

# James Oliver Curwood Finds the Soul of Nature

The Killer Who Has Turned Tells  
Why He Now Fights for Wild Life

"THERE was a time when I took pride in the wideness and diversity of my killings. I was a destroyer of life. Now I am only glad that these killings ultimately brought me to a discovery which is the finest thing I have to contemplate through the rest of my existence."

Surrounded by his books, cases crowded with stuffed birds, and with more than a score of guns notched at the stocks, recording in Indian fashion the killings, James Oliver Curwood was making this confession. It was in his home at Owosso, Michigan, a growing city of approximately 15,000, not far from Lansing, the capital of the state. The early sun of spring was shimmering on the reddish brick of his residence—the earnings of many a quirk and smile in the realm of fiction. The last vestiges of winter were vanishing and children were playing marbles over the dry spots in the streets. The naked trees of the yard had not broken into spring attire, but there was a richness of air, a stench of rain-washed lands, a steaming, pulsing of earth, that were already calling Mr. Curwood, the author, to prepare for his summer trip into the wilds of Canada.

Within this home are the evidences of the life of its resident. There was his row of 24 books—three of which have headed the list of the six best sellers. Many of these have been translated into seven different languages. Here was one of the largest collections of great game photographs in America, taken from life by himself. Mr. Curwood has come to be recognized as one of the foremost authorities on matters pertaining to the Canadian Northland; he spends several months in the wilds each year traveling as far north as the Arctic coast, and he is the only American ever employed by the Canadian Government as an explanatory and descriptive writer. About him were the guns by which he had peopled the walls and the corners with stuffed beasts.

"Now I am fighting for wild life harder than I ever hunted," commented Mr. Curwood, looking toward the guns. "With them, I have left red trails to Hudson's Bay, to the Barren Lands, to the country of the Athabasca and the Great Bear, to the Arctic Ocean, to the Yukon and Alaska, and throughout British Columbia. This is not intended as a pean of triumph. It is a fact which I wish had never existed. And yet it may be that my love of nature and the wild things, at the last, is greater because of those years of reckless killing. I am inclined to believe so. In my pantheistic heart, the mounted heads in my home are no longer crowned with the grandeur of trophies, but rather with the nobility of martyrs. I love them. I am no longer their enemy, and I warm myself with the belief that they know I am fighting for them now."

"In this religion of the open, I have come to understand and gather peace from the whispering voices and even the silence of all God-loving things. I have learned to love trees."

"What is the greatest thing each state can do to aid its conservation of wild animals?" was asked as Mr. Curwood paused.

"I am not merely fighting for the conservation of wild life," replied Mr. Curwood. "It is my belief that next to God and religion the two greatest words in the languages of all the world are conservation and propagation, but of all natural resources, and especially forests. Our future, our very lives, you might say, depend on the conservation of the resources which nature has given us. We have annihilated our forests to such a point that Michigan, for instance, is now a wood-importing state, where only a short time ago it was one of the greatest timber producing states in the Union. Last year the freight bill for Michigan's imported timber alone was \$10,000,000, or sufficient to re-forest 150,000 acres of our 10,000,000 acres of burned over and waste lands. And wild life as well as the welfare of the human lives depends first of all upon our forests. Without forests our rivers will become barren and dry up, and our smaller lakes disappear. And the wheels of almost every industry will cease to move. My belief is the biggest thing a state can do toward this conserva-

JAMES OLIVER  
CURWOOD

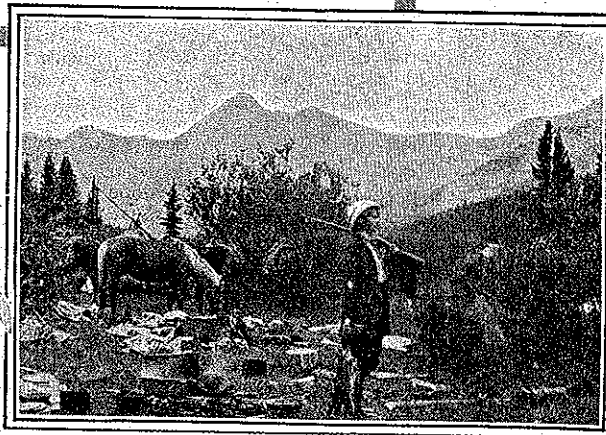


Mr. Curwood in the cabin home where he wrote "God's Country—The Trail to Happiness." Mr. Curwood built this cabin in the British Columbia mountains.

