

THE CRUISE OF THE CANOE CLUB

BY W. L. ALDEN

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THE CRUISE OF THE CANOE CLUB



“DON’T THINK FOR A MOMENT OF GETTING ANY OTHER CANOE.”

CHAPTER I.

IT is a very easy thing for four boys to make up their minds to get four canoes and to go on a canoe cruise, but it is not always so easy to carry out such a project—as Charley Smith, Tom Schuyler, Harry Wilson, and Joe Sharpe discovered.

Canoes cost money; and though some canoes cost more than others, it is impossible to buy a new wooden canoe of an approved model for less than seventy-five dollars. Four canoes, at seventy-five dollars each, would cost altogether three hundred dollars. As the entire amount of pocket-money in the possession of the boys was only seven dollars and thirteen cents, it was clear that they were not precisely in a position to buy canoes.

There was Harry's uncle, who had already furnished his nephew and his young comrades first with a row-boat, and then with a sail-boat. Even a benevolent uncle deserves some mercy, and the boys agreed that it would never do to ask Uncle John to spend three hundred dollars in canoes for them. "The most we can ask of him," said Charley Smith, "is to let us sell the *Ghost* and use the money to help pay for canoes."

Now, the *Ghost*, in which the boys had made a cruise along the south shore of Long Island, was a very nice sail-boat, but it was improbable that any one would be found who would be willing to give more than two hundred dollars for her. There would still be a hundred dollars wanting, and the prospect of finding that sum seemed very small.

“If we could only have stayed on that water-logged brig and brought her into port we should have made lots of money,” said Tom. “The captain of the schooner that towed us home went back with a steamer and brought the brig in yesterday. Suppose we go and look at her once more?”

While cruising in the *Ghost* the boys had found an abandoned brig, which they had tried to sail into New York harbor, but they had been compelled to give up the task, and to hand her over to the captain of a schooner which towed the partly disabled *Ghost* into port. They all thought they would like to see the brig again, so they went down to Burling Slip, where she was lying, and went on board her.

The captain of the schooner met the boys on the dock. He was in excellent spirits, for the brig was loaded with valuable South American timber, and he was sure of receiving as much as ten thousand dollars from her owners. He knew very well that, while the boys had no legal right to any of the money, they had worked hard in trying to save the brig, and had been the means of putting her in his way. He happened to be an honest, generous man, and he felt very rich; so he insisted on making each of the boys a present.

The present was sealed up in an envelope, which he gave to Charley Smith, telling him not to look at its contents until after dinner—the boys having mentioned that they were all to take dinner together at Uncle John’s house. Charley put the envelope rather carelessly in his pocket; but when it was opened it was found to contain four new one-hundred-dollar bills.

It need hardly be said that the boys were delighted. They showed the money to Uncle John, who told them that they had fairly

earned it, and need feel no hesitation about accepting it. They had now money enough to buy canoes, and to pay the expenses of a canoe cruise. Mr. Schuyler, Mr. Sharpe, and Charley's guardian were consulted, and at Uncle John's request gave their consent to the canoeing scheme. The first great difficulty in the way was thus entirely removed.

"I don't know much about canoes," remarked Uncle John, when the boys asked his advice as to what kind of canoes they should get, "but I know the commodore of a canoe club. You had better go and see him, and follow his advice. I'll give you a letter of introduction to him."

No time was lost in finding the commodore, and Charley Smith explained to him that four young canoeists would like to know what was the very best kind of canoe for them to get.

The Commodore, who, in spite of his magnificent title, wasn't in the least alarming, laughed, and said, "That is a question that I've made up my mind never to try to answer. But I'll give you the names of four canoeists, each of whom uses a different variety of canoe. You go and see them, listen to what they say, believe it all, and then come back and see me, and we'll come to a decision." He then wrote four notes of introduction, gave them to the boys, and sent them away.

The first canoeist to whom the boys were referred received them with great kindness, and told them that it was fortunate they had come to him. "The canoe that you want," said he, "is the 'Rice Lake' canoe, and if you had gone to somebody else, and he had persuaded you to buy 'Rob Roy' canoes or 'Shadows,' you would have made a great mistake. The 'Rice Lake' canoe is nearly flat-

bottomed, and so stiff that there is no danger that you will capsize her. She paddles easily, and sails faster than any other canoe. She is roomy, and you can carry about twice as much in her as you can carry in a 'Rob Roy.' She has no keel, so that you can run rapids easily in her, and she is built in a peculiar way that makes it impossible for her to leak. Don't think for a moment of getting any other canoe, for if you do you will never cease to regret it."

He was such a pleasant, frank gentleman, and was so evidently earnest in what he said, that the boys at once decided to get 'Rice Lake' canoes. They did not think it worth while to make any farther inquiries; but, as they had three other notes of introduction with them, Tom Schuyler said that it would hardly do to throw them away. So they went to see the next canoeist, though without the least expectation that he would say anything that would alter their decision.

