



The Meadow Fire

"Why do I never smoke!" said Ben, with his jolly blue eyes twinkling. "Well, it's an expensive habit and a dirty one, and all the things you learn about it in school are true; and then I was cured the first time I tried it."

"Tell us about it," demanded Laurence and Bert, concisely.

Old Ben's eyes danced more than ever. Nothing delighted him more than to be called on for a story, though he always affected a good-natured grumble.

"That is the way with you young ones," he said. "You think because you have nothing to do that an old fellow like me can idle around too. I tell you, it wasn't so when I was a boy. I had no time to go about bothering folks for stories. There was enough to do on the farm to keep boys stirring."

"But we have to work, too, Ben," said Bert. "I tell you our mother believes that old verse that you tell us sometimes about Satan finding mischief for idle hands to do. We get our afternoons off, of course, in vacation; but you ought to see us work in the mornings."

"Well, well," said Ben, "it will be the saving of you in the end. But about my smoking. I wasn't brought up for a sailor man. My father had a little farm some thirty miles from the sea, up Aldershot way, and my brother John and I were brought up on the farm. I learned to smoke and to stop smoking, too, one day when father and mother were away. My Uncle Ben had been visiting us, and had left a pipe and some tobacco on the kitchen shelf. I showed them to John when we had our chores done."

"What are you going to do?" says he.

"And I said, as big as you please, 'I'm going down in the meadow to smoke. Do you want to come along?'"

"You see, I was that ashamed and afraid that I didn't dare smoke in the house, for fear mother might smell it when she came home, or some neighbor might come in and catch me. John hesitated a while, but, finally came along. We went down into a little gully where no one could see us from the road or barn. I filled up my pipe and began to smoke."

"Don't it make you sick?" said John.

"Not a mite," said I.

John watched me a while, and then ran down to the bottom of the gully to see what was stirring the grass. I smoked for about five minutes, and then wasn't I sick? The sun seemed to be burning right into my brains, and the grassy slopes around me began to dance about and sort of close up to smother me. I dropped my head down on the grass, and shut my eyes for a minute. I don't know where the pipe went. I was aroused by an awful screech from John.

"Get up, you loony, do you want to get burned up?"

"I got up with my head still whirling, and there was a little circle of fire blazing merrily away within a foot of me. It was in August, and the grass was brown and dry from a six weeks' drought. I stood staring stupidly. John was stamping madly, trying to put it out."

"Help me put it out," he yelled, "or the barns will be burned up."

"I was in my bare feet," but I jumped at the little rim of fire that was eating out a larger and larger circle. It was no use. I could help very little, and, in spite of John's activity, the fire spread faster than he could crush it out.

"Let's get whips," he panted, pointing to the green bushes down by the brook.

"I was awake by this time, and we raced down there like wild. We tore off great green branches, but by the time we got back the line of flame had assumed start-

ling length. It was eating slowly across the great ten-acre field toward the barns and corn-cribs. Oh, how we worked whipping out those flames; but as fast as they died down in one place, we saw them starting with new activity in another. As far as we could see, the farm buildings, and, possibly, the house were doomed. Yet, we worked on with the energy of despair. By this time the rising clouds of smoke had attracted the attention of the neighbors. Old Farmer Cassel came running across the field.

"Leave that," he shouted, "and come and help me get the horses and plough!"

"We stopped to ask no questions, but raced to the barn. The horses, snorting with fright, were hitched to the plough. With the farmer guiding the plough, John and I led the horses into the meadow. The fire had made fearful headway. Across the long field we went, turning up a deep furrow between the line of fire and the barn. Then back again, making a second furrow. Then we could stop to rest and watch the red line creep up to the brown earth and then die down. But John and I watched all the rest of the afternoon with green boughs in our hands to whip out any treacherous sparks that might leap over the line. Before sunset there was no longer even a wreath of smoke in the meadow; then we had time to think of our tired, aching bodies and empty stomachs, and I began to face the thought of the reckoning to come when father and mother came back. That part of it doesn't belong to the story, though."

"There isn't any moral to my story. It's just true. You boys wouldn't be likely to set a meadow on fire if you did smoke, but if every boy would have a good, hard lesson like that the first time he tries the dirty trick, he'd be happier and healthier when he's an old fellow like me."—"Christian Standard."

