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Plunge into the Wilderness

John Muir

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new; we do not know how to go about it. We may be agreed that a thing is bad, but we are at odds how to stop it.

We listen to orators at election time and they tell us that if we vote for Brown, Jones, or Robinson, he will get after those fellows who are keeping us all from growing prosperous and happy, and that as soon as he is elected the Golden Age will be at hand. The fortunate candidate then confides to us that what we want is a thing to be provided by the legislature, and we suffer vain regret that we did not look at the bottom of our ticket when we voted. But we take fresh heart and next year we elect some Talk Bacillus to Congress or to the State legislature—who continues to talk. He does not know the difference between constructive thought and what he calls an 'Appeal to the People.'

In despair we turn to the bar, and its members tell us how defectively statutes are drawn, and lead us, somehow, to believe that our welfare is in the hands of the lawyers,—the while the courts continue to admit to membership of the bar, to be officers of the courts, men with neither conscience nor character.

All three departments of government claim jurisdiction over social questions, and neither they nor we know how to handle them,—yet. Really, it calls for the wisdom of an Aristotle to point the way. We are groping along, sometimes with wisdom, and sometimes with total blindness to the fact that there is such a thing as human nature. The Pure Food Law looks after the labels on our medicines, but there is no label to distinguish thought from demagogy; and some of our men most capable of usefulness utter the one and spit the other at us at one and the same time.

What we need is discrimination. Discrimination presupposes judgment, and judgment presupposes wisdom; and, God help us, we have not wisdom beyond our intelligence, our common intelligence, the thin thread of it that is common to us all, whereby we work together. But I believe that in the rule of things that has been provided for us, there is a way towards greater order and enlightenment. The way is to keep our heads and our temper.

To meet the great tasks that are before us, we require all of our intelligence, and we must be sound and wholesome of mind. We must proceed in order. The price of anger is failure.

THE PRICE OF ANGER

The Plunge into the Wilderness

BY JOHN MUIR

In crossing the Atlantic before the days of steamships, or even the American clippers, the voyages made in old-fashioned sailing-vessels were very long. Ours was six weeks and three days. But, because we had no lessons to get, that long voyage had not a dull moment for us boys.

There was quite a large number of emigrants aboard, many of them newly married couples, and the advantages of the different parts of the New World they expected to settle in were often discussed. My father started with the intention of going to the back-woods of Upper Canada. Before the end of the voyage, however, he was persuaded that the States offered superior advantages, especially Wisconsin and Michigan, where the land was said to be as good as in Canada, and far more easily brought under cultivation; so in Canada the woods were so close and heavy that a man might wear out his life in getting a few acres cleared of trees and stumps. So he changed his mind and concluded to go to one of the Western states.

On our waverine wayward way a grain-dealer in Buffalo told father that most of the wheat he handled came from Wisconsin; and this influential information finally determined my father's choice. At Milwaukee a farmer who had come in from the country near Fort Winnebago with a load of wheat agreed to haul us and our formidable load of stuff to a little town called Kingston, for thirty dollars. On that hundred-mile journey, just after the spring thaw, the roads over the prairies were heavy and miry, causing no end of lamentation, for we often got stuck in the mud, and the poor farmer sadly declared that never, never again would he be tempted to try to haul such a cruel, heart-breaking, wagon-breaking, horse-killing load, no, not for a hundred dollars.

On leaving Scotland, father, like many other home-seekers, burdened himself with far too much luggage, as if all America were still a wilderness in which little or nothing could be bought. One of his big iron-bound boxes must have weighed about four hundred pounds, for it contained an old-fashioned beam-scales with a complete set of cast-iron counterweights, two of them fifty-six pounds each, a twenty-eight, and so on, down to a single pound; also a lot of iron wedges, carpenter's tools, etc. And at Buffalo, as if on the very edge of the wilderness, he gladly added to his burden a big cast-iron stove, with pots and pans, provisions enough to stand a long siege, and a scythe and cumbersome cradle for cutting wheat, all of which he succeeded in landing in the primeval Wisconsin woods.

