

PROGRESS, SATURDAY, MARCH 30 1895.

A DEVIL IN THE CHURN.

THE HIRED MAN'S CONVERSATION WITH THE IMPRISONED FIEND.

"Fresh-Air Boys" and Their Visit to the Country—The Woman who Used big Words—Tommy sat on the Barracade—An Adventure With a Ram.

Up to the age of ten years I was a street Arab in one of our largest cities. Now that I am in a fair way to become a multi-millionaire, I can make this admission without feeling too keenly any disagreeable implication. I trust my chums at the university do not find me any the less manly because of my early experience of life on the street.

Of that life in its first phases I have but faint reminiscences: an ill-lighted room up several flights of rickety stairs in a squalid tenement; in winter, cold nights in bed with a scanty bit of an old sail for covering and no fire to speak of; in summer breathless heat, with tossing restless sleep except when my mother and I were grudgingly admitted to a little breathing space on the crowded roof.

Later on, before any good fortune came to me, the same conditions with the added memories of a rough-and-tumble life on the side-walk, newspaper selling in rags, and the continuous jangle and intercourse with boys of my own class. Happily the good fortune that made me heir to my uncle's wealth in California also removed me from these surroundings, before I became defiled with the ineradicable smirch of the slums.

One event of that life, however, remains with me, a not unpleasant memory. Before my uncle's lawyers found me and when I was verging on my tenth year there came to myself and other rag-a-muffins like me, the rumor of some wonderful visit we might make. Away off somewhere beyond the murky sky-line of tenements and factories there lay, we were told, an enchanted land where people were not crowded together, and trees grew at liberty and bread was plenty and houses clean and wholesome. We children often dimly wondered where such a place could be, for we had no idea of any life but our own and the sordid life of the great city. Where dainty ladies and mild-faced men pictured to us the delights of life in the country, we were all willing to go, because we had all in one way or another been already the beneficiaries of their good will.

Such at least is the burden of my recollection to-day of how Tommy Tripps and myself, with a whole carload of other children, came to be sent into Vermont. Due experience, that is Tommy's and mine the day we first landed in the green mountain State, was so unique, even for city boys totally ignorant of country life, that it will bear recording. I was merely an on-looker; Tommy had all the experience. This was due, I doubt not, to his sprightliness of temperament. I was ever slow and solemn, he gay and frolicsome.

We were ticketed for a little station north of Burlington. The other fresh-air children had already been disposed of before we reached that city, and we continued our journey under the care of the conductor of the train.

When the train drew up at a station there was an old gentleman on the platform with a bit of paper in his hand. His spectacles were down near the tip of his nose and he was reading the paper over them. He was fat and he looked good natured, and we agreed in hoping that he was the Mr. Bleazer to whom we were consigned. We could see him hand the bit of paper to the conductor and then we held our breath as the latter came to the car door.

"Tommy Tripps and Fred Morris get off here," he gruffly announced, and we dutifully obeyed the injunction.

When we got off the car the old gentleman came up to us and patted us on the head and said that he was to take "charge of us during our stay at Vermont." The conductor told him that he did not know about me, but as for the "other youngster"—meaning Tommy—"he'll be quite a heavy charge."

"I'll risk him," said the old gentleman with a smile and another pat on Tommy's head. And I knew from Tommy's face that he would treat the old man straight.

We then followed him back of the station-house to where the horses were tied. We found an old country-wagon with a woman in it waiting. She was not a very old woman nor a very young one. She sat so stiff and straight that Tommy at once dubbed her "pokerback;" her neck was long and she wore a big brooch with a picture of Washington on it. At this distance of time I cannot particularize her dress, but she wore a basque and something she called a bishop; for she warned Tommy repeatedly during our drive not to lean against her bishop. As I learned afterwards, she used the largest and queerest words she could find in the dictionary. She read a chapter of the unabridged every day after the bible.

She smiled sweetly on us when we came up to the wagon and said: "I see, Pa, you have our little proteges with you."

The old man took off his hat and wiped his head, but said nothing in reply. I thought at first she was his second wife, but I now find she was his daughter.

"Ascend over the wheel, boys," she continued, "but don't step on that barracade." Tommy looked at me as if there were some wild animal in the wagon. We had heard of rattlesnakes, cows and such things, but never of a barracade. We were both drawing back to see which would climb in first when the old man came behind Tommy and lifted him over the wheel. If I had not been scared myself I should have laughed at Tommy's eyes, they bulged out so when he was in the air over the wagon. When I saw that the barracade did not touch him, I got in too, but all I could see was a new blanket or wagon robe covering a lot of groceries.

