

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### The Foot of the Ladder.

BY FANNY A. COMSTOCK.

"Now, Reub, you don't mean to say it took you two hours to find those cows, and one of 'em with a bell, too! Cows are bigger than grasshoppers, and I'll venture to say you found enough of these."

Having a choice collection of bugs of various sorts in his handkerchief at that moment, Reub did not stop to argue the point. And, indeed, no argument that he could muster would change his reputation for a heedless, blundering fellow. So looked Reuben Clay to the world. And how looked the world to Reuben, fatherless, motherless, fed and clothed by Mr. and Mrs. Brown for charity's sake till such time as he could take care of himself?

Ever since he could remember, the boy had had an eager interest in everything that crept or flew. Though his zoological tastes were frowned upon, they strove under opposition; and, when one summer a college professor came to the village and encountered Reuben in one of his collecting excursions, Reub's vague wishes grew to a resolve. Some day, if he lived, he would know birds and insects as the professor knew them, and, as a necessary step to that end, he would go to college.

After his district school days were over, Reuben lived on at Mr. Brown's, helping in the regular farm work, and doing, besides, such odd jobs as fortune sent in his way, laying up money for the future, and reciting Greek and Latin to Mr. Alison, the minister.

Reuben had had one cruel accident that would have turned many boys in despair from the chosen path. On a spring morning, he had gone in his boat to the village to deposit the first fifty dollars of his savings, and, on the way, had missed his pocketbook. Whether he had dropped it in the water or elsewhere, or some clever thief had taken it from him, remained a mystery. It was discouraging work, beginning again at the foot of the ladder, but there was no other way. Abandoning his purpose never entered his mind.

The years came and went, and Reuben was eighteen, when, one morning in June, a visitor was announced to Mr. Alison, who was sitting in his study. In the parlor he found a sunburned gentleman in white flannels, who held out his hand, and said:

"I'm here, George, and I've come to ask a favor of you the first thing. My coachman gave me the slip at the last minute. Can't you tell me of someone down here that would do?"

And so it came about that, almost before he knew it, Reuben was established as coachman and general helper to Mr. Courtenay, owner of the beautiful cottage on the hill, who chanced to be also a college friend of Mr. Alison.

"He is a boy with a career before him, I think," Mr. Alison had said.

He had not told all Reub's secret, but had felt it right to say that he was an orphan, working hard for money to start in life.

Reuben's skies had never been so bright. Courtenay took the whim to offer him exceptionally good wages, and he had large margins of leisure for study. What he liked best was getting to know Courtenay, who had taken a liking to him, and let him enjoy, for the first time in his life, the familiar companionship of a gentleman. Sometimes he felt as if Courtenay were inviting him to speak of his future hopes, but this he shrank from doing.

One morning they were out in the yacht together. Reuben had improved wonderfully in his new life. He stood straighter and seemed more manly than before, and there was a happier look on his face. As he stood by the mast, in his blue yachting suit, Courtenay looked at him with something like envy.

"If I weren't so fond of myself, I'd like to try being you for a while," he said, at last.

Reuben laughed.

"You'd soon get tired of it. I'm a born plodder, and shall be to the end of my days."

"Plodders sometimes come out best in the end," said Courtenay, wistfully.

He sat silent a moment, with a look that suggested not entirely cheerful memories. Then he said abruptly: "My mother and sister are coming tomorrow. We will meet the boat."

"With Dick?"

"No, with the pair. Why do you ask?"

"We have never tried the new horses on Steamboat Wharf, but we know they are restless," Reuben answered, hesitatingly. "I think Dick would be safer."

Courtenay was on the verge of an impatient reply, but he suppressed it.

"My mother likes spirited horses. You and I will be on the front seat, and I think we can manage the blacks between us."

Clearly Reuben's only course was to obey. Morning came, and the faultlessly groomed horses were brought

to the door. Courtenay took the reins, and the horses trotted steadily over the road to the wharf, and stood quietly while the steamer swung slowly up to the pier.

