with all the roads closed to coasting, none of the kids have any place to slide, and nobody does anything in this poky old village in winter, anyhow, but sit in the house and listen to the radio and go to bed. We'll put some ginger into 'em,—pep 'em up!"

"Right-o. When do we start the campaign?"

"To-morrow afternoon," said Bennie. "Everybody'll be at home, feeling good after a big dinner."

"And we'll call a Scout meeting for Tuesday night, eh, and tell the kids what they've got to do?"

"Sure, and you ask your father to order the skis, and I'll write to Mr. Rogers to see if we can borrow his book on skiing."

"Yes, and we ought to make a survey of the number of toboggans in town ——"

"A what?" asked Bennie.

"A survey, you poor dumb-bell," Spider laughed.

"What's a survey?"

"Look it up in the dictionary, my dear boy, you'll remember it so much better," Spider grinned. "It's under *S*, like 'slogan.'"

Bennie aimed a snowball at him, which he ducked, and went whistling toward his own house. Bennie turned in at the Capen gate, and went up the front path between two walls of snow, muttering proudly to himself, "Put the Scouts on skis—put Southmead on the winter map."

CHAPTER II

Bennie and Spider Start Their Campaign

AT dinner Bennie told his father and mother the slogan, and what he and Spider hoped to accomplish. Mr. Capen listened carefully. Ever since Bennie had braced up in his school work and done his chores around the house when he was supposed to do them, in order to be allowed to make the trip out west to Crater Lake, his father had treated him with a new respect. Bennie knew, when he got back from Crater Lake that last summer, that his father would watch carefully to see whether he was going to slump again, now he'd had the trip.

"I'll fool him," Bennie thought to himself. "Besides, I'd be a tin sport, I guess, if I soldiered on the job now, after Dad staked me to such a great vacation." So he kept up the good work, and all that autumn had been getting passing marks in school. His teachers had put him on the student council, too, and he was now considered almost as much of a leader as Spider. But what pleased Bennie most was that his father never expressed any surprise at this, but simply treated his son with a new respect. He didn't order him to do things any more. He called him into the library and consulted with him; and of course Bennie was glad to do whatever they decided ought to

be done. The result was that Bennie told his problems to his father, and found his father's advice, when he gave it, was always of great help. Sometimes, though, he wouldn't give it. He would say: "Well, son, that's something nobody can decide for you. Do exactly what you think is right." When he said this, Bennie knew that his father was trusting him, and it gave him a feeling of strange pleasure, which he couldn't have explained, not even to Spider.

Now he was hungrily devouring beefsteak, and telling his father and mother about the new slogan, and the plan to raise fifty dollars for skis and harnesses, and to start a winter-sports movement in the village.

Mr. Capen looked at Bennie's eager face, and listened without a word till his son was out of breath.

"Well, son," he finally replied, "that's a first-rate scheme. I'll give you ten dollars to start with, provided your Scouts each chip in something themselves. I don't say a dollar apiece, because that's a good deal for some of the little fellows. But I'm going to warn you now that a lot of men in town won't look at it the way you and I do. When you and Spider go to see them, they'll tell you nobody bought skis for *them* when *they* were boys. They got out on their sleds and had a good time, and there's no reason why boys shouldn't do it now."

"But gee whiz!" Bennie cut in, as he passed his plate for more steak and potatoes, "they could coast on the roads then. Besides, nobody knew about skis in those days, and ——"

"True enough," said his father. "But they'll ask

you what's the matter with the pastures to coast in?"

"The matter is, the snow's too deep for sleds. Anyhow, you can't keep a bunch of Scouts together just with sleds. It isn't exciting sport enough. We just *got* to do something or the Scouts will all go to pieces. I guess folks don't want that. A lot of the kids will be back loafing around the drug-store or the depot if they do. Besides, if we can get the Scouts to build a ski jump and a toboggan slide, lots of other folks in town will get out to have some fun, too, and we'll wake this old burg up a bit! You come along with Spider and me, Dad, and help us pry some coin out of Southmead's leading citizens. They won't dare turn you down."

"No," his father smiled. "This is your job. But don't think it's going to be an easy one. You'll need all your best arguments. That's why I want you to think what your best arguments are."

Bennie was silent for a long moment. "Well," he finally said, "our best argument is really right in my slogan, if we can make 'em see it: 'Put the Scouts on skis—put Southmead on the winter map.' If we can get the Scouts to organize winter sports here, we are teaching 'em to do something for the town, so anybody who helps us is really helping the town. How's that?"

"Good," said his father and mother together.

"And you let me know how you stand to-morrow night," his father added. "I'm curious to see how you get on as a campaign manager."

Bennie ran over to Spider's house after dinner, and found Spider's father had promised to take ten dollars off the wholesale cost of the skis, so that made twenty dollars already raised.

"O boy! only thirty dollars to get! It's a pipe!" Bennie cried.

"Everybody isn't so nice as your father and my father," Spider grinned. "Or they don't know so well what worthy Scout leaders we are. Wait till we tackle old man Pulver to-morrow!"

"I move we tackle him last," said Bennie.

The following afternoon the campaign began. To cover the ground more quickly, they had intended to go around town separately, but when the time came to start out, Bennie remarked, "Say, Spider, I really think we could make a better case of it if we went together, and both talked."

"I was thinking the same thing," Spider answered. "Maybe one of us will think of some argument the other forgot."

So out they started together, neither of them confessing that he hadn't quite the nerve to go alone.

The first man they tackled was John Owen. Mr. Owen lived in a big house on the main street of Southmead, which had been in his family for more than a hundred years. He was comfortably well-to-do, had no business, and spent most of his time in his greenhouse, where he grew grapes and vegetables all winter, and raised rare plants. It was in this greenhouse that the boys found him. They came in out of the deep snow and the cold, into a hot, damp atmosphere, heavy

with the scent of carnation pinks, and looked about them with wonder at the gay blossoms and the tomatoes ripening on the vines, and the thousands of tiny seedlings in boxes.

"Don't look much like winter sports in here," Spider whispered.

"Nor feel like it," Bennie replied, unbuttoning his sheepskin.

"Well, boys, what can I do for you?"

Mr. Owen appeared suddenly, around an aisle, where he had been hidden by a huge fern.

"You begin," Bennie nudged Spider.

Spider set forth as best he could the needs of the Scouts, and what they hoped to accomplish by a winter-sport program. Mr. Owen listened till he was through.

"H'm," said he, then. "When I was a boy in this town we didn't have any Scouts. We didn't need to be told how to enjoy winter sports. We just went out —everybody—and enjoyed 'em. I had a ripper sled that held twelve people, and we used to come down Potts hill better'n a mile a minute."

"If you tried it now, the Selectmen would pinch you," Bennie retorted.

"They would? Why?"

"Because it isn't safe to coast on any roads any more, on account of the motors," both boys answered. "There isn't a ripper in town now."

"Well, well, I didn't know that," the man replied. "That's pretty tough, isn't it?"

"It sure is," Bennie agreed.

"And you think if your Boy Scouts could get skis,

they could find a substitute for the old bob-sled coasting, eh?"

"Yes, sir, we do," the boys answered. "We think we could get all the young folks in the town out, instead of doing nothing, the way they do now."

"Here, have a flower, each of you," Mr. Owen smiled, breaking off two pinks, and handing them to Bennie and Spider, for their buttonholes. They thanked him, and then didn't know what to say. Certainly two carnation pinks wouldn't buy many skis for the Scouts.

But he, too, was silent for a time, looking out through the glass at the snow-covered world.

"I've lived in Southmead all my life," he finally said, "and it seems to me folks get less and less fun out of life every year. When I was a boy, this village was ten times as lively as it is now. I'm too old to do anything about it, but I like your spirit in wanting to. Here, use this if it will help."

He took a tightly folded bill from his pocket and passed it to Spider. The boys thanked him and hurried away. In the boiler and potting room of the greenhouse, where the outside door was, Spider unrolled the bill and they looked at it eagerly.

"Ten simoleons!" Bennie gasped. "Wow! That leaves us only twenty dollars more to get!"

But in the next two hours they interviewed fifteen people, and they were still two dollars short of the needed twenty. Bennie quoted his slogan. Spider used all the arguments he could think of, but only a few men would give.

"The boys have sleds, and there's the snow. What more do you want?" was the general tenor of the replies.

"I'm getting kind of mad," Bennie said at last, after four refusals in a row. "Let's go tackle old man Pulver right now, and when he gives us the gate, let's tell him what we think of him."

"No, that won't do," Spider laughed. "A Scout is always polite, you know. I'd just as soon tackle him, though, if you'll promise to behave. He'll give us as much as the last four have, anyway, which is nothing at all."

Old man Pulver was a Southmead character. He was a retired farmer who now lived in the village. He had been a Selectman for years, although few people liked him. The reason he got elected was because he hated to spend money, even the town money, and kept the taxes down. He always spoke against every kind of modern improvement in town meeting, and Bennie had once heard Mr. Capen call him a barnacle on the ship of state.

"Well, I'll be good. Lead the way to the old barnacle's abode!" Bennie said.

Old man Pulver, as they reached his house, was just emerging from the kitchen door, to feed his hens.

"What kin I do fer you boys?" he demanded, in his high, sharp voice.

"You can give us ten dollars for the Boy Scouts' winter-sports campaign," Bennie answered.

"Doubtless I *kin,* but the question is, will I?" the old man said with a chuckle. "Why should I?"

"Well, you're chairman of the Selectmen," Bennie retorted, "and you stopped everybody from coasting."

"Coastin' on the roads, yes. There hain't no law agin coastin' all over the pastures, so fur's I know."

"There's no law, but you can't coast in such deep snow," Spider said. "You've got to have skis and toboggans. We're trying to raise fifty dollars to get enough skis for the Boy Scouts. Then we're going to build a ski jump ——"

"And break your necks," said old man Pulver.

"Sure!" Spider laughed. "And give everybody else in town a chance to break his neck, too. We want to get up a winter-sports carnival, the way other towns do, and make things livelier here for everybody. But we got to have some money to start."

"Why don't you git it from your father? He owns the bank, don't he?" the old man demanded of Bennie.

"He's given us ten dollars, and Mr. Chandler's given us ten dollars, and Mr. Owen's given us ten dollars, and Tom Crary's given us five dollars, and the boys are going to earn some themselves, and ——"

"Wall, I should reckon you had enough now to buy what-do-you-call-'ems—skis?—fer the hull town, without my givin' you more."

"I guess you don't realize what skis cost, Mr. Pulver," Spider put in. "They cost as much as good sleds. All the boys and girls have sleds, and you won't let 'em use them. Now they've simply *got* to get skis or toboggans, to have any fun. And a lot of 'em can't afford the new expense."

"You think I spoiled yer fun, do ye?" the old man demanded.

Bennie started to reply, but Spider checked him with a gesture, and answered: "No, you didn't spoil our fun. The motors did. We realize it isn't safe to let anybody coast on Potts hill. But our fun is spoiled, and if the boys and girls in Southmead are going to have fun again, somebody's got to help 'em. We've come to you because you're one of the big men in town, and because we think you don't want to see the kids grow up loafers. If we can't raise this money, the Scouts will break up, and the boys *will* become loafers."

Old man Pulver looked at both boys sharply. "I don't think much of these newfangled Boy Scout movements, and these newfangled skis, and such-like contraptions. When I was a boy we didn't have time to be loafers. We had to *work*. But I'm willin' to take a chance, not on the Boy Scout movement, but on you two boys. Strikes me you're tryin' to accomplish somethin', though blamed if I know just what. Here you be. 'Course I don't own no bank, but I guess I kin afford to help once in a while. You tell your father that, Capen."

And the old man pulled a long, dirty wallet out of his hip pocket, and extracted from it a ten-dollar bill!

Bennie and Spider couldn't have been more surprised if he had produced a rabbit from his ear.

"Say, Mr. Pulver, you're a little bit of all right!" Bennie cried.

"Well, the Scouts are certainly obliged to you!" exclaimed Spider.

"Kind o' flabbergasts ye, don't it?" the old man chuckled. "Old tightwad Pulver loosenin' up, eh? Wall, I don't calc'late to spend my money on nonsense. I'm puttin' it on you two boys. If your what-do-you-call-'ems—skis—turn out nonsense, maybe I'll come after ye and demand it back. Now I gotter feed them hens."

Bennie and Spider almost ran home.

"What do you know about that!" Bennie was saying, as they raced down the street. "Old man Pulver coughing up ten spondulicks for what-do-you-call-'ems! Wow! I guess Dad'll have a fit when he hears. Gee whiz, we gotter practice right away, and call a Scout meeting, and get busy. Wow!"

Spider was more thoughtful. "I'm trying to dope out why the old man came across," said he. "It wasn't our arguments, 'cause he doesn't believe in up-to-date things like the Scouts ——"

"It was our fatal charm, Spider," Bennie laughed. "Nobody can resist us. Personality, my boy, personality!"

"Personality, your grandmother. A lot of people resisted us to-day without a struggle. I bet it was because old man Pulver really, way down deep, likes boys and has felt kind of sorry ever since he closed Potts hill. Bennie, it's up to us to put this winter-sports thing across!"

"Sure it is. And we'll do it, too. Come on in. Maybe we'd better telegraph to Mr. Rogers. He won't

get my letter before to-morrow night. We got to have that book as quick as we can get it."

The two boys burst into Bennie's house.

"Hi, Dad!" Bennie called. "We got eight dollars over the quota! We pried old man Pulver loose from a ten-dollar bill, and he never even groaned!"

"My son, have you no respect for the truth?" said his father.

"Honestly, Mr. Capen—that's right," said Spider. "Here it is."

Mr. Capen took the bill and examined it carefully. "Why, it's genuine!" he laughed. "Well, well, I refuse to finish even in a race with old man Pulver. I'll add a toboggan to my contribution."

"What'll you give us, Ma?" Bennie demanded of his mother.

"I'll give you a piece of my mind if you and Spider don't go get ready for supper right away," she laughed.

CHAPTER III

Getting Ready for the Winter Sports—the First Try at the Ski Jump

THE next week was a busy one for the two Scout leaders. Mr. Rogers telegraphed to them where they could find the book on skiing, so they went with the neighbor who had the keys to his house, and got it on Monday afternoon, the minute school was out. Taking it home, they got on their skis and went out to the nearest pasture slope, and began to study the diagrams and practice. None of the Southmead boys had ever done much more on skis than to push along on the level, and coast straight down-hill. But that, of course, is only the mere beginning of real ski running. If you have the proper harness on your skis, so you can control them with your foot almost as well as a skater controls his skate, you can do many things. You can "snowplow" to brake your speed, for instance, which is done by putting the points of the skis close together, and letting the back ends separate, so your skis form a big V. This sounds easy. Bennie and Spider tried snowplowing first of all. They started down the slope, and when they were traveling at a good speed, they let the points of their skis come together by throwing the weight of each foot on to the inner edge. The result was that one point went

right over the other point, their skis formed an X instead of a V, and both boys went headlong into the snow.

They got up, digging the snow out of their necks and faces, and grinned sheepishly at each other.

"Not so easy as it sounds," said Spider.

"By George, I'll do it if it kills me!" Bennie cried, starting down again.

It took them half an hour to master snowplowing, but at last they got so they could do it—if they weren't traveling too fast. Also they learned how to herring-bone and side-step, as they climbed back to the book, which they left on top of their coats up the hill. You herring-bone by pointing your left ski far to the left, and your right far to the right, as if you were toeing out excessively, and then you climb up-hill without back-slipping. If the hill is too steep for that, you turn sideways, and side-step up, putting each ski down hard and packing a little level step.

After they had begun to get the hang of the snow-plow, they decided to begin on a stemming turn. To stem on skis is much the same as stopping on skates. You keep one foot straight ahead, with your full weight on it, and then you push forward the other a little, set it at an angle to your path, edge it inward, and put some weight on it. Being edged, or tipped up against the snow, the way the edge of your skate is against the ice, it pushes the snow harder and harder and brings you to a stop. The trouble for a beginner is that if he puts too much weight suddenly on the twisted ski, his other foot will slide right on over it,

and he'll get a spill. On the other hand, if he takes his weight *off* the straight ski as he throws it on to the other one, and then tips or edges the straight ski around into the same line, he will swing to right or left, according to the foot he is stemming with, and make a pretty curve. He can even swing clear around till he points right up the hill. In the book, Bennie and Spider saw pictures and diagrams of men doing this. But it was one thing to see it in a picture, and quite another to do it. They tried and tried, and fell and fell. But at last Bennie suddenly got the hang of it. Stemming with his left foot, he came curving around in a full half circle, and stopped with his skis pointing right back up the hill!

"Wow!" he yelled. "I've got it! I've got it! Gee whiz, that's a great sensation!"

A few more tries and Spider got the hang of it, too. But it was fast getting dark now. The sun had set, and the snow looked purple from the reflected sunset colors.

"Just one more try," said Bennie. "Listen. Let's aim right at that old rock sticking up through the snow, and when we get almost to it, let's stem sharp; you go left, I'll go right. I bet if we were skiing on some big hill we never saw before, we'd *have* to know how to stem, or break our necks."

"If the stem doesn't work, we'll break our necks this time," Spider suggested.

"No, we can always fall down," laughed Bennie.

They put on their coats, Spider put the book in his pocket, and they pointed their skis at the rock.

"Stem when I yell, 'Now!'" Bennie cautioned; and off they went.

The rock was far down the slope, and as they rushed toward it, nearer and nearer, faster and faster, their hearts went down into their boots as they began to think what would happen to them if the stem didn't work. Bennie had fully intended not to stem till the rock was only a few feet away, but they were still fifty feet from it when he let out a loud, "Now!" and threw his weight on to his edged left ski. Spider did the same on his right ski. And both stems worked. Bennie went shooting on a curve off to the right, Spider to the left, and they came to a stop at the bottom of the hill, three hundred feet apart.

"Say, are we some babies?" Bennie called.

"I thought you were never going to give the old signal," Spider called back. "That rock was coming at me a mile a minute."

"Wow! This is the life!" cried Bennie again, practicing a kick-around, and rejoining his chum. "Some sport, I'll say."

"Wait till we have all the Scouts doing it!" called Spider. "By Saturday you 'n' I ought to be able to teach 'em something."

The next afternoon they practiced some more, beginning on the Telemark. The Telemark stop and turn is harder than stemming. You have almost to kneel on one ski, and run the other far out in front, and then set it at a right angle to your path. Then, if you want to turn, you spring up with all your weight thrown on to the crossed ski, swing the other around,

and shoot off at right angles. It is a pretty thing to watch, but to do it without getting your skis crossed and spilling yourself headlong is very hard. We shall have to confess that neither Bennie nor Spider had succeeded in doing it when sunset came on Tuesday.

Tuesday night was the Scout meeting. All the Scouts had been told of the campaign for skis, and the club room—in Mr. Rogers' barn—was full of excited boys. Spider and Bennie talked to them like Dutch uncles.

"The men of the town have given us more'n fifty dollars," Spider said. "We are going to get skis and harnesses—real, honest-to-goodness harnesses—for every Scout who hasn't got 'em. And we are going to get a toboggan for the troop. But all of us have got to come across and deliver the goods in return for this. We've got to raise some money ourselves, and we've got to build a ski jump and a toboggan slide so's everybody in town can have a place to slide and have fun."

"It's up to us Scouts to get real winter sports going in this old burg," Bennie cut in. "You guys have been soldiering on us since Mr. Rogers went away. You got to come across now, or the Scouts will bust up sure. You don't want the Scouts to bust up, do you?"

"'Course we don't," piped little Jimmy Crosby. "But my father says ski jumping's too dangerous."

"We won't jump off Monument Mountain," said Spider; "and we won't jump anywhere till we've learned how to ski. Now, come on, you fellows, let's

find out just who has skis, and who needs harnesses and skis both, and how much you can pay for 'em."

One by one each Scout was questioned, and his measure taken to see how long his skis ought to be—just as long as he could reach upward with his fist doubled, except in the case of the smaller boys who were growing fast. Their skis would be longer, so they could use them the next winter. From the twenty-two Scouts present almost fourteen dollars was promised to help pay for the equipment, and everybody was told to report at the Scout room Saturday morning. Those boys who already had skis promised to join Bennie and Spider in practice the next afternoon. Everybody agreed, also, to hunt up two old rake handles, and make himself ski poles by boring holes in old boot-soles and fastening them on the handles, six inches from the bottom. The meeting broke up with a Scout cheer, and Bennie and Spider marched the whole patrol down the snowy street and back—" just to see what it feels like to have you all on the job again," they said.

The skis were ordered by Spider's father, by telegraph the next morning, and Friday night they arrived at the express office, together with a big toboggan. Saturday morning the Scouts marched in a body to Mr. Chandler's store and got them, taking them back up the street in triumph, while everybody on the sidewalks looked on.

In Mr. Rogers' yard the skis and harnesses were given out and adjusted, Spider and Bennie making each boy kneel down, after the harness was strapped

around his heel, and see if he could touch his knee to the ski. This is very important, as they had discovered for themselves even before they read it in the book. If your toe is jammed too far into the ski irons so you cannot kneel on your ski, you are likely to sprain your ankle when you fall. Never go out skiing without first making sure your harness gives you play enough to enable you to kneel down.

The yard was soon full of shouting boys, some of whom had never been on skis before in their lives, all shoving and scuffling around, and demanding that they be taken at once to a hill and given a chance to jump.

"Not a chance!" Bennie told them. "Spider and I have been practicing a week, and we don't dare jump yet. You've all got to learn how to run on the level, first, and we've got to build a toboggan slide, too. Now you birds go home to dinner on your skis, and get used to 'em. This afternoon, as soon as you can get there, come to the big north pasture on Monument Mountain—that's only half a mile from town, and it's steep enough to suit anybody. Every Scout bring a snow shovel, and wear two pairs of socks in his shoes. We don't want any frozen toes. Any Scout that hasn't got on two pairs of socks this afternoon gets chased home, see?"

"What are the shovels for?" somebody demanded.

"You'll see. Maybe we'll build a little jump—just a baby one to start on. Oh, and bring a toboggan if you've got one—anybody."

At half-past one the Scouts had begun to converge from all directions toward the great white field of snow

which lay tipped up from the meadows just south of the village and ran steeply toward the woods high on the mountain side. Besides the big new Scout toboggan, two Scouts had brought toboggans of their own, and five high-school girls appeared with two more toboggans. That made five toboggans and twenty-four boys on skis. It was quite a procession that filed across the half mile of meadow, packing a hard track, toward the big, tilted pasture.

At the base they paused and looked up. Not a soul had been up there since the last snowfall. It glittered white and unbroken—two feet deep with beautiful, soft snow.

"There you are!" said Spider. "Who'll be the first Scout up?"

With a yell the twenty-two boys of the two patrols started for the first steep pitch, going straight at it, while Spider and Bennie watched them, grinning. They knew what would happen. It began to happen quickly. Each boy, with his skis pointed straight up the hill, began to slip back. He would get one ski pushed up a way, and then shift his weight to it in order to push up the other foot—and go sliding backward, losing all the ground he had gained. In about two minutes most of the Scouts were floundering in the snow, and the high-school girls were in gales of laughter.

"I guess they've had enough," Spider whispered to Bennie. "Let's show 'em."

The way to climb a long hill on skis, of course, is to take it in a series of switchbacks, just as a boat

tacks into the wind, making each tack just as steep as your skis will hold without slipping back. At each turn you give a quick kick around—which all the boys quickly mastered—and start on the next tack. Following Bennie and Spider, all the Scouts were soon at the top of the pasture, where they faced about and looked back down the slope.

"Oh, golly! It's a long way to the bottom," little Joe Coley exclaimed.

"Say, I bet it won't take long to get there, though," put in Tommy Moran.

"Won't if you can keep on your feet. I bet you take a header before you've gone a quarter of the way."

"Bet you do yourself," Tommy answered.

"Well, who's going first?" Bennie demanded.

"I ain't, I'll tell the world," said Bill Gilson.

"Aw, he's scared!" taunted Tommy.

"Sure, I'm scared, and I don't care who knows it. I've never been on these things before. I'll bet you're scared, too."

"The snow's two feet deep, and you can't hurt yourselves," Spider laughed. "Let's all go down once, anyhow, and see how it feels. Come on, now, line up!"

The twenty-four boys lined up side by side, three feet apart. Far below them, down the steep slope, they could see the high-school girls, like little dolls on the snow, with the toboggans. Even Bennie felt a little queer in the pit of his stomach as he thought how fast he would fly down that white incline! Some of

the smaller Scouts were pale, but they were all gritting their teeth.

"One, two, three—go!" called Spider, and pushed off. Bennie could see the line start on both sides of him, but after that he saw nothing more than a flying blur, as he gathered headway and began to tear down the hill. The cold wind rushed against his face till his eyes filled with tears. Once he went over a bump on the pasture and his skis left the snow completely. As he landed again he expected to pitch headlong, but by a wild, violent lurch of his body, and a mad, quick stem with one foot, he managed to keep himself upright. In a few seconds more he was rushing out over the soft, level snow of the meadow, where he applied a stemming turn and came to a quick stop. Then he wiped his eyes and looked around. Spider and one other Scout—to his surprise he saw it was Bill Gilson, who had never been on skis before, and said he was afraid—were at the bottom, too, and still on their feet. Looking back up the hill, he saw the other twenty-one Scouts, scattered all the way from near the top almost to the bottom, picking themselves out of the deep snow and trying hard to get on their feet again. It was a comical sight, and Bennie emitted a peal of laughter.

"And they wanted to begin jumping to-day!" he called to Spider.

Spider laughed, too. But Bill Gilson didn't. His eyes were running from the sting of the wind, his face was flushed with excitement. He was still panting for breath.

"That—that—that's the best fun I ever had!" he exclaimed. "Golly, it's most flying!"

"How'd you manage to keep your feet?" the two leaders asked.

"I dunno. I just did. I sort of felt as if I couldn't fall down!"

Bill was too excited to talk, almost. He began tacking back up the hill as fast as he could scramble.

"Say, he must be a born skier," said Bennie.

"Beginner's luck, maybe," Spider answered. "But he's certainly become a fan the first crack."

Bennie now took half of the boys in hand, starting them from only part way up the hill, while Spider, with the other half, went to another part of the slope to lay out the toboggan slide. The high-school girls followed, toiling up through the deep snow.

"We'll soon have a path for you," Spider told them.

The slide was easily started. Putting four boys on the big toboggan, and getting on the rear himself to steer, Spider started straight down the slope. In the soft snow, with so much weight on, the toboggan cut in deep, and didn't travel very fast, so he could steer it in a direct line for the bottom. With the track thus marked out, the boys and the girls, too, took snow shovels and packed snow up on both sides of this little ditch. In this way they made a path to walk up in, on either side of the track, and the track soon had sides a foot or more high. After this gang had worked a while, Spider sent them back to ski, while the other eleven boys came and finished the job. In about an hour the girls were whizzing down this

chute, which soon became as hard and smooth as glass, and some of the Scouts, too, forsaking their skis, joined in the tobogganing. By four o'clock the slide was so fast that the sides had to be shoveled higher in places to keep the toboggans from jumping them, and at the bottom the coasters shot clear out across the meadow to the opposite woods.

It was a tired and snow-covered and rather lame lot of boys who finally skied home again at sunset to the village street, but two of them, at least, were supremely happy. Bennie and Spider had seen the beginning of their dream come true. They had all the Scouts on skis, and they had built a toboggan slide which other people in town had already used.

"When do we have the next meeting? Next Saturday morning?" they asked the troop, as the village was reached.

"Oh, no! Let's meet after school Monday."

"Sure—Monday afternoon. I wanter practice that old stemming turn."

"Say, how about building a jump next week, and havin' a meet Saturday?"

"I wanter bring my kid brother tobogganing. Let's not wait a week. Snow may be all gone."

"Sure—may get a thaw. Monday, I say."

"Monday!"

"Monday!"

"Monday!"

"Looks like a vote," Spider laughed. "Well, anybody who wants to come out to the hill Monday will find Bennie and me there. But we won't call any

regular meeting, I guess, before next Saturday. It's up to you fellows to practice hard, so we won't have any evening meeting this week. You'll all be too sleepy at night."

"You've said it!" sighed Tommy Moran. "Gosh, I'm sore all over, and I could eat a hitchin' post."

But if Spider and Bennie were happy, there was one Scout even happier. It was Bill Gilson. He didn't say much about it, but a great joy was his. All his life—and he was now fourteen—he had been afraid of sports. He was afraid in football, he was afraid in baseball when he stood up to the plate, he was afraid of the water when the boys went swimming. He had been deathly afraid before he started down the hill that afternoon the first time. He had been so afraid that he thought he was going to be sick. But the wild thrill of the speed, and the sudden realization that somehow or other he had a knack of balance which made him at home on skis right away, had put a new heart into him. He had only fallen once the whole afternoon,—and that hadn't hurt. Everybody else, even Bennie, had fallen more often than he. He was already able to stem. It seemed to come natural to him. He wasn't afraid! He wasn't afraid! That was the song Bill sang to himself, as he slid rapidly along, pushing with his home-made ski poles, and practicing at every step to get all the distance he could into his slides.

CHAPTER IV

The First Attempt at Ski Jumping

IF the first week after their campaign started had been a busy one for Bennie and Spider, the second week was more so.

In the first place, all the Scouts, proud of their new skis and their harnesses, skied all over town on Sunday, and to school on Monday. By Monday afternoon every other boy in town had seen the skis and heard about the plans for a jump, and, later, for races and a carnival. By Monday afternoon, too, every girl in the high school had been told about the toboggan slide, and how fast and how safe it was. As the Scouts streamed out across the meadow to the big slope, when school was out, they found a score of girls and smaller children headed in the same direction. Two or three of the girls had flexible flyers, and so did the children.

"That won't do!" cried Bennie. "The sleds will just ruin the skiing."

"Yes, and they'll spoil the toboggan slide—cut it all up," said Spider. "We'll have to stop them, right away."

The Scouts were quickly called together and told that each one was a policeman to keep all sleds off the hill, and Spider himself explained to the would-be coasters that this slope was set aside for the toboggan

slide and the skiers. He tried to be polite about it, though some of the girls got angry, and one of the small boys with a sled said he'd go home and tell his father.

"Go ahead, son," Spider replied. "But you'd better tell him to get you a pair of skis, too, or else go out and build you a coast on some other hill. We've worked hard to fix this one for skis and toboggans, and we don't propose to have it spoiled."

With six toboggans going it down the chute, and more than twenty skiers on the slope, the hill was a busy scene that afternoon. Bennie had brought the book along, and he and Spider were practicing hard on the Telemark turn, and the Christiania swing, with Bill Gilson keeping right at their side, and trying to do everything they did. And he did it, too. Bennie almost got mad at him, because he succeeded in making a Telemark turn after six tries, when Bennie himself had been practicing almost a week. But none of them yet could make the turn at high speed. The best they could do, when going full tilt down the hill, was a gradual stemming turn.

The next day, when Spider got back from practice, his father said, "Well, Bob, I did a stroke of good business after all, when I got those skis for your Scouts."

"How's that?" Spider asked.

"I got orders this afternoon for five toboggans and four pairs of skis—not all of 'em from kids, either. Two of the school-teachers have ordered toboggans. That young man who is staying at the Winthrops'

boarding-house for his health, has ordered skis—the best ash ones, too, with poles, harnesses, and all. The new doctor and his wife have ordered a toboggan. Your high-school principal wants a pair of skis. Says he needs more exercise ——"

"He'll get it," Spider grinned. "Looks as if we'd started something, Dad."

"It sure does. What's that slogan?—Put Southmead on the winter map? Maybe I'd better have it printed on a sign and hang it in the store window, over an exhibit of skis and winter togs."

"Oh, great! Will you?"

"Might be good business, at that," his father mused.

To add to their excitement, on Wednesday Bennie and Spider were sought out, as they left the high-school building, by a group of six smaller boys, who wanted to know if they could join the Scouts.

"Why do you want to join the Scouts?" Spider asked.

"So's we can get skis," one of them piped up.

"Yes, I thought so," Spider answered, sternly. "You didn't ask to join when we didn't have skis to give away. Well, we haven't got skis to give away now. We used up all we had on our regular boys—and they had to help pay for 'em, too."

"Yes, and they had to work to build a toboggan slide," said Bennie. "And now you guys want to horn in and get something for nothing."

The six boys looked crestfallen, and didn't know what to say.

"They can't even talk," said Spider, winking at

Bennie. Then he added, in a kinder tone, "How many of you fellows can raise money enough for a pair of skis and harnesses?"

"How much do they cost?"

"Five dollars—that's the wholesale price, too."

"Oh, gee whiz!" two or three boys groaned.

"Well, we can't take you in now, till the winter sports are over, unless you have skis," Spider said. "Wouldn't be fair to the other Scouts. As quick as any of you can earn five dollars and bring it to me, you can come in. That's a test of how bad you really want to join."

The boys went away, whispering among themselves.

"Good for you," Bennie said. "I wouldn't have thought of that."

"I don't know if I did right," Spider replied. "But we had to decide something quick. If we took 'em in just because they thought they could bum a pair of skis, I don't believe they'd ever make good Scouts."

"Sure, and if any of 'em really scratches up the five bucks, it'll mean he's got some stuff in him."

"Maybe—if he doesn't just beg it off his father. I wish Mr. Rogers would come home."

"Don't worry. None of those kids will pry five bucks out of his father, believe me," Bennie laughed. "He'll have to earn it."

That night, and all the next day, it snowed, a fine, powdery snow, but fortunately the wind didn't blow, so there was little drifting. However, the toboggan slide filled up, and on Friday all hands got out on the hill and shoveled it out again. That made the sides

still higher, so now when a toboggan went down all you saw was the heads of the people on it, flashing down the chute.

There were so many people out at the slide on Saturday morning that Spider and the two young school-teachers, who took command of the girls, laid out a second slide, not far from the first, and everybody set to work shoveling up the sides. There were now so many workers that they strung out all the way up the slope, and the chute was completed in an hour.

Meanwhile, Bill Gilson, without saying a word to anybody, had gone around the slope to the far side, where, near the bottom, it was very steep, and just above this steepest part had begun to shovel up a jump. Joe Coley was the first one to spy him.

"Hi, Bennie, look what Bill's doing!" he called.

Bennie looked, and started for the spot, all the Scouts strung out after him. When they got there, they found Bill had shoveled up the snow into a big step, four feet wide and two feet high, like a platform sticking out of the hill, and packed it down hard.

"Going to jump, Bill?" Joe demanded.

"No, I'm going to plant pansies," said Bill.

"Why do you put it above where it's so steep?" Tommy Moran asked. "Sh'd think you'd want the steep part above the jump, to get goin' on."

"A lot *you* know about jumping," Bill retorted.

"You ain't such an expert, darling," Tommy replied.

"Bill's right," Bennie put in. "He's been reading

that book on skiing. You see, the steeper the place is where you land, the less of a shock you get. If you landed on flat ground, you'd drive your heels up through the top of your head, I guess."

"How far can people jump?" somebody else asked.

"The record is over two hundred feet," said Bennie.

"Two hundred feet! Gosh! That's way down into the meadow! Wow!"

"You going two hundred feet, Bill?"

"Come down in time for dinner."

"Give my regards to the birdies."

"Better wear a coat—it's cold up in the clouds."

"You guys think you're smart, don't you?" Bill retorted, as he stuck his ski poles up on either side of the edge of his platform, so he could see where to take off. Then he started to climb up above the jump.

"Go easy, first," Bennie cautioned. He was really rather worried. He had never jumped himself. Nobody in Southmead had. Spider, coming over now, looked even more worried. "Do you think we ought to let him?" he asked.

"Snow's so deep he can't hurt himself," Bennie answered.

But they couldn't have stopped him if they had tried. Bill, all his life afraid when he played with other boys, had found his courage at last, and he was determined to prove it. He would have tried that jump if he knew he was going to break his leg when he landed!

Now he was fifty feet above the platform, and turned. He took one look, pointed his skis between

the two poles, crouched forward as he had seen jumpers do in pictures, and slid. The other boys, standing by the platform, watched him come, holding their breath. As his skis rushed over the edge of the platform and he sailed out into space, they saw him spring up erect, waving his arms around to keep himself balanced in the air. He flew twenty feet or more before he landed. As he landed, his skis seemed to shoot forward from under him, and then Bill Gilson disappeared in a vast spray of snow.

Before anybody could get to him, he began picking himself up.

"Hurt?" Spider called anxiously.

"Hurt—naw!" Bill answered, digging the snow from his face. "By gosh, I'm going to do that if it takes a leg!"

"It'll take two, Bill," somebody suggested.

"It'll take four, if *I* do it," Joe Coley affirmed.

"Well, I won't be stumped by Bill. I'm going to try!" Bennie cried. "Come on, who's a real sport?"

Spider and one other followed him and Bill up the slope. Nobody else volunteered.

"You're a fine bunch!" Bennie shouted back. "Last week you were all yelling for a jump."

Nobody said a word.

As Bennie took his position to start, and looked down the slope to the platform, and then saw the hill dip so sharply below it that it seemed as if he would leap right off into space, he felt his stomach turn over. He would gladly have turned around then and there, and quit. But the others were watching him, and

little Bill Gilson had already dared it, and so, before he quite knew what he was doing, he pushed off, and suddenly saw the edge of the platform flying toward him. He, too, crouched and sprang up as he thought his feet were over the edge of the platform. But, as a matter of fact, they were already a yard out in the air from the take-off when he sprang. The result was that instead of pitching his body forward as it should be, he was straight up, and when he hit—it seemed whole minutes later!—his feet shot out from under him, and he too vanished into a great swirl of snow. Spider and the other Scout had the same fate. But Bill, starting this time nearer the platform so that he wasn't traveling so fast when he reached it, managed to keep his footing when he landed, though his jump was only about ten feet, and went on down the hill, followed by a cheer.

As he was toiling up again, his face wreathed in a happy grin at his success, a newcomer appeared. Spider and Bennie recognized him as the man who was spending the winter at the boarding-house, and who had ordered skis at Mr. Chandler's store on Wednesday. They must have arrived that morning. He was coming up the slope in steep zigzags, with a peculiar motion that seemed somehow to keep his skis from back slipping.

"He knows his business, that bird," Bennie whispered.

The man came directly over to the group, nodded to the boys, took a look at the platform and the slope below, said, "Put a hat on top of each pole, so I can

see 'em," and started up the slope above. Spider and Joe put their caps on the poles which marked the take-off. Then everybody watched the newcomer. He was going up beyond where Bill had first started! Up, up, he went, a hundred, two hundred feet!

"Wow! he'll hit her at some speed!" Bennie muttered.

The man turned, stuck his poles into the snow, crouched, and came on with his hands almost touching his feet. Faster and faster—the boys could hear the air whistle as he hit the platform! Then he straightened up with a stiff jerk, and Bill, watching carefully, saw that his body was pitched far forward. Out into the air he shot, steady as a man on level ground, landed a full forty feet below the jump in a cloud of sprayed snow, swayed a little, shot one foot ahead of the other, and, before anybody had realized what had happened to him, made a Telemark stem which sent up a wave of white snow ahead of him, and swung around in a perfect half circle.

The boys all broke into a spontaneous cheer.

"That's the prettiest thing I ever saw!" Bill said, half to himself. "Oh, gee, if I could only do that!"

When the man, a bit winded, reached them again, herring-boning up the steep slope, Spider addressed him.

"Where did you learn to jump, sir?"

"I was at Dartmouth for four years," said the man. "Most of us learned to jump up there, though we had a jump twice as high as this, and nearly broke our necks learning. Your jump would be better if you

had some planks on it, covered with snow, so it would stay firm and even."

"Will you give us some lessons, sir?"

"Sure. But you can't jump, you know, till you've learned a lot about skiing. Better come over where it isn't so steep, and let me see what you all know."

The boys fell in behind him, all but Bill, who panted and strained to keep at his side, his eyes fixed on the stranger's face in rapt admiration. On the easier slope he showed them how the turns are made, how to stem and stop, how to keep your balance on rough going by keeping one foot ahead of the other and the centre of gravity low. In the hour that remained before noon the Scouts learned more than they had in a whole week past, and they followed him back to the village as if he had been the Pied Piper.

"Better run down to the store this afternoon, and take a look at the window," Mr. Chandler suggested to Bob at luncheon. So Spider went. In the window were two toboggans, three pairs of skis and poles and the proper harnesses, three or four pairs of high leather ski boots, some gay-colored blanket coats and bright worsted caps and mufflers for winter-sports wear—and a neat little sign:

PUT SOUTHMEAD ON THE WINTER MAP.

"Good old dad!" said Spider to himself. "I hope he sells 'em."

CHAPTER V

Getting Ready for the Carnival—The Prizes—Fireworks Arrive

MR. CHANDLER sold them. In the week that followed, a clear, cold week of ideal winter weather, three of the six boys who had applied to join the Scouts came to Spider, each with five dollars he had earned snow-shoveling, selling papers, and doing errands. Mr. Chandler sold these boys their skis and harnesses at cost, and they were taken into the troop at an enthusiastic evening meeting when plans were made for the carnival. But several girls bought skis, too, and three or four more grown people bought toboggans and came out to the hill with their small children, and Lucy Stone, the prettiest girl in the high school, appeared on Tuesday in one of the red-and-green-and-white blanket coats, and on Wednesday three other girls arrived wearing them, and Mr. Chandler ordered more. The whole town had begun to talk winter sports.

At the Scout meeting the chief centre of interest was Mr. Hadley, the man who had appeared on Saturday and shown them a jump. He was now the hero of the whole troop. Bill Gilson kept by his side, and hung on his words, but all the other boys were ready

to take his word for law, too. He had showed them how to put planks on the jumping platform; he had explained the theory of the take-off, and how to spring up from the knees, keeping the body inclined forward; he had already induced ten or twelve of the boys to try the jump, though so far nobody but Bill Gilson could consistently keep his feet on landing. The Scouts opened the meeting by making him an honorary member of the troop, and then they demanded that he tell them what events to have in the carnival.

"And will you be a judge, sir?" asked Bennie.

"Will you give an exhibition jump?" said Bill.

"Will you pick out the prizes?" somebody else demanded.

"Say, boys, I'm a sick man," Mr. Hadley laughed. "I'm up here for my health."

"Yes, you are!" Bennie grinned. "You're so sick you can only jump seventy-five feet!"

"Are you really sick?" asked Bill Gilson, moving closer to him. "Gee, I'm sorry!"

The young man looked down into Bill's upturned face, smiled, and then tapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Nerves, son," he said. "Too much work in New York and too little exercise. I'm getting better fast. Got to, to keep up with you."

Bill turned red with happiness.

"Well"—Mr. Hadley turned to the crowd—"I'd say have ski jumping, of course; distance to count half and form half."

"What's form?"

"Well, it isn't form if you spill. If somebody

jumps fifty feet and falls, and somebody else jumps forty-five feet and doesn't fall, the fellow who stands up wins. Then you want a ski race—say half a mile or so. Start on the level, go up the hill, and slide down to the finish. Then you want an obstacle race—that's great fun. You have to climb a fence, cross a ditch, and end up by crawling through barrels with the bottoms knocked out ——"

"You mean with your skis *on?*" the boys demanded.

"Sure."

"Wow!" exclaimed Tommy Moran. "I don't see how you can do that."

"Well, you can—if you study it out, and aren't in too much of a hurry. That's three events. Then you want an elimination toboggan race. Start 'em down one behind the other, three at a time, six feet apart. Anybody who gets bumped from behind is out of the race for good. That's four events. How many girls have skis now?"

"Six or eight, anyhow," said Spider.

"Well, have a race for girls—on the level—one hundred yards. They aren't very good yet—not enough practice. They'll fall down enough when they try to make speed on the level."

"Golly, how they'll scream!" chuckled Tommy.

"That's five events. If all of you boys enter, with a lot of outsiders in the toboggan races, it will make enough for the afternoon. And I'll give the prizes, if you'll let me."

