

A TALE OF THE MARLBOROUGH SANDS.

BY ELIOT McORMICK.

Tom Kidder lay stretched upon the hay in the left of his father's barn, idly whitening a piece of wood with his new knife, and listening to the superior conversation of his latest acquaintance, Dick Jones. Tom had never been out of Scousett in his life—except once when he went to Portland—and had with deep interest the marvellous tales which Dick, who was a summer visitor down at the beach, had brought from Boston. The two boys were about the same age, but Tom regarded his friend with as deep veneration as though Dick had been Methuselah. It was a beautiful summer afternoon, the air was perfectly still and not very warm, and Dick, having exhausted for the time his stock of adventures, began to find the haymow too confining for his restless ambition.

"Say," he remarked, "don't you want to harness up the horse and take me down to the beach? It would be a nice afternoon for a drive, and I ought to be going home."

Tom looked a little uncomfortable.

"I don't believe I can do that," he said. "Father has gone off with the buggy and old Sam."

"So much the better," remarked Dick. "That leaves the other horse for you and me, don't you see? Only it's a nuisance that we shall have to take the wagon."

"But I can't," remonstrated Tom. "Father never lets any one drive Prince but himself, and never harnesses him to the wagon. I'll row you down to the ferry-pier, though, and you can take the train there over to Marlborough."

Dick curled up his lip in a disagreeable way, rising at the same time to his feet. "Thanks," he said, "but I guess I'll walk. Only I don't see how I can get up here very often if it is such hard work to get back. It isn't any joke, you know, to walk two miles through the heat and dust."

Tom was in an agony of mortification.

"Oh, I say, Dick!" he cried, "you know I don't want you to walk; let me row you down to the pier. The tide will be running out in ten minutes, and it will be an easy row. Or, stay here all night, won't you? and I'll row up to town and telephone down to the beach that you won't be home."

But Dick was quite inflexible.

"No," he declared, "I am not going to be drowned in the river, and I can't stay all night. I have got an appointment at six o'clock at the hotel. If you can't harness up Prince, as you call him, why, I'll have to walk."

"But he balks," faltered Tom.

"Balks, does he? Well, if there's one thing I'm more glad to get hold of than another it's a balky horse. Why, my dear boy, I know a trick that will cure the worst case you ever saw."

Tom hesitated. Had not his father said, only the day before, that if some one did not cure Prince of his balking the horse must be sold? What a grand thing it would be if he could take Prince out and bring him back cured! Deacon Kidder did not like Dick, as Tom very well knew, but if Dick should cure Prince the Deacon could have no reason for not liking him.

"How do you do it?" Tom asked at length.

Dick surveyed him with an air of surprise.

"How do I do it?" he asked. "Well, I guess that's my secret. May be you won't find out how when you've seen it done, but I'll do it all the same. Does he balk when you drive him?"

"I never drove him," said Tom meekly.

"Never drove him? Well, before I'd let a horse like that stand idle in my father's stable while my father was away, I'd know it. It's time you began, young fellow. You can drive him part of the way this afternoon."

Now, considering that the horse belonged to Tom's father, and that if either of the two boys had a right to drive him it was not Dick, this offer was net so magnanimous as it seemed. Indeed, it was what Tom himself, if he had not been dazzled by Dick's air of superiority, would have called impudent; but just now he was under a spell which blinded his judgment and made him willing to do things that at other times he would not have dreamed of doing.

"Well, I'd like to drive Prince," he admitted.

"Of course you would, and if you had any pluck you'd have driven him long ago. The idea of a fellow like you having to take that old cow every time you go out! Why, your father ought to buy you a light wagon and let you drive Prince out every afternoon. I dare say you could train him so that he'd go inside of three minutes. Come, let's go down and harness."

Tom still deliberated. He felt flattered by Dick's sugared compliments and enticed by his wily suggestions and stung by his contempt. Perhaps it was the contempt that decided him; for when Dick rather sneeringly remarked, "Afraid are you?" Tom with a quick, angry flush jumped to his feet and faced his friend.

"No, I'm not afraid!" he said. "I dare say Father'll thrash me for it; but I'm not afraid."

"Oh, he won't thrash you, if you bring the horse back cured."

"Well, I don't know," said Tom, reflectively. "Father wouldn't believe he was cured until he'd tried him himself; but we'll go down just the same and harness him."

Tom had not lived on a farm all his life without knowing how to harness a horse, but Dick, when it came to putting Prince in the wagon, did not display that proficiency which his somewhat boastful conversation had led Tom to expect from him. Tom, indeed, had to go over his work, straightening out the trace, readjusting the breeching-strap, and making things generally safe and sure. It was strange, he thought, that a fellow who knew so much about harnessing should not know more about harnessing them; but then, perhaps, that had always been done for him. At any rate, the job was now complete and they were ready to start.

