

A MORNING AMONG MOOSE.

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Some months ago, when on an official tour in New Brunswick, a very unusual opportunity offered itself of seeing a small herd of Moose under conditions resembling in many respects those characteristic of the wild state.

Everybody is familiar with the magnificent head of our largest native mammal, and the imposing palmate horns are a common ornament about our houses and hotels ; but there are comparatively few people who have ever beheld a living moose, and fewer still who have seen this noble animal in his native haunts. It was with no ordinary pleasure that, quite unexpectedly, I found myself one morning with a few hours at liberty, and was thus enabled in company with a friend, to take a drive of four or five miles with the view of seeing the moose. We reached the small tract of forest country where, we had been informed, the moose were located, and having found the owner, he most willingly volunteered to show us his splendid captives. The personage in question was a quaint character—a veritable Robinson Crusoe in appearance and habits of life.

From his log hut he led us along a tangled forest path, through an extensive wooded area covering some hundreds of acres securely fenced in. We soon saw signs of moose. All the young shoots of certain trees had been nibbled off, or rather had been sharply nipped off, as if by a sharp, clean bite. In some places hardly a young leaf or terminal bud could be seen. The moose, as is well known, prefers above all things the young green tender sprigs on the branches of certain trees. We also noticed on the path at several points dung traces, quite unlike those of the cow, horse or sheep, being in fact olive brown ovoid bodies, not unlike nut mugs in shape and size. The trees now became thicker and the foliage more dense, and our guide warned us to walk more slowly and carefully, and to avoid treading on dead dry branches. Though partly domesticated the moose, we were informed, never wholly

loses the fear produced by unexpected sounds, and moves off in alarm on hearing the cracking of dry branches in the distance, or other warning noises. We were further warned that if we suddenly came upon one of the huge "pets" of which we were in quest, it was advisable to dodge immediately behind a tree. "Always keep a tree between you and the moose," said our guide, for the instinctive habit of suddenly striking out with his ponderous fore-foot is never got rid of. So powerful is the stroke of the sharp cloven hoof that, like the slash of a sabre, its effect is almost always fatal, as many a hunter has found to his cost. As we advanced slowly and noiselessly our guide called in a soothing tone, "Coom," "Coom," "Coom," just as a dairy maid calls her favourite calf, and ere long signalled to us to stop. Then our guide putting up his hand pointed to a small clear space in the midst of large trees. Lo! under the leafy roof we could just distinguish two large brown masses on the ground. There were a couple of moose demurely chewing the cud in this shady retreat! The colour of the hide, a dark chocolate, so perfectly harmonized with the shadows and tree trunks around, that the outlines of the two animals could be discerned only with difficulty. Both had their heads turned away from us, and the back alone was visible, much of the body being hidden by the intervening undergrowth. The explanation of the peculiar position in which moose rest during the day is easy. The back is always turned towards the direction whence the wind blows. As the wind changes the moose change their position. On this occasion the wind was from the north, and we were moving south, so that a very slight wind blew towards them from us. The moose is endowed with a sense of smell so acute, that anything approaching from the windward side is at once detected by them without the aid of eyes or ears. The head being turned in the opposite direction, the eyes and ears are thus able to detect any approaching danger from that quarter. Such is the universal habit of the moose. He detects danger by scent in one direction, by sight and sound in the other direction. With his back turned towards the wind the moose is able to detect danger from whatever quarter it comes. This was soon demonstrated, for, as we came nearer, one of them rose quickly and turned round in our direction, eyeing us sullenly. He was a magnifi-

cent animal with widespreading antlers and a height at the shoulders of at least seven feet. His stout limbs of a pale ochre colour, like the trunks of young trees, his sides deep brown, like faded foliage in shadow, his head and back much paler and glistening as if frosted, resembling a mass of leaves with the light glancing across them. We were able to view at eight or ten yards distance this kingly quadruped, always remembering the precaution to keep within reach of a stout cedar or beech. There was no difficulty in noting the peculiar features of the living moose so utterly unlike the crude and unshapely stuffed skins which we usually see. The short deep body, the monstrous towering shoulders surmounted by a bushy erect mane, the thick abbreviated neck, the long and ponderous head, and, above all, the gracefully curved snout, with pendulous upper lip, almost as mobile as the elephant's trunk, all combined to give a peculiar weird grandeur to the animal. It is impossible in a museum specimen to produce certain graceful features in this uncouth giant. Thus the soft roundness of the ears is always lost, and the elegant curve of the slit-like nostrils it is impossible to preserve after death. The strange, somewhat "lack-lustre" eye, to adopt Shakespeare's expression, is ludicrously small for so large a creature. It is, it must be admitted, a wicked eye, very unlike the large liquid eye in most of the deer tribe, nor has it the benignant intelligence of that organ which we see in the elephant, or the inoffensive inquiring look of the whale's eye, as viewed at half a dozen yards' distance from a fishing boat: but it resembles rather the suspicious ill-natured eye of the bull or the rhinoceros. The eye in fact is dull, dark, and with hardly any indication of white. From the throat of the bull hung the elegant tail-like "bell," a bushy appendage, which reaches its full development only when the creature is adult. The huge trumpet-like ears are extremely bushy, similar to the condition of the brown bear, and as mobile and rapid in movement as the ears of a horse.