Bennie jumped up. "Fellows, let's give three long

cheers and a 'Mr. Hadley' on the end! Make it good, now. Are you ready? Go!"

The walls of the Scout room quivered with the noise.

"That's a good yell, anyhow," Mr. Hadley laughed. "But you want something more for your carnival, I think. You ought to invite the whole town over to the hill in the evening and round up every toboggan in the village, and get some red fire to burn along the sides of the chute, and let everybody have a grand coast."

"Great!" cried Spider. "That's the idea! Dad's got some red flares left from the Fourth of July; maybe he'll give them to us. Gee, I wish Mr. Rogers could come up for it!"

"When's it going to be?" put in Bill Gilson.

"That's right, we must decide on a date."

"And get it advertised in the newspapers," said Bennie.

"'Put Southmead on the winter map,'" somebody quoted.

"If I were you, I wouldn't trust too much to my luck," Mr. Hadley said. "Better have it while the snow is good. Washington's Birthday is next week Wednesday. That's a holiday. What's the matter with that?"

"Great," said Spider again. "Bennie, you write to Mr. Rogers to-night and tell him he's *got* to come up for it; and you send out a notice to the *Courier*. You're our best little advertiser. Bill, you're chairman of a committee to have the jump ready. Tommy Moran, you're chairman of the committee to keep the

toboggan slides in shape, and the sides built up. I'm fireworks chairman. Sam Cheever, you're chairman of the committee to get the girls entered in a ski race ——"

"Sam's the boy for that!" sang out Tommy. "Oh, you lady killer!"

"Shut up, Tommy. Mr. Hadley's a committee to tell us all what to do; and, Joe, you're a committee to take these three new tenderfeet out on the hill tomorrow and see that they get their harnesses on right, and teach 'em the first principles. And now I got to go home and do some Latin, or I'll be fired from high school. I haven't had time to study in two weeks."

"Nor I," said Bennie. "Geometry teacher asked me the other day how to prove that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third, and I said, 'You slide the left foot forward, edge it sharply, and throw all your weight on it.'"

"What did he say?" Mr. Hadley laughed.

"He said I'd better not go near any squirrels," Bennie chuckled, as the meeting broke up.

The next day, if a stranger had come to Southmead and wandered around in the back yards of the village, he would have been sorely puzzled, because in at least twenty of those back yards he would have seen a boy, on skis, rolling out a barrel without any bottom to an open space on the snow, and then getting down at one end and going through every kind of contortion in a mad effort to get himself and his skis through to the other side. In at least ten Southmead houses that evening, too, if the stranger could have peeked through

a window, he would have seen a mother, in none too pleasant a frame of mind, we fear, mending a rip in her son's clothes, for most barrels have nails sticking through on the inside, and half the Scouts forgot this little fact—till it was too late.

The same stranger, if he had been in town early in the morning, would have seen Mr. Hadley going into Spider's father's store, and making out a list with Mr. Chandler's help. He would also have seen, if he had peeked into Bennie's desk at school, a sheet of paper on which Bennie had begun to write. It read something like this:

For the *Courier*—from Benjamin Capen, assistant Scout Master:

SOUTHMEAD WINTER SPORTS CARNIVAL!

Boy Scouts Organize Big Day of Races, Ski Jumping, Toboggan Races

February 22d,
for handsome prizes.
PUBLIC INVITED.
Fireworks in Evening.

"The Southmead Boy Scouts have organized winter sports in Southmead. Thanks to several generous citizens, all the Scouts have got skis with proper harnesses, and have been practicing using them under the instruction of Mr. Rodman Hadley, the famous Dartmouth College ski jumper, who is spending the winter in our town for his health. He has jumped almost sixty-

> five feet from the platform built by the Boy Scouts on the north pasture of Monument Mountain. The Scouts have also built two toboggan slides, which are used by everybody in town. There are twenty-five Scouts now and two assistant Scout Masters, who are older boys, and there will be exciting races for prizes and a jumping contest and a race for girls, one hundred yards. This race will be on the level. We mean by 'on the level' it won't be down-hill. All the races will be 'on the level.' It is expected to have fireworks in the evening, and everybody ——"

But here the manuscript stopped, because, we suspect, Bennie was called by the gong to go to a Latin recitation.

However, he must have finished it that evening, because it appeared in the *Courier* Saturday morning —not quite as Bennie wrote it, to be sure, but near enough so that he got a thrill when he read it, and bought an extra copy of the paper and hid it in a drawer in his bureau.

On Saturday, too, a letter came from Mr. Rogers, in New York, saying he'd come up for the carnival.

And on Saturday Spider's father exhibited the prizes in his store window.

There was a pair of the best ash skis, the best make, for the first prize in jumping, and a pair of bamboo ski poles for second prize. For the distance race, the first prize was a pair of sixteen-inch ski boots, and bamboo poles for second trophy. The first prize for obstacle race was a green-and-black plaid mackinaw shirt, and the second prize ski poles. The girls' prize

was a gay-colored woolen scarf. The first prize for the toboggan race was a five-pound box of candy, and the second prize a two-pound box.

The Scouts, who had all gone early to the hill, to lay out the race courses and to practice, didn't know the prizes had been displayed until they got back to the village at noon. Then they saw a little crowd of people gazing in the store window, and ran over to look.

"Whew!" Bennie exclaimed. "Mr. Hadley certainly blew himself. Some prizes!"

"I guess I'll win the mackinaw shirt," cried Tommy.

"Me for the ski boots!" said Joe.

"One thing's sure, Bill will get the skis," somebody else said.

"If I do, I'm going to give my old pair back to the Scouts, so a new tenderfoot can come in," Bill declared.

"That's the stuff!" said Spider. "And say, you Scouts, every last one of you go over and thank Mr. Hadley this afternoon, if he's on the hill."

"You bet!" they all replied.

Mr. Rogers arrived on Tuesday. Bennie and Spider hurried to his house to tell him about the plans, and report all they had done.

"I guess you've been busy," he laughed. "Looks to me as if I'd better go away oftener and stay longer. The whole town seems to be waked up. I'm late on the job, but here's a little contribution."

He pointed to a large box, which Bennie opened.

"Fireworks!" cried both boys. "Hooray!"

There were red flares, green flares, Roman candles, rockets, geysers, and fountains.

"Say, but the old hill will look pretty!" said Bennie. "I'm going down on a toboggan, with a lighted Roman candle in my hand!"

"You'll leave a tail like a comet," Spider laughed.

"I guess the old town will be glad we got skis and started something!" Bennie exclaimed again.

"Well, if the town gave us the skis, it's up to us to give something back, isn't it?" Mr. Rogers asked.

"Sure—that's what we've tried to make the kids see. They do see it, too. But, of course, they're havin' a pretty good time themselves."

"Aren't *you* having a good time?" the Scout Master smiled.

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world I am!" Bennie answered.

CHAPTER VI

The Carnival Takes Place—Bill Wins the Ski Jump

THAT night it began to snow. Bennie looked out of the door before he went to bed, and almost wept with vexation.

"Aw, Ma, do you suppose it'll spoil our whole carnival?" he asked.

"I suppose you won't help it any by sitting up," his mother replied. "Go to bed, and get a good sleep. Maybe it will stop before morning."

It did stop. There was just enough new snow to cover the old ski tracks. All the Scouts were early at the hill, with strict orders from Mr. Hadley, who took charge, to keep off the ski slope and leave the snow unbroken. They swept the two toboggan slides out, put up flags to mark the turning points in the distance race, measured off one hundred yards on the level meadow for the girls' ski race, and finally arranged the obstacle-race course. This began across the meadow, in the woods. The racers had to work through about a hundred feet of scrub pine and tangling bushes, climb a wire fence, cross a ditch, and finally crawl through barrels and dash to the finish, fifty yards beyond. The barrels were brought out on

wood sleds by the fathers of two of the boys. There were twenty-five of them, and they were laid in a row, a few feet apart.

The meet was scheduled for half-past two, but by two o'clock people began to arrive, and Bennie and Spider had to appoint six Scouts as special police to keep them off the slope and from trying to walk in the toboggan slide. The first event scheduled was the distance race. Bennie acted as starter, with a whistle instead of a revolver. Spider went far up the hill to be judge at the turn, and Mr. Rogers and Mr. Hadley were judges at the finish. Twenty Scouts entered for this race. They lined up at the farthest end of the meadow, and had to run on the level to the opposite side, then turn and go as far up the hill as it was possible, swing around Spider at the flag up there, and coast down to the finish, out in the centre of the level space, where Mr. Rogers and Mr. Hadley stood fifty feet apart, with a piece of yarn stretched between them.

"Are you ready? Get set! *Whrrrrrrr!*" Bennie's whistle shrilled, and twenty boys, crouching low and digging in hard with their poles, started for the first flag at the opposite end of the meadow. There were few tracks down there, and those not in a straight line. Of course it is much harder work to break track than to ski in the tracks somebody else has already made. But most of the Scouts didn't think of that. They dashed madly along, each for himself—all but Bill Gilson. He fell in behind most of them, and slid easily along in somebody else's runner marks. Two

or three boys fell down, and dropped back, but except for these early stragglers, Bill was the last to round the first flag. Tommy Moran was leading.

"Go it, Tommy!" the girls and grown people called to him.

But Tommy had used most of his wind in that two-hundred-yard dash over the meadow. When he struck the first steep pitch of the hill, where to go straight up you either had to herring-bone or side-step, he had to slow down for breath. So did nearly everybody. But Bill Gilson was fresh. However, even now he didn't try to forge ahead. Sam Cheever was leading now, taking the hill in zigzags, and Bill went right in his tracks, kicking around each turn just behind him. Others tried to herring-bone straight up, and in their haste most of them back-slipped and fell, and lost more than they gained. The crowd now began to yell: "Go it, Sam!" "Go it, Bill!"

Sam was stronger than Bill, and the climb told less on his wind. Gradually he began to forge ahead. At the top, when he turned around Spider and set himself for the final coast, he was fifty feet in advance. It looked as if the race was his, to those below. Shouts of "Sam! Sam wins!" "Go it, old Sammy!" rose from the spectators.

But Sam was still a long way from the post. He had to finish between Mr. Hadley and the Scout Master, whom he could see far down below him, each waving a flag to show him exactly where they were. To go straight for them meant he would have to take the hill down the very steepest part, and he would be

traveling a mile a minute at the bottom. However, he pointed his skis right for the goal, and pushed off.

Bill, rounding Spider a second or two later, pointed a bit to the left, and flew down after him, but apparently not headed for the judges.

"Doesn't Bill see where they are? What's the matter with him?" somebody cried.

"Don't worry about Bill," Bennie answered. "Hi! Keep out of the track!" he added, rushing over to drive some spectators back.

Sam was now two-thirds of the way down the hill, and coming like the wind. Just below him was the sudden sharper pitch where, a little to the right, the jumping platform was placed. He took this pitch at terrific speed, his skis left the snow for an instant, he wabbled as he landed, made a frantic effort to keep his balance—and spilled headlong! He was up in a couple of seconds, and on again—but it was too late. Bill, taking the hill to the left, where there was no sudden change of slope, swept easily around with a gradual turn, by edging both skis, and broke the tape ahead of him.

Just behind Sam, on the direct line, were now coming ten more boys. The first one who lit in the hole Sam's fall had made of course spilled, and the other nine all piled up in a heap. The Scout who was actually number 13 as he rounded Spider on top of the hill, finished number 3 between the judges, just because he took Bill's tracks down the slope!

As soon as this race was over, the girls' race began, while the Scouts got their wind. Sam had persuaded

six high-school girls to enter. The entire crowd, which now numbered three hundred people or more, lined up along the straightaway and urged them on with yells and cheers and laughter. The girls shrieked and laughed as hard as anybody. Every one of them fell down at least once, trying to run on the skis. Five of them fell down twice. The girl who took it easy after her first fall, largely because she was out of breath, won the race!

The obstacle race came next. There were twenty-five entries for this event. The twenty-five disappeared behind Bennie into the woods. A moment after the sound of the whistle, the crowd saw them struggling through the little pines and trying not to tangle their skis in the bushes, and then trying to get their skis and themselves over the wire fence in a hurry. Half of them fell in the process. More fell crossing the ditch which had been dug out too wide to step across. But the fun came when they reached the barrels. The first to reach one dove into it head first —and nothing but his head came out on the other side!

"Come on through, Ted; there's nothing to prevent you but your feet!" somebody cried.

"Getting your feet through a barrel with those things on is like threading a number-ten needle with a carpet thread," a woman laughed.

"Keep a-wrigglin', boys; you'll do it yet!" shouted an old farmer.

"Hurry up, Tom!"

"Come on, Sam!"

"Go it, Bill—get your feet in first!"

"Don't start rolling!"

"Any cider left in that barrel, Chet?"

"Say, the molasses came out of them barrels quicker'n the boys is comin' "—this from the same old farmer.

Little Joe Coley, who had fallen down on his side, feet toward his barrel, pushed his skis through, pushed himself after them, and was up and off before any one else. He won the race by twenty feet, with Tommy Moran second.

The crowd, still laughing and cheering little Joe, now moved over to the toboggan slide. There were twelve toboggans entered, including the Scout toboggan and the one owned by the two young schoolteachers. Mr. Hadley had abandoned the idea of running the race by starting the toboggans a few feet apart and eliminating any that got bumped by the one behind. The track was so fast, and some of the coasters were so young, that this would have been dangerous. Instead, he and Mr. Rogers stood out in the meadow, far beyond the end of the slide, with a stop watch, and each toboggan had to steer between them. Bennie, at the top of the slide, dipped a flag when he blew his whistle, and the judge's watch was started at that signal. Having to steer the toboggan out across the snow at the bottom took some skill, and slowed the trip enough to make considerable variation in the time of different coasters. The two teachers, with two high-school girls as extra passengers, won the first prize, chiefly because one of them knew how to steer

by swaying her leg behind, without dragging it in the snow, and at the same time yanking up on one or the other side of the toboggan to edge it. The Scout toboggan, steered by Sam, who dragged his boot to steer, was a bad fourth. Second prize went to four small boys on a light toboggan which danced over the snow at the bottom without breaking down deep to pile up friction in front.

And then came the real event of the day, the one which most of the village people were most curious to see—the ski jumping.

Only eight Scouts had entered for this event, and of those eight, it was a foregone conclusion that Bill would be the winner. He alone, in the few weeks that had passed since the Scouts had got their skis, had learned enough to handle himself properly, or to dare try for a long leap. Each boy was allowed three jumps. Bill jumped last. The seven others went but a short way up the slope above the platform, because the slower they hit the take-off, the better chance they would have of keeping their feet. Even so, as Tommy Moran, who was the first to try, sailed out over the edge into the air, a gasp went up from all the watching crowd below. Tommy landed upright, and managed by a wild effort to keep his balance. A great cheer broke from the spectators. Bennie and Spider ran out with the tape, and measured.

"Twenty feet, two inches," Spider announced.

One by one the rest came. Little Joe Coley made thirty feet—but fell. Four others fell. Only Sam

Cheever kept his feet,—but he was a foot back of Tommy.

Then Bill's turn came. The crowd looked up. Bill had gone fifty feet farther above the take-off than the rest. He leaned forward and tested his harnesses. Then he slid, crouched, and whizzed toward the platform. Everybody below stood stock still, holding their breath. They saw him shoot out into the air, straightening up as he did so. But he was a fraction too hurried in his spring, and straightened from his ankles instead of his knees, throwing his body too erect. He waved his arms, but he couldn't get himself inclined forward again. He hit the slope far ahead of any other jumper, but a second later he almost vanished in a wave of white.

A woman screamed. A girl shrieked, "Oh, he's hurt!" A man sprang to help him.

But Bill was up again, his snow-covered face set with grim determination, and he was climbing back.

Tommy made over twenty feet again, and once more didn't fall. The other six all fell. Then Bill again went fifty feet farther up the hill, and, after a second of deliberation, added a few feet more, and again the crowd held their breath as he crouched and flew toward the platform. Those below saw the points of his skis shoot over the edge, saw him spring up—this time correctly, only from his knees—and sail out into the air. An instant later he landed, swayed, thrust one foot ahead, rushed on a bit, Telemarked, and actually made a sweeping turn, at top speed, with the snow flying up ahead of his ski.

A great cheer burst from everybody.

Bennie and Spider ran out with the tape. Spider looked at it, and shouted, "Fifty-six feet, eight inches!"

There was another cheer.

Bill didn't have to jump again. He stood beside Mr. Hadley while Sam tried a third jump, to see if he could beat Tommy for second place. Sam also went higher up the slope, and made nearly forty feet. But it was more than he was able to handle. He went plunging into the snow.

"Please—please, Mr. Hadley!" Bill was saying. "Just once! Show 'em a real one."

"Oh, all right," the man agreed. "Just one."

"Mr. Hadley will now give an exhibition jump!" Bennie announced to the crowd.

As the people saw him climb up and up, fifty feet beyond where Bill started, there was a gasp.

"What's he trying to do, break his neck?" a man asked.

"If he don't go straight, he'll break ours," another man answered.

"Clear the way!" Spider yelled. "Get back down there and give him a chance to land!"

The crowd parted, forming a wide lane below the platform. Then there wasn't a sound as Mr. Hadley crouched and slid, except the soft hiss of his runners. He hit the platform at tremendous speed, and seemed to those below actually to sail out over their heads and drop down from the air. As he hit, a suppressed gasp and shriek rose from all the girls and women. But

it was a perfect jump. He rushed on to the bottom, and made a beautiful Christiania turn. The crowd applauded.

"How far? How far?" they called to Spider.

The tape showed seventy-one feet.

"Do it again!" a little boy piped up, excitedly. "Do it again!"

But Mr. Hadley only smiled, and shook his head. "Once a day is enough," said he.

"Once a lifetime would do for me!" one of the men laughed. "I've read about this ski jumping, but I never saw it before. It's great to watch, but I'm glad I don't have to do it."

The last event, of course, was the awarding of the prizes. Spider and Bennie lined the Scouts up in military formation, still on their skis, with Mr. Rogers and Mr. Hadley facing them, the latter with the prizes on a toboggan.

"First prize, distance race, to William Gilson," he said.

Bill took a step forward and saluted. "Please, sir, I don't want to take two prizes," he replied. "I'll take the jump prize, but it's not fair to take two."

Mr. Hadley looked at the Scout Master. "How about it?"

Mr. Rogers nodded.

"That's a fine spirit, Bill," the other said. "First prize for distance, then, goes to Sam."

The crowd applauded as each winner got his or her prize, but the loudest applause was for the two school-

teachers who got the five-pound box of candy, and for Bill Gilson, when he got his beautiful ash skis.

When the award was over, and the crowd was ready to start for home, Spider shouted: "One minute, please! Everybody come to-night! Bring your toboggans! We're going to have fireworks—it'll be worth seeing. Everybody come!"

"Sure, boys—we'll be here!" said the crowd.

And they were. All the village,—men, women, and children. Spider, Bennie, Mr. Rogers, and seven or eight of the older Scouts looked after the fireworks. Red and green flares were kept burning between the two slides, from top to bottom, to light them up. The rockets were sent hissing up from the top of the hill, pointed toward the woods. The fountains were set off at the bottom, lighting up the meadow. And the Roman candles were given to people on the toboggans, who went whizzing down the slides, leaving a comet's tail of gold sparks and popping stars behind them. There must have been five or six hundred people on the hill and in the meadow. There were more than twenty toboggans on the slides, loaded to capacity on every trip. The roar of the rushing toboggans, the yells and shouts and laughter of the coasters, the shrieking hiss of the rockets as they twisted up from the spout into the sky, the colored flares on the snow-white hillside, casting long shadows over the slope, made the whole scene so lively and gay and strange that what everybody said was: "Isn't this wonderful! We must do it every winter!"

Bennie watched a rocket burst, and saw from the

light of its hanging stars a distinct increase of pale radiation over the hill slope.

"Look, Spider, quick!" he shouted. "That rocket lights the hill up. Don't do it on the Fourth of July."

"That's because of all the white snow," Spider replied. "All the fireworks are better than they are in summer. And, holy smoke, look at all the people there are here, and all the toboggans they've dug up! A month ago there weren't three toboggans in town."

"Have we started something, or haven't we?" Bennie chortled.

The red fire lasted till almost a quarter of ten, and then Spider gave a secret signal to Sam. Only he and Bennie and Sam were in on this surprise. Sam sneaked off toward the woods at the very top of the slope, got his bugle from a hiding-place, and as the last red fire guttered out and only the stars lighted the expanse of snow, he set his bugle to his lips and sounded the first two notes of taps.

As the second note, prolonged and sweet, floated out over the hill, a hush came upon everybody. The crowd stopped shouting. Those about to take another slide stood still. They all listened for the rest of the beautiful bugle call, which came floating through the night.

As the last note died away, those at the top of the hill took a last slide down, in the darkness, and the crowd on the meadow started for home.

"That good-night call was the best part of the whole day," the Scout Master said to Spider and Bennie. "Whose idea was that?"

"Sam thought of it himself," they answered. "Honest, Mr. Rogers, do you think the Scouts have put it across?"

"I should say they had," the Scout Master answered. "And I don't see why I shouldn't go back to-morrow to New York, and stay there. The Scouts don't need me. You two fellows have beaten me out on the job."

"If you go back to New York, I'll get bounced from high school," Bennie laughed. "Golly, I haven't had time to get a lesson in two weeks."

"I'm pretty well behind myself," said Spider.

"It takes time to run a Scout troop and put Southmead on the winter map, doesn't it?" Mr. Rogers smiled. "Remember when you used to think I ought to have two or three meetings a week?"

"We were kids then," said Bennie.

"Well, you've earned your rest now. I'll come home pretty soon, and let you get back to your beloved Latin and algebra. I know how it must hurt Bennie not to study. You've done a good job, boys, and I'm proud of you, and I guess the whole town is, too. Take it easy for a bit now, and let the boys play with their skis while the snow lasts."

"Gee, I hope it lasts a month!" Bennie exclaimed. "I've simply *got* to learn how to do a Christiania and jump like Mr. Hadley."

"You'll need at least a month for that," said the Scout Master.

Spider lingered at Bennie's gate. The village street was quiet now, for they were the last ones home.

"Little Bill Gilson did a good job to-day, and the best part of it was taking only one of his prizes."

"Yea," said Bennie. "We gotter watch him. He'll make an assistant Scout Master yet. Funny—he used to be afraid of everything, and now he goes at the old take-off like an express train."

"Guess he's a born skier—Mr. Hadley says he is."

"He ought to know. Well, so long, Spider, old Scout. See you to-morrow."

"Yea, see you at school. I haven't got that old composition done, either."

"Nor me. Got to get up at five and do it."

"Bet you don't. So long."

"So long."

CHAPTER VII

Bennie and Spider Acquire a Canoe

THE echoes of the Southmead winter-sports carnival reverberated over town for many days. The snow lasted for two weeks more, before it got so sticky that even wax wouldn't make the skis slip, and in that time Spider's father sold a dozen more pairs of skis, half of them to grown people, and several toboggans. The hill was crowded every afternoon, and Bennie and Spider took Mr. Rogers' advice and left the Scouts to play with the crowd, while they went off with Mr. Hadley and Bill Gilson on a couple of expeditions. The man was certainly no longer an invalid, for he led the way up hill and down, while they panted to keep up with him, and showed them a new form of sport—skiing down long, untested hills, when you don't know what is coming next, and have to stem and turn constantly to avoid trouble. Their most exciting slide was down a two-mile wood road from almost the top of a mountain, with three or four right-angle turns in it, and one hairpin. Both Bennie and Spider had to fall down at the hairpin. They couldn't make it without crashing into the trees. But Bill followed Mr. Hadley around with a tremendous Telemark, and was rewarded by the man's, "Snappy work, Bill: we'll make a skier of you yet."

The second week in March, however, saw the snow softening into slush, and in another fortnight bare ground was emerging and the brooks and rivers were beginning to rise.

"The streams are going over their banks this year, sure," said Bennie's father one night. "When I was a boy, we used to canoe down the river every spring when the water was high. It was great sport, too."

"That's a big idea!" Bennie exclaimed.

"Oh, John, why *will* you put such ideas into his head!" sighed Mrs. Capen. "You *know* the river isn't a safe place."

"It's safe enough for Bennie—he hasn't got a canoe," Mr. Capen laughed.

"Some of us didn't have any skis last winter," Bennie grinned in answer.

"Say, my son, if you think this town is going to give you canoes for the Scouts, you'd better think again," laughed his father.

"Not for the Scouts, but just for this Scout," said Bennie. "Aw, Dad, please give me a canoe!"

"No, sir!"

"Well, your father must have given *you* one."

"He did not. I *made* mine."

"How'd you ever get down the river, then?" Bennie demanded.

"Bennie!" his mother reprimanded; "you mustn't be so rude to your father!"

Father and son indulged in a sly wink at each other, and Mr. Capen resumed: "I'll have you know it was

a *fine* canoe. It only tipped over six times the first day out."

"Is that all!" said Bennie. "I guess I could *buy* a canoe that would tip over oftener than that!"

He went off laughing to school, but he was thinking, too.

"Say, Spider," he began when they met, "I got the cat's spats in ideas."

"Well, crash through with it, old Scout. You'll feel better when it's off your brain. It'll relieve the pressure."

"If you don't show more respect to one of the most remarkable minds in the Southmead high school, if not in the entire county, nay, in the state of Massachusetts, I'll crash through with a left hook to the jaw," said Bennie.

"The only thing that keeps you from being perfect, Bennie, is your modesty," Spider laughed. "My dear sir, will you condescend to impart to this poor slave your transcendentally magnificent intellectual conception?"

"Wow! Some language!" cried Bennie. "Well, to get down to biz—here's the idea, Spider. You and I'll go around and hunt up somebody who's got a second-hand canoe he'll sell us cheap. Dad says with all this snow the river's going to be high, and it's better canoeing when it's high. Then when April vacation comes we'll take the old canoe and go on a trip down the river, see? We'll camp out at night, and shoot rapids, and—and ——"

"And upset," Spider put in.

"Well, what if we do? What do you say? Wouldn't it be great sport?"

"How far'll we go?"

"Oh, as far as we have time. Right on down to the sea, maybe. Did you know, Spider darling, that rivers flowed to a large body of salt water called the ocean?"

"If I chum around with you long enough, I'll be quite educated," Spider retorted. "What'll we do with the canoe, then? Head for England?"

"No, we'll ship it back home, or sell it, and take the train. Aw, come on, show a little enthusiasm!"

"It sounds good," answered the cautious Spider. "Only, Bennie, you and I don't know a blamed thing about handling a canoe in white water ——"

"What do you mean, white water?"

"See, you don't even know what it *is!*" Spider laughed. "White water is rapids,—water running so fast it kicks up white froth and waves. They say it takes a lot of skill to navigate a canoe through white water."

"Maybe it does on the Columbia River out in Oregon," said Bennie, "but I guess we could get down the little old Taconic all right. Anyhow, if we tipped over, we could wade ashore 'most anywhere. Well, all right, if you won't go, I'll try somebody else. Maybe Bill Gilson will. After the ski jumps he's made, I guess shooting a few rapids won't faze him."

"I haven't said I wouldn't go, you poor fish," Spider retorted.

"Well, you haven't said you would."

"Well, I don't make up my mind as quickly as you

do. My poor old brain doesn't work as fast as your six-cylinder intellect."

"I'm a straight eight," Bennie grinned.

"Pardon me. Well, suppose, first, we trot around a bit and see what we can buy a canoe for. I haven't got much saved, and we'll need some for provisions, you know, and to pay our way back from the ocean."

"Good old Spider—I knew you'd listen to reason."

"I'm not listening to reason, I'm listening to you," Spider retorted.

The snow was already melted enough from the main roads so that it was easy to get around in a car, and the next afternoon Spider borrowed one of his father's Ford delivery wagons and he and Bennie made a trip first to three or four men in Southmead who owned canoes, and then, when none of these men would sell, over to the next town, where there was a lake and two large boat houses.

They found the owner of one of these boat houses, overhauling his canoes and boats. He had twenty or thirty of them bottom side up on cradles, and was in the process of painting them for the coming season.

"Got an old canoe you want to sell?" they asked.

"I ain't got much of anything else," he answered. "After one season a brand-new canoe looks as if Noah used it on the Ark. You want to buy one?"

"No," said Bennie; "we just asked to be polite. We drove over from Southmead to make a call."

The man started to give Bennie an angry look, but when he saw the boy's laughing face and merry wink, he grinned himself.

"I got an old bus here," he answered, "that somebody tried to remove the landing with. They didn't hurt the landing much."

He led the way to a rack in the corner, and showed them an eighteen-foot canoe, badly in need of paint, with the upper part of the bow smashed and twisted. Rolling it over, he ran it out on the floor. The bow seat was gone, and a centre brace broken. Looking carefully along the sides, and then at the bottom, Spider discovered a hole, too, where something sharp had punctured the canvas between two ribs.

"Gee, you ought to give this to us, for carting it away," said Bennie.

"Is that so! Why, I can fix that up, give it a coat of paint, and make it as good as new."

"And spend twenty dollars' worth of time doing it," put in Spider.

"You must think my time's worth a lot," said the man. "Well, it is. It's worth so much I can't stand here dickering. Do you want it for fifteen dollars, or don't you?"

"Fifteen dollars!" the boys exclaimed. "Aw, say, that's a hold up! We'll give you ten."

"Good-by," the man replied, moving back toward his work.

Bennie and Spider whispered. Then Spider sang out, "We'll give you twelve."

"I'll let you have it for fourteen, if you'll take it off to-day, and not a cent less."

"Well, I suppose we got to do it, now we've got the

car over here," Spider whispered. "But he's stinging us."

"We can fix it up O. K.," Bennie whispered back. "It's all good but a few places."

They counted out fourteen dollars from their savings, pushed the canoe as far on the delivery truck as they could, and fastened it in with ropes. Then they hung a red handkerchief on the stern, and drove proudly home. With the broken bow hidden in the car, and the good end sticking out behind, they came slowly up Southmead street, while several boys dashed from the walks to have a look, and carried their prize to Spider's back yard, where they unloaded it, and put it in an old carriage house.

"We'll begin fixing it up to-morrow," Spider declared. "We'll go to the lumber yard after school and get what we need."

"Sure—and we got to give it a name, too."

"I guess she needs paint more'n a name," Spider answered.

CHAPTER VIII

Conditioning the "Mazama" for a Trip

THE boys worked for a week on their canoe, with the benefit of copious advice from all the other Scouts. They put in a new central thwart, and two braces in the bow, where the seat had been broken out, fastening the bottom of an old chair between them for a new seat. The bow gave them the most trouble, but it was finally solved—after a fashion—by taking the blades of two old hockey sticks, screwed together and rounded to the proper shape, and with enough of the handles left on to work down between the broken ends of the gunwales and fasten to the bow plate. Then canvas was stretched on over this improvised frame, padded out with cotton to give it the right shape, and tacked and glued on. A canvas patch was glued over the hole in the bottom, also, and the whole canoe painted bright red outside, and varnished inside.

"Now for a name!" cried Bennie, when the second coat had dried.

"Why don't you name it the *Bolshevik?*" Sam demanded. "It's a red, all right."

"Call it *Rough but Reddy,*" Tommy Moran suggested.

"You guys think you're smart, don't you?" Bennie

retorted. "Why don't you get a job on *Judge,* or start a comic paper of your own?"

"Never mind the children, Bennie," Spider laughed. "Let's name it after the old mountain that caved in to make Crater Lake. Let's call it the *Mazama.*"

"Hooray!" cried Bennie. "That's the cat's spats! The *Mazama!* Can you spell it?"

"I can spell it, but I don't believe I can make the letters well enough to paint it on the bow of this graceful and beautiful craft."

"Well, all we can do is try," said Bennie.

One on each side of the bow, they ruled two parallel lines with lead pencil, and printed the outlines of the letters. Then, with two fine brushes sneaked from Spider's sister's paint box, and some black automobile paint from the garage, they painted "MAZAMA."

When it was done, they stood off, first on Spider's side, and then on Bennie's, and contemplated their work.

"Yours is better than mine," said Bennie.

"It is?" said Spider. "Then I hate to go round and see what *you've* done!"

"Oh, well, folks can read it, anyhow," Bennie declared. "It's plain enough. When are we going to launch the old ship? You got a bottle of champagne to break over the bow?"

"Not on your life! It's taken us a week to fix one break on that bow, without having another."

Bennie didn't answer. He didn't even laugh. He was suddenly standing with his mouth half open, staring at the *Mazama.*

"What's the matter, Bennie?" Spider demanded. "You look like the village idiot."

"You *ought* to," Bennie answered. "Gee, we're a pair of nuts! Spider, we haven't got any paddles!"

Spider sat down with a bump on a box. "That's right!" he exclaimed. "And we're setting up for assistant Scout Masters, and teaching kids to 'be prepared.' Say, I'm glad Tommy and Sam have gone!"

"Well, what are we going to do? Go over to that bird where we bought the canoe, and get some?"

"Not on your life! He'd sting us again. Dad will order us two, wholesale, from the sporting-goods place where he got the skis. We don't want any old broken paddles to run rapids with."

"But it will take days!" Bennie sighed.

"Don't matter. The river's too high yet anyhow."

The river was too high after the paddles came, too, and although Bennie and Spider both pleaded with their fathers to let them start out during the week of vacation, early in April, Mr. Chandler and Mr. Capen both said "No," in a tone the boys knew was final. The best they could do was to take the *Mazama* out over the flooded meadows, and give all the Scouts a ride, two at a time.

The river began to go down just as vacation ended, and as the nineteenth of April—Patriots' Day—was on a Thursday, with no school Friday, they planned to start as soon as school was out on the eighteenth, and have Wednesday night, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and part of Sunday on the river.

"Gee, we can get a long way down in all that time!" Bennie announced.

"Maybe," his father smiled. "If you don't hit a rock."

"Oh, don't say that!" Mrs. Capen cried.

"It's not deep where the rocks are," Mr. Capen answered; "and they both can swim."

"But they'd catch their death of colds, in this weather."

"They'll be too busy, trying to catch their dunnage," Bennie's father laughed. "Let 'em go, and learn."

Long before the afternoon of the start the boys had their equipment planned and sorted. They took rubber ponchos, two pairs of blankets, a complete change of clothes done up in waterproof bags in case they were capsized, matches in waterproof boxes, an ax, a cook kit, and a box of grub. The waterproof bags for their clothes were made by their mothers out of oilcloth, stitched up tightly after the clothes were inside. The river was still full between its banks, and pulling swiftly, when they launched the *Mazama* at half-past three on Thursday afternoon, waved a good-by to Sam and Tommy and Bill and Joe, who walked down to see them off, dug in their paddles, and with almost no effort at all, after the bow was pointed downstream, vanished around the bend by the willows.

"This is the life!" Spider called back from the bow.

"I'll so inform the populi!" Bennie replied.

CHAPTER IX

The "Mazama" Is Wrecked in the Rapids

THEY traveled along till about five o'clock at a rapid pace, at first through meadows that they knew well, and then through less familiar country, but without any trouble at all. The river, though swift and high, was free of all stones here, and the canoe needed little more than a bit of steering to keep it in midstream.

But at five o'clock the current grew rapidly less, and then ceased. They had to paddle.

"What's the idea?" Bennie demanded.

"I guess it's the dam in Canton," said Spider. "We forgot all about that. We'll have to carry this old boat around it."

"Well, that isn't far."

"Far enough. This boat's going to be heavy."

In half an hour of paddling they reached the town of Canton, where the river flowed just behind the main street. Being thirsty, they left the canoe and went for a soda. Below the town they came to the dam and the power house. Pulling the canoe up on the bank, they went to the dam and looked over.

The water was roaring over the spillway, and foaming down a rocky gorge for at least a quarter of a mile below!

"Whew!" Bennie whistled. "There's white water for you! Going to launch into that?"

"I am not!" Spider replied. "We got to get a team, or a truck, or something, to lug the *Mazama* down to better water again."

"Oh, a truck, your grandmother!" Bennie cried. "They don't have trucks in the Maine woods, do they? I've seen pictures of guides carrying canoes on their heads. You bring the dunnage, and I'll carry the canoe."

"Oh, very well, Mr. Sandow. Go to it," Spider replied, going back and beginning to arrange the dunnage into a pack.

When the canoe was emptied, Bennie tipped it up on its side, and began to struggle with it. By stooping down he managed finally to get the centre thwart across his shoulders and back, and, grasping the gunwales, he started to straighten up. But as he pushed himself up, the full weight of the canoe left the ground; she began to roll on his shoulders, and though he put forth all his strength, he couldn't stop her from turning over. He yelled for help, but Spider was loaded down with blankets and food and the camp kit, and before he could get rid of them, the *Mazama* wrenched free from Bennie's grip and fell to the ground, with a crunch of strained timbers.

"There! Now you've done it!" Spider shouted.

"Well, I didn't do it on purpose, did I? I'd like to see you hold that blamed thing when it once starts wabbling."

"I'm going to find a team," said Spider.

Bennie made no objection, but rubbed his wrenched shoulder. He stood guard over the canoe and dunnage, while Spider went to the power house for help. The men there sent him a quarter of a mile away, to a farmer, who finally showed up with a farm wagon, and carried the *Mazama* and the Scouts half a mile downstream, to calmer water. They had to pay him three dollars for the job, too, cutting into their supply of money. And when they were again launched—discovering to their satisfaction that the *Mazama* wasn't injured by her fall—it was getting dark rapidly. They paddled down the current hard, looking for a camping place. But for a mile or more there was nothing but open, plowed fields far back from the river.

"We can't wait much longer, or we can't see to make camp," Spider said.

"Well, we *got* to find a place where there's some wood, and some shelter. Going to be cold to-night, too," Bennie answered.

But for another mile they paddled between fields, their arms aching now. At last they reached a place which, in the gathering darkness, looked like a camping site. There were a few trees on the bank, anyway, and some dead driftwood, and a strip of level ground among the trees to sleep on. So they pulled the *Mazama* out of the water and began hastily gathering wood. There were no stones, however, for a fire pit. They had to use a couple of driftwood logs. It was quite dark before they were ready to cook, and they had only the light of their candle lantern and the fire to work by. Supper was a sketchy meal, con-

sisting mostly of bread and bacon and four fried eggs and bananas and tea.

After supper they started out of the little grove to see what kind of country they were in. On the hills they could see the lights of houses, and even hear a motor now and then on a distant road, but there was no path by the river, and after walking a short distance they found themselves in a swamp.

"I guess we'll go back," said Bennie.

"Might as well turn in, and get an early start. I'm tired, I don't mind saying."

It grew rapidly colder as they got ready for the night, and they laid in as much wood as they could find in the darkness. Then they spread their ponchos over the bare ground, kept all their clothes on, including sweaters, wrapped up in their blankets, and snuggled close to the warmth of the fire.

It didn't seem to Bennie that he had been asleep at all, but that he had been tossing and squirming around for hours in a vain effort to find a spot that wasn't covered with hard lumps to press into his back or his sides, and a still vainer effort to keep warm. But he realized that he must have napped a little, for the fire was almost out. He got up very softly, so as not to wake Spider, and put more wood on. Then as the welcome blaze sprang out of the embers, he looked at his watch. It was only twelve o'clock. Five more hours before daylight! Bennie almost groaned aloud, and crouched down over the flame. Just then Spider stirred.

"You awake?" he said.

"Sure—got up to put more wood on. I'm most frozen."

"Me, too. What time is it?"

"Only midnight."

"Oh, gosh, is that all? I wish it was morning."

Spider got up also, and they lit the lantern and went after more wood. Warmed again a trifle, they lay down once more and dozed off.

Bennie was next awakened by a drop of water on his face. He sleepily put out a hand from the blankets to wipe it off, but it was speedily followed by another—and another. Then he realized that it was raining. He could hear the drops hiss in the embers of the fire. A minute later, and the rain began to thunder down on the trees, and come pouring through them, for the leaves were not yet out.

"Quick, wake up, Spider! It's raining!"

"Waz-a-matter?" said Spider.

"The matter is we're going to get soaked. Get up, and do something about it."

"Well, do you think I can stop the old rain?" demanded Spider, sitting up.

"No, but you can help me drag up the canoe, and tip it over. We'll have to get under it."

They dragged the *Mazama* up into the grove as fast as they could, turned it over, propped one side up on two sticks, put all their dunnage under it, and one poncho over it in front for a tent flap to keep out the rain. Then, on the other poncho, they both rolled up in the blankets, close together under this narrow roof, and there they huddled till morning—three long, cold,

dismal hours, neither of them able to sleep more than six winks, their whole bodies cramped and aching and cold.

The rain ceased before sun-up, and at the first rays of dawn they were out, and running around madly to get warm.

"Some night, I'll say!" Spider chattered, his teeth hitting together like a pair of clappers.

"Oh, you feather bed and down comforter!" cried Bennie. "Why did I ever leave my happy home?"

"Well, come on—let's make some tea and cook some grub. We'll feel better then."

"Sure—but what are we going to make a fire with? The wood's all soaked."

"Make it with that, I guess," the philosophical Spider replied.

That was easier said than done, but at last, by splitting up some driftwood fine, and getting the dry inside next to the tiny flame which they coaxed up with bits of bark and twigs, they succeeded in making a fire and boiling the river water for tea. They didn't dare drink it unboiled, and there was no other water in sight.

"Pity we can't even get a drink, after we've been soaked outside all night," muttered Bennie.

The hot tea, and the bacon and scrambled eggs and flapjacks restored them to something like normal warmth and good spirits, and when the sun began to emerge from over the hills on the east side of the river, they were ready once more to begin their voyaging.

"We've got three whole days ahead of us!" Bennie cried. "I bet we can get almost to the mouth of the river."

"Or the bottom of it," Spider laughed. "We'll begin to hit the rapids pretty quick."

"Rapids! Ho, I guess there aren't any rapids that will faze us much, on this old river," Bennie replied.

It was Spider's turn to paddle stern that morning, but he had little to do for two hours or more. The river kept on through fields or woods, passed close to a small village where the Scouts got two bottles filled with drinking water and bought more bread, and then, about ten o'clock, began to enter into a narrowing valley between high, wooded hills, and to flow much faster.

Spider began to feel the canoe tug and try to swirl on the eddying current. He had to steer hard and constantly to keep her in midstream.

Then suddenly, as they rounded a bend, Bennie gave a cry. "Look out, Spider! Rapids ahead!"

Glancing past Bennie, Spider could look forward for two or three hundred yards down the stream, and he saw the water broken into ripples and swirls and eddies, with here and there a dark rock sticking up above the swift current.

"Don't paddle," he called to Bennie. "Keep your paddle in your lap, ready to shove us off anything, and keep your eye peeled dead ahead for rocks!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Bennie shouted back.

The current now took the canoe, and swept it into the swift race of water at what seemed to the excited

boys like a tremendous pace. Spider, his eyes strained ahead, his paddle dug far in, put out all his strength to guide the craft. The rocks that stuck out of the water weren't so bad. He had hard work to steer away from them sometimes, with the current pulling so, and in unexpected directions, but he could do it, with enough effort. What troubled him most were the rocks under the water. He couldn't tell at all where they were, or, if he did guess a rock was there from the action of the water, he couldn't tell how far below the surface it was. Once he steered for what looked like plenty of water, and the bottom of the canoe grazed the rock, and for an instant the little craft tipped sickeningly, as if she were going over. Only a tremendous lunge of his paddle lifted them free. It was tense, exciting work for at least half a mile, and when they were through, Spider was limp with exertion and soaked with sweat.

"Gee whiz! That was as exciting as a ski jump!" Bennie cried. "You got to let me try the next one. Wow! what great sport!"

"It's great sport all right," Spider answered, "but I wish I knew more about it. If we got through, it was more luck than skill. Here—you can swap places right now."

He swung the canoe in under the bank, and they changed seats.

The water was calmer now, and soon it became so very calm they realized they were approaching a dam.

"Another three dollars," Bennie sighed.