"Which way did your father go?" asked Dick, as they got in the wagon.

"Oh, father went up to Lyman," said Tom. "We shan't meet him anywhere. Which road shall we take?"

"Let's keep down your road," returned Dick. "That will take us to the Ferry Beach, then we can drive along the beach to Marlborough."

"You forget about the quicksand," objected Tom. Dick threw back his head and laughed.

"Of all the ridiculous tales," he declared, "that quicksand story is about the worst I ever heard! Why, I drove over there the other day, and it was like a floor the whole way."

"A horse and wagon were swallowed up there once," observed Tom, soberly.

Dick's lip curled. "Oh, pshaw!" he said. "I don't believe a word of it. I'm not afraid."

By this time they were fairly on their way. The horse as yet had not shown the slightest symptom of balking, which, though it certainly made the drive more agreeable, left Tom without the excuse which he had been making to himself for taking the horse out.

"It's always the way," he said, gloomily. "If nobody wanted him to balk, he would be sure to do it."

"Who wants him to balk?" said Dick, flicking a fly off of Prince's flank with the whip. "I'm sure I don't; perhaps he'll gratify you coming back."

This possibility had not struck Tom before.

"Suppose he should?" he exclaimed.

Dick laughed. For the first time it struck Tom what a cold, disagreeable laugh Dick's was.

"Well, you'd have to get along the best way you could," he said, indifferently.

"And won't you tell me your trick?" Dick smiled, and made no response.

There was a few minutes' silence while the wagon rolled swiftly along the road. However much Dick might be enjoying it the ride was already becoming to Tom a very unpleasant experience. The sense of his disobedience and of his father's displeasure, his fear lest the horse might balk when he should be alone, and his dread of the Marlborough Sands combined to make his situation extremely uncomfortable.

"Fine, isn't it?" remarked Dick at length. Tom mumbled something which might have been either yes or no.

"It'll be finer, though," Dick continued, "when we get down to the beach."

This time Tom did not say a word, and they drove along without speaking until another turn brought them in sight of the Bay View House. In a moment more they had passed the house and crossed the rail-

way track and gained the hard surface of the sand beyond.

"Glorious!" Dick cried. "Reminds me of Nantasket!"

"Nantasket!" exclaimed Tom, indignantly; "there isn't another beach like the Marlborough in the world."

It seemed, indeed, as if Tom must be right. Far away in the direction which they were taking curved the hard level sand—so far, indeed, that the eye could not discern the end; and though it was high tide, there were yet a hundred feet between them and the rippling waves. They were leaving the Ferry Beach, as it was called, behind them, and were approaching the little river which marked the boundary of Marlborough Beach and concealed, as Tom had said the dreaded quicksands. Already they had crossed one or two little rivulets when Tom, who had been keeping a sharp watch, saw the glitter of a wider stream not far ahead.

"Now look out for the sands," he cried. "They're right along here where one of these inlets sets in from the sea."

Dick hit the horse with the whip.

"Oh, bother take the sands!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe there are any."

"Here it is!" cried Tom, excitedly, "right ahead—Dick, you shall stop!" and leaning over he grasped both reins and pulled up the horse on the brink of a stream about fifty feet wide, the appearance of which certainly gave no cause for alarm. The rushing water lurked the terrible power to seize and drag down those who might venture to cross it.

"Let go!" shouted Dick, angrily, tearing the reins away from Tom's hold. "What a fool you are! Don't you know that's the worst thing in the world to do? I'm going through here, quicksands or no quicksands. There's a wagon ahead that has been through, and where one man has gone another can go, I guess."

There was a wagon ahead,—that was a fact,—and, as the tracks showed, it had been through the stream. The marks of the wheels going down one bank were quite plain, and they were equally plain going up the other. Seeing that, Tom felt somewhat reassured and withal a little ashamed of his own haste.

"Well," he said, "perhaps it may be all right, but this looks just like the place."

"Of course it is farther on," said Dick mockingly, "if it's anywhere. I don't believe it's anywhere. Get up!" he cried, striking Prince again with the whip.

The horse, still obedient, started forward and walked cautiously into the river. Then, as he felt the water rising about his fetlocks, he raised his feet nervously and showed a disposition to stop.

"Get up!" said Dick again, with a snap. But Prince did not get up. On the contrary, he stood still. They were by this time a dozen feet past the water's edge; the water was rushing violently under the body of the wagon, and Tom noticed, to his dismay, not only that the body was nearer the surface of the water than it had been a moment before, but that the wagon tracks on the opposite side, at which they had aimed, were several feet up stream.

