

JEM O' THE LOGGING CAMP.

The great bell of the Megantic mills was clanging out over the poor little settlement, whereof the mills seemed the great first cause and ultimate conclusion. Everybody in Duck Creek worked in the mills, or outside, except the one or two who owned them, and whose families dwelt in French-roofed houses, the high strata of its social formation. One of these proprietors, a middle-aged man, whose iron-grey hair had begun to thin and his brow to show lines of care, was slowly striding down the shabby highway. He seemed much displeased with himself, and his somewhat striking countenance bore marks of recent irritability.

"I didn't like doing it!" he muttered. "I didn't want to do it!" Now, Sylvester Peters rarely did anything that—as Jem Brice would have said—"entangled him" or "agin' the grain." Jem was the oracle of the mill hands and evoked most of their sharp sayings. In this case, it was true that Squire Peters had succumbed to domestic pressure. His capable wife, Mrs. Sophronia, felt the weight of society obligation, ever existent in Duck Creek, as consciously as any cabinet lady in the charmed circles of Washington. These things are but relative; as Mrs. Peters herself would have said, "Surely! And why not?"—Duck Creek was her little world.

This pressure, as of mill-stones, had been brought to bear on the head of the house. Mrs. Peters was going forth from Duck Creek: a calculated eclipse was to take place and the brightness of her glory to be removed therefrom, for a season. In short, she was really going to Montreal. A relative had invited her for some weeks' stay; the railway fare would be inconsiderable, but how could she coax from the pockets of her reluctant spouse the cash needful for due staidness of apparel?—For Mrs. Peters read the papers and learned, thereby, of unattainable and glorious attire, "suitable, and indeed, indispensable," so the fashion editor declared, "for the carnival season." Poor Mrs. Sophronia lost her head, altogether, and made such tempestuous demands for these necessities that the Squire, utterly bewildered, yielded the point, sorely against his better judgment.

So, to say, Squire Peters was temporarily embarrassed. Some notes were falling due, which he would be forced to meet; new machinery at the mills seemed imperative, and his son, at college, sent exaggerated term bills, not to be postponed. So the harassed husband had done what he disliked doing—cut down the pay at the mills. Moreover, he had dismissed six or eight men, whom he did not actually need, but whom he had been keeping on the pay-rolls, in hope of easier times. None knew better than Squire Peters the consequences of his action.

"I hated to do it. They will suffer. Men always do, when you do so!" murmured he, pursuing his original line of thought, as he still strode on. "There's Jem Brice, for one. I like him first rate! And what he will do is more than I know. Big family on his hands and the dead 'o' winter! Dear, dear! You see spring will bring them out in debt—everyone of the poor fellows!—and in bad sledding for next summer!—Confound the women, and their fashion magazines!" Thereupon, he paused to knock a lump of ice out of his path indignantly.

"That's Jem, now, over yonder!" he remarked a moment later, as a dark figure loomed up against the snow. "I declare there's no end of fuss! This world's boiling over with it. Think of our Lawrence, just infatuated with that girl!—She is as pretty as a pink, I know. And Jem is proud of her, immediate fiancé!—But he knows, too, that a girl of his can't have a son of mine. He ought to tell her so and put a stop to it!"

Meanwhile Jem Brice went on his way philosophically, whistling to keep his courage up. His discharge did not entail upon him, or his, immediate financial ruin; for this he was thankful. Unlike many of his mates, he had a neat sum laid by for just such contingencies. Of Scotch ancestry on his mother's side, Jem Brice understood thrift, and practised it. Yet the tiny hoard would last but a few months should it be, come a sole resource. Besides, he had other plans; it was, one day, to dower his daughter, Elspeth, who, with the name of her Scotch grandmother, had inherited some of her canny traits. These did her essential service, making her a favorite with all and helping to vivify her somewhat grave beauty. Even Sylvester Peters, angry as he was at his son's misplaced attachment, had open eyes, Elspeth-ward, and full comprehension of the loveliness, which, to his mind, fairly accounted for it. Not so, Mrs. Peters. She shut herself up in willful blindness, grim as a Gorgon, and would have no such plea entered.

"Utter silliness, the whole of it!" she maintained, without a ghost of compromise,—and her indignation was at bottom half jealousy of her son's spouse.—"How a man of your age can have so little sense is beyond me! Lawrence has no business to be dangle after any low-bred girl, pretty or not. Pretentious has nothing whatever to do with it; he is simply inexcusable."