It was when Tommy went to sit down that the woman first warned him about her bishop. Tommy had a faint notion that a bishop was some sort of a clergyman—some one like the gentleman who had sent us up for the air to Vermont, and so he put on a long face and looked around him. He could not see anyone but the woman, the old gentleman and me. He knew I was no bishop, and he did not think she could be one, so he concluded her father must be the man the man. I did not know any more about bishops than he did, and I, too, fell in with the idea that Mr. Bleazer was a bishop.

"What do your horses feed on, bishop?" Tommy inquired with all the respect he could. The old man was busy chirping to his team, and when he got through he turned and looked at Tommy to see if he was in earnest. But Tommy was never more in earnest in his life. Mr. Bleazer smiled and was about to reply when a jerk of the wagon threw Tommy right over against the woman.

"There now, you've ruined my bishop, and I suppose have befouled my basque," she snapped out. Tommy was flabbergasted, and in his bewilderment he sat down on the blanket.

"Well, there," broke out the woman again, "if that boy ain't sitting on the barracade!"

Tommy jumped up as if he had been bitten by a sea serpent, and in his confusion he stepped on the groceries. He made a hole in a package of tea and spilled some sugar. Mr. Bleazer had to stop the team until we gathered things together. Tommy, I noticed, pocketed a lump of sugar.

The old man called the woman Mehitabel and told her she should not be so cross to the little fellow. She said she thought him a blunt-witted boy, a regular cittern-head, and she had an abatement (or something like it) that he would be quite an onus on them. She did bozzle considerably, she said, before she consented to her mother's taking us.

She was soon in good humor again, however, and she pecked up jauntily as we passed a farm-house. Once she asked Mr. Bleazer if the "nigh horse was as calcitrant as ever." The old man said he was getting to his oats again; and then he whistled to himself.

Mr. Bleazer's house was on a hill, quite a high hill. Why he built it on a hill when there was so much valley lying around unused, we could not understand. Some wag, I remember, told Tommy that Mr. Bleazer, being religious, built it there because he wanted to be as near heaven and as far from the other place as he could. Ike, the hired man, said that Bleazer wanted a dry cellar and a deep well. Whatever the reason was, the house was on a hill.

"Come, boys, bring them cates with you," Mehitabel cooed to us as the wagon stopped in the yard and she got out. We thought she said cates, and being hungry we had not to be told twice.

"There ain't no cates here, ma'am," said I. "I didn't say there was, did I?" she replied as she shook her dress; "bring in them groceries."

Each of us took an armful of groceries. Tommy wanted to carry the disrupted sugar, but I took it, and we followed Mehitabel. Her mother, a lank, tallish old woman, met us at the door, and the daughter introduced us as her catechumens.

Ike, the man about the house, was a queer old fellow, short, and had one crooked leg. He was very superstitious, saw ghosts every night. Saw the devil on one or two occasions, he said, and would know him anywhere. Saw him once put into a black bottle and thrown into a river in the old country. A hard-working, simple-minded fellow old Ike was, as I remember him, and I never assented to the tricks Tommy used to play on him.

After supper as we were sitting on the door-step, full to repletion with buckwheat pancakes, a man with a heavy stock of hair waving under a straw hat pointed up the hill to us. Mehitabel was letting

down her back hair and she came to the door with several ringlets in her hands. She drew back when she saw who it was, and sent her mother to let him in by the front door. Mr. Risher, she informed us from behind the stove, was a baccalaurean friend of her father's and lived on the road we had come. Ike, who was sitting on a barrel-head smoking, winked a tremendous wink and then we understood why Mehitabel was doing up her hair and why she had ordered her mother to give Mr. Risher a seat on the sofa in the parlor.

She then dismissed us, bidding us accompany Ike in search of the kine or go on our own account to see the grise in the pen. According to the dictionary grise meant little pigs, but we did not know it. We were eager to see them, however, before it grew too dark, and so we went into the yard. There was a number of animals there feeding out of a large frame. We thought they might be sheep, but Tommy, who posed as an authority, said they could not be sheep, for sheep were woolly and they had no wool to speak of on them. Doubtless they were the grise of which Mehitabel had spoken. Until better acquainted with them I thought it would be well to keep out of their reach, so I mounted the wood-pile overlooking the yard and the steep incline on the other side.

Tommy stayed down among them and both of us grew interested in one young thing that was sucking its dam. In order to get a good view of the operation he stood with his hands on his knees as if he were giving a good back in leap-frog. One of the sheep suddenly ceased eating, and backing away from the rest began to watch Tommy from behind. Tommy did not see the animal, so intent was he watching the lambkin. By-and-by Tommy began to back up in order to get a more satisfactory view. The ram, for ram, it was and a big one, took this as a challenge, and with a preliminary shake or two of the head he rushed on the unconscious Tommy. Next moment the boy was flying through the air and he landed right on the back of that mother-sheep. The sheep gave a jump and he rolled to the ground with a howl. He told me afterwards that he thought a bear had struck him.

