

The Great Timboon Explosion

By DONALD MACLEAN.

GRANFATHER THICKBROOM sat on a kerosene-box on the sunny side of the house reading the weekly paper. It was Sunday morning, a calm sunny morning, after a long spell of rain. There was no morning church, and Granfather, when he took the paper outside, was careful to explain to his daughter-in-law that he wanted to read the sermon on the back of it.

Four young Thickbrooms, of a distinctly Clydesdale type, dressed in their Sunday clothes, and restrained by maternal threats as to what would happen to them if they went out into the mud, were playing a strenuous game of Salvation Army on the veranda.

Granfather Thickbroom—fortunately for himself at the present juncture—was somewhat deaf, and, notwithstanding the tramping and tin-banging, was enabled to read on but little disturbed. Mr. Thickbroom, junior, was "taking it out" in bed, but, in any case, like the immortal Gallo, he "cared for none of these things." Mrs. Thickbroom was opposed to Sunday games on principle, but seeing the children were only playing "Army,"

sparring for time to invent a fitting answer. "I thought—they printed—the sermons in the back of the paper," Stringy shouted, "and I saw you reading in the middle of it. I s'pose you was looking to see wot the devil's been up to?"

Granfather's feet were in the toils then, and he knew it, but like the celebrated British race, of which he was an unworthy sample, he never knew when he was beaten, and with superb generalship he even now contrived to outmanoeuvre Mister Paterson, and turned defeat to victory.

"When you come to my age," he said, going off at a tangent, "you won't laugh at the devil—he's got more sense than you think"; and before Mister Paterson had time to realize what was happening, Granfather had adroitly changed the subject by asking, "But wot are you doing up so early? You gen'rally sleep in till dinner-time on Sunday. Our children annoying you?"

Stringbark Paterson was not a passionate man—nor one to retain animosity for long against anybody—hence the unwanted spectacle of Granfather Thickbroom reading a weekly paper on Sunday morning had been sufficient to drive his



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and the Army was a religious organization, she was not concerned. As for the neighbours—they were used to it.

Having satisfied his conscience by the desperate concentration necessary to read through the sermon, Granfather gave vent to a sigh of relief, and turned back abstractedly through the pages—taking here and there a mental bite (so to speak) of the forbidden fruit of worldly news.

In the midst of this doubtful occupation and the pandemonium raised by the marching "soldiers," he gradually became conscious that someone was calling him by name. Hurriedly thrusting the paper aside, Granfather rose as quickly as his stiffened limbs would permit and looked about him. The speaker being directly in front of him, leaning over the fence from the next yard, was, of course, the last object to come within the range of the aged man's vision; but, after looking in all directions save the right one, he must needs eventually look in that direction also, where he at once discovered the round eyes of "Mister" Stringy Paterson regarding him and his paper with unbounded astonishment.

"Ho, it's you, Stringy, is it?" he cried, in tones of relief, when he had assured himself as to the visitor's identity.

"Yes, it's me," Mister Paterson replied, slowly. "Any news?" he added as a kind of afterthought.

"Hay?" Granfather inquired, putting his hand behind his ear and looking interrogatively at Stringy, with his mouth open.

"Any news?" I said. Any good murders—or anything?"

"I wasn't reading the news," Granfather explained, coldly. "I was reading the sermon."

"I always thought they printed the sermons in the back of the paper," Mister Paterson remarked, pointedly.

"Hay?" Granfather inquired again—not that he did not hear—he was mercifully

personal wrongs from his mind; but the ancient man's question recalled them to him.

"It's them darned Duffies," he said, angrily. "I come home here Saturday night, and after tea put a candle in the bucket, and laid the bucket down by the wood-heap, and by the light of that candle I set to and cut up enough wood to last us all day Sunday, and I piled it up there in the shed to keep it dry—and this morning, when the missus got up to light the fire, there wasn't a blooming stick of it left. That's how I'm up so early. After cutting all that wood last night I had to get up and sail into it again this morning—when I should have been enjoying my hard earned rest in bed."

"Somebody been and shook your wood?" Granfather asked, with an appalled look, for "wood-shaking," in the eyes of every respectable Timboonite, was akin to manslaughter.

"Shook it? Yes; and it's not the first time neither. I can't keep a log of wood in the yard for 'em, and if it wasn't for that bull-tarrier of your's, you'd be the same."

"Hay?" Granfather asked, thrusting his face as near to that of Mister Paterson as the fence would allow. He had missed the last two sentences owing to a demonstration of unusual power on the part of the "Army."

"I said if it wasn't for old Peter, your bulldog, being in the yard, you wouldn't be able to keep any wood neither."

Granfather shook his head and smiled. "It's not him," he said, quietly.

"Not him?" Mister Paterson echoed; "then I'd like to know who it is. I'll swear it ain't Jerry—nobody's frightened of him."

Jerry was the father of the young Clydesdales.

"No," Mr. Thickbroom agreed; "it ain't Jerry."

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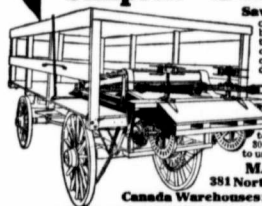
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