

Chapter XXXI

I STUMBLE INTO PARADISE

The doctor's verdict was explicit. I had been working seventeen hours a day for more than three years, and had taken no rest. He shook his head. He was a careful dignostician. What he found to be true was true. Argument was an insult to intelligence. A doctor's verdict in those days was a finality. The miracles of the new religions of spiritual healing were known only to a small circle of students. Freud had just begun his work in Vienna. Christian Science was just coming into a realization of its power in Boston. I knew little or nothing of these strange new forces. So the doctor had me by the gills. I couldn't even flutter. I surrendered.

"It's no use giving you medicine," he observed. You can't keep up the pace. A normal human being must rest as well as work--and play some too. To work seventeen hours a day is a crime. Stop it. You must live in the country and work only half the time in the city or you will not last another year. It's up to you. Take your choice.

I smiled, thanked him and when he had gone called the wife who sat down beside me. After all why not a beautiful home in the country? It required no pleading to make her see and feel its beauty. She too, had seen it in a vision long ago. When we looked the thing

squarely in the face our "home" on 94th street was just a nineteen foot slit in a block of scorched mud with a brown stone veneer. Our children were penned in its prison walls through the long winters, forbidden to walk on the grass in the cold dangerous springs. And the doctor had come to see us every week.

We began to realize that the city, the stamping ground of the herd, might be the place for trade, but that God never meant man to build a home and rear children in it. We had blundered into pest hole on Staten Island. We hadn't reached the country at all. And then the longing for the real country life in which we had both been reared came over us with resistless power. The smell of green fields and wild flowers, the breath of the open sea, the music of falling waters, the quiet of woodland roads, the kindly eyes of animals we had known, the memory of moon and star long lost in the glare of electric lights, began to call. We silently clasped hands and made up our minds.

We would move to Old Tidewater Virginia, the home of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, the oldest settlement in America, yet still the most primitive, the most beautiful and least known spot on our continent. I had hunted there once with a friend.

Before taking so important a step, I made one attempt to find rest and relaxation near New York. I took my gun for a hunt in the wild fields and forests of Staten Island.

Game must be abundant there. I found a lot of fat robins and got seventeen, enough to make a good pie. The first commission my mother had ever given me with a gun was to get her enough robins for a pie. In the South the robin is considered a game bird as it migrates from the North in the fall in great flocks. I had never heard one sing and never dreamed that anyone else had.

The game wardens on Staten Island, however, had inside information on the subject. They arrested me, confiscated my birds, and the magistrate) fined me \$25. When the story appeared in the papers the Tammany boys gave an Indian war whoop, pounced upon me and proceeded to take their revenge. They got the magistrate to reopen the case and deal out two punishments for the same offense, the Constitution of the United States to the contrary notwithstanding. The second time he fined me \$750. They then had the Game Warden to soak me another \$750..I paid the \$1525 and the Tammany press agents razzed me in the New York papers for two weeks. They ran a series of funny cartoons over which I laughed as heartily as they did. And they wrote doggerel poetry to accompany the sketches. They sent it over the Associated Press to every state giving me the national laugh. They shed hot tears over the cruelty of a man who could murder seventeen little song birds.

This angle of attack brought an unexpected champion to my defense in an article that was copied in nearly every important paper in the country. A distinguished Ornithologist

explained that there was no such thing as a robin red breast in America. The robin of song and story lives in the British Isles, a dainty bird the size of a canary. The thing we call a robin is a coarse screeching migratory thrush.

But the boys, of course, had the laugh on me. I should have known the law. So I took it with a grin and chalked up one against me on the score for Tammany. Until I got an excited letter from my lecture Bureau. The wide publicity from New York had lifted my lecture fee from \$500 a week to \$1,000 and they offered me forty weeks instead of twenty if I'd take them. I took but twenty weeks but the increase in fees netted me \$7,500 the first year. The fines which my enemy had soaked me had turned out to be a fine investment for which I thanked the boys on 14th Street.

But I sought no more relaxation on Staten Island. We carried out the Virginia project without delay. I bought a house at Cape Charles and arranged a new scheme of work, rest and play. I lived Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in Virginia. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in New York. I became the champion long distance commuter making a three hundred mile jump over night twice a week.

