

one. He would attack a bear or lion as quickly as he would a flea, evincing more ignorance than courage. But I doubted his liability to awake from less cause than a kick in the ribs.

Mr. Priour lay down upon his reeking blanket, and with genuine imperturbability fell asleep within two minutes; but I could not so easily overcome my fears. Thoughts of the living fire-engine haunted me, and, together with the sickening odor now filling the tent so as to make its sides bag outward instead of in, kept me awake for an hour or more.

But sleep came at last, and with it another scene. I was soon awakened by a scratching sound on the outside of the tent immediately back of my partner's head, and awaking him I called his attention to it. Listening a moment, he exclaimed: "Skunk!" and shouted to the dog: "Sic him! Sic him, Absalom!" A second later we heard Absalom howling with pain. Seizing our guns and rushing outside, we saw the dog rapidly describing a circle in the sand, while the centrifugal skunk was describing a similar circle, of greater dimensions, in the air. After three or four revolutions of the merry-go-around, the skunk's grip tore out of Absalom's ear, and a charge of shot from my partner's gun put an end to the scented creature which had so fiercely obeyed an order given to another. "Sic him! Sic him, Absalom."

After poking the dead animal over and viewing it from all sides, Mr. Priour said, "This ain't the skunk that drove you into hysterics the first time."

"How do you know it isn't?" I asked.

"I know by his visage, and you can count on number one's coming back again before morning."

But the words failed to have the desired effect on me, for I detected the humor in his remarks at once. Creeping under our bag, for the third time this night, we slept peacefully until daylight.

CHAPTER III IN WHICH WE BUY SOAP

After breakfast, our first duty was to wash the bedding, which was damp and odorous from the preceding night. Taking the blankets to a windmill tank, we put them to soak, and spread them on the ground to dry.

During the forenoon we took long tramps up and down the edge of the thicket, sometimes picking our way into its tangles. But birds were scarce, and we obtained few specimens at this place.

A short distance within the brush, Mr. Priour discovered the abode of a bald eagle, and girding up his loins anew, he wrestled with the immense tree until he reached the nest, forty feet from the ground. He had expected to get a set of eggs, but found instead a young bird. "Ha! ha! I'm in luck this time," he shouted, "young birds beat eggs all holler!" and taking this from the nest, he threw it to the ground, expecting the fall to deprive it of life. Catching on several limbs and easing its fall somewhat, it reached the earth, and smoothing out its ruffled feathers, settled quietly among the brush and leaves, apparently none the worse for its unceremonious descent.

Mr. Priour was soon down from the tree, and going up to the prize, was about to lay hands upon it, when it dashed through the snarled growth and out on to clear land. Declaring that he would not be foiled by a young bird with a dozen broken bones, the man dashed after it. The bird would fly a short distance and wait until its pursuer had almost reached it, when it would be up and away again, each time gaining a little on the angry man. Finally the eagle won the race, and my partner had to content himself with a pair of young Cara Cara eagles, which he had taken from another tree.

This night, before going to sleep, we lowered our tent about six inches, and turning under the edges, weighted them down with guns, stew-pots and other utensils. We endeavored to coax Absalom to sleep near us on the outside but no amount of persuasion would induce him to occupy the clearing again. He'd had enough trouble in there the first night to satisfy him, and crawled away to the wagon.

"Now ain't he a cute one?" said my partner. "He knows the next skunk'll steer clear of our guns, and he's going to defend that wagon."

Lightning not striking twice in the same place, we slept sweetly all night. The next morning we pulled out, and traveling over an almost barren prairie, came to the bay in which empties the Aransas River. Following the river, we came about 4 o'clock to a large reservoir fed by a small stream of clear and tasteless water. On each side of the fresh-water stream were many small groves or *motas*, and in one of them we pitched our tent. In the groves on the opposite side we found spots where one might well wish to live and die.

Absalom's Wonderful Memory

Large trees with interwoven branches almost excluding the direct rays of sunlight, covered the unencumbered ground, making natural halls with the level floor only occupied by the upright trunks; and I wished we were to remain here a week or more. We found small birds quite plentiful, also a few large owls. I admired their taste in selecting such a pleasant locality for homes, and almost envied them their beautiful surroundings.

