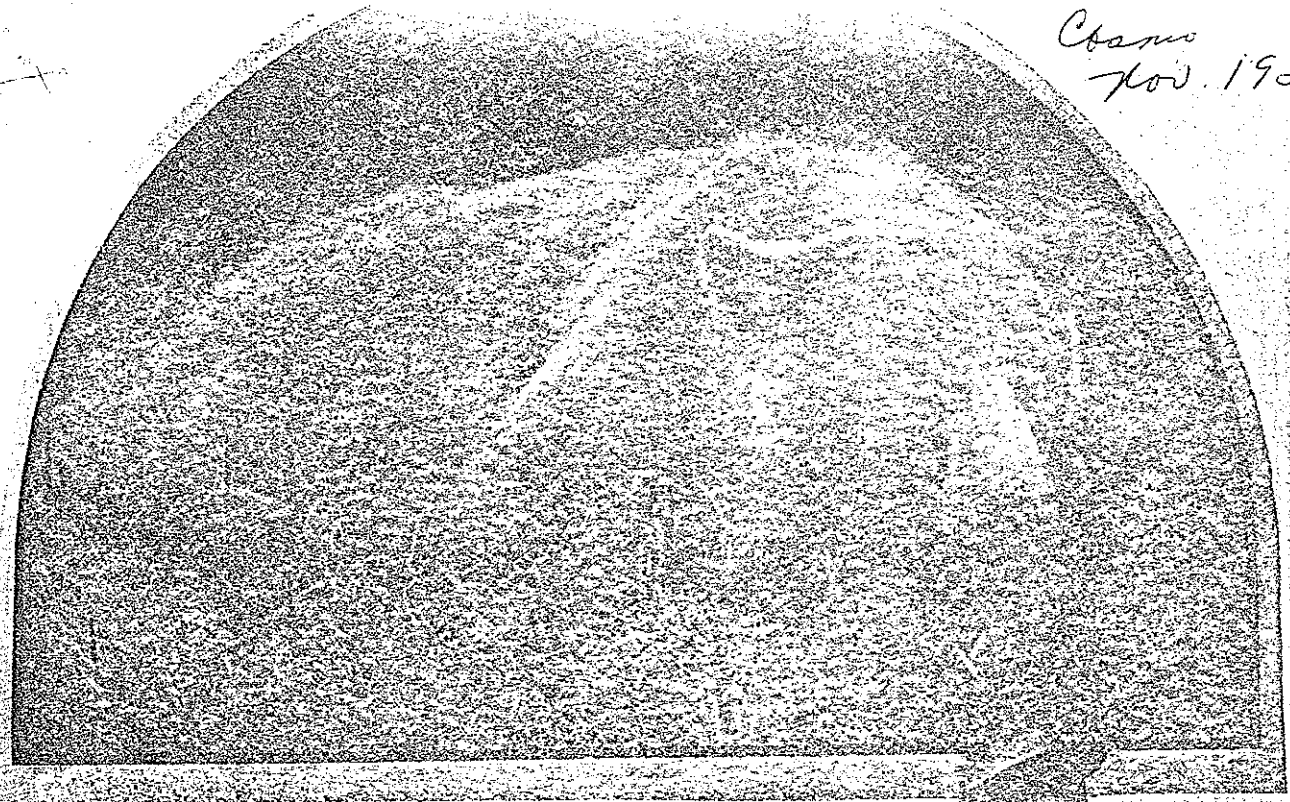


Osano
Nov. 1930



My Brotherhood

A dramatic chapter in

The Religion of a Nature-Loving Man

By James Oliver Curwood



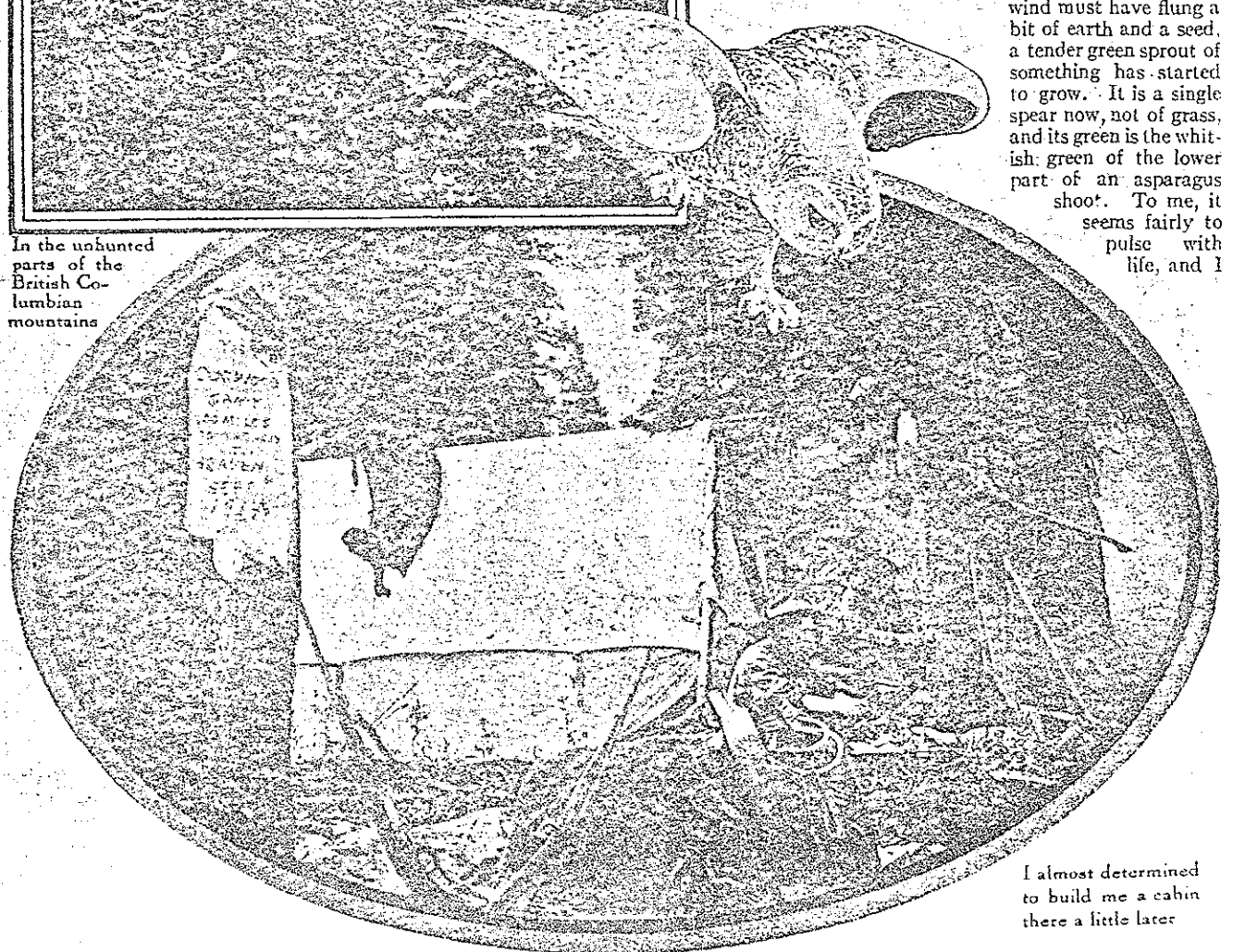
TO-DAY is Sunday, and I have just returned from a week's hike up the mysterious little creek that runs past my cabin. It seems good to be home again, and Nuts and Spoony and Wild Bill, the blue jay, have given me a royal welcome, and I am almost convinced my pop-eyed moose-bird friends are trying to tell me who was the thief in my cabin while I was gone. On that "tomorrow," when I had promised myself another day of writing, the *Wanderlust* came to me, and I packed up a kit and a week's supply of grub and started out to explore my creek. It is a very individual sort of creek—it has character, even if it hasn't a name. It comes out of deep, dark, and unexplored masses of forest to the north, and I have fancied it bringing down all sorts of romance and tragedy out of the hidden places if it could only talk. So I went to the end of it to find out its secrets for myself. And there was so much of interest that I could fill a book with it. I don't think any other white feet have ever traveled up this creek, which I now call "Lonesome." Surely, not even an Indian has been along it for at least a generation, for I did not find the mark of an ax or sign of a fire or vestige of deadfall or trap house. But it did take me forty miles back into a country of such savage wildness and dense forests that I have since determined to build me another cabin there a little later.