It saved my life. And strange to say I found that I could do more work in three days than I had been doing in seven. I built my first boat and, fascinated by it, built a new one every year. I found that boats have souls. From the moment they slip into the water some are strong, swift, sure. Others are tricky, weak, slow and possessed of the devil.

I made a garden. And over the gate set a motto in bronze letters: PRODUCTION IS COMMUNION WITH GOD. My older brother said it was sacrilege. To me it was, and is, a profound truth.

I made friends quickly with the people of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. I have never found an enemy among them. I'll love them as long as life endures.

Here I realized my first dog comrade of manhood. My life had been for years a poor thing because it had lacked the fellowship of dogs. Let no fool philosopher tell me that a dog can't think, reason, love, hate fear, laugh and cry as I do. I know better. Will Carroll sent me from Shelby a black and white Llewellyn setter named Sailor. His snow white tail sailing across a field looked like a sail skimming the sea. I didn't like his actions and thought him a failure. He was crazy about the horse, an unusual trait for a bird dog. So I sent him to the stable to live and never let him come in the house. On the first day of the quail season I tried him out with some friends who had good dogs.

And then came the dramatic surprise. From the first he was the whole show. The way he swept the field took my breath. He circled a hedge row like a streak of white light, suddenly darted out into the open, his fine head flung high in the air, and pointed a covey before the other dogs had climbed the fence. When we finished the follow up I dropped to my knees, took him in my arms, hugged him and told him what a great dog he was.

He smiled, nudged me with his nose and whispered: "I'm

a North Carolina field dog, you know! I showed these poor Virginia mutts a thing or two, didn't I?"

"I'll say you did, odd boy--" I answered.

At the next field Sailor didn't hurry. When he cleared the fence, he paused a moment and took the whole place in at a glance. He didn't use his nose at all, only his eyes and brains. He saw a patch of peas and darted straight for it, his head high in the air. On reaching the pea patch his body and tail stiffened. He had the birds before the other dogs had struck the first scent of the trail.

When we got home that night he knew without words from me the change in his status in the household. He walked straight into the library and lay down on the rug at my feet. He knew that the place belonged to him.

And he immediately developed into a fine watch dog. When I left home he walked upstairs without invitation and lay down on the rug beside his mistress' bed. He would have torn an intruder to pieces at a word from her.

He had strange powers of observation. He would spot a crank or fool in a gang of workmen and watch a chance to snap at him. Among my men there was a poor white who was a quack doctor, a quack preacher and a quack workman. The dog spotted him the first day he came and tried to bite him. I scolded him mildly and he looked up at me in a grieved way: "He's a hopeless fool-- you'll have to get rid of him." In two weeks the dog managed to tear his pants three times and get one good crack at his leg. He never disburbed another man among the gang.

As I was petting him one day he flinched painfully and I discovered that an ugly growth was developing in his groin. I knew that it was serious and stroked him tenderly. He looked at me with his big half human eyes and begged me to help him. I took him to a hospital in New York where a distinguished Veterinary Surgeon performed an operation. When the cabman was lifting him down stairs into the cab, the Doctor gravely said: "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but your dog can't live long. He will hunt all right up to the day the trouble strikes a vital organ and then go quickly."

Inside the cab I took him in my arms and held his head against mine a long time. I couldn't tell him the fatal secret that Death had already laid a cold hand on his silken head and claimed him as his own. He was happy in my arms, his head out the window looking with pity at the poor collared and chained pups he saw on the streets. He licked my hand in a grateful dog kiss for what I had done for him and for the joy of home that was in his soul! A little while longer we would roam the fields together and our hearts thrill to the joy of the chase and he would go. I wondered where?

As the end drew nearer he seemed brighter, swifter, more human. He could understand almost anything spoken in plain English as well as dog language. Lying at my feet one day in the library I thought he was asleep. Pompey the little negro boy who did our chores came to the door and in the most commonplace tones said: "Mr. Dixon, there's a hog in the garden." Without a word from me, Sailor sprang to his feet, dashed by my desk and out the door. When I reached the garden he had the hog by the ear leading him through the gate. He didn't bark at the intruder. He didn't try to bite him. He simply led him back to the hog lot.

