FIRE, FRIEND AND FOE

Have you noticed that intangible something about a camp-fire that seems to draw you to the circle of its glow? I hope so, for I wish you to have the thrill that I experience when I sit on the ground or on a log and watch the restless blaze of the fire fight back the subtle shadows of the night.

I have heard my grandfather tell of the evenings he spent with his comrades while with Sherman on his March to the Sea. When all the rest seemed vague and unreal the memory of those evenings floated back to him as one of the few times when he was allowed to feel pure contentment.

Often in the spring I am called on to do a very agreeable duty - to stay at the "Sugar Camp" and boil the maple sap down to sweet, fragrant syrup. Sitting before the furnace, feeling the radiation of the live coals on my face, smelling the fragrance of the boiling syrup, and watching the dancing shadows as they are cast against the tall maple trees arouse some primeval instinct that causes me to feel that here is peace, here is contentment, and here is security. Let the night grow cold, let the skies grow dark; by my fire I can defy nature. Cold and darkness mean nothing: fire has conquered the elements.

Often on dry, dreamy fall evenings one can ride slowly down the highway and see on the distant hills long lines of fire slowly creeping through the dry leaves and twigs looking
like columns of an advancing army. It takes a little imagina-
tion to turn the lines of flickering fire into torch bearing
savages, moving intently toward some isolated settlement; or
dropping deeper into the reverie you can feel that here is the
formation of the Christian Crusades, traveling with unfatiguing
determination in the direction of the Holy City to free it from
its captors. When the fire is whipped by a rising breeze, it
seems to leap and gallop in its race over the hills - there
leaps to our minds the legend of Hannibal who tied flaming
faggots to the horns of oxen and stampeded them into the
native defenders in his journey over the Alps.

Have you ever spent a night fighting a fire? If so you
have soon learned that here was an enemy worthy of your metal.
Plot, and strive as you may, the fire seems possessed of a super
intelligence that enables it to throw sparks into dry clumps of
leaves where they become sentries who signal to the whole body
of the flaming mass that the way is clear and suitable for
immediate advance. You beat the fire into seeming oblivion,
you tramp it with your feet, you dig with your shovel, you
curse it because it springs to life behind your back, yet in
your heart you are enjoying the battle, you are admiring the
fire; such a battle appeals to your idea of true sportsmanship.

Back of it all is the realization that it is fire, our
strengthening friend and our all-consuming enemy who has made
our rise from the level of common beasts possible; to this un-
tamed power we give our affection and respect.

- Halsey Rinehart - '38