

Notches on The Stick

A good story of the recreative sort is that entitled,—"The Forge in the Forest," Being the Narrative of the Acadian Ranger, Jean de Briart, and How he Crossed the Black Abbe; and of his Adventures in a Strange Fellowship." The balsamic odors of the woods and the scent of marshes and briny shores come to you as you read. The book has no better motive than that of beguiling you into its tower of graceful ease, with its fine picturings of old Acadian life and scenery, its passages of love and war, its exhibitions of heroism, gentleness, chivalry and peril, against the background of forest and sea, and the martial parades and hastings to and fro, incident to that primitive and troublous time. He who has been a lover of Cooper will not grudge the hour he gives to these delightful pages, where a like aloofness from the tame and dusty path of common life is afforded. No problem is here that can vex us; there is a swift solution of every one raised; and no one can object to see how the honest dog will outwit the fox and put his craft to shame. The story being historical, the elements of fact and invention are deftly and richly blended with the hues of a poet's fancy; while the whole is invested with the charm of a limpid, flexible style, grateful to him who has wearied himself over much perplexed turgid writing.

The Poet in quo of this pleasant romance are the Acadian Peninsula and the celebrated Ile Royale,—places not a little indebted for literary prestige to the verse of Longfellow and the prose of Warner. Particularly has that section of Acadie which borders on the Basin of Minas been enhaled by the great American master, and also by such writers as Haliburton, Howe, Bourinot, Roberts, Carman, Duvau, and others, who have contributed much additional lustre. The story antedates the expulsion of the Acadians only a few years; [1746-7] and some events or incidents,—such as the prophecy of the fantastic madman, Grul,—foreshadow that catastrophe. Here are recorded some of the military movements and exploits of the period, including the midnight battle of Grand Pre, where De Ramezay surprised Colonel Noble and the English, and routed them in the midst of a furious snow storm. The events of the story lead us along the borders where blazed an irregular and furtive warfare, in which the Micmac is always present as the ally and the catspaw of the French.

The opening scene of the story is that section of country watered by the Gaspereau, and its four companion streams, the Pizquid, the Habitants, the Canard and the Pereau. The hero, De Briart, an Acadian Seigneur, and his son Marc, a student recently home from Quebec, are captured at their "Forge in the Forest,"—a sort of rallying point for upholders of French supremacy,—by the Black Abbe, a turbulent and malignant priest, the evil genius of the story, and by the Indians, over whom he exerts a controlling influence. The site of the Forge is described as follows:

"Where the Five Rivers flow down to meet the swinging of the Minas tides, and the great cape of Blomidon bars out the storm and the fog, lies half a county of rich meadow-lands and long areaded orchards. It is a deep bosomed land, a land of fat cattle, of well-filled barns, of ample cheeses and strong cider; and a well conditioned folk inhabit it. But behind this countenance of gladness and peace broods the memory of a banished people. These massive dykes, whereon twice daily the huge tide beats in vain, were built by hands not suffered to possess the fruit of their labor. These comfortable fields have been scorched with the ruin of burning homes, drenched with the tears of women hurried into exile. These orchard lanes, appropriate to the laughter of children or the silences of lovers, have rung with battle, and run deep with blood. Though the race whose banishment he has gone, still stalks the sinister shadow of the Black Abbe.

"The low ridge running between the dykelands of the Habitants and the dykelands of the Canard still carries patches of forest interspersed among the farms, for its soil is sandy and not greatly to be coveted for tillage. These patches are but meagre second growth, with here and there a gnarled birch or over peering pine, lonely survivor of the primeval brotherhood. The undergrowth has long smoothed of all traces of what a curious eye might fifty years ago have discerned—the foundations of the chimney of a blacksmith's forge. It is a mould well steeped in fateful devisings, this which lies forgotten under the creeping roots of juniper and ragged-robin, between the diminished stream of Canard and the yellow tide of Habitants.