The dam, however, was a low one, for a small saw-

mill, and below it the rapids were very brief, so they managed to haul the canoe around, one taking each end, and then going back for their dunnage. A bit downstream they sat in the sun on the bank, ate some lunch, and rested an hour.

Then they started once more. Bennie was still stern paddle, when again, rounding a bend, they saw rapids ahead. This time, too, there was white water. Not much, to be sure, but several distinct patches of white, and the whole river hissed and sang with the speed of its rush.

"Do your best, Bennie," Spider called back. "I'll yell if I see anything. But you don't see the blamed rocks till you're right on 'em."

Once more the canoe dipped her bow into the rush of water and started down. Bennie kept her away from the white waves, and as nearly as he could in what looked like the deepest current, but after a hundred yards or so the whitecaps began to pepper the whole stream. There didn't seem to be any main current. There was nothing to do but steer between them. He got along all right for another hundred yards, and then, dead ahead, he realized that the water fell abruptly, with a roar, over a little sloping fall of two or three feet which stretched clean across the stream. He couldn't see, and neither could Spider, what lay immediately below. He let his eye rove across the line that marked the top of the fall, trying to guess where the deepest water went over, but he couldn't tell and there was no time to change his course much, anyhow.

"If the bow hits, hold her straight—don't let her stern swing broadside!" Spider had just time to cry out, when the *Mazama* gave a sickening pitch forward and shot over the rim.

An instant later there was a soft, grinding crash, and the voice of Spider shouting: "Hold her straight! Hold her straight!"

The bow had come down against a barely submerged rock! Bennie fairly stood on his paddle in a wild effort to keep the stern from swinging broadside into the current, and upsetting them. Spider stood on his paddle, shoved against the rock, and strained to push them back till the paddle almost bent like a fish rod. Luckily for them, he succeeded in shoving the bow free just before Bennie realized that he couldn't fight the side pull of the current a second longer. The *Mazama,* just in the nick of time, scraped past the rock, with a ripping noise, and rushed on downstream.

Now Spider dug his paddle into the water, too. "Steer for the bank!" he yelled. "Paddle as hard as you can! We're sinking!"

It didn't seem to Bennie that he could paddle, his arms ached so from the strain, but somehow he managed to head the canoe gradually toward the nearer bank. But it was harder and harder work, for she was settling fast. Already the blankets and grub-box and kettle and frying-pan were half floating in water, and the *Mazama* was lurching from side to side and threatening to upset every second.

The bank was only twenty feet away now!

"Keep going!" Spider yelled.

But even as he spoke, she started sinking. It was a case of jump, or have her tip over and lose all the dunnage in the river.

"Jump!" yelled Bennie.

They both sprang out, not knowing whether their feet would find bottom or not, but each keeping a hand on the canoe, to save it if they could.

Luckily for them, the water was only four feet deep, but it rushed so fast that it wet them to the chins, and it was all they could do, pulling with their combined strength, to get the *Mazama* and themselves into the quieter and shallower water a few feet away.

Then they tugged the water-laden craft to the shore, managed with great effort to raise the stern up on the bank, and let the water run out of the hole in the bow. They tossed their dunnage on shore,—all but the kettle and coffee-pot, which had both floated away,—and, in spite of their dripping clothes, got the canoe clear of the river and tipped over, to inspect the damage.

The bow was badly stove in. The frame was broken, both gunwales were cracked off, and the repair work they had previously done was smashed. But, quite as bad as that, the glancing blow the rock had given them as they pushed free, had torn through the canvas along the side, below the water line, and ripped a long leak for three or four feet, which couldn't be mended without the aid of canvas and paint and glue.

They contemplated the wreck in doleful silence for a moment.

"Well, I guess we'll kiss the old *Mazama* good-by."

Bennie almost wept. "Gee whiz, and it's only Thursday!"

"We'd better thank our lucky stars that we're here at all," Spider replied. "Look quick, and see if your matches are dry!"

Both Scouts got out their match-cases, which seemed to have kept out the water, and then they looked around them. There were no houses in sight. They were standing on the edge of a clearing which appeared to have been abandoned, and grown up to weeds and goldenrod. Not far off was a bit of woods. They ran toward these trees, carrying the ax and their two supposedly waterproof bundles of clothes.

They had a big fire going soon, and ripped the oilcloth bags open with their knives.

"Oh, you preparedness!" Bennie exclaimed, as he felt of his garments, and found them almost dry.

The Scouts stripped as fast as they could. They had no dry towel, nor even dry handkerchiefs, to rub down with, but they danced up and down by the fire, slapped themselves with their hands, and got into their dry clothes.

"Now what are we going to do?" Bennie demanded. "The grub's all wet, and the kettle's gone, and we've got no dry blankets, and no dry sweaters!"

"I guess we're going to beat it and find a road, and then find a house," Spider answered. "We can't lug all this wet stuff. Let's hang some of it near the fire to dry, and then find a team, and come back after it, and the canoe. We might get her home and mend her."

They found a little-used road on the far side of the clearing, but they walked along it more than a mile before they reached a house, a poor, dilapidated house with tumbled-down barns. The farmer was a rough-looking customer, with a week's growth of beard, and through the door the boys saw into a kitchen which didn't tempt them at all.

"Let's get him to take us back up to the next town," Bennie whispered, "before supper. Gosh, I don't want any food out of here!"

The farmer consented—for five dollars. They drove back in a rickety hay wagon, and loaded on their wet dunnage and the battered canoe. Both the paddles were gone.

"They're down to the Atlantic Ocean by this time," Bennie sighed.

It was three miles to the nearest village, and by the time they got there, Spider and Bennie had decided that it wasn't worth the cost to ship the canoe back to Southmead. To repair the bow properly would take a real carpenter, and there was repairing to be done all along the bottom, and new paddles to buy. They could probably get another canoe for what it would cost.

"But what are we going to do with it, now we got it here?" Spider asked, as the rickety wagon bumped into the little village, and moved toward a bridge that led over the river to the railroad station.

"I know!" said Bennie. "Let's give the old *Mazama* to the river! Let's heave it over the bridge, and let it float as far as it will before it sinks."

"Sure—a good idea! Whoa!"—this to the farmer.

That individual, who hadn't spoken six words on the whole ride, reined up his horses, apparently not in the least surprised, and the Scouts pulled the canoe off the wagon, unloaded their dunnage, paid him with a soaking-wet five-dollar bill, and watched him turn around and drive away. Then they began to haul the canoe down to the bank beside the bridge, looking around for something to stuff in the broken bow so she'd float as long as possible.

But while they were searching, three boys appeared, and looked on in surprise.

"Hey, what yer goin' to do?" they demanded.

"We're going to give this beautiful canoe a nice trip down the river all by itself," Bennie answered. "Find us an old meal sack, will you?"

"Aw, gee, it'll sink!" the boys said. "What happened? 'Jer run into a rock?"

"No, a crocodile bit us," said Bennie. "You want to look out for crocodiles in this river."

Spider had now found an old sack under the bridge, and was stuffing it into the hole in the bow. The three boys could restrain themselves no longer.

"Say, if yer don't want it, why don't yer give it to us?" they demanded.

"What would you do with it? It's all smashed."

"My father's a carpenter. He can fix it. He knows how to make boats," the oldest boy answered.

"If it's that easy, maybe we'd better ship it home, after all," Bennie said.

But Spider shook his head. "No, it would never

be strong enough to trust. We were going to sink the old craft. If these kids can get any fun out of it, let's let 'em have it. Maybe it'll do *somebody* some good. Hasn't done us much."

"All right, boys—she's yours!" said Bennie.

The three youngsters, with whoops of joy, seized the poor old *Mazama,* and began to drag her along the bank toward a house below the bridge. Spider and Bennie carried their dunnage to the depot, and learned that they could get a train for Southmead at seven o'clock. It was already nearly seven, so they had just time to rush to a grocery store and buy crackers and cheese for supper.

They ate this repast on the train, with nothing to wash it down with, and talked sadly of the day.

"I feel awful about it," Bennie declared. "If I'd had any sense, I could have sent her over that fall where the current was deepest, and there would have been enough water to float her bow at the bottom."

"No," Spider replied. "It wasn't your fault. Neither of us knows the river, for one thing, and neither of us knows how to tell from the looks of the water ahead what's there. The size of it is, Bennie, we're greenhorns at running rapids."

"Well, by Jiminy, I'm going some day to learn how to do it! I'm going down this old river to the ocean!"

"I guess it takes practice," Spider replied.

"Well, we had some to-day! O boy, but that water was cold! If I sneeze to-morrow, Ma will throw a fit, and think I'm going to die."

"Don't sneeze, then," Spider laughed.

The train required less than two hours to take them back to Southmead, though they had been a whole day making the distance by river. At nine o'clock Bennie, staggering under his load of wet blankets, wet clothes, and what camp equipment he had saved, walked up his front path and entered the house.

His father and mother were sitting in the library. They sprang up in amazement.

"Oh, Bennie, what has happened?" his mother cried.

But his father's eyes, taking in the wet pack, twinkled.

"Was it at those falls in the second rapids below Canton?" he asked.

Bennie looked sheepish.

"Yea," he said.

"A lot of people used to get through the first rapids," Mr. Capen smiled. "Where's the canoe?"

"We gave it to three kids."

"Are you wet? Were you hurt? Get right up to bed, and I'll mix you some hot lemonade," his mother put in.

"I don't want hot lemonade—I want grub, Ma. Your oilcloth bag did the trick. I'm dry, all right. Say, Dad, how do you tell where to go over those falls?"

"I never found out," his father answered.

"Why not?"

"I never got that far myself. I spilled in the first rapids."

"Well, say, that makes me feel better!" Bennie

exclaimed. "Pa, can I go up to Maine this summer, and really learn how to run rapids?"

"Didn't you get enough to-day?"

"Aw, no! What's one spill?"

"It's enough to upset your mother, son, if it doesn't disturb you. Go get some supper now, and go to bed. Your bed will feel pretty good, I'll bet."

"It's better'n trying to sleep underneath a canoe in the rain, at that," Bennie grinned. "Say, Ma, are there any doughnuts?"

He vanished after his mother, toward the kitchen, and Mr. Capen smiled and picked up his paper again. But he did not read it. His hand shook a little as he put his cigar to his mouth.

He had been down the river in spring—and he knew.

"But what can you do?" he muttered to himself. "You can't keep a boy from trying out his strength just because it's dangerous. He'd never learn. And the young jackanapes wants to try again!"

Once more he smiled, and his hand was steadier.

CHAPTER X

The Boys Get a Chance to Go to Maine, and Start Off in a Ford

THE spring baseball season had passed, high-school graduation had come and gone, Spider and Bennie, who would be seniors the following September, had taken the Scouts on a couple of three-day camping trips, and had made, themselves, several expeditions with their Alpine rope up the cliffs on Monument Mountain to photograph a duck hawk's nest which they found on a lofty ledge, with four little hawks squatting amid a pile of bones and feathers while the father and mother hawks dashed screaming overhead, wheeling and darting almost into the boys' faces as they climbed. But still they saw no way of getting away from Southmead on a trip to some higher mountains or wilder country.

Once Bennie ventured to suggest to his father that it would be a fine thing if he and Spider made a tramping trip through the White Mountains.

"Yes, it would be," Mr. Capen agreed. "How are you going to get there?"

"You are going to give me a job in the bank for two weeks, and my munificent salary will pay my fare," Bennie grinned.

"No, I don't think I am," his father answered.

"Your trip last summer to Oregon cost a lot of money. We don't need any help at the bank, so if I paid you it would have to be out of my own pocket. I guess if you get a trip this summer you'll have to earn it on your own."

"My father said just about the same thing," Spider confessed, when the two Scouts compared notes. "It's a hard job to earn money in this little town. The little kids have the paper routes, and 'most everybody mows his own lawn, and there isn't any factory, and neither of the garages want any short-time help. They want mechanics to stick on the job ——"

"How do you know?"

"I've tried 'em both," Spider answered.

"Looks as if we'd stick around the old burg, then," Bennie sighed. "Gosh, here it is 'most the end of July! Remember where we were last July, Spider? Oh, you Mount Jefferson!"

"Wouldn't it be great to get up on a real mountain again!" Spider exclaimed. "And have a chance to use the old rope!"

"I'd like to go off on a canoe trip, too," Bennie added. "Down white water, and learn to run rapids."

"Yea, and I'd like to have a million dollars, and an automobile and a six-tube radio set and an aëroplane," Spider laughed. "Wake up, Bennie. The alarm clock's ringing."

Two days after this conversation, however, Bennie was surprised and delighted to get a letter from Mr. Hadley. He tore it open and was still more surprised and delighted by the contents.

"DEAR BENNIE AND SPIDER:

"I heard all about your canoe trip. Before you try again you ought to go up in the Maine woods and learn how to run rapids. How would you like to do that? You'd have to take a young nephew of mine along, though, and look after him. Here's the proposition: this youngster, who is fifteen, hasn't any brothers or sisters. He's been brought up right in New York, in sort of a lonely way. Last year he went away to boarding-school, but he didn't know how to get on very well with the other boys, and he wasn't much good at athletics—never had skied like you fellows, for instance. But he's really a nice kid, and all he needs is some good, hard outdoor life with boys who will teach him. His father was going to send him to a camp, but he didn't want to go. I told his father about you fellows, then, and what you've done with your Scouts, and suggested that he let you and Bill Gilson, who is just my nephew's age, take the lad up into the Maine woods. He will pay for the guides, and all other bills of travel. You two, in return, will regard Sydney—that's the boy's name—as your charge, and show him a good time and teach him to handle himself. His father suggests that if you know how to run a Ford, you could all go up to Maine in a station wagon he has. Think this over carefully, ask your parents, and then let me know. If you say yes, either I or his father will bring Sydney up to Southmead.

"I wish I could go, too, but you Scouts cured me so completely last winter that I haven't a solitary excuse.

"Truly yours,

"JOHN HADLEY.

"P. S. Don't tell Bill Gilson unless you decide to accept. I don't want to disappoint him.

"J. H."

Bennie emitted a wild whoop as he finished this letter, standing on the steps of the post-office. Sadie Clark, one of the high-school girls, who was just passing him, jumped half a foot.

"My goodness, Bennie, what do you think you are, a Comanche Indian?" she demanded. "Why don't you scare me to death while you're about it?"

"Move on, woman, and don't annoy me with your idle prattle," said Bennie. "I have important matters to think about."

And he dashed down the street toward Spider's house, leaving her staring after him in astonishment.

"Will we go?" he cried, as Spider finished the letter. "Will we go? Will a duck swim? Will a canoe tip over? Will green apples give a little boy the belly-ache?"

"All the things you mention will undoubtedly happen," Spider laughed. "You hustle over to the bank and see your father, and I'll hustle over to the store and see mine, and then you come back to the store and we'll use the typewriter, and get off a letter to Mr. Hadley in style."

"Sure!" Bennie answered, as the two of them hurried back to the village centre.

Mr. Capen looked up in surprise as Bennie burst into the bank and rushed to the door of his father's office.

"What's the matter, Bennie? Somebody passed you a bad check?"

"I'll say they haven't! Read this, Dad!"

Bennie passed the letter to his father, who read it slowly and carefully.

"Well?" Bennie demanded.

"It strikes me that your friend Hadley is placing a lot of confidence in you," Mr. Capen answered. "That's evidently because you and Bob put over the winter-sports carnival."

"Sure—I understand all that. But can I go?"

"Well, now, this is pretty sudden. Maybe I'd better drop over and talk to Bob's father ——"

"Oh, Dad! You're just stalling. You know right now whether you'll let me go or not. *Please!*"

Mr. Capen grinned at his excited son.

"Do you want to go pretty bad?"

"I'll say I do!"

"But you're going to have the responsibility of looking after another boy; he's put in your charge as much as if you were a teacher. Do you think you can come across and do the job right?"

"I can try," Bennie answered, soberly.

"Well, I guess giving you some responsibility won't do you any harm," Mr. Capen said; "and I hope it won't do this other chap any harm. Yes, you can go."

"Thanks, Dad!" And Bennie was out of the bank again.

Spider's father had also consented, and so they went into the back office of the store and concocted a letter to Mr. Hadley on the typewriter, marking it "Dictated to R. C." Then they almost ran over to the post-office with it, and from there hurried to Bill Gilson's house to break the glad news to him. Bill

was knocked almost speechless. He had never in his life had a chance to go on any long trips, and this sounded too good to be true.

"Mr. Hadley's sure a prince!" was all he could say.

In three or four days they got another letter from New York telling them what equipment to have ready, and stating that Mr. Hadley himself would bring Sydney up the next week-end, in the Ford wagon. "Be sure one of you has a driver's license," he wrote. "You are going to a camp near Katahdin. I'll have the road maps for you when I come."

"Katahdin!" cried Bennie. "The highest mountain in Maine! Come on, let's look it up on the map."

They found it, a little spot on the map far up in Maine, east of Moosehead Lake. There seemed to be no other mountains around it, nor any towns or railroads. But there were more ponds than you could count, almost, and on one side of it flowed the West Branch of the Penobscot River, on the other side the East Branch.

"Say, I read something once about going down the West Branch of the Penobscot in canoes," Spider reflected. "Can't think where, but I remember it was full of rapids, and full of trout."

"Yes, and we've got to get some trout flies," Bennie cut in. "You and I've never fished with anything but worms, and Dad says they won't let you use bait in Maine."

"Well, let's hustle, then. Got any money saved?"

"Not much? Have you?"

"Not much."

When Mr. Hadley and Sydney arrived the following Saturday afternoon, Bennie and Spider and Bill were waiting for them at Bennie's house. Sydney was a fairly tall and good-looking boy, but he seemed rather frail, and shy. He shook hands with Bennie and Spider almost in silence. But he smiled at Bill.

"I hear you're a great ski jumper," he said.

"I'm not a patch on your uncle," Bill answered, blushing. "Say, did you ever climb a mountain—a real mountain, I mean?"

Sydney shook his head. "Only up Washington in an automobile," he answered.

"Me, neither," Bill declared. "Spider and Bennie have climbed a big mountain out West, and think they're the whole works. We'll have to show 'em something before we get back. They aren't so much in a canoe, though."

"You shut up!" Bennie exclaimed, as Mr. Hadley and Sydney laughed. "Wait till *you* get out in the middle of a rapids!"

"I guess it's no worse than ski jumping, is it, Mr. Hadley?"

"It's wetter," the man smiled. "Well, boys, got your equipment ready?"

That evening they went over their equipment carefully, and put it in dunnage bags or boxes in the rear of the station wagon and under the second seat. They each carried an individual bag with personal belongings—comb, tooth-brush, towel, soap, heavy socks and underclothes, and flannel shirts. Then they each had

a pair of heavy blankets rolled in a poncho and strapped, fishing rods and tackle, two cameras, a cooking kit, heavy Scout axes, and Bennie's Alpine rope, which he insisted on taking, though his father laughed and declared he'd never heard of people roping to climb Katahdin. They had, too, a box of Hungarian hobnails for their shoes, heavy knee boots which they proposed to wear from the start, and a light tent, which strung up on a rope between two trees, so no poles were needed. Sydney had brought that.

"One thing we must go down to your father's store and get," Mr. Hadley exclaimed suddenly—"some mosquito netting."

"Why?"

"Well, if the black flies are still in the woods when you get there, you'll not have to ask again," the man answered.

At the store, also, they stocked up with provisions for three days, so they could camp by the roadside on the way to Katahdin. Then Mr. Hadley got out the road maps he had brought and traced their route. They were to reach some point north of Boston the first day; the neighborhood of Augusta, Maine, the second day; and the third day they would pass Greenville, at the foot of Moosehead Lake, and then by a road built by the great paper company they were to go on fifty miles, cross Ripogenus Dam at the foot of Chesuncook Lake, and keep on twelve miles more, to the end of the road, where on Wednesday night they were to leave the car and be met with a buckboard which would carry them in eight miles further to a

camp on Kidney Pond. After this route was thoroughly understood, especially by Spider, who had the driver's license, Mr. Hadley took the two older boys aside.

"I'm not going to do any preaching to you fellows," he said. "But I want to say just this. Syd's father and mother have turned him over to you on my say so. They don't know you. If you drive the car recklessly, or get him into any trouble anywhere, you're throwing me down. I don't believe you'd do that, would you?"

"Not so you'd notice it," said Bennie.

"We'll do the best we know how," said Spider.

"That's the stuff! Now, about money. The camp and guide bills will be all paid by Syd's father. Syd has money for gasoline, repairs, grub, and any trouble you get into with the car. Just see that he doesn't use it all up on ice-cream sodas."

"I guess he won't buy many of them on Katahdin," Bennie laughed.

The next morning the four boys were up at five o'clock, tinkering the car and packing. At six they had breakfast, Mr. Capen slipped twenty-five dollars into Bennie's hand, his mother made him promise to send home a post-card every day that he had a chance to mail one, they waved good-by to the Capens and Mr. Hadley, drove to Bill's house and Spider's house for farewells, and then they were off.

"She's hitting on all four!" cried Bennie, as they sped out of Southmead into the open country. "Oh, you Lizzie!"

Spider was driving, and Bill and Sydney were on the back seat. Bennie furnished most of the conversation as they rolled along. Bill was too happy to talk. Spider was too busy, and Sydney was still too shy. But that didn't trouble Bennie in the least. He chattered whether anybody was listening or not. That was the way happiness affected him. As Spider presently remarked, "Bennie, you've got a rush of happiness to the tongue."

They passed the famous old Wayside Inn in Sudbury in the mid-afternoon, turned north off the main highway to Boston, and soon were going through Concord. Here they made a very short detour and saw the spot where the bridge crossed the river, and

> "Where once the embattled farmers stood
> And fired the shot heard round the world."

From Concord they passed quickly to Lexington where they saw the common where the first guns of the Revolution were fired, and saw, too, the statue of the Minute Man which stands there now.

"I guess if Paul Revere had had a Ford, he could have made better time," Bill suggested.

"Not if Spider drove him," Bennie laughed. "Gee, we'll never be arrested for speeding."

"You've said something," Spider retorted. "Nothing like that on this trip!"

They were nearly to Andover when they decided it was time to look about for a camping place. Turning up a side road, they went along till they came to a

bit of woods, and asked the farmer who lived near by if they could camp there.

He looked at them suspiciously. "The last folks I let camp in that grove left it looking like the town dump," he said. "Why *should* I let you camp there?"

"We know how to camp properly, sir," said Spider. "We will promise to leave the place so you can't tell where we were. We'll bury everything. We've come a long way to-day, and it's getting pretty late, sir."

"We'll pay you for it," added Sydney.

"I don't want any pay, son," the man said. "All I want is for folks to treat my land decently. No fires, mind you!"

"But how can we cook?" Bennie asked. "We can't eat raw lamb chops! We're woodsmen, sir. We know how to build a safe little fire, and put it out."

"Well, let me see you do it, then," the man replied, walking back with them to where the Ford stood by the side of the grove.

Bennie immediately began a small fire pit of stones, after scraping the surrounding earth bare of dry stuff, while Bill cut off dead pine twigs from the bottoms of the trees, clipping them close to the trunk neatly. Then, as these flared up in the pit, he looked for larger dead wood on the ground. Meanwhile Spider and Sydney got out the tent, strung the rope between two trees, hauled it taut, and began to peg it down. The work was all done so quickly and neatly, and the nested kettles came out so speedily and were given to Bill to take to the pump back at the house, and the

broiler was placed so firmly across the two sides of the fire pit, that the owner of the grove grunted.

"Well, I guess you boys know what you're about. Come over to the house and get some milk if you want it. Come all the way from the Berkshires, eh? Where you bound for?"

They told him.

"A good country," he said. "I was there once, thirty years ago, on a lumber job. Shot a moose, too. But lumbering was too much like work for me."

After supper was cooked and eaten, and the dishes washed, the boys put out the fire, stowed their dunnage in the tent, and drove up to Andover Hill to see the famous school there, Phillips Academy. From their camp they could see the tall memorial tower above the trees, and hear the chimes.

"Wish it was open now, and there was a football game," Bennie sighed. "I'd like to see Andover play."

"I wish I could *go* to Andover myself," Spider mused. "Boarding-school must be great fun, isn't it, Syd?"

"Wasn't much fun for me," Sydney replied.

"Why not?"

"Well, if you're not athletic, and want to read, or anything like that, they horse you."

"What do they do? I'd bat 'em in the eye!" Bennie cried.

"Oh, they do all sorts of things—rough house your room, put burrs in your bed, and things like that."

"I know," Bill said; "they used to do things like

that to me—not in my room, I don't mean, 'cause I live at home. But the Scouts used to rough house me ——"

"They *did?*" said Spider. "Why didn't you tell me or Bennie?"

"I'm no peacher," Bill answered.

"How'd you stop 'em?" asked Sydney, eagerly.

"Well, they did it 'cause they knew I was scared of 'em," Bill confided. "And then I got skis, and somehow I wasn't scared any more after I found I could jump better'n they could, and all I had to do was to punch Tommy Moran's jaw a couple of times, and they all quit."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Spider laughed. "What do you know about that, Bennie?"

"I guess we'd better be careful," Bennie grinned. "Syd, get him to give you a few sparring lessons."

"The only time I ever tried to punch anybody's jaw, he punched mine instead," Syd laughed ruefully.

"That was because you didn't really believe you could do it," was Bill's sage comment.

The next morning they rode past all the Academy buildings by the light of the low eastern sun, passed through Haverhill before there was traffic astir, and soon began to smell the sea, as the road took them down the Merrimac valley. They didn't get more than a distant glimpse of it, however, till they had gone through Portsmouth and reached York Harbor. Beyond York Harbor the highway ran for two miles right along the head of the beach.

"Oh, say, let's stop and go in!" Bennie urged.

"What'll we do for bathing suits?"

"Can't we hire some, some place?"

"Can't we find a spot where we can wear our birthday clothes?"

But they found neither a public bath house nor any stretch of beach which wasn't exposed to the public view, and they had, reluctantly, to keep on without a swim. They reached Portland at noon time, and had something to eat in a lunch room. Then they pushed on, around the lovely shore of Casco Bay, to the city of Brunswick, where they made a detour around the campus of Bowdoin College. From Brunswick to Augusta was a straight road, all macadam, and only seventy-five miles. The Ford was running smoothly, and they had no tire troubles, so they reached Augusta at five o'clock, and pushed on beyond it for nearly twenty miles before they decided to pitch camp.

This time they filled their kettles at a well, and drove till they came to some woods out of sight of any house, and were soon busy about their evening meal.

"One more day, and we'll be at old Katahdin!" Bennie cheered them. "I bet to-morrow at this time we'll be at Kidney Pond."

But the next day the macadam roads soon ended, and they ran into miles of dusty gravel, or else construction work where they had to drive slowly along one side, over bumps and heaps of stone and sand. It was impossible to make time. They didn't reach the little town of Greenville, at the foot of Moosehead Lake, till well along in the afternoon, and by that

time the car, their dunnage, their clothes, their hands and faces, were brown with dust.

"And I've got a bushel of dust in my throat," Bennie exclaimed. "Say, I'd like to jump into that old lake! Don't look very big. I thought it was a whale of a big lake."

"You're just on a narrow arm of it," said Spider. "Look at the map."

The four boys piled out of the car, beat the dust off their clothes in clouds, and dashed for a soda counter. Then they went into the big outfitter's store and each of them spent four precious dollars for a mackinaw shirt. Bennie chose one with dark green, bright green, and black checks. Spider and Bill chose red and black checks. Sydney got one which was all one color—pea green.

"Want some mittens, too?" the clerk asked them gravely.

"Are we going to need them to-night?" Bennie said, with equal gravity.

"Where you going?"

"In to Kidney Pond."

"Well, you might be glad of 'em," said the man.

Bennie wiped the perspiration from his forehead, leaving a streak of mud behind.

"Guess I'll take a chance without 'em," he grinned.

Not far beyond Greenville they saw an arm of Moosehead Lake again, at Lily Bay, and then the road plunged into the endless forest of spruce and balsam and they saw nothing more. It was a splendid road, built by the great paper company of stone and gravel,

and ran right through the wilderness for the use of the company trucks. The car skimmed along it merrily, climbed a hill, and suddenly came out into a wide open space, called Grant's Farm, where a lot of the company horses were stabled. And suddenly Bill gave a yell and pointed off to the right. "Look! Look!" he cried.

Spider stood on the brake, and everybody followed Bill's pointing hand.

There it was, miles away, rising sheer up from what looked like a vast green sea of forest, blue itself with distance,—the great rampart of Katahdin!

"Say, have we got to get there to-night?" said Spider.

"Wow, it's steep!" cried Syd.

"Oh, you old mountain!" Bennie breathed, happily. "Wait till we get to you!"

"I guess it will still be there," laughed Spider.

A mile farther on there was a sudden explosion under the rear of the car.

"Rats—a blow-out!" exclaimed Spider, again standing on the brake.

They all piled out, dug the jack up from the bottom of the tool box, and began to put on a spare tire. It was still and hot in the woods, and before they had worked long, dripping with perspiration, they became acutely conscious of a swarm of tiny black flies, which clung around their faces and hands, bit their lips, and even got into their eyes. Before the new tire was on, they were all four in misery, and were glad enough to climb back and once more get under way.

They had lost precious time, too. When they finally reached the little settlement at Ripogenus Dam it was after six o'clock. There was a further delay while they found the gate-keeper to let them across the great concrete buttress which walls up the head of Ripogenus gorge. To their left, as they crossed, they could see the water of the dammed-up lake stretching far out into the forests, its surface covered with millions of pulp logs. To the right, they looked down ninety feet into the wild, rocky gorge, where the logs are sent down by a spillway.

"Is that the West Branch of the Penobscot?" Spider asked the gate-keeper, pointing to the white, foaming stream at the bottom.

"Was this morning," the man replied.

"How'd you like to go down there in a canoe?" Bennie demanded of Spider.

"Did anybody ever do it?" Spider asked the gate-keeper.

"Not more'n once," that individual replied. "Keep straight on to Charlie's place. You can't miss it."

They kept straight on, for the very good reason that they couldn't possibly do anything else. The same wide, fine road was cut right through the heart of the forest. If you left it, your car would simply go bang up against an almost solid wall of spruce trees. It grew darker and darker in the woods as they sped almost steadily down-hill, mile after mile. It grew steadily colder, too. Bill and Syd on the rear seat got out their sweaters. Then Spider and Bennie put on theirs.

"What do you mean, Charlie's place?" Bennie demanded. "There's no end to this old road. I'm getting hungry."

But presently they saw a light ahead. They crossed a considerable stream, which came chattering down through a clearing, an old lumber cut, and just beyond this stream they saw a shed of rough boards, and beyond that, on a bank, a little shack, with smoke coming out of the stovepipe chimney. The road stopped abruptly at the shed. To reach the shack you had to cross a brook. Off to the right was a small natural meadow, with horses grazing in it, and beyond that two mountains with a deep gap between. They hadn't seen a sign of any mountains since they left Grant's Farm, and these two burst on them suddenly, as they entered the clearing.

"That shack must be Charlie's," Spider declared. "All out. Go find the said Charles, Bennie, and ask him if anybody has come for us yet from Kidney Pond, and find out where we can leave this boat, too. Bill and Syd, you help me unload, eh?"

"I will soon's I've had a drink," said Bill, running to the stream and plunging his face into the ice-cold water.

Bennie returned in a few moments with a long face, and Charlie. Charlie was a tall, elderly negro, who lived in the shack and looked after the company's horses.

"He says the buckboard's been and gone—wouldn't wait for us," Bennie announced.

"No, sir; Ray says he wouldn't wait no longer,"

Charlie added. "Says he wouldn't drive nobody down over that tote road after dark."

"We wouldn't hurt him," Spider answered.

"Ha, ha!" Charlie laughed. "Guess that Ray's not afraid of you boys, nor nobody else neither. He's afraid of bustin' his ole wagon and hurtin' his hosses. Guess you don' know what that ole tote road's like."

"I guess we're not going to, to-night," Spider answered. "Well, where can we leave the car?"

"How long you reckon you're goin' to leave it here? Most any place will be all right, out o' the road."

"Can't we leave it in the shed?" Bennie asked. "We're going to be in the woods two or three weeks."

"You mean the garage?"

"Oh, pardon me, the garage," Bennie laughed, bowing toward the rough building.

"You kin leave it there, but it'll cost you fifty cents a day—company's rules," said Charlie.

"That's better than leaving it in the rain," Sydney put in. "All right, Charlie. Open her up."

They ran the car into the shed, beside one of the company's trucks, and then asked Charlie where they could pitch their tent, for it was already getting so dark they couldn't see much for themselves.

He led them toward his shack, helping them carry their dunnage, and showed them a level spot by the brook.

"You all got plenty o' blankets?" he asked. "It's goin' to be cold to-night."

"'Going to be' is good," said Bennie. "I'll say it is now. I thought this was summer."

"Oh, this am summer all right," Charlie chuckled. "Won't freeze no water to-night. Jest a little mite o' frost, maybe. Won't likely freeze no water till nex' month. If you boys get cold, though, you come up to my shack after yo' supper. I got a good warm fire."

Supper was a hasty affair, cooked by the light of the fire and a candle lantern, and the four boys huddled around the fire while they ate it, too, wearing their sweaters. As soon as it was over, they hurried up the bank and burst into the one room of Charlie's shack.

"Ah thought maybe you'd come up to see me!" he chuckled.

The shack was certainly warm. It was heated by an old iron kitchen range, which Charlie kept stuffed with wood, and after half an hour the boys were as uncomfortably hot as they had been uncomfortably cold. They made a trip outside, into the starlit night, drank in the cold, clear air, and then went back again, to hear another bear story.

But Charlie grew sleepy after a while, and Spider declared it was time to turn in. "What time they coming after us in the morning?" he asked.

"Well, you all can sleep till most ten o'clock, I reckon," Charlie answered.

"That suits me," yawned Bennie. "Come on, boys, let's hit the alfalfa."

When they got to their tent, the fire was out. They brushed their teeth pretty hastily at the brook,—"Might

as well use ice-water!" Bill chattered,—took off their boots and belts, rolled up in their blankets with their dunnage bags for pillows, and prepared for a long night's slumber.

"It's pretty noisy here," Bennie muttered after a three-minute silence, broken by no sound in all the world but the faint tinkle of the brook.

"It's noisy anywhere that you are—go to sleep!" Spider retorted.

"I want to hear a loon," Bennie added.

"Well, the rest of us *can* hear one."

Bennie was silent after that.

CHAPTER XI

The Boys Get Almost to Katahdin, and Are Introduced to a Tote Road

AROUND midnight Bill woke up, and tried to move his cramped and aching body into another position without disturbing the others. As he did so, he was aware that Syd tried to move, too.

"You awake, Syd?" he whispered.

"Am I! Don't seem as if I'd been asleep. I'm all stiff and awful cold."

"Say, are you guys frozen?" came the whisper of Bennie.

"What are you all whispering for? I'm wider awake than any of you," said Spider, in his natural voice.

"If I'd known that, I'd have tried to get comfortable an hour ago," said Bill.

"Me, too."

"Me, too."

"Me, too."

Then they all laughed, in spite of their discomfort.

"Making up the fire won't do any good, not here in the tent," Spider said. "Trouble is, we didn't get any bough bed made to keep the cold of the ground away from us. And we aren't used to the climate yet, either."

"Let's get out and dance around a while."

"No, that'll wake us up so we'll *never* go to sleep again."

"Well, I'm going to make up a fire, anyhow—in front of the tent flap. Maybe it will help some," Bennie declared.

He wriggled out of his blankets, and the others heard him crawling around in the timber after fuel. He also brought some stones from the brook, and built up a little wall to reflect the heat. Against this wall, in front of the tent, he built a fire. As the flames sprang crackling up, and the red glow lit the inside of the tent, he came crawling back into his blankets.

"There—now we'll get warm for a few minutes, anyhow," he declared.

The grateful heat did indeed come in through the flap, and the four boys were just beginning to doze off when suddenly the whole tent came down on top of them!

"Say, what the dickens!" cried Bennie.

"Quick, let me get out of this. Lie still, you fellows, and don't tangle it up any worse," Spider ordered.

He pushed and felt with his hands till he found the flap, and crawled out. Then he stamped the fire from the two ends of the severed rope, which were slowly burning up like punk.

"What's the trouble?" came the smothered voices of those still under the fallen canvas.

"The matter is, Bennie built his fire right under the rope the tent hangs on," Spider replied. "Great little Scout, Bennie is."

"Oh, gosh! I never thought of that—I was so sleepy," Bennie's voice was heard declaring.

"Well, wake up enough now to find the lantern and help me fix it."

They got the severed rope tied together again, and the tent up once more, and then they made a fresh effort to sleep. But it was a restless, chill, and uncomfortable night, and instead of being still sleeping at ten o'clock, they were up at Charlie's before he was through his breakfast, to beg some hot water to wash in. The ice-water in the brook made little impression on the dust grimed into their faces.

After breakfast Bennie and Bill got out two fish rods and went over to the large stream, which was named the Sourdnahunk, to try for trout. They each tied on a fly, without any idea which was the right fly to use, and began to cast without any idea of how to cast. Maybe we ought to say they began to try to cast. Sydney and Spider watched them for a while, in their frantic efforts to get the fly out into the pools without catching the hook first in the trees or bushes behind, and then left them.

"Don't catch too many," they cautioned. "It might weigh down the wagon too much."

"All I can say is, I'd like to see *you* try it," Bennie retorted.

"You won't see me till I've watched somebody who knows how," Spider laughed, as he and Sydney walked on down the stream and into the woods.

Not long after ten the buckboard from Kidney Pond arrived for them. By that time, too, the sun was

high and hot, the flies were pestiferous, and nobody could have guessed that a few hours before it had been bitterly cold. This buckboard was one of the Rangeley Lakes type, with springs as well as a flexible bottom. It had big, stout wheels and was hauled by two stout horses. The wheels were covered with fresh mud to the hubs, and the horses were spattered. So was the driver.

"Sorry, boys, I couldn't wait last night," he said. "But we don't travel this Sourdnahunk tote road after dark. Where's your dunnage?"

The dunnage was stowed on the bottom of the buckboard, and then tied down with ropes.

"Looks as if you were loading a pack horse," Bennie said. "You don't want it to bounce off, do you?"

The driver grinned and winked at Charlie.

"You watch out that *you* don't bounce off," he said. "All aboard!"

"Looks as if he were going to hand us some rough stuff," Spider laughed.

"I'm going to show you a State of Maine tote road," the man answered, starting the horses.

They trotted down a cart trail through the level meadow by the Sourdnahunk stream, heading for the deep, narrow gap to the south, between the two mountains. Sydney was sitting with the driver, and the other three were on the second seat. The whole back of the long buckboard was packed with their dunnage.

"Which of those mountains is Katahdin, sir?" Bill asked.

"Neither. You won't see Katahdin for two hours.

One on the right is Doubletop, one on the left is part of O J I."

"Two hours—but it's only eight miles to Kidney Pond," said Bennie.

"Well, two hours and a half, then."

"What's the matter with your horses?"

"My horses are all right. Where do you think you are, on Fifth Avenue?"

Just then the horses pulled quickly up a sharp little pitch out of the meadow, and the left wheels of the buckboard jolted over a large stone, as big as a bucket. Bennie bounced up in the air, and landed on top of Spider, who landed on Bill, who nearly landed on the ground.

"I get you!" said Bennie. "Drive over one on the other side, so I'll bounce back into place."

"All right."

And sure enough, there was a second jolt, worse than the first, which threw everybody to the opposite side.

"You ought to use balloon tires on this road," Bennie declared.

"I guess an aëroplane would be better," Spider laughed, as the wagon jolted once more, and banged them down on the hard seats.

The horses toiled on in the hot sun, at a slow walk, down the tote road and into the narrow gap between the steep mountain walls. The Sourdnahunk stream brawled and sang close by. The dense forest of mixed evergreen and hard woods—mostly huge yellow birches with elms along the stream side—came almost to the

wheel hubs. The forest floor was dark and damp, and covered with rich green mosses, with ferns, with little vines that made miniature gardens as they clung to fallen and rotted logs. The boys were in the primeval wilderness.

But they had very little chance to pay much attention to the beauties around them. First one wheel and then another would bump over a stone, or over a tree root, or sink down two feet into a mud hole. They were thrown right and left against each other. They were bounced up in the air and down again, till their heads began to ache.

"I'm going to ride easier'n this," Bennie declared, climbing over the back of the seat, and perching on top of the pile of blankets and dunnage bags. "Ha, this is fine! Regular shock absorber!"

But presently he got to scanning the steep sides of Doubletop and speculating on the chances of any cliff climbing there, and forgot to cling to the ropes which bound the dunnage. The buckboard went suddenly over a root, and the wheels dropped two feet on the farther side into a mud hole—and Bennie went off the load and landed with a sqush in the mud!

He yelled. Spider looked back and shouted: "Man overboard! Heave to and get out the life-boats!" and the driver stopped the horses.

"Go ahead, go ahead," Bennie called. "I'm going to walk the rest of the way."

"Let's all walk," Spider said. "My head aches from this bouncing."

"Mine, too."

"Mine, too."

"What do you think about me?" the driver said. "I have to make this trip most every day—both ways."

The boys soon found that they could walk much faster than the horses could, over the rough tote road, so they plugged ahead, and after a quarter of a mile they couldn't even hear the team behind them. They kept on steadily for an hour, till they were hot and fly-pestered, and then, coming to a nice pool in the stream beside the road, they peeled off their clothes for a swim—the first bath they'd had since leaving home.

Bennie was the first in. With a whoop of joy he took a long jump off the bank, and landed in water nearly up to his neck. His whoop of joy changed to a wail of agony.

"Ouch! Wow! Brrrrr!" he cried, scrambling madly for the bank again, and emerging about the color of a boiled lobster.

"What's the matter? Is it cold?" Bill demanded.

"No, of course it isn't cold. Can't you see I scalded myself?" Bennie chattered.

But he went back in with the others, and they all ducked under once, and took a few strokes, and then came out and sat in the sun, feeling much refreshed. The team came along as they were starting to dress, and they had to hurry after it to catch up again.

After seven miles the tote road emerged into a clearing around the ruins of an old lumber camp, and the buckboard turned down a side trail to the right, and started to cross the stream. The boys, who were walk-

ing behind it now, suddenly realized what the driver was up to.

"Hi, there! Whoa!" they yelled, dashing after him.

"What's the matter, boys? Didn't you want to walk?" he called back.

"Sure, but we don't want to swim with our clothes on."

They just caught the rear of the buckboard, and swung on to it, as the horses entered the shallow stream at the ford, and buried their noses to drink.

The road bumped on for half a mile or more on the farther side, plunging away from the stream through a dense forest of young spruce, and suddenly emerged into a clearing.

"Here we are!" called the driver.

The boys saw in front of them five or six acres of cleared ground and garden, between the wall of the forest and a lovely pond, perhaps half a mile wide. Along the edge of the clearing, right on the shore of the pond, was a row of fifteen or twenty log cabins, with two much larger cabins in the middle. Between the cabins they could see canoes pulled up on the bank.

The proprietor of the camp, whom everybody, they found, called by his first name, Ray, turned out to be the driver of the buckboard, and he helped them unload. Then he showed them the cabin they were to live in. It had a veranda on the front, facing the lake. Inside there was a sitting-room with a cot bed in it, used as a couch by day, and a sheet-iron stove. Behind that was a bedroom with a double bed and a cot,

and two washstands. In the sitting-room there were two rocking-chairs and a table.

"Say, this is roughing it, all right," cried Bennie. "Pretty hard life in the Maine woods!"

And he sat down in the biggest rocking-chair and began to rock.

"Get up, and help stow the dunnage," Spider laughed, tipping the chair half over and spilling him out. "You'll be glad enough of a regular bed to-night, I'll bet."

They were still stowing their dunnage away, and getting out their fish lines, when the dinner gong rang on one of the large central cabins. As they hurried along the path by the edge of the water, past other cabins, Bill and Sydney ran out on a plank pier to take a look at the pond, and immediately gave a cry.