Mr. Curwood and one of his favorite dogs.



Mr. Curwood's home at Owosso, Michigan.



Mrs. James Oliver Curwood on a long and adventurous trip with her husband in the British Columbia mountains, just under the Yukon.

mas trees we are destroying an incalculable amount of timber. They should be taught to see the necessity and beauty of planting trees, and of protecting all forms of wild life which are not inimical to our welfare. They should be made to understand that if all wild life and all vegetation were taken from the earth tomorrow, the human race would within a very short time become as extinct as the Dodo and Brontosaurus. Within a few months the whole world would be a madhouse of disease, famine and death. To my mind, the most beautiful thing in the world is to teach a child not only the necessity of protecting and encouraging nature, but the beauty of it as well."

tion is to take the work of conservation and propagation out of politics.

Politics can run a government or a nation, but politics can run neither God nor our national resources. When it comes to religion and conservation the rule of politics, greed and ambition is a menace and a crime."

"Should there be courses taught in the public schools to give children a better understanding of the habits of wild animals and the necessity for conservation?" he was asked.

"Again you limit yourself to animals," he replied. "We must broaden this, also, and when we do broaden it I answer emphatically, 'Yes!' The most logical and best place to begin teaching humanity the value and necessity of conservation and propagation of our natural resources is in the public schools. Children should be made to understand that trees are as important to the welfare of this earth as they themselves are. They should be made to realize that when Michigan cuts down each year more than 1,500,000 Christ-

"What is the most striking single incident you have encountered showing the understanding of wild animals?"

"I think the most dramatic climax of my desire to let live came when I was seeking material for my book, 'The Grizzly King,' declared Mr. Curwood. "With a pack outfit of a dozen horses I had gone into the British Columbia mountains, and in a wonderful valley I came one day upon the track of a huge grizzly bear. It was the biggest track I had ever seen, and as there was no particular limit set to my time, I struck camp. For three weeks my mountain companion and I hung to that grizzly. He was a monster, weighing 1,200 pounds, if he weighed an ounce. I watched him feed. I saw him fight. I followed up his daily life until gradually there came over me an overwhelming desire to possess the skin and head of this king of the mountains for my-

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# Strange Animal Mystifies South America

## Creature May Link Past With Present

By Courtenay Savage

**T**HERE is a black shadow in South America, a shadow that has startled the natives of Southern Patagonia, a black shadow which white men think they have seen by day, a shadow that has caused 30 years of rumor, and that may reach out from the past, linking the modern world with the days before the coming of man—days when strange beasts shook the earth as they went in search of food, beasts of sixty million years ago, when the animal life of this planet was passing through the age of reptiles.

For nearly 50 years there have been periodic reports from various portions of Patagonia, generally from the southern lake region territory near the Andes, that a monster unlike any ever visioned before had been seen, first in one place, then another, and each of these reports has described a creature of such proportions that the question has been raised in men's minds as to the possibility of the fact that a Plesiosaurus, a reptile believed to exist today only in fossil form has survived the ages, and is still living in the almost inaccessible country of Southern Patagonia.

The Plesiosaurus was an amphibian monster, fossils of which have been found in various parts of the world. It was a marine reptile, living in the lakes, and along the shores, feeding on shellfish, and coming ashore only as do our seals of today, by pulling itself along with its large flippers.

These marine reptiles were very distantly related to our turtles, though in place of a shell they had a leathery hide. Their bodies were short, with two pairs of long powerful flippers. They had a short tail. The outstanding feature of the Plesiosaurus was the long flexible neck, joining a lizard-like head, armed with well-developed teeth. These reptiles were from 10 to 40 feet in length, and of two varieties, long and short necked.

The Plesiosaurus was what is termed a "bottom feeder," finding its food along the bottom of the lake, generally shellfish. An interesting point is that whenever a fossil of a Plesiosaurus has been found, inside the body cavity of the skeleton has been discovered a pile of stones. These were swallowed by the Plesiosaurus as aids to digestion, just as some of our modern birds swallow stones for the same purpose.

