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The Boy And The Prodigal

Continued from last week.

That night the stranger posted a brief letter in the little office that took up a corner in the leading grocery store.
It was addressed to John Morton, dealer in tackle, 27 Hunnaker street, New York city," and it contained this statement; "Fishing unexpectedly good. Big catch assured. Must take time, however."

The next morning the man and boy were up and out early. The man bore a fine jointed rod that he had taken from his bag and a box containing the latest paraphernalia of sport. And the boy carried a tottosome lunch in a covered basket. They were going to make a day of it.

The boy led the way along the willow road and then branched off across the fields, following the bank of the creek.

The stream entered the gorge presently and wound among the hills, narrowing here and there, now catching the sunlight, and now gurgling in the shadow.

As they approached the gorge a heavy man came across the field and passed the stranger and the boy at a little distance. He had a gun lying across his arm and he stared hard at the two.

The stranger did not look around. His soft hat was down low on his face and he plodded beside the boy with his eyes on the pathway.

"That's th' prodigal," whispered the boy; th' one I was tellin' you about."

"Yes."

"He gave us a mighty hard look," said the boy.

"Look's dont hurt," said the stranger.

"He's got a gun that would hurt," grumbled the boy.

But the stranger only laughed.

"And where do you think the prodigal was going?" he asked.

"I dunno," the boy replied. "He just seems to be scoutin' round. I guess he carries the gun 'cause he likes it. There ain't really much of anything to shoot around here."

"Doesn't he do any work on the farm?"
"No. The old man does the work an' Jed loaf's around."

"And is there no particular place where he keeps himself?"

"I've seen him four or five times up back of his house where the gorge winds in. He was sittin' there lookin' round. with the gun leaning across th' rock—an' when he saw me he shook his fist."

"Not a pleasant fellow, the prodigal?"

"None."

They trudged along in silence.

Presently the man nudged the boy.

"There is somebody watching us from the bushes up there," he murmured. "Don't look yet. It's the prodigal. Throw a stone across the creek and glance up when you throw it. Be careful."

The boy did as he was told.

"It's Jed," he whispered. "He must have cut across and headed us off. How did you know he was there?"

The man laughed.
"I saw the pebbles falling," he said. "I guessed the rest."

The boy stared.

"You're a good guesser," he said.

The catch of fish that day was very small, but this did not lessen the stranger's good nature. The boy was delighted at his flow of spirits.

"I'd be glad to work for you for nothing," he told the man, and the man laughed merrily.

"You mustn't try to beat down the market price for labor, my boy," he said. "It will never do. I begin to think that \$3 a week isn't enough for such a bright and faithful lad. In fact, I seem to see some thing more coming to you: Pretty soon I hope to tell you how you can earn it."

The boy stared at him again.

"Three dollars is mighty good pay for boys around here," he gravely said.

"And I'm well aware that you are a mighty good boy," laughed the stranger.

That night he wrote again to his New York friend.

"The fish is shy and suspicious," he wrote "I'm playing him carefully."

The next day there was another long stroll. This time the pair followed the creek still further up the gorge.

They saw nothing of the prodigal. Presently the boy stopped.

"Here's where I saw Jed loiterin'," he said.

The keen eyes of the stranger glanced about.

And then a gun rang out and a bit of lead flattened against the rock not far above the stranger's head.

The boy gave a cry of alarm, but the stranger did not move. Only the hand on his belt seemed to slip back a little.

"Hi, there, you below," cried a hoarse voice from the ledge above. "These are private grounds an' you ain't no business here. There's shootin' goin' on around here an' you're likely to get hurt. Better mosey back where you came from."

The stranger looked at the boy.

"It's all my fault, Jed," cried the boy. "I brought the stranger up here. He ain't to blame. The fishin' no good down below."

"It's a dum sight worse up here," growled the prodigal. You steer your stranger right about face and keep him away. Strangers ain't welcome hereabouts."

"All right, friend," said the stranger, in his easy way. "There isn't any harm done. Only it might be better for you to put up a warning sign instead of using your gunning method. Come, boy."

They trudged back together, neither looking around nor speaking until they were some distance away.

"Artie," said the stranger, "I'm thankful you were with me this morning. If you don't mind I'll shake hands with you."

The boy wonderingly shook hands with the stranger.

"You dont think Jed really meant to shoot you, do you," he asked.

"If he had any such idea he dropped it when he saw you," said the stranger. "But it was a beautiful spot for an accident—or a hiding place."

Then they trudged along in silence, the stranger smiling and the boy occasionally looking at him in wonder.

That night he varied his custom. He didn't send the usual mail communication. He telegraphed this message to his New York friend from the office in the little hotel; "Leave here soon. Much better. Look for me at any time."

The operator no doubt regarded this dispatch as only mildly interesting, but he would have been considerably surprised if he could have read between the lines.

The simple message was at once a revelation and a demand for help.

After he had returned to the cottage he called the boy outside, and they sat together on the little porch, the stranger smoking and the boy watching the rings of smoke that floated above his head.

