

\* \* \* The Story Page. \* \* \*

"Pidgeon-Nys"—A Story.

BY MILTON B. MARKS.

"Ar—thur! where are you?" The voice was that of a girl of perhaps fourteen years of age. As she stood in the doorway of a little cottage half hidden from view by three large willows which shivered in the cool November breeze, she glanced hesitatingly up and down the street.

Below, to the south, were rows of cottages forming a portion of a little Canadian lakeport town. Beyond, in the little harbor, numerous small craft and one or two boats of more respectable proportions rode lazily at their moorings. A closer inspection of the shipping, however, would have belied this seeming inactivity, for down on the wharves men were busily engaged hurrying the great bales and boxes aboard preparatory to the last run of the season.

"Ar—thur!" repeated the girl. Hearing no response to her call, she drew the shawl, which was thrown carelessly over her shoulders, more closely about her, and stepped out into the path leading to the rear of the cottage. She surmised that her brother could be found in his favorite retreat with his pigeons. She accordingly made her way to the little building which did service as a pigeon cote, and softly pressed opened the door and looked in. Sure enough! there sat her brother in the midst of his flock. One beautiful bird was perched upon his left hand, making vain attempts to reach some crumbs of bread which he held tantalizingly out of reach in his other hand, while on each shoulder, and even on top of his head sat others, their shapely heads stretched downward.

Ingrassed as he was with his pigeons he did not at first notice the presence of his sister, until the latter, pushing the door farther open, frightened the birds, and they fluttered away to a safe distance on their roosts, where they sat cooling and preening their ruffled feathers.

"There, Alice, shut the door quick!" he cried. "See! you have scared them away!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she replied, at the same time stepping in and closing the door.

"Girls always scare things so," was his comment.

She had, however, no sooner seated herself on an empty box near her brother than the pigeons began to hover around their heads.

Arthur Nys loved his pigeons as most Belgians do. The average Belgian delights in a well stocked cote of homing pigeons, ringed and numbered, whose framed records hang conspicuously in honored spaces upon cottage walls. And Arthur was far from being an exception to this rule. He often preferred to spend hours at a time with his feathered friends rather than join in the sports and games of other boys. The boys had nicknamed him "Pigeon-Nys," a name which seemed to fit him admirably. In fact he seemed to rather enjoy the appellation.

When he and his sister were born their parents lived in Belgium, but being dissatisfied with that country, they one day packed their meager belongings and, with the children and a few of the choicest pigeons, they started out for the great western land of whose wonderful possibilities they had heard so much. This dream of prosperity, however, resolved itself into a not very lucrative position for Mr. Nys on one of the freight boats plying the great lakes. Though this sufficed to supply the necessities of life, it fell so far short of the cherished hopes of the family that they many times wished themselves back across the seas. For that reason the pigeons became dearer to him than ever, for they brought to mind the memories of their native home.

As soon as Arthur was old enough to care for them properly, the pigeons had become his property and to the wants of his increasing flock he had ever since faithfully administered. It was, therefore, little wonder that he came to love them.

Life with these homesick Belgians, went on in this manner until one day, instead of the expected return of the father and husband, they received the message that his ship had gone down in a storm with all on board. From that hour there had been a constant struggle on the part of the mother to provide for the wants of her family. Arthur, boy-like, often dreamed great dreams of the time when he should be able to support his mother and sister, but the rebuffs he had experienced in several actual attempts to find work might have disheartened one more accustomed to battle with the disappointments of the world.

"There, Arthur, he's got it!" exclaimed Alice, who had been for a long time watching the efforts of the pigeon to get the crumbs of bread from her brother's hand.

"Isn't he a fine bird!" exclaimed her brother, as the pigeon which had called forth Alice's exclamation flew up in triumph with the largest piece of bread. "Just see how proud he looks. He's the oldest one here. Father said he came with us from Belgium and he's most as old

as I am. Poor fellow, he's been shut up in this house ever since. I don't dare to let him out or he would try to go back."

"Don't you 'spose he'd ever get there?" asked Alice. "No, 'course he wouldn't! He'd just kill himself tryin' to fly so far," replied her brother.

"I wish he could," musingly said Alice.

"What's the use of wishin' that?" asked her brother.

"If he did we wouldn't have him any more."