In leaving on my journey of exploration I forgot to close the window of my cabin, and through that open window entered the rascally thief whom the pair of moose-birds are trying to tell me about. I think Bill knows also, but I don't believe he would give a brother robber away, even if he did have four feet and a tail. By tracks and two or three other signs, I know the thief is a wolverine who, like the pack-rat over in the

I had with me a pack of Airedales trained to hunt bear



In the unbunted parts of the British Columbian mountains



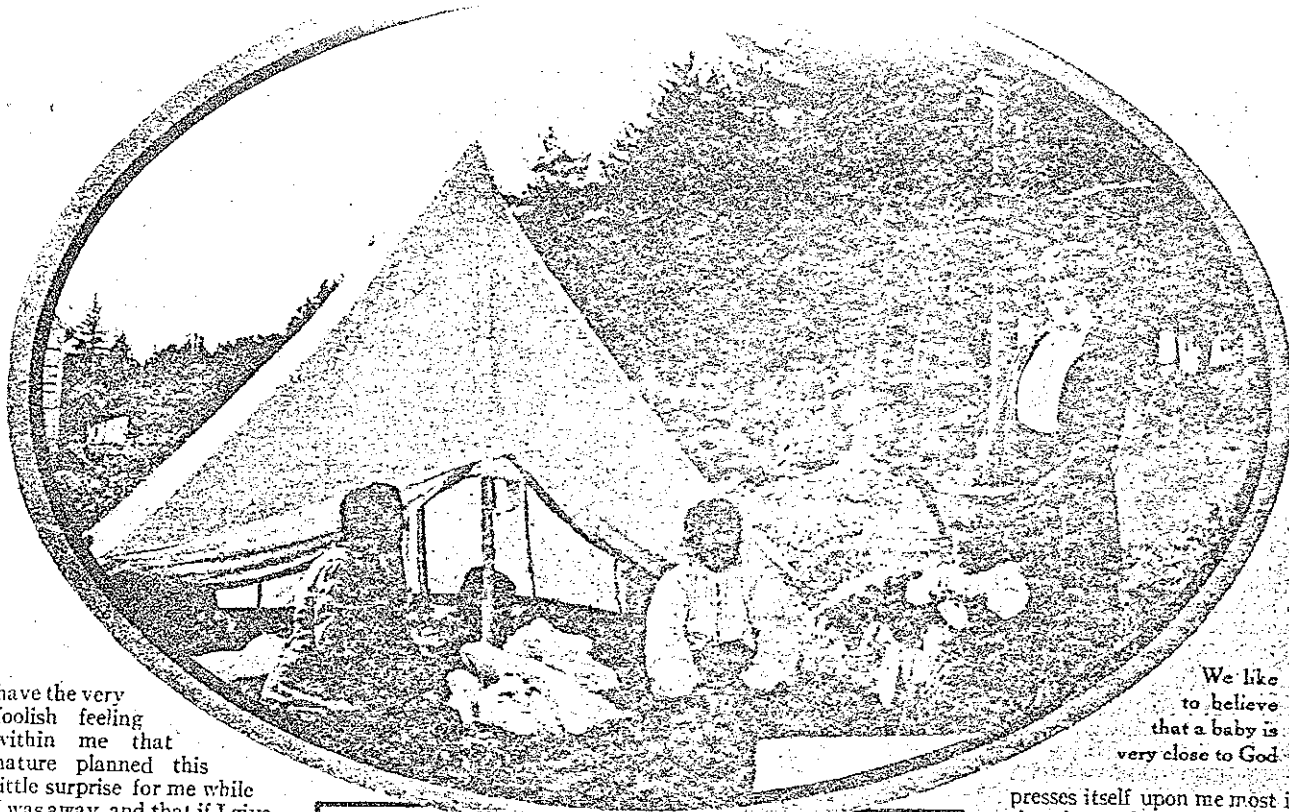
mountains, steals almost every night. This mischief-making humorist, among other things, has carried away a hat, one of my two frying-pans, several tins, half a slab of bacon, and my favorite fish-cleaning knife during my absence. But I know this clever fellow's ways, and have hope that I shall soon recover my property if I keep my eyes open and listen with both my ears.