"Hi! come here! Here's your old Katahdin!"

Bennie and Spider hurried out on the pier, past the fringe of birch trees which grew almost in the water, and looked where the other two were pointing.

Yes, there it was! Looking hardly two miles away, shooting up from the forest in a great, steep wall of woods and gray granite precipices, lay the huge rampart of Katahdin. A feather of cloud was streaming off from its summit like a plume. It looked immense, forbidding, but Bennie sighed happily.

"Pretty soon we'll be on top of you, you old mountain!" he exclaimed.

"It looks like quite a job to me," said Sydney.

"The harder the better," was Bennie's answer.

They found the dining-room full of men and

women, dressed like themselves in rough outing clothes. The guests sat at three long tables, and everybody at the table where the boys were placed looked up and nodded to them.

"Ray expected you last night," somebody remarked. "Did you have trouble on the road?"

"Only one blow-out," Spider answered. "But we got slowed down by construction work, and then we had to stop quite a while at Greenville while Bennie, here, picked out a shirt that was gay enough for him."

"You ought to see the one *he* picked out," Bennie retorted.

Everybody laughed, and the boys felt at home at once, as if they had joined a big family. The dinner was good, too, and they were hungry, and did it full justice.

After dinner Ray said, "Which of you boys is Sydney Parker? Oh, yes. Well, Sydney, your father wrote me to have two guides for you all the time you're here. But I can't give you anybody till tomorrow. Two of my men will be back then, with a party who've gone over to Slaughter Pond fishing. Make yourselves at home till then. Guess you'll sort of want to rest a bit this afternoon, anyhow, after bumping over that tote road."

"How much are the canoes?" Bennie asked.

"How much? The canoes are part of the camp. Go to 'em, if you know how to paddle. If you don't, please stay near shore. I hate having to swim."

The boys hurried back to their cabin and got out their rods. Then, in two canoes, they paddled out

around the pond, carefully watching two or three men who were fishing, to see if they could learn how it was done. After a while they sneaked alongshore till they were pretty well out of sight of the other canoes, and first Sydney and Bill, while Bennie and Spider paddled, tried casting flies; then they reversed positions. It was, of course, less difficult from a boat than from the bank, because there was nothing for your hook to get caught in behind you. But even so it wasn't easy. Over and over they tried to swish the rod and make the light fly sail far out and land delicately on the water near the spot where they had seen a fish jump. But though they gradually got the hang of it so they could cast a fair distance from the canoe, and light somewhere near where they wanted to, not a strike did anybody get.

"Maybe we're not using the right flies," Bennie suggested. "I'm going to try another one. I bet this red-and-yellow thing I've got is too gay for these Maine trout. Probably they're very sober trout."

He took off his gay fly, and substituted a drab little brown one and cast that out toward the spot where a fish had just broken water. He drew the fly slowly back toward him along the water, and then cast again. There was a sudden snap, a tug on the line, and Bennie yelled, "I got a bite!" and yanked his pole.

Of course he lost the fish.

"You shouldn't call it a bite," Spider shouted from the other canoe. "You should say 'a strike.' That's why you lost your fish."

"Is that so?" was Bennie's comment, as he cast again into the same spot.

Again the fish struck, and this time Bennie remained calm enough to twitch the line delicately enough to hook the fish, which immediately started off full speed, while the light rod bent half double and the reel sang.

"Play him! Play him!" yelled Spider and Syd from the other canoe.

"What do you think he is, a piano?" Bennie managed to retort, as he tried frantically in his excitement to grab the spinning handle of his reel.

"Oh, don't lose him! I bet he weighs five pounds!" cried Bill, almost losing his paddle overboard.

Bennie finally got hold of the reel handle, and by winding it up fast when the fish swam toward the boat, and letting him run it out less and less on each dash away, he tired the trout and at last got it alongside and lifted it proudly into the canoe.

It wasn't over ten inches long, and didn't weigh a pound!

"Gee, and I thought it was a whale," he laughed. "Well, it's better than none. Say, Spider, you better try one of these brown flies."

With the Brown hackles and also Parmachini Belles, after fishing for nearly two hours, each of the boys managed to get a trout; not exactly a substantial mess, but not so bad, perhaps, for their first try at fly fishing. They decided to quit, then, and paddle around to see the pond.

Except for their own camp, and one private camp on the other side, occupied now only by a caretaker,

there was nothing whatever on the shores but the trees of the virgin forest. Searching for the outlet, however, they paddled down a grassy arm of the pond, and came upon signs of busy activity.

Spider was the first to notice it. He pointed to a tree which had fallen across the stream. "Beavers!" he cried.

Sure enough, the tree had not blown down, neither had it been chopped. It had been gnawed through by beavers.

"And fresh, too!" Bill exclaimed. "See, the leaves are still green!"

They pushed the canoes over this obstacle, and kept on down the outlet. On both sides they saw more trees, some of them almost a foot thick, either felled completely, or half gnawed through. There were dozens of smaller saplings and bushes cut off, and when the boys examined the stumps they were amazed at the clean, deep cuts the beaver teeth had made, as if a man had used a narrow but very sharp chisel.

"Say, I'd hate to have one of those birds take a liking to my finger," Bennie declared.

"Look," said Spider; "there's a little canal they've made off to one side, I suppose to haul their logs down."

"And look ahead; there's the dam!" cried Sydney.

Sure enough, not fifty feet ahead, stretching right across the outlet channel, and back through the swamp on either side to firm ground, was a low rampart of sticks, grass, and mud. Paddling to it, the boys saw that it must raise the level of the pond at least two

feet. Syd was more interested in this dam than in anything so far on the trip.

"My, I'd like to see 'em at work!" he cried.

"Let's stick around a little while and watch," Bill suggested.

"No, I've read about beavers. They work at night. Anyhow, they never show themselves when anybody's looking. You have to build a blind, and watch 'em by moonlight."

"Let's tear some of the dam down, and see how much they can rebuild to-night," Bennie suggested.

"No, let's wait till there's a moon, and then tear some of it down, and hide, so we can see 'em rebuild it," Sydney said.

"Good idea, Syd," said Spider. "You know, it's some engineering stunt to make a dam out of sticks and mud that will hold back a pond like this."

"Some of 'em must have graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology," Bennie laughed. "Say, we better be getting back with these fish, if we're going to get 'em cooked for supper."

They paddled back up the outlet, and across the pond toward the camp. As they drew near the landing pier they saw two beautiful Persian cats sitting at the extreme end, watching them approach. Bennie and Bill were ahead, and as their canoe neared the landing, Bennie, who liked cats, called "Nice kitty, kitty."

To his surprise, and still more to Bill's surprise, who was paddling bow, one of the cats gave a meow and a big spring, cleared the six feet of open water, landed

on Bill's knees, went under his arm to the bottom of the boat, grabbed a fish, and before either boy could stop her, was up on the gunwale, sprang back to the pier, and dashed triumphantly, her white tail waving like a flag, around the corner of a cabin.

"Say, sit on your fish! Pirates on the port bow!" Bennie called back to the other canoe, while Bill shook his paddle at the other cat.

"Did she get one of your fish?" a man asked, coming down to the pier. "You have to look out. If you speak to 'em when you're coming in with fish, they think it's an invitation."

"Well, I never saw a cat before that would jump into a canoe, across open water!" Bennie exclaimed. "Say, Bill, it was *your* fish she took! Hard luck. You won't get any for supper."

"How do you know it was my fish?"

"'Cause it was the little one," Bennie grinned, winking at the man.

"Cheer up, Bill. I caught sixteen this afternoon. You can have two of mine," the man said, winking at Bill.

"One on me," Bennie admitted.

That night everybody in the dining-room had fresh trout—an almost daily occurrence, the boys were to discover. But the two guides the boys were to have didn't come back.

"I guess their party decided to stay out another day," Ray said. "Sorry. You'll have to amuse yourselves again. Maybe you'll get some more meat for my poor cats."

"Why don't you climb Doubletop with me?" the man who had seen the cat episode asked, as they sat by the edge of the pond after supper and watched the last daylight fade on the slopes of Katahdin and O J I, and on the southern peak of Doubletop to the north of them. "We can hike up there in a day,—it's only a four-thousand-foot mountain. And you get a good view. I was going alone, but I don't object to company."

"Don't say it if you don't mean it, sir," Spider answered. "We're just spoiling for a tuning-up climb before we have a go at Katahdin."

"Well, be up sharp for breakfast, and we'll tune to-morrow," laughed the man.

Later the boys, sleepy and weary, sat by the wood fire in their cabin stove, their feet stretched out luxuriously.

"Pretty hard life, this camping," said Bennie. "Nothing but an easy-chair to sit in. Nothing to burn but dry wood in a stove. Nothing to sleep in but a good old bed. Nothing —— What's that?"

All four boys sat bolt upright. To their ears had come a strange, uncanny noise. They sprang up and dashed out to the lake shore. Nobody else in the camp seemed disturbed by it. They listened, breathless. It came again—a wild, mournful sound, half a kind of scream, half a strange sort of laughter. It seemed to come from the edge of the lake, just around to the left. As they listened a man came along the path toward the next cabin.

"Listening to the loon?" he asked. "Old Joe

Howes, the guide, says you aren't really in the woods till you can hear a loon."

"That's right, sir. I agree with him," Bennie replied; and the four boys went back into their cabin, looking pretty sheepish.

"Anyhow," said Bennie, proudly, "he never knew we didn't know. I guess I'm a pretty quick little thinker."

"If you only weren't so modest," Spider replied.

"I know—I'd be perfect. Well, boys, all those in favor of going to bed say 'Aye.' Contrary minded, 'No.' The ayes have it."

But Bennie's adventures weren't over yet. Because it was really his party, Syd had the couch by himself in the front room. Spider and Bill shared the double bed, and Bennie had the little cot, in the back room. There was an entrance from the rear of the cabin into this room, with a screen door. The boys left the regular door open for ventilation, and of course nobody in the camp ever dreamed of locking anything. The screen door was left unhooked.

Everybody had been asleep for some time. Outside the world was still except for the occasional laugh of a loon on the water, or the hoot of a barred owl in the forest, or the odd little cry of a porcupine wandering around the clearing. The clear, cold, balsam-scented air was ideal to sleep in, and Bennie was about as sound asleep as it was possible to be, when he was suddenly wakened by a soft blow on his chest. Startled, he yanked an arm out from under the blanket to defend himself, and raised himself, his nerves quiv-

ering, on the other elbow. But before he could swing a blow in the darkness, almost before he was waked up enough to know anything, he heard an unmistakable purr!

His nerves stopped quivering as quickly as they had begun, and he almost laughed aloud.

"Kitty, kitty," he whispered, feeling with his hand toward the sound. His hand sank into the thick, soft, warm fur of one of the Persian cats, which had curled down close to his side. Bennie lay back, still stroking the cat, which rumbled like a contented teakettle. Presently he drew his arm under the blankets again, and fell asleep. So did the cat.

When Spider woke in the morning he looked over to Bennie's cot, and then nudged Bill awake, and pointed. The white cat, the one which had stolen the fish, was still snuggled in a ball against Bennie's side, almost up to his chin.

"Well, that's what I call gratitude," Spider laughed. "She thinks he *gave* her the fish."

"Yes, and he *will* give her one next time," said Bill. "I never saw Bennie get mad at a cat."

"Looks as if the cat knew it. Let's put her under the bedclothes."

They tiptoed out of bed, roused Syd with their fingers on their lips, and then stole back to Bennie's couch and put the cat gently under the blankets so only her head appeared, on the pillow beside Bennie's. The cat looked rather surprised, but made no objections.

"Say, you afraid to sleep alone?" they demanded.

"Whas-a-matter? What-say?" Bennie muttered sleepily, opening his eyes.

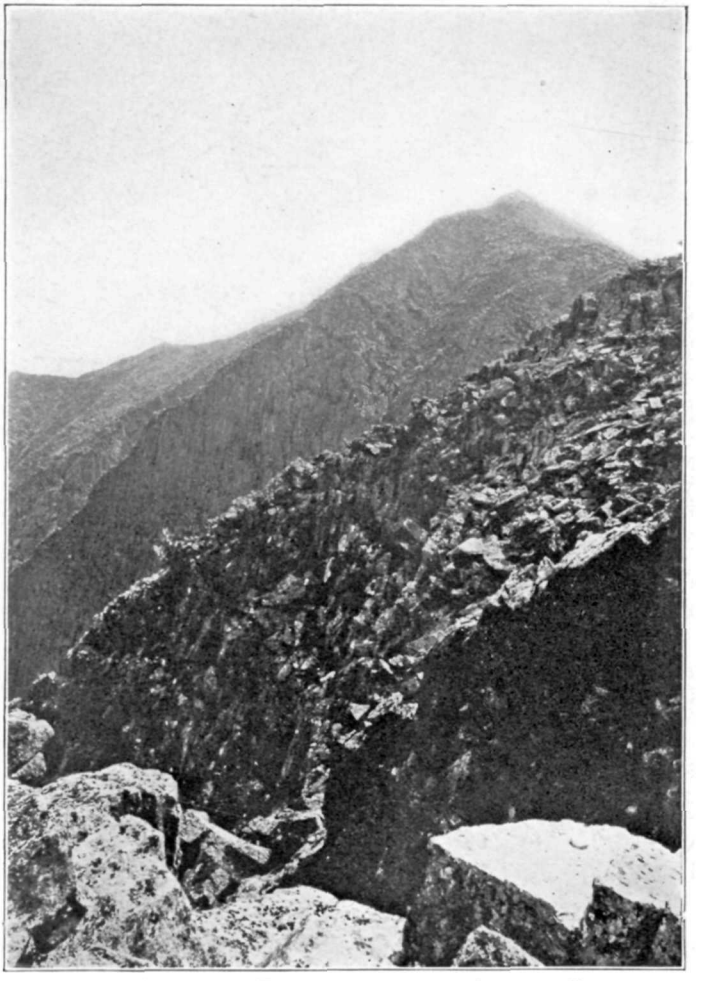
Then he saw the cat's head on the pillow beside him. "'Lo, kitty. You here still? Don't pay any attention to those big boobs. They're jealous 'cause you like me best."

The cat yawned, drew herself slowly out from under the blanket, stretched, jumped sedately off the bed, walked to the screen door, poked it open a crack with her paw, shoved herself through, and vanished.

"Some cat!" cried Bennie, sitting up in bed and watching the proceeding. "So that was how she got in last night. Gee, she scared me most stiff—landed on my chest."

"Well, old cat tamer, get up now," Spider laughed, pulling the bedclothes clean off him. "Doubletop today."

"The double top of the morning to you!" Bennie answered, landing in the middle of the floor.



THE MAIN SUMMIT OF KATAHDIN FROM THE GRANITE CLIFFS OF THE GREAT BASIN

CHAPTER XII

The Ascent of Doubletop and an Encounter with a Bear—At Long Range

THE climb up Doubletop and back took all day. They walked through wet, dense woods for three miles to the base, and then they had a stiff climb of almost three thousand feet up the steep southern face to the first of the double summits. The second summit, slightly higher, and topped with an old fire-observation tower, was a mile to the north, and connected by a high ridge, or col. From this summit they could look north, south, and west, seeing nothing anywhere but a hazy green forest stretching to the far horizon, and spotted everywhere with ponds, dozens, scores, hundreds of ponds and lakes, with the sheen of Moosehead Lake itself just faintly caught far to the west.

But eastward they could not see at all, beyond the gorge of the Sourdnahunk stream, for the long rampart of the Katahdin range—broken with cliffs and peaks and wild ravines; and then Katahdin itself rose up like a giant fortress of granite. They were high enough to catch a glimpse down into the gorges which cut far into this rampart, and to see hints of the great, treeless, rock-strewn plateau that stretches along the top.

"We'll be over on you yet!" Bennie declared, shaking his fist at the great mountain.

"I don't know whether I'll be or not," Sydney sighed, sinking wearily down in a bed of stunted blueberry bushes, which here on the cold summit still bore some ripe berries.

"I'm kind of tired, too," Bill confessed, also sinking down.

"Let's get behind a rock out of the wind and eat our lunch," the man suggested. "We'll all feel better then, I guess."

After the sandwiches were eaten a tremendous desire to sleep came over Sydney and Bill, and even Bennie, though he tried hard to resist it, was finally compelled to stretch out and close his eyes. Only Spider and the man, their backs propped comfortably against a rock, remained awake, talking in low tones.

"What a heap of wilderness there is still left," Spider said. "Far's you can see, not a town, not a house, nothing but green forest and lakes."

"Yes, and you don't see a quarter of the Maine wilderness from here, either," his companion answered. "Not a tenth of it, hardly. What a wonderful national park it would make, right here in the East!"

"Why don't they make it a national park?" asked Spider. "Costs a fortune now to get way out West to Yellowstone or Glacier, or Crater Lake, where Bennie and I went last summer."

"Yes, why don't they?" said the man. "They don't because the spruce and balsam are too valuable in paper making, and we Americans give away all our

natural resources to private monopoly. But maybe you're not interested in political economy yet?"

"I guess I don't know much about it," Spider confessed. "Look, sir. Is that a man coming up there through the scrub, over toward the south peak? He's acting awfully funny."

Spider's companion raised a small pair of binoculars he carried, and looked. Then, without a word, he passed them to Spider.

Spider focussed them, and finally got them pointed to the object he sought. He gave a long, low whistle.

"It's a bear, isn't it?"

"It sure is. Can you see what he's doing?"

"Eating blueberries," said Spider. "He kind of scoops a bush into his hands—I mean paws—and eats the berries off."

"Now, if we only had a gun, we might stalk him and get a good shot," said the man.

"Not I!" said Spider. "Bennie and I never shot anything but varmints. I guess bears don't do any harm. *I* wouldn't kill one unless I had to."

"Well, you're not likely to have to. They're more afraid of you than you are of them, except an old mother bear with cubs. Let's wake up your friends, and give them a peep."

After they had all watched the bear for a while, Bennie rose, waved his arms, and shouted at the top of his lungs. The bear was a long way off, but he stopped eating berries, and sat up on his hind paws, looking in their direction.

Then he flopped down on all fours, turned tail, and

went lumbering rapidly down the mountain toward the timber.

"The sight of you was too much for him, Bennie," Spider laughed.

"He was afraid of me—wise old bear," Bennie retorted. "Well, where do we go from here?"

"Home, I guess," said their guide. "Shall we take another route, down from this peak to the Sourdnahunk tote road?"

"Sure, if we don't have to ride on a buckboard when we get there," the boys answered.

The trail down was short and steep, extremely steep, and they made rapid time. But it brought them into the now familiar tote road six miles from camp, and they had rather a hot and weary plod, and no team to take them over the Sourdnahunk. The water came up to the very tops of their high boots as they stepped in, and the boys went back, took off their shoes and stockings, and rolled their trousers above their knees.

"Cheer up, Syd, you'll get hard in a few days," Spider told him. "We'll have you doing twenty miles and yelling for more."

"Well, it won't be to-night," Syd groaned, as his tired, tender feet hit a rock in the channel, slipped, and let the water soak his pants-leg almost to the hip.

They got back to camp just in time to clean up for dinner. Ray met them by their cabin.

"Your two guides are in now," he said. "I'm going to give you Joe Howes and Frank Stacey. They're good ones, and they won't let you get into trouble.

Sydney's father wrote me I wasn't to let Syd get into trouble ——"

"All I want to get into to-night is bed," laughed Sydney.

"Well, stay up till after grub, and I'll bring Joe and Frank around, and you can plan for to-morrow before you flatten the balsam boughs."

"Flatten the balsam boughs—that's a new one," Bennie laughed to Spider. "We haven't flattened any balsam boughs yet. Gee, I never made a balsam-bough bed. Let's hurry up and get out into the real woods and do it!"

"Well, don't start till to-morrow," poor Sydney groaned, as he hobbled along behind them to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIII

In Which the Boys Are Introduced to the Genus, Maine Guide

AFTER supper Ray led the four boys to the big cabin where the guides lived. Three or four guides, one of them looking as if he were part Indian, were sitting on the veranda, smoking and laughing. In the big living-room three more were playing cards with the dirtiest pack the boys had ever seen. There were two big chairs in the room, which attracted Spider's eye at once. Each one was made out of a piece of huge hollow pine log. The log was stood on end and left whole as high as the seat, which was built across out of short boards, and then the back was made by simply sawing away half the circumference, so the top looked like a barrel split in two. In one of these chairs a man, who looked old to the boys, was sitting, smoking a pipe.

"Joe," said Ray to this man, "here's Sydney Parker, and Bennie and Bob and Bill. Where's Frank?"

"Here I am."

A young man, not over thirty, came softly from the next room. He wore rubber-soled, ankle-height sneakers, and walked with a step as soft and springy and silent as a cat.

"Well, boys," said Ray, "I'll leave you to Joe Howes and Frank Stacey. You tell 'em what you want, and they'll do it—that is, they will if they happen to feel like it."

The old man, Joe Howes, grunted for reply, and then looked sharply at the four boys. He, too, wore sneakers. He wore, also, corduroy trousers, like the boys, and a green checked mackinaw shirt like the one Bennie bought at Greenville. His hands and neck were tanned a reddish-brown like old mahogany, and his eyes, Bennie noticed when they looked into his, were the palest blue he had ever seen. But Bennie also saw in them, or thought he did, a twinkle, as if it were hiding way down deep. Frank Stacey was smooth shaven, low voiced, rather small in size, and very good looking.

There was a silence in the cabin after Ray departed. The boys had never employed any guides in their lives. They had no idea what to say to them, or how to act. They were hiring these two men,—or Syd's father was, for them,—but they realized instantly that Joe and Frank were not to be treated like ordinary servants.

It was old Joe Howes who broke the silence, taking his pipe slowly out of his mouth.

"Well, boys," he said, "what do you want to do first,—ketch a seven-pound trout, upset in Pockwockamus Falls, or tumble off Katahdin?"

"Is there a place on Katahdin steep enough to tumble off?" Bennie exclaimed.

"They is several," Joe answered, fixing his pale

blue eyes on Bennie's face. "They is one or two that ain't ever been used yet fer that purpose."

"Seems like a waste of good material," Bennie grinned back at him. And now he was sure he saw a twinkle in the old man's eyes.

"Are there any real precipices on the mountain—that you can climb, I mean?" Spider asked.

The two guides exchanged glances. "There's nothing much but precipices on the east side," Frank answered. "Some people climb what they call the chimney over there."

"Did you ever climb it?"

Frank shook his head.

"Did you, Mr. Howes?"

"Ain't I still here?" the old man answered. "I'm gettin' sort of feeble-minded, but I ain't that bad yet."

"Any place to camp on the other side?" Bennie demanded.

"There's a good portion o' the State o' Maine," Joe answered.

"Can we get over to that side in a day?"

"How 'bout it, Frank?" Joe asked.

Frank shook his head. "Too hard work," he said. "Could do it, yes, by Hunt's trail. But we'd all be pretty blowed. Why not take 'em up to old man Sewall's cabin by Abol Slide to-morrow, and then go over to Chimney Pond the next day, and then come back to the cabin for a third night, and have Ray meet us the next morning at the tote road?"

"Four days on the mountain! Oh, joy!" Bennie cried.

"That's all right," Joe said; "but if we got to tote that much grub, we'll need Ray to take it down to the Slide trail to-morrow mornin'. How's that, boys? Goin' to cost you somethin' fer the team."

"How far is it to lug the old grub on our backs?" asked Bennie.

"Oh, eight mile or so."

"Is the tote road the same in that direction as it is up to Charlie's?"

"No," said Joe; "it's worse."

"We'll have the team!" Syd put in, emphatically.

"Now come on to the cabin, fellows," Bennie exclaimed. "Gee, we got to pack our old ruck sacks, and study the map of Katahdin Spider found in Greenville, and get the spikes in our shoes, and see if my old rope's all right——"

"Rope?" said Joe. "What yer goin' to do with a rope? Lasso a moose?"

"I'm going to lower you down that chimney," Bennie laughed.

"Yer don't need to,—it draws all right now," the old man grinned. "Come on, Frank, we got to see about grub, and the team."

"Say," Bennie exclaimed, as they hurried to their cabin, "I bet old Joe's a peach. I bet he's full of stories, too."

"How do you know?" Bill demanded.

"Well, he looks as if he was. He ought to be, anyhow. Ray says he's been guiding around here for forty years. He was born here in these woods, Ray

says. He says he wouldn't live anywhere else; you couldn't hire him to."

"I don't blame him," Spider answered, walking down to the edge of the still lake, which reflected the stars, and drinking in the cool, fragrant air, which smelled of balsam and fresh water.

Then they went inside, lit their stove, and got out the equipment they intended to carry on the Katahdin expedition. But one thing they had forgotten,—they had no iron shoe-last to put their boots on in order to drive in the spikes. So Bennie and Spider went over to Ray's cabin, carrying the boots, to see if he had one in his shop. He did, and they got all four pairs of boots well studded with hobs. Half an hour later, when they returned, they found Syd and Bill both fast asleep in bed.

Spider quietly proceeded to follow them, but before Bennie got into his cot, he sneaked out of the rear door and called softly, "Kitty, kitty; here kitty, here kitty."

But the white cat was evidently not around, or she was sleeping on somebody else's bed. So Bennie had to sleep alone.

CHAPTER XIV

Up Abol Slide to the Cabin—Footprints in the Tote Road

JOE and Frank, the two guides, were unable to conceal their amusement in the morning, when Bennie appeared after breakfast, clad in his green checked shirt, with his hundred feet of Alpine rope, the souvenir of his and Spider's climb up Mount Jefferson in Oregon the summer before, neatly coiled and hung over his shoulder. Ray, who was going to drive the buckboard, was equally amused.

"You must be planning to catch a pretty big trout in Abol stream," he laughed.

Bennie grinned amiably. "I'll bet before we get up the old chimney Frank will be yelling for one end of this rope," he said, "and Uncle Joe the other."

"You going to tackle the chimney?" Ray asked, gravely.

"Bet your life we are!"

"Well, I'm glad I'm not going with you, then."

"Is it as bad as that?" Bennie demanded, hopefully.

"It's worse," Ray answered. "You wouldn't get me up there, or down there, for a hundred dollars."

"And you couldn't keep me out!" Bennie retorted.

"I've heard a lot of folks talk that way," Ray answered, "—before they saw it."

The buckboard was finally loaded, and for two miles after crossing the Sourdnahunk stream and turning southeast the boys and their guides perched on the seats and the luggage, because the road had been little used for many years, and ran through an old forest where the going was comparatively smooth. Presently, however, they came into a clearing by a stream, where they found several big logging-camp shacks, now rotting away. Beyond this abandoned camp the forest had been cut off for two or three miles, and the sun and rain and lumber wagons had got into the tote road and reduced it to rocks and holes. On the slopes it was not much better than a stony brook bed. Everybody save the driver decided to get out and walk.

"Say, Joe," Frank asked the older guide, "wasn't that the camp where Frank Sewall fought the cat owl?"

A ghostly twinkle came into Joe's pale blue eyes, and a ghostly smile hovered across his thin lips.

"Sure was," he answered.

"Tell us about it!"

"What's a cat owl?"

"Why did he fight him?"

"Who licked?"

The four boys pressed close to Joe, urging him to talk. But he shook his head.

"Why not?" they demanded.

"Can't tell a story when I have to keep my mind

on my feet," he answered. "This tote road's too rocky."

"Will you tell us to-night?"

"Maybe—if I can remember. 'Twere a long time ago. I disremember it just now."

Frank dropped back and whispered to Bennie: "He remembers all right; make him tell you about it to-night."

Bennie nodded.

They plodded on, ahead of the wagon, for an hour or so, and then entered the old forest again, on the farther side of the cutting. But they kept on walking, for the tote road was a fascinating place, with old Joe to point out the records.

He stopped presently in a damp spot where the black forest mould stretched the whole width of the road, and pointed down.

"What do you read there?" he asked.

Bennie, Spider, and Sydney peered down carefully. Bill, who knew less about animal tracks, was not so excited.

"Well, there's a track I'd say was a fox," said Spider. "He was trotting along the tote road, making only two paw marks."

"And that other track—no, there are two of 'em, one smaller than the other—looks like a little dog, maybe, or more like a big cat," Bennie declared.

"A wildcat—two wildcats!" cried Sydney. "Is it wildcats?"

Joe nodded. "They come along here since the shower two or three days ago."

"I'd like to meet 'em!" Sydney exclaimed. "I never saw a wildcat."

"And yer ain't very likely to," said Joe. "They keep scerce in summer. What yer make o' this one?"

He pointed to a track in the next damp mould they came to.

"Oh, I know that one!" Bennie declared. "Remember, Spider, we saw it once at home, in the snow on Monument Mountain? It's a snowshoe rabbit."

"A what?" asked Frank. "I never heard it called that."

"Well, it's really a varying hare," Spider said. "It turns white in winter. There aren't many left where we live. I never saw one myself,—only the tracks."

"Them big hind-feet marks do look somethin' like snowshoe tracks," Joe reflected. "We call 'em just rabbits."

"Don't you have cottontails up here?" Bennie asked.

The guides shook their heads.

The next track they encountered was a new one to all the boys. It was fairly small, with the marks of sharp claws distinctly printed into the mud. It was a porcupine.

"You might see one o' them fellers," Joe grinned. "Leave a piece o' salt pork outside the cabin to-night, and stick around. Well, what's this?"

"Looks to me as if the old cow had been taking a walk," Bennie laughed, gazing at the huge hoof prints sunk deep into the muck.

"Perhaps it's a kind of cow, at that," Frank commented.

"A cow moose?" cried the boys.

"Sure. And she—or maybe he—went along here this morning, too. The water hasn't dried yet in the bottom of the track."

"I'd give ten dollars to see a moose!" Syd exclaimed.

"Maybe you'll get a chance for nothing," Joe encouraged him. "I shot a moose last fall on the trail we're takin' up Abol."

Syd was walking slowly, examining the ground as he went. "Think," he said to Spider, "we're the only people who've been along this tote road for three days, anyhow. But it's been used by a fox, a porcupine, two wildcats, a rabbit, a moose, a lot of little deer mice, and maybe other things we haven't seen the tracks of. The woods are really full of people, aren't they—wild people."

"You bet they are," Spider answered. "That's one thing makes 'em so much fun. Gee, I hate the men who go out and shoot all the wild things! It spoils the woods."

"Me, too," said Sydney. "I'm glad we haven't any guns."

"Wouldn't you like to shoot a moose?" Bennie demanded.

"No, sir!"

"Golly, I would!"

"Yes, and what good would it do you?" asked Spider.

"I'd put his old head and antlers up in my room, and look at 'em," said Bennie.

"Sure, and then nobody else who went into the woods after you could ever see 'em again," said Sydney. "It's folks like you who are killing off all the wild things."

"Cheer up," laughed Bennie. "I haven't killed off so many moose yet that any taxidermist is getting rich off me."

In a short distance, now, the tote road crossed a roaring brook which came down out of the dense forest on the slopes of Katahdin, and just beyond, where a footpath turned off, the guides halted.

"Here's where we begin to climb," they said, and sat down in the shade to wait for the buckboard. When it arrived, it was quickly unloaded, and Frank made a fire and brought water from the brook for tea. Ray unhitched the horses, and let them forage in a small patch of grass in the clearing, while everybody lay around and ate lunch.

"We don't seem to be in much of a hurry," Bennie suggested.

"Want to get that rope into use, eh?" Ray laughed.

"I sure do."

"Well, you haven't far to go up to the cabin, for the night, but you'll be glad of a rest before you tote your stuff up there, just the same."

When Ray had once more hitched up and departed back up the tote road, Frank and Joe shouldered their big pack-baskets, loaded with the provisions for four days, and with their own blankets and the cooking

utensils, and the boys shouldered their much lighter packs, containing only sweaters, extra clothes, cameras, and some packages of sweet chocolate, and also shouldered their double blankets, made into a roll inside the ponchos. Bennie, of course, had in addition his Alpine rope, and they all had Scout axes at their belts. But even these loads, especially the hot blanket rolls, were quite enough to tote up-hill, through a dense and breathless forest. The apparent ease with which Frank and Joe, with pack-baskets weighing surely fifty pounds, stepped up the trail made the boys gasp with astonishment.

The trail at first was not very steep. It led slowly upward through a virgin forest of spruce, which had never known an ax. The ground was very damp here, with little brooks almost every two hundred yards, and the forest floor was entirely covered—ground, rocks, fallen logs, everything—with a rich green carpet of moss. As they splashed across brook after brook, Spider called to Bennie, "Say, I wish we had all the Scouts here, to show 'em these brooks running by the dozen in August. Couldn't have a better illustration of how you conserve water by not cutting off the forests."

"I'm glad they're running," Bennie replied, plunging his face into one for about the fifth time, and drinking deep.

In spite of their heavy loads Frank and Joe had got some distance ahead, and the boys, toiling and sweating up the gradually steepening trail, presently came upon them seated by the path.

"We got to make a detour, boys," Joe announced.

"Why? They macadamizing the road ahead?" asked Bennie.

Joe pointed just up the path, and the boys, looking sharply, saw the earth torn up at the root of an old stump, and a swarm of angry bees buzzing around it.

"Trying to get us some honey?" laughed Spider.

"The old bear was," Joe answered. "We must 'a' jest missed him."

"Hark!" Bennie suddenly whispered.

They listened, intent, and off in the woods to the right they suddenly heard a crashing sound in a patch of undergrowth.

Bennie hurled off his blanket roll, his rope, and his pack, and started on the dead run toward the sound, with Syd in close pursuit.

"Hi! You've forgotten the salt to put on his tail!" called Bill.

"Don't let him hug you!" Spider shouted.

The two boys went crashing into the underbrush, paying no attention to the shouts. They disappeared from sight. The others carried their packs around the disturbed bees' nest, at a safe distance, and sat down again to wait.

"'Twon't be long," Joe mused. "They won't go fer, without no path. Not in them woods."

And, indeed, in five minutes they were back, looking very hot and rather sheepish, and Bennie with a rip in his new green shirt.

"Well, did yer see Mr. Bear?" asked Joe.

They shook their heads.

"Funny how much faster a bear kin travel through scrub than a man kin," the old guide mused. "I've often noticed it."

"You wouldn't have to be so darned observant, either," said Bennie. "Well, anyhow, we *heard* him. I hope when he comes back for that honey, he gets stung on the nose."

"Another funny thing," Joe said again. "A bear don't seem to mind much gettin' stung on the nose. Leastways, he minds losin' the honey more."

From this point on the trail began to get steeper and steeper. The woods thinned out. The trail became in places hardly more than a slope of gravel and broken rock. And presently, through the thinning and stunted trees, they could see ahead of them, stretching far up toward the apparent top of the mountain, a great white scar of naked rock and gravel.

"Abol Slide," said Frank. "We're at the bottom of it now."

"We got to climb all the way up that?" Bill demanded.

"Not to-night," Frank laughed. "But to-morrow you have, if you want to get to the top of Katahdin."

"Well, how much farther have we got to climb to-day?" asked Bennie. "I'm getting weary."

"Runnin' after bears don't help none," Joe smiled, with one of his faint smiles.

The trail now grew not only very steep, but very tiresome, for the boys' feet kept slipping back in the gravel. Their loads grew hotter and hotter, heavier and heavier. They had to stop often for breath. Yet

Frank and old Joe, who could easily have been their father, or even, perhaps, their grandfather, loaded three times as heavily as they were, plugged right on without appearing to get out of breath.

"I wish I knew how they did it!" Bennie exclaimed.

"Practice, I guess," Spider panted. "We're soft at it yet. They've been doing it all their lives."

Bill and Syd now declared they'd have to take a rest.

"Say, you," Bennie called to the guides, "we're going to stop and give the view the once over. See you later."

The two guides said nothing, but disappeared behind a clump of stunted balsams ahead, leaving the four boys stretched out in the trail, and looking back down the slope up which they had toiled and then out over the miles of green wilderness and quicksilver lakes.

Bill and Syd had almost dozed off when Spider poked them.

"Come on," he said; "we got to get going again. The guides are out of sight."

Wearily they panted up another fifty feet, around the clump of trees, and there they saw a path going off sharp to the right, along a little level plateau. They looked on up the slide, treeless from here to the summit, and saw no sign of the guides.

"Suppose this can be the way?" Spider asked.

"Well, it isn't up-hill; let's try it," said Bennie.

They walked a few feet, rounded another clump of trees, and there, right before them, was a neat cabin of peeled spruce logs, surrounded by a grove of spruce

and balsam. The door was open, and inside Joe and Frank were sitting, grinning at them.

"What did you let us rest for, when we were almost here?" demanded Bennie.

"One place is as good as another," Frank laughed. "You looked tired."

"If this cabin only had some water, it would be home sweet home," Spider declared. "My throat is parched dry as a desert."

Frank, who had unpacked his basket, picked up four tin dippers and handed them around. Then he handed out two pails from under the cabin shelf.

"Go down that path straight ahead," he said. "Wash the pails."

The boys hurried along the path not over seventy-five feet, and brought up sharp at a clear, gushing brook, two feet wide and almost a foot deep, which evidently came from some big spring in the woods above them. The water was cold and delicious, and they drank and drank, and then washed their faces and hands and arms, and went back for soap and towels to take a bath.

But the baths were rather hasty. One touch of that icy water on their bare bodies, and they yelled and danced. But they finally came back to the cabin feeling greatly refreshed and set about working up dead wood to stove length, while Frank and Joe prepared for supper.

The cabin contained a rusty sheet-iron cook stove, and two double bed springs, also rusty, set on home-made frames. The mattresses were sad-looking af-

fairs, however, being full of holes where the wood mice had evidently nested in them, and being, also, none too clean. There was a table in the cabin, made of boards, and three benches, and a set of shelves, and some pails, and four old blankets hanging on a line.

"Say, who ever built this cabin way up here?" asked Bennie.

"Old man Sewall," Joe replied.

"You mean the feller who fought the cat owl?"

"The same."

"Why'd he do it? To escape the owl?" Bennie inquired.

"No, he wa'n't afraid of the owl. The State o' Maine made him a fire observer, and he come up here to observe," Joe replied. "He brung them two bed springs, and this cook stove, and all them planks in the floor up on his back from the tote road, too. But I don't reckon he chased no bears while he was doin' it."

"He cut out all the cedar shingles way down in the swamp, and toted them up, too," Frank added; "and he was sixty-five when he done it."

"Some bird, I'll say!" Bennie declared.

"Why isn't there any fire warden here now?" Sydney asked.

"Well, I dunno that," Joe replied. "I guess it was kind o' lonely up here, and nobody hankers fer the job since old Sewall quit."

"Maybe there aren't any fires," Bill suggested.

"There won't be if I don't get some kindling," Frank answered, picking up an ax.

Bennie and Spider, meanwhile, looked at the two beds, which could sleep only four in any comfort, and then went out and looked at the thick stand of balsams.

"Real balsam! Let's sleep out on bough beds!" Bennie exclaimed.

"May be awful cold up here at night. Remember how it was at Charlie's."

"But we didn't have any boughs at Charlie's. Besides, I bet I could sleep on a cake of ice to-night. Nothing could keep me awake. Aw, come on!"

"All right."

They began to cut small boughs industriously, and to lay them on a level spot, out of the wind. Frank came over to watch them for a moment.

"You won't have anything under your head, and too much under your feet, that way," he told them. Then he cut four small logs, two long and two short, for each bed, and showed the boys how to peg them down to form a frame. When the boughs were laid in this frame, they were held in place, and couldn't slip away, either downward or to the side. When the beds were made, the Scouts rigged their ponchos over them on low poles, making two pup tents to keep off the wind and possible rain. Then they laid a fire in front, against a little wall of stones to reflect the heat, and declared they were ready for the night.

"And we're ready for supper, too," said they, coming into the cabin, where it was already getting dark rapidly, and Frank was cooking ham and eggs and making coffee, while Joe set the table and stacked the provisions on the shelves.

Syd and Bill were stretched out on the beds, oblivious.

The single candle lantern, which Spider produced from his pack and unfolded, gave them a dim light to eat their supper by. It was getting colder now the sun had set, and the heat from the roaring sheet-iron stove felt good. The food was hot, the coffee hot, and Frank produced pancakes and real syrup after the ham and eggs. It was a delicious meal.

"Say, Frank, why don't you go down to the Waldorf in New York and get a job as chef?" Bennie asked.

"Because folks in New York haven't climbed halfway up Abol Slide to get an appetite," Frank laughed. "You boys would eat fried shoe leather to-night."

"That's no way to talk about these pancakes," Spider declared. "Here, Bill, you can't have 'em all! Pass that dish over!"

While the guides washed up after supper, the boys went back to the Slide and found the little platform old Sewall had built on top of a rock, for his fire-observation post. There was still a little rose glow left in the west, but eastward the great white Slide of naked granite and gravel went up, up, to the stars.

"Gosh, it looks high!" Bill said.

"And steep," Syd added.

"And to-morrow we climb it," said Spider.

"Wow! Oh, you Abol Slide!" cried Bennie. "Come on back, and let's make old Josephus tell us about the man who fit the cat owl."

Joe was through with the dishes, and had lighted

a camp fire in the fire ring in front of the cabin door, and filled his pipe. The boys put on their sweaters, for by now it was decidedly chilly, and sat down beside him, under the porch roof of the cabin.

"Come on—the cat owl story!" said Bennie.

"But first, what *is* a cat owl?" Spider demanded.

CHAPTER XV

The Tale of How Old Man Sewall Fit the Cat Owl

"A CAT owl," said Joe, slowly, "is, well—a cat owl's a cat owl."

"You mean he hunts cats?" asked Bill.

"The one I'm goin' to tell yer about did, anyhow."

"Well, I never heard of that kind of an owl," Sydney put in.

"Maybe you've heard 'em called six hooters," Frank volunteered.

"Oh!" cried Spider and Syd together. "You mean a great horned owl! But why call it a cat owl?"

"Well, it looks like a cat, don't it?" Joe declared. "Leastways, that's what they always call 'em up round these parts. Say, you want to hear this story, or don't yer?"

"Sure!" Bennie cried. "Shut up, you amateur ornithologists, and let Uncle Joe have the floor."

Old Joe turned his pale eyes upon Bennie, with one of his ghost twinkles.

"Thanks, nephew," he remarked. "Well, maybe you remember that clearin' we come through this mornin'—the old loggin' camp? 'Twas up thar that it happened. Frank Sewall, him as built this cabin, he were a younger man then, and he were workin' on

that loggin' job. Frank were always right fond o' animals, and most of 'em took to him. I seen him out feedin' rabbits. He used to hev rabbits hoppin' all round this cabin when he lived up here; and cats —tame cats, I mean. Frank sure liked cats ——"

"Must be some relation to you, Bennie," Spider interrupted.

"Well, Frank he had a kitten with him when he jined the lumber gang, and that thar kitten got a lot o' pettin' round camp, and scraps from the cook, and mice maybe out in the woods, and it waxed exceedin' and grew mighty in the land ——"

"Is this a Bible story?" Bennie asked, solemnly.

"It's gospel truth, anyhow," Joe replied. "As I was sayin', that thar kitten waxed exceedin' and in the course o' time he become a cat, and Frank he was mighty fond of it, and it o' him, and it would set right up on his shoulder when he et his grub, and maybe sleep on his bunk when it wa'n't otherwise engaged in nocturnal perambulations. Daytimes it hed a habit o' climbin' up on the roof o' the bunk house and lyin' stretched out thar, takin' a sun bath, and maybe watchin' fer Frank to come in from the cuttin'.

"Well, nacherly they was owls about in them woods, and one day, 'long in the afternoon late, when the cat was still lyin' up on the roof and the owls was beginnin' ter *whoo-whoo—who-who* in the woods, an old cat owl come along and seen that cat on the roof, and, bein' pretty hungry, made a swoop at it and tried ter carry it off. The cat put up a holler, and fit back with tooth and nail, as yer might say, but before

anybody could climb up thar on the roof and help out, the old owl he give the cat a peck on the head that kilt it, and off he flew with Frank's best friend."