"Well, I wish he could, any way. I wish we ere pigeons so we could too," she replied.

"There's no use wishin' that 'cause we'd only just be dead if we were pigeons an' tried it," was his answer.

"I heard mother say to-day that maybe you'd have to sell some of your pigeons; then what'll you do?" asked Alice.

At this remark a slight cloud settled over her brother's face. It was not the first time the possibility of such a thing had been suggested to him and he did not enjoy pondering over the disagreeable subject.

"I'll tell you what, I wish I could get across the lake to one of those big cities and get something to do," said her brother. "It wouldn't take this fellow long to fly across if he was on the other side," indicating, as he spoke, a bird that was just then strutting along at their feet. "He's the best flyer in the lot. See!" said Arthur, as he made a dive and caught the pigeon in his hands. "His number's 1,001 and he's got a record too. Father flew him with the young birds the year he was raised."

Here they were interrupted by a familiar voice from the house calling them. "Oh! I came out to call you to dinner, and I forgot all about it!" exclaimed Alice, jumping up and opening the door as she spoke. "You'll have to hurry now."

With a half sigh Arthur released the pigeon, and, having securely fastened the door behind him, slowly followed his sister into the house. The meal which followed was eaten almost in silence. At length, pushing his chair from the table and picking up his cap, Arthur left the house and started down the street. He had gone but a short distance when he met a crowd of boys and was greeted with: "Hello! 'Pigeon-Nys,' come on, we're goin' to play shinny." But he shook his head and the boys passed on without him.

He had no very distinct notion where he was going but at last found himself at the docks eagerly watching the men hurrying back and forth, wheeling great crates and boxes. How he longed to be one of them and get into the bustle of it all.

"Hey there, kid, git out o' the way!" exclaimed a voice behind his back. He jumped away just in time to escape being run into by a loaded truck which was being pushed forward by two men. Then he wandered over to the side of the vessel and stood studying the whole scene before him. While standing there lost in contemplation of the picturesque sight, he was again startled by a voice—this time from above him. As he glanced up he saw a man leaning over the side of the boat. This new acquaintance called to him in a not unkindly tone: "Say, son, what're you doin' there? Want a job?" Arthur soon recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to answer, "Yessur." "Well, pile up here lively, then, I guess I can use a lad about your build," said the man. Arthur wasted no time in following his advice, and had soon clambered aboard.

"This way," said the man. "We'll go below." "There," said he, at last after leading Arthur down the narrow stairway, and in and out among the boxes and barrels, "stow that small truck away in shipshape; there'll be more here directly."

This work kept Arthur busy the whole afternoon and when he was again called on deck it was too dark to work longer.

"Well, son," exclaimed the man who had hired him, and who proved to be the captain, "I guess you've got the right stuff in you. Come around again in the morning. We're billed to get away from here by this time to-morrow, and we want to have everything ready." "If you please, sir," said Arthur, "couldn't you use a boy on your trip?"

"What's that?" replied the captain, "why bless me, no, we couldn't afford to hire another hand, though we could use a fellow like you to good advantage if we had him. What's your name, son?"

"Arthur Nys," was the response.

"Nys! Nys! Let me see," said the captain, "there used to be a man with me not long ago by that name. He was lost when the 'Marquette' went down."

"That was my father, sir," replied Arthur.

"Well! Well!" said the captain, "Your father, was he? Ahem—he was a pretty good sailor, Ahem," continued he, "but we couldn't afford to give you no more'n your board if you went this trip."

"That's all I want, sir," replied Arthur.

"Well, I'll think it over," said the captain.

Arthur trudged home with a light heart that night, for he thought he had seen in the captain's eye a sort of

half twinkle that portended success to his cherished hopes. When he told the good news at home, however, much argument was required before his mother could be brought to entertain for a moment such a hazardous proposition. But the opinion of an old Swedish neighbor, who had in his day been something of a sailor, finally won the day.

"Ya, ya, lot honor go, lot honor go. Gag tanker den poiken will bier en quick mon. Ya, ya, det all right," said he.

The labors of the following day were fully repaid in Arthur's mind when, as he came on deck, the captain accosted him with: "Well, son, if you're goin' with this outfit you'll have to be ready in an hour."

