

## THE ROMANCE OF SKI-ING

By AUGUSTUS BLATHERSKITE, Ottawa Ski Club

**M**AYBE it's frightful cheek for a chap like me with only one season's ski-in' to his account to start in and write a story about it, especially when I'm not one of these clever writin' johnnies that can just pick up a pen and straightaway drip off a lot of imposin' words. No, I'm an ordinary sort of chap and all I can do is put down plain facts without any fancy touches. To be sure I did once get a prize for writin' an essay, but that was a long spell ago—for Queen Victoria's Jubilee—and I haven't tried my hand at literature since. I remember it, though, because it was read out at the school concert and my folks were pretty proud of me. It began like this: "Never since the swarthy Roman wended his way through the dark aisles of our forests," and rambled on accordingly to ten or twelve pages. Come to think of it, that wouldn't be such a bad start for a ski story, because if there's one thing a ski-er does do—in Ottawa at any rate—it's wend his way through forests up the Gatineau way, dark aisles, swamps, lakes, raspberry patches and all. History repeatin' itself and all that sort of thing, eh? However, it would take a clever chap to work that idea in right and I'm afraid I'd make rather a mess of it, so I'll leave it aside and get down to the point. Into the trail, so to speak, without further digressin'.

When I came to Ottawa last year I had never seen a ski nor any real snow—just an inch or so at a time and generally turnin' to slush and mud directly. It was autumn when I arrived and everythin' looked absolutely gorgeous with the leaves colorin' and all. I couldn't see what more folks could want. But the Ottawa people didn't seem to be satisfied. Everywhere I went they were talkin' about ski-in', with their tongues practically hangin' out waitin' for the snow. On the street, in the office, at parties, wherever you went sooner or later you'd be asked: "Do you ski?" and when you said "No," they'd look at you with a fatuous sort of grin and say: "Oh, you must take it up. You'll be wild over it. Why, my first trip I . . ." and then they'd be off for an hour or so on trails and jumps and canyons and bumps and places called Fortune and Ironsides and brigands called "Mort" and "Joe," who appeared to be the presidin' genii of the aforesaid places; while you stood by wonderin' what it was all about and lookin' for a chance to get away or cut in on some other subject. After a bit you got to recognize the look they'd wear—like a dog lickin' his chops after one good bone while he keeps his eye out for another—as peculiar to the ski-in' fraternity whenever two of them got together to talk over their trails. I must say I got a bit fed up on ski-in' long before there was any sign of snow. Little did I think—as they say in the story books—little did I think how soon it would get me too!

Well, one evenin' I dropped round to a friend's house for a hand of bridge. There were some more folk there and as usual ski-in' got declared trumps about the second round. They all talked at once and it sounded about as intelligible to me as a pow-wow of the Choctow Indians' Poker Club. Every once in so often somebody would notice that I wasn't joinin' in and they'd throw out a line. "You ski, don't you? No? But of course you'll take it up?" and without waitin' for an answer, off they'd go again on their own tack. After a while it got on my nerves, so when the next one started, "You ski, don't you?", I replied very firmly, "No, and I'm absolutely not interested." Well, that made them sit up and take notice. They all stopped talkin' for a minute and looked at me as if I had announced that I didn't believe in Santa Claus or that Tunney didn't lick Dempsey. When they recovered, however, they chorused all together: "Oh, but you'll like it when you get started." And one offered to loan me his second best ski, another boots, and the rest poles, sweaters, mitts, whatnots, "just to try it once. You're bound to like it and then you can get your own outfit." Havin' this chance to talk thrown at me suddenly, I felt a bit perverse and stuck to my guns. I told them right out what an extraordinary notion I thought it was for grown-up people to go rompin' in the

snow like youngsters, rangin' all over the landscape on greased planks with the mercury below zero, when you could stay comfortably indoors. A pipe and a book and a fire in the grate, with the winter sunshine and frosty air filtered through double windows, was good enough for me. But they wouldn't hear of it. Ski-in' was healthy and sociable and you didn't notice the cold and the best way to get round the winter was to plunge right into it—if you get what I mean—all sorts of arguments until I hadn't a leg left to stand on. The upshot of it was that they practically challenged me to try out their bally ski, and though I was quite certain one trial would confirm my opinion in the matter, I pride myself on bein' open to conviction, so I couldn't refuse. I promised to go out with them in the first good snow.

