

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Guest of the Government

(Alice D. Baukhage, in the 'Presbyterian Banner'.)

As Tony Queets stood on the edge of the bluff overlooking Lake Wasco he had no idea that he offered a very good model for a statue representing his own race and its position in the twentieth century world. To be sure he wore the Reservation uniform, which he hated, and which would have detracted much from the picturesqueness of any statue, but his straight young figure, his hopelessly hanging arms and, more than all, the yearning in the dark narrow face which he raised toward the sky, would have typified to a sympathetic eye the longing of the Indian for his natural environment.

There were a great many things that Tony did not know, and among them that his people had any grievance against the white race. Personally he had no such grievance. He blamed no one for the calamity that had just brought him to the Reservation, but regarded it as one of the painful vicissitudes of life. As far back as his memory went he had been an outcast, snatching a precarious living right among the smoky tents of his people during the rainy season when they were camped on the beach, and following his own errant fancy during the halcyon summer days when western Washington is indeed a happy hunting ground. He had no recollection of his parents and had only known one friend. One friend for one week! After that came the Indian agent who, for some unaccountable reason, had brought him to this strange place where everything was very clean and very comfortable; where plenty of food and no beatings seemed to be the rule. Good things in themselves, but to the little savage offset by intolerable restrictions. He had given the teachers no trouble and had proven himself a bright pupil, quicker to understand their mysterious ways (had they but known it) than they had been to comprehend his nature. He had come to the school in December and now it was March, that month when, in Tony's country, the swelling streams rushed tumultuously down from the foothills of the Olympics to the ocean; when the world, always green, grew greener, and the air never very cold and biting, grew soft and tender. When in the meadows, the hills, and along the river banks myriads of wild folk called alluringly to the Indian boy. To-day he had wandered to the very limit of the Reservation grounds, where the bluff dropped down to the lake. With his face raised to the sky he was watching a faint, dark speck far, far away. It was only a speck yet he knew that presently it would be a great bird and that it would sail directly above him to its home in a big hemlock nearby. Moreover, he knew that it held a struggling fish in its talons, and so it proved, for as the eagle sped above his head, uttering a cry of greeting to its mate on the nest, several drops of salt water fell on the boy's brown cheek.

After that there was no more struggling. The faint call of duty but half comprehended, was drowned completely in the 'call of the wild.' The sea had sent her message in those drops of water. What could he do but respond? That night Tony's wayward feet followed the path his homesick eyes had so often taken, despite the fact that they were obliged to scale a high and forbidding wall to do so.

A year before his journey would have had no definite objective point, but now his own

thoughts turned instinctively toward his one friend. A hundred miles of forest lay between them and only a native could have hoped to endure the hardships of such a trip, but endurance and an iron will were his inheritance. Physical suffering was a matter of course; hunger and cold were bad, but liberty was very, very good. Nevertheless, it was a gaunt and footsore youth who, two weeks later, emerged from the forest at the foot of Copalis Rock.

Copalis Rock rose like a great tower a hundred feet above the ocean, separated from the mainland by a broad channel of water. At low tide one might have waded out to it in hip boots, perhaps, but when the tide was running in it could only be reached by boat. A narrow path zigzagged down its landward and least precipitous side, and on its flat top a tiny cabin stood, lashed down to its lofty foundation by stout cables passed over its roof. Twenty years before a strange Indian had come from no one knew where and built this queer dwelling, choosing the site because of its comparative nearness to a low rocky reef, a favorite basking place for sea otter in their season. The few white people who had all come into the country since the stranger's arrival, called him Hermit Jim, a name that fitted him well since he had never been known to enter any house other than his own except when the exigencies of business demanded it. He was an expert otter hunter, and partly because of his almost phenomenal success and more because of his severe way of dealing with any thieving Siwash, who ventured on his preserves, he was feared and disliked by the natives. However, he attended so strictly to his own business, and even when thrown into the society of others was apparently so oblivious of their presence that people grew to regard him as they might have regarded a deaf and perhaps blind man in their midst.