I stroked his black and white head and told him he was a great dog. He grinned and acknowledged the fact and walked back with me to the library fire.

The next summer he dropped one day under the shadow of an elm on the lawn. Death had called him and he crouched and shivered at my feet afraid of his new master. I tenderly smoothed his beautiful hair. He looked up into my face, his soft eyes full of a strange terror. Unable to bear it I started to leave him. He staggered to his feet and tried to follow me, took three steps forward, stumbled and fell on the grass. I closed his glorious eyes and felt my way back into the house.

On arrival in New York the next morning I found the city excited over the news of the sinking of the Maine in Havana Harbor. Our little Junta of revolutionists had not been able to secure ~~an~~ intervention for Cuba Libre, but in a single flash from hell it had come. We had prepared the minds of the people in a wide propaganda. War is a state of mind.

The clash was brief and two heroes emerged from the struggle. When the Spanish fleet was located in the harbor of Santiaog a gallant young naval officer of the American fleet volunteered to run the collier Merrimac into the narrow channel, sink her under the guns of the fort and bottle up the ships of Cuervera while we ravaged the coast. Accordingly Captain Richmond Pearson Hobson, commanding the Merrimac, steamed straight into the channel under the nose of their canon, and sank her as planned. The castle guns roared in vain. The deed was done. They took Hobson and his men prisoners and locked them up, but accorded him the honors of a hero. The Collier had not quite blocked the channel, but so nearly closed it that the Spaniards could not pass at night, When she emerged

in broad daylight and made a dash for the open sea Sampson's fleet closed in and sank them all.

When Captain Hobson came home every girl in America who got hear him tried to kiss him. He is still one of the handsomest men in the country and I saw him dancing with a beautiful girl at a resort last summer.

The brush with Spain gave us another hero destined to make history. Theodore Roosevelt led a regiment of Rough Riders into the war and came home a popular idol slated for the Governorship of New York on the way to the White House. I had worked with him for clean government in our city. And when they nominated him for Governor, I broke with the faith of my fathers (didn't let my father know about it) and voted the Republican ticket the first time in my life. I confess that when I saw the word "Republican" in big black letters across the top of my ticket and remembered that its radical leaders had put the defeated South to torture, I hesitated a moment. But I gritted my teeth and voted it. When they ran Theodore Roosevelt for Vice-president, I bolted again and voted for him. Named for President, I voted for him the third time. He was a great man of a great breed of men--the kind of man Abraham Lincoln said saved this country from hell. And when, in the fullness of time they named for the Presidency a Roosevelt who was also a DEMOCRAT--Now I said the kingdom of God is at hand! And it was. And is.

At the colse of Spanish American war I moved across the Bay to Gloucester County. Here we realized the true glory of Old Tidewater Virginia in a stately colonial home, "Elmington Manor". The lawn was a peninsula behind which stretched an estate of five hundred acres into the hills. The fine old house had thirty two

rooms and each one commanded a view of the water. A creek flowed gracefully through the lawn and formed a perfect harbor for our boats.

A mocking bird built in a holly and another nested in a rose bush nearby. From every shrub and tree the chatter and song of an army of feathered musicians filled the air with melody. And there were no robins among them!

We had a cultivated garden but I confess I loved the wild flowers best, buttercups, johnquills, forgetmenots, clover and daisies, they asked nothing and gave everything. Through the shadows of giant trees the waters gleaned. The flashing glory of these opal, emerald and turquoise mirrors changing their tints with every passing cloud and breath of wind, reflecting every mood of sky and shore--all now are of the rythm of our daily life.

In summer the semi tropic fruits grow luxuriantly. And here we have the longest Indian Summers in America. Italy never saw such friendly skies. The glorious sunlight and peace that flood the earth in these red letter days can not be revealed in words. Each day a miracle of beauty, clear skies, genial sun, crisp pure air, with every tree that sheds its leaf robed in scarlet and purple flame.

In winter, the holly thick as dogwood, lifts its great bouquets of scarlet berries amid the pruple splendors of oak and hickory, beech and maple, poplar and chestnut. I love these big naked trees, too, their tall nymph like limbs seem fashioned by a master artist of the nude against the azure background of the sky.