And I shall not kill him, no matter how red-handed—or red-footed—I catch him. A few years ago, I would have planned to ambush him with a rifle. But now I have the desire to become as intimate with him as possible and learn a little more definitely what he wants with a knife, a skillet, and my pans. I feel that, for his theft, he should in some way be rewarded and not slain, for he has added to my interest in life by rousing a keen and harmless curiosity. His is only one way in which nature is constantly adding fulness of life and greater contentment to my years. Everywhere, even to the smallest things under my feet and at my hand, I am learning more and more of the marvelous ways and life of all creation, and the more I learn the more I am convinced that I am simply an atom in its vast brotherhood, and I am finding a great happiness by making myself actually a part of it. Heretofore, I have been a self-expatriated spark of life, so to speak; in my human egoism, I have held myself apart from all other sparks of life that were not formed in my own poor and unlovely shape.

Two very simple things are adding to my pleasure in life this early afternoon, and illustrate the point I have in mind—if one can bow one's head down to the level of understanding. I am writing again between the two big spruce trees, but, during my week of absence, other sparks of life have, in a way, taken possession of my table. From between two of the hewn saplings that form the top of this table, where the big storm and

wind must have flung a bit of earth and a seed, a tender green sprout of something has started to grow. It is a single spear now, not of grass, and its green is the whitish-green of the lower part of an asparagus shoot. To me, it seems fairly to pulse with life, and I

I almost determined to build me a cabin there a little later

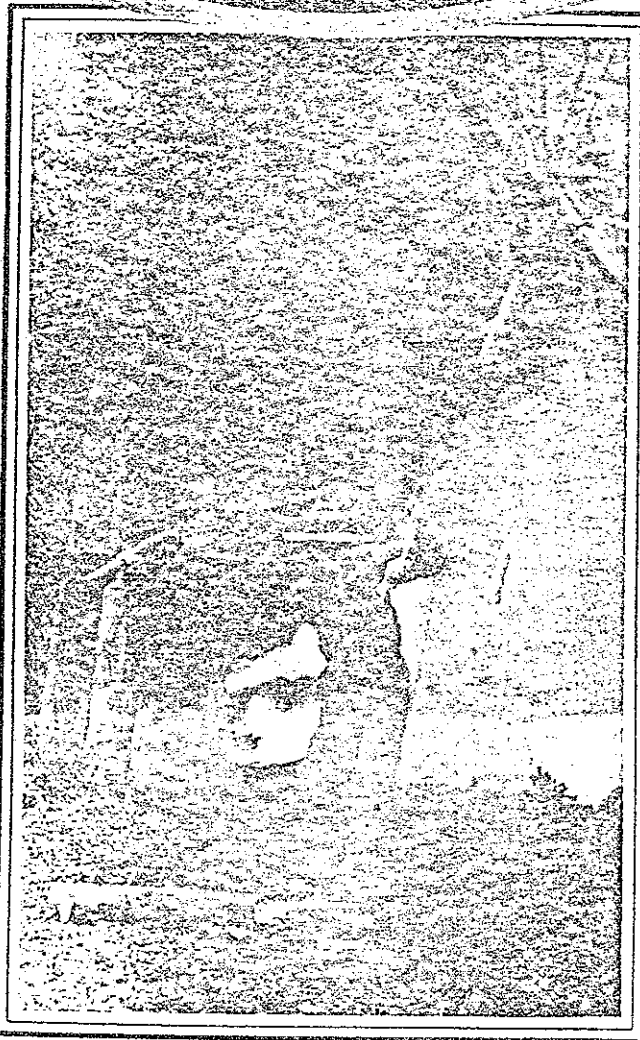


We like
to believe
that a baby is
very close to God

have the very foolish feeling within me that nature planned this little surprise for me while I was away, and that if I give it a bit of brotherly attention, I am going to have a flower on my table, not transplanted or plucked, but there deliberately through friendship for me. However foolish this notion may be, it is a very pleasant one to have, and its effect is to bring me much nearer to the Creator of things than any sermon I could hear preached from a pulpit.

