

COFFEE-PAIL EZRA.

"No, I can't go," and Ezra looked reproachfully at a pail of hot coffee, which he had set down close by, under the shadow of the big ore bin.

"Oh, bother!" said Jack Evars. "Your uncle doesn't need that stuff. He's well now—been well this two weeks."

"I know, but Grandma Hillis thinks he needs it."

"Well, he don't. Half the time he doesn't touch it."

"And sometimes he scolds you if you get in the road of his pick," put in Herbert James.

"Yes," and Ezra stroked the long ears of Nancy, the burro, meditatively. But then, you see, he might want it to-day, and it wouldn't be there. And, besides, grandma depends on me to take it down."

Still he looked at the coffee-pail with no friendly eye. If he had had a mother or even a Sunday School teacher, he would have learned long before that duty is duty, and must be done, however hard it seems; but he had no one except a feeble old grandmother and a big, busy uncle, who worked so hard all day in the mine that he invariably fell asleep at the supper table. So it is no wonder that, when Jack and Herbert proposed an expedition out in the sagebrush after cotton-tails, Ezra looked at his coffee-pail in deep disgust.

"No, I can't go," said Ezra, taking up his pail and turning toward the engine house.

"It's all nonsense, I tell you," said Jack. "Grandma'll never know if you don't tell her and your uncle doesn't want it."

"I know," answered Ezra, resolutely, "but it is my business. Grandma depends on me."

And then he began climbing the hill as fast as he could go, which, although he did spill some of the coffee, was the very best thing he could do, for he was the sooner out of temptation's way.

At the top of the shaft he climbed into the car, nodded to the engineer and slid down into the dark, close mine. The engineer knew his errand; but he had to scramble out as fast as he could to let the car go on to the seventh, from which ore was being hoisted. At the fifth level, that day, the air seemed unusual close.

"I s'pose it's because I wanted to go after cotton-tails so much that it seems uncommonly hot and nasty down here to-day," thought Ezra.

He lighted his candle and plodded his way along the low-walled drift. He had walked some little distance, trying to keep up his spirits with whistling, when he suddenly halted. His breath was coming quick and short and he began to realize that he was breathing smoke. Where did it come from? Lifting his candle, he peered about carefully. He could see no sign of fire, but the drift was gray with smoke—a heavy, curling mass that was coming toward him in sullen silence.

His first thought was to run for the shaft. But no, where were Uncle Tom and the other men? If the fire was in one of the cross cuts the smoke would seek the open shaft, as it would a chimney, and the

men would have no warning until the whole drift was ablaze and it would be too late. He must find where it was and he must reach them if they did not already know. He hurried on, but his light grew dim in the smoke and his feet stumbled over the uneven floor. His breath was growing painful and his eyes smarted unbearably. He must find the men. He stumbled on, groping, with his eyes shut, every step a stab of pain and his mind nodding but one thought—to reach the others before it was too late. Once he felt headlong; but it was a fortunate fall for the lid of his coffee-pail flew off and half the contents were dashed in his face. Quickly righting the pail, he dipped his handkerchief in the remaining coffee, one of the big red cotton handkerchiefs of the mining camps—and tied it over his head and face. He could have cried from the feeling of relief that it gave and the way grew easier until the heat dried the handkerchief and forced him to take it off. Then he groped and stumbled and fell and picked himself up and ran on and fell again and then on once more.

His strength was giving out and the curling, lead-colored mass wrapped about him closer and thicker. It was the battle of a child against a relentless, unreasoning foe, and it was bravely fought. His foot caught beneath a loose board and he fell at full length. Vaguely he felt that the struggle was over and he was glad he had done his best. He gave a little gasp—and then sat up and looked around him in surprise. The air was clearer and he could breathe. There was smoke certainly, but still he could see and breathe. His fall had carried him just past the mouth of a deep cross-cut, from which the smoke was pouring in thick, leaden masses toward the shaft. He could hear the dull crackling of the burning timbers and he knew that the time was short. He stood up and tried to run, but his mind was in a whirl and his legs tottered beneath him. Still he would not give up. The worst was past; and, as his head grew clearer in the better air, his strength began to come back also.

In less than five minutes the men in the upraise were standing about him and he was telling them, as quickly as he could, of their danger and of their one chance of escape.

"We must make a dash for it," said Tom Hillis, who was always the leader. The men nodded, threw down their picks and shovels and marched grimly out into the drift to meet the foe. How Ezra got through the second time he never knew. He remembered being dragged along by hard, kind hands and, at the last, being lifted on a pair of strong shoulders and carried "pick-a-back" like a baby; but when he opened his eyes, he was in the hoisting-room and the superintendent of the mine was there, too, looking very grave and anxious.

"Will he live?" he was asking of the doctor, who was stirring something in a glass.

"Oh, yes. He'll not die yet. He's a plucky little chap. He will be all right in a little while."

"It is strange how these things happen," the superintendent went on.

It is certainly strange. If this boy had not been going about his plain, every-day business this morning those men would have been smothered, and the whole mine would have been in such a blaze that we couldn't have stopped it."

When Jack and Herbert came home that night with four cotton-tails, they were very much surprised to find that "Coffee-pail Ezra" had become a hero in the camp, and was to be taken into the superintendent's family to go to school with his own boys.

"It's mighty queer how lucky some folks are!" said Jack.

"Taint so queer," answered Herbert, "when you consider how plucky some folks are."

"Humph! I guess anybody would have warned those men!"

"Maybe they would and then maybe they wouldn't. But what I am thinking is that there isn't more than one boy in the camp that would have been down there with the coffee-pail when the other boys were going out hunting. That's where the pluck comes in, I'm thinking."

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A Song Without Words.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

Across the waste of sand they go,
Three travellers from lands afar;
They toil along with footsteps slow,
And watch the heavens for the star.

The night is dark the way is long,
And they have precious treasure rare;
Not knowing whither, right or wrong,
They search the heaven in despair.

"Now rest us here this night," said one;
But his companions would not stay,—
"For if we halt we are undone,
We must press on without delay!"

But look—oh rapture! shining clear
And radiant, they see on high
A welcome sight which calms their fear—
A bright star moving in the sky!

With hope renewed, and fear at rest,
They follow into Bethlehem;
And find the Child on Mary's breast—
The King without a diadem.

When in the desert of this life,
With fainting hearts we toil and grope,
Through all its darkness, care and strife,
Look for the Christian's Star of Hope.

Though we may wander far and wide,
Through darkest night, the thought is sweet;
The blessed Star of Hope will guide
The lost one to Babe Jesus' feet.
—Henry Coyle.

NOT TO BE BAFFLED BY A DOOR.

Years ago, when I was quite a child, we had a large white cat of no particular breed—just cat—that was the most intelligent animal I ever saw. The most interesting trick in which I have seen this intelligence displayed was the way she would manage to open a door.

The particular door led from the porch into the kitchen, and was furnished with a simple old-fashioned latch. We never knew how the cat learned to do it, but many times I have seen her come, survey the door up and down a moment, then stand on her hind legs, put her left paw through the handle to hold herself up, and then with the right one pat the latch up and down until the door would open. Then Mrs. Pussy, with a satisfied wave of her long tail, would walk through; and it is needless to say that she never stopped to close the door after her. I am sorry that I was wicked enough sometimes to shut the door just to see her open it again.

Prize inward exercises, griefs, and troubles; and let faith and patience have their perfect work in them.

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