HELD IN THE EVERGLADES

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE PELICANS

NOVEMBER came, and with November came the pelicans. In early March they had left their island homes, and in their untiring wanderings had drifted far apart; they had sailed over the measureless waters of the Caribbean Sea, they had dipped and fished along the weeded shoals of the Great Bahama Banks, and they had sought the deep recesses of wooded shores far up the Amazon River. All at once they were seized by a sudden instinct which impelled them to turn to their breeding place among the Ten Thousand Islands on the southwestern shore of Florida.

They came singly and in groups. The first arrivals took possession of the abandoned nests of last year among the low mangrove trees; then every available space along the shores of the island was occupied. True, there were other islands, thousands of islands, near by, some of them with larger and taller mangroves; but to these not a pelican went. This single island was their nesting place, and to it the entire tribe flocked.

What sedate and mannerly creatures they were. There was no noise of greeting, as with the coots and red-winged blackbirds. They paraded along the shore and over the island, calmly surveying the place; and then as if satisfied that all was right they nestled down upon the limbs of the mangrove or upon the weeds and grass. They were graceful flyers as they came sailing in from over the Gulf of Mexico or the channels among the many islands. Measuring seven feet from tip to tip, they rivaled the bald-headed eagle in their mastery of the air; but now that they were on the firm land they were awkward birds, and their gravity and sedateness

made them somewhat ridiculous. With their short tails and long bills it would seem that they were overbalanced and tended to a somersault. They lost no time in preparing their primitive nests of sticks and weeds. Often the nests were so close that the occupants touched their great bills and wings as they settled down.

In past years, the coming of the pelicans had been of interest to the Reed family; but the novelty had worn off. Mr. Reed simply looked towards the island and remarked to his wife that the pelicans were back. He promised to take the children over to the island when the day's work was over.

Just then every member of the family was needed. The early winter garden had been a great success, and Mr. Reed must hurry his produce to the markets. The new crop of potatoes would bring a fancy price in New York and Chicago; and there would be ready sale for the tomatoes, cucumbers and beans in every city of the North.

As labor was scarce the Reeds did their own work. Even the children could help to

pull the vegetables and carry them to the crates. When a canoe load was ready the farmer rowed over to the dock, from which a small steamer took the produce to Fort Key, and express trains rushed the output to the markets.

Everybody seemed to work with a heart except Phil. Mary and Elizabeth and Isabel and Marcella carried little baskets to the crates; Benjamin, aged four, imagined that he was helping, and even the baby Josephine cooed with quiet delight under the shade of a live oak tree. While father and mother labored all day in the sun, which was hot at noon, Phil had to be reminded several times that this was one of the busy seasons of the year and that delay in getting the produce to market meant serious loss. But Phil much to the distress of his foster parents, did not take the admonitions to heart.

Early in the afternoon the boy managed to slip away towards one corner of the garden; and before the family were aware of his departure he was rowing towards Pelican Island.

No one, in fact, could find serious fault with the curiosity of the boy. On that low and swampy island, where in the morning there was not a bird to be seen, now literally thousands of monster pelicans were marching around in solemn silence. Some one had remarked that it was time for them to settle on the island. This Phil had heard, but he never for a moment imagined that so many pelicans could be found in all the world of birddom.

"Where has that boy gone?" asked Mr. Reed who was the first to notice his absence.

"Upon my word, if he isn't rowing over to the island," remarked the wife as she pointed towards the fugitive.

"He hasn't done as much work to-day as one of the girls," said the husband.

"He may do better later," put in the wife.

"He's a lazy, lazy, boy; and I just ain't goin to work either," said Elizabeth, the second oldest girl, putting down her basket.

Mary, the eldest, and little Isabel and Marcella, who had done heroic work all day long, now joined in the general strike; Benjamin

dropped the one potato which he was carrying, and even the baby under the tree began to cry.

"That boy will work to-morrow and all day to-morrow, or he'll never again sleep in our house," were the emphatic words of Mr. Thomas Reed.

"Let us give him a chance; he is young," pleaded the wife.

"He has had his chance, and the last he'll get!"

"Will you send him back to the orphan asylum?"

"Yes, and I'll put him on the first car."

"I had hoped that we would make a man of him."

"It isn't in him! I saw that the first week he was with us."

"We have no charge to make against him."

"Aren't laziness and disobedience sufficient?"

"Suppose our own child disobeyed us, would we overlook it?" asked the wife.

Then there was silence. "We'll do the work without him," said the husband, who was

the first to speak. "I thought that we would have some one who could help us, and at the same time be a member of the family. But I have lost hope in this boy."

"I heard him tell the children that he was going to run away; if we are too hard on him he may carry out his threat," urged the wife.

"Yes, he said he was going on the lumber boat," put in Elizabeth.

"So much the better," affirmed Mr. Reed. "So much the better. We will save the price of his ticket back to Brooklyn."

Soon the parents were at work, and the children imitating their good example, resumed their small tasks.

Unaware of the comments passed upon him Phil rowed slowly towards the island. He was surprised to find that the big, sedate birds were in no way frightened at his approach. But while they seemed to ignore his coming, scores of them were on guard ready to give the alarm. What monster birds they were! The boy had never dreamed that birds grew so large. And the yellow sack that hung

beneath each one's bill! Why the pelicans could almost swallow a little boy! Phil Reed was frightened. He crouched in the canoe as one of the largest of the pelicans darted into the water quite close to him. The boy thought at first that he was the object of attack; but into the water went the bird with a splash, to come out again with a fish six inches long.

Then a curious thing happened. A little sea-gull came sailing in, lit on the pelican's head, and reaching over took the tail of the fish in its bill. The gull had evidently played tricks upon pelicans before; for it watched its chance and, when the pelican opened its mouth to swallow the fish, sailed away, with the prize. Funniest of all, the pelican did not even look around to see what had become of its expected meal; it made no noise and no protest, but simply flew away to the island to join its companions.

Phil became courageous. If the pelican would not fight for its fish and would allow a little sea-gull to rob it, surely a big boy would be safe among such birds. He decided to land. The canoe came slowly towards the

shore, and still not a pelican stirred. He could almost hit the nearest one with his oar. At close view they seemed ungainly birds with tails ridiculously small and bills ridiculously large; but those overhead were masters of flying, and sailed in graceful curves, sometimes alone and sometimes beating time with a leader.

The boy stepped out on the sand, and still the pelicans did not stir. Then the oar fell from his hand and struck the canoe with a sharp note; all at once the entire flock took to flight and as their great wings beat the air it was like the blast of the tropical storms. The boy leaped to his canoe in fright and bewilderment. The whole island seemed to rise up with the vast army of winged monsters.

When the noise subsided, Phil Reed was standing in the prow of his boat on a desert island.

CHAPTER II

MEETING LITTLE DEER

"BIG birds," came a voice from behind. Phil Reed turned and saw a Seminole Indian.

"Gee!" cried the lad catching his breath, "I thought that the whole island was flying away."

"Would y-o-u like to fly away?" asked the Indian, with a prolonged emphasis on y-o-u.

"I would like to get out of this place," acknowledged Phil, "for they make me work too hard."

"Then come with me."

"Where?"

"To the Everglades."

The eyes of the boy opened with an expression of surprise and delight.

"How long will we stay?" he asked.

"We'll live there."

"All the time."

"Yes, or as long as you wish."

The appearance of the Indian was no surprise to the boy, for the Seminoles came and went at times among the islands. They were peaceful neighbors, saluting with a grunt as they passed silently along. But for the first time Phil saw one in a white man's canoe, for they invariably used their own which were cut out of the log of a cypress-tree. However, he thought little of this, for the Indians were fast introducing the dress and customs of their former enemies.

"And I won't have to work?" asked the boy as he looked across the water and saw the Reed family laboring in the truck garden.

"No work!" came the reply.

"But what will we live on?"

"Plenty fish, plenty birds, custard apples, palmetto cabbage."

Phil did not pause to consider that custard apples would not be ripe until the following August, and that palmetto cabbage could not

be obtained until late in spring; nor did he think of the rather uninviting dish of fish and birds every day and every meal of the day, even if the fish could be caught and the birds killed.

He had heard of the Everglades as a wondrous, secret place where only Indians lived. He knew that Indians worked little and yet managed to survive. It was just such a life as appealed to him; besides he feared that a reprimand, if not a punishment, awaited him on his return.

"When can I go with you?" he asked of the Indian.

"Go now, right now."

Again the boy looked across the water where the Reeds were working.

"What 'll I do with this canoe?" he asked.

"Mr. Reed has another one, he can come and get it."

"Suppose they catch me."

"No catch an Indian."

"But my clothes?"

"I'll make Indian clothes."

Again the boy looked across the bay and

saw the Reeds at work. They had been kind to him. If his labor was hard, Mr. Reed always set him the example; his own parents could not have been kinder. Then the little girls had become so kind and lovable that they were like sisters to him. At the Brooklyn Orphan Asylum one thing had been repeated to the boys over and over again. They should not run away from the family that adopted them!

"Come for a short ride," said the Indian who noticed that there was a struggle in the boy's mind.

"Will you bring me back again?"

"I will, just as soon as you wish."

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun! ejaculated the Seminole. "Honest Injun," he laughed, for he recognized this expression common to small boys. "Yes," he continued, "I am an honest Indian. Seminoles always keep their word. Jump in and see how you like my canoe!"

As Phil Reed stepped from his clumsy flat-bottom boat into the canoe, he noticed that it was heavily laden and was propelled

by a motor. Not once did he distrust or fear the Indian.

"We are off," said the Seminole as he started his motor.

The small and large islands through which the canoe glided lay on the southwestern coast of Florida, and were a part of that group known as the *Ten Thousand Islands!* Some of them were large and wooded, but the greater number were simply sand banks or coral reef covered daily by the rising tides. They formed an enchanting scene as the graceful canoe glided among them.

After an hour's ride the Indian brought his canoe ashore beneath a great palmetto tree that reached far out over the water. "We'll have a lunch," said he. From the boat he took an oil lamp, filled a little pot with water from a rubber bag and set it to boil. "We'll have some tea, and while the water is boiling I'll tell you who I am."

Seated upon the ground with his hands grasping his knees, with scarcely a movement of his body, and with his eyes fixed upon the outer branches of the palmetto trees, the Seminole told his story.

"Don't be surprised," he began, "that I speak English so well, for I'm a graduate of the Carlyle Indian College. But first I finished high school in Oklahoma. I played football with the best team that Carlile ever had, played quarter-back; but perhaps you do not know what that means. I was called Little Deer, for I was such a good runner. But I was a good speaker too and won the first place for English. Many of the Indians speak English with a perfect accent. Well, I am a son of a Seminole Chief. You may have heard that only a few of the Seminoles remained in the Everglades; the others were moved west by the government because they refused to submit to certain regulations. My great grandfather was among those who went. From my people I inherited a rather large fortune. I have always been anxious to see the place where my people lived for centuries, and from which they were driven. I have talked with my people; I have read books on the subject, and have two books with me. At last I made up my mind to spend some months in the Everglades. An-

other Indian was coming with me, I gave him money to buy a gun, but he spent it for whiskey and got drunk. I was disgusted and went without him. But I want a companion."

The slow deliberate words of the Indian were disturbed by the sizzling teapot. Using a small strainer the Seminole put some tea into the boiling water. "It will be ready in a moment," he explained, "and now," he asked, turning to the boy, "will you be my companion?"

Again there was a struggle in the boy's mind. For the first time he seemed to realize how good the Reeds had been to him. Thus far he had taken everything as his due; now it dawned upon him that he had in no way repaid them for their kindness. He was a member of the family, he would be treated as the son of Mr. Thomas Reed; he would inherit the name and the fortune. On the other hand he had been charmed by the Indian's manner and speech. He trusted the Seminole. There was the canoe ready, with ample provisions, and the lure of the wild life in the Everglades.

"Let us go back," said he, "and watch Mr. Reed take the flat-bottom boat."

"Certainly," said the obliging Indian, "and while I want you to be my companion I do not wish to force you. I will take you back to the pelican island; and when you are there you may make your choice."

Over the winding water course the motor boat cut its way. Neither the Seminole nor Phil Reed spoke. "See," suddenly whispered the Indian turning the canoe ashore, "there he is."

"Where?" asked the boy who had lost all idea of place and distance in this tortuous course.

"See, right through those two clusters of mangrove."

"I see. He has two boats. He is rowing one and pulling the other after him. He knows that I am gone."

"Yes," acknowledged the Indian, "it is too late to go after him. He will be very angry."

"He may think that I am drowned," the boy said.

"No danger. He saw my canoe; he couldn't

help seeing it. He knows that you went away with some one; but he won't know it was an Indian, for he couldn't distinguish an Indian from a white man at that distance."

"I am afraid to go back now," acknowledged the boy, "besides," he asked, "we won't be gone long, will we?"

"Only a few weeks."

"Then, where will I go"?

"I will take you back to the Reeds, and if they won't help you, I will get a place for you to work. You are a strong boy and can get along without any help."

This remark pleased the boy. For the first time in his life he felt that strength and independence which come with freedom. Yes, he could make his way. "I will go with you," he said, although his voice grew faint as he uttered the words; the words which turned him adrift upon the water, adrift in the world, adrift from the moorings of his childhood, adrift from the protection of his adopted home.

CHAPTER III

THE REEDS

No man on the police force of Brooklyn was more popular than Thomas Reed. Big Tom, they called him, and big he was. He stood six feet two in his stockings. With great shoulders and massive head, he was a perfect model of strength and energy as all day long he directed the traffic at the foot of River Street near the wharf. No driver ever disobeyed his orders. Whether it was truck or automobile it seemed as if the traffic policeman could, if it moved forward before the signal was given, pick up the machine and put it back in its place in the line.

Big Tom Reed had something of the poet in his nature. He could quote whole pages of Tom Moore, and was fond of Longfellow and of Father Ryan. It was Father Ryan's

poems that first turned his thoughts towards the South. Then he read Poe and Sidney Lanier.

One day when coming home in a street car, Tom Reed picked up an advertisement of a Land Company in Florida. It was printed on tinted paper. The man that got out that advertisement was a master at his business. Most of the pages were filled with beautiful descriptions and poetic selections; and only in an occasional paragraph did the writer condescend to touch upon the grosser things of life—the four crops each year, and the wonderous citrus groves, rich with golden fruit. There were selections, too, from each of Tom Reed's favorite poets.

The traffic policeman yearned for the peaceful and fruitful lands of Florida. Night and day at home and on the street he talked of Florida. It was the most promising state in the country; it was the land of enchantment; the land of wonderful opportunities.

Mrs. Reed was a worthy companion of the big Brooklyn policeman. In any other household she would have been the master. At the

end of a see-saw she could exactly balance the plank with the policeman on the other side. Her large, oval features bore a remarkable resemblance to those of her husband. People often called them the twins. While she made no pretence at being the master of the house she did glory in the fact that to her was committed the purse. Regularly for twelve years the traffic policeman had handed her the check from the city hall. So much had the wife saved that she kept a double bank account with the intention of some day surprising her husband. She claimed that she was saving for a rainy day, but so far no rainy day had come into the lives of the Reeds.

And now the sunshine of life, which ever had been bright, began to glow with tropical splendor; for the worthy spouse had caught the enthusiasm of her husband. How glorious it would be to get away from the flat life of Brooklyn, and to own a real home and a real farm of their own!

"If I only had another thousand!" said the husband one evening. "I have been talking it all over with Father Devlin."

"How much do you think we have?" said the wife, for now was coming the triumph of her life, the hour for which she had toiled and saved and waited.

"You told me that you had about two thousand."

"Yes, in one bank."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean what I said—in one bank."

"And why did you use two banks?"

"I was afraid to keep it all in one bank."

"How much is it?"

"Guess, dear."

"If it is a thousand I'll jump over this table with joy."

"And if it is only a few hundred?"

"Anything that will take us near the extra thousand will be welcome."

"And you cannot guess the amount?"

"Of course not, dear, you have had the bank books so long that I really had not given any thought to the amount which we have saved."

The children looked at each other and at their parents with surprise, for mamma and

papa were acting just like little children. What did it mean?

"But you must guess," insisted the wife.

"Two hundred; if it's two hundred I'll turn a somersault."

"Guess again."

"Five hundred."

"More than that."

Mr. Reed leaped to his feet, kissed his wife and all the children. "Say, you're the greatest wife in the world. But what bank is it and let me see the bank account."

Proudly Mrs. Reed arose and brought from a dresser a small bank book, and without a word handed it to her husband. Then the wife and the husband fell to kissing and hugging, until the children wondered and wondered what had happened to mother and father.

In the second bank book the Reeds had fifteen hundred dollars.

It must be explained that Father Devlin, to whom Mr. Reed had been speaking, was Secretary of the Catholic Settlement Society. The object of this association was to get the

Catholic people to leave the large cities and settle in communities in the country. One of the aims of the society was to influence a sufficient number to buy land in the same locality so that they might build a church and erect a school.

Father Devlin was anxious for Mr. Thomas Reed to be the pioneer in the Florida adventure. The big policeman was flattered by the offer; accordingly he now bought fifty acres on the southwest coast of Florida just north of the Ten Thousand Islands. A large part of the land was covered with pine trees, the turpentine from which was guaranteed to bring the price of the real-estate.

Mr. Reed resigned his position on the police force and went south where under his direction a neat cottage was constructed. True it was not a substantial building, but was well-suited to the climate; for in its planning he had followed the advice of those who had long been residents of the state. When the home was about completed the rest of the family arrived. Then followed busy days for the parents and glorious days for children.

No longer did they have to play in the dirty streets, but out in God's own sunshine along the water's edge and in the clean white sand.

More than a year passed, and the former policeman had succeeded with his marketing far beyond his greatest hopes. There seemed to be but one difficulty, that of securing labor. Mrs. Reed had done almost a man's work for the first twelve months, but her husband was determined that other arrangements should be made.

"I have the solution," he said to her one night as they walked in from the potato field, "we'll get an orphan boy from Brooklyn."

"What made you think of such a thing just now?"

"You have been tired to-day, my dear, and it has worried me."

"I have felt tired," acknowledged the wife, "but I did not think that you would notice it."

"Anyone would feel it; this summer heat has taught the natives to sleep during the heat of the day, and work early in the morning and late in the evening. We have been living and working as if we were in Brooklyn," were the words of the husband.

"Then let us try the other order, and perhaps we can get along without any help," said the wife.

"No, we'll need the help. We have only one little son of our own, and would it not be a good thing to adopt another? You remember that our pastor spoke on that subject the last day we attended church in Brooklyn."

"But orphan boys are a great responsibility."

"Not as difficult to handle here as in the city," replied the man.

