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The Lure of the Labrador Wild

Dillon Wallace

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THE LURE OF THE LABRADOR WILD

**The Story of the Exploring Expedition
Conducted by Leonidas Hubbard, Jr.**

by

Dillon Wallace

L.H.

Here, b'y, is the issue of our plighted troth.
Why I am the scribe and not you, God knows:
and you have his secret.

D.W.

"There's no sense in going further – it's the edge of cultivation,"
So they said, and I believed it..
Till a voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable changes
On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated – so:
"Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the
Ranges –
Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you.
Go!"
– Kipling's "The Explorer."

PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION

Three years have passed since Hubbard and I began that fateful journey into Labrador of which this volume is a record. A little more than a year has elapsed since the first edition of our record made its appearance from the press. Meanwhile I have looked behind the ranges. Grand Lake has again borne me upon the bosom of her broad, deep waters into the great lonely wilderness that lured Hubbard to his death.

It was a day in June last year that found me again at the point where some inexplicable fate had led Hubbard and me to pass unexplored the bay that here extends northward to receive the Nascaupee River, along which lay the trail for which we were searching, and induced us to take, instead, that other course that carried us into the dreadful Susan Valley. How vividly I saw it all again—Hubbard resting on his paddle, and then rising up for a better view, as he said, "Oh, that's just a bay and it isn't worth while to take time to explore it. The river comes in up here at the end of the lake. They all said it was at the end of the lake." And we said, "Yes, it is at the end of the lake; they all said so," and went on, for that was before we knew—Hubbard never knew. A perceptible current, a questioning word, the turn of a paddle would have set us right. No current was noticed, no word was spoken, and the paddle sent us straight toward those blue hills yonder, where Suffering and Starvation and Death were hidden and waiting for us. How little we expected to meet these grim strangers then. That July day came back to me as if it had been but the day before. I believe I never missed Hubbard so much as at that moment. I never felt his loss so keenly as then. An almost irresistible impulse seized me to go on into our old trail and hurry to the camp where we had left him that stormy October day and find if he were not after all still there and waiting for me to come back to him.

Reluctantly I thrust the impulse aside. Armed with the experience gained upon the former expedition, and information gleaned from the Indians, I turned into the northern trail, through the valley of the Nascaupee, and began a journey that carried me eight hundred miles to the storm-swept shores of Ungava Bay, and two thousand miles with dog sledge over endless reaches of ice and snow.

While I struggled northward with new companions, Hubbard was always with me to inspire and urge me on. Often and often at night as I sat, disheartened and alone, by the camp-fire while the rain beat down and the wind soughed drearily through the fir-tops, he would come and sit by me as of old, and as of old I would hear his gentle voice and his words of encouragement. Then I would go to my blankets with new courage, resolved to fight the battle to the end.

One day our camp was pitched upon the shores of Lake Michikamau, and as I looked for the first time upon the waters of the lake which Hubbard had so longed to reach, I lived over again that day when he returned from his climb to the summit of the great grey mountain which now bears his name, with the joyful news that there just behind the ridge lay Michikamau; then the weary wind-bound days that followed and the race down the trail with all its horrors; our kiss and embrace; and my final glimpse of the little white tent in which he lay.

And so with the remembrance of his example as an inspiration the work was finished by me, the survivor, but to Hubbard and to his memory belong the credit and the honour, for it was only through my training with him and this inspiration received from him that I was able to carry to successful completion what he had so well planned.

My publishers inform me that five editions of our story have found their way into the hearts and homes of those who cannot visit the great northern wilds, but who love to hear about them. I shall avail myself of this opportunity to thank these readers for the kindly manner in which they have received the book. This reception of it has been especially gratifying to me because of the lack of confidence I had in my ability to tell the story of Hubbard's life and glorious death as I felt it should be told.

The writing of the story was a work of love. I wished not only to fulfil my last promise to my friend to write the narrative of his expedition, but I wished also to create a sort of memorial to him. I wanted the world to know Hubbard as he was, his noble character, his devotion to duty, and his faith, so strong that not even the severe hardships he endured in the desolate north, ending only with

death, could make him for a moment forget the simple truths that he learned from his mother on the farm in old Michigan. I wanted the young men to know these things, for they could not fail to be the better for having learned them; and I wanted the mothers to know what men mothers can make of their sons.