"You see they are lambs," said Courtenay, as he handed the reins to Reuben, and went to find his guests. He soon returned with the ladies and put them into the carriage.

"I'll hold them while you look up the baggage," said Courtenay, taking his seat and handing the checks to Reuben.

Reuben turned away, and was busily searching for the trunks, when suddenly the shrill whistle of the steamboat sounded. With one fiery leap upward the frightened horses started at full speed, cleared the wharf, and tore down the road, Courtenay's utmost strength being powerless to control them.

The hypothesis of a right-angled triangle is often a great convenience. Reuben sprang from the end of the wharf, and dashed up the bank just in time. He flung himself at the horses' heads, and allowed them to drag him while he clung to the bits. They swerved, but soon slackened, and finally stopped at the summit of a long hill, down which Mr. Courtenay nor the ladies would have greatly relished driving just then.

It was a poor, limp creature that dropped by the roadside when the horses stopped, and one foot dragged helplessly as Courtenay put him in the carriage. The next time Reuben opened his eyes he was in his room, with the doctor bending over him.

And now came a time of lying still, waiting for the injured ankle to grow strong. This was a new experience for Reuben, the hardest he had known. But for Courtenay's sake he tried to make light of it, and to keep a cheerful face, though it seemed as if all his dreams and hopes were hanging in the balance. The doctor would not answer for the result unless the injured foot had perfect rest for an indefinite time,—a sober outlook for a boy with Reuben's plans; and, in spite of his efforts, he grew dull and listless, and lost the elasticity so necessary for a speedy recovery.

Courtenay's remorse and uneasiness were increased by this state of affairs. One evening, as he stood by Reuben's sofa, he said, "There's no use denying it; you have something on your mind, young man, and you must tell me what it is."

Reuben could not easily tell his plans, even to so kind a friend as Courtenay had proved; but, having made a beginning, it was a relief to go on, and he told all, from his first boyish dream of an education down to the present moment, not omitting the loss of the fifty dollars.

"So that is all that troubles you," said Courtenay. "Why, that is a matter that a stroke of the pen can set right. I was afraid it was something serious."

"But I don't want to borrow," answered Reuben. "It is easy and interesting laying up for by and by, but a debt fastened round your neck is a different thing."

Courtenay sat down by Reuben. "Nobody said anything about borrowing," he said. "But you are just going to college as soon as you can possibly fit; and you are going to be man enough to let me help you, and throw your scruples to the winds. You know why you are lying here. You are something to me."

In a few days a college tutor took up his residence in the house; and, when he had examined into Reuben's acquirements, he said there would be no difficulty about getting ready by October. Greatly to Reuben's satisfaction, the doctor thought the ankle would be strong by that time, if all went well.

So Reuben worked on his sofa in good cheer. The hope and will that had been wanting before were now thoroughly awake, and from the day of his opening his heart to Courtenay he seemed a new creature.

One sultry afternoon in August, Mr. Brown appeared at the Courtenay cottage. He had with him a queer bundle wrapped in a newspaper, which he handed Reuben, saying:

"Perhaps you can throw some light on this. I can't. I was harvesting potatoes this morning, and I found this in one hill. It doesn't belong to any variety that I'm acquainted with, and I brought it over as a curiosity to show you."

And there, in the nest of potato rootlets lay the lost pocketbook. With eager fingers Reuben opened it. The stout leather had guarded the treasure well. Discolored and damp the bills certainly were, but quite recognizable and fit for redemption.

"Come out very well this time, Reub, and no mistake," said Mr. Brown, when he had heard the story of the loss. "But I wouldn't risk it again. Next time you have fifty dollars to take care of, I wouldn't deposit it in the potato field; for the chances are you might not always be so lucky."

Courtenay walked down the avenue with Mr. Brown as he went away, and they spoke together of Reuben's plans.

