A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE,

OR

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

I AM fifty years old now, hale and strong, but not the vigorous man I was at the time of the events described in this story. I was reared on the Monongahela river. My earliest employment was on that stream. I was a ferryman, a fisherman, a boatman, a raftsman, and certainly a swimmer—everything that did not call me away from the river.

When the United States declared war against Mexico I enlisted at Pittsburg in the Second Pennsylvania regiment, and went. I passed through General Scott's campaign with but one slight wound, and it was an adventure I had near the City of Mexico, after the fighting was over, that resulted, strange as it may seem, in a big swim in the Monongehela two years afterward.

One day while we were quartered at Cuycan, seven miles from the conquered capital, I, being a sergeant, was ordered to take a file of men and pursue a reckless character named M'Cutchin, who had escaped from the guard house and fled toward the city. He was one of the worst men in the regiment, and had lately been confined in the guard house to await a trial by court martial on a charge of murderous assault on a superior officer. We caught sight of the fugitive before we had gone half the distance to the city, and he immediately left the road and plunged into a dense thicket of a square mile in extent. We immediately scattered through the bushes in pursuit, and five minutes later I came upon him hiding in a very thick clump of the chaparal. I expected he would run for it on being discovered, but to my surprise he sprang out and rushed upon me like a tiger, flourishing a large knife. I had barely time to club my musket when he was within two feet of me, and had he been one second sooner he certainly would have stabbed me. But with one blow from the butt of my musket I felled him, and immediately called for my companions. They were both within hearing, and soon at the spot.

"Here he is, boys," I said. "The rascal made an assault on me with his knife, and I knocked it down. Watch him. Where is that knife?"

"Here it is," said one of the boys, picking it up.

M'Cutchin had not got upon his feet and was rubbing his head, every now and then scowling upon me in a very terrible manner.

"Oh, I'll pay you for this!" he finally said.

"M'Cutchin," said I, "in arresting you I simply obeyed orders, and in knocking you down I simply acted in self-defense. You know you attempted to kill me with that knife. Now I want none of your threats, or I'll make your case worse than it is. March him to camp, boys."

We proceeded to camp, the desperate prisoner all the while glaring upon me like a demon, and repeating muttered threats. He was a very wicked and revengeful man.

He was soon after court-martialed and sentenced to wear a ball and chain about his ankle for one month, and after that he was dismissed from the army in disgrace, forfeiting all all his back pay. So two months later he was put on board a transport at Vera Cruz and sent to New Orleans.

During the second summer after my return to the United States I was employed as a mate of a steamboat on the Monongahela. She was a light draught boat called the Merry, and as the water did not usually fall low till late in August, we plied between Pittsburg and New Geneva nearly all summer—the distance being one hundred miles. Occasionally, when there was any considerable rise in the river, we ran up to Morgantown, W. V., twenty miles above New Geneva.

One rainy evening, when we arrived at New Geneva, we found the water high enough for a venture to Morgantown, and the captain decided to run up.

Just before we left the landing a strange man came aboard, stating to the clerk that he wished to take a deck passage to Pittsburg, and asking permission to remain on the boat while running up to Morgantown and back, that he might at once "turn in," and have an unbroken night's sleep, to which the clerk assented, the passenger paying his fare to Pittsburg.

He was a rough looking man, with a sandy beard that covered three-fourths of his face. However, I paid but little attention to him, and he soon passed aft to where the freight was stored and the deck hands slept.

Our boat steamed up the river a little before dark, and we passed the mouth of the Cheat river just as night fairly set in—which it did in terrible earnest. The clouds thickened up, the rain came down in torrents, and I never before or since saw a night so intensely dark. The Merry could hardly proceed far without running aground, for the tall shores entirely disappeared from view in the awful gloom; but the doors of the furnace were thrown open and the blazing fire under the boilers shed a dim light ahead, which enabled the pilot to pick his way along for a time, by running very slowly.

We had gone about two miles above the mouth of the Cheat river, when, descending from the cabin deck by means of a very narrow flight of steps on the larboard side, I saw our deck passenger skulk away from the foot of the stairs and pass into the quarters aft, as though to escape observation. As he did so I caught a brief glimpse of his face—for the light of a lamp at one of the engines shone on it—and it immediately struck me that it was not unfamiliar. A moment later, while I stood pondering, the face re-appeared at the door, and the deck passenger stepped out, saying, in a low tone:

"Do you know me?"

"I was just thinking I had seen you somewhere," I replied.

"Must I tell you my name?" he asked.

"Yes, I would like to know it."

The mysterious deck passenger stepped closer to me, so as his bearded face was within an inch of my ear, and whispered, "M'Cutchin."

I had scarcely time to think ere he gave me a violent push with both hands, and I fell backward from the low deck into the river, immediately forward of the crashing wheel. A blow of one of its paddles would have crushed me, but fortunately I sank to the bottom and before I arose to the surface the wheel had passed over me. I shall never forget the sensation produced by the thundering of the paddles over my head and the rushing and bubbling of the muddy water about my ears.