"I didn't know an owl would eat a cat," said Sydney.

"A cat owl'll eat a skunk," Joe answered. "And it's the only critter that will. Besides, this was a nice, fat cat. Anyhow, he flew off with him, and when Frank come in from cuttin' you can bet he was mighty sore about it. I'm kinder feared that he swore, and he said that, by gum, he'd be revenged on that owl, come what might.

"Well, the owl he didn't know about Frank's vow, and the next day he come back lookin' fer another cat, maybe, and, not seein' one handy, he perched down on the roof ter wait, and got kind o' sleepy and dozed off. Then Frank see it thar, and knew his chance had come.

"'Quick!' he yelled out ter Sam White, who was the feller that run the forge and tempered the axes, and such-like jobs. 'Quick, Sam, temper me some eel grass!'"

"Some *what?*" Bill demanded.

"Eel grass," Joe answered, patiently. "Don't you know what eel grass is? Well, Sam run down to that little swampy place by the stream and pulled up all the eel grass he could grab and run back to the forge and started temperin' it. As soon as he had a piece tempered, Frank he grabbed it and sprung up on the roof and attacked the owl. The owl he woke up and fit back somethin' terrible. Sam kept temperin' more

eel grass and handin' it up ter Frank, and Frank kept piercin' the owl through and through with it, and the eel grass, maybe because it was tempered so quick, kept breakin', and the old cat owl kept clawin' and tearin' at Frank, as they fit back and forth over the roof.

"But the owl he got enough before Frank did, and suddenly he quit and flopped down and started runnin' up the Sourdnahunk tote road toward where Charlie lives now. Frank sprung down, all wounded as he was, and started after him, with the last piece o' tempered eel grass in his hand, determined to finish his revenge. The rest o' the camp, seein' how bad off Frank was, started after 'em both.

"'Bout three mile up the tote road they come upon Frank and the owl both lyin' unconscious. But Frank had pierced it through and through again with the last blade o' eel grass. They carried Frank back ter camp and give him medical attention, and he got all right again. But o' course they didn't give the cat owl no medical attention, and he perished. Frank had a couple o' scars on his cheek, but he didn't care, he said; he'd avenged his cat."

Joe stopped, pressed one finger down into his pipe, and then pulled at it to see if it was still lighted. It was, and he blew out a lazy cloud of smoke, and gazed silently and solemnly into the camp fire.

"Tempered eel grass!" Bennie chuckled. "Pierced the old cat owl through and through with it! O boy! Say, Uncle Joe, could you temper us some eel grass? I'd like to see how it's done."

The old guide shook his head. "No," he replied. "Sam White was the only feller I ever see who could temper eel grass in a wood fire. O' course, if we hed some coal, I could do it. But I couldn't do it with wood."

"There not being any coal nearer than Millinocket, I guess he's safe," Frank chuckled.

Joe looked hurt. "You ain't implyin', I hope," he said, "that I couldn't temper eel grass in a coal fire?"

"Of course he isn't," Bennie declared. "And I bet you could pierce a cat owl through and through with it, too."

"Well," Joe mused, "it ain't often thet you find one settin' on a roof and givin' you the chance."

"Tell us another!" Bill now begged. "Tell us another about Frank Sewall!"

"Tell us a bear story."

"Or a moose story."

"Yes, *please* do,"—from Bennie. "We never had such a good chance to learn natural history."

But the old guide shook his head. "No, it's gettin' past my bedtime. Besides, I never tell more'n one story at a settin'. It strains my powers of accuracy too much."

And again his pale eyes turned toward Bennie with the ghost of a twinkle in them.

The boys begged and begged, but he still refused, so they all went out on the lookout for a last glimpse of the mountain, rising vast and dim to the stars above them, and of the vague, shadowy world of the forest lying far below, and then turned in for the night.

Syd and Bill rolled up in their blankets on one bed, the guides on the other. But Bennie and Spider lit their little camp fire and curled into their blankets on top of their fragrant balsam-bough beds on the ground.

"T e m p e r e d eel grass!" Bennie chuckled. "'Pierced the old cat owl through and through.' 'The owl, he fit back somethin' terrible.' Oh, gosh, if I can only remember that story!"

"I don't see how you can forget it," Spider laughed. "It was so different from any other you ever heard."

"Sure—like good old Joe himself, and these woods, and these good old balsam beds! Wow, this is the life! Tempered eel grass!"

And he went to sleep still muttering, "Tempered eel grass," with a grin on his face.

CHAPTER XVI

Over the Knife Blade in Cloud and Gale

AT some time in the night Bennie woke up chilled and uncomfortable. A piece of balsam branch was sticking into his side, and a rising wind had blown his poncho half off the pole above him, so the gale got in around his neck. He had to get up to fix the poncho and find the offending twig. The fire was burned out, and there were no stars to be seen. It was pitch black. But he didn't want to strike a light for fear of waking Spider, who was sleeping so peacefully that he didn't make a sound. In fact, Spider was so silent that Bennie put out his hand to make sure he was there—and he wasn't there!

"Guess he got cold, too, and got up to trot around," Bennie reflected, getting up himself and feeling his way out past the cabin toward the open slide and the lookout. There were a few stars visible in the west, but looking up the Slide Bennie realized that he was looking into a cloud. As his eyes grew used to the darkness, he moved up to the platform and found Spider standing there.

"Hello. You awake, too?"

"No—I'm walking in my sleep. Look at that old cloud. Say, I hope it doesn't spoil our climb tomorrow!"

"Hope not. Awful noisy here, isn't it?"

They listened intently. From somewhere far off they could hear, very faintly, the sound of a waterfall, and all around them the soft rush of the wind in the trees. But there was no other sound, no harsh noise, in all the world.

"This is great!" Spider declared. "This is being in the wilderness all right!"

Presently they went back, made up their fire again, and got back into their blankets.

They woke the next morning into a gray world, and a cold world. The cloud had come down the mountain till it just reached the tree-tops above them. Running out to the platform, they looked below and saw a gray fog hovering like smoke over every pond. The Slide went up a few rods and vanished into gray nothing.

They hastened back to the cabin and found the guides up.

"This going to spoil our climb?" they demanded.

"It may lift," Joe replied. "But you won't see much to-day. How'd yer sleep?"

"Pretty well," said Bennie; "only a piece of tempered balsam branch nearly pierced me through and through."

"You didn't cut 'em fine enough," Frank laughed.

After breakfast they all went out in the open to look at the weather. There was only a dim sun in the valley, and the cloud was still very low all over the mountain, and racing along at high speed, driven by the wind.

"Well, boys," Joe said, "you kin spend the day here waitin' fer better weather, or you kin cross the mountain in the cloud, and take a chance on to-morrer bein' clear when you come back over."

"I move we go," said Bill. "I never was in a cloud. It'll be great fun."

"They's sports I kin think of that I like better," Joe remarked.

"What do you say, Frank?" Spider asked.

"Well, it won't clear entirely, but with this wind it won't rain, not before night," Frank answered. "We're none too long on grub. I'd say go."

"Then we'll go. That all right, Syd?"

"Anything suits me," Sydney said. "I was never in a cloud, either. Sounds like fun."

They hurried back and packed what they would actually need for two days—blankets rolled and strapped in the ponchos, one ax, a frying-pan and kettle, dippers and aluminum plates, grub and extra socks. Bennie, of course, took his rope. The rest of the grub and equipment they stowed on one of the shelves in the cabin and put their name on it.

"What if somebody else comes here—won't they pinch the stuff?" asked Bill.

"This is the State o' Maine," Joe answered. "We're honest up here in the woods."

"But folks come up here from other states," Bill persisted.

"The climate makes them honest, too," Joe assured him.

Five minutes later they had started up Abol Slide,

and entered the driving cloud scud. The cloud lifted, however, about as fast as they could climb, so they could constantly see through it to the world below, though never upward more than a few rods. In the damp scud and the stiff wind they would have been pretty chilled if it hadn't been such hard work climbing. As it was, they perspired all the time they moved, and shivered when they paused to rest. The Slide, about fifty feet wide, was composed of broken stone and loose gravel, inclined at an angle of forty-five degrees, and very tiresome to climb in. Frank said it was only half a mile to the top of this slide, but they were more than an hour getting there.

At last, however, the Slide ended.

"Here we are at the top!" cried Bennie.

"The top of what?" Joe asked.

"The top of this old mountain, I hope," Bennie puffed.

Joe and Frank laughed.

"Guess again," they said.

On they climbed, over and around gigantic blocks of weather-worn granite which were piled almost into a precipice in places, and everywhere were steeper than a pyramid. They had a quarter of a mile of this, and then the dim trail seemed to vanish into a hole at the bottom of a huge, upright slab of granite.

The guides were waiting here as the four boys came up.

"What we going to do, play woodchuck?" asked Bennie.

"Is any one of you a camel?" Joe demanded.

"A camel? Why?" said Spider.

"I can't go eleven days without a drink," said Bennie.

"What's the idea?" said Bill and Syd.

"This here is the Needle's Eye," Joe answered. "Unless I disremember, the Good Book says a camel can't get through the eye of a needle. But if none of you's a camel, I guess we kin go on."

And with a faint grin he got down on his hands and knees and vanished through the hole, Frank handing through his pack-basket after him. One by one the rest crawled through, stood upright again, climbed up fifty feet more, and stood at last on level ground.

"Hooray! Excelsior! Eureka! Ne plus ultra! Summum bonum! The top!" cried Bennie.

"He's a great feller fer gettin' to the top, ain't he?" Joe remarked, apparently to the damp, white cloud which enveloped them and covered their sweaters with fine silver drops.

"Isn't this the top?"

"The top," Frank laughed, "is a mile away still. This is the Abol table-land."

"A mile!" Sydney exclaimed. "Say, is it all as steep as what we've been up?"

"Tired?" Frank asked. "No, it's pretty near level. You'll be all right."

Then he turned to Joe. "We'll have to hug the edge," he said. "If I had a compass we could strike right across."

"That's easy"—from Spider. "I've got one in my pack."

"If you want anything, just ask Mr. Wanamaker," Joe grinned.

"Boy Scouts are always prepared," Spider laughed, fishing out the compass.

Frank took it and steered almost due northeast, shading a degree or two into the north. Beside them, as they started out, was a tall pile of stones, marking the trail down Abol Slide, but after they had taken twenty-five paces into the driving cloud, they lost all sight of it. They lost all sight of everything except a little circle of ground covered with low blueberry and bearberry bushes, hardly eight inches tall, some moss and a few other stunted growths,—and with gray granite rocks, of every size from a baseball to a hogshead. This little circle of visibility moved with them as they pushed on into the fog.

"Say, did it rain rocks here once?" Sydney asked.

Joe looked at him. "That's not so bad," he said. "'Rained rocks.' Looks so, don't it?"

"And isn't there a tree up here?" asked Bennie.

Frank gestured to the left. "Go far enough northwest along this plateau, and you'll get a patch of spruce scrub so tight you can almost walk on top of it, but this main plateau's just like this."

They went on for another quarter of a mile, the little circle of the visible world moving with them, opening a few feet in front, closing up again behind.

"Say, this is uncanny," Bennie declared.

"I don't like it," said Bill. "It—it doesn't seem natural."

"It kind of scares me," Syd confessed.

Spider was silent and thoughtful, walking close to Frank and watching him use the compass.

"What would anybody do up here, Frank, if he got caught in a cloud like this, without a compass? How'd he ever find the top of Abol trail?"

"There's only one way," the guide answered. "And if he didn't know that, he could wander around for a week. The thing for him to do would be to walk as straight as he could, till he came to the edge of the plateau, where it drops off sharp. Then he could stick right to that edge till he came to the pile of stones."

"But how could he be sure he was walking straight?" asked Bennie.

"There's almost always a wind up here," Frank answered. "He could keep the wind on one cheek."

"I guess it pays to know what you're doing, if you're going to climb Katahdin," Spider reflected.

"Or have a couple of wise guides," laughed Bennie.

They had walked for three-quarters of a mile over the almost level plateau, without seeing anything except the circle of desolate, rock-strewn ground around their feet, when suddenly they began to climb. A moment later Frank, his eyes on the ground ahead, cried, "There it is!" and sprang into a dim trail, turning to the right and quickening his pace. The others, even the tired Sydney, felt the contagion and hurried after. In five minutes of not very steep climbing over almost naked, broken granite rocks, they saw just ahead of them a pile of stones, like a ghost in the fog, and beyond that—nothing.

Bennie looked at the older guide. "Uncle Joe, may I say 'Wow!' now?"

"I guess maybe it would be safe," Joe answered.

"Wow!" yelled Bennie. "We're on top of old Katahdin! We're fifty-two hundred and seventy-one feet above sea level! We're higher than anybody else in Maine!"

"And if you go ahead too fast, you'll be considerably lower than five other fellers in the State of Maine," Joe said.

As the boys rushed top speed to the rock pile, or Monument, as it is called, they saw what he meant. They saw so suddenly, in fact, that Sydney pulled back and went white in the face, and Bill looked awe-struck, and Spider gave a great shout of delight.

They were on the highest peak of Katahdin, and directly under them, to the northeast, the mountain simply vanished downward into a white nothingness of cloud. There was, to be sure, a brief incline of ragged granite blocks, twenty feet, perhaps, and then a sheer drop, an absolute precipice. How far down it went they couldn't see because of the cloud, but it was all the more terrible for that reason. It might drop for thousands of feet for all they could tell.

"Quick!" said Bennie, tying his rope under his arms; "take a half hitch round a boulder, and play me out."

"What are you going to do?" the guides demanded.

"Just go down that bit of slope, and get a straight look over," said Bennie.

"I don't know about that," Joe replied, suddenly

serious. "Them rocks is slippery and treacherous. Will thet thar rope hold yer?"

"It'll hold ten men. That's what it's made for. It's an Alpine rope, from Switzerland," Bennie replied proudly. "Come on, Spider, play me out."

He descended the twenty feet or so of slope below the Monument, and the others saw him lie on his stomach and look over the sheer drop. Then he found a small stone and tossed it over, and waited breathless to hear it land. It seemed whole minutes before a tiny sound came up to him from below the clouds.

He got up hastily, grabbed the rope in front of himself, and ascended hand over hand.

"What's the matter?" Joe asked.

"How far down is it?" said Bennie.

"Oh, about a couple of thousand feet," Joe answered.

"Let's roll a big rock over!" Bill cried.

"No you don't!" from both guides. "There may be a whole camp full of people down there. Don't you ever roll rocks down any mountain, startin' slides, maybe."

"I s'pose I shouldn't have thrown that little one," Bennie said penitently.

"I guess that won't start no slide," Joe replied. "Still, best be on the safe side always."

Spider was now examining the pile of rock, or Monument. "Look!" he exclaimed, fishing a brass cylinder out of a crack.

"Sure, that's the hotel register," Joe said.

The top was quickly unclasped, and inside they

found a few matches, which they quickly covered to keep dry, a pencil, and dozens of bits of paper signed with names and dates, and even a few calling cards.

"Sorry I left my card case at home," said Bennie. "Who's got some paper?"

Sydney finally unearthed an old letter from one of his pockets, and on the blank part of that they all wrote their names, the date, and "High wind and cloud." Then they stuffed back all the signatures, the pencil, and the matches, and put the cylinder, which was marked with the name of the Appalachian Mountain Club, into its crack.

"I don't see quite what anybody would use those matches for—there's nothing to burn but rock," said Spider.

"A feller might want ter light his pipe awful bad," Joe suggested. "This don't seem exactly a likely place ter set down and eat lunch," he added. "What you boys calc'late ter do now?"

"I want to see the view more'n I want to eat," Bennie said. "Let's hop around and keep warm and see if the clouds don't break, or something."

"Look! They're breaking now!" Sydney exclaimed, pointing to the eastward.

Sure enough, driven by the increasing gale of wind, the clouds were tearing apart. In a few moments they lifted and opened out so much that the boys could see to their right a very narrow ridge of broken gray granite rock, like a spine, stretching out for a quarter of a mile to another little peak, almost as high as the one they were on.

"That's the south peak—this is Monument Peak," Frank said. "That's a few feet lower."

Now the clouds opened still more, or seemed to be ripped and torn apart by the wind, and they saw, curving out eastward from the south peak, a long, irregular spine of naked rock, like a great bowsprit, or, rather, one side of a gigantic horseshoe. This spine, on the side toward them, dropped almost sheer down into the gulf for more than a thousand feet.

"That's the Knife Blade ridge," said Frank.

"Can we get down that way? Let's go over it!" Bennie cried.

"Not in this gale!" Joe put in.

"Why not? It isn't blowing any harder there than it is here."

"No, but there's considerable less to stand on," Joe answered.

"But I got my rope. We can rope together. Gee, that would be great!"

"I don't trust myself to no rope." Joe shook his head decidedly.

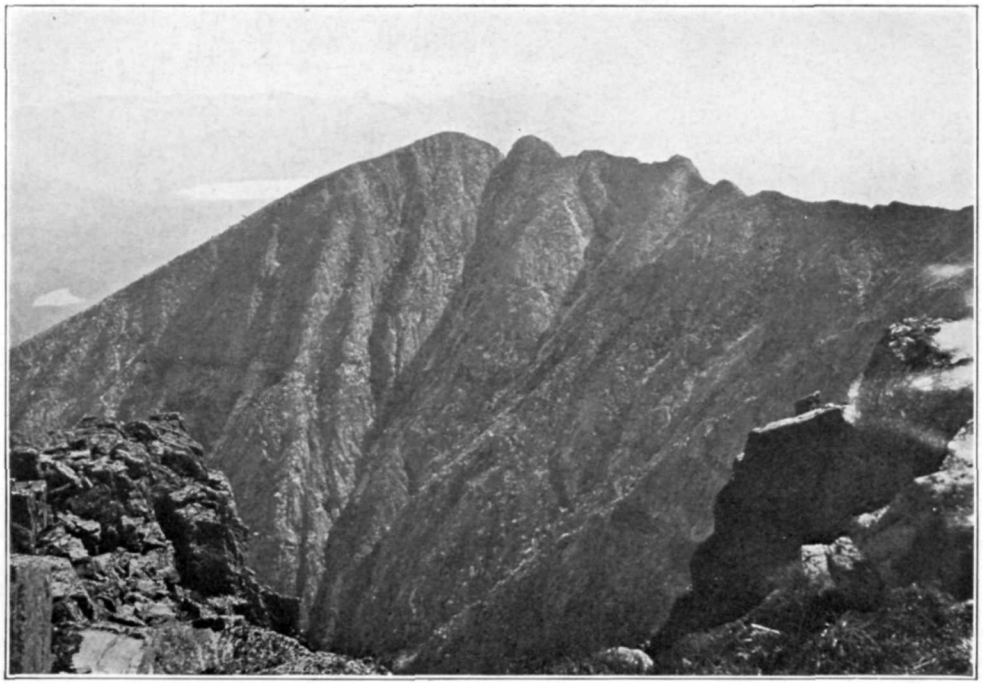
"Will you take us down that way, Frank?"

"I'll try anything once," Frank answered.

Joe shook his head again. "Risky business," he said. "But if you're goin', you'd better start. It'll rain before long. I'll go down the Basin Slide and meet up with you at Chimney Pond, by that camp those Appalachian Club folks made last summer."

"And how about lunch?" Bill asked.

"No lunch fer you till you git across the Knife Blade," Joe replied.



Looking across the Basin to the Knife Blade. The Chimney Is the Deep Cleft in Center, Slanting to the Left

He shouldered his pack and vanished into the cloud to the northward, along the trail toward the Basin Slide. The boys followed Frank toward the south peak. The rocks were slippery with the fog, and they were more than glad of their spikes. Poor Frank, who wore only high sneakers, had a harder time, and, if he hadn't been as sure-footed as a deer, would have fallen on several occasions.

When they reached the south peak, the clouds were closing in again, and they kept right on, swinging to the left and descending over the broken rock to the Knife Blade. There was no trouble at first, for the top of the Knife Blade was as wide as a road, though composed of rough, irregular blocks of heaped granite. The inner side dropped precipitously into the gulf, but the outer side, toward the southeast, was less steep. It looked exactly, Spider said, as if a gigantic dump-cart had driven along loaded with millions of hunks of granite, and dumped them off.

But, as they advanced, the wind grew even stronger, and the top of the Knife Blade narrower, till at last they saw ahead a place where the top was only a foot wide, and dropping off sheer on one side.

Sydney grew pale, as he looked at this crossing, and the wind battered him against a slippery rock.

"I—I don't much like the looks of that."

"I don't myself," Frank confessed.

But Bennie and Spider were busy with the rope. They made five loops in it, one around each member of the party. Bennie was number one, then Frank, then Syd, then Bill, and Spider as anchor.

"Now, listen, everybody!" Bennie ordered. "This rope can't break, that's sure. Everybody keep at least one hand firm over the top of the ledge, and walk on the outside of it, down to the right. If anybody slips, the rest'll hold him. Remember—don't take off both hands at once—ever!"

He started out, keeping down below the top of the ridge, on the less steep side, just far enough to enable him to maintain a grip with his hands over the other rim of the spine. Working along this way, wherever he could find a foothold, and the rest following as soon as most of the slack was taken out of the rope by the one ahead, they worked across to a wider part of the spine, in spite of the gale and the wet rocks. Once Frank's rubber soles slipped, and he would have fallen, but he cried out quickly, and Bennie grabbed the ledge with both hands, the rope between them held firm, and Frank swung back upon his feet.

"I won't laugh at your rope again," he said soberly.

As the clouds ripped open again for a moment, they could see to their left deep down into the hole of the gorge, far below—right below!—them, and Frank pointed out a sharp V-shaped gully slanting away and then plunging toward the bottom.

"Take a look at that gully," he said. "Two young fellers and a dog went down it once."

"Did they mean to?" Spider laughed.

"Sure—they was in a hurry to get to camp."

"Did their folks have a funeral for the dog, too?" Bennie asked.

"No, sir, they all three got down safe."

"Tell us about it."

"Not now—I need my wind," Frank answered, as a fresh gust hit them and wrapped them in icy cloud.

They climbed over a slight doming peak on the Knife Blade, and dropped down into a sort of flat col between this peak and another one, further east. Frank led them to the inner edge of this tiny plateau, which was grassy in spots, and pointed downward.

The boys looked, and saw a steep and deep gully plunging down at a forty-five-degree angle, and then taking what looked like a straight leap off into space.

"That's your chimney," said the guide.

"We going down that way?" asked Bennie, starting to uncoil the rope again.

"We are not!" Frank exclaimed with startling emphasis. "I wouldn't go down there in this weather, with a pack-basket and you boys, not for a thousand dollars."

Syd drew back from the edge. "Well, I'm not going to offer it to you!" he said.

"Oh, why not? The old rope'll hold us anywhere." This from Bennie.

"They tell me there's nothing to hold the rope in places," Frank answered. "I never even come up that chimney, let alone goin' down it. And I ain't goin' to begin in a wet fog. It would take us till dark, anyhow."

Bennie reluctantly coiled up his rope again, and they started on, over the next little peak, cold and wet now, and beginning to feel faint with hunger.

"This is Pamola Peak," Frank said. "That one behind is Chimney Peak. Now we go down."

They found a dim trail, and, sure enough, they began to go down fast,—over the slippery rocks, then finally into scrub evergreen, and at last into stunted woods, out from under the cloud, into a gray, dismal amphitheatre, almost a mile deep and half a mile wide, with the cliffs of Katahdin rising out of it on three sides into the gray mystery of cloud. They could not see the summit, nor the Knife Blade.

But soon they saw a little pond, and on the shore of this pond two or three tents and rough lean-tos, and the blaze and smoke of camp fires, and some people moving about, and presently they were at this camp, being greeted by a dozen men and women, and finding Joe sitting by a fire, drying out.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Say, I could eat a parsnip, I'm so hungry," Bennie replied.

"Don't require much of an appetite ter eat a parsnip," Joe said.

"Maybe not if you like 'em," Bennie assured him. "But I don't. They're my idea of the ultimate zero in grub."

"I'd eat a raw fish for two cents," Bill declared.

"Well, you don't have to," one of the women campers laughed, as she went over to a fire, uncovered a big frying-pan which rested beside it, and disclosed to their enraptured sight—and smell—a splendid mess of trout.

"Your guide told us you'd be here," she added,

" and we had a lot of fish, and thought you might like some."

" Thank you, ma'am," Spider began. But Bennie cut in on him.

" You won't have any trouble climbing the old mountain to-morrow," he said, " 'cause you'll have sprouted a pair of wings by morning."

Everybody laughed, and sat around chatting with the newcomers, while Frank and the four boys ate trout and drank mugs of hot coffee, and dried out by the fire. It was almost four o'clock, and getting dusky here in the deep South Basin, under the heavy clouds. It was chilly, too, for the wind seemed to plunge down the cliffs from above, and swirl around in the amphitheatre, trying to find a way out again.

" Got tents? " one of the campers asked.

The boys shook their heads. " Nothing but ponchos."

" You'll be pretty cold to-night. Wish we could sleep you, but we're full up."

Joe roused. " Goin' ter rain soon," he said. " We'll be joggin' down ter the old lumber camp at Basin Pond, I reckon."

" Aw, no! " Bennie said. " I want to sleep out! "

" Well, thar's no law agin it, fer's I know," Joe answered. " But I kind o' hanker fer a roof myself when it rains. Yer sorter feel more chipper like at breakfast."

" I advise you to go with him," one of the campers laughed.

"Oh, I s'pose I'll have to—just to keep him cheerful," Bennie grinned.

Joe was right. In a few minutes the rain began, and, thanking their new friends again, the boys and their guides set off down the trail a mile to Basin Pond.

"And we'll have all this to climb again," Bennie sighed.

They found a cabin in the old camp with a whole roof, and by poking around they found enough stovepipe without rust holes to get the old stove going. There was nothing to sleep on but the floor. That, however, as Joe assured Bennie, was dry. They made a clothes-line of Bennie's rope, and hung up their sweaters, which were damp with the cloud fog, and rigged up some seats out of boards and old boxes, and after hot tea and bacon and toast and jam for supper, they sat in the light from the stove-hole and Spider's candle lantern, and Frank told them the tale of the two men and the dog who descended the gully from the Knife Blade.

CHAPTER XVII

How to Get a Dog Down a Precipice

"IS this a true story, cross your heart?" Bennie demanded, at the very start.

"I hope yer not implyin' anything by that?" old Joe remarked.

"Not at all, not at all!" Bennie assured him. "I'm sure of *you* all right. But I think we ought to swear in Frank."

"Good idea!" exclaimed Spider. "Frank, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you?"

"I swear," Frank grinned. "Well, it was this way. Three or four years ago there was a couple of young fellers from over in Aroostook County—I disremember their names—campin' down hereabouts. They had fit in the War so I suppose Katahdin didn't scare 'em much. Anyhow, they climbed it one day by the Slide trail,—the one Joe came down this afternoon,—and fooled around on the top quite some time. They had a dog with 'em ——"

"What kind of a dog?" the boys demanded.

"Bulldog. Weighed about sixty pounds, they say. Well, they decided to come back the way we took today, over the Knife Blade. It was gettin' late in the day, and they was pretty hungry, and when they got

to that gully and looked down it and see that it led pretty nigh straight to their camp, and the path over Pamola took 'em on a long ways further, they quite naturally decided to take the shortest way home."

"Somebody's al'ays tryin' to prove that the longest way round ain't the shortest way home," Joe commented.

"Down the gully they started," Frank went on, "and accordin' to what one of 'em later told a friend o' mine, they didn't have no great trouble for some distance, not even the dog. But then, all of a sudden, they come to a place where there was a sheer drop of thirty feet. By this time they didn't want to go back, and as it looked like good goin' again down below the drop, they began to prospect around. About ten or twelve feet down the face of the drop there was a little ledge, and by one of 'em lyin' on his belly and lowerin' the other feller down, the second feller got to this ledge. Havin' got this far, there was no way of gettin' back if they wanted to, so they made the dog jump the rest of the way, and he landed O. K., and didn't do no more'n get cut a bit, and the two fellers found toe-holds and come on down after him."

"Poor dog!" Bennie cut in.

"Well, they had it easy for a bit now, so they told my friend, and thought their troubles were over, when, all of a sudden again, they come to a place where the drop was nearer fifty feet, and no ledge part way down, neither.

"They was fair stumped for a bit, and they told my friend they seen themselves spendin' the night there,

and maybe a week, and starvin' to death, unless somebody happened along to Chimney Pond and seen 'em. The ledge was all smooth and slippery, without any hand-holds at all. But finally one of 'em looked along the side wall of the gully, and seen a few jagged places where he reckoned he could get a hold, so he said he'd try it. But first there was the question of the pup. They took off their sweaters and belts, and ripped their shirts into strips, and tied 'em all together into a rope. It came within fifteen feet of the bottom, so the first feller started down. The second feller—he told my friend—didn't dare look over. He just sat and kind o' prayed, and every time a piece of rock fell, he thought it was his friend. But pretty soon the first feller hollered from the bottom, and the second feller tied the rope around the dog and lowered him. The first feller was going to catch him. But one o' them shirts had been too often to the steam laundry, I guess. Anyhow, the cloth bust when the poor pup was twenty feet or more above the bottom, and bein' as he weighed sixty pounds, and the feller wasn't none too securely braced in the gully below, the pup was left to land as best he could. He picked himself up, though, and didn't have no broken bones."

"Some dog, I'll say!"—from Bennie.

"Then the second feller, he started down the cliff. And he got down O. K., too, though neither of 'em had any finger-nails left, so they told my friend. The dog, they said, stood there watchin' and waggin' his tail encouragin'ly. Well, their troubles was over then, except for wadin' down in a water brook and scrunchin'

through elder to get to camp. But they decided it was safer, if not so excitin', to raise pertaters over home in Aroostook County."

"I wish I'd been there!" Bennie exclaimed.

"I wish I owned that dog," sighed Bill.

"And is that where you're going to take us to-morrow?" Sydney demanded.

"Alas, no," Bennie laughed. "We are going up the chimney. That's the other gully—the bigger one, don't you remember?—the second one we passed. That's easy, isn't it, Frank?"

"We won't have a dog to look after, anyhow," Frank replied.

"Now, you tell us a story, Uncle Joe," pleaded Bennie, turning to the older guide.

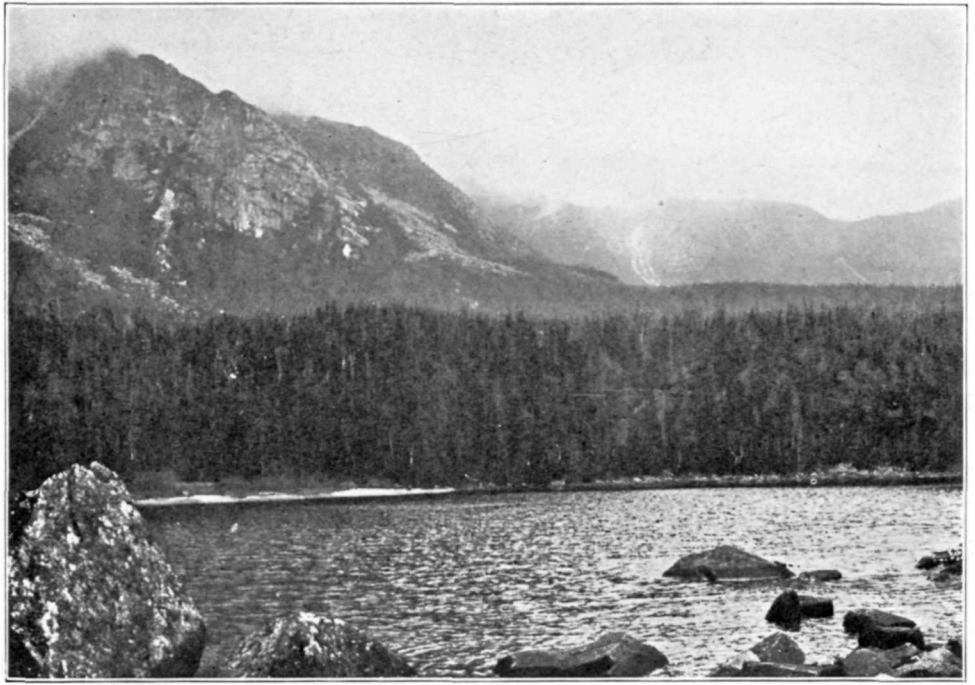
Joe shook his head. "I never tell a story when it's rainin'," he answered.

"But it's stopped raining!" Bill exclaimed, listening.

Sure enough, it had. They had been too intent on Frank's tale to notice. Running outside, they saw that the clouds were lifting and blowing away from the dim, shadowy bulk of Pamola right above them.

"Clearin' weather," Joe remarked. "May shower again, but I guess it'll be good to-morrer. Better get to bed. They tell me the chimney draws better early in the mornin'."

So they spread their ponchos on the hard floor, rolled up their sweaters for pillows, wrapped themselves in their blankets, and went to sleep. The boys woke up three or four times, with aching spots on their



LOOKING INTO THE GREAT BASIN—PAMOLA ON THE LEFT

bodies where the boards had pressed them, but by shifting to a new position they immediately went to sleep again. It is surprising how hard a bed you can sleep on if you are weary enough.

CHAPTER XVIII

Up Katahdin Chimney—the Hardest Rock Climb in the East

EVERYBODY, however, was glad to get up, and early, too.

"If everybody in the world had to sleep on the floor," said Spider, "I bet the alarm-clock factories would go out of business."

Then he and Bennie ran out to look at the weather.

"Hooray!" they cried, as they came back. "The top of the mountain is almost clear, and the sun's up bright, only you can't see it over here yet, and we're going to have a grand day for the chimney!"

They raced through breakfast, broke camp, and were soon climbing up the trail again to Chimney Pond, walking directly in at the open end of the great South Basin, which they could now plainly see, with the Knife Blade ridge forming one side, the head-wall precipices over which Bennie had first peered, forming the closed end, and the other side being formed by a much less precipitous but still very steep wall of tumbled rock and shale. It was up this slope, by the Basin Slide, that most people climbed the mountain from Chimney Pond.

They could see the chimney, too, like a great cleft cut into the cliff between Pamola and Chimney Peaks.

"I think I'll go with Uncle Joe to-day," Sydney laughed. But he more than half meant it.

"Not on your life!" Spider and Bennie answered. "You got to come along and have the real fun of climbing."

"I don't believe my father wants me to break my neck," Syd protested. "'I may have a face like a goat, but they love me at home.'"

"Break your grandmother," Bennie replied. "Say, Syd, you live in New York City. You run more risk of breaking your neck every time you cross Fifth Avenue or take a taxi than you will on this old mountain. Come on, be a sport."

"Oh, I'm coming," said Syd. "But I'm not going to pretend I want to."

They found their friends of the day before just finishing breakfast.

"How are you going to get up the chimney with all those blanket rolls?" one of the men asked. "Your guide certainly can't get his pack-basket past the chock stones—there isn't room."

"I'll take both pack-baskets," Joe volunteered. "Give me something to do."

"You can't carry two of them," Spider protested.

"Don't intend to—not simultaneous. I kin tote one a ways, and then go back after the other, and then repeat. It'll keep me from getting lonesome."

"Any of you folks been up the chimney?" Bennie asked.

"Some of us tried it two days ago, but we couldn't get past the first chock stone."

"What's that—a chock stone?"

"You'll see soon enough," the man grinned.

Another man now came over from his tent. "You boys mind if I try it with you?" he asked. "I see you've got a rope. We didn't have any rope before. And, to tell you the truth, we didn't have any too much nerve."

"Sure—come on!" the boys answered. "The more the merrier."

"I still think you're going to find those packs and blankets a great drawback, if not a danger," the first man declared.

"We'll find a way; we can pull 'em up on the rope," Bennie answered. "Are we all set? Let's go."

They called good-by to Joe and the other campers, and with the one addition to their party they started out, up the bed of the brook which comes down out of the chimney, and squeezing their way through alders still wet with last night's rain. Poor Frank's feet were soon soaked, and all of them were wet about the legs and sides from the bushes. It took about an hour from the pond through the alders and birches to the actual base of the chimney. When they finally stood clear on the scree,—or decomposed granite, washed out of the chimney by the water,—they paused to rest, and to look up at the work ahead of them.

It looked, as Bill said, like "some job." There it stretched, a great V-shaped gash in the granite cliff, perhaps thirty or forty feet wide at the top, but only a few feet wide at the bottom, twenty feet deep, twelve hundred feet high, and inclined anywhere from an angle of forty-five degrees to almost perpendicular.

"I—I don't want to try it," Syd muttered.

Bill went to his side. "Come on, Syd," he said. "I used to feel that way about *everything* till I took a ski jump off the platform. After that I didn't care what I did. You get up here, and you'll feel the same way."

"All right—I'll try," said Sydney, gritting his teeth.

Meanwhile, to the right, and joining the chimney close to them, they could see the gully which the two men and the dog had descended. Except for the lower fifty-foot cliff—the only one they could make out—it looked less steep than the chimney itself.

"Forward, men!" ordered Bennie, as he and Spider and Frank led the way.

They entered into the shadow of the cleft and began to toil up over the steeply pitched, yielding scree, most of the time having to walk in water. After a few steps Bennie dislodged a loose stone, which went bounding down, barely missing Bill and the man from camp.

"Keep as close to the side walls as you can!" Spider called back. "Watch for stones."

Now the gully grew narrower, and here and there the bottom was choked with blocks of granite, which they had to climb over or around. Presently they came to a place so steep that it would not hold the loose scree, and the water, running over it in a thin film, like a moving skin, had polished it smooth. Up this they had to crawl, finding toe and finger holds, and getting their knees and stomachs soaking wet.

There were two or three of these places, but they got over all of them without trouble, or having to use the rope. As they looked back, and out into the Basin, they saw they were up already five or six hundred feet from the base.

"Don't think much of this!" said Bennie. "'Tisn't even exciting."

"Wait a minute," said the man.

Bennie, in the lead, disappeared around a bend, and a second later the rest heard his "Wow!" of surprise.

The man smiled.

When the rest got around the bend to Bennie, they found him standing below what is called the first chock stone, and contemplating the situation. This chock stone was a gigantic slab of granite which had fallen down the cliffs and wedged itself directly across the gully, horizontally, so that it blocked the whole passage. The chimney here was inclined at about forty-five degrees, and worn pretty smooth with running water. As the slab was ten feet thick or more, it stuck out far overhead in front, and at the back made a dark, wet cave. If you will tip a V-shaped trough at an angle of forty-five degrees and then fit a piece of board into it, laid level, you will have a good idea of the way the chock stone blocked the chimney.

"Now what are you going to do?" the man asked. "Here's where we stopped the day before yesterday."

"I'm going to look up under there first," Bennie answered. "I think I see a hole between the stone and the bottom of the chimney."

He took off his pack and blanket roll, and examined both sides of the chimney bottom, looking for holds. To the right the rock was smooth and slippery, and offered no chance. But on the other side Bennie, his rope coiled over his shoulder, managed to work his way up for fifteen feet or so, till he was half hidden in the darkness of the cave.

"Say, Spider," he called back, "leave your stuff and come up here. I think I see a way."

"There's a good-sized hole over the other side," Frank said.

"Sure there is—but you can't get there from here. It's slippery as glass. There's a little hole above me, though. I think I can make it if Spider can give me a boost."

Spider scrambled up to him, and found him perched on a little ledge. Almost overhead was a small opening between the chock stone and the side wall, made because two projections of the side wall, twenty-four inches apart, left a space between them. Bennie, however, could get no hand-holds until he could get his arms up over the top of the thick chock stone.

"How you going to make it?" Spider asked.

"Remember the old crack in the mast of the Phantom Ship? I'm going to squeeze up."

Spider braced, and Bennie climbed gingerly on his shoulders. From there he was able to get his body in between the two projections. Pressing his back against one as hard as he could by pushing on the other with both hands and feet, he held himself in the niche, and by working first his feet and back, and then his

hands, then his feet and back, upwards, inches at a time, he slowly drew nearer daylight.

Those below watched breathless. If his muscles gave out, he would fall twenty feet, and if nobody managed to catch him at the bottom, he would keep right on, bouncing down the chimney. A shout went up when they saw his arms go out of the hole, and then his body and legs follow them.

A minute later they heard a shout on the other side of the chock stone, and through the larger hole came one end of the Alpine rope.

"I want Frank up here first, or Spider," Bennie called. "There's nothing to anchor to, but I'll get down in a hole and hang on."

"He can't have me," Spider laughed, "unless somebody swings that rope over to me. I got up here, but I can't get down."

Those below swung the rope over till he caught it, and holding it fast he swung out over the smooth, slippery slope under the roof of stone. Swinging from so far on the other side, of course he had to drop down, and lost his footing, so that his chest and stomach and knees swished through the water. But he scrambled up, and hand over hand went up the rope and through the hole.

"Let's haul the stuff up first," Bennie said. So they shouted back, and those below tied on loads of packs and blanket rolls, which were hauled through.

Then Spider and Bennie both tied the rope around their waists, and found a firm anchorage for their feet in a little hollow.

"Hold on a minute," Spider said, before throwing the end through again. "Syd's not used to rope work. Neither's Bill. I guess they'd better be tied." He went to the hole and called down to Frank.

"You come last, Frank. Send Syd next, and then Bill. Make a bowline hitch around under their arms, and we'll haul when you signal."

Sydney was pale. He shivered a little, Frank noticed, as the rope was tied under his arms. Frank patted his shoulder. "The rope'll hold you," he said. "Take a good grip on it with your hands, and keep your feet. All ready?"

"N-no—ye-yes."

"Let her go!" Frank called.

Bennie and Spider, above, hauled on the rope, and Syd, hanging to it, did his best to keep his footing. But his hands were cold, the rope was wet, and he didn't quite have the strength or knack to keep his grip and his balance. His feet slipped, and that made his hands slip, and he dangled on the rope's end on the wet rock face.

"Grab the rope again!" Frank called.

Syd managed to do so, and rose toward the hole, where those above pulled him through.

Bill would have had no trouble, but just as he neared the hole, a rock the size of a lemon, bouncing down from somewhere far above in the chimney, came through under the chock stone, in the water, hit a little projection, and bounced out again, striking Bill over the eye.

It was a rough stone, and cut a gash through the

skin. The blow stunned him, too, so that he lost his grip, like Syd, and sprawled on the face of the slope. Spider and Syd and Bennie hauled him through, helpless and bleeding.

The man and then Frank came up the rope without trouble, and once the whole party were on top, they breathed a sigh of relief, and turned to apply first aid to Bill.

"I'm all right," he protested. "Just made me dizzy a minute. Here, tie my handkerchief around it. I'm all right, I tell you!"

But they made him sit down and rest a moment before resuming their packs and the climb. Frank took Bill's pack and blanket and the man took Syd's.

Spider looked at his watch. "Say!" he exclaimed. "We were more'n an hour getting round this first chock stone!"

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Wow!"

They had no more trouble for some distance. There were places almost precipitous, but with plenty of foot and hand holds, and most of the way was fairly easy, in loose rock. The sun, too, was over the rim of the Knife Blade, and its rays warmed them. They were all chilled with the ice-cold water.

Then the second chock stone appeared.

The hole under this was larger, but the ledge under it was worn smooth as glass by the water, which came through it like corn through a hopper, and, besides, this ledge was perpendicular.

On one side of the chimney here, however, there was a scrub growth, and Spider, taking the rope, started up, not the bottom of the chimney at all, but the side. He clung to scrub, found foot and hand holds, worked out of the chimney, around a jutting peak of rock, and back into the chimney again above the chock stone. Then he lowered the rope over the outer edge of the stone, against the chimney side, and everybody came up on it.

"How many more chock stones are there?" Syd panted.

"Search me," Frank said. "This is my first trip."

"I've heard of only two," the man declared. "I hope that's all. You all right, Bill?"

"Sure!" said Bill, though he was very pale under his blood-stained bandage.

It was now twelve o'clock—and Joe had the grub!