A land agent at Kingston gave father a note to a farmer by the name of Alexander Gray, who lived on the border of the settled part of the country,
knew the section-lines, and would probably help him to find a good place for a farm. So father went away to spy out the land, and, in the mean time, left us children in Kingston in a rented room. It took us less than an hour to get acquainted with some of the boys in the village; we challenged them to wrestle, run races, climb trees, and the like, and in a day or two we felt at home, care-free and happy, notwithstanding that our family was so widely divided. When father returned he told us that he had found fine land for a farm in sunny open woods on the side of a lake, and that a team of three yoke of oxen with a big wagon was coming to haul us to Mr. Gray's place.

We enjoyed the strange ten-mile ride through the woods very much, wondering how the great oxen could be so strong and wise and tame as to pull so heavy a load with no other harness than a chain and a crooked piece of wood on their necks, and how they could sway so obediently to right and left, past roadside trees and stumps, when the driver said haw and gee. At Mr. Gray's house father again left us for a few days to build a shanty on the quarter-section he had selected four miles to the westward. In the meanwhile we enjoyed our freedom as usual, wandering in the fields and meadows, looking at the trees and flowers, snakes and birds and squirrels. With the help of the nearest neighbors the little shanty was built in less than a week. Just as we arrived at the shanty, before we had time to look at it or the scenery about it, David and I jumped down in a hurry off the load of household goods, for we had discovered a blue jay's nest, and in a minute or so we were up the tree beside it, feasting our eyes on the beautiful green eggs and beautiful birds,—our first memorable discovery. The handsome birds had not seen Scotch boys before, and made a desperate screaming as if we were robbers like themselves; though we left the eggs untouched, feeling that we were already beginning to get rich, and wondering how many more nests we should find in the grand, sandy woods. Then we ran along the brow of the hill that the shanty stood on, and down to the meadow, searching the trees and grass-rows, kingbirds, henhawks, night-hawks, whippoorwills, woodpeckers, and soon discovered a bluebird's and a woodpecker's nest, and began an acquaintance with the frogs and snakes and turtles in the creeks and springs.

This sudden plash into pure wilderness,—baptism in Nature's warm heart,—how utterly happy it made us! Nature streaming into us, woolingly teaching, preaching her glorious, living lessons, so unlike the dismal grammar lessons, kingbirds, henhawks, night-hawks, whippoorwills, woodpeckers, and the rest, simply tried to avoid being seen, to draw or drive us away, or paid no attention to us. Here, without knowing it, we still were at school; every wild lesson a love lesson, not whipped, but charmed, into us.

Oh, that glorious Wisconsin wilderness! Everything new and pure in the very prime of the spring when Nature's pulses were beating highest, and mysteriously keeping time with our own! Young hearty young leaves, flowers, animals, the winds, and the streams, and the sparkling lake, all wildly, gladly rejoicing together! Next morning, when we climbed to the precious jay nest, to take another admiring look at the eggs, we found it empty. Not a shell fragment was left, and we wondered how in the world the birds were able to carry off their thin-shelled eggs, either in their bills or in their feet, without breaking them, and how they could be kept warm while a new nest was being built. Well, I am still asking these questions. When I was on the Harriman Expedition I asked Robert Ridgeway, the eminent ornithologist, how these sudden flittings were accomplished, and he frankly confessed that he didn't know, but guessed that jays, and many other birds, carried their eggs in their mouths; and when I objected that a jay's mouth seemed too small to hold its eggs, he replied that birds' mouths were larger than the narrowness of their bills indicated. Then I asked him what he thought they did with the eggs while a new nest was being prepared. He didn't know; neither do I to this day. A specimen of the many puzzling problems presented to the naturalist.

We soon found many more nests belonging to birds that were not half so suspicious. The handsome and notorious blue jay plunders the nests of other birds and, of course, he could not trust us. Almost all the others, brown-shafted blackbirds, song-sparrows, kingbirds, henhawks, night-hawks, whip-poor-wills, woodpeckers, and the rest, simply tried to avoid being seen, to draw or drive us away, or paid no attention to us.

We used to wonder how the woodpeckers could bore holes so perfectly round,—true mathematical circles. We ourselves could not have done it, even with gouges and chisels. We loved to watch them feeding their young, and wondered how they could glean food enough for so many clamorous, hungry, unsatisfied babies, and how they managed to go each one its share; for after the young grew strong, one would get his head out of the door-hole and try to hold possession of it to meet the food-laden parents. How hard they worked to support their families, especially the red-headed and speckled woodpeckers and flickers; digging, hammering on scaly bark and decaying trunks and branches from dawn to dark, coming and going at intervals of a few minutes all the live-long day!

