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THE HUNTER HUNTED.

A Curious Adventure with a Blue Heron in a Swamp.

Of all the native birds in Florida none is more interesting than the heron tribes. The king of all these tribes is the great blue heron. It grows to an extraordinary size. Capt. Dummitt, who planted the most noted orange grove in the State, killed one on a bayou near Mosquito Lagoon fifteen years ago which measured nine feet seven inches from the point of its bill to the tips of its toes. The coastwise bayous and lagoons are usually dotted with small mangrove islands. In south Florida the mangrove grows to a height of sixty or eighty feet, but north of Cape Canaveral it is a gnarled bush ten or fifteen feet high. The bushes cover the little islands as hair covers a man's scalp. The islands are veritable thickets, and woe betide the man who is lost in them, for they are infested with sand flies, red bugs, mosquitoes, and scorpions. Creeks intense in crookedness and of uneven tide wind among these islands like the paths of a labyrinth. These solitary creeks are the favorite fishing grounds of the great blue heron.

Some of the happiest days of my life have been spent in hunting the bird in these haunts. Seated in the bow of a Canadian canoe, with my gun on my knees and a guide in the stern, I was noiselessly poled over the winding creeks beneath the arching mangroves. At sharp turns there was frequently a scream of affright. Huge wings were unfolded. The great bird wafted itself into the air, and was brought to earth by a shot well aimed. It is dangerous sport, however, for a stranger. Even the best guides are sometimes lost in the green labyrinth and suffer untold tortures. Unpracticed hunters are apt to lose their eyes; for the beak of the great blue heron is as sharp as a needle, and his long neck makes immense sweep and great power. The bird strikes with marvelous precision and with the rapidity of lightning. When wounded it is especially dangerous. I was once struck on the cheek within half an inch of the eye. The blow was made by a crippled snowy heron on an island in Lake Worth. It was just after twilight. The darkness saved my eye. I was in a thicket looking for birds that I had shot while on the wing. I saw a snowy spot in the undistinguishable foliage, and took it for a dead bird. As I stooped to pick it up, my cheek was pierced as though receiving a thrust from a stiletto.

In the spring of 1875 I was encamped in the heart of Turnbull Swamp, about eight miles from the head of Indian River. The weather was very dry, and there was much less water in the swamp than usual. I was hunting paroquets, wild turkeys, wood ducks, deer, bears, wildcats, and pumas. The swamp is streaked with savannas a hundred yards wide and miles in extent. Deer becoming scarce in my vicinity, I set a savanna on fire one morning while on a turkey hunt. After the burning of the dead grass the new crop would serve to bait the deer within a fortnight. At sunset I was miles away from camp. At dusk I saw several gobblers fly into a grove of tall cypresses, and marked them with the intention of returning in the morning at daylight and shooting them from the trees. The reddened sky gave me bearings on my way back to camp. After wading for ten minutes through mud and water, listening to the doleful music of a death owl, I emerged upon the burning savanna. The sky was overcast. It was as dark as Erebus. A brisk south wind was driving the fire northward. The flames were leaping over the tall, dry grass, and tingeing the clouds and the tops of the cypresses an orange hue.

Suddenly I saw in the lurid light far above me four great blue herons. They were in line, flapping their wings with precision of machinery. Instinctively I drew my gun to my shoulder. On inspiration I discharded it, for the "sight" was invisible. The second barrel did good work. The third heron in the line stopped, fell ten feet, and came swooping toward the ground in great circles. I saw that the bird would drop some distance away, and ran forward to mark the spot. But the burnt part of the savanna, despite the lurid light from the rolling wave of fire in the south, was as black as the bellying darkness of the clouds. I heard the bird strike the earth with a thud, but did not see where it fell. The black ashes of the burnt grass were ankle deep. I searched for the prize, but did not find it.

I was perplexed. Suddenly a feathery form arose from the ashes ten feet away. It seemed to tower above me. It was the heron. It had elevated the white plume on its head as an angry cockatoo draws forward its topknot. The plume alone could be distinctly seen in the darkness. With a blood-curdling scream the tall bird darted for me. I knew my danger. On the spur of the moment I turned and ran toward the blazing savanna. The bird gave chase, screaming frightfully at every jump. I divined the situation. Its wing was broken, and it was thoroughly infuriated. If it struck me in the rear with its sharp and powerful beak, I fancied that its head would go clean through me. In my haste to secure my prey I had neglected to withdraw the empty shells from the fowling piece. It would not do to stand the chance of a fight by using the gun as a club, for it was so dark that I could not gauge the bird's distance. Besides, the bird would be facing the light, and I would be facing the darkness. I continued my retreat; I ran as though the devil was after me. In my flight I threw open the barrels of my gun, and drew out the empty shells. In mad haste I reloaded and relocked the barrels, still running at the top of my speed. Then I stopped, wheeled about, and banged away with both barrels. The bird shrieked worse than ever, and was untouched.

