

"That's a fac'," his mother admitted. "But boys, an' men folks ginerally, air scandalous easy ter break a promise whar whiskey is in it."

"I'll hev ye ter know that when I gin my word I keeps it!" cried Dick proudly.

He little dreamed how that promise was to be assailed before the sun went down.

He was a tall, sinewy boy, deft of foot as all these mountaineers are, and a seven-mile walk in the snow to Birk's Mill he considered a mere trifle. He tramped along cheerily enough through the silent solitudes of the dense forest.

All at once—it was a terrible shock of surprise—he was sinking! Was there nothing beneath him but the vague depths of air to the base of the mountain? He realized with a quiver of dismay that he had mistaken a huge drift-filled fissure, between a jutting crag and the wall of the ridge, for the solid snow-covered ground. He tossed his arms about wildly in his effort to grasp something firm. The motion only dislodged the drift. He felt that he was falling, and he was going down—down—down with it. He saw the trees on the summit of Old Windy disappear. He caught one glimpse of the neighboring ridges. Then he was blinded and enveloped in this cruel whiteness. What would they say at home and at Birk's Mill? One last thought of the "pea-fowl," and he seemed to slide swiftly away from the world with the snow.

He was unconscious probably only for a few minutes. When he came to himself he found that he was lying, half-submerged in the great drift, on the slope of the mountain, and the dark icicle-begirt cliff towered high above. He stretched his limbs—no bones broken! He could hardly believe that he had fallen unhurt from those heights. He was still a little dizzy and faint, but otherwise uninjured.

Now a great perplexity took hold on him. How was he to make his way back up the mountain, he asked himself, as he looked at the inaccessible cliffs looming high into the air. All the world around him was unfamiliar. He would be half the day in finding the valley road that led to Birk's Mills. He rose to his feet and gazed about him in painful indecision. The next moment a thrill shot through him, to which he was unaccustomed.

For he heard voices! Not from the cliffs above,—but from below! He stood motionless, listening intently, his eyes distended, and his heart beating fast.

All silence! Not even the wind stirred in the pine thicket. Dick rubbed his eyes. It was no dream. There was the thicket—but whose were the voices that had rung out faintly from beneath it?

A crowd of superstitions surged upon him. He was remembering fireside legends, horrible enough to raise the hair on a civilized, educated boy's head; much more horrible, then, to a young barbarian like Dick. On this, the most benign day of all that ever dawns upon the world, was he led into these endless wastes of forest to be terrified by the "harnts"?

Suddenly those voices from the earth again! One was singing a drunken catch—it broke into falsetto, and ended with an unmistakable hiccup.

Dick's blood came back with a rush.

"I hev never hearn tell o' the hoobies gittin' boozy!" he said with a laugh. "That's whar they hev got the upper-hand o' humans."

As he gazed again at the thicket, he saw now what he had been too much agitated to observe before, a column of dense smoke that rose from far down the declivity, and seemed to make haste to hide itself among the low-hanging bows of a clump of fir-trees.

"It's somebody's house down thar," was Dick's conclusion.

When he neared the smoke he paused abruptly, staring once more.

There was no house! The smoke rose from among low pine bushes. Above were the snow-laden branches of the fir.

"Ef thar war a house hyar I reckon I could see it!" said Dick, doubtfully, infinitely mystified.

There was a continual drip, drip, all around. Yet a thaw had not set in. There was heat below certainly, a strong heat, and somebody was keeping the fire up steadily.

"An' air it folks ez live underground like foxes an' sech!" Dick exclaimed, astonished, as he came upon a large, irregularly-shaped rift in the

rocks, and heard the same reeling voice from within beginning to sing once more. But for this bacchanalian melody the noise of Dick's entrance might have given notice of his approach. As it was, the inhabitants of this strange place were even more surprised than he, when, after groping through a dark, low passage, an abrupt turn brought him into a lofty, vaulted apartment. There was a great flare of light, which revealed six or seven muscular men grouped about a large copper vessel built into a rude stone furnace, and all the air was pervaded by an incomparably strong alcoholic odor. The boy started back with a look of terror. That pale terror was reflected on each man's face, as on a mirror. At the sight of the young stranger they all sprang up with the same gesture—each instinctively laid his hand upon the pistol that he wore.

Poor Dick understood it all at last. He had stumbled upon a nest of distillers, only too common among these mountains. He realized that in discovering their stronghold he had learned a secret that was by no means a safe one for him to know. And he was in their power, at their mercy!

"Don't shoot!" he faltered. "I jes' want ter ax the folks ter tell me the way ter Birk's Mill!"

What would he not have given to be on the bleak mountain outside!

One of the men caught him as if anticipating an attempt to run. Two or three, after a low-toned colloquy, took their rifles, and crept cautiously outside to reconnoitre the situation. Dick comprehended their suspicion with new quakings. They imagined that he was a spy, and had been sent among them to discover them plying their forbidden vocation. The penalty of their still was imprisonment for them. His heart sank as he thought of it; they would never let him go.

After a time the reconnoitering party came back.

"Nothin' stirrin'," said the leader, tersely.

"I misdoubts," muttered another, casting a look of deep suspicion on Dick. "Thar air men out thar, I'm a-thinkin', hid somewhar."

"They air furdur 'n a mile off, ennyhow," returned the first speaker. "We never lef' so much ez a bush 'thout sarchin' of it."