An unknown friend writes me, "To dare and die so divinely and leave such a record is to be transfigured on a mountain top, a master symbol to all men of cloud-robed human victory, angel-attended by reverence and peace...a gospel of nobleness and faith." And another, "How truly 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.' Mr. Hubbard went to find Lake Michikamau; he failed, but God spelled 'Success' of 'Failure,' and you brought back a message which should be an inspiration to every soul to whom it comes. The life given up in the wilds of Labrador was not in vain." Space will not permit me to quote further from the many letters of this kind that have come to me from all over the United States and Canada, but they tell me that others have learned to know Hubbard as he was and as his friends knew him, and that our book has not failed of its purpose.

The storms of two winters have held in their icy grasp the bleak land in which he yielded up his life for a principle, and the flowers of two summers have blossomed upon his grave, overlooking the Hudson. But it was only his body that we buried there. His spirit still lives, for his was a spirit too big and noble to be bound by the narrow confines of a grave. His life is an example of religious faith, strong principle, and daring bravery that will not be forgotten by the young men of our land.

New York, June 1, 1906. D. W.

PREFACE TO ELEVENTH EDITION

As the eleventh edition of this book goes to press, the opportunity is given for a brief prefatory description of a pilgrimage to Hubbard's death-place in the Labrador Wilderness from which I have just returned.

For many years it had been my wish to re-visit the scene of those tragic experiences, and to permanently and appropriately mark the spot where Hubbard so heroically gave up his life a decade ago. Judge William J. Malone, of Bristol, Connecticut, one of the many men who have received inspiration from Hubbard's noble example, was my companion, and at Northwest River we were joined by Gilbert Blake, who was a member of the party of four trappers who rescued me in 1903. We carried with us a beautiful bronze tablet, which was designed to be placed upon the boulder before which Hubbard's tent was pitched when he died. Wrapped with the tablet was a little silk flag and Hubbard's college pennant, lovingly contributed by his sister, Mrs. Arthur C. Williams, of Detroit, Michigan. These were to be draped upon the tablet when erected and left with it in the wilderness. Our plan was to ascend and explore the lower Beaver River to the point where Hubbard discovered it, and where, in 1903, we abandoned our canoe to re-cross to the Susan River Valley a few days before his death. Here it was our expectation to follow the old Hubbard portage trail to Goose Creek and thence down Goose Creek to the Susan River.

Of our journey up the Beaver River suffice it to say that we met with many adventures, but proceeded without serious accident until one day our canoe was submerged in heavy rapids, the lashings gave way, and to our consternation the precious tablet, together with the flag and pennant, was lost in the flood. After two days' vain effort to recover the tablet and flags we continued on the river until at length further ascent seemed unpractical. From this point, with packs on our backs, we made a difficult foot journey of several days to the Susan River valley.

I shall not attempt to describe my feelings when at last we came into the valley where Hubbard died and where we had suffered so much. Man changes with the fleeting years and a civilized world changes, but the untrod wilderness never changes. Before us lay the same rushing river I remembered so well, the same starved forest of spruce with its pungent odor, and there was the clump of spruce trees in which our last camp was pitched just as I had seen it last. Malone and Blake remained by the river bank while I approached alone what to me was sacred ground. Time fell away, and I believe that I expected, when I stepped beside the boulder before which his

tent was pitched when we said our last farewell on that dismal October morning ten years ago, to hear Hubbard's voice welcome me as of old. The charred wood of his camp fire might, from all appearances, have but just grown cold. The boughs, which I had broken and arranged for his couch, and upon which he slept and died, were withered but undisturbed, and I could identify exactly the spot where he lay. There were his worn old moccasins, and one of the leather mittens, which, in his last entry in his diary he said he might eat if need be. Near the dead fire were some spoons and other small articles, as we had left them, and scattered about were remnants of our tent.

Lovingly we put ourselves to our task. Judge Malone, with a brush improvised from Blake's stiff hair, and with white lead intended for canoe repairs, lettered upon the boulder this inscription:

**Leonidas Hubbard, Jr.,
Intrepid Explorer
And
Practical Christian
Died Here
Oct. 18, 1903.
"Whither I go ye know,
and the way ye know."
John XIV. — 4.**

Then with hammer and chisel I cut the inscription deep into the rock, and we filled the letters with white lead to counteract the effect of the elements.

It was dark when the work was finished, and by candlelight, beneath the stars, I read, from the same Testament I used in 1903, the fourteenth of John and the thirteenth of First Corinthians, the chapters which I read to Hubbard on the morning of our parting. Judge Malone read the Fiftieth Psalm. We sang some hymns and then knelt about the withered couch of boughs, each of us three with the feeling that Hubbard was very close to us.