My plunge into the water had been so entirely unexpected that I strangled badly at first, but being one of the best of swimmers I soon recovered, rested upon the surface with but little exertion, and began to deliberate as to what I was going to do with myself. The clatter of paddles, rapidly receding from me, reminded me that I ought to make some effort to attract the attention of those on the boat, and I shouted with all my might, but to no purpose: and the faint lights that peeped from the after cabin soon disappeared beyond a bend in the river, a little way above.

The rain was pouring down, and the darkness so intense that I strained my eyes in vain to catch the outlines of the tall hills against the sky. The heavens themselves were as black as the rushing river. Nothing was to be seen; I could only feel; and it may be relied on that I felt very uncomfortable. The water was not decidedly cold, but it was much too cold when taken in such quantities.

But I was too familiar with the water to be easily daunted, and although I could not say with Byron that I was a "child of the ocean," I deemed myself, at least, as near as a brother-in-law to the Monongahela river. So I struck out vigorously for—what? Shore? Well, yes, I had some vague notion of getting to shore before morning, but how was I to get there? In which direction should I swim? For the life of me—and that life was at stake—I could not guess in what direction either shore lay. So I struck out at random. There was a strong current in the river, but as I moved along with it, I had no means of calculating its course. Still, I swam away through the black torrent, confident that I must eventually reach one shore or the other.

When I had swam at least four times the width of the river I lay-to a moment, and again endeavored to pierce the awful gloom, but in vain. My eyes actually pained and head throbbed with the effort. It was so perfectly dark that I remember wondering if it ever could grow light again. There was no means of ascertaining where the shore was, and I endeavored more than once to "touch bottom" with my toes, but in vain.

I then struck out again, and after swimmimg with all my might for ten or fifteen minutes, I began to be tired, and became really alarmed. Suppose whole hours should pass, and I should still be unable to discover the shore or strike it by accident? The danger of my situation now burst upon me with bewildering force, and I felt that my strength was failing. I grew impatient and angry, and began beating the cruel waters in my frenzy, and screaming loud curses against the murderous M'Cutchin, whose revengeful spirit had prompted him to hurl me into the fearful peril.

Presently I heard the rippling of water near me, and, thinking it was the current flowing among the rocks or bushes at the shore, I struck out in the direction with new hope. I put out my hand and touched something solid. But it was not the shore; it was a large snag that barely peeped out of the water. Gladly accepting a respite, however, I climbed upon it, almost exhausted, and sat half immersed in water, shivering, trembling, and wondering whether the morning would see me alive.

The rain was still pouring down, and I caught the glimmer of a faint flash of lightning, which was followed by the low rumbling of distant thunder. But the lightning was too dim to reveal the hidden shore. Presently I felt the snag sinking beneath my weight, and I plunged into the current again and resumed my swimming—in what direction I did not know.

At last, when I felt that I could not stay up much longer, I caught a glimpse of a light in the distance. It was evidently shining from a window, and I was sure it must be on shore; so, with new courage, I steered for the light, which for the first twenty-five minutes seemed to recede from me like an ignis fatuus. But I persevered, determined to strike as long as a muscle would move, for I was swimming to some purpose now. Ten minutes more, and I found that I was undoubtedly nearing the light. Hope lent me new strength and courage, and I think that, exhausted though I had recently felt, I now did such swimming as I had never done before.

Ten minutes more, I was rapidly nearing the light, when to my dismay, it suddenly vanished. My heart sank again; my strength was fast leaving me, and I was about to go down with a half uttered prayer on my lips, when my feet touched the pebbly bottom, and I found myself in shallow water. I stood up, and with a tottering step, waded out and found myself on shore. I crawled up a steep and muddy bank and for a few minutes lay down almost helpless.

The rain had abated somewhat, tho' the darkness had not, but presently a flash of lightning revealed the whole scene to me—among other objects, a little log house, not more than fifty yards distant. I arose from the wet earth, and with trembling steps went staggering toward the house. Another kindly flash of lightning guided me to the door, at which I knocked without hesitation.

"Who's there?" came from within.

"My name is M'Cann," I replied. "I live at New Geneva, and am mate of the Merry. I fell off, and have just swam ashore."

"But what was the steamboat doing on Cheat river?" asked the man of the house, striking a light.

"Cheat river!" I exclaimed. "We haven't been on Cheat river."

The door was cautiously opened, and the farmer appeared, with a candle in one hand and a gun in the other.

"Oh, come in," he said, as he recognized me (for he had seen me before,) "what's all this?"

I tottered in and fell to the floor exhausted. I must have been a picture to look at with my wet and muddy clothes, hair disordered, and without hat or coat.

"Dear me, I presently heard him say in a low tone to his wife, who came in from an adjoining room, "I've often heard he drank too much, poor feller, but I never know'd he got on such terrible 'uns as this."