In considerably less than the allotted time, Arthur was back at the docks. His only baggage consisted of a small basket under one arm and a bundle of necessary clothing held tightly under the other. A few hours later all he could see of the harbor was a few lights twinkling behind them in the darkness.

Arthur was not at all sorry when it came time, to 'turn in' for the cold November wind which drove the scudding clouds overhead and dashed the spray over the bow of the boat made even the thought of the rough bunks seem inviting. For a long time he lay tossing about, but in time the labors and excitement of the day began to tell and he dropped asleep. How long he slept he could not tell. It seemed but a short time. It was still dark when he awoke and he rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was not dreaming for he felt that something was happening. The motion of the boat was no longer a gentle roll; it had increased to a decided plunging. The rattle of chairs and other things being dashed from side to side below gave further evidence of this. Above the throbbing of the engines he could hear the roaring of the wind and dashing of water mingled with the shouting of the men on deck. Involuntarily he crouched down in bunk and covered his head to shut out the horrible sound. He thought of the time when the news came to his mother that the "Marquette" had gone down. He shuddered to think that perhaps—perhaps—unable longer to bear the thoughts which thronged his mind, he clutched the sides of the bunk and tried to swing himself down. Just at that moment a quiver seemed to pass through the ship from stern to stem. Then came a lurch that threatened to send the whole cargo to the bottom. The suddenness and force of the shock wrenched his hold from the bunk and threw him forward. The next instant he felt a sudden pain as his head struck the edge of a chest on the floor. Then he became unconscious.

Of the events that followed he knew nothing until in a half dream he heard some one say: "He have a rap but gag tanker he kommer round all right." Opening his eyes he saw someone bending over him. With a bewildered expression he sat up and looked around. Then the memory of it all came back to him. He was lying on a bundle of blankets and the room around him was in the greatest confusion; but it was no longer so dark and the boat had ceased its violent tossing though it still rolled and pitched considerably.

"Have we been in a storm?" he asked feebly. "Ya, ya, we har haft stor-om, ock vorth rodar 'har blost bort so we can lcke styra boaten longre. Gag tanker shall better make prayers."

With this comforting assurance Arthur again sank back. Everything seemed far away and indistinct to him and he almost imagined himself back with his pigeons. The events of the day crowded themselves swiftly before his imagination. Suddenly, he remembered something and again he opened his eyes. "Where is the captain?" he asked. The latter who happened at this moment to be near, heard the question and came to his side.

"Well son, I guess you're in for it this time," said he.

"Would it do any good to send word home?" asked Arthur, eagerly watching the captain's face.

"Well you bet it would, son, but I ain't seen any one yet who wants the job of doin' it," replied the captain.

"I'll send it!" exclaimed Arthur. "I brought number 1,001 with me, and he'd be bound to get there for he's the best flyer in the lot."

"There son," said the captain, "I guess you had a pretty hard rap and you'd better try and get to sleep." Arthur still persisted, however, and to humor him, the basket which he had brought on board was finally found and given him. He opened it before the eyes of the astonished captain and took out the blinking pigeon.

"You see, I promised my sister to send her a message the first day out and so I brought him 'cause he's the best flyer," he explained. A look of comprehension began to dawn on the captain's face. He soon recovered from the astonishment that had been occasioned by such an extraordinary revelation and lost no time in writing a message which Arthur enclosed in a small celluloid case which he attached to one of the bird's tail feathers. Taking him on deck the captain released him. Quick as a shot the bird flew upward! Twice it fluttered around in a circle and then darted suddenly away was soon lost to view.

Forty-eight hours later the tug "Royal" hailed a boat flying distress signals, and towed her into port. Among the crowd who had gathered on the shore to watch the incoming of the boats was a young girl with a shawl drawn tightly about her. When the boats reached the pier she glanced with eager eyes on the faces of the sailors. Suddenly she gave a cry of delight as she caught sight of a familiar figure among them, and running forward threw her arms about his neck.

"You see," she explained to her brother when they were at home that evening, "I had just fed the pigeons when this one came flying home. As soon as I found out what the paper said, I ran as fast as I could to that office where father used to get his pay, and gave it to a man there. I had dreadful hard work to make him understand, but when I did, you ought to see him hurry! I guess they sent a boat right off."

"And just think!" replied her brother, "I'm to have a job right in that office. I guess we won't have to sell the pigeons now!"—Standard.