THE WILD HOG OF LOUISIANA.

BY GEORGE RENO.

OF all sport none is more exciting, more abundant in surprises, more replete with dramatic situations, than hunting the wild boar in a Louisiana forest. This may seem a rash statement; but let him who doubts enter the cane and palmetto jungle of the Creole State, accompanied by a pack of good hounds, and he will never doubt again, and he who takes part in the entertainment for the first time, will never forget it. Compared with it, shooting birds becomes tame, killing deer seems murder, and fishing, as you think of the time wasted between bites, absolutely spiritless. While chasing the wild hog you have no time for reflection, no opportunity for contemplation of anything foreign to the sport; but you may have, if not careful, a chance to exchange places with your game, and become the hunted, instead of the hunter. And woe betide you if caught! You will get no mercy.

For a man suffering from ennui I can imagine no greater relief. Once on the trail of a good-running porker, the music of the hounds in your ears, the spirit of your horse aroused, and you will forget all else. The wild gallop over the magnolia ridge, the plunge into the stiff, dense cane, the scramble through close palmetto clumps, the boar at bay, the chance shot, the dash for liberty, the rush of the dogs, the rough-and-tumble fight, the tusking, the growling, the stroke of the knife, and all is over with the hog.

How you have fared in the meantime depends much on your ability to keep out of the way of the enemy's tusks. If you don't, sooner or later, get a few gouges from the swinging, thrusting, cutting ivory of his upper jaw—well, you have been prudent, but you have missed lots of fun.

One charm of hunting the wild hog is that he "fights back." And right royal battle does he give. Sometimes, when long worried, he abandons his position of defense, and makes the attack, not on the dogs, but on you, as the instigator and chief cause of all his troubles. Then look out! He comes without warning, like the bolt from a cross-bow, and if you are afoot nothing but a "death-shot" or a quick "shin" up a couple of stout canes will save you.

Over a century ago the early French and Spanish settlers of Louisiana introduced the hog into the then wild territory. When chance gave him his liberty he fled to the forest, and neither he nor his offspring has since been held in bondage. The dense jungles of palmetto and cane have afforded him a comparatively safe retreat, and there, against the roots of an upturned tree, he makes his fight to the death. He is the Montenegrin of his tribe, and though others ma claim and invade his territory, he will give them a warm reception. Young shoats caught and penned will refuse to eat, and wear themselves out in their efforts to escape.

The wild hog feeds in droves of from five to fifty. Pickets are always posted on the outskirts of the feeding-ground, and the first warning you have of his presence is a sudden loud grunt answered by the drove; a rushing sound a spasmodic waving of palmetto and cane, and they are gone. A chance shot at a retreating tail will be the most you will get.

Let me state here, however, that the wild hog is not the legitimate prey of any one who may chance through the woods with a gun. All owners of hogs running in the forest are required to register their private mark at the county or parish seat.

Hogs are usually marked before being weaned, and the operation requires agility and tact on your own part and still more on that of your dogs. Only the best trained hounds are used for this purpose. Two of them seize the mother by either ear and lie alongside, taking every turn, jump and lunge with her, as if all three were harnessed together. In the meantime you, with

the assistance of the younger dogs, are catching the little ones and marking them. If the mother breaks away—well, you had better do the same until she is again caught.

How well I remember my last hunt, although one of the crowd probably remembers it still better. The day was bright and warm, in the latter part of November. The ground was covered with mast, and the hogs, as a natural consequence, were in excellent condition.

We had just finished our plantation course dinner: rabbit gumbo with muscadine wine, broiled baggas, snipe on toast, curry of rice, fried chicken with "big brown" gravy; roast 'possum, stuffed with dressing, and sweet potatoes on the side; rice pudding, fig preserves and grape pie.

Four of my friends were out from town, representatives of good old creole families: Hemandez, La Tille, Bruseau, and my cousin Renaud. Our horses were saddled and waiting at the end of the rose-covered gallery. The hounds, called up by a few sharp blasts from the horn, were leaping around us, tails wagging, ears flopping, each giving vent to his approval of the programme in low, sweet sounds, such as only a blood-hound can utter when pleased. Black Dick and yellow Simpson were whetting their heavy machetes, or cane-knives. My mother stood in the doorway watching the picture. Behind her stood "Aunt Liddy," the best cook in the parish, her old black face smiling in return for compliments passed upon her dinner.