Again I sped toward the burning grass. I had regained my composure, however. Fear gave way to mirth. I laughed outright at the absurdity of the situation, blessing my stars that no friends were near to chaff me. Again I reloaded the gun, turned, and fired. I was on the verge of the blazing canes, and had a fair view of my pursuer. At the second shot the heron fell, and the impetus from its speed was so great that it came against me, legs, wings, neck, and beak, in a limp lump. I had shot it through the neck. Its head was attached by the skin of the neck alone.

I carried the prize to camp. Its plumage was the perfection of feathery beauty. Old Conner, my guide, was awaiting my return with a supper of roasted venison and yams. The bird was so tall that Conner fastened its beak to the back of my coat collar, drew the neck over my head, and the feet touched the ground. He afterward severed the head from the neck, and hurled it across the fire at the trunk of a palmetto—I have seen performers at a circus handle a knife in a similar way—the sharp beak entered the tree, and stood quivering there like a heavy-handled bodkin; and for all that I know it remains there to this day.—[The Cook.

What a Gentleman Knows about The Price of a Coon.

A gentleman well known in this community was presented the other day with a pet coon by a countryman who thought he could not show his appreciation of his city friend in a better way; the gentleman (the coon) was taken, and at once endowed with all the franchise that an American citizen can possess in a city home. He made himself at once perfectly at home, and the first thing he did was to crawl up on the satin-covered sofa and proceed to take a nap. The mistress of the house seeing this remonstrated by taking the young friend by the chain that hung from his neck and lifting him off the sofa, the coon in the meantime turning around like he had jumped from a fly-wheel, and catching at everything in his reach with all four feet at the same time. In his exit he got his hind leg around the support of an ornamental stand, and the irate lady, thinking that he had hold of the sofa, gave him a yank that almost pulled his head off, and brought down the table with a $35 vase on it. The coon seemed to take in the situation with perfect coolness, and while the lady was picking up the pieces he walked leisurely out into the hall and disappeared in the cellar. About an hour afterward the gentleman of the house came home, and, after listening to the threats of hot water, tea-kettles, etc., from Mrs. ——, he concluded to hunt up the coon, and started on the search—but the coon was nowhere to be found. Finally, on passing by the pantry door, which had been left open, and where a tub of water stood that had been used in washing out the pantry, he espied the coon, but the coon had turned white; this perplexed him. He called his wife, who came at once, and the cause of the whiteness was soon explained; the coon had found the water, and near by was an open flour-barrel. He had bathed in the tub and had crawled into the barrel, and had evidently been continuing this amusing process for some time, for he had worked up a lump of dough twice his own size, and was sitting in the water rolling the pieces in his paws. He was lifted out, washed and sent back with "many thanks" to the countryman, with the intimation that a wildcat, young bear, ground-hog or anything else would be preferable. The gentleman says that anybody who wants a coon is richer than he is.—[Knoxville (Tenn.) Chronicle.

At table—The master of the house, after turning a chicken over and over in every possible way—"How would you carve that bird?"

"Hot," replied a guest.

The Beginning of Sickness.

Never trifle with what are called small ailments. A disorder of easy control at first, if neglected for a few weeks may become a mortal disease. Be especially careful not to let debility gain upon you, for it is the door through which all maladies enter the system. If you feel languid, inert, and to use a common expression, "as if there was no life left in you," resort at once to Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. That great vegetable tonic will supply the vitality you so urgently need. It is nerve food. By its tonic action the stomach is so invigorated that digestion becomes regular, easy, perfect; while its mild, cathartic properties relieve the bowels from obstructions, and its alterative operations beneficially affects all the secretive organs. For the miseries of dyspepsia, and they include almost every unpleasant feeling that belongs to physical disease and mental wretchedness, this potent tonic is a certain and speedy balm.

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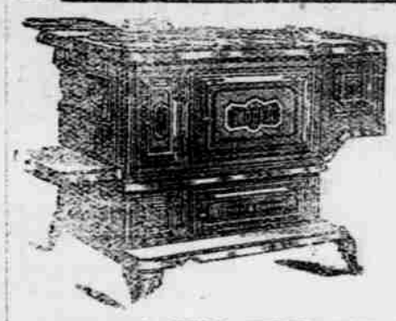

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