For some days the matter was discussed, until finally a letter went to the Catholic Orphan Asylum, in Brooklyn, with the offer from the Reeds to adopt a boy about fourteen years of age. A short and satisfactory correspondence followed, papers were signed and a nameless lad left the asylum for his new southern home. Yes, nameless, for it had been agreed that the Reeds were not to inquire into the history of the child, although they were given proofs that he was of good parentage; and they were to adopt him le-

gally into the family, and no parent or relative was to have any right over him or to know where he had been sent.

In the meanwhile a letter came to Mr. Reed from the Superior of the asylum. It contained a transcript of some notes of the directress, whose duty it was to study the characteristics of each of the children in the institution:

"Phil ————. No. 137. *Good Qualities*: a good heart, love of action, restless activity, remarkable piety, talent for drawing and especially for practical work, should follow a trade. *Bad Qualities*: that very restless activity, not a strong sense of duty, considerable selfishness—a selfishness which, if unrestrained by obedience, can lead to much misery to self and others."

"Direct to Mr. Thomas Reed, Lee Wharf, Fla." These were the words marked with heavy black ink and sewed on the lapel of the boy's coat—the nameless boy whom Mr. Reed met one morning at the boat landing. He said his name was Phil; and Phil Reed he was in future to be called.

Young Phil Reed was red-headed, very red-headed, almost fiery red-headed. His face, too, was slightly flushed and freckled; his nose and chin full and round. He had just reached his fifteenth birthday, but was rather small for his age; in fact, at first glance, one would have taken him for a boy of twelve. In his new suit, furnished by the asylum, he presented no mean appearance; and his bashful little sisters were rather proud of their new brother.

"He's got straw-berry hair," whispered Isabel aged eight.

"He'll set the house on fire with his head," affirmed Mary, the eldest of the girls.

"I jes 'lub 'im," said little Marcella.

Benjamin held tight to his hand, conscious of the fact that he now had a big brother and would not have to play alone.

Mrs. Reed folded him to her breast, and kissed and caressed him, calling him her own dear boy.

Although disappointed when he learned that he was the only big boy in the family, and in fact in the neighborhood, he made

friends with all at once; and then, uninvited, he went out to investigate the strawberry patch which he had spied when coming to the house. Who could find fault with him for wishing to eat big, red strawberries in late December? His new sisters and mother came with him, and handed him so many and such fine large berries that for once in his life he ate all he wished. Then there were birds and trees, and a whole world of things that were new to the little stranger.

Weeks went by and the novelty of southern life wore off. Only once a month when the family went twenty miles to church did Phil Reed see and talk with other boys.

Summer came, and it was warm in the fields. In fact, the hot climate and monotonous life began to be very disagreeable to Phil Reed. His foster parents did all in their power to make him interested in their home and its work; but they could not help but see that their adopted son was getting more and more dissatisfied with his surroundings.

Phil Reed, too, was being seized by a certain restless spirit of travel and adventure.

The one long trip from Brooklyn gave him some idea of the size of the world. In front of him was the boundless stretch of water of the Gulf of Mexico. It was joined to the ocean, so he was told, and the ocean went all the way around the world; so he thought, so he dreamed. Perhaps the boyish fancy would have been forgotten; perhaps the lad would have grown accustomed to the home where he wanted for nothing. However, the temptation to follow the Seminole Indian came, and was too strong. In some vague way the Everglades would be the door to see the vast world. Into the Everglades he went.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY TO THE EVERGLADES

CLICK, click, click, went the motor and the prow of the canoe was turned towards the winding currents of Ten Thousand Islands.

"Where are the Everglades, Mr. Indian?" asked Phil, when the canoe was fairly under way.

"Don't call me Mr.; call me—well, let me see, call me Little Deer. We have to go about ten miles through these islands to the mouth of the Harvy River. It will then take a day's run up the river to the Everglades."

"Will you teach me to fish and shoot a gun, Mr. Deer—Mr. Little—Mr.—Deer Little?" stammered the boy. Then both laughed. "I don't like that name," protested the boy, "I'll call you Mr. Indian."

"You are rather polite, at any rate," said the red man. "And I notice you speak English well. Most boys would have said: will you learn me to shoot and many would have said larn me to shoot. Who taught you?"

"Sister Valentine taught me the first year, then Sister Mary Paul, and Sister Mary Catherine after that."

"So you had three sisters."

Phil Reed pardoned the ignorance of the man because he was an Indian. "They weren't my sisters; they were—they—were just Sisters, who taught in the Orphan Asylum. Sister Valentine didn't know English very well, for she was French. She came from one of the countries which the French are fighting to get back from Germany. Let me see—it's Al—something."

"Alsace."

"That's it. She has gone back there to nurse the wounded. Well, she said one day that I'd be an Edison."

"How's that?"

"Why, one of the orphan's had an engine full of springs, but it wouldn't work; and an-

other boy had a boat which he used to sail in the fountain; and I took all the springs out of the engine and fixed them on the boat and made it run; and Sister Valentine said I'd be making submarines some day, and that I'd be an Edison."

"That's good; you may need your talent before we are out of the Everglades."

"But one of the other Sisters said something else about me."

"Something good I am sure."

"Not very good! She said that I was selfish and that I didn't thank people for all they did for me." Phil hung his head in shame for he now realized for the first time that he was proving himself ungrateful to the Reeds who had been so good to him.

"Don't mind it now," remarked the Indian who noticed the change in the boy's manner; "after a short time you can go to the Reeds and thank them for what they have done. But you talk about the Sisters; were they Catholic Sisters?"

"Yes, Mr. Indian."

"And you are a Catholic?"

"Of course!" was the quick reply. "Irish Catholic—red-headed and freckled-faced, see," and Phil Reed removed his torn hat.

"There is no doubt about the red-headed part. How long were you at the asylum?"

"Let me s-e-e-," and the Indian was amused at the deliberate manner of his companion. "Let me s-e-e-, it was six years. Last year I got the prize for correct English. If any boy said he done or he seen it, the other boy put a tag on him; and he had to watch and to catch some other boy who made a mistake. I didn't get the tag all the year and Sr. Mary Catherine gave me the nicest prayer-book with gold edges. I wish I had it now."

"You won't need it in the Everglades."

"Yes, I will, Mr. Indian; yes, I will, I must say my prayers in the Everglades."

"What's the use? There is no God in the Everglades."

"Yes there is, Mr. Indian, God is everywhere. He is in the water and on the islands and the trees and everywhere."

"Why doesn't He drown if He's in the water?"

"God is a spirit, Mr. Indian, and spirits can go through fire and water and everything, and nothing can hurt them."

"You are a bright boy to know all about God—or the great Spirit, as we Indians call Him. So you think that God is everywhere?"

"Yes, Mr. Indian."

"Does He see everything?"

"Yes, Mr. Indian."

"Did He see you running away from home?"

"Y-e-s, Mr. Indian, but it was your fault. You were accessary, and you are to blame just as much as I was."

"Good! By the great spirits, where did you get that big word?"

"In the catechism. There are seven ways of being accessary to another's sins."

"I've found a walking dictionary. If I had known that my companion was to be so wise, I'd have left my books at home. So I am accessary, and half the fault is with me? Well, it wasn't a big fault," explained the Indian who saw that his remark had made his young companion rather serious. "It wasn't

a big fault. You see you didn't run away from home. You haven't any home. You are an orphan boy; I will take just as good care of you as did the Reeds. But don't let us talk about the Reeds any more. Let us turn our thoughts to the life before us. Is that agreed?"

"Is what agreed, Mr. Indian?"

"That we don't talk about the Reeds, and your running away from the Reeds. We'll forget them for the present. We'll talk about birds and shooting. So you want to know how to shoot?"

"Yes, Mr. Indian."

"I'll give you your first lesson to-night with my rifle; but we haven't any cartridges to waste. How would it do to wait until we see ducks and other birds which we can eat. If you kill one, we will be that much better off, and you will have the practice at the same time. I have it; you can kill a pelican. You can't miss them. White people don't like them for eating; but white people don't know what is good. A fat pelican is just as good as a fat chicken."

"I can kill one of them with a stick or stone," remarked the boy as he pointed towards an island where a dozen were wading in the shallow water.

"You think you can. You could never get near one with a stick, and as for a stone, there are no stones in this part of the country. Even if you had one, you would require a sling and the skill of David to kill a pelican with a stone. Do you know what David did?" the Indian asked.

"Yes, Mr. Indian, he killed the giant Goliath."

"Right; and you see I know something about the Bible. We have improved since David's time. Come, this is a good time to take a lesson in shooting."

The Seminole brought the motor boat to an island. "Slip off your shoes," he said in a low voice. "I am going to put two shells into the sporting gun, for I'm afraid that you couldn't do anything with a rifle the first time. Get about twenty feet from the birds, and pick out one with its side or back towards you, for the breast feathers sometimes turn the

shot. If you miss the first time then try one on the wing; for with their big wings stretched out they make a fine mark. Don't be afraid; this gun doesn't kick. Now watch, you may as well learn how to use this automatic gun. When you fire a shot the gun loads itself and is ready for a second shot. You see this little catch under the gun and next to the trigger, it is called the safety. When you get ready to fire simply shove the safety forward with your thumb."

"Like that?" said the boy pressing the safety as directed.

"Exactly—you have it, now creep along slowly."

Proud as the oldest huntsman was Phil Reed as, with gun in hand, he waded through the shallow water. Over his head pelicans were flying—flying, no doubt, back to the island from which the boy had frightened them, while those on the little sand bank before him seemed in no way to notice his approach.

"Stop," he heard the Indian call from the canoe.

Up went the gun to the boy's shoulder. It was aimed and the trigger was pulled. Something was wrong. Yes, he had forgotten the safety; it was pressed forward and again Phil aimed the gun towards a big bird. Bang it went! There was a great flutter of wings. The boy fired a second shot. Then he looked and saw three monster birds lying before him. In his excitement he had not been aware that his first shot went true. The second shell had been equally fatal, while the Seminole had taken no risk and had killed a third with his rifle.

From that day Phil Reed felt that he was a great hunter. It took three trips to drag the prizes to the canoe. As the weather was cool and the meat would keep there was a supply for a full week.

The smaller islands of parching sand were now giving place to larger ones clothed with tropical growth. Aged palmetto trees stood sombre in the haze of November; the feathery fronds had dropped from the more aged trees leaving the trunks as smooth and bare as those of the pines, while up the brown limbs

of others the jasmine vine had twined, and with its yellow trumpets threw perfume to the breezes. More sombre still were the live oaks, with funeral pendents of Spanish moss. But the dreary oaks were gladdened by the mistletoe with its yellow-green leaves and its pearl-white berries. Mangrove clusters were on all sides. There were elder and sumac bushes and blue-berry, water oak scattering their leaves at the approach of winter, and maples with their foliage burning salmon-red.

Among the numerous aquatic birds seen in and among the islands the great blue heron stood conspicuous. Unlike the pelican which shows to best advantage in its flight, the blue heron must be studied in repose or when wading leisurely in shallow water. Standing fully six feet in height it is the prize bird of the American continent; during the early summer when it wears a drooping plume on the back of its head it shows to best advantage. Once it takes to flight all dignity vanishes. With its neck arched back between its wings, until the head is scarcely visible, and with a croaking note it sails away.

As the motor boat ran among the numerous islands, and the occupants watched the trees and birds, night came on. It was dark when the mouth of the Harvy River was reached.

"We'll camp here," said the Seminole, "and to-morrow night we'll be within the Everglades."

"Haven't you seen the Everglades, Mr. Indian?"

"No, only heard of them and read about them."

On reaching shore a fire was lighted at once; and pleasant it was in the chill November evening. Tea was made, and warmed canned-salmon was served with bread and peanut butter.

"What is that you are doing?" asked the Seminole, as he observed the boy making the sign of the cross before the meal.

"Saying my grace."

"Kind of prayer, I suppose."

"Yes," replied the boy, pitying the poor Indian who did not know what grace was.

"We say grace to thank God for giving us all good things to eat," he explained.

"But, I'm giving you all the things," claimed the Indian.

"You bought them," said the lad from the orphanage, "but God made them. He is the maker of heaven and earth. He makes the trees grow, and you cut up a tree to make fire-wood."

This was new language for the Indian. The boy was so positive in his statement that his words made a deep impression on his elder companion.

When supper was over the Seminole lit his pipe and offered a smoke to his companion.

"No," said the lad, "I can't smoke till I am twenty-one."

"How is that?"

"We made the promise on our First Communion day."

Here was some other religious devotion, thought the Indian; but he did not ask for an explanation; nor did he make any further remark when later the lad knelt down and with his hands clasped before his breast said night prayers.

The voyagers were up at day-light and soon

began the ascent of the Harvy River. The sluggish stream became narrow and swift as the day went by. At times the current was so choked with blue hyacinth and pickerel-weed that it was difficult to follow the winding passage. It was late in the afternoon when the party reached a long line of cypress-trees, the margin of the Everglades.

That night the Seminole removed the motor from the canoe. It was wrapped in several layers of oil cloth and with the entire gasoline supply buried in a high place at the foot of a large pine tree, some distance from the river.

The Seminole had brought with him a long pole made in three sections, which were fitted together and put at the side of the canoe. All was now in readiness.

At day break on the following morning the Indian pushed the canoe out into the murky waters of the cypress-swamp. Slowly it went until the edge of the swamp was reached. Then the trees were passed, and Phil Reed and the Seminole Indian were in the Everglades. Phil Reed was a prisoner.

CHAPTER V

INTO THE EVERGLADES

ONLY those who have seen the Everglades can form any idea of this world of mystery. Most people picture the Everglades as a great swamp, either covered with dense tropical growth or studded with cypress-trees, so thick that the sunlight can but faintly penetrate into the black waters where big snakes squirm and alligators splash and flounder. But in truth, the Everglades is not stagnant swamp; its waters are so pure the year round that the thirsty explorer can scoop up a cupful at the side of his canoe and drink it. Along the edges, forests of pine, cypress and palmetto abound. Within there are islands called hammocks, on the smallest and by far the most numerous of which grow mangrove bushes so thick that they can be

penetrated only with difficulty; while on the few larger hammocks can be seen clusters of small pine and cypress-trees, with an occasional palmetto. Here too, depending on the dampness of the soil, thrive many of the vines and trees common in the central part of the country.

The peculiar difficulty of traversing the Everglades comes from the fact that the region is neither entirely land nor water. Explorers scale the Alps or the Rocky Mountains, and traverse the parching plains of the Sahara Desert; but these conditions of mountain or desert do not exist in the Everglades. While the water that covers the entire area makes it impossible to use anything but a boat or a canoe, still there is scarcely enough water in places to float the smallest craft. The principal obstacle comes from a tall, bunchy growth called saw-grass; and well does it deserve its name, for its triangular blades cut deep into the flesh, and even a glove of the toughest leather will gradually yield to its attacks. It grows, too, to the height of eight feet, and so thick in places

that it is a sheer impossibility to pass through it with any canoe that can be used for navigation.

Although the Everglades stretch north from southern Florida for a hundred miles and are in places seventy-five miles wide, still if one sees but a small section of them he has a good idea of the whole formation. In some places where the water is too deep for the saw-grass to grow, the Everglades appear like a lake, and again where the grass is thick, they have the appearance of waving meadows. The monotony is broken by the hammocks. Strange as it may seem, deer and wild-cats find their way across the Everglades, the former subsisting on the coarse grass and twigs at the edge of the hammocks, and the latter eating foxes, raccoons, and other small animals.

When one passes within the Great Cypress Swamp of southern Florida he is conscious of the weird, uncanny darksomeness. The transition from light to semi-darkness is so sudden that it seems as if a great door has shut out the light of heaven. The cypress-

boles stand so thick that progress is slow, everything around is reeking with decay, the water seems black, the ground beneath oozy and unsafe, and sluggish serpents creep and hideous alligators crawl. But out in the Everglades the first feeling is one of light and warmth, sunshine and freedom. It is only when one is deep in the interior without compass or food, that the terrible reality of helplessness and isolation is forced upon the thoughtless explorer who has ventured into this unknown world.

However, on that bright November morning, when the frail canoe of the Seminole pushed out into the Everglades, happy were the hearts of Phil Reed and Little Deer. The boy sat in the middle of the canoe while the Indian standing on the back seat poled his craft slowly along.

"What a beautiful bird!" cried the boy enchanted by a vision before him.

"That's the egret," explained the Indian, as he let his pole lag at the end of the canoe.

"It looks like a woman's hat," claimed the boy.

"It may be one, some day," was the reply. "So many of these birds were being killed for hat-feathers, that the United States Government passed a law forbidding their destruction."

"What would they do to you if you shot one?"

"Nothing, unless you brought the skin and feathers to some city, and tried to sell them."

"I won't kill any; they look so beautiful," said the boy. "They remind me of big butterflies. And I see some butterflies," he continued, "big red and green and yellow and rainbow butterflies. What do they live on out here in the water? Ouch—" and in an instant the boy's left hand was covered with blood.

"The saw-grass," cried the Indian, dropping the pole and reaching for a box. "I should have told you," he said; "it cuts like a knife. You see I put on heavy gloves. But it isn't dangerous," he continued, as he began to bandage the wound.

"Did you bring that cotton with you?" asked the boy.

"Of course, I brought everything that the books called for. One man who went through the Everglades years ago, wrote down in his note book that a good supply of bandaging should be brought, for even with the best of care one would cut his hands with saw-grass. I am surprised that I did not warn you. But here are the gloves," he continued, reaching into another box. "They are just a trifle large, but they will protect your hands. That was a rather good bandage I made, even if I must say it," he remarked as he re-examined the wound and handed the boy the gloves.

"There is our first hammock," said the Indian as the canoe came close to a clump of bushes, some twelve feet in height, with small, waxy leaves and leathery berries.

"Will we sleep in a place like that?" asked the boy.

"I hope not. If you look close, you will see that the water is all in through the bushes. We must never sleep among mangrove clumps; they are full of rattlesnakes and moccasins. We will have to sleep in the canoe unless we find a dry hammock."

"Jiminy crickets! look there!" cried the boy. Right above them with its big eyes glaring in the sunlight and its forked tongue vibrating rapidly was a moccasin six feet long.

"Get away, old fellow," shouted the Seminole, hitting at the snake with his pole. "Stories say that you never bite an Indian; but I don't care about taking a risk. You have a quick eye," he said to the boy. "I was right under the thing and didn't see it. You see, I have lost all the ways and tricks of my Seminole ancestors."

The moccasin sank beneath the water, and the canoe went on.

Although the Everglades cannot be called a favorite resort for birds, owing to the absence of berries and other food stuffs, still whole flocks tarry for a few days in the passage north and south. Phil was surprised to see field-larks sailing over the water and resting on the stout saw-grass. Snipes and coots and red-winged black-birds were numerous. Ducks, too, swam so close to the canoe that they made an easy mark; but the Indian did not wish to waste a shell upon them so

long as he had the pelicans for meals. Water moccasins were everywhere, sometimes dropping from the mangrove bushes, sometimes swimming quite close to the edge of the canoe.

