

JAMES MCGREGOR BILLINGS'S MOOSE HUNT

By J.

THIS MATERIAL MAY BE
 LAW (TITLE 17, U.S. CODE)
 OLIVIER CURWOOD

JAMES McGregor Billings was the jolliest boy in the whole of Maine. For one so peculiarly gifted with a sense of the fitness of things, he was most wonderfully unfortunate. He was a very tall and a very lank boy for his age, and when not helping his mother about the house, or his father somewhere else, he was buried deep in the forest about the town of Debsconeag, always accompanied by a long, muzzle-loading rifle that his grandfather had used half a century before. From these expeditions he would often return with remarkable stories of the narrow escapes of birds and beasts that had crossed his path, but it was only now and then that he brought anything home with him. In short, Jim Billings was pointed out by all the good folks about him as a living synonym for big stories and bad luck. His hunting exploits were always topics of humorous interest in the one small store of the town, and whenever anyone suggested that he had a "new one" on "Jimmy," faces began to broaden into smiles, for it was pretty well understood that the story would be a funny one.

On this particular night, Jim and his mishaps were forgotten in Debsconeag on account of the arrival of a certain sportsman from the south, who had come up to be ready for the shooting season. Mr. Roberts was the junior member of a Boston manufacturing firm, and for three successive seasons had hunted in Piscataquis county. His arrival had been announced several days before, and on this particular evening the entire male population of the place, numbering less than twenty souls, was congregated in front of the store. The one particular subject of discussion was the "bull moose of Pamedecook lake." For at least two seasons Mr. Roberts had hunted for this animal. Its fame had spread all over the state of Maine, and stories about it had appeared again and again in the newspapers. From all accounts it was the biggest moose ever seen in those parts, and for years had eluded all the old hunters of Debsconeag. After having failed to bag the animal during his first season in the woods, the Boston sportsman had offered a reward of two hundred dollars to the person who would bring him the big bull's magnificent antlers. A dozen hunters failed to get them during the next season.

"I'll tell you what I'll do this year," announced Mr. Roberts to those congregated about him. "I'm going to double that offer of last year. If I can't get the big bull's antlers this season, I will give four hundred dollars to the man who gets them for me."



HIT THE ANIMAL FAIRLY ON THE SIDE OF ITS "HUMPBACKED NOSE"

his head cooked a pot of coffee, and ate another meal of rabbit and bread. Then once more he started out on his search for the trail of the bull moose.

Jimmy planned the method of his hunt as he struck out straight into the woods north of the lick. He would use that lick as the center of a series of circles he would make around it, and if the moose was anywhere in the neighborhood he would find the trail in the course of that afternoon and the next day. Half a mile beyond the ravine the boy began his first circuit, watching closely on each side of him for hoof-prints in the snow. For several hours he slowly continued his scrutinizing search, until again in the neighborhood of his camp, tired and hungry he now watched for an opportunity of replenishing the slim larder in the brush wigwam. Several times that afternoon he could have shot big white wood-hares, but refrained from doing so through fear of frightening the moose if it was near him. He was confident, however, that the animal was on the other side of the ravine, and now set out on the trail of one of the big rabbits, feeling that a shot would do no harm. A short distance farther on he discovered his quarry snuggled under

boulders, and there hide himself while he loaded his rifle. In an instant he had acted upon the idea, and began running back as fast as he could travel on his snowshoes. He had not gone half the distance when the noise of the animal behind as it tore out of the bushes caused him to throw a look over his shoulder. There, not half a stone's throw away, instead of a bear, stood the huge bull moose of Pamedecook lake.

James McGregor Billings stopped within five paces. He turned squarely about, dropped the butt of his gun into the snow, and stared at the animal he had come to hunt. As he looked, he mentally reckoned that he could have killed the animal with his father's old horse pistol, if he only had it with him. Then the humor of the thing began to dawn upon Jimmy. That was the peculiar thing about James McGregor Billings—his readiness to laugh at his own bad luck, and just now he was more willing to laugh than usual, because he was glad it was not a bear. A grin spread over his face, and this developed into a laugh, and as he laughed the moose gave a snort and set off at a rapid pace for the denser part of the forest beyond.

