

LOU'S CLARINET.

It was a Christmas eve service in the Second Westcock church.

The church at Second and Westcock was quaint and old-fashioned, like the village over which it presided. Its shingles were gray with the beating of many winters; its little square tower was surmounted by four spindling posts, like the legs of a table turned heavenward; its steeple windows were adorned with curtains of yellow cotton; its uneven and desolate churchyard, strewn with graves and snowdrifts, occupied a bleak hillside looking out across the bay to the lonely height of Shipody Mountain.

Down the long slope below the church straggled the village, half lost in the snow, and whistled over by the winds of the Bay of Fundy.

Second Westcock was an outlying corner of the rector's expansive parish, and a Christmas eve service there was an event almost unparalleled. To give Second Westcock this service, the rector had forsaken his prosperous congregations at Westcock, Sackville and Dorchester, driving some eight or ten miles through the snow and solitude of the deep Dorchester woods.

And because the choir at Second Westcock was not remarkable even for willingness, much less for strength or skill, he had brought with him his fifteen-year-old niece, Lou Allison, to swell the Christmas praise with the noise of her choir.

The little church was lighted with oil lamps ranged along the white wall between the windows. The poor, bare chancel—a red-cloth covered kitchen table in the center, a pair of painted chairs—was flanked by two towering pulpits of white pine. On either side the narrow, carpetless aisle were rows of unpainted benches.

On the left, the women gathered solemnly the men of the congregation, each looking straight ahead. On the right were the women, whispering and scanning each other's bonnets, till the appearance of the rector from the little vestry room by the door should bring silence and reverent attention.

In front of the women's row stood the melodeon, and the two benches behind it were occupied by the choir, the male members of which sat blushing self-consciousness at their own, but deeply abashed at the necessity of sitting among the women.

There was no attempt at Christmas decoration, for Second Westcock had never been awakened to the delicious excitement of the church by the season.

At last the rector appeared in his voluminous white surplice. He moved slowly up the aisle and mounted the winding steps of the right-hand pulpit, and as he did so his five-year-old son, forsaking his place by Lou's side, marched forward and seated himself resolutely on the pulpit steps. He did not feel quite at home in Second Westcock church.

The sweet old carol, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," rose rather dubiously from the little church, who looked and listened apace at the glittering clarinet into which Lou was now blowing softly. Lou was afraid to make herself distinctly heard at first, but she should startle the singers; but in the second verse the pure vibrant notes came out with confidence and then for two lines the song was little more than a faint hum, and when the rector's vigorous baritone joined the third verse, however, it all came right. The choir felt and responded to the strong support and thrilling stimulus of the instrument, and at length ceased to dread their own voices. The naked little church was glorified with the sweep of triumphant song pulsating through it.

Never before had such music been heard there. Men, women and children sang from the heart, and when the hymn was ended the whole congregation stood for some seconds as in a dream with glimmering smiles, till the rector's calm voice, repeating the opening words of the liturgy, brought back their self-control in some measure.

Thereafter every hymn and chant and coral was like an inspiration, and Lou's eyes sparkled with exultation.

When the service was over the people gathered around the stove by the door, praising Lou's clarinet, and pining little Ted, who had by this time come down from the pulpit steps. One old lady gave the child two or three brown sugar biscuits, which she had brought in her pocket, and a pair of red mittens which she had bought for him as a Christmas present.

Turning to Lou, the old lady said: "I never heard nothing like that trumpet of yours, miss. I felt like it just drew down the angels from heaven to sing with us tonight. Their voices was all swimming in a smoke, like, right up in the hollow of the ceiling."

"Taint a trumpet!" interrupted Teddy, shyly. "It's a clarinet. I got a trumpet home."

"To be sure!" replied the old lady, indulgently. "But, miss, as I was saying, that music of yours would just soften the hardest heart as ever was."

The rector had just come from the vestry-room, well wrapped up in his furs, and was shaking hands and wishing every one a Merry Christmas while the sexton brought the horse to the door. He overheard the old lady's last remark as she was bundling Teddy up in a huge woolen muffler.

"It certainly did," said he, "make the singing go magnificently to-night didn't it, Mrs. Talk? But I wonder how what sort of an effect it would produce on a hard-hearted beast, if such a creature should come out at us while we are going through Dorchester woods?"

The mild pleasantry was very delicately adapted to the rector's audience, and the group about the stove smiled with a reverent air befitting the place they were in; but the old woman exclaimed in haste:

"My land, sakes, parson, a bear'd be scared to death!"