"There's a hammock, where we can camp to-night," said the Indian, pointing to a pine tree which had come into view about noon. "The land is high and will make a good place for camping."

"Can't we get there for dinner?" asked the boy.

"How far do you think it is?" asked the Seminole.

"Oh, about a mile."

"I would say five or six miles."

"Then we'll have to eat our dinner in the canoe," remarked the boy.

"Precisely. That's the reason I brought the oil stove. The books say that one can live on cold meals if one had only a cup of warm tea. But," he added encouragingly, "as soon as we get fairly started we'll always arrange to be on a dry hammock at meal time. For the first few days we want to get as far as possible into the Everglades; after that we won't care so much about the speed."

"We seem to have plenty to eat," said the boy, looking at the boxes and the big pot, full of pelican meat.

"Yes, and we have a long journey before us, and a long winter before us."

"If I get tired, will you go back soon?"

"Of course! just as soon as either of us wants to go, then we start. I simply want to see the land of my forefathers or rather the land and water of my forefathers. I understand there is a large lake to the north called Okeechobee. Some day, Phil, I may sail on this Indian lake, or at least on this lake with an Indian name. No doubt, it was called after my Seminole ancestors."

All hope of reaching the pine-tree before dinner time was soon abandoned The afternoon wore slowly away, and the canoe crept slowly through the saw-grass.

"Say, Mr. Indian, that pine-tree island is going just as fast as we are," remarked Phil, as he sat gazing out over the water and saw-grass.

"I don't think we'll reach it to-day or even to-night," was the reply.

It was only towards dusk of the second day that the canoe touched the hammock. It proved far larger than it had first appeared, for there were several pines and some palmetto trees on it. The voyagers leaped with joy to the solid ground and stretched their tired limbs. "This is fine," said the Indian, "let us have a race." With these words he ran across the sand like a boy just out from school.

With a crackling noise several big birds flew from one of the palmetto trees.

"That's a new bird for me," said the Indian, as he stood looking at the slender forms. "Not herons, not curlews, but they belong to the snipe family."

"Not meadow-larks or black birds," said the boy whose bird lore was limited.

Several times that afternoon and evening the birds flew back to the island, only to be frightened away again by the human intruders.

Firewood was there in abundance. Crackers were warmed, potatoes were roasted, pelican meat was broiled, and tea was brewed. What a delicious supper it was!

Phil said his prayers that night with deepest gratitude. Slowly the ambers burned low, while the Seminole smoked his pipe and the boy lay close to the fire.

Soon they were wrapped in their blankets; and silence, the silence of ages, came over the Everglades.

CHAPTER VI

SOME WONDERS OF THE EVERGLADES

"INDIANS, Indians," cried Phil, leaping to his feet.

No reply came from the sleeping Seminole.

"Wake up! Indians are after us!" and Phil Reed all terrified shook his sleeping companion.

"What's that?" grunted the man.

"Indians are coming—hundreds of 'em!"

Still the tired Seminole only grunted some faint response.

With a mighty effort the lad pulled the blanket from his sleeping companion. "Indians! Indians!" he shouted again.

"What is it?" gasped the man half awake.

"Indians! Indians!"

"Will they kill me? Kill me here in my

own country!" muttered Little Deer, now fully awake.

"We can't run, Mr. Indian!"

"No, keep quiet! Here take this gun," and he handed the boy his rifle, while he himself took his revolver. "How could they follow us?" he asked in a whisper.

"They are on all sides of the island," stammered the boy.

"Heavens! and in the trees! But they won't kill a Seminole. I'll go and find them. Stay here." In his excitement the Seminole forgot that the island was only a few paces in size.

"Can't I go, Mr. Indian?" and young Phil Reed held on to his companion's hand.

Out of the darkness came sounds—cries—wails! Were they of earth? Were they human? Was it the war cry of the Seminole? Was it the challenge of the spirits who guarded this mysterious realm? The sounds came from overhead, from the water, from every side of the island, from one of the tall pine-trees.

Towards this tree, Little Deer crept. There

was a flutter of wings. Then the Indian recognized the night cry of the limpkin. He recalled that several large birds had made efforts that afternoon to reach the trees, but had been affrighted by the presence of men.

It is impossible to describe the hideous sounds that the limpkins can emit in the silence of night. It is strangely human. It is unlike the long croak of the frog, or the weird cry of the owl, or the bark of the jackal; it is ghostlike and ethereal.

Holding his young companion by the hand the Indian crept back to the camp and exchanged his rifle for the sporting gun, inserted a shell with a large shot, and again sought the pine-tree. After a short search he saw two forms indistinct in the faint light. He fired and a bird dropped with a thud upon the ground, while the rest took to flight.

There were other disturbing elements in the silence of the night; insects of every kind and frogs with tremulous voices; but these the voyagers did not mind. Wrapping themselves in their blankets they were soon sleeping soundly.

"I don't blame you for getting scared," said the Seminole to his companion on the following morning as they awoke and sat with their blankets around them. "I thought that every Indian in the Everglades had rushed to kill us for coming into this place. I now remember what voyagers have written about the limpkin, for when first heard it frightens everybody."

"Well, it nearly scared me to death," laughed Phil.

"I thought six thousand Seminoles were around; but now I remember that there are not three hundred in this part of the country."

"Will they come again to-night?" the boy wanted to know.

"They may, but we'll be gone. Just possible that we may be able to hear them; but it is only when one is close that they make such a hideous noise. You see this is their roost; and all the nests of last year and many years are up in those palmetto trees."

"I am going to climb up there and look at the nests," said the boy.

"You may find it harder than you think to

get hold of those old fronds in the palmettos," explained the Indian. "But I'll help you," he added.

Over to the trees they walked after breakfast, and the Seminole lifted the boy up to where he could catch the fronds or branches of the palmetto; then he stepped back to watch the lad's progress. "Jump! Jump!" he cried.

Without waiting for any further directions Phil Reed let loose both hands and tumbled to the ground.

He was none too soon, for right above him a huge rattlesnake had thrust its head out from the fronds of the palmetto.

The Indian dragged the boy from under the tree. The rattler seemed satisfied that it had driven the intruders away, and remained where it was with its hissing fangs, red and deadly, warning away any further attempt.

"We'll let the limpkins' nests stay this time," laughed the Indian.

"Let's shoot the snake," urged the boy.

"We can't afford to waste the shell or bullet," was the reply. "If it was dangerous for

others I'd kill it; but it may be years before others come to this island."

Leaving the rattlesnake to guard the roosting place of the limpkins, and the limpkins to disturb the solitudes, the voyagers were soon on their way. At noon they reached another hammock where the ground was dry.

"Would you like to be an Indian?" asked the Seminole of his young companion after they had enjoyed their meal.

"I am Irish," said the boy.

"Of course; but listen, suppose we met some Indians, it would be safer for you to look like a Seminole."

"But, I can't look like a Seminole."

"Oh yes, I know the art. It has been a tradition with us for centuries. I can change you into an Indian in five minutes."

"Try it," said the boy.

The Indian was true to his word. In a few minutes he held a looking-glass before the boy. "Is this me?" asked the boy in astonishment.

"Your first slip in grammar," corrected the Indian. "What should you say?"

"I don't know, Mr. Indian."

"You should say: 'is this I or is this myself?' "

"It doesn't sound right," said Phil. "Oh yes, I know the rule. The verb *to be* has the same case before as after it."

"Correct; but what about your being a little Indian?"

"I've still got Irish hair," claimed the boy.

"I haven't finished with you," put in the Indian.

"What would Mr. and Mrs. Reed and the children think if they saw me now?" remarked the lad. "I wish Sr. Mary Catherine could see me. I took part in a play once, and what do you think I was?"

"A good little boy."

"No."

"A good little girl."

"No - - o; worse than that."

"Much worse?"

"Yes; I was a little black devil."

"Horrible!"

"And I had a tail!"

"More horrible!"

"And I went around getting little boys to disobey the Sister."

"Most horrible! but now look at your hair."

"No more Irish," acknowledged the boy, "black hair—Indian hair."

"Now if we meet the Seminoles we can claim to be first cousins," said Little Deer. "But you will have to stay this way until we leave the Everglades, for you cannot wash the paint off."

"Let me try," replied the boy, running down to the water. True it was; the paint could not be washed off. "I don't care," said the boy. "I like to be an Indian. This is the country of the Indians and I want to be an Indian."

For seven days the two Indians poled their canoe through the waters of the Everglades; and yet they were less than twenty-five miles from the Big Cypress Swamp, the place of departure, although they had gone three times that distance, in several places crossing their own tracks.

Almost at dark on the evening of the seventh day they reached a large island, and

being tired had thrown themselves down to sleep after eating a cold lunch. When Phil awoke the bright sun was flooding the Everglades.

"A fine place for camping," said the Seminole, who had been inspecting the island. "And see how deep the water is all along one side and no saw-grass. Why its a real lake. It must be great for fishing and duck hunting."

"Will we stay here?" asked the boy.

"I've been thinking it over. Certainly we couldn't find a higher or drier island; perhaps it is one of the largest in the Everglades. But there is one serious objection to it as a camp. Look here and here," he added, pointing to two piles of ashes, "not only is this a regular stopping place for the Seminoles, but they come here often, and have been here recently. You can see too," he continued, "from the trampled grass and flowers, and the amount of wood cut that rather large numbers have been here."

"Well, I'm an Indian now," acknowledged the boy, "and so are you."

"Still, I prefer to be alone. There is no telling what they might do to us. That fine canoe and all the fire-arms and provisions would be rather tempting for a band of roaming Indians."

"I am tired of that canoe," said the boy, yawning and stretching out his arms. "I would like to put up the tent and camp for a week."

"Just what I want," replied the Indian; "only I'm looking around to find a suitable place. I see another hammock over there to the right. You can tell that it is high from the number of trees on it. The place may not be as large as this; but it is safer. Even if we conclude to pitch our tents there we can come to this island whenever we wish."

It was decided to investigate the other island at once. Only after several attempts was a "lead" found through the saw-grass; and although the hammock was only a short distance away darkness came on before the voyagers were able to land.

CHAPTER VII

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

It was a wondrous morning, and, although in November, the island was a scene of enchantment. During the week in the Everglades the voyagers had generally kept away from islands and hammocks, even sleeping at times in the open canoe. They had noticed a few butterflies, an occasional bird and scattered patches of flowers; but now their enchanted island seemed to have drawn to itself not only the birds and butterflies, but the very flowers. Along the margin of the water, bunches of pickerel-weed were lifting their banners of blue; there were purple asters, and golden pond-lilies, and white stars of water plaintain, and the vivid yellow of jasmine. Virginia creepers interlaced their

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reddish vines with the branches of the swamp oaks, while the leaves of the sour-gum trees burned scarlet against the sky. And the butterflies, the November butterflies, the ten thousand butterflies, the silken-tinted butterflies, that sailed over the waters and over the island and over the flowers! How they flitted from flower to flower in a wondrous maze of ever-changing colors! Bees, too, buzzed in such profusion around the trumpet blooms, that the delicate vine stems were tremulous and shook the richest perfume far out over the waters.

Every bird in its flight southward seemed to have come to the island that bright November morning. Mocking birds were there in numbers, with notes however that were not attuned; cardinals, too, from the far north, and though songless they stood out in beauty against the background of gray Spanish moss which hung like curtains from the oaks and pine-trees. There were finches and warblers and tufted titmouse and busy fly-catchers. Meadowlarks caroled from their perches of saw-grass, yellow-bellied swallows

sailed gracefully over the waters, and busy wood-peckers made the pine-trees rattle and sent the pine needles in showers to the ground.

Such was the enchanting scene which greeted our two adventurers on that sunny November morning in the Everglades.

"Our home at last," said the Indian as with his young companion he surveyed the island. "Let us call it the *Palmettoes,*" he continued pointing to a group of the trees. "The big island which we visited yesterday we'll call the 'Pines.'"

"There may be rattlesnakes in the trees," said Phil, remembering his experience when climbing for the limpkins' nest.

"You are an Indian now, and rattlesnakes don't bite Indians."

"Is that so? I wouldn't trust one."

"Nor would I. We'll clear this island of all snakes before we settle down."

"Call it St. Patrick's Island," suggested Phil, "and then no snakes will stay on it."

"That might work for some snakes, boy, but not for rattlers and moccasins. You can

say prayers to St. Patrick; but this Seminole intends to kill every snake in sight."

Only two small moccasins were found and quickly dispatched with a stick. Then a place was picked for the tent, where it would be concealed on two sides by mangrove bushes, and all but hid on the other sides by palmetto trees and vines.

Although the island was less than a hundred feet in length and did not exceed forty in width, still owing to its high land in the center almost every tree known to the Everglades was found on it. There were a few maples and a single hickory tree. A deep and open stretch of water was along one side.

For two days the work of clearing the ground and erecting the tent went on. Only as the various articles were unpacked and stored away did Phil realize the amount of luggage that had been brought in the canoe.

"We have been working hard," said the Seminole as he prepared breakfast on the third day. "Let us take a rest and go fishing."

"Have we any bait?" asked the lad.

"Bait!" repeated the Indian. "I'm a scien-

tific fisherman. Bait! just let me show you my fine casting flies. And there," continued he, pointing out over the water, "that's the longest stretch of water we have found, and it comes right up to the island. It is deep, too. It must be over ten feet, for there is scarcely a blade of saw-grass to be seen."

"Do you know how to cast?" asked the Seminole, as the two stepped into the canoe and rowed off towards a "lead" near a small hammock.

"No, Mr. Indian."

"Casting means throwing your line out into the water, and doing it so skillfully that the fly drops right into the place where you think there's a fish."

"Hey! Look—here," cried Phil who was in front of the boat, "this fish jumped into the boat." True it was, and a second and a third, each weighing about half a pound. They had the shape of a sunfish with black streaks behind its gills.

"We won't need any casting if fish are so polite as to leap into our canoe," said the Indian.

"What makes them jump into the canoe?"

"They just jump, and the canoe happens to be ready for them to fall into. It must be a variety of flying-fish. Although," he continued, "it hasn't the long fin of the flyer. Let us call it the 'jumper.'"

"I see lots of 'em," exclaimed the boy pointing towards a bunch of saw-grass.

"And I forgot my rifle," were the impatient words of the Seminole. "There goes a deer." It had leaped out of the mangrove bushes of a small hammock and, splashing in the water, had frightened the fish. It soon disappeared in the heavy grass where, strange to say, it seemed to find a footing. Stranger still, that it should have remained all night so near the island unseen and unaffrighted.

"We'll go through this lead," directed the Indian, as the canoe was feeling its way through the saw-grass. The two fishermen were soon at the edge of a round hole that seemed ideal for their sport.

"Put on your rubber gloves, grab a bunch of the grass and hold the canoe still, while I try my luck at casting," directed the elder.

Even when wearing gloves the boy had learned to handle the saw-grass carefully. "It won't move much," he said, holding on firmly to his anchor.

"What a hole for bass," whispered the fisherman as he made his first cast. The shining bait played on the surface, a tempting prize indeed for any game fish.

He had worked the line but a few minutes when a bass leaped for the fly, and missing it, came far out into the air. Back it plunged only to turn and again dart for the brilliant fly. "Mine!" exclaimed Little Deer as he drew the prize into the canoe. In a few minutes he had three bass.

"Now you try your luck," he said to the boy, "but steady as we exchange places."

"I don't know how to cast," replied the lad.

"It's no trick here in the open, along trout streams with trees and bushes all around you it requires some skill, but here one has only to give the line a little jerk and in it goes."

The boy took the line. "I feel one biting," he said after only a few minutes.

"Wait until you feel it tugging."

"Its pulling hard!"

"Out with it."

"The line won't come—yes, it's coming and some—thing—on—it," muttered the boy. Evidently the fish had at first twisted the line around the roots of the saw-grass and had as suddenly released it. Phil wound in rapidly; his captive leaped and splashed, but was finally landed, a four pound bass.

"Back mine go into the water," said the Seminole. "Let them grow until they get as large as yours. No, I'll keep one, and also the stupid fish which leaped into the canoe. The other two can stay until we come again," with these words he threw two of the bass into the water.

"How do you know that they will bite again?" asked the boy.

"If they don't others will. We have all that we can eat in the next two days. After this, we'll always catch just enough for our needs. Remember that we are to stay here for some time and must save our supplies."

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOVERY AND A WAR SONG

"CHIC - -KEE, chic - - kee,
Wee - -wee;
Did - - lee, did - - lee,
Tee - - tee."

As the Seminole sang these words in a weird, monotonous way he kept the index finger of his right hand on the ground and turned around and around.

"Moo - - mu, moo - - mu,
Loo-la
Koon - - ti, koon - - ti,
Foo - - fa."

The Indian picked up a book which he had been reading and put it on the top of his head, holding the covers with his hands and letting the leaves dangle loosely as he sang.

"Koon - - ti, koon - - ti,

Koo - - kee,
Koon - - ti, koon - - ti,
Sof-kee."

And now the excited dancer dug into the ground as if looking for some treasure, and then raised his hands to his mouth as if he had found something to eat.

When, all but exhausted, he turned to Phil and cried out: "Why don't the audience clap?" But the boy did not appear to be in the least interested. At first he had concluded that Little Deer was going through some superstitious exercise in honor of the Indian gods. Then he thought that the whole affair was foolish. "I can do that," he said.

"Let us see you," challenged the Indian.

Phil recalled an old nursery rhyme which, so he had heard, was made up of Indian words. It would be most suitable for the occasion.

"Ee--nee, mee--nee,
Mi--nee--moo;
Crack--ee, fee--nee,
Fi--nee--foo."

And here the lad stuck the index finger

of his right hand into the ground and went around and around.

"Om--ee, Nu--chee
Po--pee, tu--chee
Rick, bick, band doo."

And while he said these words the book was placed upon his head with the leaves fluttering like the wings of a bird.

The Seminole applauded. "Well done! well done! great Indian dance!" he cried. "But I had a reason for dancing," he went on to explain. "I have made a discovery. The great spirit has sent us food for the winter. It is right here. We can stay as long as we wish. The great spirit has provided for us."

For some time the Indian had been sitting on the ground reading one of the two books which he had brought with him, while at the same time he had examined a green shrub. It was of the palm variety, about sixteen inches tall, with a narrow glossy, dark-green stem. Then he dug into the ground and cut through a yellowish, pungent root, resembling a parsnip. The Indian looked at the book, read a few lines and again examined the root and

peculiar palm leaf. The root was tasted. Then the Indian leaped to his feet and gave the war-dance which we have described.

"Yes," said he, turning to the boy when the latter had finished his imitation dance, "the great spirit has sent us food; here on this island is enough koonti to last us all winter."

On several occasions the Seminole had explained to the boy that his people had for centuries lived on a root called by them koonti. It grew wild in the Everglades, and was found in no other part of the country. As provisions had thus far been plentiful, no search had been made for the root; but now that a permanent place for camping had been found, the red-man had begun to figure on supplying his table for some months.

