

A Runaway Automobile

(James Buckham, in 'Christian Work and Evangelist'.)

'Oh! here comes a steam-carriage!' cried Ralph. He could not say 'automobile,' it was such a long, queer word to pronounce. Bessie could say it, but it was hard work even for her. She liked Ralph's word better, and used it except when talking with older people, when she wanted to appear 'grown up.'

'Why! it's coming here!' announced Bessie, as the man who was riding in the automobile steered it out of the roadway and brought it slowly up to the edge of the sidewalk. 'Is your papa at home, children?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' replied Bessie, who was two years older than Ralph. 'He is writing in the study.'

'On his sermon, I suppose!' laughed the man. 'Well, I'm sorry to disturb him, but business is business, and we will have to do business in the daytime.' So saying, he jumped out of his automobile, ran up the steps and rang the door-bell. The servant let him in, and the children were left alone with the wonderful 'steam-carriage.'

Then that old enemy and deceiver, the Tempter, began his battle with Conscience.

'Just climb in, and see how it would seem to be sitting in a real steam-carriage!' whispered the Tempter.

'No!' said Conscience, strongly and very promptly on six-year-old Bessie's part, more slowly and weakly on four-year-old Ralph's part.

'Why, what harm would it do just to sit in the carriage?' argued the Tempter. 'There could be nothing wrong about that, and the man wouldn't care.'

'Papa and mamma would care,' answered Conscience in Bessie's soul.

'It wouldn't be very naughty, but just a little naughty, I suppose,' said a weaker voice in Ralph's soul.

'Come now!' urged the Tempter. 'The man won't be gone much longer, and unless you get right in you won't have a chance to see how it seems to be sitting in a real steam-carriage—perhaps you will never have another chance. Neither papa nor mamma will see you. Papa is busy with the man, and mamma is away shopping. Now is your chance! Only try it for a minute, and then you can jump out again, and no one will be the wiser.'

'Let's!' cried the other voice in Ralph's soul—the evil voice which is the echo of the Tempter's. 'Let's!' said the little boy's own eager lips; and Conscience, fighting alone and more feebly in Bessie's soul, went down at that, and the two children and the Tempter climbed into the automobile! That was what the Tempter had been planning all along. One can never satisfy him by yielding to him. He asks for the inch only that he may gain the ell.

'Just touch that shiny lever!' whispered the Tempter to Ralph; for he knew that Ralph was now well in his power.

The boy touched the piece of glistening steel. It felt so smooth and nice!

'Press it—just a little,' suggested the Tempter.

Ralph gave the lever ever so slight a push. There was a sudden sputter of steam, a quick jerk of the machinery; then—chu, chu, chu, chug, a-chug, a-chug a-

spiz, bur-r-r-r, and the automobile started off down the road like a living creature.

Both children screamed, and then Ralph began to cry—to bawl, as his father would say, a regular boy's howl, loud and lusty. Bessie did not cry. She felt the sudden weight of her responsibility. In that moment of danger she seemed to have grown twenty years older than Ralph. Two years' difference in age made the fault and sin seem all the little girl's—and the blame, too, if anything serious should happen.

So far, luckily, the automobile had held its course beside the road, though not quite in it. Bessie caught hold of the long bar as a drowning man catches at the largest straw, and found that with it she could steer the machine. It steered very easily, turning just as one would think it should at the slightest moving of the bar. Bessie soon saw that she could keep the machine from running into things if she did not lose her head. More than that, she could not dare to try. How Ralph had started the automobile she did not know, and the little boy himself was so nearly frightened out of his wits that he could not remember. He knew that he had touched something shiny, but whether he had pulled it or pushed it, pressed it or lifted it, he could not even think. All he could do was to cry louder and louder; and all Bessie dared try to do was to keep the machine going on the right side of the road. It was enough if she could fix her mind and attention on that.

