

WABUN ANUNG.

BY F. HOUGHTON.

CHAPTER III.—“TWO SHOTS!”



SHORT time has passed since that luckless day. We have been on a long round, looking at traps and shooting a few partridges. Many a lake we have crossed and mountain climbed—

would charm the heart of a “braw fine Hieland laddie;” but I am not a “Hieland laddie,” so I must admit that toward 5 o’clock in the afternoon I often found them a trifle monotonous, my pack a trifle heavy; for this hunting—just between ourselves, oh, public!—very closely resembles work. But who minds work, after all, with a glorious blue sky over your head, through which the fleecy white clouds drift like the sails of a fleet far out at sea, while the wind whirls the powdery snow up and sends it driving across the lakes, cutting your face—not as soft, perhaps, as it looks—and you hear the monotonous, steady, stirring creak of your snowshoes. It is bracing work, though hard—work that will bronze the cheek, toughen the muscles, give sauce for the hard tack—appetite sauce! Is there anything like it?

And tobacco, tobacco! Oh, that I could write an ode to tobacco! Oh, that I were a millionaire, that I might set up a monument to tobacco!

We return to our snowshoes and rifles, our hard tack and harder companions, our blazing camp fires, our still, solemn nights among the spectral forest trees; where the beaver is feeding on his poplar and waiting for the spring, for the rushing spring waters, for the glorious spring air, for his fresh food, for the old is souring; when the rivers tear away their banks, and the Whiskey Jack shrieks louder and shriller in the excitement of the times! Back to the green woods, where the wolves are hunting down the deer, where the marten chases the red squirrel, the mink slays the brook trout,

and the hunter—the wily hunter—whets his knife and slays them all! Back we must go further than this, till the howling of the wolves grows faint behind and the mountains rise steep before us, up to where the jack pine and lichen grow! There among the grand old hills to the north we will find our game—the shy, timid cariboo. There he stands scraping up the snow with his fore feet, every now and then raising his head to sniff the tell-tale wind. He starts! A tremble runs through his fore shoulders. Up goes the gamey head; how the nostrils widen at that long sniff!

Did he hear or scent anything?

Was it the snap of that breaking twig, or have you gone a little too much to windward? If you are within sight and shot, now is your chance, and only chance! The rock behind him is not more steady. Take him well in the shoulder or high up in the neck. Now for a steady hand and cool nerve!

Not within shot? Then you will not see him again for many a weary mile.

Go back to your wigwam and listen to the laughter of the squaws and curse your luck; it is the wisest thing to do.

Only for one instant will he remain a statue, for the wind has told him a tale—a tale of white snow dyed in blood! The grand muscles are brought into play; out stands the little tuft of a tail, and with a graceful, sidelong leap he is off into that long, steady trot, only broken when he leaps up the hillsides. On he goes, steadily—oh, so steadily—with an action that would take the conceit out of a wolf in no time, and cause it to sit down and ponder with a shame-faced smirk; for the cariboo may stop after fifteen miles, but the chances are even that it may go on for thirty.

But here I am wandering thirty miles at least from my story, and my audience again becoming impatient. I do not blame them either. To return to the beginning of this chapter and the continuation of this interesting and soul-stirring little narrative.

About half past 3 o’clock on an after-

noon, a few days later than the heart-breaking events of the last chapter, we strike Mokooming Lake again. We have had some cold weather since then—cold, stinging weather, that caused the tall rampikes to crack like pistol shots out there in the Brulé. There is no black line of dancing water to mock us now on the clear stretch of Mokooming. A strong west wind sweeps down the lake, catching up the powdery snow and sending it like banks of driving mist whirling before it, every now and then enveloping us, to pass on, leaving a stinging feeling in our cheeks and the backs of our legs. We are walking along the shore at the foot of the great bluffs we climbed a few days before. What is that track which appears every here and there in between the wave-like drifts, scarcely discernible?