Consistency.

Suppose a man with an oath in his mouth should ask God to sweep away the evils of profanity. Suppose a murderer, while drawing the trigger of his revolver to blow out the brains and the life of his victim, should pray the Lord to spare the life of that victim. Suppose a man just jumping over a fearful precipice should ask the Lord to save him from injury. Suppose a man prays the Lord to counteract the evils of intemperance while he himself sets the example of moderate (?) tipping, and signs a petition of his neighbor who 'is of a good moral character' (?) for license to sell strong drink to his children and all others who may want a 'wee drap' occasionally if the weather should be too warm or too cold. Suppose a man should pray for the poor heathen, and pay, say fifty cents or, perhaps, one whole dollar, missionary money, but puts his name on a tavern-keeper's bond for several hundred dollars. I must stop. I am becoming confused. But consistency is a jewel.—'Living Epistle.'

Why He Failed.

A young man who had failed by only three points in an examination for admission to the marine corps appealed to his representative in Congress for assistance, and together they went to see the Secretary of the Navy, in the hope of securing what is known as a 're-rating' of his papers.

"How many more chances do you want?" asked Secretary Long. "This is your third time." And before the young man had a chance to answer, the Secretary continued: "How do you expect to get along in the world when you smoke so many cigarettes? Your clothes are saturated with their odor. Pull off your gloves and let me see your fingers. There, see how yellow they are!" pointing to the sides of the first and second fingers.

Before the young man found his tongue to offer an explanation the Secretary asked him if he drank.

"Only once in a while," was his sheepish reply.

Secretary Long then invited the Con-

gressman into his private office, and while offering to do everything that he could, added: "I am sick of trying to make anything of these boys that are loaded with cigarette smoke and 'drink once in a while.'" They are about hopeless, it seems to me."

When they left the department building the young man, half apologizing for his poor showing, remarked: "Drinking, my father says, is the bane of the navy."

"I guess it is," replied the Congressman, laconically. "It is the bane everywhere else, and I should think quite likely it would be in the navy."

The young man promised to turn over a new leaf absolutely, in both particulars, and was allowed another chance.—'St. Louis Advocate.'

A Cold Water Story.

Somewhere lives a small farmer of such social habits that his coming home intoxicated was once no unusual thing. His wife urged him in vain to reform.

"Why, you see," he would say, "I don't like to break it off at once; it ain't wholesome. The best way is always to get used to a thing by degrees, you know."

"Very well, old man," his helpmeet would rejoin, "see, now, if you don't fall into a hole one of these days, while you can't take care of yourself, and nobody near to take you out."

Sure enough, as if to verify the prophecy, a couple of days after, returning from a wretched frolic, the old fellow reeled into his own well, and, after a deal of useless scrambling, shouted for the 'light of his eyes' to come and help him out.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said the good soul, showing her cap-frill over the edge of the parapet; "you've got into a hole at last, and it's only lucky I'm in hearing or you might have drowned. Well," she continued, after a pause, letting down the bucket, "take hold."

And up he came, higher at every turn of the windlass, until the old lady's grasp slipping from the handle, down he went to the bottom again. This occurring more than once made the temporary occupant of the well suspicious.

"Look here!" he screamed, in fury, at the last splash, "you're doing that on purpose; I know you are!"

"Well, now, I am," responded his old woman, tranquilly, while winding him up once more; "didn't you tell me it's best to get used to a thing by degrees? I'm afraid if I was to bring you right up on a sudden, you wouldn't find it wholesome."

The old fellow could not help chuckling at her application of his principle, and protested that he would sign the pledge on the instant, if she would lift him fairly out. This she did, and packed him off to sign, wet as he was.—'Australian Paper.'

"Suppose there were a thousand young men before me now, if they were animated with the deepest Christian principles, if they had attained the highest culture, if they had all the intelligence or wealth of society at command—no matter what their other circumstances, provided these thousand persons all began to drink to-day, without knowing their physical and hereditary tendencies, I say within a certain number of years a certain number of these thousand will become drunkards, and there is no possible way of avoiding that unless you manage to get those persons to abstain altogether."—Dr. Norman Kerr.

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