The latest report that might lead to the belief that a reptile of Plesiosauric proportions might be living today in the Patagonian wilderness was recently sent to Professor Onelli, director of the Buenos Aires Zoological Gardens, by Martin Sheffield, an American hunter and prospector, who, while traveling through the territory of Chubut, saw along the edge of a lake animal tracks that had beaten down the vegetation, and which were apparently made by a creature of huge proportions. A little later, far out on the lake, Mr. Sheffield saw a creature with a colossal neck, and swimming in such a way as to make it seem that the portion of the body under water was huge, and shaped like a turtle or a crocodile.

What was it? There is no animal of similar proportions known to exist in South America. Was it an illusion? Another "sea serpent" story? Professor Onelli thinks not. Mr. Sheffield is his friend, and, besides, there are years of rumors to substantiate what the American prospector had seen.

It is nearly 30 years ago since the night Professor Onelli, camping in the very region from where Mr. Sheffield's report was sent, listened to the frightened stories of the natives, who said that they had heard strange noises along the lake front, and that, growing venture-some, several of them had gone to investigate. What they had seen was a black shadow swimming away in the moonlight—a huge shadow, far greater than that caused by any man or beast they had seen before, a shadow with a neck that craned in their direction, and then disappeared. No; they had never heard the rumbling noise on the shore during the daytime, only at night. Yes; the animal was many feet long—with a very long neck. More than that they could not tell, but Professor Onelli was so impressed with the story

that an expedition was formed to hunt for the original of that shadow, but nothing was ever found to explain the mystery.

There have been other reports since that time—other happenings that would point to the possibility that the lake region of the Southern Andes harbored a beast unlike any known to man. In 1898 a Norwegian scientist reported having found huge footprints along a river bed, but that further search had brought out no further traces of an animal of ungainly proportions. Later the natives of another portion of that territory were sent into a state of terror because they had seen and heard a huge animal. Was it the same "black shadow" of which Professor Onelli had heard? Then in 1913 an Englishman, seeking adventure at the far-

away places of the earth, reported that he had seen a water beast with a neck much longer than the neck of most animals. He was the first white man to have seen the beast, and his report is very similar to the 1922 report from Martin Sheffield.

If there is one such animal alive, there are undoubtedly two or more, is Professor Onelli's belief, and under his supervision an expedition will search the neighborhood of the latest report. However, neither the report nor the expedition, should be misconstrued to make it seem that Professor Onelli, or any other man of science, believes that the strange marine animal, with a neck of almost snake-like proportions, has lived ever since the days of the Plesiosaurus, but it is possible that the creature is a descendant of the Plesiosaurus that lived in the age of reptiles, not so large as the ancient monster, but still of tremendous proportions.

If there is such a member of the animal kingdom in existence, South America, especially the lake region near the Andes, would be an ideal place for it to thrive unmolested, for the country is almost untouched by man, and many wonderful fossils have been discovered, showing that that portion

of the earth was inhabited by ancient beasts, and primitive men.

It was in a cave on the Last Hope Inlet, off the Straits of Magellan, that the famous Nordenskjöld Expedition found in a perfect state of preservation the skeletons of giant ground sloths, and with the skeletons were pieces of dried flesh, skin, and perfectly preserved spoor. It was a remarkable find, and rumor went forth that the animals had not been dead very long, especially when a further search disclosed the fact that there were artificially cut bundles of dried grass in the cave. Scientists, however, quickly discredited these rumors, pointing out the fact that the remarkable state of preservation was due to the fact that the cave was so situated that the air was absolutely dry, and acted as a natural preservative. The discovery of the contents of the cave at Last Hope Inlet confirmed to science the fact that the big mammals of the past had not disappeared from earth before the coming of man. Evidently the natives of that region had caged up the giant sloths (these beasts were large enough to balance themselves on their hind quarters and eat the top off a small tree) and fed them artificially; therefore, they must have used them, either as beasts of burden, for food, milk—one way or another.

However, the giant sloths lived long after the age of reptiles in which the Plesiosaurus lived. Man, according to all scientific calculations, has not been on earth more than a million years, and he came just at the end of the age of mammals, while the Plesiosaurus lived approximately sixty million years ago.

In spite of all these years, however, in spite of the fact that the earth's surface has changed in that time, it is remotely possible that a marine monster directly resembling the ancient Plesiosaurus may be living in Patagonia. To the skeptical it might be pointed out that it is not many years ago that Sir Harry Johnson discovered the Okapi, a deer-like animal from the rain forests of the Belgian Congo, and that while he was able to trap the Okapi, and so examine its general appearance, no white man has ever seen the Okapi alive.