Wabun Anung stops. looks at it a moment, "Ne-ish a dick" (two cariboo), he says. For a short distance we follow the trail. It is easy to see that they were not traveling when they broke through the top ice here. I ask Wabun Anung how far he thinks the

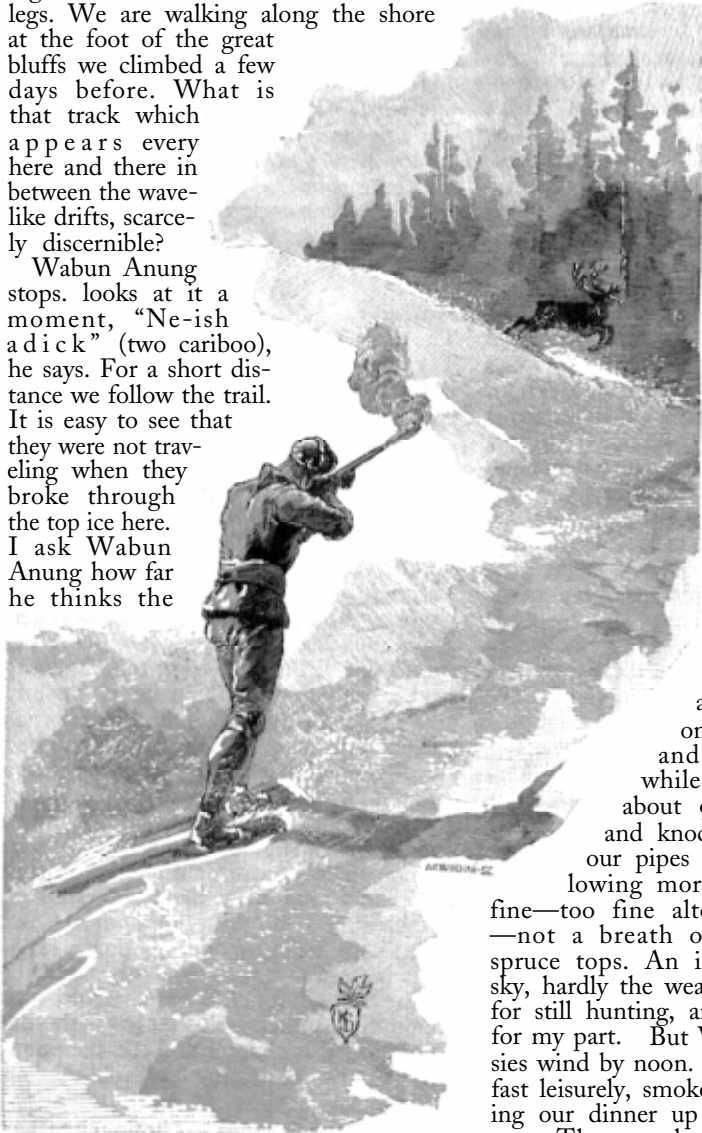
cariboo are. To my joy he tells me that he believes them to be within two and a half or three miles at the farthest, and adds "We will hunt them to-morrow."

We go on another half mile or so till we find a good place for wood, and in a thick clump of spruce we make our camp. We intend making this place a headquarters, leaving our provisions here and hunting the country a day's tramp in every direction, so we make our camp as comfortable as possible. After shoveling the snow away with our snowshoes and pitching our shelter tent, we cut some

small spruce and balsam and plant them in a thick wall to the front and windward. It gives a very snug appearance and is as comfortable as it looks, for that night, though the following evening the wind changes and blows through the only side not walled up, nearly suffocating us with the smoke. However, to-morrow evening is still in the future, the dim future, so why borrow trouble, why worry about to-morrow? "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for"—we die perchance to-morrow!

In the meantime we will have an early tea and rest our weary limbs

on our good brush bed, and tell yarns, as usual, while the fire crackles. At about 9 P.M. the wind falls, and knocking the ashes out of our pipes we turn in. The following morning breaks clear and fine—too fine altogether to our liking—not a breath of wind stirs the tall spruce tops. An intense blue, cloudless sky, hardly the weather one would choose for still hunting, and I do not choose it for my part. But Wabun Anung prophesies wind by noon. So we eat our breakfast leisurely, smoke a pipe, and after doing our dinner up in a blanket we start out. The sun by this time has risen



SUDDENLY A FINE BUCK.



THEY BROKE AWAY.

above the hills and shines across the lake with clear, cold brilliancy; there is not the slightest vapor in the air, the snow gleaming white in striking contrast with the dark green of the cypress and spruce and that deep immeasurable blue for a background. Just cold enough to make your ears and cheeks tingle, a bracing air that gives a spring to your step, an added love for this grand, glorious world, a pride in your youth, strength and manhood. There is no weariness of life here, no *ennui*, among these lonely ice-bound northern lakes.