That was late in November. For the next few weeks the thing stuck in my mind uneasily. I was anxious to get done with it, so that I found myself actually lookin' for snow. Every time a few flurries appeared I'd watch them from my window to see how deep they'd pile on the roof next door. I didn't realize it then, but I was developin' the first symptoms of ski-itis; without ever havin' stood on the fool things I shared the thought common to all the tribe just then—a desire for snow, and snow, and still more snow. Well, it came about Christmas time, and with it the day set for my initiation. A Saturday afternoon, all clear sunshine and nippin' frost and piles of fresh snow, and my friends rallied round with the promised accoutrements. I had cherished a sort of hope that they'd forget and was plannin' to put in the afternoon on chess. Chess used to be my favorite winter sport, you know, before I learned to ski. I'd been a member of the International Chess League for years and played by correspondence with chaps in Timbuctoo, Siam, Van Dieman's Land and all sorts of distant places and it really was frightfully interestin'. I had some important moves to plan just then, so I wasn't keen on bein' dragged out to ski. However, they routed me out. It seemed a fearfully cold project, so I put on practically all the woollen things—sweaters, socks, etcetras—that I owned. I run a bit to what the French delicately call *embonpoint* and the Yankees (not so delicately), corporation, so by the time I got myself completely wrapped up I felt as unwieldy as a bale of hay. They told me I wouldn't need so much but I wasn't takin' any chance on gettin' frozen. Then after a little nip of fortification on the side we were off for Ironsides.

There was a tremendous mob waitin' for the tram, ski brandished wildly in all directions, and what with pokes in the ribs and kicks in the shins as the whole crowd rushed the door, I felt I had done well to pad myself so thoroughly. However, after we left the tram and actually got goin' on the ski, it did seem a bit warm and I decided I could do with less clothes next time. I felt like a bloomin' quadruped at first, with ski and poles crisscrossin' and tanglin' up every few steps, but after a bit I got the hang of it and everythin' was fine—on the level. But when we came to the top of the first hill I looked over the edge and said to myself: "Napoleon, here's your Waterloo!" Jokin' apart, though, I did get a bit wobbly at the knees. It looked fearfully steep and I hadn't the foggiest notion how to go about it. But the rest had shot right down and I had to follow. A Blatherskite never retreats, you know. So I stiffened my knees, leaned as far forward as I could, and let go. Whizz! Zip! Plunk! Next thing I knew they were diggin' me out of a snowdrift and all laughin' like a bunch of idiots. The joke seemed to be on me and while I didn't quite see it I entered into the spirit of the thing, remarkin' playfully as they set me on my feet, "There's more in this than meets the eye." At that one of the girls that was along, in a red tam-o'-shanter, giggled and said, "There sure is. If you stand like that your right ski is liable to meet your left eye every time you come down a hill!" I withered her with a glance. A joke's a joke, but no impudent minx was goin' to giggle at Augustus Blatherskite with impunity. "Possibly you would be good enough to show me the proper way," I suggested. "Sure I will," she replied cheerfully. Evidently she was unacquainted with sarcasm and my tone was quite lost on her. But, by Jove, she did take me in hand—figuratively, I mean—and she really did teach me.

I followed her down the rest of the hills and by and by I got the drift of it. It's really quite simple once you get the idea of balancin' properly. When we got to the Dome Hill she insisted on a few slides before goin' into the Lodge. She took it like a bird. I'd rather not say how I negotiated it, but I followed right after her, game to the last ditch. Then we went inside and got in line for food. I was feelin' a bit peckish by this time, what with fresh air and exercise and all, and the cafeteria seemed a wonderful idea. There were all sorts of things, beans, pie, doughnuts, sandwiches, biscuits, soup, and along with tea and buns they filled the bill exactly. The Lodge is quite a big place but the hungry hordes kept comin' and goin' till there was hardly standin' room. I got interested lookin' round at all the folk. There were all sorts and sizes of people, from old grandfathers down to tiny tads just learnin' to toddle on ski, and they all looked absolutely cheerful and happy and glowin' with health. I began to see that this ski-in game had its points.