But beauty has always swayed the world—and that, with no feeble empire—from the days of Homer and Helen of Troy, to the modern reign of the village belle. Even the crass community, wherein Elspeth's lot was cast, did her homage in its rough way. The friendly greeting of the mill-hands, as she passed, had its touch of reverence. Had been courtiers, with doffed hats they would have bowed at her approach, sweeping the earth with trailing plumes; but, being plain New Englanders, and working men at that—they only looked grave admiration and said nothing—the silence forming their tribute of deep respect.

No wonder Jem Brice was proud of his only daughter,—and willing, even, to risk the future of his boys, if hers, thereby, could be made more certain. "The lads can fend for themselves," he would say, in confidence, to his tobacco-loving chum, Sam Gregg, who had been a sailor, and therefore knew much of the world. "But the lass is not going to saw cross-grained logs for her living. No, sir!"

So Mrs. Peters had this one bitter element in her cup of bliss, soon to overflow with the Montreal visit—there would be no one to keep Lawrence in order during her

absence. His father was too easy altogether! His vacation, unluckily, would occur before her return, and his arrival home might be counted upon for a dead certainty; no persuasion would induce him to visit any of his chums, while Elspeth was at Duck Creek.

As for Jem Brice, it did take more whistling than usual to keep up his spirits. He was far from bursting into volcanoes of wrath, or swinging his shillelah, Irishman-fashion; nor did he join his mates in their fierce outcries over the tyranny of Capital. On this latter point he had his views, to be sure, but was too level-headed—as he himself would have said—to let passion or pressure of present events warp his deliberate convictions. Now, like the cool yeomen of the braves, his first idea was to investigate the puzzling, yet crushing blow. "Something's gone wrong with the Squire," he muttered. "He wouldn't come down on us unless he had to!" Then his brow darkened. "But whatever made him light on me? He knows I'm an old hand—and a good one. He's said times of times! That white-livered scamp, Bennett, would have turned me off, any day the past three years, if he could! 'Tisn't likely he's got any more influence now." And the frown on his set face deepened into dangerous significance, as he found himself nearing a conclusion. Jem Brice, the other men said, "was pure grit."

"It's the lass—and Lawrence! I see!" The wrath in his dark eyes burst into flame. He was touched on his sorest spot. His love for Elspeth swallowed up all else; his own misfortunes, or money losses, he could bear, but this blow aimed at her, roused the latent fire of a calm nature.

Bennett, the bookkeeper at the mills, who had at one time acted as foreman, knew every man in the Squire's employ, and had a quiet influence over the management, which Jem was now underestimating. He was a cunning man and had worked for some time indirectly to compass Jem's dismissal. He often urged the Squire to scale down wages, and discharge extra hands. Not once did he fail to mention Jem in this connection.

"No, no!" the Squire would ejaculate. "Not Brice! We must keep Brice away."

Still Bennett saw that the notion of dismissing him was slowly entering the Squire's brain, as a wedge starts a cleavage. The bookkeeper knew a reduction of wages must come ere long and resolved that Jem should be one of its victims. So, when his employer got the point down the pay-roll, he quietly made out a list of hands to be discarded, putting Jem's name last. This he read over to the Squire, waiting breathless at its close for the owner's decision.

"Brice?" said Peters at last, interrogatively.

"Yes."

"I'll be hard for him."

"I don't know," replied the book-keeper in a tone of carefully assumed indifference, yawning as he spoke. "He is pretty well-handled, they say. Able to take his family and move out of this!—And he cast a sharp glance at the Squire, and to a new idea fell with force. It Jem would only leave Duck Creek and take his daughter with him,—away, out of sight and hearing,—Lawrence would soon forget her, and one, at least, of the Squire's anxieties be set at rest. The temptation was a strong one, as Bennett had foreseen, and a little later, the book-keeper, being far too wary to urge the point, or let the other suspect his motives.

With Squire Peters it was a struggle between the forces of evil and his better nature. To do as he would be done by, to proud of her immediate fiancé!—But he knows, too, that a girl of his can't have a son of mine. He ought to tell her so and put a stop to it!"

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this point its sign of dubious entertainment. It was Scott Bennett, bent on improving this opportunity—which he being so long in finding—to express his regret at the change they had been forced to make at the mills.

"We were unwilling to part with your father," he was saying glibly. "And I hope to find room for him again, if he concludes to remain in town." No answer being vouchsafed to the final suggestion, the clear gaze fixed on him seemed to transpire his duplicity, and, in some embarrassment he added hastily, "an very sorry, myself!" The blue eyes took on an icy gleam.

"Indeed, Mr. Bennett! I can hardly credit it! Good afternoon!" With a decisive little bow, which did not lack dignity, Elspeth turned away; but her cheek flushed scarlet, and an angry light fixed her eyes.