At first the trail we strike leads us in a direction across the lake for the farther side, then twists about, getting nearer the shore we have just left. At last we see it plain enough, in the deep snow where it leaves the lake. Right up among and over the great bluffs we climbed a few days before it goes. Every now and then Wabun Anung stops, glances anxiously at the spruce tops for signs of the longed-for wind; but they are motionless, steady as the hill on which they stand. He mutters something, tries to comfort himself and me by saying: "Nebowa nodin undas nocqua" (enough wind by noon); but by noon it may be too late; this creak, creak of our snowshoes, which

sounds to me much louder than it ever did before, may strike the ear of the wary, listening game and start them off on a ten or fifteen mile trot. I think of this, and suggest to Wabun Anung a return to camp till the wind rises. At first he seems half inclined to accede, but the excitement of the chase is on him,

"We will go on a little farther," he says.

So on we go—up and down and round the hills we follow it, not advancing much, for the trail keeps doubling on itself.

At last we come to their yesterday's tracks in a deep gully. In front of us is a mountain, and somewhere on it, Wabun Anung tells me, we will find them—or they will find us, I think—a vast difference. I say nothing, however. Always when hunting in the woods with an Indian, let him have his own way, follow him like a lamb, do whatever he tells you—he knows what he is about. This is my advice to young gentlemen from town—would-be sportsmen; they may know a thing or two about office life and balls, but about the woods they know nothing, and about the temper of Indians less than nothing—in all probability.

When we near the top of the mountain Wabun Anung stops and tells me to

take the lead. I draw the cover off my rifle and crouch down low. I can see that on the summit there is a place bare of trees. When I arrive at the edge of this, I stop and peer cautiously about Wabun Anung is a little way behind me.

About twenty yards ahead the snow has been tramped down and scraped away. I can see that this very morning the cariboo have been feeding here. I turn and beckon to Wabun Anung. In an instant he is beside me. After looking at the tracks for a few moments he says that I had better go straight on very quietly, keeping a sharp look out—needless to tell me—while he goes round the mountain top to the right. Then we separate.

For about fifteen minutes I go on, very cautiously using every tree and bush for cover. I am determined that it will not be my fault if I do not get a shot this time. Every second I expect to see one suddenly start into sight. My rifle is at full cock—so, I might say, are my eyes and ears. At this moment, some two hundred yards away to my right, I hear a clear, sharp report, followed by a tick, plainly to be heard almost as the report itself, as the bullet strikes a branch. Numerous curses, not loud, but very, very deep, I mutter on my luck and push on in the direction of the shot as fast as possible, expecting to find Wabun Anung grinning over the carcass of a cariboo—not shot by me.

Bang! Another report rings out, echoing among the hills and dying away fainter, fainter in the valleys.

I feel in a thoroughly bad temper by this time and, I grieve to say, curse most heartily both aloud and to myself. I must ease my overburdened feelings before I hail Wabun Anung, my face wreathed in smiles, to congratulate him on his success. I feel quite certain of

finding two dead at the very least I am hurrying down the side of a knoll on the mountain top; some fifty yards ahead of me is another one.