So they kept on going—smoothly and not very fast, but farther and farther from home all the time. Bessie kept hoping the machine would run down, but it did not. It 'chug'd' and 'chug'd' busily and cheerfully; the air-cushioned wheels rolled softly through the dust, and all the houses and trees fell steadily behind them. Pretty soon Ralph stopped crying. He found that he wasn't getting hurt, and the ride was growing rather pleasant after all. Before long a smile began to dawn on his freckled face; but Bessie's face was still sober and anxious.

People stopped to gaze at the two tots gliding by in the automobile. But the children seemed to be managing it all right, and were gone before one could really make up his mind whether to do anything about it or not. Bessie never took her eyes from the road in front of her. She did not seem to be conscious of anything else—men, women, children, electric cars, teams, dogs or cats. The one thing that she felt she could do, to atone for her sin, she did with all her might—she steered the automobile clear of every obstacle.

By-and-by, keeping straight on, they got out into the country, and for long distances had the road all to themselves. By this time Ralph was laughing and cheering with boyish delight. It was the greatest lark he had had since he graduated from skirts. 'Why don't you holler?' he kept demanding of Bessie. 'It's such fun!' But Bessie's face was still stern and her heart was filled with dread and shame. 'Don't bother me, Ralph,' was her only reply. 'Let me steer straight.' And all the time she was praying in her heart, 'O God! make this steam-carriage run down!'

And at last, when they were fifteen miles from home, it did run down. The gasoline in the tank gave out; the machine's 'chug-a-chug' began to choke; there was a final sighing 'p-hiz-z' of steam—and then the

wheels ceased to turn, and the automobile stopped in plain sight of the little railway station at Mystic.

A moment later a man came rushing out of the station, bare-headed. He was the telegraph operator, and he had just been taking an odd message from the ticker—'Look out for runaway automobile with two children. Wire if seen.'

'The very children!' he cried, as he hastened up the street toward the run-down automobile. 'I'll send them in by the next train, and wire their father to meet them. Poor, guilty-looking little things! I guess they have learned one lesson that they will remember.'

Tried to Forbid the Marriage.

A friend sends us the following interesting account of how Miss Hull's pet colt interrupted her wedding.

A wedding in rural high life was interrupted in a peculiar fashion at Walnut Hill, Connecticut, a few days ago.

The parents of Miss Nellie Hull, who was to become the wife of Mr. Anson Gear, thought it would be the thing to celebrate the wedding in church.

The contracting parties were pleased with the suggestion, and preparations were made for an elaborate wedding.

All the people on the Hill were invited, and all went. The church was beautifully decorated with flowers. Built over the path leading from the road to the church door was an awning, and on the ground was laid a strip of carpet.

Miss Hull was very fond of pets, and among the animals on the farm she had a pet cow and a pet colt. Her affection for these animals was warmly reciprocated. Either of them would follow her about like a dog. Daisy was the name of the pet colt. It happened that Daisy had his eye on the preparations for the wedding. He stood with his head over the pasture bars and saw his mistress climb into the family carriage and drive down the road. A short time after, according to the testimony of the hired man, the colt cleared the bars at a bound and with tail up and heels in the air went down the road at a lively gait in the direction his mistress had taken.

The wedding party was in the church, and bride and bridegroom were standing before the minister ready to take their vows, when there was a commotion in the vestibule. Every man, woman and child in the church turned towards the door just as Miss Hull's colt stuck his head through the opening. Seeing his mistress at the altar the animal walked down the aisle, and thrusting his head between the bride and bridegroom, rubbed his nose against the bride's shoulder, whimpering affectionately.

The preacher stopped, the bride's father attempted to drive the colt out of the church, but it refused to go until induced to do so by its mistress, who led the way. When the horse was outside, the door was closed to keep out the animal and the young woman returned to the altar and was married.

When the wedding procession set out for the Hull residence, where refreshments had been spread for the guests, the colt trotted along by the side of the carriage in which its mistress rode.—'Our Dumb Animals.'