There is not a day in the calendar from the first of January to the end of December that there is not good fishing or hunting or both in Old Tidewater Virginia.

On long winter nights we sit beside a roaring log fire, read and dream, listen to music, or chat with our kindly neighbors. Down here they are not in a hurry. They have more time than money and spend it more freely. They have mastered the art of living and we have fallen into their friendly ways.

In what strange paradoxes we become entangled! The failure of my dream of a great temple of marble broke my heart. Yet had it been realized, I might have become a fat barker for the Standard Oil Company in my admiration for John D. Rockefeller. Through this failure I stumbled into Paradise and learned to live.

Chapter XXXII

I BUILD A BOAT

If I had exchanged my New York brown stone house for a log cabin in the woods on the shores of the Chesapeake it would have been a good trade if the boys could have had boats.

A boy who learns early to handle a boat has achieved a better education than he who graduates at the head of his class in the city high school.

A boat teaches him the first lessons of life..Law and obedience.. in vital ways. You can talk about Law to a boy hours and hours. It goes in one ear and out of the other. The fact is, few of us ever learn things in the abstract. We rarely learn anything until Nature raps us over the knuckles and calls our attention to it.

A boat says to him;

"Keep in harmony with the Law and I am your swift and willing servant. But if you take your hand off that sheet in a gale, or forget to ease my sail to that cat's-paw..overboard you go." One ducking is enough.

The love which a boat inspires in a boy is not quite like any

other. It is more complex and broadens his mental and spiritual horizon in proportion to its complexity. He may love a horse, or a mule, or a dog simply for his own sake.

A boat inspires this and more. He soon learns that a boat has a soul born of the union of Labour with Nature. Though a boat is made of nails and wood and ropes and cotton, the putting together of those pieces by human hand and brain gives it the impress of character which reveals itself the moment she is afloat. Boats are good or bad, tricky or true, just as animals and folks.

Sailing on the river one day with my ten year old in his boat, we passed another boy in a narrow cranky looking craft with a big ugly sail. He was a poor youngster, a cook for some carpenters near by. But the salutes between them were given with all the deference of two ocean captains in Mid-Atlantic. I asked my skipper what was the name of his friend's craft.

"Hell", he answered.

"What"

"Yes, sir, Hell...she's so tricky."

A boy learns to love or hate a boat for its individuality as he does man or animal. This love for the boat rouses in him reverence for Nature in her larger life.

He learns that winds and tides have souls.

He must study their temper and moods.

The face of the water is ever changing from laughter to tears, from joy to anger, and with each breath speaks a new message. He must listen. The boat compels him.

The tides speak with authority and eternal mystery. With never a break they ebb and flow twice each day. He must know their hours and plan his life in harmony with them. The fish and crabs obey their laws. He must know whether it will be ebb or flood when he starts home from a day's outing, or he will miss his supper. He must figure the height of the tide to cross a bar and get back to his channel, and must know the hour of high water and low water, the day he hauls out his craft to scrape her bottom and paint her with copper. The tide is his ship's railway and the beach his drydock. He must study the humors of the tide and interpret them. When the tides run unusually low he knows the wind is blowing strong off shore outside and a storm is brewing from the land. When the tide comes rushing in and piles up its flood to normal reach two hours ahead of time and keeps on rising higher and higher, he knows an easterly storm is sweeping in from the sea and makes things snug for its coming. Their everlasting mystery tantalize with a thousand questions about the Power back of their measureless tons. Early he learns the lesson of Reverence in the presence of Mystery.

A boat is a specific for conceit.

When a boy reaches the massive age of thirteen and begins to instruct his father and mother on the conduct of life and the meaning of things, give him a boat and turn him loose in tidewater. He may get wet, but he will be saved early from many afflictions.

I told my boy one day not to venture too far in the wind and tide of the hour from the yacht in his little sailboat. He waved his arm to me in lordly gesture and informed me he could sail her anywhere in sight and back all right. I said nothing and let him go. An hour later, I came out of the cabin and went ashore in the tender for supplies.