Canoeist No. 2 was as polite and enthusiastic as canoeist No. 1. "So you boys want to get canoes, do you?" said he. "Well, there is only one canoe for you to get, and that is the 'Shadow.' She paddles easily, and sails faster than any other canoe. She's not a flat-bottomed skiff, like the 'Rice Laker,' that will spill you whenever a squall strikes her, but she has good bearings, and you can't capsize her unless you try hard. Then, she is decked all over, and you can sleep in her at night, and keep dry even in a thunder-storm; her water-tight compartments have hatches in them, so that you can stow blankets and things in them that you want to keep dry; and she has a keel, so that when you run rapids, and she strikes on a rock, she will strike on her keel instead of her planks. It isn't worth while for you to look at any other canoe, for there is no canoe except the 'Shadow' that is worth having."

“You don’t think much of the ‘Rice Lake’ canoe, then?” asked Harry.

“Why, she isn’t a civilized canoe at all,” replied the canoeist. “She is nothing but a heavy, wooden copy of the Indian birch. She hasn’t any deck, she hasn’t any water-tight compartments, and she hasn’t any keel. Whatever else you do, don’t get a ‘Rice Laker.’”

The boys thanked the advocate of the “Shadow,” and when they found themselves in the street again they wondered which of the two canoeists could be right, for each directly contradicted the other, and each seemed to be perfectly sincere. They reconsidered their decision to buy “Rice Lake” canoes, and looked forward with interest to their meeting with canoeist No. 3.

That gentleman was just as pleasant as the other two, but he did not agree with a single thing that they had said. “There are several different models of canoes,” he remarked, “but that is simply because there are ignorant people in the world. Mr. Macgregor, the father of canoeing, always uses a ‘Rob Roy’ canoe, and no man who has once been in a good ‘Rob Roy’ will ever get into any other canoe. The ‘Rob Roy’ paddles like a feather, and will outsail any other canoe. She weighs twenty pounds less than those great, lumbering canal-boats, the ‘Shadow’ and the ‘Rice Laker,’ and it don’t break your back to paddle her or to carry her round a dam. She is decked over, but her deck isn’t all cut up with hatches. There’s plenty of room to sleep in her, and her water-tight compartments are what they pretend to be—not a couple of leaky boxes stuffed full of blankets.”

“We have been advised,” began Charley, “to get ‘Shadows’ or ‘Rice’—”

“Don’t you do it,” interrupted the canoeist. “It’s lucky for you that you came to see me. It is a perfect shame for people to try to induce you to waste your money on worthless canoes. Mind you get ‘Rob Roys,’ and nothing else. Other canoes don’t deserve the name. They are schooners, or scows, or canal-boats, but the ‘Rob Roy’ is a genuine canoe.”

“Now for the last canoeist on the list!” exclaimed Harry as the boys left the office of canoeist No. 3. “I wonder what sort of a canoe he uses?”

“I’m glad there is only one more of them for us to see,” said Joe. “The Commodore told us to believe all they said, and I’m trying my best to do it, but it’s the hardest job I ever tried.”

The fourth canoeist was, on the whole, the most courteous and amiable of the four. He begged his young friends to pay no attention to those who recommended wooden canoes, no matter what model they might be. “Canvas,” said he, “is the only thing that a canoe should be built of. It is light and strong, and if you knock a hole in it you can mend it in five minutes. If you want to spend a great deal of money and own a yacht that is too small to sail in with comfort and too clumsy to be paddled, buy a wooden canoe; but if you really want to cruise, you will, of course, get canvas canoes.”

“We have been advised to get ‘Rice Lakers,’ ‘Shadows,’ and ‘Rob Roys,’” said Tom, “and we did not know until now that there was such a thing as a canvas canoe.”

“It is very sad,” replied the canoeist, “that people should take pleasure in giving such advice. They must know better. However, the subject is a painful one, and we won’t discuss it. Take my

advice, my dear boys, and get canvas canoes. All the really good canoeists in the country would say the same thing to you.”

“We must try,” said Joe, as the boys walked back to the Commodore’s office, “to believe that the ‘Rice Laker,’ the ‘Shadow,’ the ‘Rob Roy,’ and the canvas canoe is the best one ever built. It seems to me something like believing that four and one are just the same. Perhaps you fellows can do it, but I’m not strong enough to believe as much as that all at one time.”

The Commodore smiled when the boys entered his office for the second time and said, “Well, of course you’ve found out what is the best canoe, and know just what you want to buy?”

“We’ve seen four men,” replied Harry, “and each one says that the canoe that he recommends is the only good one, and that all the others are good for nothing.”