A second interesting thing that has happened to my table is that it has become a plain across which now runs the trail of a big tribe of ants. These ants, I have found, climb up the farthest right-hand support of my table and proceed straight across to the big spruce on my left, up which they disappear; and a returning file of the workers come down the spruce and hit it "cross-country" to the table-leg again. They don't seem to be bearing any burdens, yet they move with precision and purpose, and I have come to understand that, when ants move in this way, they have something very definite in mind. I am convinced they are moving from one fortress to another, or, at least, that every "working" individual in the tribe is personally investigating some new discovery that has been made either up the spruce or in the direction of the creek. Later, I shall know more about it.

But the point that im-



Mr. and Mrs. Curwood in a country of savage wildness and dense forests

presses itself upon me most is that, in my destroying days, I would have swept the friendly little green sprout from its cradle, and would have driven the ant tribe from my property, destroying as many of them as possible. Again, I want to emphasize that I am not a crank, or narrow-minded in my religion of "live and let live." If this same tribe of ants had invaded my cabin, and were preying on things necessary to me, I would destroy them or drive them away. That is my nature-given privilege—to protect myself and what is mine. It is also the privilege of every other spark of life. These same ants, were I to stand on their fortress, would attack me desperately. But now they do not molest me. And I do not molest them. It is the beautiful law of "live and let live"—so long as the necessity for destruction does not arise.

When I sat down at my typewriter an hour ago, I had planned to begin immediately the telling of what I have wandered somewhat away from—the story of a few incidents which helped to bring about my own regeneration, and which at last impressed upon me this great Golden Rule of all nature—live and let live. The big dramatic climax in that part of my life happened over in the British Columbian mountains, where my love of adventure has taken me on many long journeys. (Continued on page 171)

Captain Gaius rubbed his chin. He seemed a bit embarrassed.

"Well, I tell you, Charlie," he said. "You see—well, you see, Bashby, she still thinks I've got spirit-power. She thinks I can get messages from aloft, you know."

"Ha, ha! Excuse me. Yes; I suppose she does."

"Um-hm. And—and—well, she'll take orders from spirits where she wouldn't listen to live folks—that's all. Bein' a medium has *some* advantages."

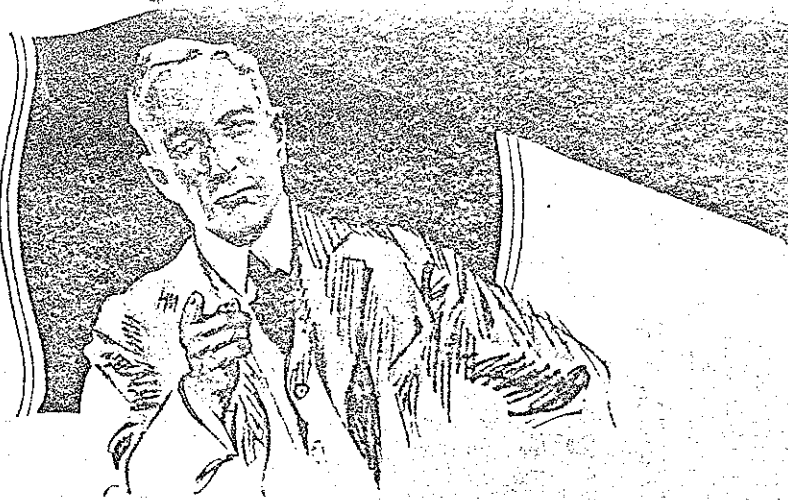
My Brotherhood

(Continued from page 33)

But the change had begun to work in me before then. My conscience was already stabbing me. I was regretting, in a mild sort of way, that I had killed so much. But I was still the supreme egoist, believing myself the God-chosen animal of all creation, and when at any time I withheld my destroying hand, I flattered myself with a thought of my condescension and human kindness.

