

Excerpt from *Memoirs of odd adventures, strange deliverances, &c. in the captivity of John Gyles, Esq; commander of the garrison on St. George's River. Written by himself. ; Eight lines in English from Homer's Odyssey*

Gyles, John, 1678?-1755.

Of further Difficulties and Deliverances.

ONE Winter as we were moving from Place to Place, our Hunters kill'd some Moose; and one lying some Miles from our Wigwams, a Young Indian & my self were ordered to fetch part of it. We set out in the Morning when the Weather was promising, but it proved a very Cold, Cloudy Day. It was late in the Evening we arrived at the Place where the Moose lay: so that we had no time to provide Materials for Fire or Shelter. At the same time a Storm came on very thick of Snow, and continued till the next Morning. We made a small Fire with what little Rubbish we could find around us, which with the heat of our Bodies melted the Snow upon us as fast as it fell, and fill'd our Cloaths with Water. Nevertheless, early in the Morning, we took our Loads of Moose-Flesh, and set out, in order to return to our Wigwams: We had not travelled far before my Moose-Skin Coat (which was the only Garment that I had on my Back, and the Hair was in most Places worn off) was froze stiff round my Knees like a Hoop, as likewise my Snow-shoes & Shoe-clouts to my Feet! Thus I march'd the whole Day without Fire or Food! at first I was in great Pain, then my Flesh numb'd, and I felt at times extremely Sick, and tho't I could not travel one foot further; but wonderfully reviv'd again. After long travelling I felt very drowsy, & had thoughts of setting down; which had I done, without doubt I had fall'n on my final Sleep; as my dear Companion, *Evans*, had done before; for my Indian Companion, being better Cloath'd, had left me long before: but again my Spirits reviv'd as much as if I had receiv'd the richest Cordial! Some Hours after Sun-set I recovered the Wigwam, and crawl'd in with my Snow-shoes on. The Indians cry'd out, *The Captive is froze to Death!* They took off my Pack, and where that lay against my Back was the only Place that was not frozen. The Indians cut off my Shoes, and stript the Clouts from my Feet, which were as void of feeling as any frozen Flesh could be: but I had not sat long by the Fire, before the Blood began to circulate, and my Feet to my Ankles turn'd black, & swelled with bloody Blisters, and were inexpressibly painful. The Indians said one to another, *His Feet will rot, and he will die.* Nevertheless, I slept well at Night. Soon after the Skin came off my Feet from my Ankles whole like a Shoe, and left my Toes naked without a Nail, and the ends of my great Toe-Bones bare, which in a little time turn'd black, so that I was obliged to cut the first Joint off with my Knife. The Indians gave me Rags to bind up my Feet, & advis'd me to apply Fir-balsom, but withal said, that they believ'd it was not worth while to use means, for I should certainly die. But by the use of my Elbows and a Stick in each Hand, I shov'd my self on my Bottom, over the Snow, from one Tree to another, till I got some Fir-balsom, then burn'd it in a Clam-shell till it was of a consistence like Salve, and apply'd it to my Feet and Ankles, and by

the divine Blessing within a Week I could go about upon my Heels with my Staff. And thro' GOD's goodness, we had Provision enough, so that we did not remove under ten or fifteen Days, and then the Indians made two little Hoops something in Form as a Snow-shoe, and seiz'd them to my Feet: and I follow'd them in their Track on my Heels from Place to Place; sometimes half Leg deep in Snow & Water, which gave me the most acute Pain imaginable, but I was forced to walk or die. But within a Year my Feet were entirely well, & the Nails came on my great Toes: so that a very critical Eye, could scarce perceive any part missing, or that they had been froze at all!

In a Time of great scarcity of Provisions, the Indians chas'd a large Moose into the River and kill'd him; and brought the Flesh to the Village, and laid it on a Scaffold in a large Wigwam, in order to make a Feast. I was very officious in supplying them with Wood & Water, which pleased them so well, that they now & then gave me a piece of Flesh half boil'd or roasted, which I did eat with eagerness: and I doubt without great Thankfulness to the divine BEING, who so extraordinarily fed me!— At length the Scaffold broke, and one large Piece fell and knock'd me on the Head [the Indians said that I lay stun'd a considerable time] the first I was sensible of was a murmuring Noise in my Ears, then my Sight gradually return'd, with an extreme Pain in my Head, which was very much bruised, and it was long before I recovered, the Weather being very Hot.

I was once with an Indian fishing for Sturgeon, the Indian darting one, his Feet slipped and turn'd the Canoe bottom upwards, with me under it; holding fast the Cross-bar (for I could not Swim) with my Face to the bottom of the Canoe. But I turn'd my self and bro't my Breast to bear on the Cross-bar: expecting every Minute, that the Indian wou'd have tow'd me to the Bank: *But he had other Fish to Fry!* Thus I continued a quarter of an Hour without want of Breath, sounding for Bottom, till the Current drove me on a Rocky Point, where I could reach Bottom; there I stop'd and turn'd up my Canoe. I look'd for the Indian, and he was half a Mile distant up the River. I went to him, and ask'd, Why he did not tow me to the Bank, seeing he knew that I could not Swim? He said he knew that I was under the Canoe, for there were no Bubbles any where to be seen, & that I should drive on the Point: therefore he took care of his fine Sturgeon, which was eight or ten Feet long.

Fishing for Salmon at the Fall of about fifteen Feet of Water, there being a deep Hole at the foot of the Fall; the Indians went into the Water to wash themselves, & asked me to go in with them. I told them that I could not Swim. They bid me strip [which was done] and dive across the deepest Place, and if I fell short of the other side, they said they would help me. But instead of diving across the narrowest, I was crawling on the bottom into the deepest Place: but not seeing me rise, and knowing whereabouts I was, by the bubbling of the Water; a young Girl, dove into the Water, and seizing me by the Hair of my Head, drew me out: otherwise I had perished in the Water.

While at the Indian Village, I had been cutting Wood, and was binding it up with an Indian-Rope in order to carry it to the Wigwam, when a stout, ill-natured young

Fellow about 20 Years of Age, threw me backward, sat on my Breast, and pulling out his Knife, said that he would kill me, for he had never yet kill'd an English Person. I told him that he might go to War, and that would be more Manly, than to kill a poor Captive who was doing their Drudgery for them. Notwithstanding all that I could say, he began to cut & stab me on my Breast. I seiz'd him by the Hair, & tumbled him from off me on his Back, & follow'd him with my Fist and Knee so, that he presently said he had enough; but when I saw the Blood run & felt the Smart, I at him again and bid him get up and not lie there like a Dog,—told him of his former Abuses offer'd to me & other poor Captives, and that if ever he offer'd the like to me again, I would pay him double. I sent him before me, took up my Burden of Wood, & came to the Indians and told them the whole Truth; and they commended me: And I don't remember that ever he offer'd me the least Abuse afterward; tho' he was big enough to have dispatched two of me. I pray GOD! I may never be forgetful of his wonderful Goodness! and that these Instances may excite others in their Adversities to make their Addresses to the Almighty; and put their Confidence in Him in the use of proper Means.