“I might have sent you to four other men, and they would have told you of four other canoes, each of which is the best in existence. But perhaps you have already heard enough to make up your minds.”

“We’re farther from making up our minds than ever,” said Harry. “I do wish you would tell us what kind of canoe is really the best.”

“The truth is,” said the Commodore, “that there isn’t much to choose among the different models of canoes, and you’ll find that every canoeist is honestly certain that he has the best one. Now, I won’t undertake to select canoes for you, though I will suggest that a light ‘Rob Roy’ would probably be a good choice for the smallest of you boys. Why don’t you try all four of the canoes that have just been recommended to you? Then, if you cruise together, you can

perhaps find out if any one of them is really better than the others. I will give you the names of three or four builders, all of whom build good, strong boats.”

This advice pleased the boys, and they resolved to accept it. That evening they all met at Harry’s home and decided what canoes they would get. Harry determined to get a “Shadow,” Tom a “Rice Laker,” Charley a canvas canoe, and Joe a “Rob Roy;” and the next morning orders for the four canoes were mailed to the builders whom the Commodore had recommended.

CHAPTER II.

IT was some time before the canoes were ready, and in the mean time the young canoeists met with a new difficulty. The canoe-builders wrote to them wishing to know how they would have the canoes rigged. It had never occurred to the boys that there was more than one rig used on canoes, and of course they did not know how to answer the builders' question. So they went to the Commodore and told him their difficulty.

"I might do," said he, "just as I did when I told you to go and ask four different canoeists which is the best canoe; but I won't put you to that trouble. I rather like the Lord Ross lateen rig better than any other, but, as you are going to try different kinds of canoes, it would be a good idea for you to try different rigs. For example, have your 'Rob Roy' rigged with lateen-sails; rig the 'Shadow' with a balance-lug, the 'Rice Laker' with a 'sharpie' leg-of-mutton, and the canvas canoe with the standing lug. Each one of these rigs has its advocates, who will prove to you that it is better than any other, and you can't do better than try them all. Only be sure to tell the builders that every canoe must have two masts, and neither of the two sails must be too big to be safely handled."

"How does it happen that every canoeist is so perfectly certain that he has the best canoe and the best rig in existence?" asked Tom.

"That is one of the great merits of canoeing," replied the Commodore. "It makes every man contented, and develops in him decision of character. I've known a canoeist to have a canoe so

leaky that he spent half his time bailing her out, and rigged in such a way that she would neither sail nor do anything in a breeze except capsize; and yet he was never tired of boasting of the immense superiority of his canoe. There's a great deal of suffering in canoeing," continued the Commodore, musingly, "but its effects on the moral character are priceless. My dear boys, you have no idea how happy and contented you will be when you are wet through, cramped and blistered, and have to go into camp in a heavy rain, and without any supper except dry crackers."

While the boys were waiting for their canoes they read all the books on canoeing that they could find, and searched through a dozen volumes of the London *Field*, which they found in Uncle John's library, for articles and letters on canoeing. They thus learned a good deal, and when their canoes arrived they were able to discuss their respective merits with a good degree of intelligence.

The "Rob Roy" and the "Shadow" were built with white cedar planks and Spanish cedar decks. They shone with varnish, and their nickel-plated metal-work was as bright as silver. They were decidedly the prettiest of the four canoes, and it would have been very difficult to decide which was the prettier of the two. The "Rice Laker" was built without timbers or a keel, and was formed of two thicknesses of planking riveted together, the grain of the inner planking crossing that of the outer planking at right angles. She looked strong and serviceable, and before Tom had been in possession of her half an hour he was insisting that she was much the handiest canoe of the squadron, simply because she had no deck. The outside planks were of butternut; but they were pierced with so many rivets that they did not present so elegant an appearance as did the planks of the "Shadow" and the "Rob Roy." The canvas canoe consisted of a wooden skeleton-frame, covered

and decked with painted canvas. She was very much the same in model as the "Shadow;" and though she seemed ugly in comparison with her varnished sisters, Charley claimed that he would get more comfort out of his canoe than the other boys would out of theirs, for the reason that scratches that would spoil the beauty of the varnished wood could not seriously injure the painted canvas. Thus each boy was quite contented, and asserted that he would not change canoes with anybody. They were equally well contented with the way in which their canoes were rigged, and they no longer wondered at the confident way in which the canoeists to whom the Commodore had introduced them spoke of the merits of their respective boats.

Of course the subject of names for the canoes had been settled long before the canoes arrived. Joe had named his "Rob Roy" the *Dawn*; Harry's canoe was the *Sunshine*; Tom's the *Twilight*; and Charley's the *Midnight*. The last name did not seem particularly appropriate to a canoe, but it was in keeping with the other names, and, as the canoe was painted black, it might have been supposed to have some reference to her color.