(C) American Museum of Natural History  
Long-necked American type of Plesiosaurus, from a painting by Charles R. Knight. It is a marine reptile of this type that is reported to have been seen in the lake region of Southern Patagonia. If such a creature exists it is possibly a descendant of the Plesiosaurus that lived approximately sixty million years ago. The painting is suggested from fossils of the Plesiosaurus.

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self. I named him Thor, and I began to watch my opportunity to kill him. At the end of the first two weeks, I believe he felt that I was not going to harm him. Then I got a shot and put a bullet through his shoulder. After that it was a game between the cunning and trickery of two men's brains and a brute's instincts. I got two more shots on two different days and hit him both times. The third time I was surprised that Thor did not face the battle and charge. And then, almost a week later, the thing happened. I had climbed the steep side of a mountain to get a look over the valley with my hunting glasses, and rested my gun against a rock. Then I went 40 or 50 feet farther on, following a narrow ledge, until I found myself in a little pocket, with a sheer wall of the mountain at my back, and a 100-foot precipice below me. Here I sat down and began to scan the valley. Perhaps 15 minutes had passed when I heard a sound that stopped every drop of blood in my body—the click, click, click of clawed feet coming along the ledge. With my rifle 50 feet away, and no escape up or down, I sat petrified. And then along the ledge came Thor!

### The Turning Point for Curwood

"**H**E STOPPED squarely in front of me, not more than six feet away, and turned his great head toward me, swinging it slowly from side to side. His jaws were open a little, and they were drooling. His eyes were small and shone with a dull red fire. In that moment I was certain that my end had come, for the big grizzly had smelled me many times, he had seen me and had felt the sting of my bullets, and vengeance was rightly his. He looked at me. And now I saw there was no anger in that look. In those terrible moments my heart went out to that great, lonely brute. For perhaps two minutes the grizzly stood there, and then he went away, leaving me unharmed! And yet he knew that I was hunting him, that I had shot him, that I was his enemy! I was weak when I got on my legs again.

"From that hour something new was born in me, a new world opened up for me, and in all my adventures since then that world and its possibilities have grown steadily more wonderful. I have learned the truth of the Biblical prophecy. It is not wild life that is at war with man, but man that is at war with wild life. In the heart of the wild creature, waiting to be fanned into life, is a love for man."

Comfortable in his city home, with all of the conveniences of modern living, with a wife, two daughters and a son, I wondered how many miles this man had gone in search of nature. To gather the information for "The River's End," he traveled 3,000 miles up and down the Saskatchewan. Then he told me that perhaps his love of nature might have come by heredity "inasmuch as my grandmother was a full-blooded Indian." On his father's side he is a descendant of Captain Frederick Marryat, the distinguished British novelist who visited the West and Canada in 1837.

Sometimes when writing in Owosso, he deserts his own home and back at his mother's is a room furnished with a stove, a chair, a sewing machine stand for a table and a typewriter. Here he can work. Most of the shacks where he has written his novels of the North have been built by his own hand, while his wife fished in the brook for food for the meals.

### How His Life Has Been Spent

**M**R. CURWOOD is 42 years old, as lithe as an athlete and interested in everything. For seven years he served as a newspaper editor. Perhaps that accounts for his deep interest in local, civic and national problems. Born in Owosso, Michigan, in 1879, Mr. Curwood still insists that his real birth was only 10 years ago, when he openly espoused his ideas of nature conservation.

"I am glad that the first years of my life as a man were spent in the crowded places," mused Mr. Curwood as he discussed the development of his doctrines about nature. "Without those years I would have only a one-sided view of what nature means to the fortunate ones who find it. Fate, in that way, has been kind to me. For I was born in a small city, and saw a circus, which I still remember, at the age of five. I did not see another until I was 14, for between the years of 6 and 14, I lived on a 40-acre stone quarry, which my father fondly believed was a farm when he bought it. But it was ideal for me, close to the shore of Lake Erie, and with big woods and swamps behind it. At the age of eight I had a gun and at the age of nine began writing my first thrilling pieces of fiction. Then—back to the little city where I was born, Owosso; my experience at school, the University of Michigan, and after that seven years of newspaper work.

"And then—God's country. And by God's country I do not mean the great North alone, though it is always into the North I go when I have many months to spare. All outdoors has become God's country to me now."