"Nothing to do but keep on," said Bennie, starting up again.

Their difficulties proved to be over—but not their dangers. The top of the chimney was full of loose scree and rock, and though Spider kept warning everybody to hug the sides, a great stone two feet thick broke loose under his feet, and only his quick yell of warning and a quick leap to one side by the man kept their new friend from being knocked over and perhaps badly hurt.

They paused and listened as the rock went crashing and bounding down the chimney, dislodging more stuff as it went, and sending back a rattling roar.

"I hope nobody else is climbing to-day!" Spider gasped.

"No—everybody in our camp went up the other way, and there's no other camp," the man answered.

"Whew!" Spider sighed deeply. "Gosh, sir, my heart went down in my boots when I saw you in the track!"

"All in the day's work," the man laughed. "That's part of the sport of rock climbing. What's the fun without the danger?"

A last scramble took them over the ledge and on to the little grassy platform of the Knife Blade. It was getting on toward one o'clock, but they all flopped down full length, wet and hungry as they were, and lay there for five minutes or more.

Then Bennie sat up and shook his fist at the chimney.

"We beat you, you old chimney, you!" he cried.

"But it got in one good wallop on poor Bill," said Spider.

"And pretty nearly had me through the ropes," said the man.

"And gave me the hardest job I ever had in the Maine woods," said Frank.

"Gee, fellers, I'm glad I did it!" Syd suddenly exclaimed, his face glowing. "I didn't want to come. But I wouldn't have missed it for a million dollars. I'd like to go down it now!"

"He's got a touch of mountain sickness," Bennie winked to the others. "I guess we'd better get him to old Doc Howes, and have some grub prescribed."

But Bill put out his hand and touched Syd's shoulder. "'At a boy!" he whispered.

"Joe's waving to us now," Frank announced. "See him up there by the Monument, with the other party?"

Sure enough, across the end of the Basin they could see tiny figures on the peak of Katahdin, and some one waving a white handkerchief.

They waved back, and set out across the Knife Blade. No trouble to-day. The rocks were dried by the sun, and there was little wind. They climbed to the south peak, hurried over the broken stones on the col, and found Joe at the Monument.

"Where's the grub?" they cried.

"Grub?" said Joe. "Yer ain't hungry, be yer? That's too bad! I left it down the trail a piece."

The boys insisted on fishing their signatures out of the cylinder and adding that they had climbed the chimney. Their new friend added his name, too. Then they said good-by, leaving him with his own party, and hurried down the trail to the point where the Abol Slide path branched off.

Here Joe had left the baskets, and they fell upon the food ravenously. It was two o'clock, and they had been climbing since eight.

"Too bad we ain't got some raw beefsteak fer Bill's eye," Joe mused. "He's sure goin' ter look as if he'd been callin' an Irishman names."

"I don't care!" Bill declared. "I got up the old chimney!"

After luncheon they loafed across the mile-wide plateau. It didn't look so dismal in the sunlight, but

they were surprised to see how far it extended to the north, for Katahdin is a big mountain stretched out north and south for some miles, with the high peak at the southeastern corner.

"Used to be great caribou country up here," Joe mused. "I've heard old-timers tell, when I was a boy, of seein' a hundred head up on this plateau. I guess I seen the last two anybody laid eyes on in this state, and they was browsin' right about here."

"How long ago was that?"

"Twenty or twenty-five year, I reckon," Joe replied, sadly.

"What made 'em disappear?"

"Men!" Joe exclaimed. "Men and guns and lumber camps and paper mills! They got shot off, and they wandered off north, too, I reckon, where they could be left alone. Once in a while you find a bone up here yet. That's all that's left o' them grand animals—bones."

"Well, I'm glad *I* never shot one!" Spider declared.

"I know you be," old Joe said with feeling. "Dunno's I'd guide yer if yer wa'n't."

At the top of the slide they paused for a look at the great prospect, with the smoke of Millinocket like a cloud over the lake and forest to the south, and far to the west, beyond miles and miles of a green ocean of trees, the silver shimmer of Moosehead. Directly below them they could see a score of ponds, and in the middle distance the shimmer, here and there, of the famous West Branch of the Penobscot.

Then Bill's and Syd's loads were divided among the rest, and they crawled through the Needle's Eye and started down the slide. It took much less than half the time to descend than it had taken them to climb it the morning before, and the afternoon sun was still high above the western horizon when they reached the cabin.

"Home!" cried Bennie.

"Water!" cried Bill and Spider and Syd.

"The grub's still here," said Frank, poking his head in the door.

The boys made a dash for the brook, and then a big fire was built and everybody except Joe took off most of their clothes and hung them to dry, meanwhile lying on the beds clad in blankets. Spider, however, first bathed Bill's cut eyebrow with hot boiled water, and tied it up again with a fresh bandage. The cut was only a surface one, but the eye was already beginning to turn black, and poor Bill's head ached into the bargain. Spider rolled him up warm next to the wall, and he went fast asleep.

For that matter, so did Syd and Bennie, and napped till Joe and Frank called them to get up and dress again for supper.

Since nothing had to be saved except enough for breakfast, they had a big meal. But that night nobody asked for a story. They were all ready for bed when the dishes were washed. And that night, on their boughs, neither Spider nor Bennie woke up till morning.

The Katahdin chimney had one victory, after all!

CHAPTER XIX

A Strange Adventure With a Moose

BILL felt better in the morning, though his eye was black and Bennie named him Bill the Bruiser, which was speedily shortened to Bruiser. They ate breakfast, packed, and loafed down the two or three miles to the tote road. The team got there about as they did, and the dunnage was all loaded aboard. With the weight off their shoulders, it was a joy to walk, so they swung up the tote road ahead of the buckboard, examining tracks, trees, and flowers, and waited for the team at the old lumber camp, where Bennie insisted on being shown where the eel grass grew.

Joe walked up and down Katahdin stream, but he couldn't find any.

"What!" Bennie said. "No eel grass? You've got to explain that!"

"Well, thar used ter be a dam here, o' course, and that kind o' made a swampy place. But since the dam rotted out, and the water went down, the eel grass just nacherly died."

"You can't catch Uncle Joe, Bennie. Better call it a day," Spider laughed.

They rode the last two miles in to camp, and that

noon sat down to dinner at tables, with napkins and dinner plates.

"Seems kind of queer. What do you do with this piece of cloth?" Bennie whispered, pointing to his napkin.

That afternoon they went over to the Sourdnahunk stream, to a deep, sandy hole, and had a swim. Unfortunately they couldn't use the lake because they had no bathing suits. Then they came back and got two canoes and tried fly fishing again, with somewhat better luck—at least, Spider had better luck, and caught five trout. While they were fishing, a loon rose from the water, and flew low, right over their heads, so they could plainly see his gray-white shirt front, his iridescent blue-black collar, and his great wings. As he flew, circling the lake, a call came from far off, perhaps from some other pond in the woods. He answered it with a ringing, wild laugh, rose higher, and shot in a bee line over the trees toward his mate.

"My! That's a beautiful sight!" Syd exclaimed.

"And I love that call, too," said Spider. "People say it's melancholy, or else it's like a crazy man laughing. But I think it's just wild and beautiful."

Frank, who had come out with them and was paddling, nodded his head. "That's the way I feel," he said. "Joe, too. Did you ever hear how Joe was guiding two city sports once? He'd taken 'em up north some place, twenty miles or so, to a pond where there wa'n't no camp, or even much of a trail, I guess, and one of the fellers shot a loon. Joe, he just up and packed his own kit and hiked right back, and left

'em to get out as best they could. Said he wouldn't guide nobody who'd shoot a loon."

"Would you do that?" Syd asked.

"Well, I dunno. I might. I'd feel like it. But a guide's got to be pretty darned independent to throw over his party that way."

"I guess Joe is independent, all right," Spider laughed. "I guess living in the woods makes you so."

"Maybe," said Frank, "but Joe would be independent in the middle of New York City."

That night the boys wrote post-cards home, and sat around their stove and talked over the Katahdin trip, going to bed early and sinking down on the mattresses with sighs of content. The next day they decided to take life easy, and let Bruiser Bill's eye heal up and Syd's tired muscles get rested. Then they planned to take a canoe trip.

Syd and Bill planned to spend the day building a blind near the beaver dam, with Joe's help, because in a few nights now there would be a moon. Bennie and Spider, with Frank, planned to take their rods and fish up and down the Sourdnahunk stream for trout, carrying some lunch with them.

"Why the lunch?" Bill demanded. "Afraid you won't catch anything?"

"Be prepared, is our motto," Spider laughed.

As Uncle Joe paddled with the two younger boys to the beaver dam, he talked about beavers.

"Funny thing about them animals," he said; "they have regular engineers, who boss the job. Fact. I seen it happen once, up Chesuncook way, it was. You

know, after a little while a beaver colony gets pretty well crowded, so the young uns go off by themselves and start a new settlement, as you might say. They start in buildin' a dam, and then they begin makin' houses and cuttin' down trees and sticks for food. Well, this colony I was watchin' was a new one, all young beavers, and there was only eight of 'em. The stream was right swift where they was tryin' to put across their dam, and every time they got the dam built, the water would pile up agin it, and maybe a rain would come, and down it would all go agin. Four times I seen that happen.

"Well, they was workin' like mad, by daylight, too, fixing it up agin when I come along, and bang, splop, bang, went a tail on the water, and all eight of 'em dove under. But one young beaver, he come up among the missin' ——"

"How'd you know? Did they come up with you around?" Syd demanded.

"I sneaked into a kind of a blind I'd rigged up, and waited," Joe answered. "They was only seven of 'em come up, and they quit workin' on the dam much, but kind o' scattered around, cuttin' down stuff as you might say in a dilatory manner. Thinks I, that's funny, and so I come back agin the next evenin', when there was a moon, to see what was doin'."

He paused and poked his pipe.

"Yes? What was doing?" the boys prompted.

"Well, what do yer think? That young beaver that come up among the missin' had gone downstream—or upstream, I can't rightly say—and brought back an old

dog beaver, and there was the whole nine of 'em workin' on the dam. Only this old feller ——"

"Sort of a consulting engineer," Bill laughed.

"That's the idee, exactly! This old consultin' engineer beaver wa'n't workin' so much with his hands, as you might say, ez with his brain. He was runnin' back and forth over the dam, directin' operations. Trouble was, the young beavers hadn't built their dam right, for the current. They'd been puttin' it straight across. Now they was buildin' it in a curve, with the arch pointin' upstream, so's when the current hit it, instead o' breakin' it passed the strain along to the ends which was braced on the banks. I seen it all plain."

"Did the new dam stand?"

"It sure did. I come back in a few days to look, and it was there, and only the eight young beavers, workin' away on their canals and house. The consultin' engineer had gone home agin."

"If Bennie was here," Syd laughed, "he'd say, 'I wonder what they had to pay him?'"

"Funny—I was jest thinkin' the same thing," said Joe.

But Bennie wasn't there. While Joe and Bill and Syd were rigging up a blind of branches and sticks and clearing away enough stuff in front to give them a view of the dam from it, Bennie and Spider and Frank were fishing the Sourdnahunk, picking out the most likely-looking pools below the numerous little falls and rapids, and casting sometimes from the bank, sometimes from flat rocks out in the water. But the day

was too bright for much luck, or they didn't have the right flies, or, as Bennie said, "More likely there aren't any fish. They heard we were coming, and beat it." Anyway, one o'clock found them with only two small trout, both caught by Spider. They cooked these two, however, and divided them up equally.

"Lucky we did bring something else," Spider laughed, as he contemplated his tiny portion.

After lunch they lay for a long time on a grassy spot by the stream, too lazy and contented to move. A few big white cumulous clouds were drifting across the blue sky. The Sourdnahunk murmured a sleepy song as it ran clear and brown over the gravelly bottom. The air was sweet with the smell of spruce and balsam. There was a soft wind just whispering through the branches over their heads.

"This is the life!" Bennie exclaimed, rolling over on his back and gazing up to the lazy white clouds. "A good old loaf in the woods! Wish a bear or something would come out, so's I could just lie here and watch him."

"He would, if he only knew you wanted him to," Spider laughed. "Do you s'pose we'll see a moose any time on this trip, Frank?"

Frank shook his head. "Not likely," he answered. "A moose can most generally see you, or hear or smell you anyhow, before you spot him, with all the leaves on the trees, and he'll get out of your way."

"I never saw a moose. I'd rather see a moose than most anything."

As the sun got lower they started fishing again, and

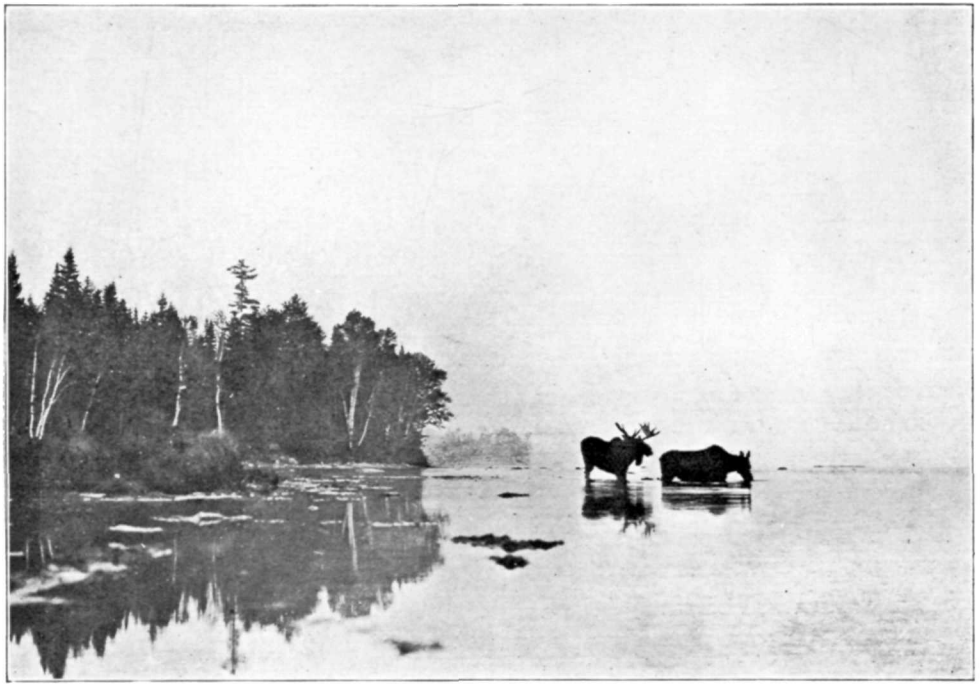
this time they had better luck. The trout had decided, evidently, the time had come to feed. Also, the three fishermen were working downstream and finding deeper pools. Frank and Bennie each got a one-pounder, and Spider hooked a two-pounder, which pulled him off the slippery rock he was casting from into water up to his waist before he landed him.

"Better dry your clothes while there's some sun," Bennie suggested.

"I might at that; guess there won't be many ladies passing," said Spider. So he took off his shoes, stockings, underclothes and trousers, wrung the water out, spread them on a hot rock to dry, and went on fishing barelegged. This way he could wade out anywhere and cast as he pleased, and he added two more one-pounders to their string.

It was getting late now, and they realized suddenly that they would have to be starting home. Frank and Bennie lay down when they reached Spider's clothes and waited for Spider to dress. He had his trousers and stockings on, and was seated by a big rock, which nearly hid him, about to put on his boots, when Bennie gave a very soft, warning sound, and whispered: "Don't move! Look downstream!"

Frank and Spider looked, and Spider, at any rate, gasped. There, just breaking through the bushes two hundred yards downstream, on the opposite side, was a bull moose! He was a big, proud creature, but evidently with nothing on his mind at the moment but the thought of water. He splashed down the bank into the river, and stood with the current swirling



MAINE MOOSE DRINKING AT TWILIGHT

about his knees, and thrust his big black muzzle into the coolness. Listening intently, holding their breath and not moving a muscle, the boys fancied they could hear the suck of the water as he drank.

After the moose had satisfied his thirst, he lifted his noble head and looked around. He looked right upstream at them.

"Don't move!" Frank whispered, very low.

They didn't stir, but the moose did. He began to walk, in the water, right up the stream toward them!

"Say, what'll he do to us?" Bennie whispered.

"Sh!" Frank cautioned.

The moose stopped presently, and took a nip at an evergreen shoot which hung over the bank. Then he looked again toward the still and breathless boys—and kept on. Nearer and nearer he came, till he was almost opposite them. Then he paused again, sniffed, braced his feet well apart, and turned his face full upon the three. To Bennie it seemed as if the moose was looking him square in the eyes. He trembled with excitement—and with something else, too. What if that great creature *wasn't* afraid? What if he decided to come *at* them, instead of running away from them?

Then, very slowly and deliberately, with a great splashing through the swift water, the moose started across the stream—toward them!

They didn't move. They simply stared. The moose reached their side of the stream not more than fifteen feet away from where they lay, and again he paused, and again his eyes were fixed on Bennie's face, and his nostrils sniffed.

"Say, I don't like this!" The whispered words were fairly forced from Bennie's throat.

The moose, at the sound, gave a single stretching bound and was up the bank. They heard him crashing away.

"What did you speak for?" Spider demanded.

"What did I speak for? Gosh all hemlock, he was looking me square in the eye, and beginning to snort!" Bennie answered.

"He was not; he was looking *me* in the eye!"

"You're both wrong; he was looking *me* in the eye," said Frank.

"Well, what of it, anyhow? He wouldn't have touched us. We'll never get another chance like that to watch a moose."

"How'd I know—how do you know—he wouldn't touch us?" Bennie retorted. "He'd come right across the stream, after he'd seen us, hadn't he? He could have just taken one step on any of us, and goodnight!"

"He wouldn't have touched us, would he, Frank?" Spider persisted. "A moose always runs from a man, doesn't he?"

"I dunno what to say," Frank answered. "I been all my life in the woods, but I never seen a moose do a thing like that, nor heard tell of one. I dunno what to make of it."

"Well, I don't mind saying I was kind of uneasy," Bennie confessed, "even if you two weren't. You know about the man who told another man that his dog wouldn't bite him, and the other man said, 'Yes,

you know it, and I know it, but does the dog know it?' Well, Frank and you, Spider, knew the moose wouldn't touch us. But did the moose know it? That's what had me guessing."

"S'pose we beat it home and ask Uncle Joe," Spider laughed. "He'll have an explanation."

They hurried back to camp with their string of fish, talking excitedly about the moose, and got in late for supper. As soon as they had eaten, they hunted up Joe and told him what had happened. The other guides, also, sat around and listened intently. At the very word "moose" they pricked up their ears. Frank corroborated what the boys said. Nobody laughed at their tale, or pretended not to believe it, but they all agreed it was highly unusual.

"I heerd tell once of a sim'lar thing happenin' up in New Brunswick, or Canada, somewhere," one of the guides declared. "But I never heerd tell of it round here. 'Course, in the ruttin' season a bull moose'll take a lot o' chances and go places he won't other times, but he most generally keeps clear o' men."

"What about it, Uncle Joe?" Bennie demanded.

Joe removed his pipe and spoke seriously. By this time the boys could tell when he was serious, and when he was yarning.

"Curiosity," he said. "I never seen nothin' like it myself, but I been around the woods now fer—well, no matter; it's long enough—and one thing I come to believe, namely, you can't never safely say an animal won't do certain things even if you never seen one do 'em before. Most animals is full o' curiosity. Take

a bear, or a squirrel, for example. And a moose ain't no different. This moose most likely had smelled men but hain't never been shot at, so he wa'n't scared at your smell, if he got it. He seen you lyin' there still, and he kind o' wondered about it, and come to have a look. It's unusual, but not impossible."

"Of course it isn't impossible, 'cause it happened," said Bennie. "But would he have come nearer and poked us or stamped on us, if I hadn't spoken?"

"I can't rightly say," Joe answered. "I don't reckon he would. All I kin say is, if he *had* stomped on yer, yer wouldn't hev relished yer supper much to-night. Speakin' of moose ——"

"Yes—yes—go on!" The boys gathered on the steps at old Joe's feet and waited for the tale, for now they saw the pale twinkle coming back into his eyes.

"I got ter fill my pipe agin, fust," said Uncle Joe.

CHAPTER XX

The Hat-Rack That Ran Away

"WELL," Uncle Joe began, "this wore a long while back. They was number one cuttin' and number two cuttin' goin' on at the same time, 'bout three mile apart, and the gangs was racin' to see who'd get the most feet o' logs. They was kind o' measured up, impersonal like, as yer might say, every Saturday by a company boss who came in ter see how things was goin', and the company was givin' somethin' extry in the way o' refreshment, so ter speak, every Saturday night ter the gang that was ahead that week. The gang that led on the grand total, come spring, was ter get a grand blow-out from the other gang. And they was several side bets up on it, too. Every time a feller from number one camp met a feller from number two, he'd just nacherly say his gang was goin' ter have a blow-out on the other gang, and then the other feller'd nacherly say, 'I'll bet yer ten dollars yer don't!' And nacherly the first feller would cover him. So it come about thar was considerable at stake, come middle o' winter, and feelin', as yer might say, was runnin' high."

"But where does the moose come in?" asked Bennie.

"Say, yer're nearly as impatient fer that moose as

yer are fer gettin' to the top o' Katahdin, ain't yer? The moose has come in, only I ain't told yer about him yet. Seems number one gang was leadin' in the race, not by many feet o' logs, but enough to keep 'em hustlin' ter hold on, and one reason they was leadin' was a Canuck named Chris Doucette. Chris was some feller with an ax! He could lay a tree so's it would smash a butter plate you'd placed fer a target, and take it down in fewer strokes than any jack in camp. Chris was a funny feller, too,—kind o' shy and quiet, and he had a great way with animals. He could imitate most any bird thar is, and make 'em come hoppin' into the branches around him ——"

"Even a cat owl?" Bennie demanded.

"Sure—cat owls would most eat out o' his hand. Well, Chris he took up with a moose that winter, a big bull moose. The snow was powerful deep, and the moose wa'n't findin' it none too easy foragin' about in it fer food, and Chris he kind o' coaxed this moose along with offerin's o' hay, as yer might say, and apples and things, till the gol-derned critter plumb follered him inter camp one day. Kind o' surprised the rest o' the gang ter see Chris comin' out o' the woods, with the ol' moose trottin' along behind him, and they all sorter scattered, not feelin' quite sure what the moose would do. But he didn't do nothin' 'cept stand around and paw up snow, and kind o' snort, much as ter say, 'Hi, you, gimme an apple.'

"So the gang they come peerin' back from behind the camp buildin's, and off the roofs, and they all went past the moose inter the mess house.

"'Don't pat him, boys; him don' like be patted,' Chris told 'em.

"Well, Chris he went in, too, and et, and then he went out and give the old moose some sugar on his hand, and an apple, and a couple other fellers brung out apples, and the moose took 'em and et 'em up, and then *galumphed* back in the woods.

"Next day, come noon, when the men come in fer grub, thar was the moose, standin' in the clearin', pawin' snow, and wantin' more apples and sugar.

"'Hello, ol' moose,' Chris said. 'You come back, hey? You wan' more sugar, hey? You wait here till Chris get him grub.'

"And Chris took off his fur cap, which covered his head and his ears all up warm, and with a laugh he hung it on one o' the points on the old moose's antlers.

"Well, the moose, he stuck around, and after he'd et, Chris took out some more grub and give it ter him, and so'd some o' the other jacks, and Chris reached up and got his cap, and the old moose he went off agin.

"Next day he was back, decidin' he'd found a good meal ticket, I guess, and two-three other fellers thought it was a good joke to hang *their* caps on his antlers. So they done same. After 'bout a week every mother's son o' the gang took ter hangin' their caps on that moose's antlers 'fore they went in ter grub, so the old moose, standin' thar waitin', looked like the hall hat-tree in a boardin'-house. But he didn't mind losin' his dignity none, 'cause he got apples and sugar later.

"Well, things went along like that some bit, and

number one gang still was leadin' in the race, and they sorter come ter regard the old moose as their mascot, and fed him up good so's he was gettin' fat and pretty pertikler about his victuals, too, and wouldn't scarcely touch ordinary hemlock and sich. Then, one day, durin' a pertikler cold spell o' weather, when they'd all hung up their caps on the hat-tree and gone in fer grub, thar come a shot outside.

"Chris, he sprung up, and everybody sprung up, and rushed out, suspicionin' somethin' wrong. Sure 'nuff, the moose was gone, caps and all—every golderned cap in camp! Chris, he wore so plumb mad he didn't wait fer no substitute, but got on his snowshoes and started after the moose, ter see if he wore hurt. Two-three other fellers wrapped their heads and ears up in shirts, and beat it around the clearin' ter find the tracks of the feller who'd done the firin'. They didn't rightly guess yet what the idee was.

"Chris, he come back presently with six caps and a friz ear, and reported thar wa'n't no blood on the tracks, and maybe the moose was jest scared off with a pepperin' o' bird shot, but he friz his ear before he come ter whar the first cap hed dropped, and he wa'n't goin' no further, and he begin ter rub his ear with snow. The other fellers lost so much time gettin' on their snowshoes and shirts over their heads that whoever done the shootin' got away clean to the tote road, and thar they lost his tracks. Maybe, they said, he had a hoss waitin'. Looked that way.

"Well, none o' the gang that didn't have no caps would go out choppin' in that weather—they'd have

friz their ears, sure, and they 'lowed they couldn't go workin' round spruce trees with their heads tied up in shirts, so the fellers whose caps Chris had found had ter foller up the old moose's tracks, lookin' fer more. But all they found was two more, and then the moose he just scampered right up the side o' Katahdin, with the other caps clingin' ter his antlers, and it wa'n't no use tryin' ter foller him thar—not the way *he* took."

"I bet it was somebody from number two cutting who did the shooting!" Bill declared.

"That's a remarkably intelligent guess," Joe went on. "It no doubt wore. Leastwise, the result wore most satisfactory ter number two gang. Number one gang lost a whole afternoon's work, and the next day there wore only eight men willin' ter go out and cut, 'cause they had caps. T'others wouldn't go at all till the company sent 'em up new caps from Millinocket. And that took two days more. Result was, o' course, that number two camp passed 'em that week on logs, and jumped into a good lead. Say, was they mad? They was. But they couldn't prove nothin', o' course —only it wa'n't safe fer a feller from number two cuttin' ter come very nigh their camp. And the next Sunday they was a fight, and a few fellers from number two wa'n't able ter do no work Monday, and number one gang caught up a bit o' lost ground. But they decided then and thar it don't never pay ter use a moose fer a hat-rack."

"I'm glad I didn't try it this afternoon," laughed Bennie.

"Well, o' course it wouldn't make so much difference in August," said Uncle Joe, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "Yer ears won't freeze this weather. But it gets powerful cold hereabouts in January. A feller's mighty thankful fer a cap."

"How cold does it get?" asked Spider.

"Well, I can't rightly say, exactly. But it ain't warm."

The boys went grinning to their cabin, to prepare for a canoe trip on the morrow.

"A hat-tree moose," chuckled Bennie. "Golly, I must write down Uncle Joe's yarns before I forget 'em. Wonder what he'll spring next?"

CHAPTER XXI

The Boys Start Down the West Branch, and Bennie Carries a Canoe

THE next morning as soon as breakfast was over the boys and their guides began to load the canoes for the West Branch trip. They planned to be gone two days, so they had to take blankets, grub, some cooking utensils, and fishing rods. Joe, Bennie, and Bill embarked in one canoe; Frank, Spider, and Syd in the other. The guides paddled stern, and the two younger boys bow, while Bennie and Spider lolled on the blanket rolls amidships and made remarks about their "crews."

However, they didn't have long to ride, for Kidney Pond was soon crossed. At the farther side of the pond the guides ran the canoes up on the muddy shore, at the foot of a trail, and ordered everybody out. Bennie and Spider now had to shoulder the pack-baskets, while Syd and Bill piled the blankets upon themselves. Then Frank and Joe pulled the canoes out of the water, stood the paddles up against a tree where they could grasp them without stooping when the time came, and then taking hold of the canoes by the rail amidships heaved them up, with a rolling motion so they were balanced upside down on their shoulders. Then each guide took a paddle and inserted it

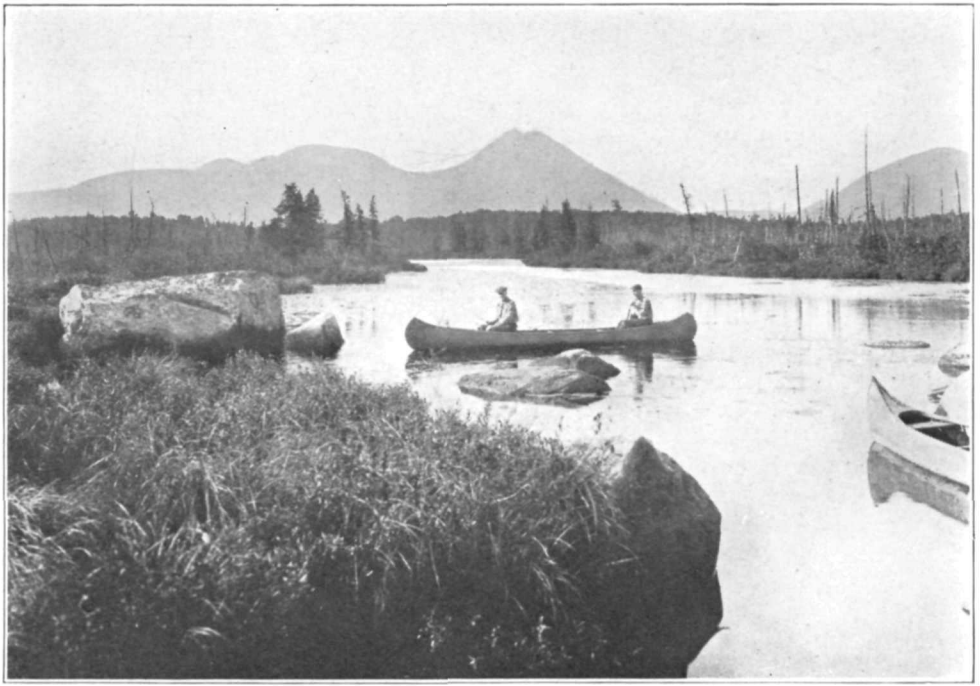
under the two middle thwarts so that it formed a brace on his shoulder parallel to the canoe, and the same with the other paddle on his other shoulder. In this way the canoe could not roll to either side. His hands, grasping the gunwales, kept it from tipping forward or back. Then the guides started down the trail, or rather the inverted canoes did, for it looked exactly as if the canoes had a pair of legs and were walking off. The guides' heads were quite hidden.

"So that's how you do it!" said Bennie. "Remember, Spider, how we had to go hire a team to get the old *Mazama* around the dam? I'm going to try it at the next carry. Some stunt!"

The guides plugged along quite as fast as the boys wanted to walk, for half a mile, over a very wet, muddy trail. Then they came to a black, sluggish stream in a swampy spot, and launched the canoes again. A short paddle down this stream and they emerged into Lily Pad Pond, a small pond surrounded by dead, gray trees, killed because the water level had been raised by a logging dam. From this pond they could see Doubletop behind them, and the whole wall of the Katahdin range, and even a glimpse of the top of Abol Slide. At the farther end of Lily Pad they again left the canoes, but this time the guides didn't pick them up. Instead, they turned them over in the bushes to keep dry, hid the paddles, shouldered the pack-baskets, and led the way down a trail.

"What are we going to do when we get to the West Branch?" Syd demanded. "Swim?"

"Hope not—I can't swim," Joe answered.



Lily Pad Pond—Doubletop Mountain in Background

"Is that true?" Spider asked.

"Sure it's true."

"You've been running rapids all your life, and you can't swim? What would you do if you upset?"

"About what the feller who could swim would do," Joe smiled. "Hang on ter the canoe or drown. But I kind o' made it a policy a good many years back not ter upset. It saves speculation."

The trail very soon came up alongside of the Sourdnahunk stream, and for three or four miles it followed the right bank of that noisy and beautiful little river, which goes tumbling down over great slabs of rock, and flattens out into deep brown trout pools, and roars and whispers and chatters to itself. At last they heard a roar ahead, through the trees, louder than any of the others, and came to the final plunge of the stream where it goes foaming and bubbling into the West Branch. The trees opened out, there was the sunlight of a clearing ahead, and a moment later they stepped from the forest out upon the rocky beach of the Penobscot.

Bennie looked a trifle disappointed. "It—it isn't so big as I thought it was," he said.

"It'll float a canoe," Joe answered.

The West Branch at this point is perhaps one hundred and fifty feet wide, and flows quietly along between gravel and stony beaches upon which the four-foot pulp logs have lodged everywhere.

"Looks as if a flood had hit somebody's woodpile," Spider suggested.

Out in midstream, too, they could see logs bobbing

along on the current, on their way to the mills far below, and watching them a moment, they realized that this current was much more powerful than it looked at first.

Meanwhile Joe and Frank were dragging two canoes out of the bushes. As the boys put them in the water, and stowed the dunnage, the guides went back into the woods and reappeared with four paddles and two long spruce poles, shod with iron points. They looked like vaulting poles.

"What's the big idea? Going to harpoon sword-fish?" Bennie inquired.

"We kinder thought you might like ter git home agin ter-morrer," Joe replied.

Frank laughed. "We have to pole back up the rapids," he said. "They're too swift to paddle up."

Bennie and Spider now took the bow paddles, with the guides, of course, in the sterns, and the two canoes pushed out into the current and swung downstream.

They had gone but a short distance when the water ahead began to boil and swirl, and the guides ordered Bennie and Spider to take their paddles out. A moment later, and the current took the canoes in charge; there was nothing for the guides to do but steer.

Joe went ahead, and Frank followed him.

"Joe can read water the way another man reads a book," Frank said to Spider. "He's been on this river 'most fifty years. He's poled up it in pitch-black night. I've only been on it five years, so I just get by, and that's all."

"Five years, and just get by!" Spider exclaimed.

"No wonder Bennie and I upset when we tried to go through rapids the first time!"

He sat up in the bow and observed every motion Joe made in the canoe ahead, and tried to guess from the look of the water where he would steer his course. But half the time Joe went over just the places he had decided weren't the best ones!

"I give it up," he called back to Frank. "I can't tell why you folks go where you do. Joe just went so close to a big rock he almost hit it."

"Sure," Frank laughed. "I'm going to, too. You watch, now."

The canoe shot in close to this rock, which stuck up out of the water, and, just as it got there, Frank swung it around several points with a turn of the wrist, and it went sliding smooth as a toboggan down a long run of swift water.

"See?" he called. "There's a kind of dead water behind that rock. You can steer in it easy, and set your canoe right down this chute. It's pickin' out places like that, and tellin' how much free water there is over a sunken rock by the way it acts, and such things, that we call readin' water. Takes a heap o' practice."

Meanwhile the canoe was traveling along twice as fast as any one could paddle, with pulp logs dancing down the current beside it, and the other canoe dancing down ahead. The motion was as soft and easy, though, as skis in deep snow.

"Wow!" came back the voice of Bennie over the hiss of the rapids; "this is the life!"

Now they shot out again into still water, and for a mile or two they paddled down the calm river, between banks of tall, beautiful trees, and ahead of them a great blue heron kept rising and flying a few hundred feet, and alighting only to rise and fly again as they drew near. Some wild ducks were swimming in the stream as they came around one bend. In almost every stretch of the river a big kingfisher was perched over the water, watching for prey. It was easy paddling, for the gentle current took them along.

Then they had swift water again, then more calm. But after four miles the guides shot the canoes to the bank and ordered everybody out.

"Can't we shoot 'em?" Bennie asked.

"Abol Falls? It ain't done—not intentional," Joe grinned.

"How long is the carry?"

"'Bout half a mile."

"I'm going to take the canoe!" Bennie declared.

"Well, far be it from me ter interpose any objections," said Joe.

Bennie stood the paddles up handy, and then attempted to heave the nineteen-foot canoe up on to his shoulders. He got it nearly up, but it twisted out of his hand and started down. Joe and Frank sprang and caught it in time to save a crash.

"Better lean it up on a limb," Frank suggested.

"But how'll I learn that way?"

"Better learn on a smaller boat."

Bennie took his advice, and raised the bow first, propping it on a tree limb so he could step under.

Then he inserted the paddles under the cross braces and over his shoulders, and raised the whole canoe up level.

"Wow!" came his voice from underneath; "I'll say this thing weighs a couple of pounds and three ounces!"

"It'll weigh six ounces more in half a mile," Joe told him.

Spider, not to be outdone, got the other canoe on to his shoulders, and the two Scouts started down the rough path, full of roots and rocks, staggering under their burdens.

After they had gone not more than two or three hundred yards, Bennie's voice came from underneath his canoe.

"Am I most there?"

"Not half-way yet," Frank laughed.

"Want me to take a turn?" said Joe.

"No, sir! I'm going to tote this boat all the way! But tell me when it's half-way. I gotter rest a minute. These paddles are cutting my shoulder blades in two."

"They've cut mine in two already," Spider gasped from under his load.

At the half-way point the Scouts let the bows tip upward and slid them over a tree limb by the path, and then eased the sterns to the ground. They stepped from under, their faces streaming with sweat, and began to rub their shoulder blades.

"Not sore, be yer?" Joe asked.

"Oh, no! I feel fine," said Bennie. "Say, how do

you do it without sawing your shoulder blades clean through?"

"I got corns on my collar bones," Joe grinned.

"Well, I haven't," Frank confessed. "Some days before night it seems as if I couldn't carry the old boat another foot. Let me show you what I do."

He took Bennie's sweater from the pack, and wadded it over the Scout's shoulders. Then he did the same with Spider's. This wad of sweater acted as a pad when they once more inserted the paddles and lifted the canoes.

And again they staggered on. It seemed to both boys that the trip would never end, though. They gritted their teeth, and vowed they wouldn't set the canoes down to rest again, but when they finally came down to the water once more Bennie's knees were shaking, and Spider's arms ached so that he had to ask for help to lower the canoe to the ground.

Again they wiped their dripping faces, and rubbed their shoulders.

"Well, we did it!" Bennie exclaimed. "By Jiminy, though, I'll never say a guide doesn't do a day's work!"

"I'd rather tote a canoe than set all day watchin' a feller swishin' a fly around in a pond, jest the same," Joe reflected. "Fishin' is all right when yer don't make a religion of it. I hed ter paddle a feller around onct who got mad at me if I even remarked it was a pleasant day. 'Twa'n't what you'd call a real sociable time."

Bennie and Spider were now quite willing to let

Bill and Syd paddle bow down the next stretch of calm river. Soon they came to a spot where two streams flowed into the West Branch, only a hundred feet apart.

"See them streams?" Joe pointed. "One's Katahdin stream, that flows past number one cuttin', where Sam White tempered the eel grass; and t'other's Abol stream. Great campin' place between 'em. There's a path starts here and goes up to the one we took up the Slide, and right off the mouth o' them streams I seen some pretty nice trout caught—two- and three-pounders."

"Would you consider it an unsociable act, Uncle Joe, if we fished here a few moments?" Bennie asked. "You may talk all you like."

"Not ef you ketch somethin'," Joe answered, his face perfectly sober.

The canoes were run up on the bank, and the boys got out and jointed their rods, casting from the bank into the river where the cold clear waters of the two mountain streams poured in. One after another they got a strike. They shouted with excitement, and Bill and Syd got their lines tangled together, and Joe sat smoking his pipe and grinning. But before long Spider had landed a two-pound trout, and Bennie had one almost as large, and Syd had a one-pounder, and Bill, much to his surprise, was fighting what he declared was a whale. The rest stopped fishing to watch the battle and shout advice. The reel sang, and then Bill pulled in, and then the fish ran it out again. The rod bent double, and Bill in his excitement nearly fell

into the water. But at last the weary fish was alongside the bank, and Bennie jumped in nearly up to his waist and scooped it to the bank with his hands.

It was a speckled beauty! Bill held it proudly up, and Frank said: "Three pounds, if it's an ounce. We'll have a pretty good lunch to-day."

The next excitement was the running of Little Pockwockamus Falls. This was a short but lively rapids, and then the guides ran the canoes in under the shelter of some big rocks and driftwood, and hauled them out. Below, from the river, the boys could hear a loud and steady thunder.

"Goin' ter carry this time?" Joe asked Bennie.

"Every other time—it's only fair to you," Bennie retorted, picking up the pack-basket.

The carry was around Big Pockwockamus Falls, where the river thundered and boiled down over a series of rock steps,—a great, foamy turmoil of water.

"Anybody ever run those falls?" Syd asked.

"Well," Joe answered, "Fred Pitman—he's an old river man—he said onct, 'If I'm drownded, yer don't need to look fer my body in Big Pockwockamus. Wherever 'tis, 'twon't be thar."

"I guess they don't, Syd," Bennie laughed.

"Oh, one or two has tried it," Joe said, as he slid the canoe into the smooth water below the falls. "But they never wrote no book about it afterwards."

The canoes soon came into a wider space, where the river spread over shallows, and they had a splendid view of Katahdin, with Abol Slide like a great white scar down its side.

Joe looked at the mountain, and a reminiscent twinkle came into his eyes.

"Did I ever tell yer how I give that mountain away onct?" he asked Bennie.

"No," said Bennie. "You didn't. I guess you were ashamed to."

"No, I wa'n't ashamed," Joe answered. "A man hadn't ought ter be ashamed o' bein' generous, had he? 'Twas a fine day like this one, and I was takin' a lady from Buffalo down the river. We come out into this dead water here, and she looked over and seen old Katahdin standin' up thar big and pretty, jest the way he is now, and she sorter sighed, and said: 'My, I never seen nothin' so beautiful in my whole life as that thar mountain. I wisht I hed it home in my back yard in Buffalo.'

"Well, I was feelin' kind o' generous that mornin', so I said, 'Madam, take it, it's yourn. It's the biggest pile o' rocks we got in the State o' Maine, but you kin have it. I'll get the boys together this winter, and we'll pile up another one.'"

"I call that real kind of you," Bennie chuckled.

"But the mountain appears to be there still," Bill put in. "What's the matter?"

"Yes," Joe drawled, "it's still thar. Fact is, she's been sort o' dilatory about takin' it."

They now passed a big camp on the river bank, with a long row of log cabins, and then pulled up on the shore to cook lunch, which consisted chiefly of fresh fried trout.

Joe watched Bennie and Spider eat for a while, and

then he remarked, "Yer sore shoulders don't seem ter interfere none with yer appetites."

"Say, I could pick up a motor boat after eating one of these trout!" Bennie laughed.

After lunch they went on downstream for two miles more, through Pockwockamus dead water, carried an eighth of a mile around a thirty-foot fall, into Debsconeag dead water, and paddled for a while in that big lake, for it looks far more like a lake than a river. But they liked the river better, and before dark carried back around the falls and up again toward the camp.

Joe found a spot on the bank, close to a clear brook, where he could make a fire against an upright boulder which would reflect the heat. Facing this boulder and the fire three of the boys built bough beds, while Spider went fishing for more trout for supper, and Frank got the rest of the meal ready. Spider caught only two trout, which were not enough for a meal, but there was plenty of other food, and they sat around their fire eating and laughing, while the river ran by at their feet, and a loon called in the distance, and a barred owl hooted in the woods.

When supper was over and cleared away, the boys demanded a story.

"Tell us a river story," Bennie demanded.

"Tell us a bear story," cried Syd.

"Tell us any old story," Spider laughed.

Joe poked the hot ash down into his pipe.

"Did I ever tell yer about Sam White and the porkapine?"

"No," said the boys. "Was that the same Sam White who tempered the eel grass?"

"*The* same. He was a sorter resourceful feller, Sam was, and it didn't pay ter monkey with Sam's traps. Well, yer see, it was this way ——"

CHAPTER XXII

The Tale of the Porcupine, or Sam White's Revenge

"SAM was settin' quite a few traps that winter, and kind o' calc'latin' ter lay in some pelts agin a rainy day, as yer might say. Pelts was bringin' a good price that year, and Sam had his eye on a place whar he'd seen martin tracks, and set his traps accordin'. 'Course, he was pretty busy around camp, shoein' hosses and grindin' axes and sich-like ——"

"And tempering eel grass," Bennie cut in.