"The forest then was a wide-spreading

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solemnity of shade wherein armies might have moved unseen. The forge stood where the trail from Pereau ran into the more travelled road from the Canard to the Grand Pie. The branches of the ancient wood came down all about its low eaves; and the squirrels and blue jays chattered on its roof. It was a place for the gathering of restless spirits, the men of Acadie who hated to accept the flag of the English king."

Marc is taken away, while De Briart is left bound beside his forge; but, being immediately liberated by Tamin, the fisher, he follows his captive son, and by a well concocted plan secures his liberation, and the active resentment of the Black Abbe. The scene is then transferred to Shulie, on the Cobequid, and to Chignecto where De Ramezay and his officers are quartered, and whither comes the Black Abbe to denounce Marc as a spy and a traitor, but without success. The book is there after occupied with plot and counterplot on the part of the Abbe and his intended victims, while flight and pursuit are kept alert to the end of the story.

Of the two parts into which the work is divided the second is most romantic and of deepest interest. The women who give charm to the narrative are here principally seen. These are Mistress Mizpah Hanford, a young and beautiful widow, with her child Philip, and her sister Prudence, "the lily maid," betrothed to Marc. They are New England girls, who have been sojourning under the shelter of English guns at Annapolis, and who were rescued from captivity by the Seigneur De Briart, and from the hands of the Black Abbe, who, with his Indians, carried little Philip away. The second part—"Mizpah"—is occupied with the pursuit and final recovery of the child, by De Briart and Mizpah, who insists on accompanying him, who proves his useful, loyal, courageous comrade, by whose love he is well rewarded in the end. Their journey in a canoe, along rocky shores and up tidal rivers, surrounded by perils to which love and courtesy lend grace and sweetness, gives flavor to the romantic story, and leads to many a pleasing episode. Subsidiary, but important and well outlined characters, are Grul, the madman, a mysterious, questionable character, who badly frightens, and at last circumvents the Black Abbe; Tamin, the fisher, always in at the rescue, who perishes in the fight at Grandpre; Father Lafard, the good priest of Grandpre, with whom we would willingly have had closer intimacy—a spiritual kinsman, we should say of Father Felician; Phillip, the bright boy, with his clusters of golden hair; and Etienne the friendly Indian, and his son Xavier, by whose aid the child is recovered. At the last all interested meet at "The Forge in the Forest," and the story ends as such a story should.

The engravings by Henry Sandham improve the book and are in keeping with the narrative. The book is neatly bound in cloth, and is modestly attractive to the eye; differing, in this respect, from Prof. Roberts' volume of short stories, "Earth's Enigmas", with its spread eagle, and its bizarre yellow and red. An outline map of the Acadian Peninsula, of Ile St. Jean and Ile Royale, will enable the reader easily to follow ranger Jean and his fair companion in their wanderings. The book is dedicated to George E. Fenety Esq., of Fredericton, N. B., Lamson, Wolfe and company, are the publishers.

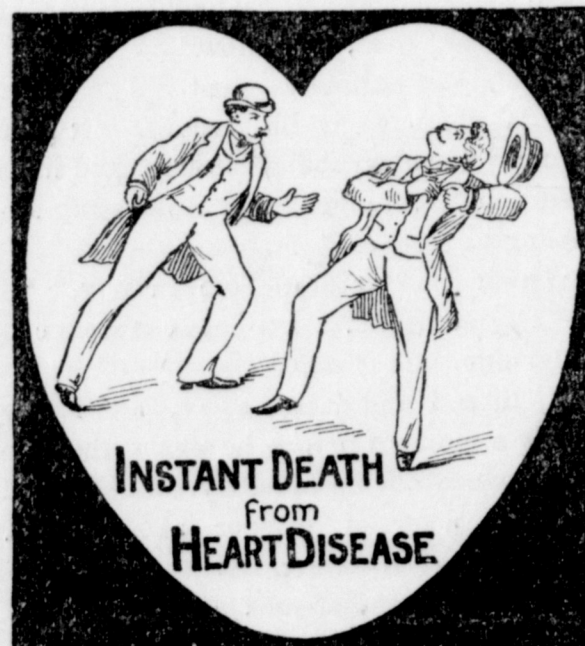
Professor Roberts is the author of various works, disclosing strongly original and versatile powers, refined and scholarly. Where good taste and conscientious care are prized at their worth his writings will be cherished. Beside his four volumes of verse, his compilation, "Poems of Wild Life" in the "Canterbury Poets' Series," and his translation of De Gaspe's "Canadians of Old," he has published two volumes of short stories, and an earlier historical tale of Acadie, entitled, "The Raid From Beauséjour," which appeared in The Dominion Illustrated Monthly, in 1892. He has done much to illustrate the Canadian Provinces by his books of topographical description, written with unusual grace and skill. He has in press at the present time a History of Canada. He is justly a recognized leader of Canadian letters.