Sister Annie was mounted and waiting for us. Keep her from the hunt? Not if she heard the horn! Emile would cut the cane and vines which barred her way.

Suddenly old Beauregard gives a sharp bark. A stranger has appeared at the gate—hardly a stranger, either; it is Perkins, the insurance agent. No, Perkins would not permit himself to be a stranger long in any locality. Diffidence was not one of his peculiarities.

"Good afternoon, everybody!" he called from the gateway. "How about those dogs?"

Being assured that they were not vicious, he came up the path.

"Now, I'll bet you're all going 'hog-hunting.' Just my luck to be afoot!"

"Sorry, Mr. Perkins, that all our horses are, as you see, in use."

"Yes, too bad! I used to be very good after hounds—chased many a jack-rabbit in Kansas, but never tried hogs. A fellow needs a horse, I suppose."

"There is Mary in the corral," suggested Annie, with a twinkle of mischief in her eye.

"Is she insured?—beg pardon, is she broke, I mean?"

"Mary's all right, if you can once *catch* her," remarked La Tille.

"I'll *catch* her, if that's all," replied Perkins. "Just give me a rope and Mary's mine, sure's my name is Perkins."

One of the darkies handed him a lariat, and we all followed Perkins to the corral.

Mary was an old gray mule with all her race peculiarities strongly developed. She had never been known to stop or start at a command When the word was given she would always turn and look at you with a "wait till I'm ready" air that was extremely aggravating. This whim of Mary's had to be humored, or trouble would immediately ensue.

There she stood, tail toward us, with her head in the shade of a pecan tree. Perkins stopped at the entrance of the corral.

"How do you work this noose?" he asked.

La Tille showed him now to hold it, and Mr. Perkins prepared for the capture.

Perkins had one peculiarity which produced a kind of mental shock to his auditor whenever displayed. He would assume a wonderful knowledge of any subject, and then, with the most innocent look imaginable, ask some stupid question.

"Better take some corn so she won't suspect anything," suggested La Tille, handing him an ear.

"Good idea!" assented Perkins, and, armed with a lariat in his right hand, the ear of corn in his left, extended like an olive branch toward the mule, he advanced cautiously.

"Easy now" whispered Bruseau.

Mary switched her tail at a fly. Perkins looked anxious.

"That's all right—only a fly," assured Hernandez.

Mary turned her big head toward us.

Perkins paused and thrust the corn in her direction.

"Steady now," called Renaud.

Mary espied the corn; she turned, looked at Perkins, and then, with deliberate calmness, started toward her would-be captor.

"Now is your chance!" shouted La Tille.

Perkins threw the lariat. It missed; but the mule came on just the same. Mary grabbed the ear of corn. Perkins made a move for the corral gate, her long-eared highness following. We all laughed.

"See here, folks, this is a put-up job; that mule's tame."

A saddle was soon procured, and Perkins prepared to mount.

"You may need a whip," remarked La Tille as he climbed the field fence in search of a switch.

"Is she skittish?" asked Perkins, holding her head.

"Oh, no! only a little mulish at times," replied Renaud.

La Tille returned with a good stout switch.

"There you are; Dick, haven't you got this saddle too far back?" he remarked, as he shoved it a little forward. Simpson gave Mr. Perkins a leg up, and raise the rather stout, short-legged little gentleman to Mary's back. Perkins stood in the stirrups a second, took the reins from La Tille and settled himself back in the saddle with a proud and satisfied smile.

But Mary was no longer the patient, docile drudge. There was a look of mulish malice in her eye. Her ears lay back, pointed direct at Perkins; her heels were throwing sand and gravel in the direction of Mars. Something was the matter with Mary.

"Stop her!" cried Perkins. "What the *(kick)* devil is the *(kick)* matter with *(kick, kick)* her?"

We all cried, "Whoa, Mary!" but Mary kept right on with her gymnastic exercise. Her Southern blood was up.

"Let me get off!" Perkins shouted.

"Are you insured?" asked La Tille; but Perkins disdained to reply.

"Take your feet out of the stirrups!" I called, fearing he would be thrown. Perkins obeyed; but Mary continued to kick just the same. With one violent effort she bounced her burden out of the saddle onto her shoulders.