The boys had intended to join the American Canoe Association, but Uncle John suggested that they would do well to make a cruise, and to become real canoeists, before asking for admission to the association. They then decided to form a canoe club of their own, which they did; and Harry was elected the first Commodore of the Columbian Canoe Club, the flag of which was a pointed burgee of blue silk, with a white paddle worked upon it. Each canoe carried its private signal in addition to the club flag, and bore its name in gilt letters on a blue ground on each bow.

Where to cruise was a question which was decided and reconsidered half a dozen times. From the books which they had read the boys had learned that there is, if anything, more fun in cruising on a narrow stream than in sailing on broad rivers; that running rapids is a delightful sport, and that streams should always be descended instead of ascended in a canoe. They, therefore, wanted to discover a narrow stream with safe and easy rapids, and also to cruise on some lake or wide river where they could test the canoes under sail and under paddle in rough water. They learned more of the geography of the Eastern States and of Canada, in searching the map for a good cruising route, than they had ever learned at school; and they finally selected a route which seemed to combine all varieties of canoeing.

The cruise was to begin at the southern end of Lake Memphremagog, in Vermont. On this lake, which is thirty miles long, the young canoeists expected to spend several days, and to learn to handle the canoes under sail. From the northern end of the lake, which is in Canada, they intended to descend its outlet, the Magog River, which is a narrow stream, emptying into the St. Francis River at Sherbrooke. From Sherbrooke the St. Francis was to be descended to the St. Lawrence, down which the canoes were to sail to Quebec. They wrote to the postmaster at Sherbrooke asking him if the Magog and the St. Francis were navigable by canoes, and when he replied that there were only one or two rapids in the Magog, which they could easily run, they were more than ever satisfied with their route.

The previous cruises that the boys had made had taught them what stores and provisions were absolutely necessary and what could be spared. Each canoe was provided with a water-proof bag to hold a blanket and dry clothes, and with a pair of small cushions stuffed

with elastic felt, a material lighter than cork, and incapable of retaining moisture. These cushions were to be used as mattresses at night, and the rubber blankets were to be placed over the canoes and used as shelter tents. Although the mattresses would have made excellent life-preservers, Uncle John presented each canoeist with a rubber life-belt, which could be buckled around the waist in a few seconds in case of danger of a capsize. Harry provided his canoe with a canvas canoe-tent, made from drawings published in the London *Field*, but the others decided not to go to the expense of making similar tents until Harry's should have been thoroughly tested.

When all was ready the blankets and stores were packed in the *Sunshine*, the cockpit of which was provided with hatches, which could be locked up, thus making the canoe serve the purpose of a trunk. The four canoes were then sent by rail to Newport, at the southern end of Lake Memphremagog, and a week later the boys followed them, carrying their paddles by hand, for the reason that, if they had been sent with the canoes and had been lost or stolen, it would have been impossible to start on the cruise until new paddles had been procured.

Newport was reached, after an all-night journey, at about two o'clock in the morning. The canoeists went straight to the freight-house to inspect the canoes. They were all there, resting on the heads of a long row of barrels, and were apparently all right. The varnish of the *Dawn* and the *Sunshine* was scratched in a few places, and the canvas canoe had a very small hole punched through her deck, as if she had been too intimate with a nail in the course of her journey. The boys were, however, well satisfied with the appearance of the boats, and so walked up to the hotel to get dinner and a supply of sandwiches, bread, and eggs for their supper.

Dinner was all ready, for, under the name of breakfast, it was waiting for the passengers of the train, which made a stop of half an hour at Newport. A band was playing on the deck of a steamer which was just about to start down the lake, and the boys displayed appetites, as they sat near the open window looking out on the beautiful landscape, which rather astonished the waiter.

A good, quiet place for launching the canoes was found, which was both shady and out of sight of the hotel. It was easy enough to carry the three empty canoes down to the shore; but the *Sunshine*, with her heavy cargo, proved too great a load, and about half-way between the freight-house and the shore she had to be laid on the ground and partly emptied. Here Joe, who tried to carry the spars and paddles of four canoes on his shoulder, found that there is nothing more exasperating than a load of sticks of different sizes. No matter how firmly he tried to hold them together, they would spread apart at every imaginable angle. Before he had gone three rods he looked like some new kind of porcupine with gigantic quills sticking out all over him. Then he began to drop things, and, stooping to pick them up, managed to trip himself and fall with a tremendous clatter. He picked himself up and made sixteen journeys between the spot where he fell and the shore of the lake, carrying only one spar at a time, and grasping that with both hands. His companions sat down on the grass and laughed to see the deliberate way in which he made his successive journeys, but Joe, with a perfectly serious face, said that he was going to get the better of those spars, no matter how much trouble it might cost him, and that he was not going to allow them to get together and play tricks on him again.

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