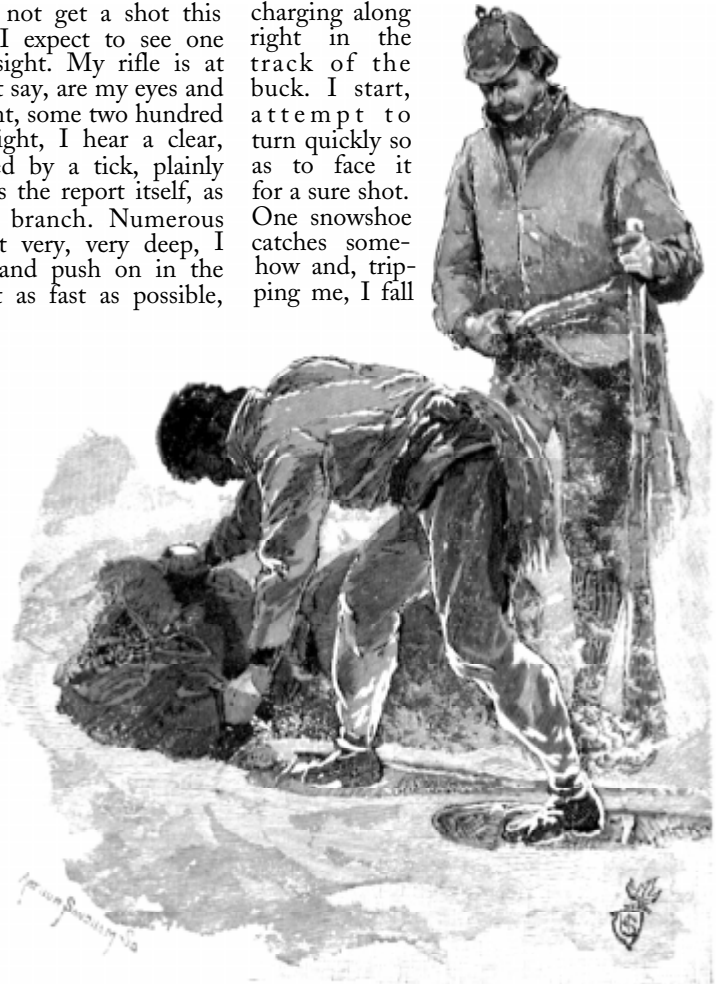
Suddenly, without a sound of warning, a fine buck cariboo goes bounding up the far side of the knoll before me, reaches the summit and is in the act of bounding down the near side.

It is my turn now!

I throw up my rifle, take a rapid aim for its neck and fire!

Clear and sharp the report rings out. It continues the spring it is in the act of making; while still in the air its head drops, alighting in the snow on its shoulders, its fore legs doubled beneath it. It never moves again.

I have not much time to contemplate my handiwork, for, glancing up, I see a second one charging along right in the track of the buck. I start, attempt to turn quickly so as to face it for a sure shot. One snowshoe catches somehow and, tripping me, I fall



WABUN LAID DOWN HIS PACK.

flat on my back. At this moment the cariboo sees me; stops an instant. From where I lie I can just see its head above the top of the knoll, with round, startled eyes looking at me.

I do not attempt to rise. Seizing the trigger guard in one hand, I throw the shell out and reload. I seem to be taking a long time about it, but I cannot be more than a second or two, for the cariboo is there still. We seem to be looking straight into each other's eyes,

I raise my rifle and, aiming a couple of inches below the nose, so as to take it in the neck just under the chin, fire. Again that clear report rings out, breaking the stillness of the woods. When the smoke clears away the head has disappeared.

Scrambling to my feet, I rush to the top of the knoll, at the same time reloading, to find cariboo No. 2 lying in its tracks, with just sufficient life to raise its head for an instant, draw a long breath, like a sigh; a few flecks of blood come to its lips, the dark eyes glaze, as slowly, slowly the gamey head sinks down till it rests upon the white snow—dead!

A few minutes more and Wabun Anung comes in sight scrambling down the hill side.

"Ne-ish adick!" (two cariboo), I call out, grinning.

"Neeshishim! neeshishim shogonosh!" (well done! well done, white man!) he answers, joyously. What cares he who shoots them, so long as he gets them.

After taking off a forequarter we bury them in the snow. The two shots I heard had been fired by Wabun Anung at a long range; both had missed. We return to camp for our dinner, and what a dinner we eat! How good that fresh meat tastes after pork, and how thoroughly happy we feel afterward; puffing away at our pipes and fighting the morning's battle over again, or stretched on the balsam brush, too lazy and dreamily contented even to yarn.

All that night it snowed steadily, and toward morning a southeast wind sprung up and blew hard, filling our tent with smoke and wet drifting snow. The following morning we start for Mississauga, the walking tremendously heavy. I think with a weary sigh of the eighteen miles or so before us, and heartily wish it over. First we go to the mountain top where we shot the cariboo, and, digging one up, we skin and butcher it. Wabun Anung then asked me if I could carry some meat

to Mississauga, besides my pack. It felt quite heavy enough without any extra weight, but I was young and foolish in those days, so of course answered, with assumed joyousness: "Oh, yes."

I did not feel at the time as if I could, but one must not be beaten by an Indian, if one lives among them. There would be too much smiling and sneering at the *shogonosh* to make life bearable.

