

"THE TERROR OF ATHABASCA"

By J. Curwood, Owasso.

[WRITTEN FOR THE ARGOS.]

"Yes, stranger, this be a purty place that's certain," said old Ike, the Canadian guide, as he complacently lit his pipe and gazed across the glorious sheet of water that spread its scenery out before us.

The sun had just reached the tops of the trees on the farther side of the lake and its bright warm beams cast a golden glory over the glassy surface of Athabasca.

"Ye think," continued the guide, "that when ye cum ter upper Canada during the finest season of the year that ye are bravin' the perils of the great northern woods. Ye paddle around the lake shootin' the smaller game now, and think it's fun; but when ye cum ter put on the 'shoes' and face a blindin' sleet, the sport's not in it."

I was somewhat taken aback when I heard the blunt assertion of the grizzled and weather-beaten hunter, but wishing to be on friendly terms with the old fellow I extended my hand and said: "I suppose you have many thrilling adventures in these regions and if it is not too impudent may I ask how you came by that terrible scar on your cheek?" He started as though struck a sudden blow.

"That scar? Stranger, it's a story you'd not believe, though I could make you believe it, for I have proof—yea proof of a hundred men."

My curiosity was at once aroused and seeing that my companion was not intent on telling the story I repeated my question.

"Wall, young man," he said, turning and looking me straight in the face, "if ye want ter hear it so bad I'll tell it to ye." Then after filling his pipe with fresh tobacco he launched forth.

"Thirteen years ago this comin' winter I was employed as scout and guide at Fort Fon du Lac. A party of gentlemen had established a fur company at this place, and as I was also one of their chief hunters you see my life was a rough one.

"The winter of which I speak was an extremely cold one in upper Canada. Ours was also the roughest route of the kentry, between the Beaver river and the Great Slave. Game was very scarce that year, fer'ardly a moose or a caribou had been seen.

"Our supplies ran low and the manager determined to send a number o' men to Doabaunt lake for the much needed provisions. We started for the distant post about the middle o' Janu-

and that it would be sure death to be caught unsheltered. One of the men, who had been a scout in the war of 1812 and knew this kentry as well as a schoolboy knew his map, vowed that was a cave near by that would prove a safe retreat for the hull on us.

I don't believe any one of us had a chance to answer, for the next instant it seemed as though the infernal regions had let loose. I threw myself on my face 'till the first rush had passed over, and then arose and faced the mountains of snow. I could not see five feet distant, large flakes as large as chestnuts filled the air. I called for my companions, but heard no reply. Then stranger, the true horror of my position came upon me. We were separated and I was alone. Alone, and nearly a hundred miles from any habitation. The thought made me frantic; I yelled again and again but of no avail; I gave up all hope—my days were numbered and I was doomed. Still I staggered on, hardly conscious of moving at all. My limbs were numb and I had dropped my pack luggage, but I yet clung to my trusty rifle.

I began to grow warmer now, and I felt buoyant. I realized that I must make one last effort or perish. Suddenly I ran up agin a block, and with a glad cry I sprang forward. It was the cave of which Pete had spoken. But he was off, stranger, some ten miles off. His reckoning cost twenty-two lives.

The floor of the cavern was covered with bones and dry wood. Collecting some of the latter I built a rousing fire and felt like my own self again. I always carried a small knapsack in which I never failed to have a good supply of cooked food. Having ate my supper I lit my pipe and leaned back agin the stone wall of the cavern. I was thinking of my less fortunate companions who, long ago, had perished in the treacherous storm. I then went to the mouth of the cave and yelled at the top of my voice, then I fired my rifle several times, but stranger, it did no good. Jim here, and I, were the only ones left out of that party of twenty-eight." Here the old guide paused a moment to point toward his friend who sat on a bench by the tavern door. "The bodies of the others" he continued, "were found the following spring, but now fer the scar. I agin took my seat by the fire and was soon in a light doze. The flames threw a bright light on the surrounding walls and I was suddenly startled at the appearance of a man at the mouth of the cavern. I sprang forward and held out my hands: 'You're welcome stranger.' He paid no attention to my greeting but opened his lips and uttered a terrible scream. I leaped backward in horror. It was more like the cry of a panther than a human being. Agin the blood-curdin' yell echoed throughout the cavern. Then the terrible truth rushed upon me: I was in the

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"Our supplies ran low and the manager determined to send a number o' men to Doabaunt lake for the much needed provisions. We started for the distant post about the middle o' January and reached our destination some two weeks later. You can imagine our disappointment when we found they were as much in need of supplies as we were. Of course there was nothing left for us to do but to make our way to Fort Churehill, some two hundred miles distant. Here we obtained our supplies and started on the 20th day of February for Fon du Lac. I tell ye, stranger, this was the 'ardest pull of all. Two hundred and fifty miles of snow and forest with no shelter except brush wigwams. The packs we carried were heavy and bunglesome, besides each had a heavy rifle strapped to his back.
"Our party numbered twenty-eight when we started but before we had traversed half the distance we encountered a terrible snow storm in which four of the party were lost. The next day we encountered a party o' injuns; The poor cusses were nearly dead fer they hadn't had anything to eat for three days. We gave 'em enough grub to last until they reached Wollaston lake, then continued our journey.
"We had been ten days on the march and Fon du Lac was still some seventy miles distant when the great calamity of the winter occurred, in which scores of lives were lost in the Northwest alone. The day was near an end and we were lookin' for a place to camp for the night. It was strangely silent, not a breath of air was stirring; huge clouds began gathering in the west. It grew darker and darker until we could hardly see one another's faces. We knowed that a blizzard was nigh

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I started for my rifle, but he was upon me instantly. I tried to throw him off but he could have handled three such men as I. I was pressed to the floor his hand clutching my throat while with the other he tore at my face. I began to grow faint and dizzy and realizing that my life was at stake I drew out my pistol and stranger—*I killed him*."
As he uttered the last words Old Ike arose and stalked toward the tavern, then he abruptly halted, turned toward me and said: "If ye wan't ter see that poor fellow's grave, I'll show it ter ye tomorrer—it's over yonder on the hill."

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