At the particular time I am going to write about, I was on a big grizzly-hunt in a wild and uncharted part of the British Columbian mountains. I had with me one man, seven horses, and a pack of Airedales trained to hunt bear. We had struck a grizzly-and-caribou paradise, and there had been considerable killing, when, one day, we came upon the trail of Thor, the great beast that showed me how small in soul and inclination a man can be. I was alone that morning, for I had left camp an hour ahead of my man, who was two or three miles behind me with four of the horses and the Airedale pack. I went on, watching for a new camp-site, for the thrill of a great desire possessed me—the desire to take the life of this monster king of the mountains. It was in these moments that the unexpected happened. I came over a little rise, not expecting that my bear was within two or three miles of me, when something that was very much like a low and sullen rumble of far-away thunder stopped the blood in my veins.

Ahead of me, on the edge of a little wallow of mud, stood Thor. He had smelled me, and, I believe, it was the first time he had ever smelled the scent of man. Waiting for this new mystery in the air, he had reared himself up until the whole nine feet of him rested on his haunches, and he sat like a trained dog, with his great forefeet, heavy with mud, drooping in front of his chest. He was a monster in size, and his new June coat shone a golden brown in the sun. His forearms were almost as large as a man's body, and the largest three of his five knifelike claws were five and a half inches long. He was fat and sleek and powerful. His upper fangs, sharp as stiletto-points, were as long as a man's thumb, and between his great jaws he could have crushed the neck of a caribou. I had never looked upon anything in life quite so magnificent. Yet did I have no thought of sparing that splendid life. Since that day, I have rested in camp with my head pillowed on the arm of a lying grizzly that weighed a thousand pounds. Friendship and love and understanding have sprung up between us. But, in that moment, my desire was to destroy



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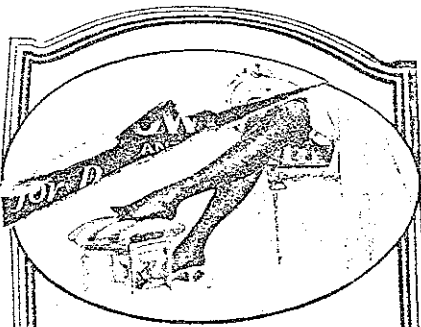
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That was so much greater than my own. My rifle was at my saddle-horn in its buckskin jacket. I fumbled it in getting into action, and in those precious moments Thor lowered himself slowly and ambled away. I fired twice, and would have staked my life that I had missed both times. Not until later did I discover that one of my bullets had opened a furrow two inches deep and a foot long in the flesh of Thor's shoulder. Yet I did not see him flinch. He did not turn back, but went his way.

Shame burns within me as I write of the days that followed; and yet, with that shame, there is a deep and abiding joy, for they were also the days of my regeneration. Day and night, my one thought was to destroy the big grizzly. We never left his trail. The dogs followed him like demons. Five times in the first week, we came within long shooting-range, and twice we hit him. But still he did not wait for us or attack us. He wanted to be left alone. In that week, he killed four of the dogs, and the others we tied up to save them.

Then, at last, came that splendid day when Thor, master of the mountains, showed me how contemptible was I—with my human shape and soul.

It was Sunday. I had climbed three or four thousand feet up the side of a mountain, and below me lay the wonder of the valley. On three sides spread out the wonderful panorama of the Canadian Rockies, softened in the golden sunshine of late June. And I, looking over all that vastness, felt my own greatness thrust upon me. For had not the Creator of all things made this wonderland for me?

There could be no denial. I was master—master because I could think, because I could reason, because I held the reins to an unutterable power of destruction. And then the vastness of time seized upon me like a living thing. Yesterday, a thing had happened which came strongly into my thoughts of to-day. Under a great overhanging cliff, I had found a part of a monster bone as heavy as iron—a section of a gigantic vertebra. Two years before, I had found part of the skeleton of a prehistoric creature identical with this, and from photographs which I took of it, the scientific departments of the University of Michigan and the government at Ottawa agreed that the bones were part of the skeleton of a mammoth whale that once had swum where the valleys and peaks of the Rocky Mountains now disrupt the continent.

And on this Sunday, looking down, I thought of the monster bone I had found yesterday in the dry shale and sand under the cliff. When the Three Wise Men saw the star in the east, that bone was as I had found it. It was there when Christ was born. It was there, unmoved and untouched, before Rome was founded, before Troy died in the mists of the past, before history, as we know history, began. It was there a million years ago, ten million, fifty, a hundred. And, thinking of this, I felt myself growing smaller and smaller; my egoism died away, and I saw these mountains obliterated, and, under the blue of a vast ocean, and rising out of that ocean, I saw other continents, peopled with other people, moved by other religions, beating to the pulse of other civilizations long dead.