"Look," said he, pointing towards a wide area which they had cleared away, "all those palms, or what we thought were palms, were real koonti roots. But at this season of the year they will keep in the ground; and there," he continued, indicating a part of the island as yet untouched, "that is all koonti root, and I am sure we can find the root on almost every

hammock. Just taste the root," he said at the same time peeling it with his big hunting-knife.

"It's like a turnip," said the boy as he bit the koonti, "but it has a wild taste."

"Exactly, it is wild; but recent government investigations have proved that it has an abundance of starch. You Irish had better look out for your potatoes, for some day people will be eating koonti root instead of the Irish potato. But come, let us cook some sof-kee. It's made of koonti root, seasoned with fish. We have both; come, let us be real Seminole and have a Seminole dinner on sof-kee."

The koonti roots were peeled and boiled like potatoes. A starchy matter was then squeezed through a cloth, leaving a yellowish fibrous sediment. The starch had the appearance of flour with some slight coloring ingredient. It was mixed with the fish, from which all bones had been carefully removed, seasoned with red pepper and boiled.

The two agreed that the sof-kee meal was a success. They finished their dinner with dessert of apples and cake.

That afternoon was spent in arranging various things around the tent.

After dinner the Seminole became serious and sat for an hour looking out over the water and saw-grass. He had picked an ideal place for wintering in the Everglades; he had found sufficient koonti root. There was no longer a question of provisions. Would he now disclose to the boy the further object of his visit to the Everglades?

He decided to reveal a part of the truth, but would not disclose the fact that Phil Reed was a prisoner.

"Phil," said he that afternoon, "come and sit here, I have something to tell you."

"You've looked glum since dinner," replied the boy, who had not failed to notice the change in the Indian's manner.

"Not glum boy, but serious. Phil, to-morrow is the day of the great spirit. He may come to the Everglades to-morrow."

"Gee! What will he look like?" asked the curious lad.

"No white man has ever seen him, boy."

"Is he dangerous?"

"He may be, if he finds that you are trying to be an Indian. I think it better to remove that paint and let you be a white boy again."

"I thought you said it wouldn't come off."

"Water won't take it off; but I have something that will."

After some further explanation Phil began to be serious. He did not know just what was going to happen; but he felt that it was safer to let the Indian remove the paint.

"It's only a moment's work," said the Seminole as he brought a small box from the tent. He put ointment on the boy's face and rubbed briskly.

"Look at yourself" said he, holding a glass before the boy.

"Little Irish boy again," replied Phil Reed.

"There'll be changes for the white boy, tomorrow," said the Indian, "big changes, but the white boy won't be frightened or hurt."

"Do you know what I think?" put in the lad; "I think that some kind of cloud will come over the Everglades and you'll call it the great spirit."

"You are wrong. A person will be here.

You can see him," he added after a pause. "But you're my friend and nothing will hurt you."

All that afternoon the Seminole talked in a mysterious way. He was silent during supper and sat in silence long after darkness had come over the Everglades. Phil Reed had trusted Little Deer from the beginning and his trust had never weakened; still he was fearful and prayed with unusual fervor that evening.

It was far into the night when he fell asleep, and even then his rest was frequently disturbed. The wind moaned through the palmetto fronds, insects chirped within and around the tent, and blackbirds in the pines kept their noisy vigil.

Midnight came on. The wind still moaned through the palmettoes, insects still chirped, blackbirds uttered faint calls from the pines; but Phil Reed was in the land of slumber.

CHAPTER IX

SOLVING THE MYSTERY

WHEN Phil Reed awoke the tent was flooded with light. The boy looked around to see whether any changes had taken place. Nothing had been disturbed. He noticed, however, that the Seminole's cot was empty.

Out from the tent he went. Not ten feet away he saw a white man mending a fishing line.

"Mister; who are you?" he asked, walking up to the stranger.

"Twist, Oliver Twist," came the reply, although the man did not so much as look up from his work.

"Where did you come from?"

"Several places."

"Well, how did you get here?"

"Presto, and I am here."

"You didn't swim or wade; and I don't see any canoe," said the boy looking around him.

"Presto, and I am here," repeated the man.

"Where is the Indian?" asked the lad who now turned and looked around the island.

"Presto, and he was gone," said the strange individual.

"Please, sir, won't you tell where he is, and where you came from?"

"We were metamorphosed."

"What does that mean?"

"Means what it means, metamorphosed, changed, vanished; and here is Mr. Poe, Edgar Allen Poe."

"Is that your name?"

"It certainly is."

"You just said your name was Oliver Twist."

"Certainly, I forgot, I have several names; but you can call me Mr. Twist, or if you wish, Oliver Twist."

"I read about little Oliver Twist. He's the boy who didn't get enough to eat."

"Is that so? I'm sorry for him. But you want to know about your Indian friend?"

"Yes, sir; where is he?"

"Did I not explain, my fair red-headed lad, did I not explain that he was metamorphosed?"

"He ain't drowned, is he?"

"Not much."

"Or killed?"

"Well, I should say not."

"He ain't on this island," said the boy, "for I could see him."

"Run around and see whether you can find him."

Phil ran from bush to bush and looked along the shore. "I can't find him," was his report on returning.

"You can't find him; then he must have vanished, disappeared, metamorphosed," were the careless repetitions, as if the matter were plain and of no importance. But it was important to Phil Reed, who was beginning to view the matter seriously. "Did you ever play, *Hide-and-Go-Seek?*" asked the stranger.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy wondering what such a trivial pastime could have to do with the serious matter of finding oneself with a stranger in the Everglades.

"Let me see, you play it this way," said the

man. "You shut your eyes and count fifty, while some one hides a stick; then you try to find it."

"You count forty," put in the boy.

"I like to count fifty," replied the man.

"But I don't want to play," protested the lad. "I want to know where the Indian is."

"Just what I'm going to show you; only we will do it by playing *Hide-and-Go-Seek.*"

"No, you won't."

"Yes, I will. But, of course, if you are not anxious to find the Indian; then let the game go." Phil Reed was puzzled. While he stood looking at the man, the latter, who was calmly adjusting his fishing line, began: "You run to the end of the island, close your eyes and count fifty; and when you come back your Indian friend will be sitting right here."

"Oh! I know now!" claimed the boy! "He is hiding out there in the water and grass."

"Cold—cold—cold," repeated the man, imitating the actions of children who in *Hide-and-Go-Seek* cry out these words when a child is wandering far away from the object that has been hidden.

"He is up in one of the trees."

"Cold—cold—cold but come, boy, play the game with me."

"And will the Indian be right here when I count forty?"

"No, little sir, you count fifty. I always count fifty in my game."

"Where do I hide?" asked the boy whose curiosity was being aroused.

"You must run to the far end of the island, shut your eyes tight, and count fifty slowly. Will you play?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you won't open your eyes?"

"No, sir."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, sir; cross my heart," and Phil made a cross on his breast, the solemn pledge which few lads will fail to keep.

"Then the game begins. Run to the end of the island."

Off went Phil, threw himself on the ground, buried his face in his hands and slowly counted fifty. Then back he ran; and to his utter surprise there sat his Indian friend alone and

with the features as rigid as a statue. However, it didn't take him long to discover the trick; for there were blotches of white upon the red-man's face and a part of one hand which was not well concealed showed the white skin.

"So you ain't an Indian after all?"

"Only half metamorphosed," acknowledged the man breaking out into a loud laugh.

"But you did look like an Indian," acknowledged the boy.

"So thought the man who helped me to disguise myself. But now to business, Phil. I'll get this paint off and then I'll tell you who I am, and what we are going to do. I am not Oliver Twist or Edgar Allen Poe; the names just came to me by chance. My name is Ferdinand Rauderly. A year ago I came to Fort Key, not fifty miles from here, and heard everybody talking about the Everglades. I wanted to see them. A young man of my age promised to come with me, and I offered to pay all expenses. I read several books about the place and felt sure that I could live in the Everglades for six months.

At the last minute my friend went back on his promise. At first I thought of staying in the Everglades alone, but I wanted a companion. By chance I ran across you. Now you know the story. Shake hands! Ferdinand Rauderly and young Phil Reed are to have the honor of exploring some unknown parts of the Florida Everglades."

By this time the speaker had removed all the paint from his face.

"Is the great spirit coming?" the boy asked.

"No, I was only joking. I am the great spirit. I only wanted to let you know that there would be a change here. Now you see the change. I have turned from a Seminole Indian to a white man."

"But why did you paint yourself like an Indian?"

"Don't ask me that question. Some day I may tell you. For the present we are explorers. The koonti, which we found yesterday, will support us as long as we wish to stay here. Then we can fish and hunt. It will be a glorious life—a glorious life! Come let us get our breakfast!"

CHAPTER X

THE SLACKER

FERDINAND RAUDERLY was a slacker. When the United States declared war on Germany, this young man, an only child and a heir to a fortune, found not the courage to respond to his country's call. But how would he evade the draft? How could he escape the net thrown around the entire country for those who had deserted? Two years previously, when he was nineteen, he had visited south Florida and had seen the border of the Everglades. He had heard strange stories of this mysterious place—a haunt for deserters during the Civil War. What better place could he seek? To the Everglades he would go.

Ferd, or Raud, as he was familiarly called by his companions and high school associates, had lived his entire life in Chicago, where his

father had amassed a fortune in the hardware business. After the latter's death, the boy was brought up in ease and indulgence. He was rather tall and slender, had a nicely shaped head with sandy, curly hair, and there was something pleasant about his features, which were, however, wanting in firmness. His interest in games was for the most part limited to that of an observer, for he seldom took part in any sports except tennis and roller skating. He was fond of books and in his reading had been well directed by his mother. Since leaving high school he had made two trips with boy friends to a lake in northern Wisconsin; an experience in which he had learned much about taking care of his automobile, running a launch, and casting for game-fish. Probably, in normal times Ferdinand Rauderly would have developed into a good citizen. It did not occur to him that he would bring disgrace upon his mother and make it forever impossible for him to inherit and enjoy the fortune which his father had left.

One morning, young Rauderly went to a

store to purchase an Indian outfit. He took with him the colored picture of a Seminole and asked to receive just such a costume.

"Can you teach me how to paint myself like an Indian?" he asked of the proprietor.

"Nothing easier," replied the little man with a smile, for he recognized at once that the well-dressed young purchaser could pay for any lessons.

"I'm going to take part in a little play, I want to make myself up, and also keep the costume for some further performance."

"You'll be a duplicate of the picture in your hand," assured the proprietor.

"How long will it take to teach me?"

"Let me see! Since you look like a very bright young man, I think that you can learn in three lessons. Most people require five lessons."

"And the cost?"

"Not much; and since you are going to buy the costume I'll—I'll—charge you only seven dollars for the three lessons and ten dollars for the outfit—and one dollar for the paint." The proprietor was afraid of adding further to the cost.

"Will you agree to teach me to paint myself?"

"Certainly, you will be so much of an Indian that you won't know yourself from the picture in your hand."

"When will we begin?"

"Right now; you may be able to take all three lessons to-day."

"Then let us start," was the reply of the youth.

Young Rauderly was indeed surprised at the simplicity of the art; for in a very short time he could apply the color and draw the darker lines which gave him the appearance of an Indian.

Next came the costuming, moccasins for his feet, deer skin leggings with rows of beads at the sides, a dark green shirt, and a turban made of a red towel around his head. Ferd had read in books that this red towel was also used for attracting deer in hunting.

"A real Seminole, a Seminole chief," remarked the proprietor, as he lead the young man to view himself in a glass. The transformation was perfect.

"I didn't think you could do it," replied

Ferd. "My own mother would not know me; and I could run for the office of chief."

"If they elect their chiefs," put in the man.

"Yes they do elect them," added the young man.

"You seem to be well posted on the Seminoles."

"Been reading a little," said Ferd cautiously.

This much was settled; Ferdinand Rauderly could disguise himself as a Seminole. He had not forgotten that most of the Indians wore large silver earrings. However, so many of the tribe had given up this practice that it would not seem strange or excite suspicion if an Indian appeared without this part of the tribe's outfit.

One of the latest adventurers, who crossed a section of the Everglades, had used a canvas canoe on account of its light weight; but he had expressed it as his opinion that a steel boat would be best adapted to the trip, and recommended one, sixteen feet long with thirty inch beam and water-tight sections at either end. Young Rauderly found one that measured exactly these proportions. He also

secured mortar for mending and paint to keep the canoe from rusting. He knew that a motor or oars could not be used in the Everglades owing to the heavy grass; but a detachable motor would be handy in reaching the margin. He could then hide his motor and oars, and make use of a pole.

In a store, Ferd found an aluminum outfit which was probably an improvement on that of any previous explorer of the Everglades. It consisted of a pot into which another pot fitted. Then came two frying pans, two dishes, two plates, two cups, a coffee pot, knives, forks and spoons, a most ingenious hunter's outfit for two.

He had not thought of a companion, and yet he believed that in some way he would pick up an associate. This outfit for two, therefore, fitted in with his general scheme.

He took with him two books written by explorers who had spent weeks in the Everglades. He had also read the report of two army officers who had warred with the Seminoles, and knew the hardships and necessary equipment for life in this mysterious world of land and water.

A week after all the equipment had been shipped to a southern port, the slacker bought his ticket to Tampa, Florida.

And now came the hardest thing of all, leaving home. Ferdinand Rauderly had imagined that he had completely deceived his mother. He whistled and danced and sung, and did all in his power to show that he was in the best of humor. In fact, it was his forced hilarity that had awakened his mother's suspicion.

"And you may be called to your country's service next week." Mother and son were sitting at supper. Ferd had in his pocket the ticket to Tampa. A small valise had been slipped away and checked at the depot, for he would leave the house empty-handed to divert all suspicion. No answer came to the mother's words.

"Your country may call you next week." Still there was no reply. "I know that you have felt it my boy. You have thought that you were deceiving me. You whistled and sang to make me believe that you were happy. I know that you wish to spare me the pain; but, my boy, your mother gives you up gladly.

Go, and remember that your mother will be as brave as her son." Mrs. Rauderly spoke with tender affection. Then she reached for the hand of her boy and kissed it.

The slacker could bear it no longer. Rising and kissing his mother on the forehead, he took his hat and went from home.

Two weeks had passed and the mother could give no reply to the letters sent to her from the registration board. The dreadful thought of slacker came to her mind, but she would not utter the word.

Two weeks had passed, and a light canoe propelled by a motor was darting along the little channels that flow among Ten Thousands Islands. In the canoe sat an Indian. Once he met other Indians but the quick motor quickly took his canoe out of sight, leaving the Seminoles to wonder why one of their own should turn away from them. Years before, one of their tribe, who had grown rich, refused to commingle with his own; was this another instance of a Seminole who had turned a traitor to his own people?

Twice the motor boat was turned up

stream to follow the course that lead to the Everglades; but each time the hand that directed it grew nervous, and the little craft was allowed to drift back among the Ten Thousand Islands.

Ferd had become a wanderer on the waters. Occasionally he passed a fishing or wood scow; but he kept at a distance, and people were in no way suspicious of his craft, for fishermen and hunters often came and went among the islands. No one had suspected him when he loaded his outfit on a boat in Tampa or when he asked to be set adrift near the Ten Thousand Islands; and now none of those who saw his canoe gave it more than a passing look or thought. Still he could not indefinitely continue to evade the various smacks which sailed these waters. He must either retreat to the Everglades or return to civilization.

Like Phil Reed, he had been attracted by the coming of the pelicans. He wondered why the birds congregated on one island. He would visit the island and see this land of birddom.

To the island he went that November afternoon, and there, by accident, he found the boy who was to be his companion in the Everglades.

CHAPTER XI

A HEART THAT WAS TRUE

WHILE Ferdinand Rauderly was removing the last traces of paint from his face his young companion stood by his side.

"How old are you?" was the innocent question.

"Not very old," was the indifferent reply.

"Twenty-one."

"Not that old."

"But you will be soon, won't you?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"I was just thinking of something."

"Of what?"

"Of soldiers."

"What have I to do with soldiers?"

"Perhaps you ought to be one," was the remark.

"Perhaps! perhaps! And is that any of your business, young man?"

"No, sir, but I was just thinking of it."

"Weren't you taught in the orphan asylum to mind your own business?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then do it! and let us hear no more about soldiers!"

"But, Mr. Rauderly, if you are old enough you ought to be a soldier."

"Stop, I say!" and for the first time the young man showed signs of anger.

"I would like to be a soldier; and if the war lasts until I'm old enough, I'm going to volunteer."

"You are Irish; and Irish like fighting."

"But, everybody should be willing to fight for his country."

"Of course! of course!"

"Then why don't you fight?"

"Why don't I fight? Young man, didn't I tell you to stop this talk?"

"You said not to talk about soldiers."

"Then don't talk about them."

"Jiminy crickets! Can't we talk about the war?"

"You don't know anything about the war."

"Yes, I do, sir; I used to get the papers and read every line, for I hadn't anything to do in the evenings. And Mr. Reed used to read the papers, I could tell Mr. Reed all about the Hindenburg line. He said I could go to the army when I was old enough. Do you think the war will last that long?"

"How do I know how long it will last?"

"If I had been in your place, I'd have waited until the war was over and then visited the Everglades, so that people couldn't say I was a slacker." Right into the heart of Ferdinand Rauderly went the shaft of those childlike words.

"But I don't care what people say!" he protested leaping to his feet and digging the toe of his right shoe into the sand.

"But I'd care. I wouldn't let anybody call me a slacker."

"Don't talk to me about the war. Don't talk about anything—I don't want to talk."

"I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings," and Phil Reed stood looking up at his companion. For the first time he saw that his face was flushed.

"Go cut some wood," ordered the man, "and don't stand looking at me as if I were a captured animal."

A big lump came into the boy's throat as he turned to obey the command. "I didn't want to make you angry, sir," he said.

"We came out here for rest and adventure; and now you are spoiling the whole thing by this war talk," protested young Rauderly.

"Why can't we talk about it, sir?"

"Because—because—because I say so."

"But everybody talks about it now."

"If I knock your head off, you won't be able to talk about it."

"I believe you're a slacker," were the stinging words of the boy.

"Suppose I am?" and he reached out to grasp Phil Reed.

"Then I'd be sorry that I came with you," were the defiant tones as the little lad evaded his would-be-captor.

"You were a slacker when you ran away from home," returned the man.

"No, I wasn't. I hate a slacker."

"Then you hate me, for I—am—a slack

—er," he hissed the words. Then he stood for a few minutes as if in a trance—then slowly he sank to the ground. "Get me some water," he pleaded. "There," he muttered as he drank. "Keep away from me; I'll not hurt you. Don't call me a slacker. You don't know how it sounds. It almost kills me. I'll start to-morrow, you hear; start to-morrow. As soon as we can get away from this place I'll surrender and be a soldier," he said in a faltering, gasping voice.