Well, I must admit my bones did creak a bit on the way back; it was a long time since they had tried so many acrobatic stunts, and I wasn't sorry when we reached the tram. She offered to take me over the Canyon the next day, but I thought I'd better not. The longer I sat down the more convinced I was that I wouldn't be feelin' so giddy by the next day and there was no use overdoin' it. However, I had to admit that I was sold on the game and compromised on bookin' her up for the next week-end. And since I had heard so much about the Canyon I didn't want to appear an utter dub when I tackled it, so I got out and practised nights durin' the week. I had heard them talkin' about technique—Telemarks, Christianias, jump turns and all, and I did my best to learn them, but the only one I seemed able to get the hang of was the sittin' stop. I must say I got it down to perfection.

Well, the next week-end I rolled out of bed at an unholy hour of the mornin' and made for the Old Chelsea bus. There was even a worse jam waitin' for the tram for Ironsides. They came streamin' along from all sides and it took a dozen or more busses before everybody got squeezed in. Everybody seemed awfully chummy and I felt quite like one of the crowd. Fellows who had never been introduced were callin' me "Gus" in no time but I didn't mind. It's rather a good idea to be informal in the great open spaces, don't you think? Back to Nature and the brotherhood of man and all that sort of thing, you know.

All went well on the Canyon for the first couple of miles and I was frightfully pleased with the progress I had made durin' the week. Then we ran into a couple of chaps doin' some pick and shovel work along the trail and they hailed us like long lost brothers. One of them—I think they called him "Joe"—smiled cherubically as we passed and called out, "It's in great shape to-day. Why, down there by Hospital Corner—" I didn't hear any more but I did'nt exactly like the sound of that. I knew the Canyon was supposed to be the last word in well equipped trails, but a hospital right on the premises! That seemed a bit thick.

We kept on climbin' straight up until there weren't any more hills and we came to a sign readin' "Top-o'-the-World." And it seemed to be. Between the trees you glimpsed layers and layers of hills all around and the track ahead dropped straight down into abysmal depths. A little distance off you could make out a bit of shingled roof with half a dozen chimneys and smoke curlin' out of them. Probably the hospital, I thought. And, by Jove, when I looked at the track I thought I should be glad to roll into it if I ever got down alive. My knees began to wobble again. However, others were comin' along as thick as mosquitoes, whizzin' past me and disappearin' from view. I couldn't stay there all day obstructin' traffic, so I took the plunge. I stepped into the track, commended my soul to the great god Thor, or whichever old Vikin' it was that invented the damn sport,—and the law of gravity did the rest. They say that a fellow fallin' off a skyscraper gets a chance to repent of his past sins before he hits the ground. Not so on the Canyon. I hadn't begun to remember half of mine when I stopped thinkin' at all. A lightnin' slide, a wild leap off the edge of nothin', the snow suddenly risin' up to hit you,—and

when you come to, the "Hospital Corner" sign is starin' you in the face! There didn't seem to be any hospital in sight. Evidently they're just pullin' your leg when they talk about it. After a while I managed to crawl out of the snow bank and to stand up. I didn't feel quite the same as before and I counted all my arms and legs and teeth and such to see what was missin'. They seemed to be all there, so I concluded it was just my dignity that was gone. It was too late to retrieve that, so I carried on. I'm not at all clear how I managed the rest of the way but presently I staggered into the camp, expectin' they'd play "See the Conquerin' Hero" when they saw me. But not a bit of it. Instead, somebody who noticed that I was all covered with snow warned me to keep out of Joe's way because he goes berserk when he catches amateurs makin' new dints in his pet trail.

The Lodge was packed but we managed to secure a fryin' pan, teapot and the corner of a table and soon had a perfectly corkin' luncheon prepared out of the contents of the haversack I had been carryin' all the way. Camp Fortune was even more interestin' than Ironsides; everybody takin' a hand in the chef business instead of a cafeteria and producin' all sorts of weird and wonderful food. There was an absolutely marvellous air of good fellowship about it all; and as I sat back smokin' my pipe after luncheon I thought what a lucky chap I had been to discover it. Well, after a bit of a rest, we started out again, headin' for what they called "George's," where, I was assured, all the bones dislocated on the Canyon would get jolted back into place again. On the way we met the Great Sachem of the tribe, whom they call "Mort." He was wearin' his full regalia of office—red buntin' swathed round his noble brow and artistically draped round his middle—and with a few faithful satellites was busy pickin' out a race trail. We followed him a bit; I was frightfully impressed with the honor of meetin' him so informally; but after a while we left them on the edge of a precipice debatin' whether the racers should be made to climb up it or jump down over it. It looked like sure death to me either way, so I didn't offer to try it out.