"I wonder if it would frighten a bear," thought Lou to herself, as they were getting snugly bundled into the warm, deep "pung," as the low box sleigh with movable seats is called.

Soon the crest of the hill was passed, and the four-poster on the top of Second Westcock church sank out of sight. For a mile or more the road led through

half-cleared pasture lands, where the black stumps stood up so strangely through the drifts that Teddy discovered bears on every hand. He was not at all alarmed, however, for he was sure his father was a match for a thousand bears.

By and by the road entered the curious inverted dark of Dorchester woods, where all the light seemed to come from the white snow under the trees rather than from the dark sky above them. At this stage of the journey Teddy retired under the buffalo robes, and went to sleep in the bottom of the pung.

The horse jogged slowly along the somewhat heavy road. The bells jingled drowsily amid the soft, pushing whisper of the runners. Lou and the rector talked in quiet voices, attuned to the solemn hush of the great forest.

"What's that?" Lou shivered up closer to the rector as she spoke, and glanced nervously at the dark woods under a southern sky.

The rector did not answer at once, but instinctively seized the whip, and tightened the reins as a signal to old Jerry to move on faster.

The horse needed no signal, but swung on at a gallop, and the rector had become a gallop had the rector permitted.

Again came the sound, this time a little nearer, and still apparently just abreast of the pung, but deep and hoarse, as if it were a distant, wailing cry, blended with a harshly grating undertone, like the rasping of a saw.

"What is it?" again asked Lou, her teeth chattering.

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lips, the sleigh dashed into the open. A dog bayed angrily from the nearest farm-house, and the panther stopped short on the edge of the wood. Ted, who had been leaning forward, now sat back, and the sleigh stopped, shivering as if he would fall between the shafts.

After the story had been told, and Jerry had been stabled and rubbed down, the rector resumed his journey with a fresh horse, saving no fear that the panther would venture across the cleared lands. Three of the settlers started out forthwith, and following the tracks in the snow, succeeded in shooting the wild beast after a chase of two or three hours.

The adventure supplied the country-side all that winter with a theme for conversation, and about Lou's clarinet were gathered a halo of romance that drew round congregations to the parish church, where its music was to be heard every alternate Sunday evening.

—Charles G. D. Roberts in Companion.

TEDDY'S HOLIDAY.

On a certain Saturday morning in May, while the sun was yet below the horizon, a little cart full of farm produce lay heavy on field and orchard, Teddy Allen bounced out of bed and ran to the window.

"Hurrah! Clear as a whistle! I'm in luck for once," he exclaimed joyfully. "Fair weather meant a great deal to Teddy, for this was the holiday which he had earned by faithful attention to duty during the week. Country lads have very little carol for farm work during busy spring months, and it is not surprising that Teddy felt in nearly good spirits at the prospect of having the whole day to himself.

He was going fishing, of course; and his hand itched at the thought of the deep pools down by the creek where he had caught many a plump chub or perch on memorable occasions in the past.

He was soon dressed; and after doing his head and arms at the pump and eating a hasty breakfast he finished his usual morning chores about the house and barn. Twenty minutes' work with the grubbing hoe behind the pig-pen yielded a handful of fat black worms, and a small cart was soon filled with good things by a kind mother.

Mr. Allen was watering two horses at the trough as the lad passed through the barnyard. "Where are you going?" he asked, smilingly.

"Fishing," replied Teddy. "You said I might."

"So I did," admitted the farmer. "I clean forgot this was Saturday. Going to the creek, is that?"

"Yes, sir," replied Teddy. "I don't time now. These farm-bells make me awful hungry."

This obvious hint was not lost upon Teddy. He willingly spread out the contents of his lunch-basket and the boys shared with him a hearty meal of tempting sandwiches, the fatty apple pie, and the fat, brown doughnuts. How they did eat—nudging each other in the ribs and winking slyly at one another when Teddy was not looking.

"Let's move on now," proposed Tom, when the napkin had been put into the empty basket. He seized his rod and started down stream toward a worm fence that divided the woods in two alleys, and into a large, leafy tree.

The other followed. Teddy looking a little anxious. He had reason to feel so, for timber and scrub across the fence was forbidden ground. It was known as Ben's meadow; and Mr. Ben was so grimly set against trespassers—fishermen in particular—that the country lads always made a wide detour around his territory, when they visited Cedar Run for trout.