There are two things these red brethren of ours admire above all. The first of these is strength. The second is to be a good hunter. This last accomplishment (if I may call it so) covers a great deal. You must be a good canoe man. By a good canoe man I do not mean one who can paddle well.

I have seen numbers of girls who could paddle quite as well as any man and much more gracefully, but they are quite as far removed from being canoe men as the Tam o'Shantered, white-flanneled young gentlemen who sit bolt upright on the stern seat and paddle them about. A canoe man is one who can read the surface of a rapid as you can a chart, telling by the surface where the sunken boulder lies, where the deepest and safest channel is—often not much wider than your canoe and crooked as a snake. You have to see this at a glance; there is no time for hesitation. "Will I take this or that channel?" Hesitation means wreck!

To a canoe man there is very often no choice; the channel opens out to him bit by bit at a time as he rounds the bends—plainly to be seen by his experienced eye—twisted as the silver thread of a brook through green meadows, seen from a hill-top.

A narrow path, indeed!

It will take years of study to learn to read this little bit of nature—the tumbling, foam-flecked, roaring rapid! Then, too, you must be able to pole up a river—an art in itself! It looks easy. Just try it, friend!

You must also be a good portager. A good shot! Have unlimited stock of patience, self reliance and determination. All these, with a certain amount of pluck, will make you, in time, a hunter—provided you have other qualities too numerous to mention thrown in.

To continue. I got Wabun Anung to do up my pack and put in what meat he wanted me to carry, and, after tying up his own, we started. I felt, when I had managed by a mighty effort to swing

mine on my back with the tump line over my head, my heavy rifle between it and my neck, over my shoulder, that my chances of sitting at the festive Hudson Bay post board that night were slim indeed.

Up and down the mountain sides and across the lakes we tramped, where the weight of snow had pressed down the ice so as to let the water over it, and through this snow and into the water our snowshoes would sink at every step, coming out caked and five times their weight. It was weary, weary, heartbreaking work we had of it that day.

"And this is what you call sport, you awful idiot," I would murmur softly to myself as the perspiration trickled down my nose.

On we go over those everlasting hills, while the tump line seems to be pressing my skull into my brains and the pack has certainly gained fifty or sixty pounds in weight. At last we come to the Patogosing River, and there is that mountain—steepest of all—just south of it. Up it we climb, ever so slowly, with heads bent forward so that we cannot see any distance before us.

How those heavy packs seem to drag us down! I raise my head and glance upward, to see the summit apparently as far off as ever. Groaning inwardly, I remember that this world is peopled by wise men and fools—the majority fools, and I am without doubt one of the majority. However, the highest hill top is gained—I am told. Perseverance does it with this hill, as it has with many another, and we reach the top at last.

Oh, the indescribable relief of dropping your pack and seating yourself on it, rubbing your stiff neck and feeling that the worst is over, and only four miles or so more to walk!

After a five minutes' rest we start again, and about half past 4 o'clock we arrive at Wabun Anung's lodge, and, slinging down our packs to the barking of numerous half-starved dogs, walk in. There is much smiling, laughing and munching in the lodge that night, and "*Ta-a-bid*" does his share, you may be sure.

But for all this jollification I do not stay; the post is still a mile away. So shouldering my pack again with a cheery "Booshow! Booshow!" I leave them. Twenty minutes of a walk and the post is reached and the hunt over at last! At last, my audience joyfully echo, or is it only a snore I fancy I hear? How comfortable the red light looks streaming through the window! I cannot tell you.

I kick off my snowshoes and pushing the door open walk into the kitchen, where the whole family is assembled,

"Goodness gracious! Well! Hulloo!" [Oh, blessed English again] a chorus of voices greet me.

My whole face becomes one gigantic grin. I rub my neck and say, "Gibbee don neen punge skittewaboo." There is a laugh and answering grin all around, and the Hudson Bay man's wife, going over to a cupboard, produces a large, square, jolly-looking black bottle, and in a minute or two gives me a hot Scotch that would warm the typical Scotchman's heart, not to mention the rest of his braw fine body.

I sit down, sip it, become communicative, tell my tale of the great mountains climbed and the cold, wind-swept lakes crossed, rub my neck and twist my head about as I tell of my portaging; but brace up wonderfully, and stiffness is forgotten as I tell of my

"Two shots!"