George's lived up to its reputation; it reminded me of the rollin' deep with the accent on the roll. But, jokin' apart, it goes just like ocean waves and I should think that anyone contemplatin' an ocean voyage would do well to practise ski-in' on George's first. If you can keep your ski under you there you don't need to worry about your sea-legs. I seemed to get switched over to golf while I was doin' it because I made a hole-in-one on every curve and I don't know how I managed to come through alive. But I did and I was still feelin' quite chipper when I got back to the bus. On the whole I was frightfully pleased with the day and promised to go again the next week.

Well, that was just the beginnin'. The wise johnnies say that when you wait until late in life to fall for anythin' you fall twice as hard. Maybe it's so. It was in my case as far as ski-in' goes. I got absolutely fascinated with it and every week-end you'd find me on the trail, besides all the trips I could manage in between. There were all sorts of other trails, too, besides the Canyon and George's, east side, west side, all around the map, and I didn't miss any of them. My chess got frightfully behind; in fact, I decided I should have to give it up. It wouldn't do to keep those chaps in Timbuctoo, Siam and Van Dieman's Land waitin' all winter for the next move and really I didn't have time to concentrate on the game. So I sent in my resignation, very regretfully, of course, but then I really think ski-in' is more of an all-round sport, don't you?

I wish I could tell just what I do think about it. A regular writin' chap could describe it all so you'd see the magnificent scenery and feel the invigoratin' effect of pine-scented, frost-tipped air and the sun shinin' on the snow and gorgeous blue sky and the people all so much more natural and interestin' than they are in stuffy houses. Why, you could write whole novels about it and run over into poetry besides. No wonder ski-ers want to keep at it all winter and talk about it all summer. It was funny lookin' back to think how set I'd been against it and then how frightfully keen I got almost the first time I tried it! I stayed right with it until the last flake of snow melted. Some

days late in the season there was practically no snow left in the city and people looked as if they thought you were balmy to be carryin' ski. But I didn't mind; they didn't know what they were missin' and if it amused them to be superior why should I care? Some of the trips late in the spring were really the best of all.

I felt quite sad when I finally had to put my ski away and almost right away I began to count the days until there'd be snow again. However, I ran into quite a few of the ski-in' crowd durin' the summer, one way or another, and we always seemed to enjoy a chat about the good old trails.

Now, I suppose you've been wonderin' all this time where the romance comes in. It really has been there all through but I was sort of shy about mentionin' it. As I said at the beginnin', I'm a plain sort of chap, and I'm not much on the Romeo stuff, at least not to write about it. But—well—you remember that girl I spoke of, the one that giggled in the red tam-o'-shanter? She was along on a lot of the hikes and really she turned out to be quite a good sort after all. As things went on we got a bit chummy, and what with cookin' our grub in the same fryin' pan and usin' the same brand of ski wax and moonlight hikes and all—well, we've decided we could use a double membership ticket this year. Her first name's Mabel; the other one really doesn't matter because she's promised to change it to Blatherskite soon. So now you see why I'm so frightfully keen on the Ottawa Ski Club and regard it as a highly beneficial and romantic institution.

Oh, by the way, I met a chap from my old home the other day. He had just arrived in Ottawa and hadn't quite got his bearings. After asking about all the old folk, I said to him, "Do you ski?" and he said "No." So I said, "Oh, but you must take it up." And I went on to tell him all about it, Fortune and Ironsides and the Canyon and Mort and Joe and all. He bein' new in the city I thought it was only friendly to put him on to it. We chatted for nearly an hour, right there on the corner of Bank and Sparks. He seemed frightfully interested, although he didn't say much and didn't stay to hear it all; said he had an appointment somewhere and had to get away. But I assured him that Mabel and I would be delighted to teach him and I'm sure he's goin' to take it up.

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## THE SKI-RUNNER

The sparkling mountains glint and glow  
Against the paling azure sky,  
My skis run smooth o'er virgin snow  
On passes high.

One second balanced on the crest,  
Before the swift unswerving run  
Skims to the burning crimson west,  
And sinking sun.

My solitary track I see,  
As throbbing from the rushing flight,  
I pause beneath a whispering tree,  
For sheer delight.

For sheer delight of frozen spray  
That scatters at each turn I take,  
And leaves behind a ribboned way,  
A snowy wake.

A path that points to magic days,  
And tempts my ardent soul to roam;  
Or else a track, by beaten ways,  
To call me home.

—Beryl M. Booker.