"No, he wa'n't temperin' no eel grass that winter. Well, ez I said 'fore I was interrupted, he was pretty busy, and couldn't get out around ter all his traps every day, but that didn't worry him much, 'cept as he was afeared a bobcat might eat up what he'd cotched. He got around every few days, and he was havin' luck with foxes and a couple o' otter and some mink, but so fer he hadn't cotched no martin.

"Well, one day he come to whar he'd set a trap fer a martin, and he seen thar'd been a martin in the trap all right, 'cause thar was the tracks leadin' up to it, and none goin' away, and blood and fur on the iron, but thar wa'n't no martin. More'n that, thar wa'n't no bobcat track, neither ——"

"Might have been a cat owl," Syd suggested.

"Sam, he thought o' that, too. But he reckoned a cat owl couldn't pull a martin clear out of a trap. Anyways, he decided to do some investigatin', which same he done. He swung out about fifty feet or more, and tromped a circle clean around that trap, and, sure 'nough, he come on tracks, but they wa'n't bobcat tracks nor cat-owl tracks. They was bear-paw tracks."

"A bear, eh?"

"I didn't say so. I said bear-paw tracks. Bear-paw snowshoes, they was. The feller that wore 'em hed taken 'em off in the thick scrub, and come on foot ter the trap, and then he'd scooped snow into his footprints and covered 'em all up careful as he went back ter his snowshoes.

"Well, seein's how most fellers in the woods had bear-paw snowshoes, that wa'n't much of a clew, and when Sam follered the tracks back, they led right into the tote road and he lost 'em. Sam took the size of 'em, though, pretty careful, and when he got back ter camp he didn't say nothin', but did some snoopin'. Thar wa'n't a pair in camp that fitted. Sam was kind o' glad o' that, too. He was most ginerally a peace-lovin' feller, quiet as the West Branch in Debsconeag dead water, and he didn't want no trouble with anybody in his own camp. 'Sides, it ain't very pleasant ter be livin' in the same bunk house with a skunk ——"

"But I thought this was a porcupine story," Bennie interrupted once more.

"Thar he goes agin!" Joe complained. "Always wantin' the top o' the mountain afore he gits thar! Hold yer hosses, son. The porkapine's comin', several

of 'em, in fact. Sam, realizin' it wa'n't none o' his gang that had swiped his martin, sot about thinkin' out who it could be. Thar were two-three fellers on the next cuttin' who trapped some, an' Sam took a snoopin' trip over that way and measured up their tracks, and some more tracks around thar. Funny thing was, he found half a dozen pairs o' shoes that fitted pretty close. Any one on 'em might 'a' made the tracks around his martin trap. Seemed like somebody thar had a kind o' model he built snowshoes on.

" Sam he got ter thinkin' it over some more, tryin' ter figger out how he was goin' ter decide which o' the half dozen got his martin, when somebody come along and told about a feller who was livin' up the tote road toward Sourdnahunk Lake, in a cabin he'd kind o' patched up that stood in an old lumber camp. This feller had come down out o' the north, and was trappin' 'round O J I and Doubletop. Well, Sam he thinks maybe if he'd got ter take on somebody fer a row, it might be easier ter pick out a lone feller than a feller who was surrounded, ez yer might say, by fifty-nine huskies. So he took another little snoopin' trip up the tote road, and give this feller's tracks the once over. Sure 'nough, they fitted, too. Then Sam walked right on past the cabin, real bold like, hopin' fer a look at the feller. He seen he'd split some new cedar shingles and got the roof o' the old cabin all patched up, and they was a lot o' skins stretched on the wall, but there wa'n't no martin. Sam, he whistled, but nobody answered, so he walked right up and looked in. He didn't see no martin skin inside,

neither, though he poked around some bit, bein' careful ter put everythin' back jest so. Still, he wa'n't convinced. The skin not bein' thar showed ter Sam the feller'd hid it. He wanted a look at the miscreant.

"Well, comin' back down the tote road, he met him. He said 'Howdy,' and the feller said 'Howdy,' and Sam asked him real perlite like how's the trappin'? And he jest kind o' grunted, and went on, and Sam didn't like that. Sam was a sociable feller, and he sized this other feller up as kind o' low down.

"'I'll betcher he took my martin,' Sam said ter himself, which seems kind o' foolish, bettin' with yerself, 'cause any way it goes yer bound ter lose. But Sam couldn't prove nothin', and he was a just man, and he didn't know what ter do. So he kind o' brooded on the problem, feelin' sure all the time it were this feller who'd stolen his martin, but knowin' he didn't hev no case. And it come March, and the snow began ter get soft, and it come late March, and one day there come a south wind and a thaw, and it began ter look ez if pretty soon the cuttin' would be over fer the season. And the bears come creepin' out and rubbed their eyes, and the porkapines come around the camp lookin' fer pork rinds, and then Sam got his idee ——"

"Hooray! The porcupines at last!" Bennie cried.

"Yes, Sam see a lean porkapine, lookin' ez if he hadn't et a square meal since Thanksgivin', chewin' at a piece o' old harness, and he got an idee. He knew a porkapine ain't at all pertikler 'bout what it eats, and he knew it likes anything salty. I see a porkapine my-

self eat up an ax helve 'cause it had got salty from the sweat of a man's hands. I seen one eat up the sleeve of a woolen sweater onct. And Sam knew that 'specially in spring after a hard winter in the woods the porkapines'd be thick around a cabin. So Sam he took a big can and filled it most half full o' salt, and then he waited till it wore evident there wore goin' ter be one gosh-awful downpour o' rain before mornin', and then he toted that can on his back, hid in a pack-basket, up into the woods close to this feller's cabin, and he hid whar he could observe what was goin' on, and waited till he see the feller go out. Then Sam filled the can up with water, and dissolved the salt into a nice rich brine, and climbed up and poured it all over that feller's roof, especially right on the part o' the roof over his bunk. After which, Sam packed his empty can back ter camp, and got back late fer supper, but with a smile on his face."

"Did it rain?" Syd demanded.

"Sam wore an excellent prognosticator," Joe went on. "The rain didn't come till about three in the mornin'. By that time the porkapines had et more'n twenty-one holes through this feller's roof, thirteen of 'em over his bunk. Maybe he heard 'em on the roof, but a tired trapper don't get up in the middle o' the night ter shoo a porkapine off the roof. He didn't suspicion nothin'. But when the rain come he woke up all right. That rain come down like the West Branch over Big Pockwockamus, and about half the water that hit the roof come through onto his bed. He got out o' bed, and moved across the room, but it

come down on him thar. No matter whar he crawled, it kep' comin' down on him. He was livin' under a sieve, as yer might say. There wa'n't nothin' he could do in the dark ter mend the roof. He jest had ter set in a puddle and cuss them porkapines.

"The rain woke Sam up, too. He says it were the prettiest sound he ever heerd, and he couldn't hardly go ter sleep agin fer listenin' ter it, and thinkin' how the water wore comin' down on that feller's bunk."

"But he didn't get his martin skin," said Bill, seriously.

"No, that's a fact," Joe mused. "Still, thar's a powerful lot o' satisfaction in jest gettin' square."

"And he wasn't even sure it was this fellow who stole it," Syd added.

"Oh, yes, he were, really," said Joe. "Sam could tell by the look of a feller, if he got a real good peep at him. And he allers said this feller looked exactly like a feller that hed stole a martin out of another man's trap. Sam wa'n't no lawyer, but he was a prime jedge o' character."

"I don't see how he could tell that by just looking at a man," Bill persisted.

"It were a bit unusual, I confess," Joe said, with a sly wink at Bennie. "But you'll hev ter admit that a feller who can temper eel grass ain't no common man."

"It's a good scheme, anyhow," Bennie declared. "Gee, I wish we had porcupines at home!"

"What would you do?" Frank asked.

"I'd pour brine on the schoolhouse roof!" laughed Bennie.

"Well, they can't hurt our roof to-night," said Spider, "seeing that we haven't got any. I move we switch off the stars, and turn in. Bennie's got a hard day to-morrow, with a canoe to carry around two falls."

"Sure," Bennie grinned. "And say, Uncle Joe, better sleep on your ax. The porcupines might eat the handle."

"That ain't such a joke as it sounds," Joe answered, carefully placing the ax under a stone before he kicked off his boots and rolled up in his blanket for the night.

The last sounds were the groans and "Ouches!" of Spider and Bennie, as their lame shoulders hit the earth.

CHAPTER XXIII

In Which Syd Turns Out to Be the Hero

THE next morning, while Joe and Frank were building the fire and starting breakfast, the four boys peeled off their clothes, dashed down the bank, and, with shouts of pretended agony at the cold water, —it wasn't all pretended, either,—splashed through the shallows and swam to midstream and back. Syd, who had learned swimming from an instructor in a tank in New York, could beat the other three easily, for he knew the racing crawl and went along on top of the water with his face buried and the foam churning.

The guides stopped work to watch.

"Syd, thar, seems ter be quite some otter," Joe remarked, as the four emerged dripping and pink on the bank.

"Why don't you and Frank have a bath? Makes you feel fine!" Bennie cried.

"That ice-water make me feel fine?" Joe retorted. "Say, the only cold bath I like is one that scalds me."

"Well, they say everybody's afraid of *something*," Bennie declared. "You guides are afraid of cold water."

"Cold water wa'n't never made to apply externally," Joe grinned. "Come and git some hot coffee 'fore yer have a chill."

The boys decided at breakfast that what they wanted to do that day was to go back upstream to the mouth of the Sourdnahunk, unload the canoes, and then practice themselves for a while running the first rapids below. Joe and Frank looked pretty doubtful at this proposition, but said little.

The first carry that morning was much longer than on the down trip, because the guides couldn't pole back up Little Pockwockamus, and the canoes had to be toted around both falls. Bennie and Spider insisted on starting with the boats, and, once started, they were too proud to give up. By resting twice on the way they got them to the river again, above the falls, and straightened their aching backs and shoulders. But they let the guides carry around Abol Falls.

When they came to the foot of the lower rapids, the guides, who had been hugging the left bank to keep out of the current as much as possible, put the canoes across to the right bank, and ordered one boy out of each boat.

"Can't pole more'n one passenger up here," Joe said. "The smaller he is, the better."

"Sounds almost as if he was hinting for you and me to walk," Bennie remarked to Spider. "Is there any path, Uncle Joe?"

"You'll find a tote road up the bank, unless it's moved itself pretty lately."

Spider and Bennie reluctantly climbed out, and walked up the dim, almost unused road on top of the bank, while the two guides pushed into the stream again. Between the trees the Scouts could see them

lay down their paddles as the rapids were reached, pick up the long iron-shod spruce poles, stand up in the stern, and begin to plunge the poles down through the water and push. The bottom of the river in the rapids was nothing but a stone heap, and the iron spikes on the poles rang and rattled and scraped as the boatmen plunged them down. Sometimes the poles found a grip near the surface, sometimes they went down eight feet, sometimes they slipped off a rock and the canoe wabbled and the guide had to keep his feet and find a new firm hold for his pole and prevent the bow of the canoe from being swung around broadside by the rushing current, all in the fraction of a second.

"Oh, golly! I wish we were trying that!" Bennie cried. "Must be exciting!"

"And look at old Uncle Joe walking right past Frank, and Frank twenty years younger than he is, and stronger, too," said Spider. "That's because he can read water better."

The Scouts could hear the ring of the steel-shod poles above the roaring of the rapids, even after the tote road receded a long distance from the bank. But they didn't see the canoes again until they came out on the beach at the mouth of the Sourdnahunk. Both the guides were paddling now, coming along the still water to ferry Bennie and Spider to the other side.

They unloaded the canoes, and ate lunch. Then the boys again declared they wanted to run a rapids themselves.

"Not with me in the canoe, yer don't!" Joe said emphatically. "I ain't no otter."

"I ain't exactly lookin' for a bath myself," Frank added.

"Well, you and Frank go down ahead in one canoe, with Bill and the poles, see?" Bennie suggested. "Then Spider or I'll take the other canoe through, and then we'll change passengers, and pole back, and the other one'll come through. You just wait at the bottom to pick up the pieces."

"If you don't mind, I guess I'll go with Joe and Frank," said Syd. "I'd rather wait a trip and see how good you are!"

"Ho, I'm not afraid!" said Bill.

"I guess if Frank and Joe are, I don't mind being," Syd answered.

"That's right, son, yer're skeered in good company," said Joe.

The guides were pretty reluctant to let Spider and Bennie take a canoe through. If anything happened, they said, they would get the blame. They only consented at last, because the boys could swim so well, and these rapids were easy ones, and, as Bennie pointed out, the only way you could learn was to try a thing for yourself.

The four boys took off all their clothes except their underwear, even Syd, because, as he said, he might have to go swimming after the rest of 'em. He and the guides got in one canoe and went ahead, while Bennie steered Spider and Bill in the second. Bennie had a bad moment when the bow of the canoe tilted

over the first dip of the rapids and the whole boat suddenly seemed to be grabbed by an unseen force and pulled out of his control. But he quickly found that he could control it, and did his best to keep in the same path Joe was taking ahead of him. Joe, however, was a hundred feet ahead, and it wasn't easy to tell, in the rushing water, which seemed to change and shift, which boil he had gone over, which current he had followed. Once the canoe scraped her bottom. Once, trying to hug close to a rock as Joe had done, he bumped the bow and almost lost control and swung broadside before he could, by tremendous back paddling, get straightened out again. But he did get straightened out, and a minute later came sliding down the last drop into calm water, with a loud cheer from his crew.

"Wow! that's fun!" Bennie cried. "Now comes the real job. I got to pole her back. You'll have to walk, Spider."

"Walk? Say, how can I walk without my shoes?"

"Oh, it isn't far, and there aren't many blackberry bushes. Come on—out you get!"

Poor Spider was landed on the bank, and Bennie, taking a pole from the other canoe, stood up in the stern to push back up the rapids.

"If you swing broadside, don't try to get her back," Joe cautioned. "Sit down, drag your pole, let her swing all the way around, and come back."

"Aye, aye, skipper," Bennie shouted, and began to pole.

He got up the first incline all right, though those in

the other canoe could see his muscles straining. But in the next incline, a fairly long, deep, powerful chute of water, he had the canoe only half-way up when his pole, already bent with the strain as he leaned upon it, slipped off the submerged rock it was resting on, and plunged deep down. Bennie, of course, went with it. He almost went out of the canoe, which tipped dangerously, and began to swing around broadside to the current. Bennie got to his feet again, made a stab downward with the pole for a fresh anchorage, and, forgetting Joe's advice, tried with all his strength to push the stern around so the canoe was headed upstream again. But he saw he couldn't do it from that side, and he shifted his feet and lifted his pole to plunge it down on the other side. In that instant the current caught the boat, swung it full broadside on, and of course tipped it. Bennie, being on his feet, with a long, heavy pole in his hands, staggered as the canoe rocked, and that was the last straw. Over she went!

Both boys went under, and the canoe passed over their heads. Bennie, as he came up, grabbed the gunwale and went down with the canoe. But Bill missed it. He was just taking a stroke to steer himself so he would head downstream when a pulp log, four feet long and almost a foot thick, bobbing down in the current, hit him square in the chest, knocked his wind out,—and that was the last he remembered.

Those in the canoe below, however, had seen what happened. As Bill went under again when the log hit him, Syd cried, " Steady—I'm jumping," and dove

out of the canoe. Three strokes brought him to the foot of the rapids, and he held himself there. Bennie went by, clinging to the overturned canoe. But Syd's eyes were fixed on the water. An instant later, held up by the current just under the surface, he saw Bill's body, and with a lightning-quick surface dive he grabbed for it, caught one of Bill's arms, came up, got a fresh hold under the shoulders, so Bill's head was out of water, and struck out for the shore.

By this time Spider, who had plunged down the bank as the canoe upset, was out into the stream up to his neck, and met Sydney, helping to rush Bill ashore. They turned him face down, and lifted him by the middle to get the water out of his lungs, and then they were preparing to induce respiration as Syd and Spider had both learned to do in first-aid courses, when Bill's eyes opened, he gasped and choked, and then raised his arms weakly and muttered, "I'm a' right."

The guides had now towed Bennie and the other canoe ashore, and caught the pole as it drifted past near the canoe. Bennie rushed over to Bill.

"You all right, Bill?" he cried. "Oh, gee, I didn't mean to! Is he all right, Spider?"

"Just got his wind knocked out by that old pulp log, I guess," Spider said. "He wouldn't be all right, though, if Syd hadn't got him before he'd been under more'n three seconds. That was the prettiest surface dive I ever saw, Syd."

"Well, I just *had* to do it," Syd answered. "Didn't have time to do any thinking."

"*I've* had time ter do some thinkin'," Joe now said.

"I've thought we've hed about enough experimentin'. Git back ter yore clothes, you two"—to Bennie and Spider—"and Frank and me'll pole these two fellers back. Come on—beat it!"

Joe spoke sharply, as they had never heard him speak before, and Bennie and Spider didn't wait to obey.

The guides put Bill in the dry canoe, tipped the water out of the other, and poled back to the mouth of the Sourdnahunk. Here the boys spread their underclothes on a hot, dry rock in the sun to dry, and wrapped poor Bill, who was still weak and shaky, up in two blankets and laid him under the shade of a tree to rest.

Joe looked at him, and gave him a pat on the head.

"My fault," he said. "Teaches me a lesson. Next time I guide, I'm goin' ter guide."

"No, it was my fault," Bennie declared, penitently. "I ought to have sat right down and let the canoe swing clear 'round, the way you told me. But I thought I could get her headed upstream again."

"You thought you knew more about polin' up the West Branch than you did," Joe said, dryly. "And you found it don't pay to shift sides in midstream. Can't say ez you didn't learn nothin', but it come near bein' a costly edication."

"But how did you learn? How does anybody learn?" asked Spider.

"They begin whar they ain't quite so much water," Joe answered.

After nearly two hours they started up the trail for



HELLO! WHO'S TAKING MY PICTURE?

home. Bill's load was divided among the rest, and they traveled slowly because he was still a bit shaky and dazed from the shock. The sun had just set when they reached Lily Pad Pond, and the mountains stood up around it like great amethysts, mirrored in the dark, still water. Across the lake a deer stood on the edge, drinking. A loon was crying, and two barred owls.

"My, this is peaceful and beautiful!" Spider exclaimed. "That old loon's call is the loveliest noise I know!"

They paddled quickly across the pond, and the guides took the canoes while the three boys staggered under the rest of the luggage, over to Kidney Pond. As they relaunched in what now seemed to them like their own lake, they heard the dinner gong at camp.

"That's one sound that beats the loon's call," Bennie declared.

"Say, if you went under three times, and they fished you up chock full o' water and bailed you out, I reckon you'd ask fer grub when you come to," Joe remarked.

"Well, I'm kind of hungry myself," Bill piped up, loyally.

"And the only one o' yer who's got a real right ter grub is Syd, here," Joe continued. "Syd was afraid ter run the rapids with you experienced skippers, but he wa'n't afraid ter jump overboard, I noticed, when yer needed him."

"For goodness sake, forget that!" Syd exclaimed.

"If anybody says anything about it in camp, I'm going home."

"I won't say anything about it, but, gosh! I won't forget it!" cried Bill. "I won't *ever* forget it!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Two Men Lost on Katahdin in a Storm—Bennie Hikes All Night to Spread the Alarm

"WELL, boys, what yer calc'latin' ter do to-day?" Joe asked the next morning, as he brought a load of stove wood to the cabin while the four were dressing.

"I'm calculating to borrow a little horse liniment and rub it on my shoulders," said Spider.

"I didn't know but I'd take a little jog up Katahdin by Hunt's trail," Bennie grinned.

"What you goin' ter do, Bill?"

"Sit around!" Bill replied.

"Glad one o' ye's honest," Joe remarked, dropping the wood. "Syd, if yer goin' ter watch them beavers you'd better plan ter do it to-night. We're fixin' fer some bad weather."

"What does the morning paper say about the weather, Uncle Joe?" asked Bennie.

"The papers didn't come this mornin'," Joe answered solemnly. "The baggage man fergot to throw 'em off the train as it was passin' down the tote road."

Spider and Bennie walked four miles through the forest that morning, to Slaughter Pond, to try the fishing there, but Syd stayed in camp with Bill, who still felt a bit unsteady. They got in a canoe and

paddled down to the beaver dam, where Syd ripped off a foot or more of the top, and then drifted lazily around the pond, talking.

"Funny thing," Syd said, "I can talk to you, Bill; but at school, where I go in New York, I never seem to talk to any of the fellows."

"I guess we kind of hit it off, the way Spider and Bennie do," Bill answered. "Gee, I wish we went to the same school! The fellers at home laugh at me when I get going sometimes about—well, about skiing, for instance. Skiing's a whole lot more'n just going down-hill. It's getting out into the woods when they're all sort of soft and quiet with snow, like—like a church; and it's feeling yourself pushing into the air when you slide, so the air's like a hand on your face trying to shove you back, and you—you sort of *fight* with the air pressure, and lick the life out of it! But the other fellers guy me if I talk about it."

"Sure—I know," Syd nodded. "We had to get up and give talks once in school, and I told about watching birds in Central Park, and the fellows all guyed me. They called me 'Birdie' for a long while afterwards. You and Spider wouldn't have laughed, and Bennie—well, Bennie would have laughed, but he wouldn't have really meant it. I wish I lived in Southmead!"

"Well, anyhow, you can come up with your uncle vacations. You come up next winter, anyhow, and see me, and we'll go skiing!" Bill declared.

"You'd better not say it if you don't mean it!"

Sometimes finding a friend is as wonderful an ad-

venture as finding a gold mine or a new continent. At any rate, it makes you quite as happy. Syd had lived a lonely boyhood, without many friends. He had been too shy and sensitive to make them. His day alone with Bill, floating around the pond in the canoe, was one of the happiest of his life, and of Bill's life, too. They were surprised when they heard Bennie and Spider hallooing to them from the shore and holding up a string of trout and shouting, "Do you want any of these for supper, or don't you?"

And after supper, by the light of a pale and hazy moon, they paddled off again, alone, and sneaked into their blind by the beaver dam, and Syd's day was completed by a sight of four beavers working busily at the job of repairing the damage he had done earlier in the day. There didn't seem to be any boss on this job, however. All four beavers worked,—"worked like beavers," as Bill put it,—dragging back sticks and plastering in grass and mud between them.

And the next day, when Bennie woke up and looked out of the cabin, he exclaimed, "Uncle Joe's spell of weather!" All day long it rained, a fine drizzle. The clouds were very low, so low that as you looked at Katahdin or Doubletop you could see only the very lowest slopes. A stranger could not have told there were any mountains there. The boys put on their ponchos and tried fishing, but it was rather sticky and wet work, and they soon got discouraged. Syd found some books in the camp library, Spider started writing up a diary of the trip, Bennie went off to the guides' cabin to listen to the guides swapping yarns, and Bill

got a birch board from the camp lumber shed, and a spoke shave, and tried to work out a canoe paddle. Everybody in camp, to tell the truth, was rather bored. A rainy day in the woods can be extremely long.

"What's the prospect for to-morrow?" somebody called to Joe, as he passed the cabin.

"Same thing," he answered.

The boys groaned.

"Gee whiz, and only a few days more to stay!"

"I spoke ter the feller who makes the weather," said Joe, "but he was feelin' sorter cantankerous, as yer might say, and plumb refused ter make any change in his plans. He's plannin' about a three-day rain."

That night, long after supper, the camp guests heard the telephone ring, and the voice of Ray, answering it. It seemed odd to hear a telephone here in the woods, but when the paper company built their road to Charlie's place, they strung wires to the end of the road, and Ray ran a wire the eight miles down from Charlie's to his camp, fastening it on trees.

He came into the camp living-room a few minutes later looking very grave.

"Two young fellers lost on the mountain," he said.

"What's that?"

"Who are they?"

"Did they go up a day like *this?*"

"How long have they been lost?"

"One at a time!" Ray exclaimed. "Seems there were five of 'em come in by motor to Charlie's place, and hiked down to the cabin on Abol Slide yesterday. Three of 'em didn't want to climb to-day, but the

other two did, because they couldn't wait over. Near as I can make out from Charlie, they all started up this mornin', but three of 'em turned back to the cabin. The other two kept on. When it got late, and they hadn't come down again, one of these other three run all the way up the tote road to Charlie's, 'cause it was the only place he knowed about, and left the others at the cabin. Seems these two that went up didn't take no blankets nor grub."

"Well, surely, they can find the cabin again and get dried before much can happen to them," one of the guests said.

"I guess you've never been on the Katahdin tableland in a cloud," Ray answered. "If they ain't found Abol Slide by now, they're in a bad way. How about it, boys? You were up there in a cloud."

"I'll say they are!" cried Bennie.

"They are if they haven't got a compass, and don't know the mountain," Spider said. "If you'll lend us an oil lantern, Ray, Bennie and I'll start for the cabin now. My candle lantern won't last the trip."

"I guess several of us will start," Ray answered. "I don't want to send out an alarm if it ain't necessary. They may be down by now. Just a bare chance. If they ain't, I want somebody to send back to telephone every camp we can reach around the mountain."

"I'll come back!" cried Bill.

Ray shook his head. "No, you and Syd stay here to-night. No need for you youngsters to get into it yet. Come on, Bennie, and you, too, Spider. Anybody else volunteer?"

Most of the men present were middle-aged, city business men, to whom a night trip on foot, in the rain, over the soaking-wet tote road for eight miles, and then three more up the mountain to the cabin, didn't appeal. It was too much for them to tackle. Only one volunteered, and Ray, after looking him over, decided he'd better wait till morning. So they went to the guides' cabin, and got Frank, Joe, and Indian Bill. Putting provisions, a first-aid kit, and blankets in their packs, they got two lanterns, full of oil, Bennie got his Alpine rope and coiled it around him under his poncho, Spider got his compass and a scout ax, and finally Ray produced three revolvers, to fire for signals. The guests all crowded on the cottage porches as the procession started into the dark and the rain, and the last Bennie and Spider saw was the disappointed faces of Syd and Bill, left behind.

"Do you s'pose they've got down by now?" Bennie asked Joe, as they sloshed and plodded behind the bobbing light of Ray's lantern along the wet and inky-black tote road.

"I hope so—I hope so," Joe answered. "What time did that feller leave Sewall's cabin—the one who run up ter Charlie's, Ray?"

"Charlie said he left at six."

"Whew! That's eighteen miles, most, in the dark —and he done it in less'n four hours! Some runner, that feller!"

"Charlie said he was all in. He's keepin' him there."

"Remember what I told you about findin' your way

down off Katahdin in a fog?" Frank asked the Scouts. "Pays to know your mountain."

"I'll say it does!" Bennie panted, as he dragged his feet out of the deep, black mud of the tote road and kept his pace behind Ray and Indian Bill, who were striding silently and rapidly along.

It seemed to the boys as if they would never complete the eight miles to the Abol path, but at last they reached it, and turned to the left for the final climb to the cabin. They went into the cloud almost at once. The lantern ahead grew foggy and dim. The air was damper than ever, and chilled their hands, though their bodies were sweating with the exertion. They were toiling now in silence, up the path which grew steeper and harder as they reached the first loose gravel of the slide.

"I didn't expect to be coming up here again," Spider gasped, between breaths.

"Not at one o'clock in the morning, anyhow—in a cloud and a rain," Bennie panted back.

As they reached the lookout plateau, and turned toward the cabin, they smelled wood smoke. A shout brought two young men, hardly more than boys, to the door. One look at their scared, anxious, tired faces showed that the lost climbers had not returned. They had a fire going in the stove, and some of their clothes drying by it, but they had no lantern.

Ray quickly got their story. They were college students, who had been at a camp on Moosehead. They had planned to take three days, before going home, to climb Katahdin. All five had got as far as

the Needle's Eye that morning before nine o'clock, but after one look at the plateau,—or, rather, at the vast cloud bank which hid it,—three of them had turned back, already soaking wet and cold. They expected the two who went on to be back in camp by mid-afternoon at the latest. When they hadn't returned at half-past five, the other three began to get scared, and the best runner in the party had started for Charlie's to get help. No, the two on the mountain had no compass nor blankets; nothing but sweaters, and a couple of cakes of sweet chocolate. No, they hadn't looked at any map—just asked somebody back at Greenville how to get there. Since dark the two left in camp had climbed as far up the Slide as they could in the dark, and yelled till they were so hoarse they couldn't yell any more.

Ray turned to Bennie and Spider.

"Which of you wants to go back to camp?" he asked.

"I do!"

"I do!"

"No need for both. H'm—you've got the first-aid kit, Spider. Well, Bennie, you go. Leave your rope and travel light. Take a lantern and one of these young fellers. Tell my wife to notify the superintendent of the paper company first,—she'll know,—and have 'em get out every available man around the mountain to-morrow morning. Then tell her to notify all the camps she can reach. Better have her tell the company to bring in a doctor to my camp, and hold him there, and another on the south side of the moun-

tain. Get some breakfast and come back with a can o' kerosene and your lantern. Now, which of you two fellers ——"

"Is it so serious as all that?" the two young chaps asked, their faces white in the lantern light.

"It's no picnic, bein' lost on Katahdin," Ray answered. "There's only two paths down on this side, and one on the east, and it's a thousand to one they missed 'em. If they did miss 'em, they've come down into a wilderness, and the wilderness just now ain't no place to be in without food or blankets. One of you fellers go along with Bennie and send a telegram breakin' the news as gentle as you can to the fathers of these boys."

"I'll go, Tommy; you're too tired," the taller young chap said. "Oh, my God, I don't know what to say to Jerry's mother!"

"Buck up, son!" Ray slapped him on the shoulder, when he saw the speaker was close to a breakdown. "If Jerry hasn't any father, wire the other boy's father, and let him tell Jerry's folks. Maybe we'll find 'em all right to-morrow mornin', as soon as the clouds lift and they can see where they're at. But it ain't right not to let their parents know, somehow."

"I—I'm all right," the young man said, gritting his teeth. "Only we ought to have *made* 'em come back with us."

"You said a true word then," Spider heard Joe mutter.

Bennie took off his rope and his pack, and led the way out of the cabin, followed by the collegian, who

was three or four years older, and two inches taller than he was. But it was Bennie who knew the way, and Bennie who tried to be cheerful and hopeful as they plodded wearily down the mountain and eight miles back over the soaked tote road. As Bennie had walked over ten miles already that night, at full speed, the last few miles of the return trip were all he could do. His feet were soaking wet, cold, heavy as lead. His eyes were almost closed with sleep, and he stumbled and nearly fell three or four times.

At last, however, they waded the Sourdnahunk, sloshed through the last mud, and reached the sleeping camp.

"No use trying to 'phone now," Bennie said,—"not till daylight. Here, come into our cabin and get your wet clothes off. I'll wake you when it's time."

He built up a roaring fire, while Syd and Bill woke up and listened to the news. Then he made the young man strip and get into his bed, while he undressed and got in with Bill.

"I'm dead for sleep, Bill. It's up to you now. Wake me at the first crack of dawn. Can you do it?"

"I'm going to get up, and stay awake!" Bill declared. And he did. He sat by the fire and kept pinching himself for the next two hours, till the first gray of dawn was visible through the windows. Then he roused Bennie, though it took some minutes to do it. Fifteen minutes later Ray's wife was busy on the telephone, and the alarm was going out.

CHAPTER XXV

The Search Begins—A Wild Night on the Mountain

THE next afternoon Mr. Capen stayed late at the bank, and when he left the afternoon papers had come in from the near-by city. Mr. Capen bought one, and glanced at the front page as he walked along. Suddenly his feet stopped moving, his heart almost stopped beating, for his eyes had caught this headline:

"TWO BOYS LOST ON KATAHDIN."

He had to steady himself against the Owen place fence before he could read on.

But one line of the small type relieved his mind. "Two young men, Jerome Goupil and Charles Witherspoon, of New York City, attempting to climb Mount Katahdin yesterday," it began, "evidently became confused in the clouds, and have not returned. A large number of guides and employees of the International Paper Company have left various points for the slopes of the mountain to search. Katahdin stands in the midst of a wilderness, and there are very few paths to or upon it."

This brief dispatch bore a Millinocket, Maine, date line.

But Bennie, of course, as he tramped back to Abol

cabin after breakfast, did not know that a reporter in Millinocket, meeting the paper company superintendent, had learned the news and wired it to a Bangor paper, and that the Associated Press man in Bangor would broadcast it all over the United States. Nor did he know that this same reporter was already setting out with several men from Millinocket, to join in the search. Bennie was chiefly conscious of the fact that it still rained dismally, that his boots hadn't got dried, that he had had only two hours sleep after a twenty-mile hike, and was now sore and stiff, but had to keep going to get the lantern and the two-gallon kerosene can back to the cabin, and that he couldn't let himself seem grouchy or despondent, because Rob —the young man who had come down with him the night before—had insisted on going back with him. Of course Syd and Bill had begged to go, but Bennie wouldn't let them.

"No, you stay here and keep dry," he said. "Maybe it will clear later. The Abol cabin'll be too full as it is. If you want to do something, go up the tote road toward Charlie's and meet the fellow who ran up there last night, and bring him here. Keep hollering as you go along, in case those two poor guys have walked down into the woods on that side. 'Course, if you get news they are found anywhere, one of you beat it up to Abol and tell us."

It was eleven o'clock when Bennie and the now soaked and weary Rob finally turned the corner off the Slide, to the cabin. There was nobody inside at all, but a big supply of wood had been cut up and stacked

under the porch out of the rain. Pinned to the table was a piece of paper.

"To BENNIE:

"Ray says for you and anybody with you to stay at the cabin and get some sleep. Somebody will be back at supper time. Keep the fire going. We have gone north along the mountain.

"SPIDER."

Bennie read this note aloud.

"Get sleep!" cried his companion. "I ought to be out hunting, too—not sleeping!"

"Say, aren't two lost ones enough?" Bennie replied. "I guess the best we can do is to mind Ray. I know if *I* don't get some sleep, I won't be much use as a hunter. Here, let's rustle up some lunch and a cup of coffee, and then turn in."

Bennie quickly boiled two cups of coffee and fried some bacon. Then he hauled a lot of wood into the cabin, out of the damp, filled up the stove, stood his and Rob's boots to dry, and hung their soaked socks and pants on a string by the stove. Rolled up in blankets on the old beds, they dropped almost at once into the sleep of exhaustion.

It seemed to Bennie he had been asleep only a few minutes when he felt somebody shaking him, and calling his name. He sat up. The interior of the cabin was dusky. Dim at best, with the trees and the cloud about it, and only two small windows and a door, it grew rapidly dark as the day died, and Bennie realized it must be late in the afternoon. Spider was shaking him.

"Get up," he said, "and let me have a go at the bunk."

"Any news? Where are the rest? What time is it?" Bennie was on his feet now.

Spider shook his head. "No news. Our guides will be here in a few minutes, to get some grub. It's half-past five. We worked north as far as Hunt's trail last night and this morning, along the side of the mountain. Gee, it was terrible going! Ray wanted to look in the cave up at the boulders,—that's something like the Needle's Eye on Abol Slide. Then we went down Hunt's trail, firing and hollering. At the bottom we met a gang from Daicey Pond Camp, and they are working on north. We came back through the lower woods. To-night they're going to work south."

"How'd you get here ahead of 'em?"

"They sent me up to get some grub ready, and then they say I gotter sleep. Gee, I can, too! Come help me get grub, or I'll fall asleep in the coffee-pot."

Rob had slowly roused from his heavy slumber at the sound of their voices, and cried out for news.

"Sorry—nothing yet," said Spider. "But Ray says there'll be two or three hundred men out by now, all around the mountain, and we'll find 'em soon."

Rob sprang up. "I've got to *do* something!" he cried. "I've just *got* to *do* something!"

"Keep cool, and help us get supper for the gang," said Spider, gently but wearily.

"Is it still raining?" asked Bennie.

"Listen—can't you hear?"

In the silence Bennie heard the steady, ceaseless patter on the roof, and the moan of the wind.

"Joe says he doesn't see any sign of clearing, either," Spider added in a low tone, so Rob wouldn't hear. "How'd you keep Syd and Bill from breaking loose?"

"I sent 'em up to Charlie's to meet that third feller, who was starting back. I told 'em to take him to our camp on Kidney. They've all probably gone out with some other gang by this time."

"Well, I hope they have sense enough to stick with a guide. We can't go after 'em now."

"I told 'em to come up here and report any news, if there was any; they know the way here."

"Hope so. Get some more water, will you?"

Spider was nearly all in, Bennie saw.

"Here—you get your clothes off. I'll tend to grub. Rob, you bring a pail of water from the spring, will you?"

Bennie got Spider's boots and socks and soaked trousers off, and put him on the bed. Then he lit a lantern, hung it over the stove, and began to cook. He had a big pot of coffee, a big plate of bacon, and a spider full of fried potatoes ready when he heard the sound of voices outside.

Ray, Joe, Frank, Indian Bill, the young man called Tommy, and two other guides whom they had encountered came wearily into the cabin, and sniffed the hot food with eagerness. They got off some of their wet clothes, and Bennie, refreshed after his five-hour sleep, poured their coffee, and cooked more bacon, and

fried some eggs, and cut bread and opened a jar of jam, and took food to Spider on the bed.

The two new guides had just come up from the river. They said word had come to all the camps and paper-company gangs that the father of one of the boys had offered a two-thousand-dollar reward to the person who found the lost climbers, and that he had telegraphed orders for food stations to be established all around the mountain, for the searchers, and that he was already on his way to Millinocket on a special train.

"They's five hundred men out searchin' right now," these guides said, "and if it clears so's they can see, two o' them navy airplanes is goin' to fly up from Portland. Seems as if we ought to find 'em pretty soon."

"Five hundred men ain't so many around Katahdin," Joe mused. "There's considerable forest here."

"But why don't we go *up* the mountain and look for them?" Bennie demanded. "They were lost up on the top, not in the forest."

"Say, if you were up on top o' that plateau in a cold rain storm, what's the first thing you'd try to do?" asked Ray.

"Get down," Bennie confessed.

"Sure. But they couldn't find the path they got up by, evidently, so they must have come down into the woods. Naturally, not bein' idiots, they'd keep on 'comin', lookin' for a brook to foller, 'cause it's a well-known fact that brooks flow down-hill toward a river, and they must have reckoned they'd get to some

kind of a tote road in the course o' time. But they could foller some brooks quite a spell, and get into swamps, or they could cross an old tote road in the dark. My hunch is we'll find 'em somewhere down toward the West Branch, if we don't run into 'em to-night."

"But," Bennie persisted, "couldn't they just wander in circles on the plateau, and not find the edge? It's pretty big."

"They could for a while, but not for two days and a night," Ray answered.

"What do you think, Uncle Joe?"

Joe shook his head. "Nobody knows," he said. "They might be anywhere. But most likely they tried to get down some place, and are in the forest. We just got to keep goin'."

"Aren't any of you going to sleep to-night?"

Ray shook his head. "The longer those boys are out in these woods, the less they'll feel like goin' back to college. I reckon we can keep on our feet another night."

Bennie lit his lantern after supper, leaving Spider to clean up; two other lanterns were filled with the oil he had brought, and the whole party, save Spider and Tommy, whom Ray ordered to bed, set out in the pitch-black night, in the chilling cloud-fog and the rain, to work southward, down and around a shoulder of the mountain, till they reached the east-and-west section boundary, where they expected to encounter other searchers, and learn where some of the provisions and relief stations were being placed.

Bennie had been coon hunting at home on clear, cold October nights, scrambling by lantern light over the steep sides of Monument Mountain. But that was mere child's play beside what he now encountered. In these upper levels of the mountain forest the growth was stunted, but the trees were thick together and tough as steel. There had never been an ax in these woods, either, and the steep rocks were treacherous with wet, slippery moss; the blow-downs blocked your feet at almost every second step; the wiry dead branches, even the living branches, caught you and tore at your clothes, your face, your hands. Everything was soaked with rain and icy, cold, cloud-damp, and, worst of all, the darkness was so inky black that the lanterns seemed almost lost in it. Progress was not possible faster than a crawl, and every so often, too, they stopped and shouted, and now and then fired a revolver, and then listened with bated breath. But the revolver shot, the shouts, seemed to be muffled and swallowed up by the enveloping blanket of cloud, and the only sounds they heard were the drip of the trees and the moan of the wind.

They encountered no one, and neither heard nor saw any sign of other searchers. After what seemed hours to Bennie, and after he was scratched and bruised from the tearing spruces and his stumbles amid the rocks, they reached a lower level and higher timber, and presently found themselves on a dim cutting through the woods.

"Section line," Ray said briefly.

He led the way to the left, eastward, along this

easier going, and they plodded on for three or four miles, just south of the mountain.

"Keep goin' this way long enough," Joe said to him, "and we'd git around the mountain ter Chimney Pond."

"Why don't we do it, and come back right over the top?"

Joe shook his head. "They got gangs in on that side, all right."

But Bennie was not convinced. However, he wasn't the leader. He had to admit Ray and Joe probably knew better what to do than he did.

They made a score of side explorations, both up and down the brooks which crossed the section line, one guide going up, one down, and always shouting at intervals. But all was in vain. Finally Ray turned back, and they worked their way, sometimes in the section line, and sometimes through the woods, toward the Sourdnahunk tote road. How Ray and the rest kept their direction, in the pitch-black night, was a mystery to Bennie. But they did. Finally they emerged on the tote road, and started north. It was nearly morning. Bennie and Rob, the college man, were staggering along, almost too weary and sore to walk. But Ray and the guides kept up their steady pace, though they hadn't slept now for two days and two nights.

Not far up the tote road they suddenly saw a tiny, misty yellow glow coming toward them. It proved to be another party of searchers with lanterns. They were paper-company men.

"We've just toted a couple of tents and supplies up to the Abol trail, where it leaves the tote road," they said. "The company's establishing stations all around the mountain. Where you from?"

"Kidney Pond."

"Then that's your handiest spot for breakfast. Better go and rustle yourselves some grub. We got another station where Hunt's trail starts, and one down by Abol Pond."

"And we've still got grub up at the Slide cabin," said Ray.

"'Tain't likely you'll need it up there," the men answered. "Them boys must be pretty far down into the woods by now."

"That's what they all say," thought Bennie to himself. "But if they got bewildered on the table-land, or—or ——"

He didn't like to finish his own thought. It suddenly occurred to him that they might have slipped on the Knife Blade, or tried to go down the Chimney! Though it seemed unlikely that they wouldn't have realized that was the other side of the mountain from the way they had come up. Still, if they didn't know how to get back ——

Bennie didn't speak his thoughts, however. He looked at the face of Rob, drawn and tired and ghostly white in the dim lantern light, under the dripping trees, and he didn't have the heart to put his fears into words.

They said good-by to the men, and soon came to the white tents, pitched at the trail up Abol. There

were two boxes of provisions stacked inside, and dry blankets, and as the gray morning light broke, under the dismal roof of cloud, Joe scoured around for birch bark to kindle a fire, some of the other guides worked up dead wood, and Frank, as soon as the fire was coaxed into life, began to get breakfast.

After some food and hot coffee Ray ordered the guides into the tents for a couple of hours sleep.

"You take this young feller up to the cabin and put him to bed," Ray said to Bennie. "And you and Spider better stay there with him and his friend for the day. 'Tain't likely them lost boys will show up at the cabin, but there's a bare chance they might, seein's that's where they started from. Anyhow, these friends o' theirs ain't much use huntin',—they can't do nuthin' except with other folks to guide 'em. 'Long in the afternoon you'd better take 'em back to Kidney Pond, and get 'em safe and dry there, or they'll be takin' sick."

"But we want to hunt, Spider and I do!" Bennie cried.

