

COLONEL BRAINARD'S OATH.

A Strange, True Story.

The morning was lovely. The sky was cloudless. The air was sweet with many odors. A soft, cool wind swept by, now and then shaking the shimmering rain-drops from leaf and twig and slender grass-blade. Yet, despite the sweet placidity of the morning, evidences of the terrible storm that raged all the night before was on every hand.

The little village of Marshville most conclusively bore witness to the fact that a storm in all its fury had visited it, by its torn and twisted elms, its many houses without chimney tops, its orchards wherein the half-grown fruit lay in windrows on the short orchard grass, and its fields of badly lodged corn.

The storm was the universal topic of conversation among the village people that morning. Groups of men, their heavy eyes telling of long hours of anxious wakefulness, gathered on the street corners, compared notes. Each told how the house shook and the beds rocked when the wind put its great shoulder against the house, how his frightened Hannah or Martha was, how his apple crop was a dead loss, how that "splendid piece of corn of mine would never straighten up again in the world, sir," and what trees on his little domain were down, trees that he "wouldn't have taken a hundred dollars for!" And yet, running through it all, was a little vein of half-concealed pride in the fact that the wind had frolicked so roughly with their possessions.

"Well, neighbors," said a cheery-faced member of one of these little groups, "I think there's a great deal to be thankful for! We can't expect sunshine with gentle winds all the time. I suppose these great storms are just as necessary as our 'clearing up fires' are in the spring. Why, just think how hot it was yesterday forenoon! Then the Lord sent a big storm and all the damage it done was to throw down a few bricks and a few apples or so; and didn't harm a hair of our heads. Now see how clean and fresh everything is today? I tell you. He's pretty good to us taking it all round."

"You don't believe that anyone had anything to do with last night's storm, do you, Story?" queried a sarcastic voice, and a tall, commanding-looking man joined the group. "Haven't I heard a quotation from some old book or other that runs like this, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth'?"

The other's face flushed, but he answered sturdily. "And this is another quotation from that same good old Book: 'And He arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace be still.' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm." It's God Almighty's wind, Colonel Brainard.

The other laughed scoffingly, while a look impossible to describe, hardened the lines of his face into iron.

"Well, then, His wind blew down my barn last night. Now I call upon you all to bear witness to the thing that I swear! I will build me a barn that God Almighty can't blow down!"

The glow on Story's face faded to ashen gray. He said slowly, "And I call upon all to bear witness to this thing, also, that Colonel Brainard will yet be utterly ashamed of the oath he has sworn before you."

Amasa Story turned on his heel and walked away.

The town of Marshville was halved by a wide, deep, still-flowing river. The largest half of the town was built on an eminence on the south bank of the river. The Brainard Place, as it was called, was built on an eminence on the north bank of the river and at some little distance from the village proper. And so, as there were no houses or buildings of any description to obstruct the view, one standing in the village streets and looking up the river, could get a very good view of the Brainard Place. The second week after the great storm, the village was all wonderment. Four slow-going, patient oxen were dragging an enormous stick of timber through the quiet streets.

"Hello, Brown!" shouted one of the villagers to the teamsters, "where's that big fellow going?"

"That's for Colonel Brainard's new barn," was the reply; and then everybody knew that the Colonel's oath was no idle one.

A few days later the colonel stopped at the village store. It was just at edge of the evening. It had not grown dark as yet, for a soft amber light flooded the skies and unwrapped the earth. It was just the time when the store was full of villagers making their purchases for the morrow and getting the news of the day to carry home.

"Boys!" called out the colonel in his bluff, hearty voice, "come up to the 'raising' tomorrow! I need a good deal of help about this one, I can tell you! Come up, neighbors! Story, I shall count on you, anyway! You'll be there, won't you?"

"Not I, colonel!" answered Story, seriously, but pleasantly. "I'm just as much obliged, but I ain't flying in the face of providence this year."