The living moose combines many of the general features of the horse, the deer, and the pig. Indeed the young calf-moose is strikingly pig-like in appearance, on account of the long snout, the large pointed ears, small eyes and sloping back.

Our guide assured us that he had captured, when practically full grown, the splendid bull-moose which we had the privilege of seeing, and had brought it from the wild Quebec country, north of the Lower St. Lawrence to New Brunswick on a rudely constructed raft—a marvellous instance of a hunter's skill, perseverance and success.

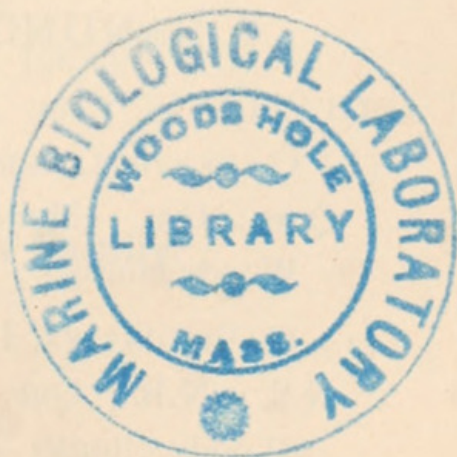
Taking a stout maple branch in his right hand he walked up to his colossal pets, holding out a piece of turnip as a dainty bribe, and uttering his cry "Coom," "Coom." The cow moose rose and readily took the piece offered, but the bull was more reserved and only after much persuasion condescended to accept a fragment of the turnip, leisurely stretching out his head and seizing the piece with his elastic lips after the manner of a horse.

Our guide patted the creature familiarly, and seemed to take no such precautions as would be necessary for a stranger to take. It is true he was cautious in approaching the bull at first: but the animal was clearly semi-domesticated. When the cow rose, the absence of horns and of the bell, and the meagre character of the upright mane took away from her appearance. Her size too is rather smaller, and the ears appear, if anything, larger and more prominent: but the absence of horns may account for that. She lacks the impressive grandeur of the bull. Soon a small calf-moose, about as large as a 12-hands pony, appeared in response to repeated calls. It was about a year old and appeared quite tame, pushing its huge nose under the armpits of its master, and exhibiting signs of affection. The lips are far less pendulous and mobile in the calf. A further walk of a quarter of a mile enabled us to see another cow, whose ears were crumpled and shorn at the tip. This animal when newly captured, and tied about the neck, head and ears with ropes, had been frost-bitten, and had lost the tips of the last-named organs. Finally a fifth moose was seen, a calf born in captivity, and so tame as to jump over a fence at the command of its master. It was a surprise to see a heavy, uncouth, almost unwieldy, animal such as this, take a fence four or five feet high with greater lightness and ease than a hunter. Our guide not being pleased with his juvenile pet's performance, administered one or two blows with his cudgel, whereupon the creature cried in a sharp, ill-natured manner,

not unlike the cry of a horse in pain or anger, but less loud and strong. Indeed the sound was ludicrously weak and shrill for a quadruped of such large dimensions. This feeble, ill-natured cry resembled strongly the weak cry of the monstrous rhinoceros, the voice of which is so ill-proportioned to the animal's size.

It was interesting to note that our departure was watched with the utmost keenness and suspicion by the moose. They followed us with ears and eyes, turning round when necessary to observe our movements as we hurried away. It was an impressive spectacle to see in the distance the two massive captives standing in their leafy retreat, the pale grey horns of the bull rising majestically amongst the branches.

Cases of tame moose are familiar enough in Canada : but it is a rare experience, except to the hunter, to see a herd of moose under conditions so resembling the wild state. One gained some notion of their appearance in the forest. One sad reflection only could not be avoided, arising from the probability that in spite of laudable steps to preserve these noble monarchs of our Canadian forests, the cruelty and barbarity of man is almost certain ere long to exterminate them. Not merely pot-hunters, who slay the helpless mother-moose just before and after bearing her young, but professed sportsmen, have no mercy. Their relentless efforts may ere long deprive our Dominion of the moose in our forests as they have already robbed us of the royal buffalo on our prairies, unless severe and righteous measures be effectively carried out.





Prince, Edward Ernest. 1895. "A Morning among Moose." *The Ottawa naturalist* 9(5), 103–107.

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