He was on his hands and knees about to rise, when the ram hit him again. Tommy again went flying forward, this time on his face. He had not yet seen what struck him and he was getting mad. Once more he essayed to rise, when the ram hit him a third time. Tommy was knocked out. Not knowing what else to do, he began to crawl on his stomach towards the house. The old ram still followed him.

Now, Mrs. Bleazer had left her large churn in the yard to air. It was lying on its side, its mouth facing Tommy. Here was a place of refuge, and into it the boy crawled. The ram, eager for more fight, gave the churn a vicious butt as Tommy disappeared inside, and set it a-rolling. As I said, the house was on a hill, and the churn rolled around towards the slope. The ram followed and gave it another frisky butt. Away went the churn and Tommy down the hill. Over and over it rolled, faster and faster it flew. One moment Tommy's legs would show, and the next they would disappear in that cavernous churn. If I had been dying, instead of being more or less frightened lest the ram should now attack me, I could not have kept myself from laughing. The churn went steadily on its way until finally it brought up among a clutter of thistles and lamb's-quarters where the hill lost some of its abruptness.

The ram, after shaking its head several times and prancing to show its temper, was turning to come back to feed when Ike came along. He had caught sight of the churn and he knew he would have to go after it. "Bad cess to you for a ram, but you're bad off for buntin'" he said, making a kick at the ram. He had not measured the distance correctly, and so the blow fell short, and he had kicked so hard that his crooked leg lost its staying power. He was falling when the ram hit him and sent him after the churn. The hill was so steep that Ike could not stop himself at first. All the time I could hear him use words which I now know were not suitable for a catechumen's ears.

When he fetched up at last he looked up and shook his fist at the ram and called pet names. At one time I thought the ram was going down to give him more, but he did not. Ike then looked down at the churn, and I suppose he thought he had better fetch it up.

It was about dark by this time, and as the ram was busy feeding at the crib I stole down hill also. I could see Ike stop short when he came near the churn. It was still moving a little and the awfullest sounds were coming from it. You see Tommy had gone further into the churn than he wanted to, and now he could not get out. Every time he stirred the churn rolled. He heard Ike coming and thought he was the ram, of which he had got a glimpse, as he enter-

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ed the churn. His blood was up and I am sorry to record that he swore very profanely.

Now the old house dog Codger, attracted by the hubbub, having first made a detour to avoid the ram, reached the churn almost at the same moment with Ike. The dog put his nose to the mouth of the churn and just when he was expecting no such treatment Tommy's both feet took him in the snout. With a quick jump and a howl he turned to run, nearly upsetting Ike. The latter thought the old dog had been in the churn, and I could hear him say, "bad luck to you for a dog, but we'll have hairy butter next week." And with that, in his wrath, he seized the churn, when Tommy's shoes almost hit him in the mouth. Ike let go with an oath and the churn stood upright. Tommy was now standing fairly on his head. The churn rumbled like a drum with his cries, Ike was sure it was a devil or a ghost that was in it, and he began to speak in a trembling voice. Tommy was swearing and I could hear him speak of hell.

"Ah! poor sperrit, what are you doin' in hell?" Ike asked with that tremor in his voice, "Churnin'?" "What did you go to hell for?" "Churnin'?" "Arrah, thin I must give up the trade." "You'll be there for ever, of course?" "You won't?" "How're you goin' to get out?" "Me jolly you out? No, it all Mrs. Bleazer's crame went into wley fur the next three months I wouldn't lay a hand on you. Stay there, you devil you, and burn the old churn if you want to get out."

With that Ike turned to go and Tommy would have had to wait till I could get to him did he not accidentally happen, by an extra effort, to upset the churn. This brought him on his feet again, and while he could not strike off the churn he was able to take a few steps with it over him. While Ike did not relish talking with the devil after dark he could not forbear having a parting word with him. He turned, but there was the churn actually following him, with no sign of a leg or foot to carry it. With a yell, that brought even Mr. Risher and Mehitabel to the door, Ike made up the hill, falling over the ram when he reached the top, praying all the prayers he could think of against the devil in the churn.

I released Tommy and together we slunk around the side hill to the barn.

For Forging Pictures.

The French Ministry has determined to make an effort to reach a form of swindling which is known to be extremely common, and which hitherto has managed to escape the penalties of the law—the forging of pictures. More than one well-known painter has admitted openly that he has allowed his name to be signed to pictures that either he has not touched at all or has finished in a few unimportant details. Other painters follow the practice of copying well-known masterpieces, and passing them off through shady middlemen as copies made by favorite pupils of the master during his lifetime, or even by the master himself. The proposed law puts the forgery of artists' names alongside of forgeries, and punishes it equally.

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