"The 'raising' was a grand success, and all who attended it came back with the most vivid accounts of the strength of the new barn and the immensity of its timbers."

In a day or two afterward, Col. Brainard again stopped at the village store.

"Story!" he called, "come out here, can't you? I want to see you about a little matter."

Story rose to his feet and walked out to the colonel's carriage.

"What is it, colonel?"

Brainard put his hand on Story's shoulder and pointed up the river.

"Well, Story, I want you to see something, for of course you haven't noticed it before; I want you to see that frame up there on the Brainard place! What do you think of it?"

"I think it is a pretty strong one, colonel," was the frank reply. "In fact, I know it is, for I have been told over and over again by the best of judges, that from ridgepole to plate, and from plate to sill, it is just as strong as huge beams, iron rods and steel bolts can make it; but, Colonel, you and I are both lumbermen; and more than once we have seen great tracts of timber, through which the wind had hewed itself a path, and do you remember ever seeing a tree left standing in any one of those paths? And did you ever think of what a tremendous force it must have been that took hold of those big trees and pulled them up out of the ground just as quickly and easily as a dentist would pull a tooth? If I were you, colonel, I guess I would take it all back, and not pit man's little strength against the mighty arm of the Lord!"

"If you were me!" said the Colonel, mockingly. "But you're not me, Story, and I, Brainard, don't take back anything I say, very often. You're on the losing side, Brother Story! Don't forget that!"

As the days went by, it became evident that Colonel Brainard did not intend that Amasa Story should have a chance to forget it. Every time he saw Story, he never failed to remind him in the most offensive manner of the fact that the barn still stood, firm and strong upon its foundations, "and will stand, Brother Story, until time rots the timbers and rusts out the bolts!"

And Story would answer cheerily: "The Lord has got lots of patience, Colonel!"

Winter came on. Colonel Brainard and Amasa Story, both engaged in extensive lumbering operations in the great forests in the northern part of their native State, and did not see each other again for some months; but with the return of spring, logs and lumbermen came down the river.

Colonel Brainard got home first. He was in the best of spirits. His winter's work had given him a great deal of money, and naturally he felt rather jubilant. As soon as he heard that Story had got home, he made all haste to go to the village.

"Hello, Story!" he shouted, as soon as he caught sight of Story's cheery face, "when did you get home?"

"Just come, Colonel!" answered the other, heartily. "What's the news? Everybody all well up to your place?"

"Pretty well, Story; pretty well; and come to think of it, neighbor, why didn't you inquire about the barn, also? Don't forget that barn, Story! I want you to keep an eye on that barn," said the Colonel with the same old mocking inflection in his voice.

Story colored furiously. He had forgotten all about their dissension in his joy at getting home, and his pleasure in seeing his old friends; and to have his friendly inquiries met in this way, was almost too bad. But, controlling his temper, he answered with something of an effort:

"No need of me, colonel. The Lord has got His eye on that barn fast enough!"

Somehow the colonel could not seem to get those words out of his mind, although the impression they made on him did not hinder him from attacking his victim every time he came within sound of his voice.

Matters went on after this fashion until midsummer. One day about the last of July, the sun rose in the morning just like a ball of red-hot iron. All the forenoon the very air had a quivering appearance, as though it was panting in the intense heat, and the glare of the sunshine was blinding. But, late in the afternoon, a soft haze came into the air and some fleecy clouds crept over the face of the sun. Now and then there was a little whiff of wind.

Late in the afternoon, a bank of gray clouds softly rolled up in the west. There was nothing particularly alarming about them. They were not dark and thunderous looking, but were simply a soft, fleecy mass of misty cloud; but somehow they seemed to bring with them a deathly stillness that settled down over everything, "folded upon fold;" and its influence was felt by even Col. Brainard himself.

He harnessed up his horse, and down town he came. Story and a number of his friends were standing on the steps of the village store, busily, though quietly, talking politics; and thus did not notice Col. Brainard until he drew rein before them.

