

SIX

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Crooked Toe

By CHARLES EDWARD HEWITT

"Pa!" said Warren Townsend, between snuffling gasps, as he cleaned up preparatory for the morning meal. "That drafted prize turkey hen we had shipped from New York stole a seat somewhere in this forenoon. With the same haven't done nothing" kind of look Carlo Purp, who has been in the house for some time, looked at him. "The next expected business is to get in the old feed bin; unless she has her blame carcass over eight foot of wire fence."

"Thus 'tied tangled brier and odorous pine, a blue-blooded offspring of civilization kicked a way into being, amidst the happy, moist clouds of the wild; in whose sylvan birthplace he had been unceremoniously placed while yet in an embryo stage of egg-hood. It was at the very threshold of his momentous career that the little brown-mottled fellow obtained that which distinguished him henceforth from all his kind, and proved in later life such a menace to his existence. As he rolled out of his clinging shell, the great middle toe of a wildly gyrating right foot became entangled in a loose thread of adhesive shell skin; and during the long struggle for life which ensued (lasting fully five minutes) the imprisoned member was drawn around outward, the skin thread then taking a turn about the right little toe, forming a very effective band. When the little turkey was at last free of his shell, the contorted member was still held in its strange position, and ere the skin bandage had worn away, the pliable cartilage had set in a perfect semicircle.

"This defect in his lower extremity troubled Crooked Toe not at all. He stole up to unsuspecting flocks, evaded at the maternal warnings, and yanked off tender tops of young grass blades with all the abandon of a truly concentrated nature. He could stretch fully half an inch higher than the largest of his mates, consequently obtaining many choice morsels beyond their reach, and waxed plump and large during that critical period of pin-feather growing, which weeded out five of the flock's weaklings. A fox pounced upon one other who foolishly disobeyed the hen's warning "putt," so the ever-guarding turkey mother had but five of the original eleven to lead before her proud lord and master at autumn's first mellowing breath.

In the flock which now gathered together about the great breasted tom were some two dozen young of various sizes, on whose full-feathered sides of amber hue the sunlight glinted as burnished copper; on all save one, whose great blue-black back loomed even now perceptibly above the level of the flock. At once through the initiative foresight of the denizen of the wild, the fierce old leader had sensed a future rival in Crooked Toe; therefore giving the young tom bare space to feed in peace, so that from a plump well-fed bird the youngster might come away and live at ease, never sure of an unbarred moment.

On a crisp morning in late October the flock had wandered from its accustomed haunts to the rich feeding-ground about old Sheldrake's—midst whose whispering, scrubbed oak glens many an oasis of crimson and gold—where wild grape and hammersweet together extend their offerings of orange and purple to the harvest gods; and while lagging behind, his heart smouldering with a slowly igniting flame of rebellion, Crooked Toe spied a particularly productive mountain vineyard, unnoted by the others. How eagerly he tossed down great clusters of the luscious fruit gorged until the distended crop would hold no more, then sank down in the sun's golden warmth to forget all troubles of spirit and flesh in nature's sweet balm of sleep.

It was not many days later that the following conversation took place between Farmer Townsend and his son Warren: "Come across an almighty big turkey track, on their west side of Old Sheldrake, this afternoon," the old man said. "Wished ye could yinz him, Warren. Whilst there new snow makes good trackin'."

"I came on a whole bunch of turkey trails over 'tender side of Mill Brook Way, yesterday forenoon," spoke up Townsend Junior, "led by a wingin' tom, too. Foot stretched three inches, by thunder."

"Shucks!" returned his father, "warren's a circumstance to Old Crooked Toe. His steppers'll cover four inches of gravel; or I'll eat my hat. You watch fer 'em Sonny." The old feller forgot to cut his nails, and their right big toes grewed like a fish hook."

Thus spread the fate of Crooked Toe, who had eluded one evil only to bring unto himself a ten-fold greater. In

his favor, however, was the wild creature's indomitable fear of man, combined with the sacred exactness of generations of civilization; and many a time the youthful Townsend lay prone for hours behind some huge rotting trunk, guarding a run-away of the bent-toed tom, to rise stiff and baffled, all unknowing of a motionless object with unseeing eyes watching from yonder heavily-clouded fir.