In the tops of the tall trees under which we had camped, were many nests of the great blue heron. These birds are said to be as graceful in flying as a windmill broken loose from its fastenings, which comparison I believe to be an accurate one. But in alighting they much resemble the action of a boy tumbling off a pair of stilts. The first time I saw one of these birds visit its nest, I could almost have sworn that it had died in the air and fallen into the tree, for they are as likely to bring up on their back or head as upon their feet, and I often thought it strange that their haunts could not be known by broken legs and wings scattered about.

Late in the evening I slipped quietly out from under the trees, hoping to get a shot at one of these birds; but they saw my movements and flew away. Absalom had not seen me when I left the campfire (he being too busy in catching fleas to know anything else), and when I came walking leisurely back, I was surprised to have him seize me by the leg and tear my trousers from the knee down. This made me angry at him, but his master praised him for the act, and marveled at his wonderful memory—probably his memory of the fact that he was to protect the camp from all intruders.

In the afternoon of the following day, we started for the Chiltipin Creek. Crossing the Chiltipin, we took a look at a vacant cabin in which we had spent a cold and stormy night in January. The weather was warm now, but sight of the half-burnt sticks which remained in the low, tumbled down, fire-place just as we had left them, was suggestive of the misery in which we had smoked ourselves nearly blind on that wild night. Driving about a mile further, we camped in a small grove of post-oaks.

Why post-oak timber should be called by that name is an unanswerable question, for like all other trees that I saw in the country, it grows about as crooked as can be imagined. A much more appropriate name would be hoop-skirt oak.

During the night a severe wind came up from the east, laying our tent down upon us, and tearing the back end into shoe-strings. As might have been expected, the wreck did not awaken my partner, although it left his head freely exposed to the driving wind; and it was only after a thorough shaking that he opened his eyes and assisted me in raising the shelter again.

In the afternoon of the following day, we crossed the Aransas River. While driving along the bed of the stream, we saw a large hole in the bank above us,

about twenty feet from the water, and four or five from the top of the ground above. This hole we supposed to contain an owl's nest, and after ascending the bluff, we went back to investigate. Clinging to the stunted grass on the edge of the bank, I let myself down to a narrow shelf of sand, about four feet from the top, and on a level with the hole. Digging a place in the sand for one of my hands, and flattening myself as much as possible, I stooped, and was about to insert my free hand into the opening, when, with a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, a large owl made its exit. This so startled me, that losing my balance, I slipped off the shelf of sand, and holding a handful of torn up grass roots, plunged down the embankment. Where I struck, the earth was soft and loose, and I was uninjured. Then Mr. Priour let himself down by the lines fastened to the wagon-wheel, searched the cavity and found a pair of young birds.

We camped in a pleasant grove on the river's bank. Nearby were several wild mulberry trees loaded with ripe fruit, and we ate our fill a dozen times while here. These trees were also patronized by hundreds of warblers, and we took several varieties of them to our camp.

Papalote

April 14, we drove into Bee County and camped on the river. Packing up what bird skins we had, and leaving the camp in care of Absalom, we drove to the railroad town of Papalote, to ship our trophies, and do some trading.

The settlement of Papalote consists of one dwelling house, one store and post office combined, and the railroad station; all being closely huddled in a small clearing, and surrounded on all sides by a thick wood. The only outlets of the place appeared to be the railroad track and the path by which we had come, a passage cut through the timber, and not much the better from wear.

The store and post office commanded the greater part of our attention. We purchased some coffee and grain, and after a long consultation between Priour and myself in regard to advisability, etc., we decided to invest in a cake of soap. Making our want known to the grocery man, he proceeded to attack a large lump of yellow something with a chisel and hammer. This lump was about as large as a bushel, and I could not remember having seen soap on sale in such style before. After chiseling a while, the man held in his hand a piece of the substance, weighing perhaps a pound, for which we were to pay one dollar. Making a hole in this lump with a nail, he threaded it with a stout piece of bark, that would serve as a handle to carry or hang it by.

As we had seen no human beings besides each other, for a week, it was natural that we should remain here a short time and talk with people as they came and went from the store. Where they came from was uncertain. They all emerged from the wood surrounding the clearing, and disappeared in a similar manner,

no two persons entering the wood at the same place when going away. They came and went like bees from the hive, every man bringing a back-load of some merchantable article, and taking away something in exchange.

Shortly after we had secured our soap, a customer entered the store, and accosted the proprietor, "Have ye got 'ny beeswax here?"

"Yes; what in thunder d'you want of bees-wax?"