"Are you sick, Mr. Rauderly?" asked the boy in a kind tone.

"Yes, I am sick. It has been burning in my heart all these days. I thought that I could live it down. But when you said it—when you said the word slacker, Lord, I thought a bullet went through my heart."

"I didn't mean anything," pleaded the boy.

"No, but I am glad you said it. You didn't mean it, but without knowing it you've been my best friend! You are a good boy! You know what is right, and your heart told you what to say. Come, come, let us walk around the island. To-morrow we start for

Harvy River. You know the rest of the way."

"Are you going to take me back to the Reeds?"

"Not unless you wish. You can come with me to Chicago."

"How long will it take us to get out of the Everglades?" asked the boy, for all at once the charm of the place seemed to have vanished.

"I don't know. Travellers have told us of their experiences. They spent weeks and then found themselves at the point where they started; but as we have a light boat and plenty of provisions there's no danger."

"Gee! I want to see Chicago! They say it's almost as large as New York. But I'd like to see the Reeds again."

"Well, we'll go by way of the Reeds. When you get there you can talk it over with Mr. Reed. If he wants you to stay you can take your choice. You can come with me or stay with him."

"I'll be so glad to see them," and Phil Reed clapped his hands with delight.

Along the island they walked with scarcely a word passing between them. Ferdinand Rauderly was deep in thought. For days he had been battling with himself; for days his conscience had cried out, "Slacker, slacker, slacker." It was only when an innocent and thoughtless boy said the words that the full guilt of his deed was forced upon him.

Back to the tent he wandered. "How well we had everything arranged," he said; "a fairy island for a home, our tent pitched, provisions and everything one could ask for. Still I deserve nothing but punishment, I wonder what they will do with me?" he mused, as he sat in the door of the tent with his boy companion by his side. "But I don't care what they do!" and the restless youth leaped to his feet to face his imaginary judges. "I don't care what they do! Let them put me in the guard house! Let them put me in the first trenches." Suddenly he seemed to address some one. "Give me a chance! Let me show that I am not a coward! Let me prove it! Let me prove it!" Then his judges vanished and he was standing before his companion.

An hour passed before the slacker regained his peace of mind. His determination was firm. To-morrow morning he would start for home, would surrender himself and ask for pardon—ask to prove that he would fight for his country.

"I want to climb a tree," said he to Phil, "and look over the Everglades. Perhaps I can get a view of Big Cypress Swamp, and some idea of the direction." Standing out from the other trees was an old sour-gum almost bare of its leaves. Into the tree he climbed, took from his pockets a small glass, and began to survey the monotonous stretch of the Everglades. Yes, that must be the faint outlines of the Swamp. How far it seemed away! If he were only there!

Dark objects in the grass at no great distance attracted his attention. He looked again. Yes, there was no mistaking it. Seminole Indians in two long canoes were approaching the Pines.

He slipped down the tree to announce the news to his companion.

CHAPTER XII

PRIVATE MAX GAUDET

In southeast Florida, some five miles from the city of Miami, there was located, in September, 1917, the Curtis Aviation Field. The heavy wire fence which surrounded the camp ran along a ridge of pine-trees, and over beyond the pines was the eastern boundary line of the Everglades.

No aviator was allowed to sail over the *Glades,* as they were called by the soldiers, for the simple reason that it would have been impossible to save a machine that dropped down in the saw-grass. Fast cruisers were every ready to bring in any unlucky plane which fell into the nearby ocean; heavy trucks brought them in from distant points of the land, but neither boat nor truck could move over the Everglades. Hence the orders of

Major Larnar were that the Everglades should be avoided.

Major Larnar was an old army man having seen service in the Spanish War. War with him was business. Although he was known as a strictly just man, he tolerated no infraction of military discipline, and under his command the Curtis Aviation Field was a model camp.

Time and again rumors came to the Major that slackers were hiding in the Everglades. From the knowledge that he could gather of the nature of the place he gave no credence to the reports. But the rumors were so persistent that he finally concluded to investigate the matter.

Marcus O'Donnell, one of the biggest contractors in Florida, had been awarded the work of constructing the barracks and, also, of draining a part of the camp near the Everglades.

"Just the man I am looking for," said the Major one morning as the contractor walked into headquarters. "Sit down."

"Am I to be court-martialed?" laughed the big Irishman.

"Yes, if you give me the wrong information. You have been living in Florida for many years. Do you know all about the Everglades?"

"Probably as much as any other white man in the States; you see I have been on the Drainage Commission."

"Been all through the Everglades?"

"No, sir."

"How far?"

"Well, Major, you don't have to go all through the Everglades to know them; one or two days spent there will give you a good idea of the whole place."

"I don't intend to go—at least for the present; I am simply asking for information. How many slackers do you think are hiding in the Everglades?"

"Do you mean Indians or white?"

"Either Indians or white."

"As for the Indians," said the contractor, "there are few young Indians left; only a few old fellows who like to be called chiefs, and some squaws and children."

"Well, let the Indians go. What about

white slackers?" and while he listened to the contractor he ran his eyes over the morning mail.

"There may be five, possibly three, probably one, and more probably none. You see," he continued, "no one could get into the Everglades unless he had a rather costly outfit. Those who have gone through them are experienced hunters and travelers. They stay for five or six weeks. Some of them have never come out. Then there are foolish stories of trunks of gold left there by the Spaniards. There is a great deal of writing and talking about the Everglades. When we have a bad crop in Florida, we write and talk about the Everglades—their beauty, romance, fertility and all that kind of stuff. Then some rich Yankee comes down here to speculate and we make enough on him to carry us through the year," and Marcus O'Donnell laughed heartily.

"It seems to me," interrupted the Major, "that the Florida Cracker has got so used to robbing the Yankee that he does it in poor seasons and good seasons. But coming back

to the slackers. You don't put any stock in these rumors?"

"Not in the least."

"Helloo!" exclaimed the Major glancing at a letter from Washington, "the rumors have reached the War Department. By George!" he continued, "I am ordered by the War Department to make a thorough investigation and to round up all slackers in the Everglades."

"That's the Yankee of it," replied the contractor; "those people at Washington think that you can march out into the Everglades in an afternoon and come back for supper."

"And I haven't any time for this trifling," protested the Major. "I am to have fifty men ready to report at Newport News within two weeks, and now I'm to send them out on a fool's errand."

"If a machine drops into the Everglades," said the contractor, "it will never come back again; and I don't see how the flyer will come back."

"Well," said the officer rising from his seat and pacing his small office, "I must investi-

gate; but the orders don't say how much or how long. I have it," he continued after a short pause. " I have one hydroplane here and a wonderful little flyer."

He rang a bell and in stepped an orderly. "Order Private Gaudet to report here." "Don't go," he said to the contractor who had risen; "be seated. I want you to listen to my instruction to this young man, and if I'm wrong kindly assist me with your experience and knowledge." Pleased by the remarks Marcus O'Donnell sat down. "This young man, for whom I sent is a French Canadian, a perfect dare-devil, I wouldn't lose him for fifty men. He has been crazy to fly over the Everglades." As he spoke in walked a slender youth with an almost boyish face.

"Why, chap," said the big contractor, when introduced to him, "you are just a boy."

"But he thinks he's an eagle," said the officer.

Private Gaudet stood at rigid attention.

"Private Gaudet," said the Major, "rumors have come to headquarters that there are slackers hiding in the Everglades. Go in the

hydroplane and investigate as far as you can; but take no chances; report here an hour before retreat."

The young aviator saluted, turned mechanically on his heels and started for the door.

"Say, young chap, come back here," called out Marcus O'Donnell.

But Private Gaudet went on until he heard the voice of his commander to return.

"I wish that you would listen to this man," said the officer. "He is an old resident of Florida and will be able to give you some advice," and he bowed to the contractor.

"In the first place," began Marcus O'Donnell, "watch that saw-grass that covers the Everglades. It has got many a man who thought it looked harmless, so at least the stories go. Don't think that you can push your way through that grass with the wings of your machine, for you can't. Don't come down until you see a clear space. There are lots of them. I wager that you are going out for a day's sport. Don't look so serious." But the youth's face did not unbend. "I'll

wager that you see not one slacker, perhaps not an Indian. Yes, Major, I'll wager he doesn't see a slacker." Down into his pocket went the contractor, and placing a hundred dollar bill on the officer's desk, he continued; "that belongs to the young man if he brings back a slacker with him for supper."

"His machine has two seats," explained the major; "if he finds one your bill is gone."

"It's in your hands, officer, and it's his, if he brings back his man. What will you do?" he asked the Major.

"Why, I'll court-martial the slacker and shoot him at sunset."

"No, sir, Major, the first slacker to come in must be pardoned."

"All right," agreed the Major, taking a chance, for he knew that a higher power than his was needed to pardon a deserter.

"Have you any further directions," he asked of the contractor.

"Yes, something very important. Sit down young man."

But Private Gaudet stood at rigid attention.

"Be seated," said the officer.

"Now, we can talk business," said the contractor, "that stiff standing may be all right for war, but I like to get a man in a chair."

"That's the way you get us Yankees," replied the officer.

"Yes," acknowledged the man, "it's easy fishing to catch a Yankee. But, you see, I'm interested in this young man, I want him to win my bill and free a prisoner."

"I forgot," said the officer, "that he entrains to-morrow for Newport News. If he is to win your hundred dollars, he must do so to-day."

"I'll do my best to help him," assured the contractor. "Now, young man, don't look around the grass for slackers. If they are in the grass they must also be in a canoe and you can see them for miles. Then don't look into every clump of trees. The only islands where men can conceal themselves have pine or palmetto or other large trees on them. Don't bother about the islands with small mangrove bushes on them. They look dry from a distance, but you'll find that there

isn't enough land there for a turtle to sun or a moccasin to curl up on. That's about all, and I hope that you win my hundred dollars, although I feel perfectly safe. See here, Major," he continued, "you are only holding the stakes and if the chap doesn't win, back comes the money to me."

"Oh, I'll take out enough for a box of cigars," replied the officer.

Once out of the headquarters the features of Private Gaudet relaxed. Like a boy he skipped across the field to the sheds.

Testing every part of his hydroplane to a nicety and providing for an eight hour trip, Private Gaudet stepped into his machine. In the meanwhile the news of his mission had gone around the camp, and a crowd of aviators had come to see him off.

They cheered as his machine started spinning along the field. Then they watched it rise into the air, circle the camp and sail like a great bird over the pine-trees towards the Everglades.

CHAPTER XIII

UNWELCOME VISITORS

"Don't get frightened, Phil, but we mustn't let those Indians know that we are here," were the warning words, of young Rauderly when he had come down from the observation tree. "Seminoles are harmless when they visit towns and cities, but who knows what they will do out here in the Everglades. Then we have guns and knives and cooking utensils that might be a temptation to them."

"I want to get out of this place," whimpered Phil; "nothing but snakes and things here. Let's ask them to show us the way out."

"Are you going crazy? They will only kill you! Listen to me; if you make any noise after the Indians reach the island I'll kill you. Do you hear?" These were the severest words that Ferdinand Rauderly had used

towards the lad.

"I want to get out of here!"

"Do you want to get killed here?"

"No, Mr. Ferd."

"Then, do as I tell you. We won't make a fire, and we'll hide in the bushes. The Indians may stay only a few days, or even only long enough to cook their meal. Remember now you are to make no noise."

"Yes, Mr. Ferd."

"And you are to remain hidden until I give the signal."

"Yes, Mr. Ferd."

"There! I knew you would do it. It won't be long before we start."

The first thing to do was to lower the tent and conceal it among the bushes. When this had been done and all other signs of habitation removed, Ferdinand again climbed the gum-tree. "You needn't hide until you hear me whistle," were his parting words. "Oh, yes," he said, turning towards the boy, "dig the koonti roots, we'll need two bushels for the trip, I'll be back in a few minutes."

It was an ideal observation post, with one

limb bending far out over the water and away from the foliage of the other trees, still it had sufficient leaves to hide the observer.

There was no mistaking the two canoes. Some thirty feet long and but a little over a foot in width, they were evidently the water craft of the Seminoles, made of a single trunk of a cypress-tree. Their weight and high prows made them convenient for working one's way through the tall grass. Slowly —slowly—slowly they crept along.

With his glass Rauderly could examine the features of the Indians. In one boat there were six occupants and in the other nine. There was only one man, and from the rich decorations of his head-gear he was evidently a chief. There were five squaws and the rest were children. Around the necks of the women could easily be distinguished the heavy chains with beads of turquoise blue and red. They wore lighter beads, too, which glinted in the sun's rays. Most of the women wore bright calico dresses. In each boat a single squaw was poling, while others were industriously weaving baskets of willow-twigs. Three

of the children were eating sof-kee out of a huge wooden bowl, using a wooden spoon about the size of a soup ladle.

Ferdinand Rauderly was glad indeed to see that there were no warriors in the company. But why should these helpless creatures be plowing slowly through the Everglades?

"No danger!" were his greeting words to his young companion whom he found busily engaged digging the koonti roots. "No danger! Not a warrior in the canoe."

"Are they Indians?"

"Yes; but only one man, and he is so old that he couldn't hold a rifle. I think he is a chief."

"Have they landed, Mr. Ferd?"

"No, it will be fully an hour before they reach the island. I want you to take a look at the canoes. You have never seen anything like them. They are hollowed out of a single cypress-log."

With eager delight Phil Reed climbed the gum-tree. What a glorious vision was stretched out before him! It was some time before he could find the canoes, which were

all but concealed in the tall grass. How slowly they went! What could be their destination? Would they return soon? Would Mr. Ferd let him go with them? Far to the left he could see the faint outlines of the Big Cypress Swamp; and beyond that were Ten Thousand Islands and the Reed home. How he wished that he were there!

His reflections were disturbed by the voice of Mr. Rauderly,

"Have they reached the island yet?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"How would you like to travel in one of those boats?"

"I wouldn't mind it, if it took me to the Reeds."

"So you still think of your friends."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come on down; you'll see the Reeds some day."

After hiding the canoe well in among the mangrove bushes and removing everything that might attract attention, the two explorers began to dig the koonti roots. Every

few minutes one of them would climb the gum-tree to observe the two canoes.

It was late in the afternoon when the Indian party reached the Island. As they had eaten their provision of cold sof-kee during the voyage, they simply rested in the warm November sun. Then at a signal they drew forth masks and dresses of various colors. Rauderly watched them for some time and then descended from the tree.

"Do you wish to visit the Indians?" he asked of his companion.

"Will they take us home?" and the boys eyes brightened.

"I don't know; but they are getting ready for some kind of ceremony and I am interested."

"What's that noise?" Ferdinand Rauderly leaped to his feet. There was a chug, chug, chug and a whirr—whirr—whirr— overhead. In full view in the sky was a flying machine. Round and around the larger island it circled.

Indian women and children screamed and fell prostrate upon the ground. But the chief stood passive to welcome the great spirit who

in his opinion had come from the skies to visit him. At each circle the machine drew nearer to the island. Finally the chug of the engine ceased, and the machine glided into the water at no great distance from the Indians.

Ferdinand felt safe in climbing the tree to witness the outcome. He could see the aviator unstrap himself and lift from the machine a small canoe in which he slowly paddled towards the island. Only the Indian chief stood to welcome the visitor.

"White man," said he to this strange apparition, "I thought that you were a messenger from the great spirit. More than two hundred moons ago I went to live with the white man. I learned his language; but I didn't like the ways of the white man and I came back to the Seminoles. Most of my braves are dead; but we are at peace with the white man and no longer need to fight. Only the squaws and children will come with me. We are in search of the great gold trunk. Six hundred moons ago and two times six hundred moons a white man was cast upon the sea-shore far beyond the Big Cypress

Swamp. He had with him a chest of gold, and offered much of it to a Seminole who promised to take the white man across the Big Grass Water. The white man was sick and could not pole the canoe. The white man died. The Seminole tied his body to the trunk of gold and dropped them into the water. The Seminole reached our homes, but he too was sick. He told my people of the chest of gold. Then he died. Each year the Seminoles go out to search for the chest of gold. Some day we will find it. But the young men laugh at the story, and will not come with me to find the chest of gold. Only the women and children will come with me to find the chest of gold. Perhaps you can help us, oh, white man, to find the white man's chest of gold. When I was young I saw the great boats of the white man; I saw the great iron horses that pulled houses; but now the white man sails through the air like a bird. Can he see down into the water? Can he tell me where to find the chest of gold?"

"Great chief," the aviator made reply with

befitting dignity, "I'm just out on a hike through the air, I dropped down in my hydroplane to fill my canteen with fresh water. I am fully three hundred miles from the aviation field and must be hitting it back before dark. Already my companions may be wondering what has become of me. I have listened with pleasure to your story of the golden chest. I certainly wish that I knew where it lay. We have stopped fighting with the Seminoles, but I am sorry to say that we are still fighting. When we whip the Kaiser, it will be my pleasure to return to this world of enchantment and seek for the treasure."

"May I offer you some of our sof-kee?" said the Indian chief pointing towards a large bowl.

"Thanks for your gracious kindness, but it is only water and slackers that I crave."

"Let the children and squaws see you," said the chief. On uttering some guttural words, the poor frightened creatures came crawling from under the bushes, until at the further bidding of their leader they approached the aviator, and saw to their astonishment that he was only a man.

They watched him as he entered his machine, and saw the great wings go spinning over the surface and then suddenly spring into the air.

The machine barely missed the tops of the tall pine-trees of the palmettoes, while in the mangrove bush beneath lay Ferdinand Rauderly with thumping heart.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SURRENDER

WHILE Private Gaudet was preparing to leave the Indians, there was a great struggle in the bosom of Ferdinand Rauderly. Now was the time for him to send a message to the government offering to surrender unconditionally and to expiate the past. He would ask for a chance. He would offer to go into the front trenches, to go over the top at the first call! For the first time in weeks there came over him a feeling of peace and comfort.

While the thoughts were struggling in his breast he saw the aviator prepare for flight. Again the fear came over him and he fell into the mangrove bushes. The struggle with self was renewed. Then as the machine went over the pine tops Ferdinand Rauderly leaped

to his feet, shouted and waved a towel which he grabbed from the side of the tent.

On drove the machine, then it went higher into the air, wheeled and came back over the palmettoes. Twice it circled the island and then dropped into the long deep pool.

Leaping into his rubber boat the aviator soon reached the bank.

Ferdinand Rauderly grasped his hand. "Will you carry a message for me?" he asked.

"To whom?"

"Uncle Sam."

"Of course, what is the message?"

"From—a—slack—a—slacker. He wants to surrender," and the words came with difficulty.

"Let him surrender to me! Where is he?"

"I—I—myself" faltered the youth.

"Then come right on, I've been looking for you," and Max Gaudet drew a revolver from his belt.

"Shoot if you wish," and a sudden braveness of heart came over Ferd, now that he had confessed his guilt. "I've suffered worse than death," he said. "But I would ask only

one thing—a—chance—a—chance to fight—a chance to go into the front trenches—a chance to win back the name of Ferdinand Rauderly."