Miss Marie Corelli, in her last slap at her critics, has this for the present hapless Laureate: "There was once a very clever individual named Alfred Tennyson. He was our last Laureate. There is a Laureate now, we are told, but we do not believe it. We knew Tennyson,—we do not know anything about this other man, and I am afraid we do not want to know. Well,—our last Laureate was pleased to form one of 'my public,' and he was also pleased to write and tell me so with his own hand. Of course he must have been incontestably desperately 'vulgar.' The San man will quickly understand how 'vulgar' he was. He was a bit of the 'great heart,' and his place has not been filled up yet, because that same 'great heart' does not take to Alfred Austin. Wherein is the proof of how singularly gifted a man Austin must be. To have no public now is a splendid thing,—especially for a poet. No public now; but all postscript hereafter. Alas! Alfred the Second! You must have come in under a malignant star!

And yet, we have heard how he, who now passes unquestioned, was once called "Miss Alfred," and when he came to his public, softly as the white doe of Rylstone came to Emily, he was pestered with a whole cloud of critical flies and not a few hornets and devil's darning-needles. He finally brushed them off. We can ourselves remember when in later years the critical cry went up against him, and such injustice was done to his dramas as might well discredit the whole critical tribe. One day I read these exquisite lines which had just appeared:

"Once more the heavenly power
Makes all things new;
And dimes the red-plow'd hills
With loving blue;
The black birds have their wills,
The throats too.

My auditor sniffed at these lines, inveighed against the waning Laureate and his unfailing pathos, professing he could write better things himself if he should choose. Such nonsense now is being dropped. We know not the critics of the "Poems by Two Brothers," of "Maud" and the Dramas; but who knows not the masterpieces they criticised? John Richard Green declared that in his historical researches he nowhere obtained so just and vivid a conception of Henry II and his court as from Tennyson's "Becket"; and Dr. Henry Van Dyke properly affirms that "the systematic undervaluation of Tennyson's dramatic work is a reproach to the intelligence of our critics." Therefore, it follows that—though Austin in not comparable with Tennyson—something of critical injustice may also have been done to him. PASTOR FELIX.



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LARGE BLACKSMITH SHOP.

It Was Three Miles From the Entrance of the Shop to the Anvil.

Among the stories told of early California days is one which gives a remarkable picture of a blacksmith's shop.

In the days before roads had been laid out and sawmills built, a blacksmith settled on one of the river bars, and erecting a forge of clay and stones, set the anvil on a big tree-stump, which he had sawed low for that purpose, and did a thriving business sharpening the picks and drills of the miners.

He was himself a miner, and did his blacksmithing almost entirely at night. Not knowing when his claim might fail or be disputed and be forced to move on to another place, he did not think it worth his while to build a regular shop.

One day two of the miners left the bar for a town some twenty miles away. As they came into the main trail leading to the blacksmith's haunt, they met a man leading a horse which had lost a shoe and was stumbling badly.

"Strangers," said the man, in a weary tone, "can you tell me how far it is to the blacksmith's shop? My horse has lost a shoe, and he's mighty lame."