"The officers can't find this place no-ways 'thout that thar chap for a guide," said a third, with a surly nod of his head at Dick.

"We're safe enough, boys, safe enough!" cried a stout-built, red-faced, red-bearded man, evidently very drunk, and with a voice that broke into quavering falsetto as he spoke. "This chap can't do nothin'. We hev got him bound hand an' foot. Hyar air the Philistines, boys! Mighty little Philistine, though! hi!" He tried to point jeeringly at Dick, and forgot what he had intended to do before he could fairly extend his hand. Then his rollicking head sank on his breast, and he began to troll again,—

"Old Adam he kem loafin' round,  
He spied the peelin' on the ground!"

One of the more sober of the men had extinguished the fire in order that they might not be betrayed by the smoke outside to the officers whom they fancied were seeking them. The place, chilly enough at best, was growing bitter cold. The strange subterranean beauty of the surroundings, the wall and arches, scintillating wherever they caught the light, were oddly incongruous with the beastly, bloated faces, and uncouth figures of the distillers.

He observed that they were making preparations for flight, and once more the fear of what they would with him clutched at his heart.

"This haar cub will go blab," was the first suggestion.

"He will keep mum," said the vocalist, glancing at the boy with a jovially tipsy combination of leer and wink. "Hyar is the persuader!" He rapped sharply on his pistol. "This 'll scotch his wheel."

"Hold yer own jaw—ye drunken 'possum!" retorted another of the group. "Ef ye fire off that pistol in hyar we'll have all these hyar rocks"—he pointed at the walls and the long colonnades—"answerin' back an' yowin' like a pack o' hounds on a hot scent. Ef thar air folks outside, the noise would fotch 'em down on us fur true!"

Dick breathed more freely. The rocks would speak up for him! He could not be harmed with all these tell-tale witness at hand.

The man who had put out the fire, who had led the reconnoitering party, who had made all the active preparations for departure, who seemed, in

short, to be an executive committee of one—a long, lank, lazy-looking mountaineer, with a decision of action in startling contrast to his whole aspect, now took this matter in hand.

"Nothin' easier," he said, tersely. "Fill him up. Make him ez drunk ex a fraish b'iled owl. Then lead him to the t'other end o' the cave, an' blind-fold him, an' lug him off five mile in the woods, an leave him thar. He'll never know what he hev seen nor done."

In the preparations for departure all the lights had been extinguished, except a single lantern, and a multitude of shadows had come thronging from the deeper recesses of the cave. In the faint glimmer the figures of the men loomed up, indistinct, gigantic, distorted. They hardly seemed men at all to Dick; rather some evil under-ground creature, neither beast nor human.

And he was to be made as besotted, as loathsome, even more helpless, than they, in order that his senses might be sapped away, and he should remember no story to tell. There was his promise to his mother! As the long, lank, lazy-looking mountaineer pressed the whiskey upon him, he threw it off with a gesture so unexpected and vehement that the cracked jug fell to the floor, and was shattered to fragments.

Dick lifted an appealing face to the man who seized him with a strong grip. "I can't—I won't," the boy cried wildly. "I—I—promised my mother!"

He looked around the circle deprecatingly. He expected first a guffaw and then a blow, and he dreaded the ridicule more than the pain.

But there were neither blows nor ridicule. They all gazed at him, astounded. Then a change, which Dick hardly comprehended, flitted across the face of the man who had grasped him. He turned away abruptly, with a bitter laugh that startled all the echoes.

"I—I promised my mother, too!" he cried. "It air good that she's whar she can't know how I hev kep' it."

And then there was a sudden silence. It seemed to Dick, strangely enough, like the sudden silence that comes after a prayer.

The "executive committee" promptly recovered himself. But he made no further attempt to force the whiskey upon the boy. Under some whispered instructions which he gave the others, Dick was half led, half dragged through immensely long black halls of the cave, while one of the men went before carrying the feeble lantern. When the first glimmer of daylight appeared in the distance, he understood that the cave had an outlet other than the one by which he had entered, and evidently miles distant from it. Thus it was that the distillers were well enabled to baffle the law that sought them.

They stopped here and blindfolded the boy. How far and where they dragged him through the snowy mountain wilderness outside, Dick never knew. He was exhausted when at length they allowed him to pause. As he heard their steps dying away in the distance, he tore the bandage from his eyes, and found that they had left him in the midst of the wagon road to make his way to Birk's Mill as best he might. When he reached it the wintry sun was low in the western sky, and the very bones of the "pea-fowl" were picked.

On the whole, it seemed a sorry Christmas Day, as Dick could not know then—indeed, he never knew—what good results it brought forth. For among those who took the benefit of the clemency extended by the government to the "moonshiners" of this region, on condition that they discontinued illicit distilling for the future, was a certain long, lank, lazy-looking mountaineer who suddenly became sober and steady and a law-abiding citizen. He had been reminded, this Christmas Day, of a broken promise to a dead mother.—*Youth's Companion*.

To clean a stove zinc or zinc-lined bathtub, mix ammonia and whiting to a smooth paste, apply it to the zinc and let it dry. Then rub it off until no dust remains.

BROWN BREAD.—Take one pint sweet milk, one teacup of molasses, put on the stove and let it come to the boiling point. Take from the fire and add at once, one quart of brown flour, a tablespoonful of salt, and a teaspoonful of soda. Bake immediately.