"You get these two fellers rested, and then get 'em to camp, first!" Ray said sharply. "After that you can join up with us if you feel like it. We'll be basin' our hunt either here or at number one cuttin', at the foot o' Hunt's trail."

Bennie took his lantern and led the way up the path, followed by the weary and dejected Rob. It was hard work climbing again, after the night's labors, but the exertion at least kept them warm,—all but their feet, which were soaked and felt like blocks of

ice. At the cabin they found Spider already up, and he and Bennie got Rob out of his wet clothes and put him to bed. Bennie, too, undressed to dry his clothes, and lay down beside him.

"Call us at noon, or earlier," he whispered, "so we can get these guys to Kidney, and have time to get back and join the hunt."

It was not much after ten o'clock, however, when Spider, who had gone to the lookout and was peering into the gray-white blanket of the cloud in the vain hope that it would show some sign of breaking, heard voices on the trail below him. He shouted, and the answering shout was in the voice of Bill. A moment later Syd and Bill, their ponchos bulging over packs and blanket rolls, came toiling up out of the cloud into sight.

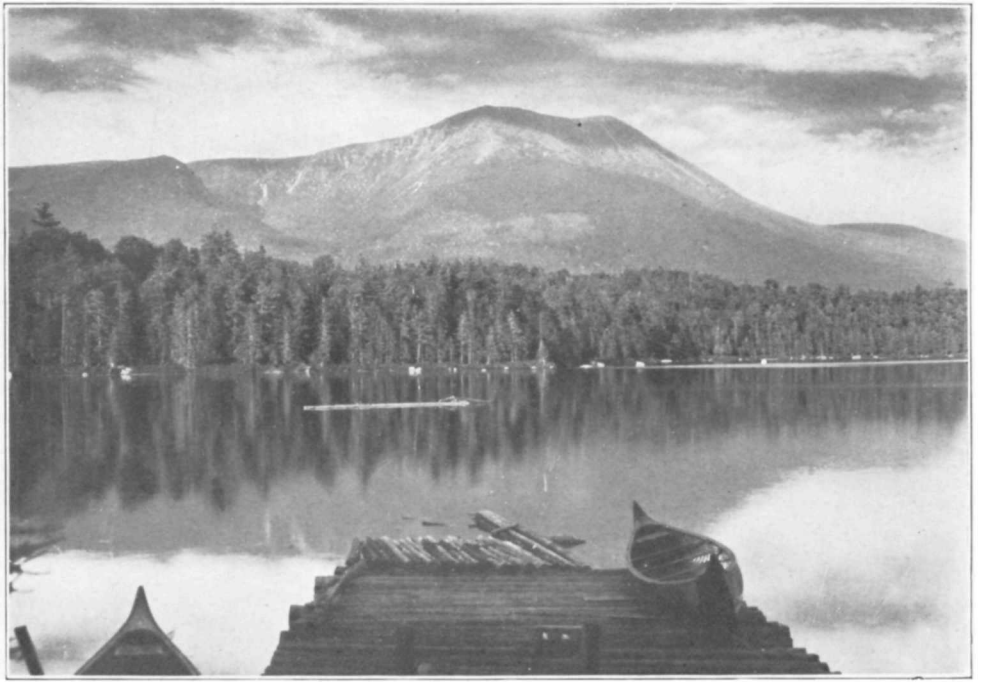
"Well, what are you doing here?" Spider demanded.

"What are we doing here? Say, do you think we wanted to sit around camp, cooling our heels, for a week?" they answered. "And we got a lot of messages for you and Bennie, and we wanted to find out where you were."

"What are the messages?"

"Well, your father telegraphed, and Bennie's father telegraphed, and my father telegraphed," Syd answered. "Wanted to know if we were all right, and told us not to get lost. I answered 'em."

"Say, there's a doctor waiting at camp, and there've been three or four reporters around, sending out stories



KATAHDIN FROM DAICEY POND. BASIN ON THE LEFT IS THE LITTLE KLONDIKE

every day, and they say it's in all the papers in the country; and there are more'n five hundred men out searching now, and some aëroplanes are coming up here from Portland when the cloud breaks," Bill panted.

"Did you see Ray?" Spider asked.

"Sure, he and Joe and Frank and some more men were just starting out from those tents down at the foot of the path."

"What did he say to you?"

"He told us to stick with you and Bennie, and see that you didn't get lost yourselves," Bill grinned.

"Where's that third fellow, the one who ran up to Charlie's the first night?"

"He's out with a gang from Daicey Pond Camp."

Spider took the boys to the cabin, and about eleven he woke Bennie.

"If we send Bill back to the camp with these two chaps," said he, "and leave Syd here, Syd will be all right, 'cause he's got sense. Bill can come back and join him for the night. He don't have to go all the way,—just far enough to set 'em on the side road to Kidney. Then you and I can go do some hunting on our own."

"Sure!" Bennie exclaimed. "We can look *up* on the mountain. I got a hunch maybe they didn't get as far down as all the rest think."

Spider nodded. "I've been thinking the same thing. Up at the head of the Little Klondike—that's the gulf north of Hunt's trail—there are some pretty stiff cliffs. They might have got stuck trying to get down there.

I want a look. When we were at Hunt's trail before, Ray said nobody would try to go down those cliffs. But he don't realize that when folks are scared they'll do most anything."

The Scouts now waked the sleepers and told them Ray's orders. Bill was to lead them as far as the tote road in to Kidney Pond Camp. Syd was impressed with the importance of staying right at the cabin, to keep dry wood and hot water ready for emergency; and Bill had to swear he wouldn't leave the path, and would come directly back to the cabin and stay with Syd till the next day.

"If Bennie and I aren't back by this time to-morrow," Spider said, "go down to the base camp and tell somebody we've gone over the table-land. But we are taking food and blankets and a compass, so you don't need to worry about us."

Bennie coiled his rope around him, and they put some food in a pack, including a can of condensed milk, to feed the lost boys if they found them; they also took a compass, a full lantern, a scout ax, and matches in a waterproof case. Then they put on their ponchos again—torn now and looking as if they had been clawed by wildcats—and set off up the Slide, as Bill, shouting good-by, led the two haggard friends of the lost climbers down the trail.

"I hope Bill can make it," Spider muttered. "He's been ten miles already to-day. He's got at least twelve more to go before he gets back to the cabin."

"Don't worry about Bill—he'll travel on his nerve if he has to," Bennie answered.

"And how about you? You haven't slept any too much since yesterday."

"I got nerve enough to take me some distance, too," was Bennie's retort.

CHAPTER XXVI

Spider and Bennie Find the Lost Men, One Almost Dead, and Bennie Rushes for Help

LOADED as they were, with Bennie wearied by his night's work, they made slow progress up Abol Slide, stopping often to shout, and to let Bennie rest. It was two hours before they crawled through the Needle's Eye and stood once more on the table-land, with the cloud scud thick upon it, racing past them like a vast charge of ghost cavalry and obliterating everything from sight fifty feet away.

"I guess we're the first people up here on the table-land since these chaps were lost," said Spider. "Gosh, it's thick! We got to be awfully careful that *we* don't get lost."

"Remember what Frank said—follow the edge."

"You bet we will! Come on."

They turned to the left and moved along the extreme edge of the table-land, never getting far enough away to lose from sight the steep drop, and stopping frequently to shout. But a shout seemed to be grabbed by the wind-driven clouds and swallowed up.

"You couldn't hear a cannon two hundred feet away," Spider declared.

Following the windings of the rim, they traveled for two miles or so, and suddenly, out of the cloud, emerged the monument marking where Hunt's trail enters the boulders and runs down over the shoulder of the mountain.

"Hooray! All right so far!" Spider shouted. "Now let's keep on to the head wall of the Little Klondike gulf, and then go down into it, the way these poor fellows may have done."

They kept on, still hugging the rim, for a mile, and then they ran into trouble. They ran into a stand of scrub so dense, so tough, that it was quite impossible to force your way through it. In fact, it was almost possible to walk on top of it!

"We can't go any farther," Bennie declared.

"No, and those fellows couldn't have got through it, either. They wouldn't have tried," said Spider. "We don't know how far back it extends into the plateau, nor how far it goes to the north. Nothing to do but go over the rim here."

Over the rim they went, and almost at once they realized that they had their work cut out for them. They had patches of spruce scrub to fight, they had steep, wet, slippery rocks, and they had sheer drops without a hold. In two or three places Bennie had to get out the rope and double it around the base of a scrub tree. They slid down on the two strands, and then pulled on one end and hauled the rope down to them. Soon a dozen little trickling streams which came down the cliffs from the plateau above gathered into small brooks, which leaped over waterfalls, mak-

ing the rocks even more slippery and treacherous. Loaded with packs and blankets, and having to wear their ponchos to keep the blankets dry, their progress was very slow and cautious. They could, of course, see but a little way below them into the cloud, and had no idea how far from the bottom they were.

But, indeed, there was no bottom, really—no flat bottom. The Little Klondike tips steeply outward, as if emptying itself. All the brooks that come tumbling down the three steep sides converge into Katahdin stream, which pours from the open end. Anybody descending the cliffs, too, naturally follows the same line and gets to Katahdin stream.

The Scouts did. They reached at last the big brook, without having seen a sign of the lost boys. It was getting late in the day, too, and Bennie was plainly fast tiring.

"What'll we do now?" he demanded.

"Follow the stream down, I guess, to that relief camp at number one cutting."

"That means three miles or more through water and primeval timber, don't it?"

"As near as I can dope out where we are, just about."

"I don't believe I can make it."

"Well, we can't stay here. This is no place to camp. No shelter at all."

"How far is it to that cave on Hunt's trail?" Bennie demanded. "We could rest there, and be near the top of the old mountain. I want to hunt *on* the mountain. I bet my hunch is a good one."

Spider looked carefully at his compass, which he had kept referring to frequently all day.

"If we go due south from here, a half mile ought to bring us to Hunt's trail," he said. "It's steep climbing, though."

"Bad's what we been down?"

"Well, it didn't seem so when we were looking up into the gulf from the tote road back a year ago, when the weather was clear."

"Let's try it. I'd rather climb than wade this brook three miles and climb blow-downs."

So they turned sharp left, and soon began to climb out of the bottom of the gorge, up a very steep slope, through scrub and stunted forest, but not, fortunately, encountering any precipices. An hour's hard work, with Bennie going slower and slower, brought them on to the shoulder, just as darkness was beginning to settle down.

Spider gave a cheering shout of joy. "Here's the trail!" he yelled back.

They followed up it only two hundred yards and came to the cave, where Bennie dropped completely exhausted, and lay panting in the dry shelter made by a huge slab of granite which had fallen from above somewhere, and rested leaning against an upright ledge. In front of this shelter, which was shaped like one-half of a tent, were the remains of many camp fires.

"You lie there!" Spider ordered. He dropped his pack inside, unsheathed the ax, and went after wood. First he collected as much dead stuff as he could find

at this altitude, and then he searched a long time in the gathering dusk for a birch tree. A small one was all he could find, but he got a few peels of bark and brought them back under his poncho. Finding a flat slab of stone, he propped it across two other stones, as a kind of roof over his little fire, and with the bark and dead twigs he got a blaze going in front of the cave mouth. As soon as it had really caught, he removed the rock and piled on all the wood he could find, making a regular bonfire.

"Get off your boots and socks," he ordered Bennie. "Rub your feet."

"How about your own?"

"Never mind me. I'm going after water for coffee."

Spider didn't know where water was to be had, but he stumbled on a pool of rain water in a hollowed rock, and bailed up enough of that to make a pot of coffee. Then he hurried back, got the pot on the fire, and toasted bacon on a stick, feeding it to Bennie on slices of bread from the loaf they had brought. The coffee they drank clear.

"We may need the condensed milk for those lost chaps—can't open it now," Spider declared.

Bennie revived with the hot coffee and the food, but he was still weak, and he shivered frequently.

"Here—this won't do! Don't you get sick on my hands!" Spider cried. "Get off those wet pants, too, and wrap up in your blanket!"

He hustled Bennie into the driest corner of the little cave, and put his own blankets around him, too, after

beating his feet to warm them. In two minutes Bennie was dead to the world, sleeping so hard that an earthquake wouldn't have waked him.

Spider lit the lantern and went searching for more wood. He even cut down green trees and piled them back of the blaze, as a reflector, and to catch slowly and burn during the night. He had the cave almost hot by the time he got through, and he himself was heated with the exertion—all but his feet. Then he took his own shoes and socks off, and crawled in under his blanket, beside Bennie.

He woke up, chilled, after a few hours. The fire had burned down to hot coals. But he noticed they were not sizzling from raindrops. The rain had ceased! They were still in a cloud, however. Bennie was still fast asleep. Spider pulled on his boots, which were still wet, and went after more wood. He got the cave warmed again, and lay down once more, getting so close to Bennie that he could get some of the blanket under him without getting it off his chum. The heat of Bennie's body warmed him, too, and he managed to sleep again.

But he woke before morning, and struck a match to look at his watch. It was four o'clock. The cloud was thick, but the rain had not come again. He got up, beat his feet warm, put on his half-dry socks and his wet boots, and went after wood and water. As soon as the coffee boiled he shook Bennie.

"Get up! We've got to begin searching again. Wake up!"

Bennie roused, groaned, and sat up.

"How do you feel? Got any fever?" Spider asked, putting his hand on Bennie's forehead.

"I feel pretty good—sore—lame—my feet are cold —otherwise I'm all right," said Bennie. "What's the time?"

"Half-past four."

"Gee—we wasted a whole night! And those poor guys still lost!"

Bennie was on his feet, grabbing his boots and trousers.

They drank their hot coffee and ate toasted bacon and bread—their only food—as the daylight increased. It was a great relief to have no rain at last, after days of downpour, and the Scouts made up their minds to get up again as soon as possible on the table-land, so they could be ready, if the clouds should lift, to get a good view of all the country below the mountain. They were chilled, however, after their night in the cave, and they felt sore, stiff, and strangely heavy of foot.

"I feel's if my boots weighed seven tons," Bennie complained, as he dragged himself around.

"Once the old sun comes out, we'll feel better. Got to keep going, anyhow. I guess we feel better than those two lost fellows, anyhow."

"That's right—if they feel anything by this time. Say, it would be a good one on us if they were found already!"

"I could stand that joke pretty well—I hope they are. When you think how we feel, and we've had food and blankets and sleep!"

"Come on—let's go!" Bennie exclaimed. "I don't want to think about 'em too much."

Rolling up their blankets and shouldering their packs, the two boys now started slowly up Hunt's trail, entering a stretch of rough going through the Boulders —a great, heaped-up, tumbled confusion of huge granite rocks—and finally emerging above them on to the table-land again. They were still in dense cloud, but somehow it seemed lighter, less oppressive, than the day before. It gave them the sense that the sun was trying to shine through it. Certainly it was not so cold and clammy as it had been.

"I bet it's going to clear off before three hours!" Bennie declared. "I'd like to cut right across the old table-land and have one look to see if those fellows registered in the cylinder, and—and get a look along the cliffs. You know Frank's story of the two men and the dog? They might have tried to go down a place like that, and got stuck, and still be sitting on a ledge."

Spider reflected a long moment. "Well, we've got a compass, and we know the lay of the land. All right—let's take a chance. It's only a mile or so across. We'll come pretty close to the peak if we steer dead east."

They left the rim behind them, and were swallowed up in the white mystery of the cloud-swept, naked table-land. But Spider kept the compass in his hand, steering due east. They shouted at intervals—but there was no reply.

When they had walked for twenty minutes, and

still there was no sign of the other side, Spider began to get worried.

"We ought to be there," he said.

"Guess we don't travel quite so fast as the last time we hiked over here," Bennie answered. "Maybe it's farther across by Hunt's trail, anyhow."

After another fifteen minutes of walking even Bennie became worried. "Say, I hope *we* aren't lost, too!" he exclaimed. "Sure your old compass is right?"

"'Course it's right. Say—look! Isn't that a break in the cloud?"

"Sure! Wow! It's going to clear!" Bennie cried. "And look, there's Monument Peak—I can just see it. We're too far to the left."

They changed their course at once, hurried along as fast as their weary legs would let them, and before long came to the marked trail up the final peak of the mountain. A few more moments and they stood by the monument, while a gust of wind tore the whole thinning cloud mass off the Knife Blade, and showed the Scouts, for a full minute, a glimpse of a sunlit world far away to the eastward. But they didn't look at that. They looked along the Knife Blade cliffs for any sign of the lost boys. There was nothing to be seen. Then the thin clouds closed down again.

"Look in the cylinder," Bennie exclaimed.

They pulled out the papers and cards—but the names of the two lost climbers were not there.

"I guess they never got this far," said Spider.

"But we better have one look over this cliff. Give me the rope."

"No—let me."

Spider shook his head. "No, sir; I'm fresher'n you are to-day—more sleep. I'm going."

He tied the rope under his arms, and Bennie took a half hitch around the base of the monument, and played him out down the cliff till he could look over the sheer drop and along the sides. The clouds were now so thin that he could see for several hundred feet. But there was nothing except black, rain-soaked granite. He yelled—and there was no answer.

"What'll we do now?" asked Bennie.

"Well, we've got to get back to the cabin pretty soon, or the kids will be scared, and sending somebody after us. Let's go along the south rim of the table-land to the top of Abol Slide. Maybe it will clear some more before we get there. Anyhow, we'll cover ground nobody's been over."

They descended the peak again, during a rift in the cloud, so that they were able to get a sight line on the southern rim and make directly for it. Once there, it was simple, cloud or no cloud, to follow along it, and they knew that in a mile it would bring them to the Needle's Eye.

"Just think," Spider said, "if those two chaps had just known this simple trick Frank told us, about following the rim, they'd never have been lost."

"Any trick's simple when you know it," Bennie answered. "I wonder if they went down in any of those woods?"—and he pointed to the scrub forest

which came almost up to the rim at their feet. They stopped and yelled at the top of their lungs, with voices grown hoarse with calling. But again there was no reply.

Then they walked on. When they were more than half-way to Abol Slide, as they reckoned, there came another brightening of the cloud, and then a puff and whistle of wind, and in a moment the mists around them seemed to be caught up and swept away. They were in a clear space of actual sunlight. Taking instant advantage, they looked ahead to see how near they really were to the top of the Slide, and then looked down. They were standing on top of another slide, a wide incline of broken stones, which pitched downward for almost a thousand feet, into the forest below.

Suddenly Bennie gasped, pointed, and said in a hoarse whisper, though he tried to shout: "Look! Look! What's that?"

Spider saw, half-way down this slope of tumbled stones, something moving. They watched in breathless suspense. Yes—it was moving! It was a man, crawling on hands and knees. He was crawling upward.

With one wild yell they started down the incline, risking their own necks at every jump.

The crawling figure heard and saw them. He raised one arm feebly and waved. On they came. They reached him. His face, haggard, drawn, dirty, with bloodshot eyes, looked up at them with a look of heartbreaking joy.

"Where's the other fellow?" Bennie cried.

The man tried to speak, but no words came. He gestured down the slope.

"How far?" asked Spider. "As far as the woods?"

The man shook his head.

"All right, Bennie. I'll manage. I'll give 'em first aid. Leave your blanket—pack—everything. Go back to Abol, and down to the cabin. Don't try to take the Slide too fast, and break your ankle. Send Bill to camp for a doctor, and Syd down the tote road the other way, till he finds help. We got to have enough men to carry 'em down to the cabin. You know what to do—get help, that's all!"

Bennie ripped off all his luggage, his rope, everything, even his sweater, and, forgetting he was sore and lame and weary, started back up the rocks almost on the run.

Spider grabbed the blanket he had thrown off, and wrapped it around the poor fellow who lay exhausted on the ground. He saw that he wore no shoes, his stockings were cut to ribbons, and his feet were swollen and caked with blood from rock bruises. Then Spider got out his can of condensed milk and a tin mug. Water! Where could he get water? He looked around. Yes, there was a cupful of rain water in a hollowed rock! He scooped some up, knocked holes in the cover of the can with his ax, poured in some milk, stirred it around, and held it to the other man's lips. The famished chap tried to grab the cup and drain it all, but Spider knew that was not right, and snatched

it from him when he had drunk but a couple of swallows.

"You lie here," he said. "I'll be back. I'm going to help the other fellow now."

Taking the cup, ax, and the other blanket, he hastened on down the rock slide. He had gone only a couple of hundred feet when he saw the other young man, lying in what tiny shelter a rock two feet high and six feet long afforded, looking as if he were dead. Spider rushed to his side. He was alive! His eyes opened, eyes that stared at Spider with a feverish, wild expression. His face was drawn and haggard, too, but it was flushed with fever. Spider saw that his feet, likewise, were bare, and that they had been cut terribly by the rocks. But he also realized that they were infected. It was only too evident that he was in a very bad way.

Spider bent down and held the cup of milk to his lips, but he was too weak to drink. The boy had to force his lips open and pour some of the food into his mouth. Then he covered him with the other blanket, and looked about for fuel. He must have a fire, and get the other fellow down to it also, and heat water and get those feet bathed!

Spider dashed over to the nearest timber, low, stunted spruce, still rain-soaked. Useless! He dashed down the slide another three hundred feet, to the bottom, and there managed to gather an armful of dead stuff and a few dry twigs. Staggering back with these, he got a fire going. Then he climbed up to the first chap, who was able after the sip of milk to prop

himself up enough to help a little, and got him over his back and shoulders, with the fireman's hold. Spider thought his legs would give out beneath him before he reached the fire, two hundred feet below, but he got there, and lowered his burden. He never did realize how he did it. Next he gave both the men another drink of the condensed milk.

"In fifteen minutes you get a piece of bread," he said to the one who could still crawl.

This poor fellow opened his mouth to speak. A funny sound came first—and then words.

"That's a sweet word, bread," he said. "How's poor Jerry?"

"I don't know. I'm no doctor. We'll have a doctor here soon's we can get you down the mountain. Do you know where I can get water?"

The other shook his head.

Spider went back to the knapsacks, and taking the coffee-pot and a dipper went around the rocks scraping up rain water till he had half a pot full. Then he put it on the fire and went after more wood. On his return he gave the chap who could use his hands a tiny piece of bread, soaked in the condensed milk.

"Suck it slowly!" he ordered.

As soon as the water was hot he washed the sick man's terrible-looking feet as best he could with his handkerchief, and then wrapped them in pieces of cloth torn from his own undershirt.

Then he looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. With the best of luck in finding help near the bottom of the mountain, it would be noon before any help

could get there. He wondered what he could do next.

The sick man was moaning now. Spider mixed a little more milk and fed it to him, and gave a sip more to the other chap, who thanked him.

"Wha—what day is it?" he asked.

"Tuesday morning," Spider answered. "But you better not talk now. Lie still."

Spider took his ax and started down toward timber. He hunted out four straight trees that were tall enough for his purpose, and cut and trimmed four poles, ten feet long. These he brought back to the fire, and with a sigh at what he was doing, chopped Bennie's Alpine rope square in two in the middle. Then he laid the poles two feet apart, in pairs, and knotted and wove the two lengths of rope between them, making two rope stretchers.

The chap who was less badly off opened his eyes and watched.

"Wha—what you doing?" he asked.

"Making two stretchers to save time when the men get here. You shut up, I told you."

"You're kind of a bossy kid, aren't you?" the young man remarked, in the hoarse half whisper which was all that was left of his voice.

"You bet I am!"

"Don't you want to know how we got lost?"

"I want to know how you got rescued safely more. You go to sleep!" Spider replied.

The young man's bloodshot eyes twinkled at him an instant before he closed them again. Spider put

Bennie's sweater under his head for a pillow, and went after still more wood. Then he piled up rocks behind the fire to make a reflector to throw the heat back on the two exhausted men, and sat down to wait for help. One of the men slept now. The other, his eyes wide-open at times, at times closed, moaned and tossed and every now and then cried out.

When he cried out Spider shivered. His own body was heavy with weariness. His legs and back ached. His head felt like lead. But he sat erect, above the two men, and watched the rim above for the first sight of the relief party.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Rescue—Spider Keeps Going Till the Job is Done

MEANWHILE Bennie had gone down Abol Slide at a rate of speed that probably broke all records for that descent. He was careful on the rocks below the Needle's Eye, but once on the loose gravel of the Slide, he simply jumped, got his balance with a running step or two, and jumped again. He tore along the path to the cabin, shouting for Bill and Syd.

They were both there, sitting under the porch.

"Found! We've found 'em!" Bennie cried. "They're up on top. They can't walk. They got to be brought down the Slide. Quick, Bill! You're to go right back to camp and have the doctor rushed here to this cabin. Send up anybody you meet. Syd, you're to go down the tote road the other way, and keep yelling until you find somebody, and send 'em back up here. Wait a minute. If there's nobody in the tents at the bottom, take a piece of burned wood off the fire and write on the tent: 'Found—help! Come to top of Slide at once!' See? Got it? Now go—quick. Get help—anybody! That's your job. I'll be at the top of the Slide to direct 'em."

Breathless, exhausted, Bennie sank down on the door-sill as he finished.

"You'd better take a rest before you do anything, seems to me," Syd said.

"Never you mind me! Beat it!" Bennie cried. "If you don't get help here quick, those guys may cash in."

Bill and Syd, without another word, set off down the trail on the run. But Bennie didn't get up at once. He sat on the door-sill and panted. Finally he stumbled into the cabin and took a long drink from the water pail. The first excitement had carried him down the Slide, but the reaction left him weak and shaking.

"Bill's got ten miles to go for the doctor," he muttered half aloud. "That'll take two hours. Two hours more for the doctor to get here. Don't know how long it'll be before any men come. 'Pends on where Bill or Syd meet up with 'em. I ought to go back up and help poor old Spider."

But he didn't go at once. He looked at the bed. He sat down on the edge of it. It was good to sit down on something soft! He leaned backward—he lay down. A delicious drowsiness stole over him. His eyes closed.

Then suddenly he woke with a start, and realized what he had done. Guiltily he yanked out his watch, and breathed a great sigh of relief when he saw he had only dozed ten minutes. But it wouldn't do to risk that again. He sprang up, took another drink of water, ate several spoonfuls of jam from an open jar, built up the fire in the stove and set a kettle of water on it to heat, and then started back up the Slide.

By now the clouds had lifted and scattered so much

that only the top of the Slide was under, and the sunshine felt good. He toiled on slowly upwards, looking back frequently when weariness forced him to rest. Just as he reached the last rocks, and was about to enter the cloud, he saw figures emerging into an open space on the trail below the cabin. Help was coming! He sat and waited to make sure. Yes, the figures, looking small as ants far below him, emerged into the wider space of the Slide at the lookout, and kept on up. He counted them—four—five—six! Then he got to his feet, scrambled on over the rocks and through the Needle's Eye, and awaited them on the edge of the table-land. He wanted to rush ahead with the news to Spider, but he didn't dare, for fear he would not get back in time.

After what seemed like hours of waiting, he heard their voices on the other side of the Needle's Eye. Then a head came through, a body, the body straightened up—and with a shout of welcome, Bennie cried, "Uncle Joe!"

"What's left of him," Joe answered. He looked haggard and worn out, and he had a three-day stubble of beard on his face. So did Ray and Frank and Indian Bill, and two guides from Daicey Pond, who followed him.

"Where are they?" Ray panted.

"I'll show you. 'Tisn't far now."

Bennie terribly wanted to add, "Well, they *were* on top of the mountain, after all." But he didn't. He decided that would be poor sportsmanship.

Ray, however, said it for him.

"So your hunch was right, eh?" he remarked. "Well, as Joe said two days ago, one guess was as good as another."

"Or even better," Joe added, with the ghost of a twinkle still left in his tired and bloodshot eyes.

Bennie led them quickly along the southern rim, amid wisps of broken cloud that kept disclosing and then concealing the view, and at the top of the rock slide he shouted. From below they heard Spider's answering call. In five minutes they were at the fire. They took one look at the sick, delirious boy, they looked at the stretchers Spider had made, Ray said tersely, "That's saved some valuable time, Spider—good work,"—and without further words the two sufferers were laid on the stretchers, Spider and Bennie picked up their packs, and the procession started back.

"I had to cut your rope, Bennie," Spider whispered.

"I'd have cut you if you hadn't," was Bennie's answer.

It was a hard job getting the stretchers up the steep, rock-strewn slope, the rear man having to hold his end on his shoulders, while the front bearer let his end sink as low as possible. Otherwise the boys on the stretchers would have slid off. In fact, it did become necessary to make ropes of sweaters and shirts, and tie the boys on. The six guides alternated in carrying the burdens. From them Bennie and Spider learned that Bill had met them by good fortune almost at the bottom of the path, in the tote road, as they were headed for the relief tents to get some food and a couple of hours rest.

"Know anything about where these boys have been?" Ray asked Spider.

"No, I wouldn't let him talk,"—Spider gestured toward the chap who was less badly off,—"and the other poor fellow was dippy even when I got there. First fellow couldn't talk till I gave him some condensed milk in water."

It was a difficult job getting the stretchers through the Needle's Eye, and a still harder task getting them down the almost precipitous rocks to the head of the Slide. There the guides had to put their burdens down and rest a minute.

Poor Jerry was now unconscious, with his eyes fast shut. But Charlie, the other chap, had been watching operations from his stretcher ever since they passed him through the Needle's Eye. Spider gave him another sip of milk, and he seemed to want to talk.

"Sorry I'm so much bother," he said, in a hoarse croak.

"Forget it," Ray answered. "What happened to you? Why didn't you get down into the woods and build a fire?"

"Couldn't find any down," Charlie said, "all the first day. Wandered round and round on a flat place ——"

"Got to going in a circle on the plateau," Joe nodded.

"Feet so wet at night took off boots—nothing to make fire of—matches all wet, too—terrible cold—lay on top of each other—couldn't get boots on next day—feet swelled ——"

"Take it easy—take it easy," Ray cautioned.

"Next day got to a place pitched down. Started down it,—couldn't see anything—came top of precipice—didn't know how deep—went back ——"

"They must have got over on the other side," Frank said.

"Or at the head of the Little Klondike. We went down there yesterday, and had to use the rope," Bennie added.

"Wandered round a long time—found six blueberries—feet all cut—got to place where you found us—started down—Jerry collapsed—took off wet clothes and took turns lying on top of each other to try to keep warm ——"

"Good God!" Ray exclaimed.

"Next day Jerry couldn't travel—I got up mountain again, hoping clouds break so could see—shouted self hoarse—didn't dare go far fear lose Jerry—went back down slope and found woods—didn't know how far would have to travel to get any place—bad as lost on mountain—didn't want to desert old Jerry—crawled back—'nother awful night—Jerry got dippy—fever—started crawling up to find path this morning, when clouds broke ——"

"That's enough for now ——" Ray laid his hand on Charlie's shoulder. "Come on, men, let's start again."

They hadn't gone far, traveling slowly with their heavy loads down the steep Slide, when they saw below them four figures coming up. Syd had found help, too. The three new guides Syd had brought

soon joined them, and did most of the work of carrying down to the cabin.

Here the two sufferers were stripped, bathed quickly in hot water, rubbed dry, and wrapped in blankets on the beds. Some hot coffee was given to Charlie and some forced into poor Jerry's mouth. Then Syd and Frank and Spider hurried about getting food for the guides, who, still wet and nearly exhausted, had slumped down anywhere on the floor or out under the porch roof. Two or three of them had dropped instantly to sleep.

They had barely finished eating, not long after three o'clock, when voices were heard. A moment later a large party came around the corner to the cabin. There was a doctor, puffing and red with the exertion of the climb, and men carrying his kit, and blankets and two stretchers, and Bill, wearily bringing up the rear. The doctor put nearly everybody out of the cabin except Spider and Ray, and examined the sufferers.

"Extraordinary!" he exclaimed, leaving Charlie. "He doesn't seem to be much the worse for it."

But over Jerry he worked a long time, or it seemed a long time to Spider, asking for hot water and a basin.

He came from the bed finally, looking very grave.

"We've got to get that boy to a hospital, the quicker the better," he said. "Gangrene's started on both feet. There's a hospital in Greenville. Can we get him there? The other better go too."

"The only way is to take 'em by buckboard up the tote road to Charlie's."

"The buckboard is down below—I came over on it," the doctor said. "It's a terrible road to take a well man over, let alone one who's sick."

"I can go, too, and drive 'em to Greenville in our Ford station wagon!" Spider said.

"Got the key to start it?" Ray asked.

"No, but Bennie could go ahead and bring it out to the tote road by the upper cut-off from your camp."

"He could if he's up to ten miles more—I doubt it," Ray answered. "Where is the key?"

"In my duffle-bag, under the bed."

Ray went out.

"The three fellows who were with these two have a car at Charlie's, too," Spider told the doctor.

"Yes, but they're out hunting somewhere. We've got to act quick."

Ray came back. "I've sent a man for the key who was fresh," he said. "Ready, doctor?"

Four guides came in and put the young men on the stretchers again, and started down the mountain. The four boys were the last to leave, for they had to gather up all their possessions. On the trail they caught the doctor.

He looked at Spider. "How'd you know enough not to let that fellow eat all he wanted to at first?" he demanded.

Spider blushed red. "I—I studied first-aid with the Boy Scouts," he answered.

"Well, you found that young Jerry just in time. He'd have died in another night. He may lose his

feet as it is. What you going to do with the two thousand dollars reward?"

"The *what!*" both Spider and Bennie replied.

"Sure—didn't you know there was one?"

"Yes—but I'd forgotten all about it," they answered in chorus.

"It's yours, though."

Spider looked at Bennie, and Bennie looked at Spider. Their eyes questioned each other. Then Spider slowly shook his head.

"We couldn't take that reward, sir," he finally answered. "Scouts don't take rewards for doing a good deed, as we say."

"I know, boys, but this is different. Why, you've saved two lives! And a thousand dollars apiece would help you get through college."

"No, sir; I'd rather work my way through, if I had to. I wouldn't feel right about taking a reward," Spider persisted.

"That goes for me, too, sir," from Bennie.

"Besides, we didn't do much. We just had the luck to find 'em. Those guides have worked harder than we have. Hardly slept at all for four days, or had on dry clothes. Bennie—let's tell Charlie's father to divide up the reward between the men who carried 'em down!"

"Great idea!"

"All I can say is you're pretty good Scouts," was the doctor's comment.

At the bottom the two young men were placed on a great heap of blankets on the buckboard, to cushion

the jolts, covered over, and tied on with the ropes taken from Spider's stretchers.

"Who says that old rope hasn't come in handy?" Bennie demanded of Joe. "You aren't laughing at it so much now, are you?"

"Son, I ain't laughin' at anythin' right now," Joe answered.

The doctor, Spider, and the driver climbed aboard, and they set off on the long sixteen-mile ride to Charlie's. A man met them with the key half-way on the journey. Even trotting the horses on every possible place, they didn't reach Charlie's till eight o'clock. Spider had gone to sleep, in spite of the jolting, and was leaning heavily against the doctor.

Now he woke up and hurried to get the car out. To his joy, the tires were still up, and the battery answered. Charlie and the driver brought the boys across the brook in their arms and laid them again on the blankets, in the bottom of the station wagon, out of which Spider had taken the rear seat.

"Telephone ahead, Charlie, and have the dam gate open at Ripogenus," Spider cried; and, as the doctor climbed in beside him, he started.

The road was good, and, of course, clear of traffic. In spite of the long rain there was no deep mud, for that road had been built with a stone bottom. He gave the old Ford all she had, and tore through the night between the walls of the forest. At Ripogenus dam the gate was wide open, and a crowd of men gathered to hear the news. But the doctor only said, "They're alive, and one of 'em's not badly off—yes,

found 'em way up near the top ——" and on they flew.

Spider made the seventy miles to Greenville in two hours! The little town was dark as they entered, and they had no idea where the hospital was. But they saw, around a corner, light from a fruit store, and pulled up to inquire. The proprietor ran out, clung to their running-board, and directed them as Spider drove on again. Another half mile, toward Greenville Junction, and the hospital gates appeared. In they went. Charlie, or some one else, had warned the hospital of their coming, and nurses and orderlies were at the door. The two sick men were carried quickly in, out of Spider's sight.

"Aren't you coming in, too?" a nurse asked Spider.

"I got to drive back," Spider answered.

The doctor looked at him and laughed. "Can you give him a bed?" he demanded of the nurse.

"Surely."

"Well, feed him and put him to bed. And let him sleep as long as he wants to. He's earned it."

"What'll I do with Lizzie?" Spider inquired.

"Run her out on the drive and leave her till tomorrow," the nurse told him. "She won't wander away, I guess."

Spider climbed wearily out, and entered the hospital. Ten minutes later he was devouring food. Half an hour later he had had a hot bath, he was dressed in clean pajamas, several sizes too big, and he was crawling into a real bed between real sheets.

One minute later he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Boys Refuse the Reward and Start Home

THE next morning Spider woke up at nine o'clock. A nurse brought him breakfast in bed.

"But *I'm* not sick!" he declared. "How are those poor chaps?"

"One of them is going to be all right in a few days. The other, the one they call Jerry, has both feet infected. They will have to amputate some of his toes, but they hope to save the feet. They don't know yet. He's a pretty sick boy. He was almost dead, I guess. The other boy's father will get here this morning. You must wait."

"Oh, no! I don't want to see him!"

"Why not? He'll want to see you and thank you."

"That's just it," Spider tried to explain. "I hate to be thanked. Makes a feller feel so sort of silly."

"Well, go see Charlie anyhow."

Spider dressed and went into a room where Charlie lay in bed, already looking much better. His eyes were twinkling, and he grabbed Spider by the hand.

"Tell me your name's Spider," he said. "Well, you caught these two flies just about in time. My father's on the way. You and your friend get a reward, you know—not that money can measure how we feel about you, old chap."

Spider turned red. "We—Bennie and I—couldn't

take any money," he answered. "Please tell your father to send it to Ray Bragdon, at Kidney Pond, to divide up with the guides who brought you down."

"No—you tell father. He'll want to see you."

Spider shook his head. "I—I've got to beat it back," he said.

The other fellow grinned. "I know how you feel—a mess, being thanked, isn't it? Say, you going to college?"

"I hope so."

"Well, we want you in Yale, Spider—you and Bennie—that his name? And I won't forget that, if you do."

Charlie put out his hand again, Spider grasped it, they looked in each other's eyes, and Spider departed.

"Some good sport, that feller!" he said to himself.

He got gas, oil, and water for the batteries, and started back toward Charlie's. At Grant's Farm he met Tom and Rob and the other one of the three friends of the lost climbers, headed for the hospital to see their chums. They had been found that night searching with a party around Grassy Pond. Of course they stopped and thanked Spider again, and wrung his hand.

"I've never been so much thanked in my life," he muttered, as he climbed back into Lizzie.

Charlie met him as he reached the garage.

"They said I was to telephone when you come, and they'd send a team for you," said he.

"Telephone your grandmother," Spider laughed. "I'm all right. I've got two feet."

His clothes dry, the sun out, a good night's sleep behind him, Spider felt fine, and swung down the tote road at four miles an hour.

At camp he found Bill and Bennie just getting up! They had slept all night, and practically all day. Bennie was hoarse as a frog from shouting, and had a cold. Bill, who had run nearly all the way for the doctor, was so lame he could hardly walk. Ray and the guides were still pretty weary, too, and they also had slept almost all day.

But Uncle Joe was sitting on the steps of the guides' cabin now, smoking his pipe, and cast a glance at Spider and Bennie when they emerged with Syd from their cabin.

"Well, boys, whar yer calc'late yer want ter go termorrer?" he asked. "Been kind o' quiet around here to-day. Got ter be doin' somethin'."

"I thought maybe we might have a go at those cliffs on O J I," Bennie winked.

"They ain't very tall," Joe mused, glancing over toward the rock face, where veins of outcropping white stone plainly formed the capitals O J I, in letters two hundred feet high.

"Well, if you can't think of anything better, I guess we'll have to go home."

Joe looked surprised. "Yer mean that?"

"Yes, our time was up yesterday, really. Syd got a telegram to-day from his father. Guess they're scared *we'll* get lost."

"Well, I sure am sorry," Joe said with real feeling. "I ain't never guided nobody who appreciated my

stories as you boys do. Most folks is kind o' stupid, and don't realize I'm tellin' the truth."

"I can't imagine anybody being *that* stupid," Bennie grinned.

Spider and Bennie held a conference that evening, and then went to find Ray. They told him what they had done about the reward, but made him promise not to tell the guides till they had gone.

"We don't want a lot of palavering," they said.

Ray hardly knew what to reply. "I—I—well, boys, all I can say is—you come back to this camp any time, and what we've got is yours!"

Syd filled out the blank check his father had sent, for the camp board and the guides' pay, and they spent the evening packing. In the morning the whole camp piled out to say good-by, and Joe and Frank walked with them, behind the buckboard, as far as Sourdnahunk stream. They didn't say much as they shook hands on the bank, but old Joe put one of his hard, strong hands on Bennie's shoulder, and patted him roughly, and then turned quickly away. Bennie's eyes were suspiciously moist as he hopped up on the buckboard to ford the stream.

The car was soon packed at Charlie's, and off they went. At Grant's Farm they stopped for a last view of old Katahdin, fifty air-line miles away over the forest, rising up blue and serene and peaceful.

"Don't look as if it could nearly kill anybody, does it?" Syd mused.

"Good-by, you old pile o' rock!" Bennie cried. "You didn't lick us, anyhow!"

At Greenville they stopped at the hospital to inquire after Jerry and Charlie. Charlie was already sitting up, they learned, but Jerry was still very sick, though the doctors thought there was a good chance of saving his feet. They had already taken off most of his toes, however.

"Poor Jerry!" Bill said, as they climbed back into their car. "*He* won't climb any more."

"Ho! lots you know about it," Syd answered. "Admiral Peary went to the North Pole without any toes."

"I bet that's no harder than the Chimney climb," Bennie laughed.

"Nor colder than that old cave on Hunt's trail in a cloud," Spider added.

After two nights on the road, with no worse mishaps than a couple of punctures and a bawling-out by a traffic cop, they rolled, late in the afternoon, into Southmead, and came tooting their horn at full blast up the drive of Bennie's house.

Out came Mr. and Mrs. Capen—and Mr. Hadley, Syd's uncle.

"Oh, we've been so worried!" Mrs. Capen cried, kissing Bennie.

"Worried, why?"

"Those poor boys lost, and you out hunting in the rain, and your finding them and—and all ——"

"There, there, Mother—here they are!" Mr. Capen said. "Well, boys, from the papers I take it you did a good job."

"Has it been in the papers?" the boys cried.

"Sure—you've been on the front page," Mr. Hadley laughed. "Had a good time, Syd?"

"Have I?" Syd exclaimed. "Say, I've had the best time I ever had! And Bill's coming to New York to see me, and I'm coming up here next winter to ski. Oh, gee, it's been great!"

"Well, get your stuff out now," Mr. Capen laughed. "Spider and Bill want to get home and see their folks."

In three houses in Southmead that night there wasn't much talked about but Katahdin. But what pleased Mr. Capen and Mr. Chandler the most was what Bennie and Spider did with the reward.

There remains only one thing to tell. Syd went back to New York to school. The Southmead high school opened. The two Scouts got a long letter from Charlie's father and one from Jerry's mother,—she had gone to Greenville to be near her son,—and finally one from Jerry himself, telling them he was going to save his feet—thanks to them. That was the best news. But it was in October that a package came to Bennie by express. He opened it without any idea what could be inside. And there, coiled tightly, were two hundred feet of braided Alpine rope, imported from Switzerland!

There was a card inside, Charlie's card. Bennie read what was written on it, with a chuckle:

"I wasn't so dead to the world but I heard how Spider cut your rope. Try this on the Congregational steeple."

He grabbed up the rope and the card, and ran over to Spider's.

"Look!" he said. "Two hundred feet! Makes one rope for me, and one for you—and we've still got the old one, spliced!"

"Nothing to it, Bennie," Spider said. "We've simply *got* to go somewhere again next summer and try 'em out."

"You've handed down a supreme-court decision, I'll tell the world," was Bennie's answer.

THE END

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