But when the napkin had been put into the empty basket, he seized his rod and started down stream toward a worm fence that divided the woods in two alleys, and into a large, leafy tree.

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their folks don't own a farm, are you, Teddy?"

"Of course not," promptly replied Teddy; and the answer showed the feelings of the two injured lads.

"I was only joking," said Dave. "And I didn't mean to punch you," added Bud.

"There, that squares everything," spoke up Tom. "And now come along with us, Teddy. Your father will be glad to get a nice string of trout, and they're sure to bite like all forty to-day. Bud and I caught three dozen last week."

"Yes, do come," pleaded Dave and Bud. "It's no use fishing in this old creek. We can have a jolly time over at Cedar Run."

Teddy hesitated. Chubs and perch were suddenly grown commonplace; and he thought longingly of the speckled trout that lurked in the grassy nooks and shadows of Cedar Run, and of the flowery thickets and woodlands through which that merry little brook would be winding way.

But the other hand was a memory of his father's command. Conscience and the possible results of disobedience held him wavering between temptation and duty.

"Better say you persisted. Tom. It's jolly fun to pull out trout, for they bite as fast as minnows."

"An' your sure of a big string before evening," added Bud.

"All right, I'll go," exclaimed Teddy, unable to hold out against such arguments. He repeated the moment he had spoken, but it was now too late to back down.

"No reason for me to stay away from Cedar Run, but because these fellows are going there, too," he said to himself, as he picked up his rod and basket. "I don't think father will mind, anyhow, when I tell him how nice and kind the boys were. He won't know them as I do."

This line of reasoning stilled Teddy's conscience; and he was troubled with no misgivings as he tramped over the hills with his companions. Cedar Run was a mile away, but the distance seemed hardly half that. The boys were in jovial spirits, and their antics and smart sayings seemed irresistibly funny to Teddy. He caught the contagion, and laughed as heartily as the rest.

When Cedar Run was reached, the long poles were exchanged for slender, plant elder-rod, which were better suited for the purpose. The lads followed the winding of the stream for more than a mile, till they came to a thick bed of thickets of fern and undergrowth, casting their lines in every rift and pool. The trout bit greedily; and when the young anglers stopped to rest in a sunny bit of woodland, away with wild flowers, they had nearly a dozen apiece.

"Pretty good for such a short time," observed Bud.

"We'll have as many more before we fish," replied Tom. "It's dinner time now. These farm-bells make me awful hungry."

This obvious hint was not lost upon Teddy. He willingly spread out the contents of his lunch-basket and the boys shared with him a hearty meal of tempting sandwiches, the fatty apple pie, and the fat, brown doughnuts. How they did eat—nudging each other in the ribs and winking slyly at one another when Teddy was not looking.

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and took one painful nip at the calf of his leg, he slipped and rolled head first into the pool of water three feet deep. Boy and dog were promiscuously jumbled together for a few seconds. Then grim old farmer Ben arrived on the scene, and after calling the dog off he lifted Teddy out on the bank by the collar. He held on to him with one hand, while with the other he called a pliant switch from a convenient bush.

In vain Teddy pleaded for mercy, and sought to explain the trap into which he had been led.

"None of your lies, young man!" exclaimed the angry farmer. "I'll give you a double dose for calling me a relation of that worthless scoundrel. If you're Henry Allen's son, there's no much less excuse for you're getting into bad company. Take that, and that, and that."

With stinging force he applied the switch to Teddy's legs until it broke in two. "Now get out," he thundered, "and just let me catch you here again."

Teddy obeyed orders with the promptness of a well-trained soldier, though his appearance and gait were anything but military as he limped painfully out of the woods and over the hill. He saw nothing of his late companions on the way, and when he reached home he wisely made a clean breast of the whole affair to his father.

Seeing that the lad had been sufficiently punished for his disobedience, Mr. Allen was content to let him off with a sharp lecture. Even that might have been dispensed with, for Teddy had learned by experience a lesson that he will assuredly never forget. He is not on speaking terms with the Mill-wood boys now.—William Murry Gordon.

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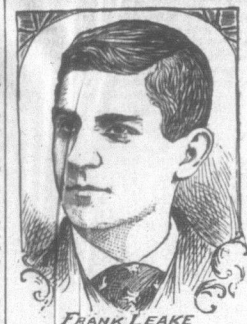
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