"By Jing, I can almost do it with a snowball!" cried Jimmy. He caught up a piece of hard snow and hurled it through the air in the direction of the fleeing moose. To the boy's surprise the chunk hit the animal fairly on the side of its "humpbacked nose."

In its shrewd mind the old moose quickly reasoned from where the hurt had come, and before Jimmy had fully realized the significance of his throw, the animal was tearing up the snow and leaves in its effort to turn about upon its assailant. The youthful hunter was not slow in finding the use of his feet again, and started once more for the big pile of rock. In that moment all the humor went out of Jimmy's life, for the time being, at least. If he feared a black bear, he doubly feared an angry bull moose, and as he heard the animal begin the pursuit behind him, he redoubled his energies to reach the big oak and the boulders beside it. He had a good start, and as he reached the first rocks he kicked off his snowshoes, and dropped his gun.

The old bull was not a dozen feet behind when Jimmy leaped upon the first low boulder, and from there began climbing up the smooth side of the huge mass of stone. The stone was covered with snow, and at each step of his flight the boy dug his toes and his hands deep into the thick crust. At last he paused, half way up, and seating himself comfort-

James McGregor Billings had been sitting on the edge of the store platform with the others, drinking in the conversation of the rich man from Boston with open mouth. Just now a big, rosy cloud floated before his eyes, and before he realized it, he was at the Boston man's side.

"Mister Roberts, I'm going to git that moose for you!" he cried. "I know right where he is now!"

Long after Jimmy had climbed the stairs leading to his room in the garret of the Billings log home, the man from Boston was regaled with mirthful stories of the boy's exploits. Meanwhile the young hunter was making plans of his own. In the middle of the night he went down and awakened his parents with the information that he was going out with his gun at daylight or before, and might not be back for a couple of days. Then he packed some provisions, cleaned his rifle, and never slept a wink from then until the edge of the forest began to outline itself against the light of the sky. For three or four days snow had been falling quite steadily, and when at last Jimmy started off in the first glimmer of the dawn toward the head of Pamedecook lake he wore a pair of snowshoes.

It was still early in the morning when Jimmy entered the edge of the woods on the other side of the lake. Now his eyes were open and alert, and he held his rifle ready for instant use. For a mile or more his progress was still rapid, in spite of the fact that the forest was becoming denser every minute. At the end of that mile Jimmy began watching the trees. Here and there the larger ones had white scars on their trunks, where the boy had chopped out chips with his hatchet. In the course of another hour these marked trees led him to the edge of a rock-strewn ravine, and down in that ravine Jimmy looked upon the only salt-lick ever discovered in Piscataquis county, and that lick, he thought, was known only to himself.

Half a dozen distinct trails led up and down the ravine, and breathless with excitement Jimmy hurried down to examine them, hoping that he would find that of the old bull moose among them. But he was doomed to disappointment. The big tracks of a stag and the smaller ones of a doe circled up in the timber and on the other side of the ravine. In places the snow was pattered thick with the delicate prints of fox feet, and a lone wolf must have sauntered along that way early in the morning. It was evident that the moose had not been there for at least thirty-six hours, for the ravine was so protected by the overhanging trees that the old tracks would not have become completely smothered under the snow in that time.

