

The Inglenook.

The Boy That Held His Tongue.

BY LAURA DAYTON EAKIN.

The boy's name was Sam Pierson, and he was the third of five brothers. When people twitted him about being so silent, he used to say he guessed it was because he had no chance to talk as he grew up. There were so many of them always eager to be telling what they saw or what they heard that he had the monopoly of listening. He was not surly or rude, and his employers never complained of his few words. He asked enough questions to understand thoroughly what was expected of him and no more, and then he went on in the even tenor of his way and took no one into his confidence.

Just now he was driving a wagon for the cottenseed oil mills, which were some miles from Texas city where his mother and four brothers and two sisters lived. Ever since he was a chap in short trousers, he had found his own places and made his own living, and ever since this mill had opened its door, he had been employed in some way or other by the management. His individuality had not as yet made much impression upon the august company, who were said to be "coining money" from cottenseed.

So when Sam was feeding his team at the mill stables on a certain day in March, silently as usual, though the yard was full of other teamsters, laughing and talking loudly to each other, his heart gave quite a jump, when the son of the president, strolling apparently in great unconcern, stopped for a moment near him and said: "Is your name Sam Pierson?" "Yes, sir." "Hitch your team," continued the young man, "and go right away to the office."

Sam's hat came off again. His hands shook a little as he followed the brief directions. He was wondering what he could have done to be called before the officers. Richard Watson Jr., had never spoken to him before, but he knew his name, and his eyes followed him now as he sauntered with apparent carelessness, speaking to the other men as he went back to the office. But Sam observed that none of the others left their teams. He alone had been summoned to the office. He thought hard but said not a word. He paused a moment to wash his face and hands at the water trough, and run a comb he took from his pocket through his hair, buttoned his coat a little closer and was at the door only a few moments after it closed on the young cashier. His tanned cheeks were a trifle paler. He expected instant dismissal with perhaps the loss of a week's wages.

"Come in!" said a voice, not connected with anyone belonging to the mill that he had ever met. The boy looked bravely into the owner's eyes, holding his hat in his hand, and bowing awkwardly to the greeting of the single occupant of the office. "Will you sit down for a moment?" said the elderly gentleman, and a big lump seemed to fill Sam's throat as he placed himself on the edge of a chair indicated by a motion of the great man's hand. Sam was sure he was a great man. He was dressed so well, and a diamond stud flashed

on his shirt-front. He wore gold glasses and his bald head fairly shone. He put the tips of his long shapely fingers together, and it seemed to Sam as if he was looking quite through him.

"I want to have a talk with you, young man!" he said at last.

Sam gasped.

"I have been told that you know how to attend to your business; that you can hold your tongue."

Sam nodded, but no words came to him.

"The mill company has need of such a man as that."

Sam straightened up and sat more firmly in his chair. He had never been called "a man" before. "I'm at your service, sir," he said.

Mr. Richard Watson, Senior president of the mill company, and also of the El Paso Trust and Banking Company, measured again his fingers from tip to tip. Then he drew out a massive gold watch and noted the time, and went to the door and looked up and down the hall, and in succession to each window. When he had satisfied himself that there was no one in hearing he proceeded to give his orders to his quiet companion.

"You are to be at my gin house on the Bella-Rica plantation," he said, "to-morrow morning at daybreak. You know where it is?"

"I've hauled seed from there before," answered Sam.

"You are not to tell a soul of your errand, and be on hand by four o'clock."

"You can depend on me, sir," Sam was greatly surprised when this ended the interview, and still more when the president shook hands with him at the office door.

Daybreak came slowly that next morning. All the long night it rained torrentially—dense gray clouds hung low and the trees dripped their cold moisture upon him, as he drove along his dreary way to Bella Rica. To his immense amazement, Sam found Richard Watson, Senior, and Richard Watson Junior, awaiting him.

"All right!" they said peering from the gin-house door. "Take these bags to your wagon, Sam;" the younger man said. Sam tugged manfully at the first one. "Heavies seed I ever struck," he mumbled. Then both father and son by a lantern's dim light lifted with him, and soon the wagon was filled, and just as the first faint streaks of dawn came athwart the leaden sky, Sam climbed to his place in front.

"Sam," said Mr. Watson, the elder, "You doubtless know there is more in those bags than cottenseed. A vast deal depends on its reaching the mill by the time work begins. Drive for your life, Sam. If you are disturbed, use these." Then he handed the astounded lad two pistols with every cartridge in place.

Sam's eyes said a good deal just then, but he placed the murderous weapons in his pockets as if he was used to carrying them every day.

The streams were running full as he drove back into the woods. Once two men accosted him. Better turn back; Del Santo creek is nearly gone, and the ford is impassable."

Sam only shook his head and urged his team on through the rushing waters with all its

might. The bridge was tottering, but Sam drove on with a prayer. "God help me get over!" he cried in his heart, but his lips were dumb as ever. The bridge swayed and swung and the muddy water was up to the hub of the wheels. Several times he thought his precious load was gone. The horses were true to his guiding and they made the perilous passage in safety and at six o'clock were at the mill door.

The manager was there, and together they took in the wet bags. A dextrous cut of a sharp knife in the bottom of each one released a leather sack of bright new gold. Sam had carried many thousands of dollars to the mill. He learned then that a crisis had come to the business. Not only the cottonseed oil mill but the fertilizer works, and the great stove factory that made the barrels, paid at the mill office their entire force of employees. Sam Pierson had led a strategic movement of much importance.

A strike, which would mean dreadful disaster and utter ruin, indeed, was imminent. Labor and capital were on the verge of an awful clash. A few hot-headed workmen had plotted vengeance on all the industries and even on the bank in the city. This gold was to forestall the attempt that was to be made during the night that followed Sam's perilous ride. It was the outcome of weeks of discontent with their wages and hours of work. After many hours of consultation and conference, capital had decided to make such concessions as would meet labor half way.

All morning the work went on as usual, but the men were sullen and ill at ease. At noon each industry closed down, and as usual the men stood round in little groups, except Sam the immovable. No one got a word out of him. Indeed, he was too sleepy to talk at this juncture.

A strange order came to the workmen early in the afternoon. They were to "lay off" an hour earlier and line up in front of the office. The engineers, the foremen, teamsters, workmen of all kinds, even the little boys who mended the bags and packed kindling, all were there. Inside the office, the gold Sam had brought was divided into hundreds of shares, and on each bag the name of one workman appeared. The elder and younger Watson and the manager and others of great corporation were present, and every face wore a look of intense anxiety.

Mr. Watson, Senior, president of the great corporation that controlled the several industries, spoke first. It was wonderful how men's brows cleared as he told them that past year had been so successful as to determine them to increase the wages ten per cent., and thus share with them the profits. Besides the hours were to be shortened, and a half-holiday given on Saturday, and instead of the "scrip" which they had been receiving and spending at the company's store, they were to be paid in virgin gold to-day, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the opening of the mills.

They were dumb with surprise at first; but presently cheers rent the air, and the black looks all faded away. Capital had made friends with labor.

Perhaps a fortnight later, Sam Pierson was called again to the office. He was not so frightened this time, but when the president opened a red case of Russian leather and presented him a gold watch and handsome fob, he could scarcely articulate, "Thank you, sir!"

A position as watchman at the bank in El Paso was tendered him with much better wages than his teamster's place gave him, and he has been entrusted since with many