

Rodney simply shook his head.

"Eh-ha! sorry!" meditatively grunted the agent, as Rodney passed on up the hill toward home, thinking that if Leveque were really very sorry he would give him work.

As Rodney came around the corner of the cabin, Mrs. Merton was dipping spoonfuls of yellow corn-meal dough from an old basin on to the board which lay in front of a populous hen coop, and stood watching the downy balls of chickenhood as they picked impotently at the wet meal in imitation of the coaxing mother hen, which set them a noisy and excited example.

She started at the sound of his quiet approach, pushed back her sun-bonnet, and smiled for almost the first time that he could remember since his father's death.

"Well; ma!" he exclaimed, as he came awkwardly and almost bashfully toward her, wondering whether or not she would kiss him. He was going to ask: "Did I scare you?" but he did not have time before she dropped the basin and spoon, and without saying a word kissed him impulsively.

There followed a moment of embarrassing silence, which was finally relieved by Rodney, as he picked up the fallen basin and rapped its edge, with a startling bang against the board in front of the coop.

"Well?" said his mother, in the hopeless tone which plainly implied "I know the worst has happened."

"No; I didn't get anything to do, ma. But I