"I'm glad you're going to give him a lift," said Mr. Brown. "It'll save time for him; but Reub would have

done it himself, somehow. It's in him. When he once made up his mind, it was never any sort of use to contend with him; and, when he'd once tackled anything, whether 'twas a tough stump in a pasture or a contrary horse, or what not, he never gave up till he'd mastered it. I've seen considerable many sorts of boys in my time, he concluded, "and Reub is the sort that gets there. You mark my words; the world will hear from Reub one of these days."—Christian Register.

### A Dog Story of St. John, 1847.

"Yes, my dear child, this is Christmas eve."

The people were astray in the crowded streets, caring but little for the poor unfortunates.

"Oh, mama, I'm so hungry and in pain here," placing his thin hand on his hollow stomach. There was no food in the house, (if a hovel could be called such,) to satisfy the piercing cry. The careworn, emaciated mother thought of the happy home of twenty-five years ago in Fredericton, which she willingly exchanged for a cosy cottage on Charlotte St., in St. John, and of the happy hours spent with the husband of her choice, and the bright happy children who, all but little Willie, had come to years and, like the over-grown birds, had flown from their nests to shift for themselves. It was long ere the patient wife and loving mother realized that a dark cloud was hovering over the home, at first not bigger than a man's hand, but it was destined to burst in all its fury on their household.

The terrible liquor habit was forming and danger was at hand. The curse of Christian lands had stealthily crept into the once happy home; first a mortgage, and later what part of the home this did not swallow up was soon squandered by the now reckless, dissipated husband; thus was the cosy cottage exchanged for the apology of a home in "Cooper's alley," where we found the sad mother and hungry child.

All the household effects which could be converted into drink were sold or bartered, and at last the family ten dollar Bible went on its mission and may have done some good.

The poor drunken sot had lost a good situation some time before the date of our story.

Said the almost frantic mother to Willie, "Come, my child, let us take a walk to see the Christmas decorations," (with a view to begging food for dear Willie.) Oh, thought she, is it possible, have I come to this, a beggar in the street with a drunken husband, made such by the city laws which permits for "blood money" a demon man to sell that which brings such misery to mortals. How long, oh Lord, how long shall this "death work" continue, and under the sanction of laws.

Calling at the door of a respectable looking house she said in substance:

"Oh, pity the sorrows of a poor old woman, whose starving child has brought her to thy door, oh, give me food, and God will bless you ever for your Christmas gift and add much to your store."

As the door was closing against her she heard the cutting words, "Go work as we do for your food."

Their next call was to a bakery on Germain street, kept by two fine old men, who owned a large black Newfoundland dog. These men were busy serving their customers, and scarce noticed the shivering form of the starving woman and child. The faithful old curly Carlo kept gazing wistfully at the buyers as they took their turn at the counter. The lad Willie, patted him on the head. Finally Jimmie, a lad of nine, stepped up to make his Christmas purchases, (he lived at the head of "Cooper's alley" in a brick house,) and as he had often done before, gave "Carlo" a penny to buy a cake with. The dog, as was his habit, put his fore paws upon the counter, with one he rapped, whilst between his teeth he held the coin. He would drop the coin, cover it with one paw till the cake was within reach, then raise his paw and push the penny to the store-keeper. Carlo came over to the hungry lad who had petted him and dropped the cake into his hand.

"Oh, mama, see what the dearie dog has given me." Then in a ravenous manner the famishing child began to eat, offering his dear mama a part.

Jimmie, who took in the situation, slipped his two and sixpence, "Christmas money," into the woman's hands. "May the dear Lord bless you, my sweet boy, for your kindness to the poor."

The good bakers, after the rush was over, made up a parcel of Christmas goodies. The mother and child then wended their lonely way to their empty rooms in "Cooper's alley."

The mother hid the balance of food for future use. Had this woman lived later when "Beautiful Joe" was written, and read the passage, "I don't know whether there are any dogs in heaven, but I do think heaven would be happier if I knew my beautiful Joe was to be there," would have said: "No, there are no dogs in heaven, because the spirit of the beast goes downward

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