The revolver went back into the belt. "Let us sit down and talk it over," said the aviator. "There will always be one thing in your favor—namely you surrendered before you were discovered; but I saw your tent hidden in the bushes and would have come back even if you had not waved the white flag. You called me back to send word to the government that you surrendered or wish to surrender —it's all the same. You gave up before an officer arrested you. This, I say, will be in your favor."

"Do you think they will give me a chance?" grasped the youth.

"You are a lucky fellow and so am I; but if we are to win we must start. I am offered one hundred dollars if I bring back a slacker before night; and the slacker has been promised his pardon."

"How?" and Ferd grasped the aviators hand.

"Why it was only a joke. A contractor

and the Major were talking about slackers hiding in the Everglades. Neither believed the stories going around, although the Army Officers at Washington ordered an investigation. The contractor offered me a hundred dollars if I got a slacker; and not to be outdone the Major said, that he'd set the fellow free."

"I don't want to go free! I want to fight and show that I'm not a coward!"

"Well, the Major has not the authority to pardon any one; but he has made the promise and he'll stick to it. He's strong at Washington. But we must start at once."

"But I have a companion," put in Ferd.

"Oh, two slackers!" and Max felt for his revolver again and stepped to one side.

"Only a kid," said Rauderly, "and I persuaded him to run away from home."

"Where is he?"

"Hey Red!" shouted a voice, and trembling with fright the boy crept from his hiding place.

"Why he's Indian or half Indian," claimed the aviator looking at the boy, "and red-headed as you make 'em. A red-headed

Indian. That's one of the wonders of the Everglades."

"No, sir, he's Irish; Irish and freckled-faced. I painted him like an Indian, a few days ago, and some of the paint is still holding on.

"Well, what will we do with him?"

"Please sir, I didn't do anything but run away from the Reeds."

"From home?"

"No, Mr. Soldier, I haven't any home."

"What about this one?" and Private Gaudet glanced around him. "Will you stay here for one night by yourself?"

"I am afraid of limpkins."

"Ghosts, Indians' ghosts, I suppose."

"No," corrected Ferd, "it's a big bird that makes a most horrible noise."

"It isn't dangerous, is it?"

"No, sir, but it scares a fellow to death."

"Well you look very much alive. Now listen. Your friend here has done a great injury to himself and his country. He wants to be pardoned. If he reaches the aviation camp before night he will be pardoned. I'll

take him with me and come after you to-morrow morning."

Max Gaudet didn't wait for a reply. He did not allow his prisoner to return to the tent. He saw the two shake hands and heard the boy crying; but he seemed to pay no heed to what was going on before him.

While appearing unconcerned he kept his eye on his prisoner. Into the canoe they stepped. He explained to Ferd that he must be strapped into the machine.

Up into the air went the hydroplane, and before the bugle at Curtis Field sounded for retreat the aviator had alighted with his prisoner.

Cheer after cheer went up from the boys as Private Max Gaudet walked towards headquarters with the slacker at his side.

Marcus O'Donnell, who had just stepped into the Major's private office on business, only laughed when he saw the officer hand the new one hundred dollar bill to Private Gaudet.

Major Larnar, however, had a more diffi-

cult problem before him. He had promised to pardon, and pardon he would; but how fix matters at Washington? When he had listened to the narration of the private he pulled his chair close to the prisoner and began.

"I understand that before the United States went into this war you had made up your mind to visit the Everglades. I—don't interrupt me. Being of a scientific turn of mind, that is given to books and learning—I understand, but don't interrupt me"—for the young man wished to add a word of explanation—"and fearing that you might die in your country's service, you wished to explore the Everglades before entering upon duty—there now not a word, you must never interrupt an officer—I say you wished to explore the Everglades before entering upon service. You did not know how much time it would require to cross the Everglades. Mr. McDonnell thought he knew all about them, but he didn't. Now, I ask, in all justice, could a young man with only book knowledge know all about them? How could he know

the time required to cross the Everglades? You ran against saw-grass and hammocks and other unexpected obstacles, and time went by and so you were detained—unavoidably detained. Now—not a word, not a word—you are in service and have orders from the commanding officer. Private Gaudet says that you have some experience, in fact considerable experience, in driving your own car; you can learn in a few days to drive a motor truck. We are training the men for France. You start for France to-morrow and are assigned to motor truck service." Major Larnar was evidently pleased with his speech while his civilian friend, the contractor, put his hands deep into his pockets and roared.

The Major pressed a button. "Tell Captain Madden that I would speak to him," he said to the orderly.

"There is a mistake here," he explained to the Captain. "I haven't time to rectify it all. But private Ferd Rauderly goes with the oversea company motor truck service to-morrow. I'll see to his papers later. Only

make a note of the matter. Is Captain Christopher outside?"

"He is, Major."

"Tell him to step in."

"Captain Christopher," said the Major, "there's some mistake about Private Rauderly here. Take him over to your quartermaster's depot, and give him an oversea outfit. I'll hand you the requisition to-morrow." The Captain saluted and retired. "This young man is committed to your care to-night," said the Major to Captain Madden. "See that he has the proper papers."

"I have a short message to leave with you," explained Private Gaudet.

The Major listened to the story of Phil Reed with interest, took all the details and promised to send for the little fellow early the next day.

"Now, I've kept my promise," said the Major with a laugh, when he was alone with the contractor. "But some day there'll be the devil of a mixup at Washington. Here is a man in foreign service who has never enlisted. But Major Larnar has made other

mistakes and has not been court-martialed. I was determined that I'd keep my promise. Good night!"

"Good night!"

And the two men separated.

CHAPTER XV

ALONE IN THE PALMETTOES

PHIL REED stood watching the hydroplane until it disappeared, then he wiped away the tears with his sleeve.

For some time he wandered aimlessly over the island. Finally he set to work, arranging the guide ropes and pitching the tent which had been lowered.

Long before it was dark he tied the heavy cord, which held the canvass door, and lay down to sleep.

When he awoke it was bright; the dreaded night had passed while he had slept undisturbed.

Out into the sunshine he ran, and with no thought of food sat in an open space with a towel ready to wave, if a flying-machine should come into sight.

There was a noise. He sprang to his feet! Vain hopes! for it was only a fish leaping in the water. Often he had seen and heard them, but now how loud seemed the splash.

A few minutes passed. Again there was a sound! Phil Reed glanced up only to see a bird fluttering out from the canopy of Spanish moss.

A decayed frond fell from a palmetto with a thud into the water. The boy was startled, while his heart beat fast; for his fears and expectations magnified the sound.

Later a shadow swept over the island! Up went the towel to signal to the approaching hydroplane. Vain—vain hopes again! It was only the outstretched wings of a buzzard, which sailed silently away and was soon lost to view.

A whir-r-r-r over head, and a shadow too large for any bird! Deliverance was at hand! No—it was a flock of black cormorants. Hideous creatures were they at this hour when human wings were wanted! Their croaking cries seemed forecasts of evil yet to come!

Phil Reed waited until almost noon without touching anything to eat. Then he climbed the look-out and saw that the Indians were leaving the Pines. Slipping down the tree without any thought of tent or supplies he jumped into the canoe.

For hours he tugged and tugged. He could not see the Indian's canoes, nor did he know in what direction they were poling their craft. He worked madly, almost franticly, but little progress was made, and this in a direction far to the left of the Pines. From sheer exhaustion he dropped to the bottom of the canoe and fell asleep. He awoke with a shudder to find that darkness was coming over the Everglades. He stood up in the canoe and shouted, but his cries were lost over the water and sawgrass. Falling back into the canoe with his head resting on the hard seat he again slept. Several times during the night he woke with a shudder, then quickly closed his eyes only to drop off again into a disturbed rest.

Morning came. Under other circumstances Phil Reed would have remained stretched at length in the bottom of the canoe; but now

one thing came to his mind with vivid realization—he must quickly regain the Palmettoes or he would starve. With difficulty he turned the prow of his canoe towards the island, and set to work with his pole. He worked slowly and carefully, avoiding the places where the grass was high or heavy. At times he supped the water from the palms of his hands. Towards the afternoon he observed on a hammock some yellow shriveled fruit—the custard apple, although it is more like a muskmelon or papaw than an apple. The season had long since passed, and most of the fruit had either been devoured by the birds or had rotted; however, some of it had clung to the bushes. He devoured the dried fruit and quenched his thirst with water.

New courage came to him. On and on he poled with ever renewed confidence, until just at dark he reached the Palmettoes.

The place seemed like home to him. Come what would he would not venture from the place alone. Although weak to exhaustion he set to work to make a little tea, found some hard crackers in a box and took his first meal

for two days. As he munched the crackers he thought of the bountiful table prepared by Mrs. Reed. He had been ungrateful for it all! He had been selfish! Now he was suffering for his faults! Such were his thoughts.

When he awoke on the following morning he resolved to be brave and set to work to take an inventory of his supplies. There were two sacks of corn-meal carefully wrapped in coverings of oilcloth. Only a little flour was left, but there were several small boxes of tea, and some cans of sardines and fruit.

The ammunition for both sporting-gun and rifle seemed sufficient, and there were five boxes of cartridges for the revolver. The shining barrel of the sporting-gun had an attraction for the boy; picking it up he aimed out over the waters, up into the tree tops. Then he took the rifle, somewhat heavy for a boy, but a deadly instrument in the hands of one who could handle it. The 38 caliber revolver came in for practice, and in quick succession the lad killed a dozen or more imaginary Indians. Finally he ran his hands over the shining blade of a six inch hunting

knife. The boy opened the two books which were contained in his treasures.

Both were about Florida, one having short descriptions of the different birds which passed through the state in fall and early winter, and containing many colored plates.

Phil Reed got interested at once. He glanced up into the branches of a live oak laden with its drapery of moss. What a land of enchantment for birds, a great stage where they acted, set with dainty curtains of tangled lace swaying with frail beauty, delicate in its dextrous weavings of nature.

Out stepped a cardinal, a perfect actor in pantomine, with its red plumage in bright contrast with the dull-green setting of the stage. Of course, it could sing and call cheerily, but now it was only a moving-picture. Its act was short, and back into the curtains of lace it went.

Another actor! Frail its form and tender its voice. Phil Reed watched the bird, then consulted his book. It was surely a warbler; but the book gave fifty or more varieties. Why did it not remain still, until it was

classified? The boy got his telescope. How big the bird appeared! Every line of its shapely body came out. There was no doubting it now, this little performer was the golden warbler.

And that ugly creature bringing bad luck! You are a black cormorant!

Mr. Mocking-bird; but why do you not sing? A mocker and not singing. True your best notes are not expected except in spring or summer when fruit is ripe; but you might at least carol for a while. No. Then the field-glass must examine you. Fraud! You are betrayed! You are the butcher-bird! Your white throat and spotted wings and tail betray you; nor have you the delicate shape of the mocker!

What a beautiful creature! Proud too, and conscious of its gifts of nature, even though it is only a little finch. The bird manager gave it but a few seconds for its act; for it was soon recalled behind the scenes which hid it from further observation.

What a pleasant hour that was for Phil Reed! He would spend a part of each day

in studying the birds. And there was a note-book, in which he would write down the name of every specimen. How many came to the island? Would it not be interesting to have their names and know their songs? "Birds of the Everglades"—what a captivating title for his notes.

Then the second book was taken up. The first part contained a history of Florida; the adventures of Ponce De Leon and the wonderful story of the Fountain of Perpetual Youth. Then there was a history of the old city of St. Augustine. The book had a colored picture of a Spanish masterpiece, which hung in the Cathedral, a picture of the Blessed Virgin with the Divine Infant.

Phil Reed was a devout boy. Removing his hat and kneeling on the sand, he reverently kissed the feet of the Child and the Virgin. Then he prayed that the Divine Child and Blessed Virgin would guide and protect him. Conscious of his weakness, the little castaway found strength in Heaven—in the vision of the Child and Mother.

Then a thought came to him that brought

joy and peace to his heart and a smile to his lips. He would build an altar. How wondrous and beautiful had been the May altar in the orphanage at Brooklyn! From the book he carefully tore the image and made a crude frame of cypress stems. As he cut the delicate branches, perfume came from the soft and green needles. It was like the odor of incense! So would the incense of his prayers rise up to heaven!

Into the tent he carried the picture. He was well provided with tools. To work he went. When the altar was finished, leaves of every tint were collected and put at each side, and with them small pine-trees just as he had seen the evergreens arranged at Christmas time. He covered two empty bottles with the yellowish leaves of the mistletoe and filled them with clusters of purple asters. Over the altar and through the pine trees he entwined the delicate vines of the jasmine, and as he worked he caught the perfume from its blooms of yellow trumpets.

Then he knelt and prayed again. That afternoon he recollected that there were

candles in the collection left to him. He took two and placed them before the altar, carefully covering with leaves the cans which held them. There was no mistaking it, the altar was a thing of beauty! Was it not as beautiful as the wondrous May altar before which he had prayed with such devotion?

Phil Reed no longer dreaded the coming of night. All day long, as he worked and tinkered around the tent, he thought of the candles which he would light as darkness came on. How secure he felt with the image of the Blessed Virgin in his tent.

In the South, twilight is short; the day went rapidly by and darkness dropped swiftly from the skies. The candles were lighted. Before the altar the boy knelt and said his beads. How heavenly was the vision before him. Almost in an ecstacy, he prayed. He extinguished the lights, undressed himself and lay down upon his cot.

How peaceful was his rest. In the curtains of moss overhead the birds, too, slept peacefully.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MESSENGER OF THE AIR

After his peaceful rest a feeling of strength and confidence came to Phil Reed. Kneeling before the little shrine he said his morning prayers; then he looked at his diary. It was Friday, November the twenty-first.

For some days flocks of pelicans had swept over the Everglades, coming, as it seemed, from the direction of the Big Cypress Swamp. Phil Reed knew that the birds did not frequent the swamp, and, therefore, that they were leaving the island close to the Reed household. To him the birds were messengers from friends. He could almost hear them call out to him as they sailed over the palmettoes.

Frequently, too, the birds dropped into the leads to fish.

"Trouble out there!" Phil muttered to himself one morning. With his field-glass he had been watching a dozen birds feeding in the saw-grass. Suddenly all the pelicans but one rose from the water and flew away with wild cries. Evidently something had happened to this one which was beating the water with its wings.

"Trouble out there!" the boy repeated.

"A snake has got the bird," he mused.

"Something has got it; that's sure," he soliloquized starting for the canoe.

As he neared the struggling captive it made frantic efforts to escape.

"Something is holding it, and the water is bloody," said Phil to himself standing up in the canoe to get a better view. "Caught in the saw-grass and cutting its legs? Now I see!" exclaimed the boy, "turtle, a big turtle! a monster of a turtle!"

A monster it was! By its very weight it prevented the bird from rising from the water, although the pelican, had it been able to mount into the air, would have carried the turtle with it.

"Let go, you big fool!" cried the boy picking up the fluttering bird to which its would be captor clung tanaciously.

"All right! come right in and I'll make soup out of you!" With these words he heaved both the bird and the turtle into the canoe.

The latter struck the seat with a thud and at the same time released its hold on the pelican.

"There you are," he said, turning to the turtle. "You would hold on, would you? This is the last pelican you'll feast on! I know who'll have some good turtle soup!"

For a few minutes it seemed as if both prizes would escape, for the pelican was pounding at the boy with its strong wings and the turtle was making every effort to crawl over the side of the canoe.

"Get back!" he cried out to the turtle, while with the pole he hit its nose. Evidently the turtle did not like this treatment, for it drew its head within its shell and lay quietly in the bottom of the boat.

This gave the boy a chance to secure the

pelican with a rope, and to pole to shore. After dispatching the turtle with an axe he released the bird and took it to his tent. Destruction followed, for the big pelican overthrew the altar and scattered the cooking utensils which were on a stand.

Leaving the tent and securely fastening the door, the boy set to work to make a cage for the captive. Stakes were driven into the ground and a lattice work was made of mangrove saplings.

After placing the captive in its new house the boy sat down and began to talk to it.

"Say, Mr. Pelican, where did you come from? Do you know the Reeds? Did you cross the Big Cypress Swamp on your way here? I wish that you were a parrot and that you could talk. It's lonesome out here. Are you much hurt Mr. Bird? Are you hungry? Have you got anything to eat in that yellow sack under your bill? Say, you're a queer one! You're ugly, too; you're all head. Well, I'll get you something to eat."

Off went the lad to cut up some sof-kee for the bird.

"Won't take it! Say it's mighty good!" remarked the boy when the pelican refused to eat. "Well just wait."

He was soon out in his canoe casting for a species of white fish which he had often caught; as luck was with him the boy was soon back at the cage, dangling a fish through a crevice. The pelican opened it's big mouth, and the fish disappeared.

"That's great! Now say thank you! And do you want some water?" Around the cage the pelican turned and strutted as if it were perfectly contented with its new surroundings. It's wound did not seem serious.

All day long, and even into the night, the boy talked to the bird. He was no longer alone on the island; he had a friend.

"Say, Mr. Pelican," the boy began early on the following day, "I saved your life, won't you help me? Suppose I let you go, will you fly away to the Reeds?"

There was a nod, for these big birds are always nodding. "Good! I knew you'd do it. I'm going to send you with a message."

With the bark of a willow tree Phil Reed

made a small box, and smeared the sides with some resin from a nearby pine. Then he took a leaf from the back of one of his books and wrote the following:

A young boy, named Phil Reed, is all alone in the Everglades, about twenty-five miles from the Big Cypress Swamp. Came by the Harvy River. Inform Mr. Thomas Reed at Pelican Wharf.

Phil Reed.

The note was put in the box which was made water-tight with more resin.

"I wish you could carry this note, then come back to me," said the boy, sitting down by the side of the cage with the message in his hand. "I'll be lonely when you go. Now, remember that you are to take this letter to the Reeds."

As the bird was constantly nodding its head the boy could at any time accept the action for a favorable response.

He put his hand to the door to release the bird. Then drew it back, while tears gathered in his eyes. "I'll be all alone, if I let you go."

As the hours passed the boy talked to the bird. Each time that he attempted to tie the box to the pelican's leg he lost heart. How could he give up the companionship of this new friend!

The day went by; the willow box still lay upon the ground near the cage; the pelican was still a captive.

It was only by a heroic effort on the following day that the lad came to a final decision. Tying the little box to the pelican's leg and leaving it to dangle about the foot, he drew the bird from the cage.

"Good-by, Mr. Pelican. Now, you know what to do. You are to go right across the Big Cypress Swamp, and take the message to Mr. Reed." He kissed the bird which was fluttering in his lap.

"Good-by."

Into the air the bird was tossed. It had evidently been weakened by the loss of blood and want of exercise, for it could scarcely fly. It seemed bewildered, too, and beat the air feebly. Then slowly it began to circle the island while the boy from below watched with bated breath.