"Well, now," said one of the miners, leaning forward and smiling in a most encouraging way, "don't you be for givin' up. You're in the blacksmith's shop now, though I'm bound to tell you it's about three miles more before you'll strike the anvil."

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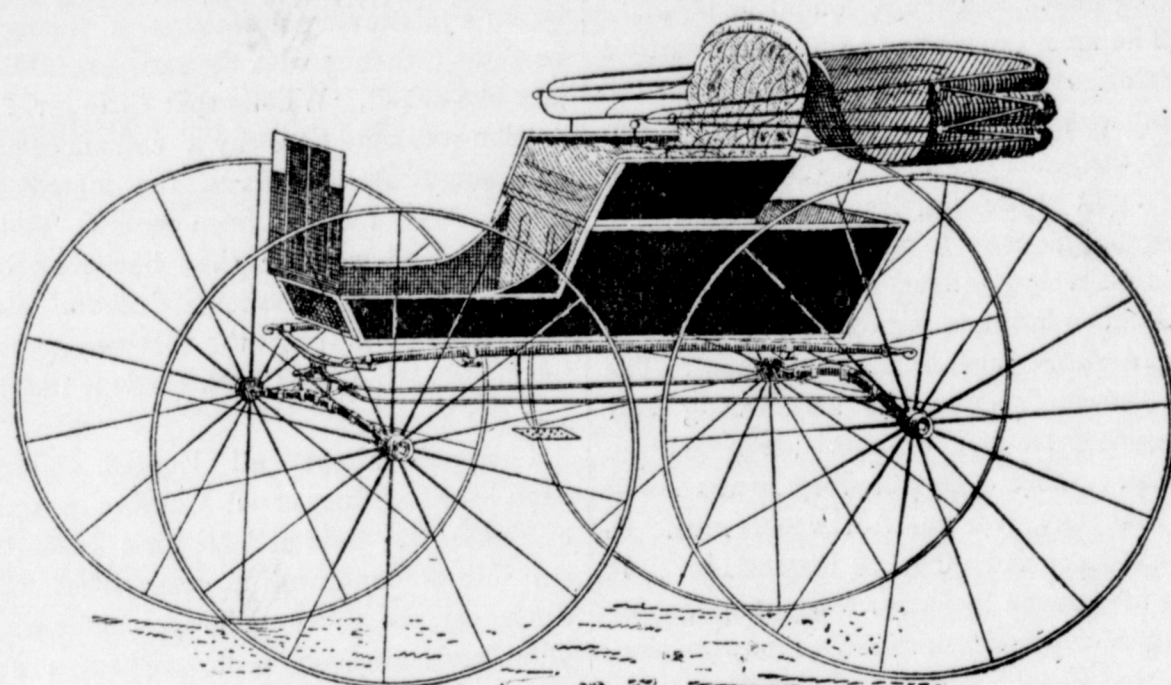
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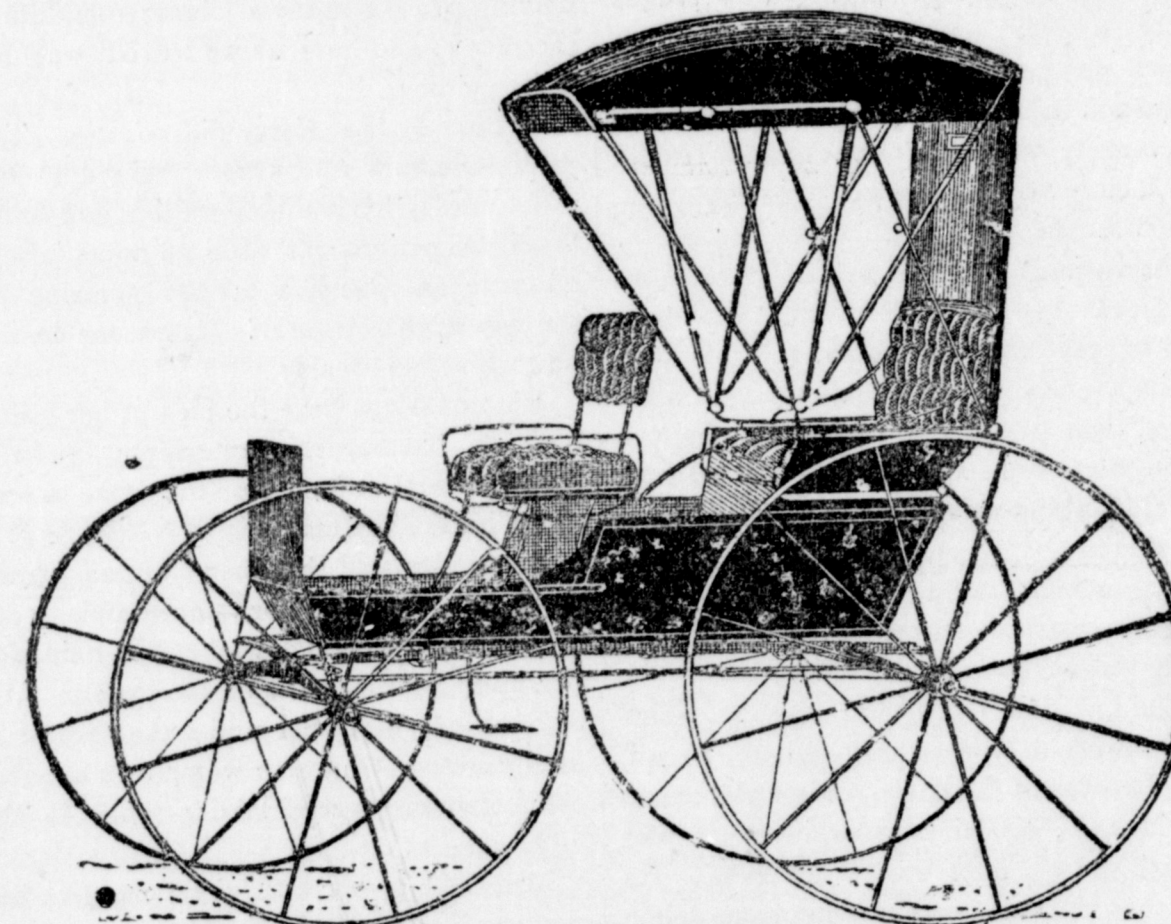
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SUFFICIENT EXCUSE.