She had not fully gained her serenity at the close of a long walk, which brought her to a lovely nook by the millstream, which might well be a trying place. Here, myriads of pointed firs flung moveless reflections into a black pool whose glassy surface hardly knew a ripple. A few young pines, interspersed among the other evergreens, carpeted the earth in dull, soft red. The silence and softness pleased Elspeth.

"I like deep water best," she said to herself. "It is still, as if it stopped to rest. And it comes out clearly, without any muddle, without mistakes or excitement. I wish I always could!"

Beyond, through a gap in the firs, she caught sight of a sunlit clearing, where the stream rushed on again amid the sprouting reeds and rushes of early spring. Their pale green and delicate half-hesitancy of putting forth struck Elspeth as pathetic. "The melting snows have chilled them," thought she. "I fancy I can see them shiver!" But the stream itself, rejoicing in the added power of a recent freshet, had gained perceptibly both in depth and volume. So absorbed was she in all this that she did not perceive Lawrence Peters emerging from behind the bole of a giant pine apparently the ancestor of all the rest. He darted on swiftly, after catching sight of her, and her reception of his embrace and kiss evidenced between them the perfectly good understanding of affianced lovers.

Their conversation was desultory—as, indeed, it is apt to be in such interviews—yet Elspeth had much to tell. Lawrence waxed indignant over Jem's discharge, and laid the whole blame on Scott Bennett, not realizing the Squire's full complicity in the transaction.

"Father left in January for the logging camp," said Elspeth, gravely. "He must do something, you know."

"Yes, and he is good at that! A sort of king among the loggers. They call him 'Jem o' the Logging Camp.'"

"I know. He was a great woodsman in his early years. But mother, she persuaded him to stay at home and go into the mill. Poor mother! she is so feeble! And logging is cold, dangerous work; she will worry every day father is gone."

"Elspeth, I am done with this! I can not bear it any longer! I will leave college and join Smith's scientific survey party; they pay a good salary, and we can marry at once. Then these miserable worries will stop for good and all!"

"Oh, Lawrence! I cannot let you." The clear Scotch decision behind the words made itself felt as the voice of authority, and her lover's face fell. "Your father is so fond of you, Lawrence, and willing to give you this superb education. You cannot disappoint him and throw it away."

Whereat the young man began to look dreadfully unhappy, a rare occurrence with him.

"Yes," he rejoined slowly, "I have disappointed father once already. It was his darling scheme to build up the 'Megantic' and enlarge it, that I might go into the business and be his successor. But I hated it as a child, and I hate it now. I don't care old fellow gave it all up—good naturedly, too—and a pretty penny my precious 'science' has cost him!"

"So you see yourself, Lawrence dear, it would never do to vex him again. No, we must wait. Perhaps the costly science may bring the salary, something like that now!"

"My days of independence are very far off, then!" muttered the young man ruefully.

His graduation was really fixed for the next year, but to the impatient wooer that one year seemed a lifetime.

"I never do get my freedom and an income of my own, Elspeth, my darling!"—A series of rhapsodies followed with which the reader has no concern. Young Peters was most sincerely in love, and the heart of the veriest stranger would have stirred in sympathy, beholding him thus whirled on by the tides of passion. Like his father he did nothing by halves, and his whole soul had gone out to Elspeth.

Jem Brice had started off for the woods in a feverish mood, dispirited and angered. Nor did his rough work, beneath the fresh influences of nature, in the free air and amid wondrous scenery of fir forest, exert its usual charm to soothe his fretted soul. He worried every day and pondered. Was the world unjust? Was the laborer always at a disadvantage—and this of necessity? A God of justice—could He be unjust, too?

He would discuss these questions by their camp fire at night with old Sol Quentin, the trapper; though it must be admitted that he had the argument mostly his own way. The daily grew more irritated, his anger against Squire Peters slowly deepening into hatred. Yet, all the while, he felt it as more than an individual wrong, merely from man to man; it involved the whole mighty pressure of the upper classes upon the lower, of capital upon labor.

"Men ought to stand together like trees," pursued Jem, seriously, "each giving the other a chance for air and sun. The tall ones let the smaller ones grow in their own plane; even the underbrush gets every bit of its share!"

"Why don't ye say ground pine, an' moss, an' the little ferns, an' the mosses? I tell ye the very smallest aint aught! An' they all git on, quietly."

"The peace of God that passeth understanding." There's more of it here, Sol, in the lone woods, than anywhere else!"