The wind was blowing a spanking breeze and the tide was running with the wind like a mill-race. I saw my omnipotent young navigator off to the leeward a mile, anchored and a distress signal flying. I ran the launch within a quarter of a mile of him, but paid no attention to his frantic gestures for help. I passed on to the shore and an hour ~~later~~ later returned. Again I passed him waving his arms and bellowing for a tow. I allowed him to think, skillfully beat his craft to the windward, and knew he was learning one of the secrets of the deep seas of life. Then I saw him round the bend in the channel, ease off her sheet, and lean back with a smile as he flies before the wind, and I knew he had felt the thrill of the harmony of Nature and her laws. He has come into a heritage no calamity can imperil and no panic destroy.

The only way to really get out doors is to push off fifteen miles from shore into salt water. Our planet is a globe of water through which five or six lumps of dirt and rock project. We call these lumps of exposed earth, continents, and imagine they are the world, when as a matter of fact they cut a comparatively small figure in the total history of our sphere.

The man who does not know salt water is lopsided and undeveloped.

I have known people who have spent all their days on one spot of ground on one of these land lumps and thought they could teach the children of men the deepest truths of universal life.

Has a landlubber lived?

The sea is our most expressive symbol of the eternal, and the truest test of reality. Fifty cents may pass for a dollar in the interior, but when it strikes salt water, it is worth just fifty cents.

It is so with men.

A boat is the only instrument by which a man move over any considerable part of the earth's surface.

When I bought my first boat, and became amphibious, I was an efficient inhabitant of the world. I determined finally to build us an ocean going yacht.

In no way can a man so accurately express his character as in the boat he ~~builds~~ builds if he has had sufficient experience to understand the language of the sea.

I planned a schooner of ocean going tonnage, yet of such light draught she could thread her way amid the labyrinths of sand shoals, mud flats, marshes and creeks that make the home of the wild fowl in Tidewater Virginia.

I had her built at Pacamoke City, Md. for \$3,500 and put the newest type of tender aboard her davits for an additional \$600. She was 80 feet overall, had a saloon sixteen feet square with four bunks and three staterooms amidship. The Chesapeake Buckeye rig make her a most economical craft. Two men and a boy were a full crew with her owner to lend a hand. We could keep her in commission for six months of the year at a total cost of \$750 a frifle compared to our expenses ashore.

Such a craft is the most useful boat in Virginia waters a man can build. We could anchor on the feeding grounds of wild fowl where the tide leaves her high and dry twice a day, and stay as long as we like. She is a powerful boat when she drops her center-board and draws 10 feet of water, and if overtaken in such a storm at sea that she could not live out, she can lift her board, and in 3 feet of water slip up on the beach and land her passengers in safety to them if she lose her own life.

I was anxious to get the opinion of my sea-dog Captain George Isdell, when he first brought the "DIXIE" home from her cradle at Pocomoke where she was born in 1897.

His face was wreathed in smiles. Such characters are always blunt and plain spoken when they talk about the qualities of a boat. They locate her weak spots in twenty four hours, and tell you with authority what she is worth.

"How is she, Deprge?" I asked as I sprang up her gangplank the day she arrived.

"She's a Jim-dandy!" he cried with a grin. "I've tried her out. She goes through the water slicker'n a eel. She stands right up in a blow and leaves a whith streak behind her as far as you can see."

I take a hand with the boys alearing her decks and storing everything snug. Her gunning boats and decoys are slung in on deck ~~ad~~ and her tenders on her davits.

On the trial spin we swung out into the channel and headed for the Chesapeake Bay. Black scurrying clouds from the North came sweeping down and obscured the sun. In a quarter of an hour the Bay was a smother. I heard her new steel shrouds crack as her tall masts keeled over ~~and~~ and tested their temper.

She swept gracefully through the dark waters like a great white startled swan, her loere row of windows under water, leaving a white thread of foam behind her.

"Time her now between these seven mile bouys!" cried George, as we flashed by a red can bobbing up and down in a mass of spray.

I looked at my watch. Heavens, how she flew! She was alive, and the wind the breath fo her joyous soul. As I held her wheel, I could feel the beat of her heart and the quiver of her nerves. When I moved