Phil Reed's heart almost ceased to beat as he saw the bird turn and sail towards the east.

"Come back here!" he cried. "Say you're going in the wrong direction!" He watched the pelican until it disappeared, then fell to the ground and wept.

CHAPTER XVII

OTHER FRIENDS

Sad and lonesome was Phil Reed for the rest of that day; but he awoke on the following morning with a determination to be brave.

He took pleasure in hearing his own voice. "Good morning, Mr. Pelicans," he cried out to a number of birds fishing in a lead at no great distance. "Say, won't you come over and keep company with a fellow? If you had any sense or any politeness, you'd take a message for me. Don't understand me? Well, you're stupid birds. I saw a little sea-gull rob one of you pelicans and he didn't wink an eye. Good luck," he continued as one of the birds came to the surface with a fish of unusual size. "Hold on to it; that's right, now put it into your sack."

He had scarcely uttered the words when the

fish was twisted in the pelican's mouth and disappeared in the sack. "Good old fellow," cried the boy, "you are the first pelican that I ever knew to obey orders. But, say, won't you come over this way." Just then the whole flock took flight. "Good-by, you big fools. I wouldn't have you around; you are stupid things! Get away!"

This imaginary conversation brought the boy so much relief that he began to talk to inanimate objects. "How are you this morning?" he said to a long jasmine vine hung with its yellow trumpets. "You look fine. And you, Mr. Palmettoes, how are you? Got any rattle-snakes for boarders?"

Thus the boy amused himself as he wandered over the island.

"Stop awhile," he shouted to a flock of white ibises which sailed overhead. "Lots of room here for boarders. No time to stop? Well come some other day and bring your sewing." He stood looking into the heavens until the beautiful delicate creatures had disappeared.

"Say, you're all out this morning," he cried

again shortly, as the long slender bodies of a dozen flamingoes rushed by. For days and weeks had he seen these same ibises and flamingoes go by; only now when he was lonely and alone did their passing attract his attention.

Of one thing Phil Reed felt convinced; he must have a companion of some kind. He thought that he could climb the live oak at night and catch a black cormorant, for they often came to the island to roost; but no, they were ugly birds, and like crows, would bring bad luck. There seemed no possibility of catching a white ibis; and as for the pink flamingoes, even if he got one and cliped its wings it could walk away with its long legs.

Although turkeys had come to the island of late, no attempt had been made to kill them, for Phil wished to keep them as a reserve stock in case other supplies failed. But would not a turkey make a good companion? Would it not seem more like home if a big gobbler walked around in front of the tent? Perhaps he could have half a dozen. He could have eggs and young turkeys.

Phil Reed clapped his hands. "The book, the book!" he cried. "It had a picture of a turkey trap." Back to the tent he ran. "Yes, yes, it was a picture of a trap used by the Seminoles. It wouldn't hurt the game; and, wonder of wonders, such a trap had been known to catch a whole flock of fifteen turkeys at one time.

"Why, here you are all ready," he cried out, as with his hands deep into his pockets Phil stood with evident pride before the pelican cage. "Made you without knowing it. Made you just the right height, the right width! How did I do it?"

True it was, that the cage constructed for the pelican was just the proportion given in the book. It only remained to remove the box to the proper locality and prepare a clearing or path some twenty feet long leading towards the trap and under it. Here, pointed pine sticks were to be so arranged that a turkey could easily push them aside while forcing its way into the cage; but could not do so easily in trying to escape.

As the clearing went under ground it was covered with a wicker of saplings. Once

beneath this wicker and tempted by the great amount of food within the box a turkey would push its entrance through the pine sticks into the trap. It was possible for it to work its way out as it came; but like all other captives it would invariably beat aimlessly against the sides of the cage until its captor came.

After setting up the cage at the far end of the island and clearing three paths to it, Phil returned to look around the tent for some tempting bait. "I don't like to use you," he said, as he opened up a tin box containing several pounds of peas. "Besides I want to make a garden. But as I've got to have a turkey for a pet, one pound will be well used."

"I think I'll try only one of the paths and save the peas," he argued with himself, as he went back to the clearing.

Phil Reed certainly prepared an enticing meal for the turkeys, or rather the beginning of a meal, for he used but a handful of the peas, putting another handful inside the trap.

Picking his way back to the place where the

koonti root had been found, Phil prepared a plot for a garden, at least the beginning of a garden. He would first try peas, if they succeeded, he would plant some beans; although he had only a small supply of the latter, he was sure that they would grow.

After working away for an hour he crept towards the clearing to make an examination. In the middle of the path was a red-headed woodpecker, hopping along and picking up peas. Soon it was near the trap; but since it had eaten its full it flew away to a pine-tree and made it ring with its rat-ter, rat-ter, tap-tap.

Along the path the boy walked. Not a pea was left. "You robber, you red-headed robber, just come down here, and it'll be the last of you. Shame on you! Eating my peas when I've got so few. Where is your politeness?"

A shower of pine needles came quivering down from the tree as an only response. How the woodpecker did make the pine limb rattle, for never before had it partaken of such a plentiful repast.

"I'll try some other bait," said the boy to

himself. "I've plenty of sof-kee, it's good too. I will spread it along the path. If you come down here again," the boy, looking up towards the woodpecker, "there's going to be trouble. Do you hear?"

The red-headed robber flew off to perch on the saw-grass and take a drink.

Later when Phil was spreading the mushy sof-kee along the path he heard something fall to the ground from the pine-tree. It was the red-headed woodpecker.

"I've got you, you glutton." True it was, for the little robber was suffering from cramps caused by the swelling peas.

Tying a string to the bird's leg, the boy left it in the tent while he went on with the work of spreading the sof-kee along the three paths.

Before an hour had passed the red-headed woodpecker had entirely recovered and was making desperate efforts to escape. Why not make a cage for it? With slender willow branches and willow bark it would be an easy matter to construct one. So thought the boy, and to work he went, interrupting the job at

times to take a look at the trap; but nothing else seemed to steal the food.

Late in the afternoon the largest flock of warblers, which he had yet seen, settled down upon the island quite close to the clearing.

"I'll keep an eye on you," muttered the boy. But before he realized what had happened hundreds of little birds were at work along the paths.

"Robbers, robbers, get out, get out," shouted the boy, running with full speed in the midst of the little marauders. To his utter astonishment two of the prettiest warblers were captives in his hat, having dashed blindly into it as the flock took to flight. Closing the top of his hat quickly the boy had his prizes safe. At the same time he looked down into the paths and found what had attracted the birds; the sof-kee along the paths was black with ants.

Phil Reed now had so many things to do that he did not know just where to begin; there was the garden to be dug and planted, cages to be made for the warblers and red-headed woodpecker, and some scheme to be

devised for preserving the bait near the turkey trap.

He set fire to the dry grass and pine needles around the trap thus ridding the clearing of the ants. Then he placed a fresh supply of sof-kee quite close to the cage, returning to it every few minutes to see whether any fresh ants were getting at the food. In the meanwhile he worked at the cages.

Late that afternoon he saw three turkeys light on the island; he heard them calling and gobbling, until finally he could see them quite close to the box. His heart beat rapidly as he observed one of them put his head under the cage. Then up and into the trap went the big bird.

Phil could not wait to give the other turkeys a chance to be caught, but leaping to his feet he dashed for the prize.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DIFFICULTIES OF A YOUNG NATURALIST

"Got you! got you!" cried out Phil Reed with delight. "And a gobbler! A gobbler! A big gobbler!" he continued, dancing around the cage.

All in vain the bird began to beat against the wicker sides of the box.

"No getting away!" said the boy at the same time closing the opening under the trap. "But I'll be your friend. Suppose I'll clip your wings to keep you from flying, will you stay on the island? Well, I'm afraid to trust you. I'll just clip your wings and then I'll tie a string to your leg. You see, I was too good to Mr. Pelican, and he went away laughing at me. But this is your home; you won't mind staying with a lonesome little boy, will you? That's right," for the bird had quieted down as if resigned to its fate.

"Just stay here, and make yourself at home; I'm going to see the woodpecker and the little twin warblers." Off went the boy; and on the way a sudden thought came to him. Could he not make traps and catch every kind of bird that came to the island?

Again the book was consulted. Why had he not thought of it before? In the volume was a full description of the Indians' primitive but effectual way of catching birds.

Down on the ground he sat and read, "The Seminoles are most ingenious in their methods of securing birds for eating and for their plumage. With the long slender branches of the willows they weave rough baskets which are used for bird-traps. This basket is fully six feet square and about three in depth, tapering to a point in the middle. It is placed on a smooth surface and tilted on one side, being supported by three sticks arranged in the shape of the letter four. The three sections of this letter can be so arranged that the least motion will throw the parts down and let the basket fall. With this device the Seminoles often catch a dozen different vari-

eties. For bait they use their own favorite food called sof-kee, made of the starch of koonti root seasoned with venison and vegetables."

"Hurrah!" cried Phil as he read; "just the kind of bait I was using. I believe that I'm turning into an Indian. Mr. Rauderly said that I looked like an Indian."

"Well, there's lots of time to catch other birds," he mused. "I must first make a cage for my little pets here. How are you Mr. Woodpecker? How are you, dear little warblers, how are you? Feeling fine are you? That's right." And the more the boy talked aloud the more he himself felt reconciled to his surroundings.

Making the cages was not difficult. Placing willow sticks, about a foot in length, along the ground, the boy wove them together with the bark from the same tree. When four sides with top and bottom of equal size had been constructed, they were fastened together with other pieces of bark and the box was finished. But then there arose a difficulty, for there was no door. After some further work

Again the weeks passed by; the chorus of song birds and the yellow flowers of the butterwort and jasmine announced that spring was fast approaching.

The Indian's vacation was over and although he had forgotten his work at Palm Beach, he again sighed for the haunts of civilization. Phil Reed yearned for a return to the home of the Reeds.

But strange things happened out in the Everglades, and their departure was far from that which they had planned.

CHAPTER XXI

OLD FRIENDS MEET

"INDIANS! Indians!" cried Phil Reed scrambling down the bay-tree and running to the Seminole. The boy having climbed the tree to make his daily observation, had discovered Indians in two canoes landing at the Pines.

Extinguishing the fire which he had just started the Seminole sprang towards the look-out. "Bad Indians!" he called out to the boy beneath. "Big Indians! Bad Indians! Got two white men, one much big man; other me see before. Don't know name. White man's feet tied. Bad Indians, bad Indians!" continued the Seminole.

"How many are there?" asked the boy from below.

"Six Indians, six bad Indians," and it was evident from Little Deer's words he was

ashamed of those of his tribe who had turned robbers.

Up the tree climbed the boy. "Let me have a look," said he, taking the glass from his pocket.

"Me no need glass," said the Seminole.

"Heavens!" cried the boy after some observation. "It's Mr. Reed."

"White boy's friend?"

"Yes, my father; I'm his adopted son."

"Me help two men! Slow, much slow," cautioned Little Deer, who knew how to deal with his own.

"Will they kill the men?"

"Me no think so. Seminole 'fraid kill white man."

"What will they do with them?"

"Don't know, but no kill."

"But if they rob them and then let them go, Mr. Reed will report them and the soldiers will come after the Indians."

"Don't know."

"But can't we help in some way?" asked the boy as he again looked through the glass and saw Mr. Reed helplessly bound.

"See!" exclaimed the Seminole. "Indians go fishing!" In a few minutes the six Indians pushed out from the island leaving the two men on the shore. Even if they could succeed in untying the ropes which bound them, escape was impossible.

Luckily the Indians went off to the south of the Pines and opposite the Palmettoes.

Putting the two rifles, shot-gun and revolver in the canoe in stepped Little Deer with Phil. They were hid from the fishing party by the Pines.

"We'll give Mr. Reed the heavy rifle," whispered the boy as the canoe crept through the saw-grass.

"Yes," replied Little Deer.

"And the other man gets the shot-gun."

"Yes."

"You keep your rifle, and I'll take the revolver."

"Yes," answered the Indian mechanically and wholly intent upon his work. Seldom did a cypress canoe cut through the leads as did that of the Seminole.

"And we'll all stand up and fire at once."

"Yes."

"And when the Indians see us and hear so many guns they'll run."

"Fine," said the Seminole as with every muscle he pushed the canoe through a heavy bunch of grass thereby saving several minutes.

Soon the Indian and boy were creeping up the side of the Pines.

"Stay here," he whispered to the boy as they gained a clump of mangrove bushes not twenty feet from the two captives. Then with his knife in his mouth he dragged himself along the ground. The Indians were in full view but were engaged in fishing.

"Me, friend!" said a voice to the captives.

Mr. Reed turned his head and saw an Indian crouching behind a bunch of scrub palmettoes.

"Me, friend! No move! Cut ropes." And he pushed the knife towards the captives.

By twisting the knife between his fingers the man soon cut the ropes which bound his hands; then those around his feet were removed. With scarcely a movement the other man was liberated. The two men understood

their part in the work. Turning they saw that the friendly Indian had gone. Soon they heard him crawling back through the bushes.

"Big rifle," whispered Little Deer handing the weapon to Mr. Reed, for he remembered that such was the boy's wish. "Big noise! Much big noise," he continued as he handed the sporting gun to the second man, meaning the big gun would frighten, but not kill.

Phil Reed was only a few feet behind the Seminole. He heard the Indian give further directions.

"All jump! Much shout! Much shoot, but no kill," were the Indian's words.

"Jump in bush like deer, hide like panther!" All understood the directions. They were to show themselves to let the Seminoles know that others had arrived on the island; they were to fire rapidly to frighten the enemy and let him know their strength, then they were to seek shelter before the Indians had time to fire in return.

The ruse worked perfectly. The Indians saw a party on the island, as shots rained

around their canoe. In the confusion which followed they concluded that a company of soldiers were in pursuit. At once the prows of the Indian canoes were turned towards Big Cypress Swamp. No attempt was made to follow them.

As Thomas Reed stood watching the Seminoles in their flight he was conscious that some one had grasped his hand.

"Papa!"

"Phil, my boy!"

"Will you take me back again?"

"Yes, child."

"And let me be your son?"

"Yes, yes."

"And call me your son?"

"Yes, yes," and the tears were swelling up in the big man's eyes.

"Then, papa, forgive me. I'll not run away again."

"You are my boy."

"And my little sisters?"

"They talk of you each day."

"And Mrs. Reed; does she still call me her son, her boy."

"Always, Phil; she trusted you when the rest of us thought that you were ungrateful and selfish."

"And she'll again call me her child?"

"Yes, Phil, both of us."

"Both of you?"

"Yes, Phil, both of us. You'll be our child, our boy."

"Thanks, papa," and the boy wept tears of joy.

In the meanwhile Mark Green, for that was the name of the other white man, and Little Deer were discussing what action to take.

"We ought to get after them and kill the whole infernal bunch," protested the old hunter, Mr. Green.

"No kill!" pleaded their Seminole friend, "no kill, they no kill white man! Bad Indians, but no kill white man!"

"No telling what they would have done," put in the angry man. "They robbed and tied us and perhaps would have killed us."

"They go, please sir, no kill; let go bad Indians."

"You have saved our lives, for I believe that we would have been murdered," he said to the Seminole. "You have helped us and for your sake I promise not to touch one of those Indians. Here is my hand!"

The two shook hands. "Mr. Green," said Thomas Reed, "here is my runaway son; he, too, has helped to save our lives. But have you anything to eat?" he asked Phil.

"Yes, lots of it," and the boy began to enumerate all the good things which were on the Palmettoes.

"Don't let us lose any time here," said Mr. Green; "those Indians are going as fast as their poles will take them. From the volley of shot we sent towards them they must think the island is filled with soldiers."

While Little Deer poled the canoe back to the Palmettoes, Mr. Reed explained to Phil how he happened to be in the Everglades. It was simply a matter of business. The government was dredging the place especially to the south and east. There were persistant rumors that the western part would soon be drained and that the country would be ex-

tremely rich. Mr. Mark Green, an old hunter and trapper, had agreed to take Mr. Reed on a trip through the Everglades to investigate the place as a business venture. The latter had no idea that Phil had gone in this direction. The afternoon that Phil left home a lumber-boat had passed near the shore; all thought that Phil was aboard it.

Thomas Reed and his partner were surprised indeed when Phil showed them his home on the Palmettoes, the cooking outfit, the supply of fresh venison, the cocoanuts and limes, the long row of cocoanut shells filled with otter grease for cooking and lighting.

"But let me show you my altar," said the proud little lad leading his father to the tent.

Down before the picture knelt the man and said a prayer. Then Phil explained how he got the picture and what suggested the altar.

"See here," said Thomas Reed as he rejoined his companion, "I wouldn't mind staying here for some weeks myself."

"Then we'll stay," was the reply.

"But what of the family? They'll worry.

You remember that we were to be here for some weeks and nearly three have gone by."

"It will take at least a week to reach Big Cypress Swamp, even with the best of luck; and then its three more days home," was the reply of the hunter.

"Suppose we ask our Indian friend to take a message for us," said Mr. Reed. "He can get there much sooner than a party will make it."

"Me go other way," answered Little Deer, indicating that he wished to go towards the eastern part of the state.

"Let me go," spoke up Phil. "I can find the leads."

All were surprised as the boy explained how he had learned the passage through the saw-grass.

"But you might get lost," objected his father.

"No get lost," said Little Deer, "like Indian boy—no get lost. Find much way—find big way—no get lost."

"That won't work," said Mr. Reed. "The Indian is going to the east shore in his cypress canoe; Phil takes his steel boat and goes west.

We are left here," he continued turning to Phil; "those Indians took our canoe. It was a fine dug-out made by Mr. Green."

"No Indian could make one as good," said the hunter, "and Mark Green is going to have it back even if he has to kill every Seminole in the Everglades." But he cooled down after a few muttered words of profanity and munched at the hot venison stake which Little Deer had cooked.

"And you think you can find your way out of this place?" asked Mr. Reed of the boy.

"Yes, father."

"Then why didn't you try it."

"I tried it when I was first alone," explained the boy, "but I didn't know at that time how to follow the leads. It has taken me all this time to learn the ways of the Indians. We were talking yesterday of leaving the place. I'm not afraid to go alone.

"And suppose you meet those Indians?"

"I'll hide in the grass."

For some time the situation was discussed. All agreed that they should take a good rest and wait until the next day to work out a scheme.

CHAPTER XXII

ANSWERING THE MESSAGE

MAX GAUDET was now a Captain and instructor in the Curtis Aviation Camp. His service in France had been short and brilliant. Again and again he had led a squadron of fighting planes against superior numbers of the enemy. Seven times unaided he had brought down a machine. He had been decorated for his valor and raised to the position of Captain.

Wounded in action, he had been sent back to the United States, and assigned to the duty of instructor at the Curtis Camp.

"I am much improved," said he to a fellow officer one day, "and am sighing for the air again. My first trip, if I am strong enough, will be over the Everglades."