As spring crept through the valley and mountain, dispersing the ice king's hoarded drifts into the racing currents whence they came, each faint blush of arid day was heralded from Sheldrake's somber side by the challenge of a mighty gobbler that strutted back and forth in the increasing glow, quivering defiance to the world of living things. Long of limb and great of frame, with drooping wattles that swelled from white to purple and purple to crimson with a tingling charge of battle rage, he was indeed a noble foe to look upon.

From far down the dusky mountain, one warm morning in May, came floating to the challenging one the cry "Yonk, yonk" of a love-love soft-eyed poult.

"Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble!" thundered Crooked Toe, head back drawn, tail fanned, making way with long jerking strides toward this sweet music for which his lonely heart has been yearning long. "Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble!" ("I your lord and com'ng!" he roars, and halts a brief second, for from below ascends the strident battle cry of a wild tom. The sloeey barred tail is now fattened, and the great neck stretches out straight as the mighty bird skims over bush and prostrate trunks. There he stands, the young hen's side! that hated persecutor of youth; his amber sides vibrant with fury; the wicked jet eyes shooting forth sparks of potent scorn at this aspirant to the forest throne. Five paces between them pose as grave images, for one brief instant—then together hurtle, the impact of their huge bulks sending many a feathered mother from her brooding sleep in screaming terror. Around and again around they pirouette, spur glancing spur, beaking parrying beak; but you, Copper King, your neck is too short to faint a throttle-hold on this giant son of a generation of giants. Even now your haughty head, narrowed by many a crimson ooze, is borne restlessly down. In a wavering circle you totter; silken tassels and shining breast dragging mine and bramble. Yet hold! Fate has saved you to garnish another feast.

"Quick! You gibbering blatherskite! Grab ther' hulk'n' dark un, whilst I nab ther' wild tom," comes audibly from a near-by clump of blueberry, and through the wary poult has long since flown, the panting tons, conscious of naught, save blood, struggle on. Noisily, and almost imperceptibly, the dreaded man and his stalwart son approach the battling ones. Forward suddenly pitches Crooked Toe, as he long legs are lifted clear of the ground. "Crack! crack! crack!" his mighty pinions beat the tumbled tow-head and blocky shoulders.

"Help me, Pa! He's yankin' loose!" young Townsend yells; so, loosing the smaller bird, the farmer, with his son's aid, at last succeeded in securing the huge gobbler.

"Junin' Sally!" ejaculated Townsend the elder, mopping his beaded brow. The critter's a sure 'nough devil. Ain't nothin' but a yearlin' tom, neither. But it do beat all, Warren, how a pure blood Mammoth Bronze comes to be hikin' around 'this mountain by hisself."

"By Cripes! Pa!" Warren exclaimed suddenly, bringing a huge paw down on his thigh with a resounding thwack. "Ye know ther' prize turkey hen from New York led her fast egg somewhere in ther' bresh, last seed time? Well! This here's ther' egg hatched out, by some tarnation manner."

"Believe yer right, boy!" exclaimed the farmer, rubbing his horny hands together. "And, under those circumstances, the critter's the best blooded aly one last season, on account of 't' dat' danged fox. We'll trim his wing, and leave 'im inside ther' eight foot wire, along with a couple of breeders."

"Ah, Crooked Toe! They whom you so craftily evaded during the dreary, lonely winter season have slung your mighty weight on their shoulders at the very threshold of glory. Snip!" and your hope for freedom is in twain. Twice, thrice, and again your bleeding head is crushed against cruel wire. That was truly a noble skyward leap! But a useless wing sends you spinning to

earth. Back again to the flesh bleeding fence. On crazed meteor of blood-clothed feather and fury; once the glory of a mountain morn, to sink baffled at last, but not beaten!

"He'll spruce up an' take notice o' ther' galls purty quick," the farmer remarked to his son, some days later, as they watched the captive disconsolately standing in a far corner of his enclosure. "He's commencin' to find out better livin' than acorns, I reckon; and when some o' his cussed wild trainin' wears off, ther' hen'll find 'thrive ketchin' a mighty fine ladies' man."