Everything about us was so novel and wonderful that we could hardly believe our senses except when hungry, or while father was threshing us. When we first saw Fountain Lake Meadow, on a sultry evening, sprinkled with millions of lightning-bugs, thrashing with light, the effect was so strange and beautiful that it seemed far too marvelous to be real. Looking from our shanty on the hill, I thought that the whole wonderful fairy show must be in my eyes; for only in lighting, when my eyes were struck, had I ever seen anything in the least like it. But when I asked my brother if he saw anything strange in the meadow he said, 'Yes, it's all covered with shaky fire-sparks.'

Then I guessed that it might be something outside of us, and applied to our all-knowing Yankee to explain it. 'Oh, it's nothing but lightnin'-bugs,' he said; and he kindly led us down the hill to the edge of the fiery meadow, caught a few of the wonderful bugs, dropped them into a cup, and carried them to the shanty, where we watched them thrashing and flashing out their mysterious light at regular intervals, as if each little passionate glow were caused by the beating of a heart. Once I saw a splendid display of glow-worm light in the foothills of the Himalaya,
north of Calcutta, but glorious as it appeared in pure starry radiance, it was far less impressive than the extraordinary, abounding, quivering, dancing fire on our Wisconsin meadow.

Partridge-drumming was another great marvel. When I first heard the low, soft, solemn sound I thought it must be made by some strange disturbance in my head or stomach; but as all seemed serene within, I asked David whether he heard anything queer.

'Yes,' he said, 'I hear something saying, boomp, boomp, boomp, and I'm wondering at it.' Then I was half satisfied that the source of the mysterious sound must be in something outside of us, coming, perhaps, from the ground or from some ghost or bogey or woodland fairy. Only after long watching and listening did we at last discover it in the wings of the plump brown bird.

The love-songs of the common jack-snipe were not whit less mysterious than partridge-drumming. It was usually heard on cloudy evenings, a strange, unearthly, winnowing, spirit-like sound, yet easily heard at a distance of a third of a mile. Our sharp eyes soon detected the bird while making it, as it circled high in the air over the meadow with wonderfully strong and rapid wing-beats, suddenly descending and rising, again and again, in deep, wide loops; the tones being very low and smooth at the beginning of the descent, rapidly increasing to a curious little whirling sound, more than half as strange as partridge-drumming. It was usually heard on cloudy evenings, a strange, unearthly, winnowing, spirit-like sound, yet easily heard at a distance of a third of a mile. Our sharp eyes soon detected the bird while making it, as it circled high in the air over the meadow with wonderfully strong and rapid wing-beats, suddenly descending and rising, again and again, in deep, wide loops; the tones being very low and smooth at the beginning of the descent, rapidly increasing to a curious little whirling sound, more than half as strange as partridge-drumming.

Far, far apart from this loud marsh music is that of the many species of hylas, a sort of soothing, immortal melody filling the air like light.

Soon after our arrival in the woods some one added a cat and puppy to the animals father had brought. The pup was a common cur, though very uncommon to us, a black-and-white short-haired mongrel that we named 'Watch.' We always gave him a pan of milk in the evening just before we knelt in family worship, while daylight still lingered in the shanty; and instead of attending to the prayers, I too often studied the small wild creatures playing round us. Field-mice scampered about with so much far-seeing care; and the drosdons and booming monster trying to swim. Recovering somewhat from his fright, he began to bark at the creature, and ran round and round his milk-pan, wouf-woufing, gurring, growling, like an old dog barking at a wild-cat or a bear. The natural astonishment and curiosity of that boy-dog getting his first entomological lesson in this wonderful world was so immediately funny that I had great difficulty in keeping from laughing out loud.

Watch never became a first-rate scholar, though he learned more than any stranger would judge him capable of, was a bold, faithful watch-dog, and in his prime a grand fighter, able to whip all the other dogs in the neighborhood. Comparing him with ourselves, we soon learned that although he could not read books he could read faces, was a good judge of character, always knew what was going on and what we were about to do, and liked to help us. We could run almost as fast as he could, see about as far, and perhaps hear as well, but in the sense of smell his nose was incomparably better than ours.