"None your darn business what I want it fer. I want beeswax, I do."

"But yer ain't got no gun, and wax is no good ter ye; I don't see what ye want wax fer."

"I want wax fer a sore on my gal's foot. Wax is good 'nough fer any gal's foot."

"Well, how much wax yer want; and how ye goin' to put it on yer wife's foot?"

"When I want yer to help put my gal's foot ter soak in hot wax, I'll ask ye! Gimme a coon-skin's wuth o' wax."

A Mysterious Substance

To my astonishment, the man in charge chiseled the customer off a piece of the same stuff he had sold us for soap. Soon after this, and while I was studying the subject over, and wondering whether we had been sold wax for soap, or if the last buyer had been given soap for wax, still another customer entered, and called for hard-bread and cheese. He was supplied with both, the cheese being chiseled from the same amorphous body that had supplied two other articles. Tightly clinging to the piece we had bought, I determined at the first opportunity to hold an inquest and learn its precise nature.

We remained an hour or more, and I closely watched every customer who entered, hoping to learn more of the subject which was uppermost in my mind. But no one asked for genuine beeswax, creamery cheese or best toilet soap, and I thought it best not to show my ignorance by questioning the proprietor. Dressed as I was, and somewhat grimed and oily, I fancied I would pass for a Texan anywhere. But should I ask such a question as was on my mind, I feared it would "give me away" and in such a case I would be driven crazy by improbable stories of encounters with, and hairbreadth escapes from, tigers, hyenas, snakes and scorpions, the narration of such stories being the conventional way in which sons of Texas amuse a "Boston man."

We saw skunk skins traded for coffee; wild game exchanged for bacon; potatoes bartered for jerked beef, and dog hides swapped for molasses, until I was tired of confusion, and longed for our camp again.

Driving leisurely back we started up a good many goatsuckers, and spent some time in hunting them; but as the thickets were dense, and the birds sharp enough to remain quiet when once hidden, even if almost stepped upon, we secured but

two specimens. These birds do not evade capture by flight, but by hiding, and they often escape detection by lying low among the underbrush which they so much resemble in color. A good dog could find them easily, but such game was too insignificant for Absalom to trouble himself with, and he much preferred running a cow or steer over the prairie, to hunting birds.

Absalom on Guard

We had hardly alighted from our wagon, after reaching camp, when Absalom, instead of being pleased to see us, began to growl and bark in a savage manner. He had forgotten our faces, and showing his sharp teeth, defied us to approach the tent. It was in vain that we saluted him by his name, called him "good doggy," or adopted any procedure to show him who we were; he would not allow us to approach him. We tried to knock him out by throwing clubs of wood, but he was a good dodger, and such mode of attack only seemed to make him worse. I was a little afraid he might make a dash at us, for having once felt his teeth, I knew them to be sharp and capable of inflicting a painful wound.

After beating the bush for a half-hour, Mr. Priour became desperate. "Give me my gun," said he, "I'll see if I'm going to be kept from my own camp by that whelp."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"What am I going to do?! I'm going to blow that cur back to Corpus Christi!"

I gave him the gun, but hadn't the slightest idea that he would shoot. Taking the weapon in his hand, he turned to me and exclaimed: "You fool! Do you suppose I'm going to kill my dog?!"

I was getting tired myself, and stating the same to my partner, I went into a thick clump of brush down the bluff, and lying upon my face, watched the maneuvers of the opposing forces. I could do no good at camp, and thought it only a question of time when the dog would recognize us.

Mr. Priour walked around and around the tent in a large circle; but whether he went fast or slow, the savage animal kept between him and the goal, all the while showing his gleaming canine teeth and barking vociferously. At last the man went to his wagon, got his harness-lines, and making a noose in them, returned to the vicinity of the dog. Going as near his foe as he cared to, he cast the noose over the animal's head, and then breaking into a run, choked the animal into quietude by dragging him over the rough ground. He then entered the tent hauling the dog behind.

I had a comfortable bed in the brush, and not wishing my partner to know that I had seen the performance, I waited ten or fifteen minutes before going to camp. When I entered the tent, Mr. Priour was smoking and the dog lay at his feet, nearly lifeless from garroting. Saying that I had just awakened from a sound

sleep I asked how he had made himself known to the dog. He answered that as soon as I was out of sight, the intelligent animal had come to him of his own accord, and it was I against whom his threats had been so furiously directed. An inquiry as to the cause of the dog's present unconsciousness elicited the opinion that having barked at me so energetically he had completely exhausted himself. My partner evidently was not quite sure that the explanation he offered would prove satisfactory to me; however, he said but little more on the subject, omitting the customary eulogy on the animal's wonderful memory. By daylight on the following morning the dog had recovered his sensibility enough to be about, and exhibited evidences of rapid convalescence.