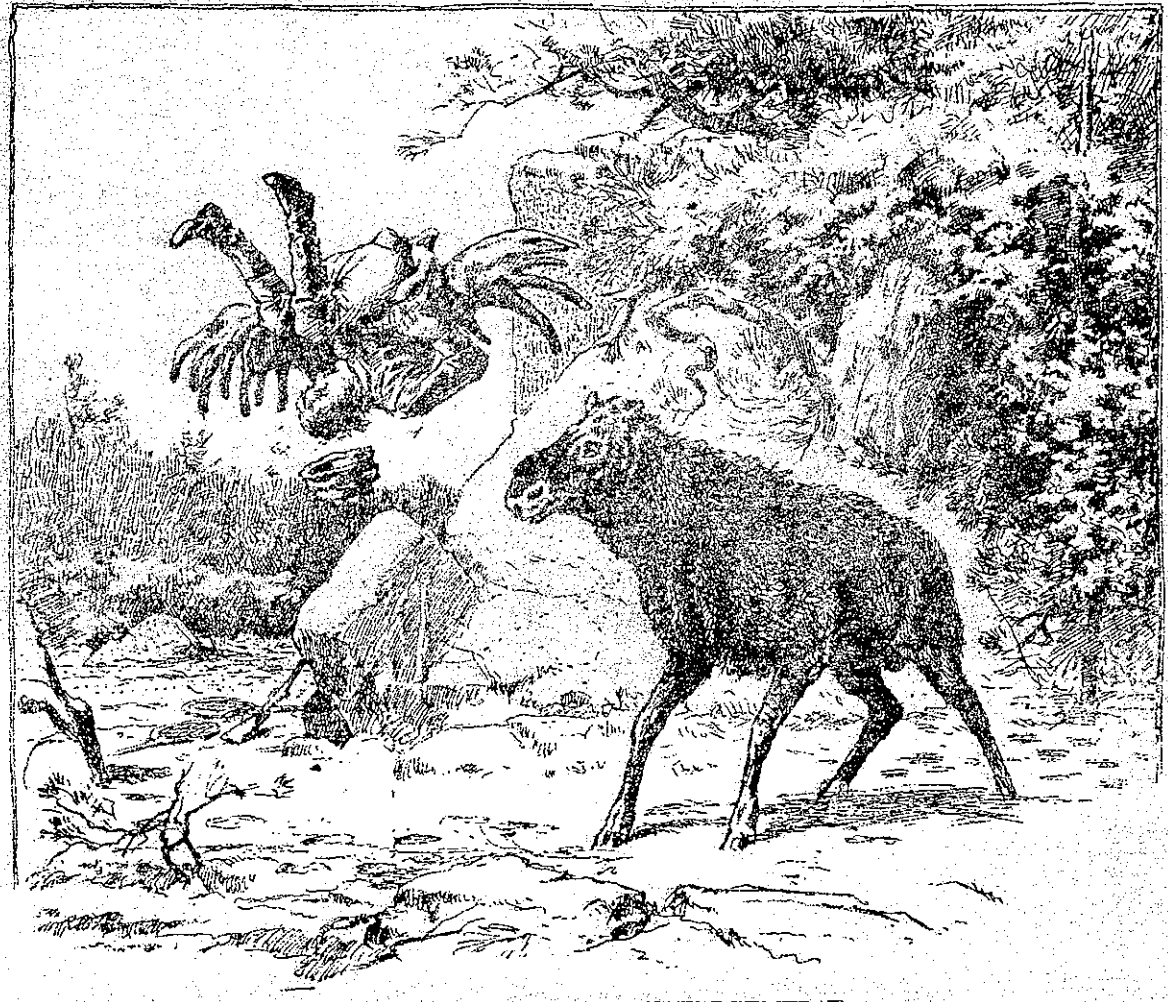
Going a distance back over the old trail, Jimmy selected a bare spot under a thick growth of scrub pine, and began cutting armfuls of branches with his hatchet. In a short time he had made himself a shelter, in which he placed what provisions he had brought with him, and the coffee pot and frying pan that always accompanied him in his rambles in the woods. Then he built a rousing fire of pine cones and dry wood, and when the sun was directly over

the edge of a bog, and resting his gun upon the stump of a broken bush, Jimmy sent a bullet fairly through the animal's head.