"I'm well blessed with you, boy," said the man presently. "I find you are just the lad I was sure you would prove to be. And now I'm going to trust you to do a very responsible thing."

Continued next week.

Current Events

The old order indeed changeth. At a county fair in Ohio, the first prize for fancy needlework was won by a man.

All the fleets of commerce and the navies of the powers do not keep the great ocean from being a vast solitude. A ship which recently sailed from Seattle to Philadelphia sighted but three other vessels in the one hundred and thirty eight days of the voyage.

Athletics in American schools and colleges are occasionally attacked on one ground or another, but it is worth noting that the German Emperor holds up the American sports and the way athletics are conducted in this country as a model for the young men at the German universities, where at present athletic sports are almost unknown.

Siam made remarkable progress under the enlightened rule of King Chula Longkorn, who died late in October. One of his early teachers was an American woman, and he had a great admiration for this country. Among his many reforms he abolished slavery, wisely declaring that "the welfare of the land is impossible when the principle of equality is absent."

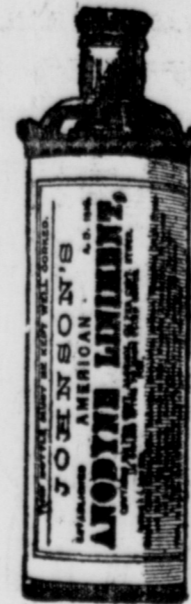
Let us hope that the man is not mistaken who thinks he has found a mountain in Alaska two thousand feet higher than Mount McKinley. Perhaps if that mysterious summit is deprived of its distinction as the loftiest peak in North America, people will stop trying to go up it and disputing acrimoniously as to whether somebody else reached the top or lied about it.

Leave of absence on full pay for four months has been granted to the soldiers who took part in the Portuguese Revolution—not so much to reward them, as to secure the temporary disbanding of the victorious regiments, who were getting arrogant and giving trouble to the men running the government. The ancient risks of calling out an army to overturn the government seemed to have survived to this day.

After all the missionary work that has been done in behalf of Lelf, the son of Erik, culminating in the erection of statues to him in Boston and Reykjavik, it is disconcerting to have Doctor Nansen, who is an authority on exploration, as well as Lelf's fellow country man, strike a blow at his fame. It is quite impossible, Dr Nansen thinks, to identify the land reached by Lelf with any portion what ever of North America, or the people described by Erik the Red, historian of the expedition, with either Indians or Eskimos.

Mr John Gunckel, who has been instrumental in greatly improving the morals of the newsboys in Cleveland, recently said, "Our boys have brought into our office more than forty seven thousand dollars' worth of lost property, most of which has been restored to the owners. Boys who bring in lost money or other articles receive a roll of honor or certificate, which will get them a job wherever they want one. Nearly eight hun-

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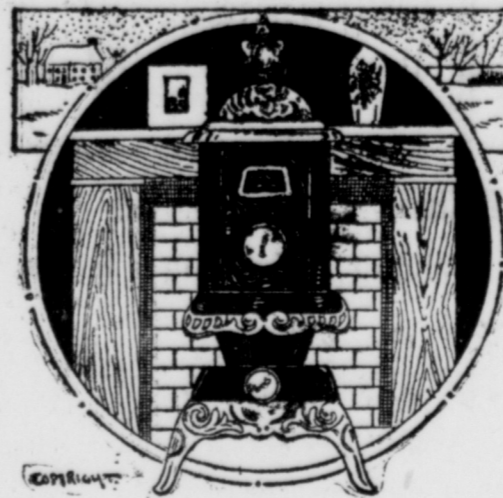
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One valuable forest tree, at least, is holding its own against the inroads of axe and fire. This is the white birch, sometimes called the paper birch or canoe birch, since it furnished the Indians the material for their graceful canoes. The forest service of the national government expresses the belief that more white birch is now growing in the United States than two hundred years ago. It spreads rapidly over spaces left bare by forest fires, but it is a short lived tree, and does not prosper where it has to compete with other trees for light and soil. No other wood as hard as birch can be worked with so little dulling of the tools, and this quality, with its handsome color and its failure to warp after seasoning, makes it much used in the manufacture of various novelties. Practically all spools are made of birch, and in Maine alone, which is the chief seat of this industry, about eight hundred million spools are turned out annually.—The Youth's Companion.

Waiting For Christmas

(Edgar A Guest, in Detroit Free Press.)

I need new shirts and need 'em badly,
The socks I have are thin and worn;
But wife declares she'll darn 'em gladly,
If I won't buy till Christmas morn.
My collars now are frayed and splitting,
Of gloves I've not a decent pair,
But she declares it wise and fitting,
To wait. I may get things to wear.
My neckties all are torn and tattered,
My slippers out at toe and heel,
My fancy vest is gray spattered,
I think it's pork or lamb or veal.
To buy such things just now, she warns me,
Is simply throwing away,
And so, though ragged stuff adorns me,
I'm hanging on till Christmas Day.