One winter morning when the ground was covered with snow, I noticed that when he was hungry and stretching himself, after leaving his bed, he suddenly caught the scent of something that excited him, went round the corner of the house and looked intently to the westward across a tongue of land that we called West Bank, eagerly questioned the air with quivering nostrils, and bristled up as though he felt sure that there was something dangerous in that direction, and actually caught sight of it. Then he ran toward the Bank and I followed him, curious to see what his nose had discovered.

The top of the Bank commanded a view of the north end of our lake and meadow, and when we got there we saw an Indian hunter armed with a long spear, going about from one muskrat cabin to another, approaching cautiously, careful to make no noise, and then suddenly thrusting his spear down through the house. If well-aimed, the spear went through the poor beaver-rat as it lay cuddled up in the snug nest it had made for itself in the fall, and when the hunter felt the spear quivering, he dug down the mossy hut with his tomahawk and secured his prey, — the flesh for food, and the skin to sell for a dime or so. This was a clear object lesson on dogs' keenness of scent. That Indian was more than half a mile away across a wooded ridge.

Had the hunter been a white man, I suppose Watch would not have noticed him. When he was about six or seven years old he not only became cross, but several of the neighbors declared over and over again that they had caught him in the act, and insisted that he must be shot. At last, in
Father was busy hauling lumber for the frame house that was to be got ready for the arrival of my mother, sisters, and brother, left behind in Scotland. One morning, when he was ready to start for another load, his ox whip was not to be found. He asked me if I knew anything about it. I told him I didn't know where it was, but a Scotch conscience compelled me to confess that when I was playing with it I had tied it to Watch's tail, and that he ran away, dragging it through the grass, and came back without it. "It must have slipped off his tail," I said, and so I did n't know where it was.

This honest, straightforward little story made father so angry that he exclaimed with heavy foreboding emphasis, "The very devil's in that boy!" David, who had been playing with me, and was perhaps as much to blame for the loss of the whip as I was, said never a word, for he was always prudent enough to hold his tongue when the parental weather was stormy, and so escaped nearly all punishment. And strange to say, this time I also escaped, all except a terrible scolding, though the thrashing seemed darker than ever.

As if unwilling to let the sun see this shameful job, father took me into the cabin where the storm was to fall, and sent David to the woods for a switch. While he was out selecting the switch, father put in the spare time sketching my play-wickedness in awful colors, and, of course, referred again and again to the place prepared for bad boys. In the midst of this terrible word-storm, dreading most the impending thrashing, I whimpered that I was only playing because I could n't help it; did n't know I was doing wrong; would n't do it again, and so forth. When this miserable dialogue had been exhausted, father became impatient with my bro-

ther for taking so much time to find the switch; and I was equally so, for I wanted to have the thing over and done with.

At last, in came David, a picture of open-hearted innocence, solemnly dragging a young bur-oak sapling, and handed the end of it to father, saying it was the best switch he could find. It was an awfully heavy one, about two and a half inches thick at the butt and ten feet long, almost big enough for a fence-pole. There was n't room enough in the cabin to swing it, and the moment I saw it I burst out laughing in the midst of my fears. But father failed to see the fun and was very angry at David, heaved the bur-oak outside and passionately demanded his reason for fetching 'sic a muckle rail like that instead o' a switch? Do ye ca' that a switch? I have a gude mind to thrash you instead o' John.'

David, with demure downcast eyes, looked preternaturally righteous, but as usual prudently answered never a word.

It was a hard job in those days to bring up Scotch boys in the way they should go; and poor overworked father was determined to do it if enough of the right kind of switches could be found. But this time, as the sun was getting high, he hitched up Tom and Jerry and made haste to the Kingston lumber-yard, leaving me unscathed and as innocently wicked as ever; for hardly had father got fairly out of sight among the oaks and hickories, ere all our troubles, hell-threatening, and exhorations were forgotten in the fun we had lessing a stubborn old sow and laboriously trying to teach her to go reasonably steady in rope harness. She was the first hog that father bought to stock the farm, and we boys regarded her as a very wonderful beast. In a few weeks she had a lot of pigs, and of all the queer, funny animal children we had yet seen, none amused us more. They were so comic in size and shape, in their gait and gestures and merry sham fights, and in the false alarms they got up for the fun of scampering back to their mother and begging her in most persuasive little squeals to lie down and give them a drink.