I heard the beat of waves below me, where grew the grass and the flowers in the valley. And the droning music of that valley seemed to change into the low whisperings of countless trillions of men and women and little children who had lived and died in those other civilizations of the lost ages; and that fancied whispering of dead worlds told me a great truth—that the Supreme Arbitrer of things had watched over all those trillions just as he was now watching over me, that I was but a pitifully small grain of dust in the great scheme of things, that my egoism was criminal, sacrilegious, a curse set upon myself by myself. And the soft and droning whisper also told me the time would come when my own "civilization" would be obliterated, to be followed by a hundred, a thousand, or a million others, each, in its turn, to live and die.

And it was then, on that Sunday precious to me, that I asked myself an old, old question in a great new way: "What is God?"

And looking down into the valley and up into the sky, understanding came to me. God is there, and there, and there. He is the Infinite Power. He is Life. Life began infinities ago, and it will continue through other infinities. While we are squabbling among ourselves with our little religions and our little views, while we are preaching the damnation of beliefs that are not ours, while sects fight to convert sects that do not think as they think, while our narrow-gage minds travel in their narrow-gage paths, that Infinite Power is watching and waiting, as it has watched and waited from the beginning, and as it will watch and wait until the end. And I stared down into the valley, green and glorious and filled with sunshine and peace, and that low-sung whisper seemed to say, "If this is not God, what is God?" And then, also, in a new way, came something in my brain which said to me, "And who are you?"

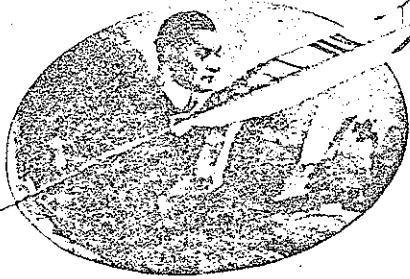
I climbed higher up the mountain. I felt my greatness gone. Kindly, something had told me how pitiful I was. I was not mighty. I was no more in the ultimate of things than a blade of grass. My egoism, on that glorious Sunday, began to crumble in my soul. And then, by chance, if you will have it so, came the climax of that day.

I came to a sheer wall of rock that rose hundreds of feet above me. Along this ran a narrow ledge, and I followed it. The passage became craggy and difficult, and in climbing over a broken mass of rock, I slipped and fell. I had brought a light mountain-gun with me, and in trying to recover myself, I swung it about with such force that the stock struck a sharp edge of rock and broke clean off. But I had saved myself from possible death, and was in a frame of mind to congratulate myself rather than curse my luck. Fifty feet farther on, I came to a "pocket" in the cliff, where the ledge widened until, at this particular place, it was like a flat table twenty feet square. Here I sat down, with my back to the precipitous wall, and began to examine my broken rifle.

I laid it beside me, useless. Straight up at my back rose the sheer face of the mountain; in front of me, had I leaped from the ledge, my body would have hurtled through empty air for a thousand feet. In the valley, I could see the creek, like a ribbon of shimmering silver; two or three miles away was a little lake; on another mountain, I

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...a bursting cascade of water leaping from the heights and losing itself in the sweet green of the lower timber. For many minutes, new and strange thoughts possessed me. I did not look through my hunting-glasses, for I was no longer seeking game. My blood was stirred, but not with the desire to kill.

And then, suddenly, there came a sound to my ears that seemed to stop the beating of my heart. I had not heard it until it was very near—approaching along the narrow ledge.

It was the click, click, click of claws rattling on rock!

I did not move. I hardly breathed. And out from the ledge I had followed came a monster bear!

With the swiftness of lightning, I recognized him. It was Thor! And, in that same instant, the great beast saw me.