Hardly had the boy lowered his gun when there came a terrific crashing from a brush thicket not more than thirty yards away, and the boy's heart seemed to stop still as he stood there, for the time too startled to move. Nothing could make that commotion but a bear, and a mad one, too, thought Jimmy. A second thought added a chilling fear to this. His gun was empty! And even in his fright and excitement he knew that the great animal was coming in his direction. A little way back the boy remembered having passed a huge oak that grew at the side of a mass of rocks. If he could reach those rocks he might climb up one of the great

ably, looked down upon the angry animal that was tearing the snow from the lower part of the rock with its antlers and effect. Meanwhile Jimmy planned how he might get hold of his gun. He had just about made up his mind to climb to the top of the rock, and try to steal down the other side, when he made the thrilling discovery that the crust on which he was seated, and all the snow under it, was slowly moving. Inch by inch it was traveling down toward the moose, and he was traveling with it!

The boy could see that in the course of a very short time the mass of snow that had just begun to move would be turned into a veritable avalanche, and he would be hurled down under the feet of the old bull. There was only one way of escape, and



JAMES MCGREGOR BILLINGS WAS PITCHED HIGH INTO THE AIR

THE AMERICAN BOY

that was to climb to the top of the rock. Turning about as carefully as though he were creeping on eggs, Jimmy began this ascent. But his movement gave the descending snow an added impetus, and in a flash the avalanche pitched down upon the moose, and Jimmy went with it. Fortunately, the boy landed on his feet. Darting around the edge of the rock, he ran as he never ran before in his life, but the speed of the big moose that followed in pursuit was appalling. He could hear the clattering hoofs nearer and nearer at his back. When it seemed that the moose must surely be almost within reach of him, the boy dodged around the other edge of the huge boulder, but not quicker than the animal behind. He had not taken a dozen more leaps when the shock came, and with a yell that echoed all through those woods James McGregor Billings was

pitched high into the air, and fell in a limp and apparently lifeless heap twenty feet beyond.

How long he lay there, unconscious in the snow, Jimmy could never say. But when he first began to "wake up," there seemed to be an oppressive weight on his back, and it seemed many minutes before he could throw this weight off. Then he pulled himself together, sat up, and saw to his astonishment that the objects he had shoved aside were the great antlers of the bull moose of Pamedecook lake!

In a flash the true situation began to dawn in the boy's dazed mind. The moose had charged him, and in doing so it had shed its antlers. He knew that occasionally bull moose "dropped their horns" in this way, and the surprise at losing its headpiece had so startled the animal that it had ambled off into the forest again, without pausing to make

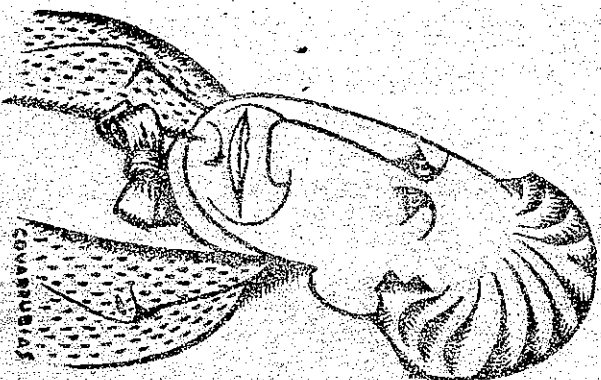
placement of the youngster who had occasioned it so much trouble.

The next afternoon Jimmy came limping up to the little store in Debsconeg, dragging along a big bundle covered with fir branches on a sled improvised out of stripped saplings, and when the boy exposed his treasure, the fame of James McGregor Billings was made, and his prowess vindicated forever.

Just a week after that, a small express package came to the settlement, addressed to "Mr. Henry J. Roberts," etc., and in less than an hour after that Jimmy was counting over the biggest roll of bills it had ever been his fortune to look upon.

And the big bull moose of Pamedecook lake still eludes the old hunters of Debsconeg, and there is at least one person who says it shall never come to harm at his hands, and that person is James McGregor Billings.