But the wild "trainin'" failed to wear off. "Yonk! Yonk! Yonk!" the villanous battle cry has changed to "Yonk! Yonk!" from rosy dawn to night owl's hoot; the wild caged thing cries, not quite alone, as the breeders have been given a more appreciative spouse. To eat, sleep and send that plaintive call echoing toward Sheldrake's pine-clad crest is all that remains for Crooked Toe now; and so the summer, with its accompanying mists, mazes, and unreasoned by captors and captive alike the mighty wings are again in their barred perfection.

"I'll be mighty glad when this everlastin' 'Yonk! Yonk!' gets done with, Warren," said the good wife to her protector on the afternoon preceding Thanksgiving, as the two ruminatively eyed the big gobbler. "You heard 'thrive ketchin' ther' infernal squak since ther' pesterin' critter was fetched."

"Wall," drawled the farmer, "ther' right an' so. But ther' pinter's to ther' fifty-pound mark this side of Madison show, I'll bet a coupla' so sayin' ther' infernal squak 'edge up' the fatal axe."

Is that the yelp of a far-distant soft-eyed poult which haunts the listless leg exile on this day of doom? "Gobble! Gobble! Gobble! Gobble!" he rumbles the afternoon preceding Thanksgiving, as the two ruminatively eyed the big gobbler. "You heard 'thrive ketchin' ther' infernal squak since ther' pesterin' critter was fetched."

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Now the enclosure where the big turkey was confined stood some distance from the house. The bird, however, was a rocky knoll that jutted about six inches from the top of the enclosing wire, and as the shadows were enveloping all, the dusky cloud of the Copper King, followed by his favorite hen, stepped upon the knoll and peered down at the captive below. Humiliation's dregs of bitterness in

misfortune's cup renders the prisoner again motionless for an instant. But see! With baleful eye he crouches! Fortunate is the useless wing! Up! Up! he comes, beak, claw and beating pinion propelling upward, and the top is reached!

Oh! lost let's chance! The mocking foe has sprung to knock you back, Crooked Toe; and even now the shadow below hold reaching arms and waiting axe. "Ah, with lightning side step learned in youth's parring, he evaded the flying amber bolt and down to the waiting arms fell the Copper King."

"This here bent-toed turkey beats all I ever seen, Pa!" muttered Townsend Junior from a cloud of steam, as he plucked the "caged bird" suspended from the barn door, by the full moon's silvery light. "He was durned hard to git, warrn't a mite o' use as a brooder, 't' half ther' size he looked to be, and ther' triflin' cuss hed jest larnt at kilin' time, ther' hed a grow n'as w'as down and dark, in ther' 23B 72-bb I heered a great squakin' twixt 'em down and dark, in ther' critter's yard, an' bustlin' in, by ginger! ther' ther' old feller was, walkin' up ther' eight foot wire as though it warrn't nothin' but a stone wall. Luck was ag'in 'im ther' throw, howsoever, for a fox, or some varmint, skeert 'im back."

"Seems like a hood-doo business from start to finish," replied the farmer, knocking the ashes from his corn cob pipe. "Maybe it's his black claw foot ther' worked them devil tricks."

"Here, Carlo Purp; chew up ther' hood-doo," said Warren, completing his task, and the "poult" happily "chewed," but not the supposed hood-doo.

"Never knowed a farm turkey taste so gamy," remarked Carlo Purp, and send, as he snatched his lips over the silvery brown meat.

"Old Crooked Toe was raised wild, I know, Ed," said the host, between great mouthfuls.

"Mighty strange," spoke up the Townsend of South Fork. "As me and Jimmy draw around Sheldrake this mornin', I ketcht sight o' two turkey trails in last night's sift o' snow. I juss' don't see how they warrn't sot in ther' meat this mornin'. I'd say Old Crooked Claw war a sure nough 'n'ant."

And while they gorged on the flesh of the Copper King, said Sheldrake's whispering pines Crooked Toe strutted beside the soft-eyed poult.