After her darling short-snouted babies were about a month old, she took them out to the woods and gradually roamed farther and farther from the shanty in search of acorns and roots. One afternoon we heard a rifle-shot, a very noticeable thing, as we had no near neighbors as yet. We thought it must have been fired by an Indian on the trail that followed the right bank of the Fox River between Portage and Pack­wauke Lake and passed our shanty at a distance of about three quarters of a mile. Just a minute after that shot was heard, along came the poor mother, rushing up to the shanty for protection, with her pigs, all out of breath and terror-stricken. One of them was missing and we supposed, of course, that an Indian had shot it for food. Next day, I discovered a blood puddle where the Indian trail crossed the outlet of our lake. One of father's hired men told us that the Indians thought nothing of leaving this sort of blackmail whenever they were hungry. The solemn awe and fear in the eyes of that old mother and little pigs I never can forget; it was as unmistakable and deadly a fear as I ever saw expressed by any human eye, and corroborates in no uncertain way the oneness of all of us.

Coming direct from school in Scot­land, while we were still hopefully ignorant and far from tame, notwithstanding the unnatural profession of teaching and thrashing lavished upon us,—getting acquainted with the animals about us was a never-failing source of wonder and delight. At first my father,
Another fine ox showed his skill when fed the cattle lots of pumpkins and gourds could be readily broken off. But owned, was a notably sagacious fellow of the second yoke of oxen that we had, and he seemed to reason sometimes like a boy choosing an orange or apple, through the hard rind with their teeth, but crushed them with his head. He never wasted on anything like an affectionate way, as he wanted to catch, as we approached the place where she had been captured she stood stock-still, gazing through the bushes, fearing the Indian might still be hiding there ready to spring; and she was so excited that she trembled, and her heart-beats were so loud that I could hear them distinctly when I was sitting on her back, boomp, boomp, boomp, like the drumming of a partridge. So vividly had she remembered her terrible experiences.

We used to cut and shock and husk the Indian corn in the fall, until a keen Yankee stopped over night at our house and, among other labor-saving notions, convinced father that it was better to let it stand, and husk it at his leisure during the winter, then turn the cattle to eat the leaves and trample down the stalks, so that they could be ploughed under in the spring. In this winter method each of us took two rows and husked into baskets, and emptied the corn on the ground in piles of fifteen to twenty bushels, then loaded it into the wagon to be hauled to the crib. This was cold, painful work, the temperature being often-times far below zero and the ground covered with dry, frosty snow, giving rise to miserable crops of chilblains and frosted fingers — a sad change from the merry Indian-summer husking, when the big yellow pumpkins covered the cleared fields; golden and orange pumpkins, gathered in the hazy golden weather. Sad change, indeed, but we occasionally got some fun out of the nipping shivery work, from hungry prairie-chickens and squirrels and mice that came about us.

The piles of corn were often left in the field several days, and while loading them into the wagon we usually found field-mice in them,—big, blunt-nosed, strong-scented fellows that we were taught to kill just because they nibbled a few grains of corn. I used to hold one, while it was still warm, up to Nob’s nose, for the fun of seeing her make faces and snort at the smell of it; and I would say, ‘Here, Nob,’ as if offering her a lump of sugar. One day I offered her an extra fine, fat, plump specimen, something like a little wood-chuck, or muskrat, an appetizing morsel, after smelling it curiously and doubtfully, as if wondering what the
gift might be, and rubbing it back and forth in the palm of my hand with her upper lip, she deliberately took it into her mouth, crunched and munched and chewed it fine and swallowed it, bones, teeth, head, tail, everything. Not a single hair of that mouse was wasted. When she was chewing it she nodded and grunted, as though critically tasting it, approving it.

My father was a steadfast enthusiast on religious matters and, of course, attended almost every sort of church meeting, especially revival meetings. They were occasionally held in summer, but mostly in winter, when the sleighing was good and plenty of time available. One hot summer day father drove Nob to Portage and back, twenty-four miles over a sandy road. It was a hot, hard, sultry day's work, and we seemed to be miraculously sustained.

