

Do You Happen to Know Him?

The Story of a Thoughtless Son, and How His Thoughtlessness Was Brought Home to Him in Time.

"You may have the making of a great man in you or not," the young priest said, not at all disconcerted by the waving of fans in the sultry air of the chapel...

It was a short practical sermon on well-known scriptural texts, which Roderick Bell, just fresh from college, considered too obvious for close attention.

"Stupid hole of a place—Blackwell," he murmured, mechanically taking the holy water his mother offered, with a smile.

General Walters and his wife wanted to greet the returned collegian. The General had seen much service, and had come home to his native place, to a little house and a large garden...

"Ho, boy," said the General, patting Roderick on the arm, "back to the old sod? Well, your people have been lonely enough without you."

"I don't know, sir," said Roderick rather sulkily. "That depends on father."

The General turned and smiled at father, who sighed. Mrs. Walters came up and kissed Roderick in her motherly fashion.

"Here's Clara," the General said, "you haven't met for two years."

"I'm glad to see you Mr. Bell," she said. "I hope that you play tennis better than you did—but, after all, it doesn't matter, for we're going off to the mountains next week."

"Too bad!" said Roderick, and he really meant it. He had counted on a hearer for his "aspirations," his interpretations of Browning, and his thoughts on life.

Itching Skin

Distress by day and night—That's the complaint of those who are so unfortunate as to be afflicted with Itchema or Salt Rheum—and outward applications do not cure. They can't.

Hood's Sarsaparilla

rides the blood of all impurities and cures all eruptions.

again. He was somewhere in Canada. Roderick was the only one left.

"It seems to me, mother," said Mr. Bell, one day after a particularly hard morning on the farm, "that we've done nothing all our lives but make sacrifices for our children. I hope Rod will pay us back."

"We've done it for love," said the mother, "and for no other payment."

The old man sighed. The farm would not stand another mortgage; the interest seemed harder to pay every year, Roderick's bills never grew less, but the old man's determination to make him "as good as other folks' boys" never faltered.

General Walters and his wife, who were saving every cent possible for Clara's future, deplored the blindness of the Bells—they were spoiling Roderick!

"You're spoiling me!" said Clara, "Take your pleasure; don't save for me. When my chance comes I'll work. I ought to be working now."

But the General only smiled indulgently, and limited himself to one cigar a day.

"There's a lot of good in Roderick Bell," Clara said during the family discussions of the affairs of the small neighborhood; "but he's like most people of today; he's too individual, he thinks—yet I like him all the same—he thinks—oh, I don't know what he thinks! And her mother laughed. Clara looked scornful.

"I despise the class of men brought up in some of these colleges. They learn to take everything for granted. Their character is not formed."

his evening pipe. "Tell him! The ungrateful young fool ought to know!"

"Children never know." "When I'm dead and you're in the almshouse, mother, he'll know I'm old; I don't get on to new ways; I'm sick half of the time. But I know that this farm could be made to pay if he had half the energy of one of those Polish peasants—or half the heart!"

The mother went over to him, and put her arm on his shoulder. "The bitterest thing is to have a son who can't understand."

"But he is our son all the same," said the mother. "Poor Roderick! I must have set him wrong somewhere."

The father turned up the lamp. "Clara Walters doesn't forget us. She has sent the new book on 'Intensive Cultivation,' and written me a long letter about it. When I think of her and compare her with this heartless scoundrel of ours—"

"Don't," said his wife, "oh, don't!"

The time of the snow came. Roderick Bell had found work—work that enabled him to occupy a pleasant room in a decent boarding-house and to wear good clothes. No more than that. The city had not recognized his genius. There were thousands like him claiming every post. He had hoped to become a secretary to some important man or corporation, but a smattering of Horace, the ability to read a German book, and a little political economy stood no chance as recommendations in comparison with an expert proficiency in stenography and typewriting. But he was honest and some of his college friends knew this. He was quick, too, and he found himself glad to get the post of assistant in the box-office of a popular theatre; and there he stood. Where were now the budding garlands of fame?

He wrote home regularly, but some what perfunctorily. In the beginning of winter he began to think more frequently and sadly of the old folk. They had asked no favors. His mother had made only one request, in the slightly tremulous hand; she once wrote, "Sometimes, dear boy, pray for us."

Roderick began to realize that it was hard to get money. And it occurred to him once or twice that his father must have worked hard and thought hard to keep him so well supplied with cash at college. Once he needed a new overcoat, and he wrote about it to his father. His mother answered sending him half the price.

He was disgracedly surprised at this. In the early winter, late in the afternoon, he was walking home, after an unusually anxious altercation with a difficult ticket-buyer, when he suddenly came to him; "Perhaps those three five dollar bills represented all his mother had." It was nonsense, of course. A flood of uneasiness suddenly filled his heart, as the tremulous lines of his mother's writing swayed before his eyes: "Sometimes, dear boy, pray for us!"

He turned impulsively into a side street, and in a few moments he was kneeling under the red lamp that burnt before the Holy of holies in St. Ann's.

"I shall need it," Roderick answered. "I shall want the cutter at once."

The landlord did not hear—a wild blast crashed hail and snow against the window.

"Jiminy!" he exclaimed. "I remember the General's daughter kissed your father and mother, and said, 'You just wait. He was lonely here, but he'll come back, for there's no place lonelier than a big town.'"

"She's right!" said Roderick. "I must have the cutter at once!"

"To-night!" exclaimed the landlord, shocked. "To-night?"

"Yes," Roderick put on his overcoat. "If it kills your horse I'll pay. I must see my people."

Argument was vain. The landlord reluctantly gave way, and finally Roderick went out and harnessed the horse himself.

The landlord murmured discontentedly as the young man drove off. "But I wouldn't have let him have the horse if I wasn't anxious about the old folks myself. They haven't been about here for weeks, not even to the grocery store."

Roderick clenched his teeth against the mingled snow and biting hailstones. A fire seemed to burn in his veins. Vague tears filled him. Why? He asked himself. And he could not answer. The old horse knew the road, there were no lights anywhere, every marked place was now unmarked; the snow leveled all it could remorselessly. Where the crossing of the trolley road had been, there was now soft drifts, through which the horse waded deep.

It was slow work. Every minute of delay seemed an hour. The forefeet of the horse went down into the ditch. Roderick, beside himself with feverish impatience, forced him upon the road again; but the poor beast was bewildered, and for a moment his driver fancied that it was a matter of a broken leg. Just then the tinkle of bells sounded behind, and, crashing through the snow, came a big automobile. The horse, half crazed, dashed back again into the ditch, and dragged the sleigh into the yielding white mass.

The automobile stopped. Roderick saw that his horse was prone beside the road, half hidden in the snow. The horse would right himself no doubt, but he must not lose time! The voice of his father seemed to call him! The horse dragged himself up, and Roderick pulled the sleigh, filled with snow, back upon the road.

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