At the sight of the Colonel, Story, who happened to be the speaker at that moment, abruptly stopped. By this time, he dreaded the sight of the dark, mocking voice; but the Colonel did not mention his favorite subject as soon as he saw Story, as usual, but instead said anxiously:

"Boys, I wish you'd take a look at those clouds yonder. Somehow I don't like the looks of them."

Of course, everyone instantly looked eagerly in the direction toward which the Colonel pointed.

"Don't see anything alarming about them," said one; "though it does seem as though they were pretty near us, now, don't it?"

"Well," said another judiciously, "it does seem so, that's a fact! And there's one place right back of the village here, that looks pretty dark. Do you see it?"

"Story, what do you think about it?" queried the colonel.

Story gave one quick look at the colonel's face and then turned his face back to the cloudy sky without one word in reply. The colonel laughed loud and long.

"Oh, ho! Brother Story, haven't you got a word to say? Come, it's time for you to own up beat! It's no time to hold out any longer. I believe that every man that stood on that street corner that morning after the storm, is right here now. Do you remember what I swore, Story,—that I would build me a barn that God Almighty could not blow down?"

"I remember!" came the answer; but the speaker never took his eyes off those silent clouds.

"And I swear it again, right here, face to face with those clouds you are studying, Brother Story. Come, face round

here, my friend; I hate to talk to the back of a man's head."

Story never moved.

"Do you give it up?" went on the mocking voice. "Of course you remember what you said at the street corner that morning!"

As one having ears, hears not, Story half-faced around. "Hush!" he said sternly. Silence fell over the little group; and through the stillness, a strange, low sound reached them. Instantly every man turned his eyes to the west. "Look!" said Story, in a hushed voice.

There was no need of the admonition. Every eye was fastened on a little dark cloud that had swung itself loose from the rest. The strange, low sound deepened. The Colonel's horse pricked up his ears, worked his delicate nostrils afrightedly, then shuddered all over. The Colonel's hand tightened instinctively on the rein, but he had no reassuring word for the quivering animal that he had petted from a tiny colt. Somehow his throat had become hard and dry. He heard nothing but that weird sound, saw nothing but that little swirling, black cloud.

It was forty years ago, that the events of our story happened, long before the word "cyclone" with all its dread significance was a household word, and they happened, also, in a State that to this day, knows but little about these terrible wind-storms. But the terror of this strange, grewsome thing, whose roaring now filled the air, was sufficient of itself to smite all color from the bronzed faces of that group of lookers-on and chill them to the marrow with fear.

Lightly, as a thistle-down, turning and twisting, seemingly a plaything of the air, it sped along over the fields, on the south bank of the river. At first, it was a round mass something like a huge cannon ball, then shaped by viewless hands it took on a funnel shape; finally it started straight as a line for the river bank. A group of tall elms stood in its way. The soft cloud touched them and then swept on. A few ragged and mutilated trunks pointed toward the sky, branch, twig and emerald leaf twisted away by ruthless force. It swooped down on to the river which was full of logs. A riverman was standing on one of the great log booms at work. The voiceless, motionless lookers-on saw him face round, and then the next instant, he had dropped into the water, and was clinging desperately to the boomstick, then the cloud hid him from view. On sped the cloud. For one instant they turned their eyes from the cloud to the place where they saw the lumberman. He was safe, though his face, which was just emerging from the water, was as white as a patch of foam. Then they turned to the cloud again.

It sped up the river bank, aiming as straight as an arrow sped from a taut-strung bow, for the Brainard barn. The soft cloudy mass reached it, and never halted an instant as though hindered, but lightly and steadily kept on its way. But for all that, the thing happened that every man had had a distinct presentiment would happen—of that great, solid-built barn not one timber was left upon another. Full to the rafters with an abundant harvest, with six great river batteaux piled around it, in the twinkling of an eye, barn and batteaux were snatched away, and not a vestige of either left.