Our camp here on the bluff of the Aransas River was in a picturesque country. It was a favorite haunt for birds of many species. In places the bluff is cut by deep and narrow fissures. Within these are the homes of many owls who sit drowsily on their back door steps while daylight lasts, patiently waiting for darkness when they sally forth. Woe to the mouse, rat or squirrel which ventures out after dark. Owls will eat small birds, but they much prefer mammals, and a large owl will not hesitate to pounce upon rabbit or skunk. I admire their bravery more than their taste.

We camped on this stream for a week, and found hunting productive; securing fine specimens of great-horned, short-eared, barred and barn owls, and of many other birds—warblers, grosbeaks, night hawks, etc. One morning we saw a column of least terns fishing in the river. They seemed out of place so far from the salt water, but the sight was a pleasing one to us, and we took several of them. From an excavation in the bluff on the far side of the river we took three young barn owls. They were not more than two or three days old, and being too young to stuff, we concluded to make a comfortable bed for them in our wagon, and keep them until they were feathered out. Killing plenty of birds we could easily furnish them enough to eat.

A Chance for a Talk

April 22, we struck our tent, bade farewell to the Aransas River and started on our journey again. During the forenoon the most of our road lay over a barren prairie, but we succeeded in getting a few birds from the *motas* and single trees which occasionally relieved the monotony of prairie travel. In places the ground was much cut up by burrows of the ground squirrel. Like the burrowing owl, these animals have the ability to get out of reach after being killed, but I obtained one specimen in spite of their activity.

About noon we saw a man approaching us on horseback, and as he drew nearer I noticed that he was dragging something by a long rope fastened to the pommel of his saddle. I was about to ask my companion what this could be, when a

second thought called to my mind my usual policy upon similar occasions, and I waited to see myself. The man met us just as we neared a *mota*, and according to the customs of the country, we stopped under the trees to exchange ideas and narrate experiences.

People in Texas are never in a hurry; time is long with them, and to meet a person and not stop and talk an hour or two would be considered a breach of prairie etiquette. The gist of the matter in these cases is for each one to find out as much of the other's business as possible, and information to such an end is generally freely given. A conversation between two strangers meeting on the prairie is something like this:

"My name's Bill Goshull; what's yours?"

"I'm going to Papalote; where are you going?"

"I was born in Webb County, on the Rio Grande; where was you born?"

"I've killed two Mexicans; how many've you killed?"

This talk continues until both parties are satisfied that they have pumped to the bottom, when any other subject is in order.

Dismounting, this man took the object he had been dragging, and placing it near the foot of a tree, seated himself upon it and began to make a cigarette. From a first view, the bundle appeared to resemble more than anything else a dead calf with its hair scraped off. But examining it as well as I was able, without showing my curiosity, I at last discovered beneath dry mud with which it was coated, the letters U. S. M. My sense of inquisitiveness was thus much appeased, and I concluded that this man was one of the much heard of "mail riders." This conclusion Mr. Priour corroborated after the stranger had taken his departure.

A Bird Haunt

At 2 P. M, we reached the town of Refugio, commonly known as "The Mission." Shortly after leaving Refugio we struck the open prairie, where we found buff-breasted and bartramian sandpipers without end. They had not been hunted much, for we took as many as we wished. There being no cows in sight, Absalom condescended to engage himself in our cause, which he did by dashing ahead and scaring any bird he saw us creeping upon. But not being able to work in two places at once, he could hinder only one of us at a time.

At dark we made camp in a growth of weesatche timber, and the ground was nearly destitute of herbage upon which our horses might feed. For this reason Mr. Priour did not fasten the animals at all, but allowed them to go wherever they could find food that would pay for picking. It was my partner's rule to tie one of the horses to some tree at night, but the one so tied often managed to loose himself before morning, and it was no unusual thing for us to spend an hour or two before breakfast looking them up.