Why She Gave an Excuse For Rufus to the Master.

The New Orleans Times-Democrat tells a plantation story of a colored man and his wife. They were among a score of colored field-hands, and were what the Times-Democrat calls 'typical darkies.' The man, in addition to his work in the field, was expected to attend to the horses and do chores about the house.

He was well on in years, but one of the most faithful fellows that ever followed a plow or curried a horse. His wife officiated as cook and helped with the housework.

The master was a hard worker, who spared neither himself nor his employes, and though he gained the rather unenviable reputation of a 'driver,' he had his good points, and one of them was a liking for old Rufus and his dusky wife, Rebecca. They were negroes of the old slavery times, polite and mindful of the days when their lives were literally owned by their masters.

One day the aged negro did not appear in season for work, and as the master had

counted on his early presence about the stables, he took Rebecca to task for the tardiness of her spouse.

'Hev to 'scuse Rufus dis mawnin,' boss; hev to 'scuse him—'

'What's the matter with him? Why aint he here on time, eh?' the master put in seditiously.

'Hev to 'scuse him dis mawnin'. Rufus died jes 'fore sunup boss.'

The quaint manner of her putting the matter and her faithfulness to her own work acted on the master's good qualities, and quickly telling her she could 'have a holiday,' he turned away, possibly to conceal his feelings.

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Horticultural.

"Let me see," mused the sporting editor; "what's an incubator?"

"An incubator," replied the agricultural editor, "is an egg plant."