Strange denouement! Mary's hind legs were down on the ground once more. Her ears straightened up, and she commenced calmly to chew the ear of corn which had been dropped. La Tille's gympsum weed bur had worked from under the back of the saddle and slipped to the ground. Perkins followed suit.

"See here, boys, that was a put-up job on me, or that mule ain't properly broke."

But after Simpson had readjusted the saddle, tightened the girth and ridden her around the yard a few times. Perkins' courage came back to him, assisted, I think, by a few words of sympathy and encouragement from my sister.

Simpson helped him to mount in safety, and we started two abreast down the white cotton rows, around a field of waving sugar-cane, through a little grove of pecan trees, until we came to the rail-fence separating us from the woods. Black Dick had preceded us to this point, and removed the rider, Each horse took the fence easily, as did May, in spite of Perkins' efforts to hold her back.

We at once plunged into the forest —the most strangely fascinating, the most weirdly picturesque spot I know. We had broken in upon the stillness of death, and yet all was life, living luxuriance, perpetual green. But few trees drop their leaves in that latitude—only alien beech, hickory and walnut—immigrants from colder climes. But even these were green now. Jack Frost had only nipped a little; he had bitten nothing as yet.

The bright carmine cones or seed-pods of the magnolia nestled like red wax tapers in its dark glossy leaves. The massive, gnarled live-oak, the holly, gum, pecan, all locked arms.

Pendent stalactites of Spanish moss hung gracefully from every vine and branch—a silvery fringe draping Nature's ruggedness.

We were riding along the edge of a magnolia ridge. Simpson and Dick, with sharp cane-knives across their shoulders, were ahead. Perkins, supremely happy, brought up the rear. Mary was behaving beautifully. A dense canebrake was on our right. We had seen several turkey wallows, but so far no "hog signs." The hounds

scattered in all directions. They were trained bounds, five of them, and knew we were after hogs, and nothing else.

"How are you getting along with Mary?" I called to Perkins.

"Beautiful!" I've got her broken in now. I knew I would if I just stuck to her."

Quiet again ensued for some minutes.

"This is real exciting, ain't it?" remarked Perkins. "But where are your dogs?"

A short, sharp bark, away off on our left, came in answer. Old Dan had struck a fresh trail. Beauregard suddenly tore across our front to join Dan. The others were soon with him, sending back glad yelps.

Across the magnolia ridge we galloped to join in the pursuit.

"Come on, Perkins!" I called. He came. Mary wouldn't have it any other way.

The music of the hounds was delightful. There were heart, soul and sense in it. If the trail grew cold or doubtful, the time of the music slackened, but not the burden of the song. It told of joy and triumph, perhaps of vexation—seldom of despair. And how distinct was each of their voices—Dan's and Beauregard's—strong, deep and serious! They were six years old—veterans in the war on wild beasts. They only spoke occasionally, with veteran's caution. When tusked or in bodily pain no sound came from their throats. If the enemy was pushing them hard you heard no whine—nothing but deep breaths, low growls and crunching jaws.

The other dogs were, in comparison, pups, but they were brave. They came of a race that knows no fear. They are descended from the bloodhounds of Cuba. They will fight to the death any beast they have ever met, whether panther, bear or wild boar. They are young and enthusiastic in the hunt. When on the trail they like to talk all the time. When the enemy is bayed they are kept back with difficulty. When he makes his rush, they are the first to seize, the first to suffer from his tusks. If badly hurt they will howl, but it is with rage, not fear. Give up? Run away? Never! They die first!

A dense jungle of palmetto, cypress and cane lay on our left. Along its margin the hogs were running like deer. A novice has no idea of the speed of the wild hog, but his run is seldom long. When tired, he turns into the thicket and tries to escape unnoticed, or hunt a good place to make his fight; for, if found, fight he must and will.

The hogs, following the edge of the swamp, gave us a good run, but the dogs were close on their heels. Renaud was in the lead now. Annie's horse had got hung around the body with a sarsaparilla vine; Emile was freeing it with his machete.