The next morning our horses were missing, and we spent the forenoon in hunting for them. They were not found and, having used all of our fresh water the night before we ate at noon a dry meal, as we had done in the morning. While we were eating, a Mexican drove into camp to chat. Mr. Priour had spent several years in Mexico, and spoke the language as fluently as his own. He engaged the visitor to hunt for our lost team, agreeing to pay him four bits should he be successful in his search. An hour later the horses were driven into camp, and we went on our way rejoicing.

We made camp at the St. Nicholas Lakes, which are simply large and shallow depressions, and contain a great deal more mud than water. The next day we tramped through and about these lakes, finding thousands of red-breasted snipe and lesser yellow-legs feeding in them. Had it not been for the density of the shrubbery, this would have proved the finest hunting we had seen. But in spite of all the obstruction, we took as many specimens as we could possibly use. Curlews, stilts, snowy herons, spoonbills, ibes, snow-geese, and ducks of several species made the mud their general feeding ground. Hidden behind their screens of rushes and other vegetation, they saw us long before we came within gunshot of them, and our hunting was rewarded principally by the sight of hundreds of the birds rising *en masse* only to fly a short distance and alight again.

In the few straggling trees about camp we obtained a number of warblers and flycatchers. By an ingenious falsehood of how I had failed to find a bird that I had shot, Mr. Priour called me back of the remains of a large tree, dead long ago. Walking carelessly in the direction he pointed out, I was startled almost to fits by the snarl of an opossum not twelve inches from my legs. Stowed away in a cavity of this large stump, his eyes flashing and his teeth gnashing with rage, he seemed a picture of savageness. Priour laughed heartily at my sudden fright, while I only wondered what had kept the angry animal from flying at and tearing me to pieces.

I wanted to call Absalom and "sic him," but Priour, knowing as well as myself that the dog would run his innocent nose right into the set of tearing ivory, said that he was trying to make a bird hunter of him, and that killing opossums would lead him from his lessons. When I poked the muzzle of my gun into the hollow tree, the animal bit and re-bit it with such fury, that dozens of his teeth snapped like glass, pieces of them flying several feet away from the tree.

Mr. Priour finally put an end to the snarler's life with a charge of shot, and seeming to forget his anxiety about Absalom's attention being called away from birds, he allowed the dog to play with the 'possum as much as he liked, all the time "sicking him on."

CHAPTER IV IN WHICH ABSALOM FINDS THE STEW PAN

April 25, we drove to the San Antonio River. The stream was low and not more than fifty or sixty feet in width. On each side was an almost perpendicular bank about sixty yards in length, measured on its surface.

It seemed at first that it would be impossible to drive down the declivity without the wagon sliding over and dropping down ahead of the horses. But Priour was ingenious, and procuring a half cord or less of grape vines from a ravine nearby, he wove them through the wheels so skillfully that they all refused to turn.

The horses were reluctant to step down this hill, and I did not blame them. They'd had experience with such precipitous highways before, and there being no breeching, they well knew what it was to have the wagon crowding their rear.

After a little persuasion, gently punctuated with a switch, the animals gracefully resigned themselves and started down the bank. They knew the situation as well, as anyone could know it, and picked their way as carefully as a human being could have done under similar circumstances, bracing up against the wagon as much as possible.

Everything progressed nicely until about one-third the distance had been made, when one of the grape vines parted. This threw additional strain on another one and it parted also. The wagon crowded harder and harder until the horses could hold the weight against their hips no longer, and, only attempting to keep clear of the heavy wagon, they dashed down the bluff.

Priour heroically clung to the lines, traveling about twelve or fifteen feet at a jump, and it seemed as if the momentum must bury man, wagon and team out of sight in the bank across the stream. But there was an obstacle at the foot of the hill; an abrupt two-foot rise of planking on the edge of the ferry-boat. This obstacle arrested the wagon only, while everything in it fell in a shower on the boat and in the river. Neither Priour nor the horses went off the boat, although they came near doing so.

How I wished Absalom had been on the wagon. My heart bled with regret that he was still on the top of the bank. Such a chance to improve a dog's memory is not often seen, and he knew not what he had missed.

The spilling of our merchandise was no great hardship to us, for on the other side of the river we had to carry everything up to the surface of the earth by hand, the horses having all they could do to get up with the empty wagon.

Such is the typical ferry in Texas. The outlay of a small sum of money would put the way to and from the boat in a passable condition, but as long as a thing is possibly usable here, it is never improved in any manner. About a mile from the ferry and by the side of the river we camped.