WOODSMEN BATTLE
FOR LAND AND LOVE
INCURWOOD NOVEL



JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD
CONSTITUTES AS

THE ANCIENT HIGHWAY. BY James Oliver Curwood. New York: Gannophol-
low, Book Corporation, '13.

Reviewed by ERNEST JACKSON

THEIR enchantment and mystery of the forest, the willful charm of a beautiful girl and the love of a man with a wrong to right are the strings upon which Mr. Curwood plays in making a delightful melody of action and thrilling situations. From the moment Olaf Jonsson steps blithely into the story striding along the dusty highway until the story touches its climax in true Curwood style in the last few hundred words, there is action. In the character of Joe, the mysterious orphan boy, and Jim, his dog, there is a wistful appeal that goes straight to the heart. A strange mingling of modern business methods which, in the hands of Ivan Hunt, the villain, include murder and acts of violence which are medieval in their cruelty, and of the open-hearted friendliness of a child goes to make "The Ancient Highway" a wholly charming story. The crux of the story is the battle between Hurd and Brent, who fight one for a forest domain and a girl and the other for a girl's love and herdenally a forest domain. In the telling Mr. Curwood is traveling a road which he knows well and one which he is able to describe so his readers may see it plainly backwards and forwards. One of the most beguiling characters of the tale is Gasparid St. Yves, who loves Angelique Planchon and a good fight. Big blustering, clear-headed Gasparid buds battles enough to satisfy even his eager heart before he claims his Angelique. But he is not alone in being among the clearly delineated appealing characters who go to make the web and woof of this interesting story of a most interesting country. "The Ancient Highway" does carry the reader into the charmed land of romance and high endeavor.

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The Courage of Captain Plum

By James Oliver Curwood. With illustrations by Frank E. Schenck. Indianapolis: The Hobbs, Merrill Company.

As a warning to folk of staid habits who are wont to retire at a regular hour the advice is hereby given not to begin reading "The Courage of Captain Plum" too near bedtime. Once it is taken up the book is like a live wire which you cannot let go until the current is turned off in the last sentence. It will profit you nothing to shrug your shoulders in scorn and say that this advice is simply the cant phrase of a book-reviewer. The warning is founded on personal experience; for the reviewer himself, who from long practice in such matters is proof against the ordinary volleys of romance, could not let go the book until morning light came creeping through his window just as Captain Plum was whispering the final vows to the girl whom he held throbbing against his breast.

The story deals with one of the most picturesque phases of American history. Its scenes are enacted for the most part on Beaver Island where the Mormons have established a petty kingdom, twenty miles off the coast of Michigan. One dark night toward the close of the Spring of 1866, Captain Nathaniel Plum, master and owner of the sloop "Typhoon," was becalmed off the head of Beaver Island. Two boat-loads of Mormons from the town of St. James noiselessly boarded the vessel and made the skipper and his crew prisoners while they looted its cargo. The next day Captain Plum returned to Chicago and tried to get the revenue cutter "Michigan" to go back with him to punish the pirates and regain the stolen cargo. Failing in the attempt, he armed his sloop and persuaded some friends to accompany him in an expedition against the Mormon king, Strang.

Luckily he gained the good will of Obadiah Price, one of the Mormon monarch's counselors. While waiting outside the old counselor's cabin, he abruptly "found himself staring into the white terrified face of a girl. Eyes wide and glowing with sudden fright met his own. Before he could speak the girl sprang back with a low cry and ran swiftly down the path that led into the gloom of the woods. There remained a faint sweet odor of lilac which stirred his soul and set his blood tingling." Afterward the hazard of his venture is doubled by the dangers which beset this girl, Marion. The plot unfolds in a quick succession of dramatic maneuvers. The characters are brought out with a realism that is as searching in its disclosure as a stream of sunlight.

From the Chicago
Illustrated Review, ↑
no date.

From the Public Ledger
and North American,
← 5 September 1925.