Suddenly a bouncing shoat shot from the canebrake and bolted across the ridge some sixty feet ahead. Diana, one of the pups, was after it. Renaud drew up, pulled his heavy colt and gave the shoat two shots in quick succession, one of which tumble it over. But we never stopped. One of the darkies stuck its throat, and on we rushed. The drove had scattered, most of them diving into the deep jungle on our left.

Suddenly came two quick, eager barks from Beauregard, then an awful squealing. He had captured a young sow. Each dog was following one or more of the drove. What a racket came from the canebrake! In we all plunged as best we could. Dick and Simpson cutting the way, we got there at last. One of the younger dogs had joined Beauregard. They held the sow by the ears, hard and fast, but oh, how she did squeal and fight! No one dared to shoot for fear of injuring the dogs.

Catching a glimpse of one ear, I saw she was unmarked; so I gave the order to Dick, who jumped astride her back, reached down, and, with his sharp sheath knife, cut her noisy throat. He got a slight bite on his hand from her jaws, but after sucking the wound for a moment, a piece of old shirt fixed it all right.

The sow was dead, but her avenger was nearer than we dreamed. A desperate plunging through the palmetto on our left was followed by short, savrage grunts, and with an angry rush one of the largest boars I ever saw charged down on us. He had heard the squeals for help and came to the rescue.

"Quick, boys, climb!" I shouted. There was a general scrambling in all directions. We gave him a few shots from our revolvers, but none apparently took effect. Beauregard and two of

the pups immediately tackled him, but he gave them an awful fight. His huge tusks cut deep at every stroke. The battle in the cane waged wild and furious. I feared for my younger dogs, and yet could not well help them. A few sharp blasts from Bruseau's horn brought old Dan and Rusher on the scene; and how they did pitch in!

The old boar, strong and brave as he was, soon found himself getting the worst of it, as he couldn't protect his flanks. With one mighty rush he broke away and plunged into the swamp, with the dogs in hot pursuit. Diana was badly hurt, but she limped bravely after the leaders.

We could not well follow, but listened anxiously to the running. Several times they for a moment brought him to bay, but he broke and ran again, evidently in search of a suitable place in which to make his last fight.

The sounds were growing fainter; he must be a half-mile away. Again the noise of the battle arose. The dogs are more cautious than at first. Now he is running again; they come nearer; the hounds are working him toward us.

Down the ridge, a quarter of a mile from us, and not fifty yards from the edge of the jungle, was a nest of upturned trees, stumps and branches. Into this retreat he had plunged, determined to make his fight for life.

"Renaud, we must kill that boar now, or he will finish some of the dogs," said La Tille.

I agreed, and we all dismounted.

"Hello!" There was Perkins, still astride the mule.

"Where have you been?" asked Renaud.

"I have been watching the hog you shot," he replied.

"And you didn't see the fight in the canebrake?"

"No; but I'm going to see this one," he answered. "They're pretty quiet there now, and I think I'll just follow you boys in and see the fun."

We loosened our revolvers and entered the jungle afoot. Perkins turned Mary's head toward the dogs and said, "Get up!" But Mary didn't move. She preferred to remain with the horses, which Annie and Emile were holding for us. Perkins dug his heels into her ribs and brought the stick he carried down on her back. Mary turned and gave him a pitying look, hesitated a moment while forming her plan of action, and then plunged into the thicket. On went the mule, straight for the scene of action.

"Whoa, Mary!" called Perkins. He was getting too close, and, worse than all, a tough vine had caught him.

"Whoa! Whoa, Mary!" But it was useless.

She is within two lengths of the hog, whose foaming mouth, glistening eyes and savage grunts bid defiance to all comers.