LITTLE LEAKS COST U. S. RAILWAYS \$300,000,000 A YEAR

The railroads of America waste \$300,000,000 annually through small leaks in their operations, according to an engineer of repute who has analyzed their methods. In the stopping of these leaks this engineer sees the solution of the present problem and he declares that there need be no question of cutting wages or raising freight rates if the railroads would only attend to the small leaks. "The waste is too small to count," he says, "but it is too large to ignore."

Harrington Emerson, until recently standardizing engineer of the American Locomotive Works, New York, says these things.

"Railroad officials," he said, "have conceived of the results they may achieve by endeavoring to bring their staffs to the highest average of efficiency, and the use only of equipment up to the highest possible standard."

SMALL LEAKS IGNORED.

"Up to the present the chief officials have been engaged in getting the traffic and moving it within the limits laid down by the law. Enough attention has not been given to stopping small leaks, which, in a great system, run into the millions."

Mr. Emerson took the grease-cup on a locomotive. It is a trifling part of the engine. To the automobilist, who uses but one machine, it matters very little if he pays \$1 or fifty cents for it. But to the railroad, which needs 30,000 a year, a saving of ten cents a cup means \$3,000 more for its net earnings.

In the same way small economies in the manufacture and use of thousands of parts which a railroad needs in its daily business mount up to enormous sums.

Fuel is, of course, one of the chief expenses, yet when Mr. Emerson pointed out to one of the chief railroads of the West some extraneous fluctuations in their coal records, the only explanation he could get from the highest officials was:

"Oh, the records are wrong. We never go much by them."

On another important system run-

ning into Chicago he was told by the official in charge that he quite believed the company lost at least a dollar every year for every car it brought into its yards. As it passed through the yards there was endless petty pilfering, and he was nobody's business to put a stop to it.

GENERAL LEAKAGE IN FUEL.

"Now, the effect of this is," said Mr. Emerson, "that no engine every day has any statistics which will show how much coal a locomotive ought to consume on a trip and how much it actually does."

"A locomotive may be held for hours on a siding waiting a clear track. No body bothers about the fuel which is being burned, and without accurate returns and proper standardization there is no way of discovering accurately that the delay has cost the company in coal alone a very considerable sum."

Tools are another source of large expense to railroads, according to Mr. Emerson. "Why not call every tool," he said, "a company?" said the engineer, "It was thought a great thing that when the workman decided he must have a new tool, he was forced to produce the old one."

The remedy Mr. Emerson has for all these troubles is standardization. He points out that it is impossible for the higher officials to attend to petty details. They must, therefore, delegate them to their subordinates. He says one cannot expect a vice-president, drawing his \$10,000 or \$15,000 a year, to give much attention to the make of a file or lathe needed. He will delegate such questions to his superintendents and they will pass them on to the master mechanic, who will ask the foreman's views, until finally a fifty-dollar a month man has the last word, and the great railroad is ruled by a fifty-dollar a month judgment."

Not only would the finances of the railroads benefit, in Mr. Emerson's opinion, by the instructions of a standardization of repairs, but the workmen would be much the better off.

DEVELOPS BETTER WORKMEN.

"In taking up the study of shop efficiency," he said, "I had a moral as well as an economical motive. I saw that at present the workmen are too valuable for me to let go. I would not let a foreman discharge them, and they will not leave me at the bidding of a union because they know they can never get as much anywhere else. I have found, and I can produce the testimony of working men to show it, that by using the standardizing method, I gradually build up a force of unusually efficient men and keep them contented at the same time that I save money for the company which employs them."

FISH AS TURTLE CATCHERS.

A curious mode of catching turtles is practiced in the West Indies. It consists in catching a ring and a line to the tail of a species of sucker fish, which is then thrown overboard and immediately makes for the first turtle he can spy, to which he attaches himself. The fisherman then hauls both turtle and sucking fish in.

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\$1.00 Butter Knives, Saturday price	.75
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Ladies' \$1.25 D & A or P C Corsets, Saturday price	.96
Ladies' 1.00 D & A or P C Corsets, Saturday price	.78
Ladies' .50 D & A or P C Corsets, Saturday price	.39
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