INTO THE WILDERNESS

Great was the delight of brothers David, Daniel, and myself when father gave us a few pine boards for a boat, and it was a memorable day when we got that boat built and launched into the lake. Never shall I forget the first sail over the gradually deepening water, the sunbeams pouring through it revealing the strange plants covering the bottom, and the fishes coming about us, staring and wondering as if the boat were a monstrous strange fish.

The water was so clear that it was almost invisible, and when we floated slowly out over the plants and fishes we seemed to be miraculously sustained in the air while silently exploring a veritable fairyland.

We always had to work hard, but if we worked still harder we were occasionally allowed a little spell in the long summer evenings about sundown to fish, and on Sundays an hour or two to sail quietly, without fishing-rod or gun, when the lake was calm. Therefore we gradually learned something of its inhabitants,—pickerel, sun-fish, black bass, perch, shiners, pumpkin-seeds, ducks, loons, turtles, muskrats, etc. We saw the sun-fishes making their nests in little openings in the rushes where the water was only a few feet deep, ploughing up and showing away the soft gray mud with their noses, like pigs, forming round bowls five or six inches in depth and about two feet in diameter, in which their eggs were deposited. And with what beautiful unweariable devotion they watched and hovered over them and chased away prowling, spawn-eating enemies that ventured within a rod or two of the precious nest.

The pickerel is a savage fish endowed with marvelous strength and speed. It lies in wait for its prey on the bottom, perfectly motionless, like a water-logged stick, watching everything that moves, with fierce, hungry eyes. Often times when we were fishing for some other kinds over the edge of the boat, a pickerel that we had not noticed would come like a bolt of lightning and seize the fish we had caught before we could get it into the boat. The very first pickerel that I ever caught jumped into the air to seize a small fish dangling on my line, and missing its aim fell plump into the boat as if it had dropped from the sky. Some of our neighbors fished for pickerel through the ice in mid-winter. They usually drove a wagon out on the lake, set a large number of lines baited with live minnows, hung a loop of the lines over a small bush planted at the side of each hole, and watched to see the loops pulled off when a fish had taken the bait. Large quantities of pickerel were often caught in this cruel way.

One hot summer day father told us that we ought to learn to swim. This was one of the most interesting suggestions he had ever offered, but precious little time was allowed for trips to the lake, and he seldom tried to show us how. 'Go to the frogs,' he said, 'and they will give you all the lessons you need. Watch their arms and legs and see how smoothly they kick themselves along and dive and come up. When you want to dive, keep your arms by your side or over your head, and kick, and when you want to come up let your legs drag and paddle with your hands.'

We found a little basin among the rushes at the south end of the lake, about waist-deep and a rod or two wide, shaped like a sun-fish's nest. Here we kicked and plashed for many a lesson, faithfully trying to imitate frogs, but the smooth, comfortable, sliding gait of our amphibious teachers seemed hopelessly hard to learn. When we tried to kick frog-fashion, down went our heads, as if weighted with lead, the moment our feet left the ground. One day it occurred to me to hold my breath as long as I could and let my head sink as far as it liked without paying any attention to it, and try to swim under the water instead of on the surface. This method was a great success, for at the very first trial I managed to cross the basin without touching bottom, and soon learned the use of my limbs. Then of course, swimming with my head above water soon became so easy that it seemed perfectly natural. David tried the plan with the same success. Then we began to count the number of times that we could swim round the basin without stopping to rest, and after twenty or thirty rounds failed to tire us we proudly thought that a little more practice would make us as amphibious as frogs.