"You may find difficulty in getting the Major's permission," remarked the officer.

"I have it already. I cannot drive a matter from my mind. I'll not be satisfied until I visit an island in the Everglades. I went to France with a so-called slacker. But he was true as gold, was wounded—he may be dead. We left a little boy out in the Everglades on an island, I was to get him the next day, but orders came to start for Newport News. I gave full instructions to one of the men and felt that I could rely on him. Just before I left France, and while I was with the sick slacker, who should come in but the aviator. He told me that he had not been able to find the island in the Everglades or the boy, and had concluded that the little fellow had gone with some Indians. From his narration I believe that boy is still in the Everglades. I promised Private Rauderly—he was the slacker—that I would go to the island if ever I was able to fly and that I would send him word. Yesterday Major Larnar gave me the permission. If I am strong enough I go to-morrow."

"Interesting story," said the fellow official. "But come out with the squad for a while and

chase curlews and pelicans. It's great sport. Here's a charm I found tied on to the foot of a pelican, which I captured some time ago."

Captain Gaudet took the charm, a little box, in his hand. "Did you examine the contents?" he asked.

"Nothing to examine, that I see."

"Yes, it's a water-proof box. It may have something of importance in it."

"Then look into it," said the officer.

Captain Gaudet crushed the box, and from it took a piece of paper. As he read the contents his face turned white.

When Major Larnar heard of the affair, he swore that he would court-martial the aviator who had brought him the false news about the boy. Then he blamed himself for not investigating further. "Captain," said he to Max Gaudet, "I've just received another commission from the Government. While we have the hydroplanes here I am asked to make a survey of the southern part of the Everglades for the purpose of getting some information in regard to drainage. Mr. Marcus O'Donnell, the contractor, has agreed

to come with me. We go to-morrow. If I judge correctly we will be near your island. You will come with us!"

"Gladly, Major; and if I find the boy I send a wireless to Private Rauderly?"

"Two of them," said the Major. It was well known in the camp that Max Gaudet was the Major's pet boy.

On the following morning while the party on the Palmettoes were discussing the manner of departure, there was a noise overhead and three hydroplanes came in sight. They circled the island several times then dropped into the water.

A pilot, who had evidently been the leader of the crowd was the first to reach the island in his rubber canoe. It was Captain Max Gaudet.

"Found! Found!" cried he, rushing up to Phil Reed. "I knew it! I knew it! They wouldn't believe me, but I knew it! I knew it!"

Then as the parties in the other two machines came ashore Captain Gaudet introduced them, Major Larnar and his pilot, and

Marcus O'Donnell and his pilot. "Major," said he, "I've kept my word to Private Ferdinand Rauderly; now grant me my request, let me cable him the news."

The permission was given. Out to his hydroplane Max Gaudet rowed. Soon there was a click of instruments and the wireless station at Camp Curtis caught the message from Major Larnar. The lines were clear to Washington. Before the sun set that night, a fever-stricken soldier, lying in a hospital in France, was roused from his slumber; and a Sister of Charity read to him a message. It ran: "Everglades, March 27, 1918. Phil Reed found by Max Gaudet, well, sends regards. Major Larnar, Commanding Officer, Camp Curtis, Fla."

While Captain Gaudet was sending the message over the wireless, Major Larnar explained to Mr. Reed what had brought him to the Everglades.

"Well," replied Thomas Reed, "I am out on business myself. I wanted to buy some of this country after the government had drained it; but I think this experience will do for me."

"From the North, I suppose," put in Marcus O'Donnell.

"Yes, sir, Brooklyn; but I've been in Florida for over a year."

"Buy Everglades property?"

"No, sir, upper part of Ten Thousand Islands."

"Good country, sir; but some parts of the Everglades will make remarkable land for truck gardens and citron-groves. We have made a mistake in trying to cultivate everything. There are thousands of acres in Florida that will never be cultivated. There are thousands of acres in the North that will never be cultivated. Unfortunately for our reputation, some of this poor ground has been sold to northern speculators, and Florida has suffered. But," he said, turning to Phil who for a moment had been neglected, "we have come to the island to get this boy. Did you have enough to eat all the time, lad?"

"Yes, sir."

"Look at his outfit," said Mr. Reed pointing to the tent. "He has enough provisions for the crowd. Suppose we all stay here for a while and play Indian."

"Excuse me," replied the contractor. "I've had all the camping I want; for twenty years or more I've slept away from home for half the time."

"And I rather like my little cot in the barracks," laughed the Major.

"Thinking of the matter," explained Thomas Reed, "I'm fully a week's travel from home."

"Make it ten days or two weeks," interrupted Mr. Green.

"We have several observations to make," said the Major, "and need most of the day. How are we going to break camp?"

"Much good eat—much good venison!" called out the Indian, who had set to work to prepare a lunch. "Much good tea. Palm Beach tea!"

"Rather fashionable out here," remarked the Major.

While the men were enjoying the lunch they discussed the manner of departure.

Thomas Reed positively refused to ride in one of the hydroplanes; although he was assured that there was no danger, and that he would be home in less than an hour.

Captain Gaudet offered to visit the Reed family and inform them of the husband's safety and of his return in about two weeks. There was a place in his machine for a passenger. Would Phil like to take a ride? The boy was jubilant. No time was lost!

The Indian would take his own canoe and go his way.

The Major and the contractor would go as they had come.

Mr. Reed and Mr. Green would strike camp on the following morning and, using the steel canoe, bring the camping outfit. Moreover Captain Gaudet and other aviators would fly over the Everglades every day and see to it that the hostile Indians did not molest the two men.

Phil Reed went into the tent followed by Little Deer. Both knelt before the little altar to say a short prayer.

"Good-by," said the boy to the Indian. "You have been good to me, and taught me many things."

"Good-by," replied the Seminole meekly, "much good boy! Say much prayers! Say no bad words; much good boy!"

"I'm going back to the Reed family," explained the boy, "but later on I'd like to come here and camp again. Where can I write to you?"

"Me no read, me no write," said Little Deer. "But me get letter at Palm Beach Hotel. They want me work, they know place me stay, me tell people. They know find Indian."

"If I can get the permission next year," said the boy, "I'll write to you."

"Good-by, good boy;" and all present saw the attachment that had grown up between the Indian and the white lad.

A few minutes later a shout went up as Captain Gaudet and his little charge went spinning over the water, rose into the air and sailed off towards the Big Cypress Swamp.

Soon Major Larnar and Marcus O'Donnell were gone. Then Little Deer poled his canoe out into the waters and was lost in the saw-grass.

Thomas Reed and Mark Green began to prepare for an early departure on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE WINGS OF EVENING

THE great flock of pelicans which Phil Reed had frightened away in November had more than doubled in numbers. The breeding season was over and the young had reached maturity. The same instinct that had brought the birds together in early winter now urged them to separate. Perhaps their departure would have been delayed for a few days had it not been for the sudden appearance of Phil Reed. This time he came in no clumsy flat-bottom canoe, but was borne aloft by the wings of the hydroplane.

At his approach the whole world of birddom took to flight. Though swift of wings the pelicans were no match for the machine, which was soon in their midst. In fact, it required considerable skill on the part of

Captain Max Gaudet to avoid the cloud of birds.

"Well catch one," he shouted to Phil, for although the boy was close beside him the noise of the machine made conversation all but impossible.

"And I'll take it home with me," came the answer.

"Get ready!" directed the aviator turning the machine towards a single pelican. "You grab it."

Up and down darted the bird, with the machine fast overtaking it.

"Now!" cried the aviator as the hydroplane cut in under the prize.

Had not Phil Reed been strapped to his seat, the monster bird would have lifted him into the air. As it was the boy had not the strength to hold the affrighted pelican. All that he had in his hands after a short struggle were a few feathers.

"We'll try another one," cried out the aviator.

Phil was all excited as with both hands he prepared for his second attempt. This time

the machine struck the pelican and sent it twirling to the water. Max Gaudet could not turn the hydroplane quick enough to follow the bird. "We'll try again," he exclaimed directing his flight upwards, where a single pelican was soaring away.

"Now's your time!" for the bird almost dropped into the lap of the boy. "Hold fast!"

"I've got him!" cried the boy. It proved to be a rather young bird, and had not the strength of the one that had escaped.

"Hold it tight, or it will get away!"

"I've got him!" repeated the boy in a loud tone.

"Where is the house?" asked the aviator of the boy.

Phil could not at first locate it, unaccustomed as he was to making observations from such a distance.

"I see three houses," said the man; "one of them must be the Reed's place."

"There's only one," said the boy, for he did not know that other houses had been built in the locality during his absence; nor was he

aware that the Reed family was watching him from the garden.

All that day the little Reeds and the mother had worked in the truck garden planting peas. True it was not hard work and the smallest child of seven could, in the course of a day, do its task, which was of considerable value.

Frequently the planting had been interrupted for play, while a lunch of jam and bread had been served in the morning, with the sweetest of grape pies in the afternoon. Although the weather was ideal and the task light, the children were tired as the afternoon drew to an end.

"Come dears, this will do to-day," said the mother, and there was such a clapping of hands.

"I'm tired," said little Marcella who had done heroically.

"Me, too," cried the others.

There was still greater joy when the little folks were informed that they could invite the Cooms children over the next day for a picnic.

While the little laborers were resting, Eliza-

beth caught sight of a big bird in the heavens.

"It's a flying machine," said Mary. "I saw one in the park in New York."

"Me, too," cried out Isabel.

Over the head of the children it flew as the pilot picked out a safe place to land.

"Oh, it's coming to us!" shouted the children clapping their hands with glee.

"Oh, it's going away!" cried some one.

Evidently the pilot could not find a suitable place to land and had decided to drop into the water. For two days there had been a high wind, which not only raised hugh billows in the Gulf of Mexico in front of the house, but swept far into the narrow currents among the upper part of the Ten Thousand Islands.

It required considerable maneuvering on the part of the pilot to find a stretch of water for alighting; when his machine did come to rest it was fully two miles from the Reed household.

"What will we do?" he asked the boy. "You have no canoe and can't get home from this place."

"Sometimes the Gulf is as smooth as this place," said the boy.

"Yes, but the heavy sea will not go down to-day. How would you like to sleep here and let me come after you to-morrow. But, no," he said after a short pause, for he saw that the boy was not willing to be left alone a second time, even if he were near his home.

"Let us send word by the pelican," said the boy, recalling his former success.

"How will you do it this time?"

"We can cut its wings and drop it into the yard."

"Bully!" cried the aviator. "The biggest carrier-pigeon ever used. I've got the paper and string."

From his tool-box Captain Max Gaudet took a sheet of note-paper and wrote the following:

Somewhere in Ten Thousand Islands,

March 27, 1918.

From: Phil Reed and Captain Max Gaudet.
To: The Reeds, mother and children.

Subject: The Return of Phil Reed and also Mr. Thomas Reed.

This to inform you that Mr. Thomas Reed has met with an accident that will delay him a few days. He is on his way home and has provisions. Phil Reed was in the machine that flew over your house half an hour ago. He will return to-morrow. He asks pardon for running away, and wishes to come back home.

CAPTAIN MAX GAUDET, Instructor.

Curtis Aviation Field, Miami, Fla.

"An official document," remarked the aviator as he read over the message couched in military form. "Have you a knife?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"We must be careful not to cut the wings too short," said the man. "We want the bird to sail down into the yard. If the wings are too short the fall will kill it; and if they are too long the bird may fly out into the water. Can you hold it?"

"You bet I can. I think it is a young bird," said the boy.

Max Gaudet set to work trimming the feathers. "I am going to sail down, right over the children's heads," he explained. "Won't they be surprised!"

It required only a few minutes to tie the paper to the pelican's leg. Then over the water and up into the air shot the hydroplane.

"It's coming back!" cried out Isabel who was the first to catch a view of the returning machine.

Little hands clapped and little voices called out aloud as the hydroplane encircled the house dropping closer and closer to the earth. So close it came that Benjamin clung close to his mother in fright, and the baby cried. The other children scarcely breathed as the big wings swept right overhead.

"Let it go!" was the command of the aviator.

Phil dropped the bird.

Like a toy aeroplane it sailed slowly to the ground.

With his glasses Captain Gaudet saw the

mother pick up the bird and read the note. Turning his machine he started back to the Palmettoes.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST FLIGHT

"COULDN'T land, but sent word by a carrier-pigeon," were the words of Captain Max Gaudet as he stepped out on the Palmettoes, followed by Phil.

"Wasn't the truck garden large enough?" asked Thomas Reed who had run down to the shore to meet the returning party.

"Looked too rough!"

"And the Gulf?"

"Waves mountain high."

"And the pigeon, how did you get a pigeon?" asked the excited man.

"A monster! I am going to introduce them in the United States aerial service," and Max Gaudet told the two men of his and Phil's experience.

"And are you sure that they got the message?" asked Thomas Reed.

"Saw your wife pick up the bird and read the note."

"You'll be sure to return to-morrow."

"I'll be back early in the morning. Phil and I will try it again."

"How do you like flying?" asked Mr. Reed of the boy.

"I was scared at first. But, gee, you can go home while you count Jack Robinson," he said.

Some refreshments were served before the aviator prepared to return to the camp.

True to his promise Captain Gaudet was back early on the following morning. Phil, who now considered himself an experienced flyer, lost no time in joining his friend. Off they went. In a short time Mr. Reed and Mr. Green also left the island.

The water in front of the Reed house was without a ruffle. Into it the machine dropped. Lowering the rubber canoe the man and boy were soon on the shore.

Phil Reed ran ahead of the pilot and kissed Mrs. Reed, who was crying, and the little girls who were dancing and clapping their hands.

"Will you be my mother again?" said the prodigal.

"Your own dear mother;" and she took him in her arms. "I knew you would come back again."

"And may I call you mother?" pleaded the boy.

"Yes, my dear child, yes."

"And these are my little sisters," cried the boy and he fell to kissing them again.

"Oh, Phil, we are so glad, so very glad you've come; and you've got some big boys to play with," said Mary.

Here Phil was introduced to Master Rapier Cooms from Maryland.

While the children were rejoicing and Phil was giving them an incoherent recital of his adventures, Captain Gaudet further explained to Mrs. Reed about her husband's accident and his losing the canoe. It would take him ten days to reach home. But the aviator promised to come each day and report progress. As he would be out over the Everglades for practice, it would require less than half an hour for him to fly over the Reed home. They

could watch for him and pick up a message which he would drop from the machine. Shaking hands with Mrs. Reed, Phil, and all the children, he went back to his machine and soon disappeared in the sky.

Each day Captain Gaudet brought his message to the Reed family. All the neighbors came over to hear the news. Phil was introduced to Giovani Arrata, an Italian, and Clifford Savage from a town in Virginia. Both families had recently come to the Catholic settlement, and others were expected.

At last Phil Reed would have companions. The boys needed no introduction. Phil was soon giving them an account of his adventure; then he whispered a secret. Only the boys should know it. Somewhere in the Everglades there was a trunk full of gold. He would take the boys with him and they would find it.

"Gee! Won't that be great?" said the little Italian, Giovani Arrata, and suiting his action to his words, he began to gather up imaginary gold coins in his open hands.

"Will you give us some?" asked Rapier Cooms, a retiring lad just from his father's farm in Maryland.

"Of course, he will," put in Clifford Savage, who could boast a Yankee family tree.

"Well, he don't have to," replied young Cooms gently.

"Of course he does," said Clifford.

"He found it, and it's his," claimed Rapier.

"It ain't found yet," retorted Clifford. "If we help him to discover it we get our part. I read a book once about three men discovering gold, and they divided it equal."

"That wouldn't be right," exclaimed the Italian; "it's his and we are only going to help him. He gets the biggest share."

"Of course, he does," chimed in Rapier Cooms.

"Wait until we find it boys," broke in Phil. "But if we get the trunk I'll see that every boy gets his share."

As this was satisfactory to all Phil went on with his narrative.

A letter which the aviator brought to the Reed family on the eighth day stated that the

men had reached the Great Cypress Swamp and expected to arrive home in two days. Moreover they would have some company. Major Larnar, the commanding officer of the Curtis Aviation Field, and a well known contractor, Mr. Marcus O'Donnell, of Miami City, had accepted an invitation to dine with the Reeds when the head of the family reached home. Captain Gaudet had obtained permission to join the company. It was explained that three hydroplanes would bring the party.

Just think of it! Three flying-machines to come at one time. How the children clapped their hands with joy.

The neighbors came over to assist in the preparation for the dinner.

The calculations were all correct, for just before noon of the second day the canoe swung in sight of Pelican Island, while almost at the same time the three hydroplanes began to encircle the farm.

Never was there such a joyful crowd and never had so many people gathered within the new settlement!

After numerous introductions and explana-

tions dinner was announced; but when the guests had taken their places Phil Reed was missing.

He and his boy friends had run over to look at the canoe. Phil showed them the big rifle with which he had killed the deer, the tent, and all the other wonders of the equipment. This was the canoe in which they would seek the trunk of gold.

If they could only start at once. Some one else might find the trunk! The trunk might have rotted and the gold coin might be scattered around or hid in the heavy grass which Phil had described! Could they ask Mr. Reed's permission to start that night? No! No! That would give the secret away! They must wait; but the secret—no one must know of the secret—only the four boys must know of the secret—must know of the trunk of gold.

Their dreams were interrupted by Mr. Reed, who was yelling to them that dinner was ready.

After dinner, and the general rejoicing, the guests prepared to depart. All went down to

the shore to see the hydroplanes off. Slowly they went over the surface, then faster, then they rose from the water, and with giant wings swept into the air.

Phil Reed, with his young friends at his side, stood watching the hydroplanes as they sailed over the water, sailed over Pelican Island, sailed over Big Cypress Swamp, sailed over the Everglades; and his thoughts sailed away with the machines, sailed away to the mysterious Everglades where he had been, and where he, one day, hoped to be again.

On the following morning Phil Reed was back at work in the truck garden, back to the realities and drudgery of life. But there was now a change in that life! He had resolved to be unselfish, to be grateful. He had found companions—companions with whom he could hunt and fish and play ball, when the duties of work were finished. But never did the boys meet that they did not talk in whispers of the lost trunk of gold.

About a month later, Mr. Reed brought in from the mail-steamer a curious letter. It was from France and directed to Phil Reed.

It read:

Dear Phil:

I am dying. I am dictating this letter to a Catholic Sister, and your teacher, Sister Valentine. She has been so good to me. I kept my word and proved that I was willing to die for my country. I volunteered to drive a truck along the Aisne River where ammunition was running out. I knew I hadn't much of a chance, but I got ammunition to the guns. I was hit three times. I am happy, for I have died for my country. Phil, I give you the canoe and all the equipment which we took to the Everglades.

Your friend,

Ferdinand Rauderly, the Slacker.

But the word slacker had been crossed out by the Sister, and in it's place was written in capital letters the word, HERO.

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