One evening, in late November, Jim came out of the store laden with provisions. It was raining hard and the loafers about the place had drawn their chairs close against the wall to be under shelter. Just as the big Indian stepped off the porch something hustled past him and a boy's slender figure lay and stretched for a moment on the ground at his feet. There was no outcry, though the fall and the kick that occasioned it must have hurt cruelly, but the boy was an Indian—was Tony, in fact—and not given to crying. Jim made no sound, either, but he stooped and helped Tony to rise, passing his hand rapidly over his head and body to locate his injuries. Then he turned and deliberately faced the three men on the steps. 'You?' he asked of one, and 'You?' of another. Both of the men shook their heads emphatically. Without wasting another 'you' he seized the third man by the collar, and drawing back his heavily booted foot sent him stumbling and reeling into the street. Then laying his hand on Tony's shoulder he piloted him away from his tormentors.

A week of stormy weather Tony spent in Jim's comfortable cabin, the first guest ever to be entertained there, then came the Indian agent, and the bewildered boy was transferred from his silent host to another, this time to be the guest of the government. If the agent explained why it was best for him to give up his wandering life and to go into a home where he would be taught what it really meant to be a citizen of the United States, poor Tony did not comprehend his meaning; instead he wondered why, since Jim was will-

ing, he might not stop on in the only shelter he had ever found.

To this shelter then Tony hastened when he had turned his back on the reservation. For the last twenty miles of his journey he had dragged himself wearily along, sustained by the thought that he would find rest and food at Copalis Rock. A storm had been brewing for several days, but as yet there was little wind and the signal Jim had taught him, and which Tony gave over and over, should have reached the hermit. After repeated failures to elicit any response he looked for the canoe which, when the Indian was at home, hung from hooks driven into a crevice of the rock just above high water mark. It was not there and the boy knew that his friend was not at home and that the boat was hidden among the rocks.

This was a sore disappointment to the tired boy and he reluctantly looked about for some place where he might find partial shelter from the storm. Asleep or awake Tony's ears were always set for danger signals, and it seemed to him that he had hardly closed his eyes before he was awakened by voices near at hand. He peered cautiously around the boulder which sheltered him. Two men were engaged in taking Jim's canoe from its hiding place. One, an Indian renegade, whom Tony recognized, and the other, the white man, whose heavy hand and foot he had good cause to remember. That the two meditated some evil against the hermit the boy knew even before he caught the drift of the broken conversation.

'He's safe for the night,' the white man was saying, 'if he should see the light he couldn't do the ten miles in less than an hour, and with the tide high and the canoe gone he'll just have to cool his heels on this side for a couple of hours after he gets here. Long before that the schooner'll have seen the signal, too, and put in for the harbor, and we will be on hand at Rocky Point to welcome her.'

The Indian said little, but Tony knew in a flash what their plan must be. There had been a wreck two years before, when an English schooner had come ashore on a night like this, lured by a signal she took to be a harbor light. There had been some talk then of foul play, but the two sailors, the sole survivors of the wreck, had disappeared soon after and the affair had never been investigated. The rascals who were planning this wreck recognized the danger of a second attempt, and so had arranged to implicate Copalis Jim. Anyone who saw the signal from the shore would know immediately that it could only come from Jim's promontory, and it would be the innocent hermit who would suffer for the dastardly crime.

Tony, crouching behind the boulder, thought fast. How could this thing be prevented? He had reached no conclusion when the men had launched the canoe and climbed in; nevertheless, he crept out and slipped into the water behind them, swimming silently in the wake of the boat. Arrived on the other side the men lighted a lantern and the boy had much to do to keep out of sight while they clambered up the difficult landing place. When they had reached the top of the rock he untied the boat and cast it adrift, hoping that the rising tide would wash it back to the shore. At any rate, he was resolved that the rascals should be made prisoners. Then he climbed stealthily up the path and watched the men while they collected Jim's store of wood and piled it ready for burning. They