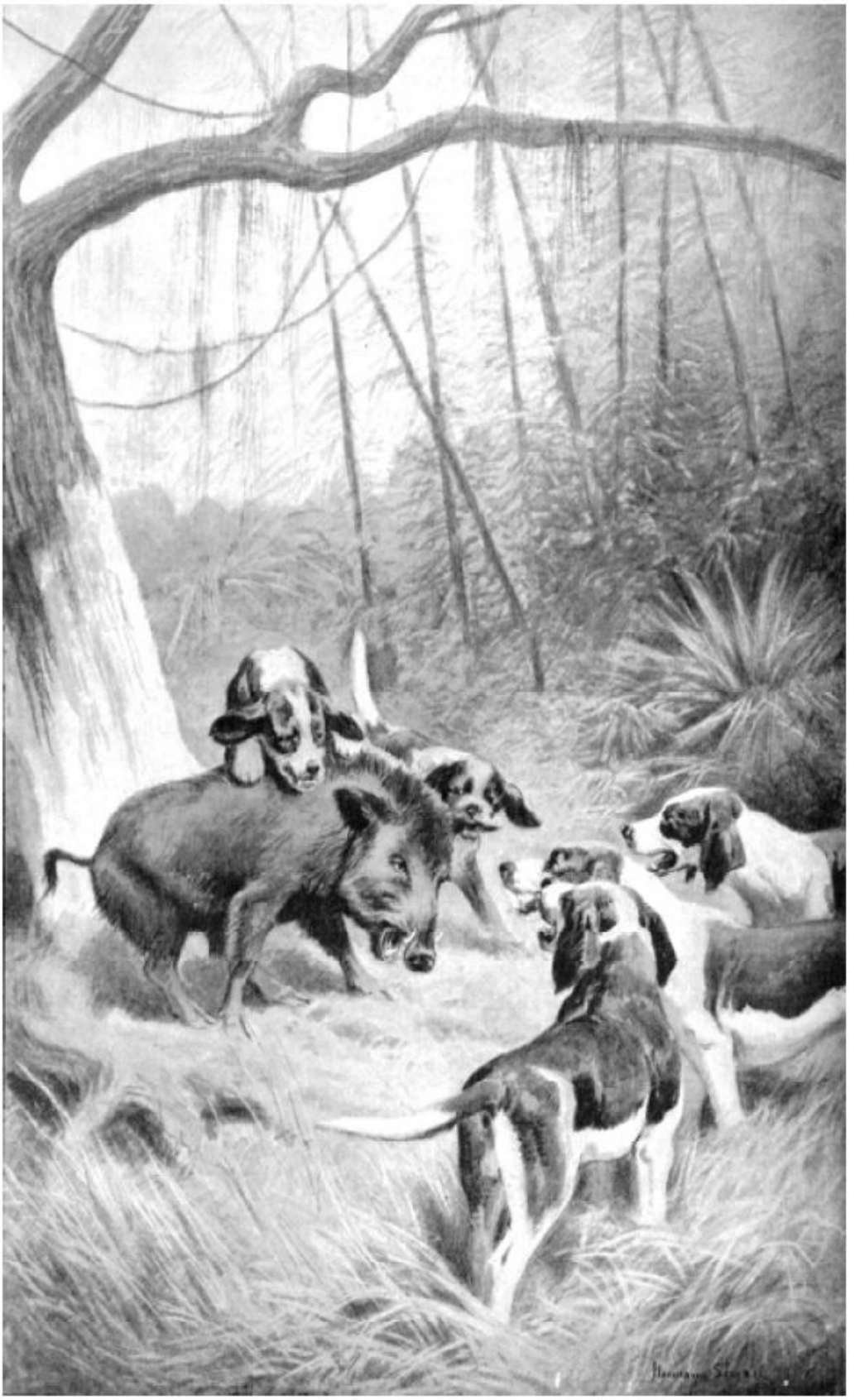
The stretching vine has dragged Perkins off the saddle. "Whoa, Mary! D—— it, boys, somebody stop her!" But Mary never stopped. Perkins clung to her with grim desperation. Suddenly the vine broke, the mule went on, and Perkins came in a heap to the ground.

This new evolution of the enemy evidently decided his hogship. With a savage grunt and rush he came straight for the prostrate agent. But old Dan and Beauregard met him half way. Each seized an ear, while the others attacked his flanks.

"Take 'em off! Take 'em off!" yelled Perkins, still on his back.

The battle, now fiercer than ever, waged on all sides of him; tangled up in the vine, with gnashing teeth and angry tusks playing too close for comfort, Perkins was really in a serious plight.

We all made a rush to his assistance, but little La Tille, the author of his past troubles. got there first, and placing his heavy revolver between the fighting boar's shoulders, fired, The battle was over; but Perkins always swore "'Twas a put-up job."



Painted for OUTING by Hermann Simon. (See "The Wild Hog of Louisiana," *p. 364.*)

THE VETERAN'S LAST FIGHT.