

novation and a first-rate thing, for it afforded a delightful chance to blow their brains out, or inflict on themselves some other mortal injury. They took turns to fire, with the door of an old barn for a target, which they rarely hit, but came nigh killing the cattle in the field by the reckless way in which they fired with both eyes shut. The gun was Captain Bob's; and they got it of him when he was labouring under an excess of good-nature, and was sorry a moment afterwards that he let it go off. They returned it, however, without having blown off any of their limbs.

"If that gun had served you as it did me once, you'd never have wanted to borrow it," said he.

"Tell us about it," they cried.

"Well, one night as I was sleeping with my brother Ben in the attic of the old homestead,—a little one-story house, not much bigger than a martin-box,—there came a yowling of cats on the roof, as if they were holding a caucus up there. We were right under 'em, and could hear 'em scorching, clawing, and spitting; and says I, 'Ben, you lay still, and I'll go out and fix 'em.' So I crept down stairs, and felt along to where this old gun was hanging. I had loaded her for ducks as much as six months before, and hung her up all primed for use; but the ducks hadn't happened along. I took her down from the hooks, and went out just as I came from bed, and the night was cold as Cicero. I didn't stop to think, because I was so chilly, but blazed away; and in half a minute I was kicked about six rods over across a fence into a snow-drift. I got back as soon as I could, you bet, and found Ben half scared into fits, because, he said, the shot had come right on to him. Next morning we found three dead cats in the cabbage-yard behind the house. That's the identical gun."

They all looked at it and handled it with fresh interest, but the captain never loaned it to them again.

There was a place called "Beaver Dam," for some reason or other, which was famous as a place of resort for the boys; and the names of many generations of Rivertown boys were carved deep in the bark of an immense broad-breasted beech-tree. Ike's name soon found a place there in characters more bold than elegant, to be admired by coming ages. There were grand pasture oaks also in the vicinity, whose lower branches swept the ground; and walnut-trees, which accounted for the attraction of boys and squirrels in the fall of the year. Perhaps it was for their picturesque effect when the leaves were changing, and the whole forest of hard-wood trees was crowned

with the glories of autumn. Whatever the reason, they were sure to visit Beaver Dam. One fine warm October afternoon quite a crowd of the youngsters, having had their accustomed ramble through the woods, cutting "cat-tails," and hemlock boughs for bows, found their way to the "Dam," and were enjoying themselves splendidly, risking their necks by climbing the trees as if they were squirrels and without any more fear. After a while Ike, jumping up and catching hold of a branch, cried out,—

"See here, Sam Hyte! I say, Tom Scates! Hallo, all of you! I'm going to show you some new gymnastics. I intend to join the circus next year."

"What are you going to do?" asked one.

"I'm up a tree, and I'm going to try some new ground and lofty tumbling."

"Take care you don't tumble in earnest."

"Look out and don't fall."

"You'd better give up your monkey-tricks, and come down."

Almost everyone had something to say about it; and Ike gave up his intention of astonishing them, but came down upon a limb about twelve feet from the ground, and settled among the branches, half way out, his weight bending down the ends till the boys below could reach them.

"Now," said he, "take hold, and give us a swing."

"All right."

"Well, now all together!"

"The limb, which was a pretty large one moved gracefully up and down, and away. a little to the right and left, Ike nestling among the leaves, and urging those who had hold to toss him up higher.

"Now give a half dozen pulls for the last," he shouted.

They took hold now with a will, and threw all their strength into the effort, when, at about the fourth pull, they heard the limb split off from the trunk of the tree, and Ike rolled out of his oradle, falling head first upon the ground, like a paver's rammer. He put out his hands to break his fall; and when he got upon his feet, as soon as he was able to do so, he thought his wrists were broken. They swelled immediately, and were entirely useless. Here had been "ground and lofty tumbling" which they had not expected; but they said nothing, only to sympathize with one sufferer.

He was in a bad condition when he got home; and Mrs. Partington sent for Dr. Kittredge to come as "expediently as possible." He came, examined the hurts, and was thinking what to do, when

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