The noise of the cyclone died away. Colonel Brainard and Amasa Story swung around and faced each other. There was too much of a terrible fear, of an amazement beyond words in the eyes of one, to express defeat, too much of a solemn awe in the eyes of the other to express triumph.

"Behold He taketh away, who can hinder Him?" said the skeptic slowly; and never afterward was he heard to speak lightly of Him who "holds the wind in His fist."—Percy V. White, in *Transcript Monthly*.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF A HORSE.

How One Fought an Ugly Colt to Save Its Trainer.

"Talk about a dog being a man's best friend," said an old horse trainer, "I say the best friend a man has among the lower animals is a horse. Horses will be just as affectionate and faithful as dogs if you use them right, and a blamed sly more useful. To be sure they won't lick your hands for kicking 'em. They've got more spirit than that, and I admire them for it. I had a horse once that saved my life, and that's more than any dog ever did for me."

"How did it happen?"

"It was ten years ago when I was a country horse doctor and used sometimes to break ugly colts for the farmers. My horse was one I had raised from a colt and she knew me like one of the family. Her name was Mollie. She was a high strung animal, if she was gentle, and one needed to understand her in order to drive her. There was a farmer living near by had a colt which he wanted broken, but the brute was so vicious that half a dozen men had failed to do anything with him. I thought I was a pretty good horseman so I concluded one day I'd try him. I drove up to the farm, and, as I didn't expect to use Mollie again that afternoon, I turned her loose in the field to roll. Then I caught the colt. The farmer told me he would lead all right, so I wasn't looking for any trouble till I tried to bit him. I was walking along ahead of him with the halter strap in my hand when the devil got into him. Before I noticed that he was mad he started for me, mouth open, and began to strike with his front feet. That's a trick no horse gets except from inborn wickedness. He knocked me down the first blow and then backed off a few steps and gathered himself together. I saw he was going to come for me again and I tried to crawl out of the way when all of a sudden I heard hoots coming from behind and Mollie came up at a full run. She dashed right at the ugly colt and, wheeling round, gave him both her heels in the chops. Then she planted herself between him and me and there was the stubbornest fight you ever saw for a few minutes. Both horses screamed like human beings, reared, struck and bit at each other and neither would give an inch. At last Mollie got the colt by the neck and fairly tore a piece of flesh out of him. That took the nerve out of the brute and he ran away. I was too much hurt to get up alone, and I have always said that if it hadn't been for Mollie I'd have been killed, though some fools thought she'd have come to fight the strange colt just the same if he hadn't attacked me. I know better.

AN ARKANSAS VILLAGE PAPER.

Where Editors Praise Everybody and Everything, and Should Be Happy.

A photograph of a village in Arkansas would not be complete without a view of the village newspaper. The Arkansas country newspaper is a weekly journal full of the humanities. The rural newspaper is always a mirror. But these small Arkansas papers return more truthfully the reflection of their locality because they fill their columns with news from different little villages adjacent that have no paper of their own. The letters are by local correspondents, and are highly natural. The painstaking editor, who is often the printer as well, amends the spelling and corrects the grammar according to his lights (lights sometimes rather dim), and washes his hands of the rest.

Here is a paragraph describing the drowning of a boy—"The body was gotten out three or four hours after, and was interred the same day, and has gone to meet the father of long years of suffering, and also some brothers who have gone before. Freddy was a good boy." The same sheet, in an earlier issue, used a striking but friendly frankness regarding the "Widow C—," who had come to town with her cotton. "The widow," says the kindly editor, "is the right type of widow, and moves on with a firm but sure step to the goal. Her son Tommy is a great help to her. Tommy is a good boy and honors his mother, and his days shall be long in the land."