"It is the Marlborough Sands!" he cried; "and oh, Dick! we are going down!"

At the same moment, the man in the wagon ahead happened to turn around and discovered their perilous position.

"Whip your horse!" Tom could hear him cry; "for heaven's sake, whip your horse!"

Dick had already been whipping the horse, but whether the wagon was too heavy to be pulled out of the shifting sand, or the animal himself was contrary, they did not move an inch, except as the swift current carried them down the river, and the sand threatened to swallow them up. Already the wagon had sunk to the hubs of the wheels.

"Jump!" cried the man, driving back to the bank; jump now! It's your only chance!"

Dick threw down the whip and flung the reins over the dashboard. "I was a fool to trust myself to a balky horse!" he said.

"You'd better jump, Tom, while you've got a chance, and leave the brute to take care of himself. I'm going now."

With these words he clambered into the back of the wagon, coolly removed the second seat, tossed it into the river, and then jumped in after it. The seat served as a

buoy to keep him above the dangerous sands, and with a few rapid strokes he gained the shore which they had left. Without waiting to see how Tom came out of the scrape, he made his way up the stream, to where it might be crossed, and thence as quickly as he could go to the hotel.

Tom, meanwhile, sat hopeless and dazed. Rather than go back to his father without the horse he would go down with the wagon. It wouldn't be long, if he sat there, before he would be drowned. How terribly he was paying for his disobedience, and how ill prepared he was to die! The cries of the man urging him to jump fell on deaf ears. He could not jump and leave Prince to drown.

But need he leave Prince? A sudden thought roused him from his stupor. Leaning over the dashboard he cut the traces with two strokes of his sharp knife. Another stroke severed the strap that connects the saddle with the breeching; then, gathering the reins in his hands and stepping carefully on the shaft, he mounted Prince's back and hit him sharply with the reins. The horse, alive to the situation, plunged forward. Tom's feet pushed the tugs away from the shafts, and with another plunge the shafts dropped into the river. The horse stood free. Another plunge—the reins were not needed now to urge him—and his feet were extricated from the shifting bottom. Another, and Prince, quivering like a leaf, was scrambling up the farther shore. The whole operation had taken but a moment, but when Tom had leaped from the horse's back and looked around for the wagon he discovered with a thrill of horror that it had disappeared from sight.

"Well!" exclaimed the man, who had watched the proceeding with eager interest, "that was a smart thing to do, but let me tell you young fellow, you had a pretty narrow escape."

Tom's face had not yet regained its natural color, nor his voice its usual steadiness.

"Yes," he said, soberly, "I suppose I did."

"Horse balk?" inquired the other.

Tom nodded.

"Won't do it again," said the man, "no more'n you'll cross the Marlboro' Sands again with a heavy wagon at a high tide."

"I guess I won't," said Tom. "I didn't want to do it to-day."

"The other fellow led you into it, did he? Well, you won't be led so easy the next time. Going up Scousett way?"

"Yes, said Tom; "I'm Deacon Kidder's son."

The man whistled. "Deacon Kidder your pa?" he exclaimed. "Land's sake! won't you get it when you get home? Guess I'd better step in and tell them how cute you saved the horse. You can ride up with me, if you like."

"Thank you," said Tom, "I'll be glad to ride up with you, but I'll tell father myself about—the fact is, I took the horse and wagon without leave, and I shan't feel quite easy until I've made it right."

"You'll get a thrashing," said the man, who seemed to be intimately acquainted with the deacon's peculiarities.

"All right!" said Tom cheerfully. "I'd rather be thrashed than feel mean."

"Well," said the man as he whipped up his own horse and the two started off, leading Prince behind, "so would I; but I'll tell you what I'd do—I'd take it out of that other fellow the next time I met him."

Tom laughed.

"Oh!" he said, "I don't want to take it out of anybody. I'm too glad to have got out of that place alive to feel mad."

"Well, you had a mighty narrow escape," said the man again, as though that, after all, was the chief impression which the affair had left upon his mind.

Did Tom get a thrashing? Well, I am obliged to admit that he did. He brought back the horse, to be sure, but then he had had no business to take the horse out; besides which he had lost the wagon. He bore the chastisement, however, very philosophically, knowing that he deserved it, and after it was all over told his father that Mr. Chase—John Chase, of Lyman, which Tom had discovered to be the man's name—had said that the horse would never balk again. The deacon was very incredulous, but as it turned out Mr. Chase was right. Prince never did balk again—except once when the deacon tried to drive him through the Marlborough Sands at low tide. Then he rebelled; and not all Mr. Kidder's persua-