"The thought of Elspeth, too, haunted Jem continually. Was she not fair enough to be a lady? And sweet enough? And had she not due dignity of carriage? In fine array of that which could be bought with money, would she not shine, also, in all that money cannot buy? Some instinctive sense told Jem that Mrs. Sophronia herself, measured by severe standards, was not a lady. Despite her fine clothes, she fell below even his ideal.

On this point, also, he took counsel. The trapper marvelled at his queer questioning.

"Tell us, Sol, what makes a lady?"

"Look 'er here mate," responded the wise man, "what makes a posy? Softness an' sweetness, an' no airs! That's my idee."

"Pretty good, Sol. But—education?"

"Well, that's aint book larnin', I've seen book larned chaps come up 'ere who wanted eddication' just the wust kind!"

Jem had no cause to blush for his daughter's education. Thanks to the public schools, she had a fair amount of common knowledge, carefully supplemented by a good course of English reading. Since Lawrence first appeared on the scene, she had known no lack of books. In point of mental ability she was his superior, possessing, as we have said, a clearness and solidity of mind, to which, bright as he was, he could scarcely lay claim.

The more Jem examined his daughter's case, the more unjust appeared the world's verdict against her. She had been anxious to bear him company on this winter trip, defiant of its hardships; but this he had sharply negatived. "No camp life for her," he had muttered, setting his teeth. Yet he did finally promise her an outing of some kind in the deep woods, when summer arrived.

Thus February wore away; the March winds began to howl round their camp, and it became a question of what should come next. Sol Quentin had his idea as usual.

"Naow, Jem, this sorter use goin' back ter the Crick. There aint no work there. Go an' see yer folks, if ye want ter, an' then come up 'ere again for the summer. There's drivin' an' raftin', ye know. All these 'ere logs got ter git down ter mill, somehow. An' them city fellers that want ter shoot deer, an' don't know how mo' n' a baby, air a-hangin' round arter jest sich men as you an' I."

Jem was tempted. It hurt his pride to go home and idle about, a discharged employe, in company with McCutcheon, Pretzel O'Brien and the rest, all worthless foreigners of the baser sort. That no work would be proffered him at the Megantic was a moral certainty, and what little occupation the town afforded, unprofitable to a degree. The Squire's action was already working out results far beyond its immediate effect, and for which even Jem was unprepared. To be out of regular employment had never happened to him since he was a lad. He felt like a vagrant, a tramp, a ne'er-do-well.

So to the woods he returned, finding plenty to do in a region where wooden men of athletic build are potential kings and rulers of men.

He might have been seen, axe in hand, striding swiftly across a low ridge near his camp one dark day in July, his face set and his eyes fixed on a vicious cloud with ragged edges, rising black in the east.

"Wind," he muttered, "it's decisively, and changed his course so as to strike the little river which flowed beyond. Ere long a mad roar in the tops of the pines verified his prediction. He had now reached the stream and was resting by its brink, in a sheltered spot, for the third time, as he murmured, watching the sway of a poorly rooted oak on the opposite bank, its base washed bare and partially undermined by the torrent. "Hello!" he shouted suddenly, "what fool's that?"

He had caught sight of a man on horseback, sitting awkwardly, coming down toward the other shore of the stream. "Don't he know this ain't Stubb's crossing? It's a mile further down." As the stranger approached Jem saw he had a companion, a younger man, on foot. "No use to yell," he reflected, "with this wind against me. He could only await the catastrophe he felt impending."

Plunging into the stream, the frightened horse soon lost footing. Another glimpse of the man's face and Jem started. "Jehoshaphat!" he cried, "it's Squire Peters."

A hundred thoughts surged up within him—at his wrath, his sufferings, his wrongs, and the "settlement" he had threatened, which Providence, now, and not he, was palpably making. A crash thundered into his thoughts, as of fallen giants! The toppling oak, overblown, had struck the water with terrible force. In a second the horse was in the waves alone, his rider gone from sight. On the further bank the Squire's companion stood still, calmly gazing.

"You blasted coward!" yelled Jem, shaking his fist at him, while he leaped himself into the boiling waters, swimming for dear life. He caught the Squire with one hand, but found him pinioned down by the limbs of the fallen oak. Otherwise, his own exertions might have prevailed, for Sylvester Peters was a good swimmer, though no horseman.

It was life and death work for Jem and his axe the next few minutes. The Squire cast one agonized look on the face of his deliverer bending over him, strong and merciful, then swooned from pain. Jem had to hold him up, so as to keep his head above water, while he plied the axe on a tangle of intertwining boughs, which seemed interminable. But the woodsman had a mighty frame like a lion's, and his iron muscle met the demand. His blows had the inspiration of humanity and God. His soul was on fire with it!