Indeed, every page radiates an intimate friendliness. Has Squire Leens broken his leg, the correspondent condole, mentioning in warm terms how usefully and nimbly the squire would otherwise employ that imprisoned limb. "Mrs. Rev. Jones," has "a severe attack of the la grippe," and Miss Nettie Howard, who "is suffering from a rising in the ear," each has a whole paragraph of sympathy. Numerous jocose though mysterious allusions enable us, it not the editor, to guess why young "Bud Harrington comes over to our town so often these moonlight nights, isn't it, Bud?" As Shakespeare or some other poet author says, "There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream." That's so!" In this fashion of pleasantry does the wit of the writers disport itself. Frequently, like Mr. Wegg, they drop into poetry. The rhyme is of a free and generous turn, de-spising the clogging fetters of metre. I have a specimen before me. A correspondent tells of the death of a "prominent citizen," and expresses sympathy for his widow, concluding:—

"Oh, may Mrs. Hotchkiss' path be lit
With consolation from on high;
And may they all live in righteous ways
Until they come to die."

Thus on, piously if not poetically, through three stanzas.

The editor blesses all the brides and praises all the babies. Not in his columns shall you find the ill-bred sneers of his Northern brother in regard to mothers-in-law. He doffs his hat and bows. Once, at the top of an editorial column, I read, "Our mother-in-law, Mrs. S—, is in town."—Octave Thane, in *the Atlantic Monthly*.

"Don't Care to Eat."

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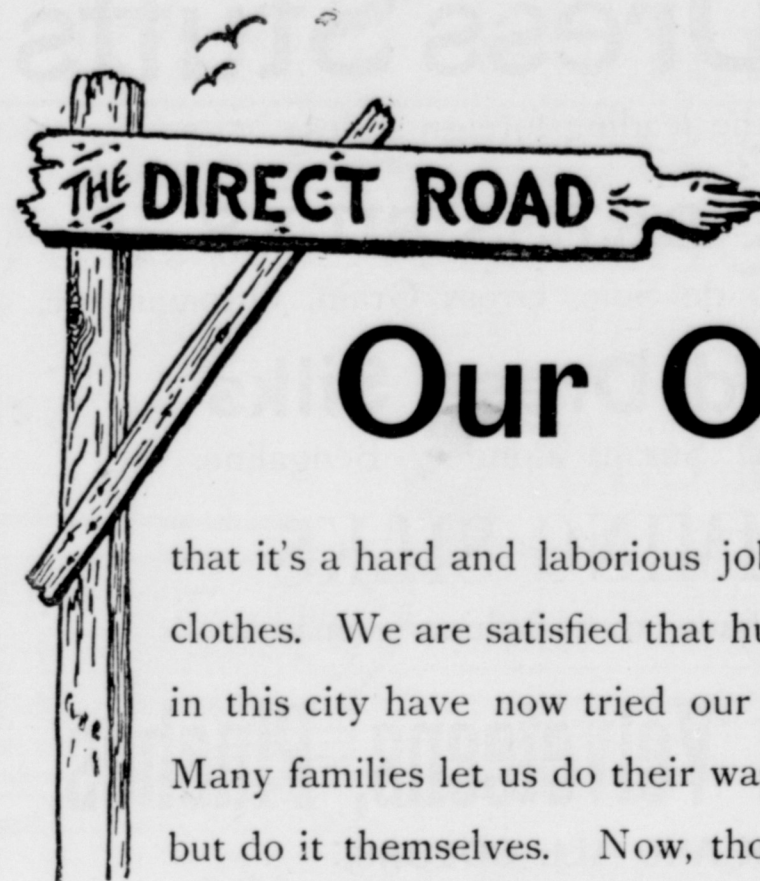
LINGAN, C.B., Nov. 9, 1888.
DEAR SIRS: We use no other soap, as we find the labor greatly reduced in washing, scrubbing or any other work by using Surprise.
Yours, MRS. JOHN BURKE.

OTTAWA, March 3, 1891.
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The above is no "tally," but genuine admiration of your soap.
Yours faithfully,
W. H. CRAFTON, Customs Dept., Ottawa.

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