In thirty seconds I lived a lifetime, and in those thirty seconds what passed through my mind was a thousand times swifter than spoken word. A great fear rooted me, and yet, in that fear, I saw everything to the minutest detail. Thor's massive head and shoulders were fronting me. I saw the long, naked scar where my bullet had plowed through his shoulder; I saw another wound in his fore leg, still ragged and painful, where another of my soft-nosed bullets had torn like an explosion of dynamite. The giant grizzly was no longer fat and sleek as I had first seen him ten days ago. All that time, he had been fighting for his life; he was thinner; his eyes were red; his coat was dull and unkempt from lack of food and strength. But at that distance, less than ten feet from me, he seemed still a mighty brother of the mountains themselves. As I sat stupidly, stunned to the immobility of a rock in my hour of doom, I felt the overwhelming conviction of what had happened. Thor had followed me along the ledge, and, in this hour of vengeance and triumph, it was I, and not the great beast, who was about to die.

It seemed to me that an eternity passed in these moments. And Thor, mighty in his strength, looked at me and did not move. And this thing that he was looking at, shrinking against the rock, was the creature that had hunted him; this was the creature that had hurt him, and it was so near that he could reach out with his paw and crush it! And how weak and white and helpless it looked now! What a pitiful, insignificant thing it was! Where was its strange thunder? Where was its burning lightning? Why did it make no sound?

Slowly, Thor's giant head began swinging from side to side; then he advanced—just one step—and, in a slow, graceful movement, reared himself to his full, magnificent height. For me, it was the beginning of the end. And in that moment, doomed as I was, I found no pity for myself. Here, at last, was justice! I was about to die. I, who had destroyed so much of life, found how helpless I was when I faced life with my naked hands. And it was justice! I had robbed the earth of more life than would fill the bodies of a thousand men, and now my own life was to follow that which I had destroyed. Suddenly, fear left me. I wanted to cry out to that splendid creature that I was sorry, and, could my dry lips have framed the words, I would have been cowardice—

I have read many stories of truth and hope and faith and charity. From a little boy, my father tried to teach me what it meant to be a gentleman, and he lived what he tried to teach. And from the days of my small boyhood, mother told me stories of great and good men and women, and, in the days of my manhood, she faithfully lived the great truth that, of all precious things, charity and love are the most priceless. Yet had I accepted it all in the narrowest and littlest way. Not until this hour on the edge of the cliff did I realize how small can be the soul of a man buried in his egoism—or how splendid can be the soul of a beast.

For Thor knew me. That I know. He knew me as the deadliest of all his enemies on the face of the earth. Yet until I die will I believe that, in my helplessness, he no longer hated me or wanted my life. For slowly he came down upon all fours again, and, limping as he went, he continued along the ledge—and left me to live!

I am not, in these days, sacrilegious enough to think that the Supreme Power picked my poor insignificant self from among two and a half billion other humans especially to preach a sermon to, that glorious Sunday on the mountainside. Possibly it was all mere chance. It may be that, another day, Thor would have killed me in my helplessness. It may all have been a lucky accident for me. Personally, I do not believe it, for I have found that the soul of the average beast is cleaner of hate and of malice than that of the average man. But whether one believes with me or not does not matter, so far as the point I want to make is concerned—that from this hour began the great change in me, which has finally admitted me into the peace and joy of universal brotherhood with Life. It matters little how a sermon or a great truth comes to one; it is the result that counts.

I returned down the mountain, carrying my broken gun with me. And everywhere I saw that things were different. The fat whistlers, big as woodchucks, were no longer so many targets, watching me cautiously from the rock-tops; the gophers, sunning themselves on their mounds, meant more to me now than a few hours ago. I looked off to a distant slide on another mountain and made out the half-dozen sheep I had studied through my glasses earlier in the day. But my desire to kill was gone. I did not realize the fullness of the change that was upon me then. In a dull sort of way, I accepted it as an effect of shock, perhaps as a passing moment of repentance and gratitude because of my escape. I did not tell myself that I would never kill sheep again except when mutton was necessary to my camp-fare. I did not promise the whistlers long lives. And yet the change was on me, and growing stronger in my blood with every breath I drew. The valley was different. Its air was sweeter. Its low song of life and running waters and velvety winds whispering between the mountains was new inspiration to me. The grass was softer under my feet; the flowers were more beautiful; the earth itself held a new thrill for me.

A few nights later, beside a small fire we had built in the cool of evening, I tried to tell old Donald something about the