He had just crushed and stamped out what he now knew to have been temptation.

"It's the devil who bids a man 'go by on the other side,' when help's needed! He's got that camp by the ear and gone off with it," muttered Jem, finding the Squire's comrade had skulked away.

By heroic effort he succeeded in bringing the injured man to shore, where luckily he caught sight of Sol, who, after some worry at his prolonged stay, had started in search of him. Between them they contrived to lug the Squire up to their camp, where Sol

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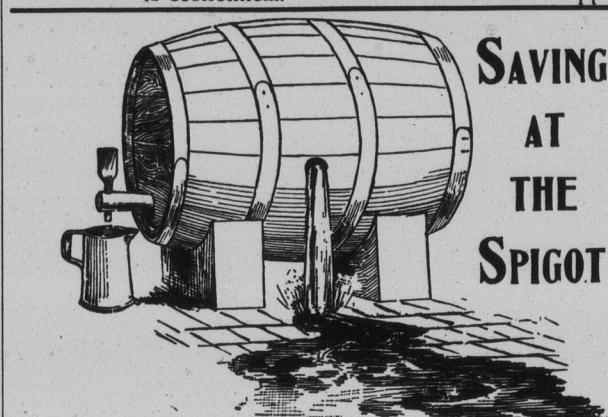


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did some rough surgery, woodsman-fashion, "There!" he said, when he had done, "that jint's in agin, somehow." He had really reduced a bad dislocation of the shoulder, and bound up the arm with much skill.

The Squire watched Jem working for his comfort with mortified eyes. This was the man he had wronged! This man of men, who returned good for evil, who had attained that Christ-like attitude of forgiveness, that royal height, the loftiest attainable on this mortal earth.

"Who was it with ye, Squire?" asked Jem, when his patient could speak.

"Scott Bennett."

"Wal, he's an all-fired sneak," growled old Sol. "Sich fellers aint fit to live, nor ter die, neither."

The Squire lay for some time in a critical condition, the shock having told on him more, even than his injuries. The men did all they could for him, though many comforts were unattainable. But one bright morning a merry, musical voice broke into the stillness.

"Father, it is I, Elspeth!"

And Jem, though he had stoutly maintained that a camp was "no place for dear women-folk," felt glad enough to see his daughter. She had been promised an "outing," and for fear of losing it, had come on her own responsibility to claim it before the summer should wane. But pleasure, she saw at a glance, must bow to duty.

"Can't you fix a sick man any better than that?" she asked pointedly, taking in the situation. "Well, I can."

And the enterprising young woman justified her statement. A born nurse, she took charge at once with sweet authority and a native tact which never missed the mark. She spared no pains, was she not doing it all for Lawrence? And as the Squire watched her moving about, he would not have bared his nurse for any piano-playing young lady in his circle of acquaintance—no, nor for fussy Madam Sophronia herself! Her soft voice and quiet ways controlled him when most impatient, calming his nerves in a way that impressed him with a sense of her superiority.

"She is a sweet girl," he said to himself every day. "And Lawrence isn't a fool. Not like to be, either, seeing he takes after his father! He has picked out a good wife—a mighty good one—or I'm mistaken."

Some weeks elapsed, however, before the Squire could be moved to Fairville, where Mrs. Sophronia was to join him. He sternly refused to have her come up into the wilds. "Her feathers and trimmery won't do in a logging camp!" was his uncompromising verdict; and long before her arrival Elspeth had won him over.

What do you do to do justly, walk humbly, keep thy out of it are path of thy f established. Blessed are he at heart for the right and it is joy. Let none brother in ye evil, and rejoice in the joy of the Lord. Be not over-evil with good burdens, and Thou shalt neither rob the sight of a man his due. Speak ye neighbor, de raise no false abomination deal truly ar Cease from that is so he that rule that taketh a Walk in the flesh will of that he sove spik reas pl Let robe opportunity let us not gr in due season Let the mi Christ Jesus spik reas pl O Thou w Thy comma eternal God selves, grant affection, and goodwill; th with our who other in the law fulfil the law

Preached in the "And he said Luke xv, 11. The Jews, of God, and broadly rever very rarely r Him as a fath the Divine Be under the t giver, and J represented s he is repr select few, namely, the "Like as a fa the Lord pit Mark the wo in one of the "Father to th hardly a simp to be the Fa race, condit Jesus Who fi the glorious, and inspirin Father of all pious, the ob the prodigal theologians s ideas, on the Old than Let have co people the id of those who