On the Fourth of July of this swimming year one of the Lawson boys came to visit us, and we went down to the lake to spend the great warm day with the fishes and ducks and turtles. After gliding about on the smooth mirror water, telling stories and enjoying the company of the happy creatures about us, we rowed to our bathing pool, and David and I went in for a swim, while our companion fished from
the boat a little way out beyond the rushes. After a few turns in the pool it occurred to me that it was now about time to try deep water. Swimming through the thick growth of rushes and lilies was somewhat dangerous, especially for a beginner, because one's arms and legs might be entangled among the long limber stems; nevertheless I ventured and struck out boldly enough for the boat, where the water was twenty or thirty feet deep. When I reached the end of the little skiff I raised my right hand to take hold of it to surprise Lawson, whose back was toward me, and who was not aware of my approach; but I failed to reach high enough, and, of course, the weight of my arm and the stroke against the overleaning stern of the boat shoved me down and I sank struggling, frightened and confused. As soon as my feet touched the bottom I slowly rose to the surface, but before I could get breath enough to call for help sank back again and lost all control of myself. After sinking and rising I don't know how many times, some water got into my lungs and I began to drown. Then suddenly my mind seemed to clear. I remembered that I could swim under water, and making a desperate struggle toward the shore, reached a point where, with grim deliberation took a header and dived straight down thirty or forty feet, turned easily and, letting my feet drag, paddled straight to the surface with my hands as father had at first directed me to do. I then swam round the boat, glorying in my suddenly acquired confidence and victory over myself, climbed into it and dived again, with the same triumphant success. I think I went down four or five times, and each time as I made the dive-spring shouted aloud, 'Take that!' feeling that I was getting most gloriously even with myself.

Never again from that day to this have I lost control of myself in water. If suddenly thrown overboard at sea in the dark, or even while asleep, I think I would immediately right myself in a way some would call 'instinct,' rise among the waves, catch my breath, and try to plan what would better be done. Never was victory over self more complete. I have been a good swimmer ever since. At a slow gait I think I could swim all day in smooth water, moderate in temperature. When I was a student at Madison I used to go on long swimming journeys called exploring expeditions, along the south shore of Lake Mendota, on Saturdays, sometimes alone, sometimes with another amphibious explorer by the name of Fuller.

My adventures in Fountain Lake call to mind the story of a Scotch fiddler playing at a wedding, who drank so much whiskey that on the way home he fell by the roadside. In the morning he was ashamed and angry and determined to punish himself. Making haste to the house of a friend, a gamekeeper, he called him out, and requested the loan of a gun. The alarmed gamekeeper, not liking the fiddler's looks and voice, anxiously inquired what he was going to do with a gun. 'Surely,' said he, 'you're no gun to shoot yourself.' 'No-o,' with characteristic candor replied the penitent fiddler, 'I didn't think that I'd just exactly kill myself, but I'm gun to tak a dander doon the burn (brook) wi' the gun and gie mysel' a deevil o'a flag (fright).'

[Other experiences in the Wisconsin wilderness will be described by Mr. Muir in the January number. — The Eorrons.]

THE VALLEY OF THE OTHERS

BY ELIZABETH TAYLOR

I HAVE come to Dalen to spend the whole night here alone. The Pastorinde and I have often talked of coming — just we two — to see what goes on here during the sub-Arctic summer night, how the birds and flowers conduct themselves through the hours that are dark in more southern lands. Dalen is a great, lonely valley, two miles from the Parsonage. On three sides are high, rugged fields, but the fourth is open to the northern sea, to distant islands, and to wonderful shore-cliffs. The Pastor affirms that his best sermons are composed here on snipe-shooting days, and I know that when I come here fishing I return a much better woman than when I left home, even though midgets bite and trout do not. When a rare guest visits the Parsonage in the summer, the Pastorinde brings him here as the best her hospitality can offer. If he grumbles at the rocky, Boggy trail and looks with a cold eye on Dalen, finding her desolate, then the Pastorinde knows that to one chamber of her heart that guest will have no key. It is a great heart, that of the Pastorinde, and I have learned to know its strength and sweetness during my winter in the little parsonage of Vidareide.

In August, ten months ago, I did my Christmas shopping, talked my last English to the Danish officials in Thorshavn, the capital of the FAréors. Then I sailed away to this northern island where Danish is the language of the Parsonage, old Norse that of the little turf-covered cottages. The last boat of the year came in November. After that we were shut off from the outside world. No telegraph, no cable, no post! Truly I had need of the Pastorinde, and she has not failed me. There are no children at the Parsonage, but long ago the Pastorinde learned to call me her 'pleie-barn' — her foster child; and I call her 'pleie-mor' — foster mother.

It is because the Pastorinde slipped