But I soon convinced them that I was not on a "terrible 'un." A roaring wood fire was started in the huge fire place, and some coffee made for me, which I drank, and found myself materially revived.

Then I told my story.

Mr. Davis' house stood on the right bank of the Cheat river, a mile from its junction with the Monongahela; and it began to appear to mind—and such was the fact—that after having swam a couple of miles down the Monongahela, I had varied the exercise, in the blind night, by swimming a mile up the Cheat river, and against a strong current. I presume that I had first decried the light shining from Mr. Davis' window while still floating in the Monongahela at the mouth of its tributary.

Such was my swim for life.

Not long after I had been pushed from the deck of the Merry she ran aground, as I afterwards learned, and stuck till morning. M'Cutchin, the malevolent deck passenger, thinking it a good opportunity to escape, attempted to leap ashore; but the boat was not so near the shore as he supposed, and he landed in the water, and was soon carried beyond his depth by the swift current. Not being such a swimmer as the man he had endeavored to murder on that dark night, he soon sank beneath the muddy torrent—and his body was found a few days afterwards a short distance below Brownsville.

☞ The "Sunday Afternoon" says: One of the most remarkable things in human nature is the willingness of women to sacrifice a girl's life for the chance of saving the morals of a scapegrace man. If a pious mother can only marry her Beelzebub to some good, religious girl, the chance of his reformation is greatly increased. The girl is neither here nor there, when one considers the necessity for saving the dear Beelzebub.

A Woman's Thumb.

THE female thumb is said to be an important index of the female character. Women with large thumbs are held by phrenologists, physiognomists, etc., to be more than ordinarily intelligent—what are called "sensible women," while women with small thumbs are regarded as "romantic."

According to certain authors, who profess to have been observers, a woman's hand is more indicative of a woman's character than her face, as the latter is to a certian extent under the control of temporary emotions, or of the will, whereas the former is a fact which exists for any one who understands it to profit by. Consequently a few hints about the proper reading of a woman's hand may be very useful to certain of our readers, especially married men, or men contemplating matrimony.

Women with square hands and small thumbs are said to make good housewives and gentle wives. These sort of women will make any man happy who is fortunate enough to win them. They are not at all romantic, but they are what is better—thoroughly domestic. Women with very large thumbs have a "temper" of their own, and gennerally a long tongue.

There is a hint in this to a lover. Let him, the first time he seizes hold of his mistress' hand, examine under some pretext or another her thumb; and if it be large let him make up his mind that as soon as he becomes a married man he will have to be a good boy, or else there will be the very deuce to pay.

Again, if a young man finds that his ladly-love has a large palm, with cone-shaped fingers and a large thumb, let him thank his stars, for in that case she is susceptible to tenderness, readily flattered, easily talked into or talked out of anything, and can be a readily managed partner. But if she is a woman with a square hand, well proportioned, and only a tolerably developed thumb, why then she is either one of the two distinct classes of woman—she is either a practical female who will "stand no nonsense," or she is a "designing female." She is a woman who cannot be duped, or a woman who will dupe him.

A Darkey's Opinion.

Pompey hired himself as a laborer to a farmer who was very fond of laying out the work so that there was always something pressing when Sunday arrived. When haytime came, he would sometimes cut down a lot of grass on Saturday that would require turning over in the morning.

One Sunday at daybreak, he called his new servant.

"Now, Pompey, get up!"

"Don't want to get up. Sunday morning, massa."

"But you must get up and get your breakfast!"

"Don't want no breakfast. Sunday morning, massa: rather lay a-bed than breakast, massa."

"But get up and help to shake the hay."

"Don't do work on Sundays, massa. I didn't hire out to work Sundays."

"Oh! but this is a work of necessity."

"Don't see dat, massa, at all; don't see dat; it's no work of necessity."

"Well, but would you not pull your ox out of the pit on the Sabbath day?"

"Oh, yes, massa! oh yes; but not if I shoved him in on Saturday night."

Horrible Death.

A singularly painful experience has been that of a burglar who has been emulating the exploits of Mr. Peace, at Sheffield. The plunder-seeker determined to enter a pawn broker's shop by the chimney. Descending to within six feet of the fire place, he stuck fast, and despite all his efforts, utterly failed to get free.

For four long hours he struggled in vain, and then the servant of the pawnbroker came and lighted the fire below. Then the roasting of the burglar began. What kind of sensation the robber experienced we are left to imagine; all that is known is that after three hours of torture, his groans became so audible that the proprietor of the place heard them, and, sending for the police and a builder, did the best he could to extricate the thief. This proved, however, to be no easy matter, for before the entrapped rascal could be rescued the brickwork had to be taken down. When found the miserable man was imbedded firmly, his mouth and eyes were filled with soot, and he was dreadfully scorched so that he died immediately after he was taken out.

A Great Enterprise.

The Hop Bitters Manufacturing Company is one of Rochester's greatest business enterprises. Their Hop Bitters have reached a sale beyond all precedent, having from their intrinsic value found their way into almost every household in the land.—*Graphic.*