In early morning we shouldered our packs again, and with a final look at Hubbard's last camp, turned back to the valley of the Beaver and new adventures.

DILLON WALLACE.

Beacon-on-the-Hudson, November eighteenth, 1913.

CONTENTS

- I. The Object of the Expedition
- II. Off at Last
- III. On the Edge of the Wilderness
- IV. The Plunge into the Wild
- V. Still in the Awful Valley
- VI. Searching for a Trail
- VII. On a Real River at Last
- VIII. "Michikamau or Bust!"
- IX. And There was Michikamau!
- X. Prisoners of the Wind
- XI. We Give It Up
- XII. The Beginning of the Retreat
- XIII. Hubbard's Grit
- XIV. Back Through the Ranges
- XV. George's Dream
- XVI. At the Last Camp
- XVII. The Parting
- XVIII. Wandering Alone
- XIX. The Kindness of the Breeds
- XX. How Hubbard Went to Sleep
- XXI. From Out the Wild
- XXII. A Strange Funeral Procession
- XXIII. Over the Ice
- XXIV. Hubbard's Message

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D. W.

New York, January, 1905.

THE LURE OF THE LABRADOR WILD

I. THE OBJECT OF THE EXPEDITION

"How would you like to go to Labrador, Wallace?" It was a snowy night in late November, 1901, that my friend, Leonidas Hubbard, Jr., asked me this question. All day he and I had been tramping through the snow among the Shawangunk Mountains in southern New York, and when the shades of evening fell we had built a lean-to of boughs to shelter us from the storm. Now that we had eaten our supper of bread and bacon, washed down with tea, we lay before our roaring campfire, luxuriating in its glow and warmth.

Hubbard's question was put to me so abruptly that it rather startled me.

"Labrador!" I exclaimed. "Now where in the world is Labrador?"

Of course I knew it was somewhere in the north-eastern part of the continent; but so many years had passed since I laid away my old school geography that its exact situation had escaped my memory, and the only other knowledge I had retained of the country was a confused sense of its being a sort of Arctic wilderness. Hubbard proceeded to enlighten me, by tracing with his pencil, on the fly-leaf of his notebook, an outline map of the peninsula.

"Very interesting," I commented. "But why do you wish to go there?"

"Man," he replied, "don't you realise it's about the only part of the continent that hasn't been explored? As a matter of fact, there isn't much more known of the interior of Labrador now than when Cabot discovered the coast more than four hundred years ago." He jumped up to throw more wood on the fire. "Think of it, Wallace!" he went on, "A great unknown land right near home, as wild and primitive to-day as it has always been! I want to see it. I want to get into a really wild country and have some of the experiences of the old fellows who explored and opened up the country where we are now."

Resuming his place by the blazing logs, Hubbard unfolded to me his plan, then vague and in the rough, of exploring a part of the unknown eastern end of the peninsula. Of trips such as this he had been dreaming since childhood. When a mere boy on his father's farm in Michigan, he had lain for hours out under the trees in the orchard poring over a map of Canada and making imaginary journeys into the unexplored. Boone and Crockett were his heroes, and sometimes he was so affected by the tales of their adventures that he must needs himself steal away to the woods and camp out for two or three days.

It was at this period that he resolved to head some day an exploring expedition of his own, and this resolution he forgot neither while a student nor while serving as a newspaper man in Detroit and New York. At length, through a connection he made with a magazine devoted to out-of-door life, he was able to make several long trips into the wild. Among other places, he visited the Hudson Bay region, and once penetrated to the winter hunting ground of the Mountaineer Indians, north of Lake St. John, in southern Labrador. These trips, however, failed to satisfy him; his ambition was to reach a region where no white man had preceded him. Now, at the age of twenty-nine, he believed that his ambition was about to be realised.

"It's always the way, Wallace," he said; "when a fellow starts on a long trail, he's never willing to quit. It'll be the same with you if you go with me to Labrador. You'll say each trip will be the last, but when you come home you'll hear the voice of the wilderness calling you to return, and it will lure you away again and again. I thought my Lake St. John trip was something, but while there I stood at the portals of the unknown, and it brought back stronger than ever the old longing to make discoveries, so that now the walls of the city seem to me a prison and I simply must get away."

My friend's enthusiasm was contagious. It had never previously occurred to me to undertake the game of exploration; but, like most American boys, I had had youthful dreams of going into a great wild country, even as my forefathers had gone, and Hubbard's talk brought back the old juvenile love of adventure. That night before we lay down to sleep I said: "Hubbard, I'll go with you." And so the