

SNATCHING VICTORY FROM DEFEAT.

"You might as well not set any strawberries at all as to set them on sod; the ground will be full of white grubs." Rufe spoke positively.

"Isn't there anything I could do?" David asked soberly. "It's the only piece of land father can let me have, this year."

"Oh, if you should disc it all this fall, I rather guess 't would fix 'em, if you made a thorough job of it."

David brightened. "I'll do it," he said. "I'll begin now, if father isn't using the horses," and he started off energetically.

Up and down the long, narrow strip, David rode the disc harrow many times that afternoon, and on many subsequent afternoons, and when the ground at last froze, late in the fall, the soil was in fine condition.

All that winter, David employed his leisure in studying up strawberry culture, and just as soon as the ground could be worked in the spring, he got it ready, bought some plants of a neighbor, and set them out. The weather and everything favored him, and the plants thrived wonderfully. David was beginning to estimate how many quarts he'd be likely to get from his patch when one day in June something happened.

He had early taken precaution against brother Joe's chickens. He had stretched chicken wire the whole length of the piece, but it had never occurred to him that there could be any necessity for stopping up the pair of bars that opened into the road. So when he came home from school one afternoon and went to look at his strawberries he found that a neighbor's pigs were there before him. There were eight of them, and they had apparently been very busy there for some time.

Rufe and Joe helped drive the intruders out, and then the three boys sat on the stone wall and surveyed the ruins.

"Well—that ends it!" said David in a voice choked with grief and anger. "Everything I ever undertake always goes to smash somehow. I'm not going to waste any time on such a bed of strawberries as that. Father can sow it down, for all me."

Rufus gave a contemptuous "Humph!—Is that all the sand you've got. Regular little baby, aren't you!—you've tumbled down my blocks and I won't play any more."

This was bitter, coming from Rufe, for David rather looked up to his elder brother. "Oh, yes," he retorted, "I s'pose you'd go on with it, and not get strawberries enough out of it to pay for the plants!"

"Certainly, I'd go on with it," said Rufe. "Do you think I'd back out and give up and let myself be beaten by a few measly shotes?—and old Gallagher's shotes at that? Not much I wouldn't!"

"Well, what would you do? You can't set those old wilted things out again and have 'em do anything."

"I'd get new plants. It isn't so late but that they'd start all right, and you'd get almost a full crop from 'em."

"Go ahead," said Joe encouragingly, "I'll help you set 'em out."

David took the advice given him. He cultivated his second planting assiduously, did a good deal of hand weeding, and cut the late runners persistently, so that when fall came there was not a finer looking bed of strawberries anywhere about. In November he mulched them, and then rested from his labors till spring. When the leaves began to peep up through the mulch, David took it off and spread it between the rows, and then the leaves broadened and reached out and stretched up in a way that was surprising. When the blossom buds began to swell, David began to count his profits.

But along toward the last of May there came a spell of cold weather. It devolved upon David, one afternoon, to deliver a cow to a purchaser fifteen miles distant. As he sat in the open buggy, with the cow fastened on behind, all ready to start, he cast an anxious glance over toward his strawberry patch. "Do you s'pose there'll be a frost?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I hardly think there will," his father answered. Mr. Warren had an optimistic disposition.

David was to stay over night, and return with the horse and buggy in the morning. It was a slow journey, for it would not do to go faster than the cow wanted to walk. It seemed pretty cold towards the last of it, and the first thing David did when he reached his destination was to ask for the thermometer.

"It got broken a few days ago," the man answered.

So David had to go to bed without knowing just how cold it was, and he was so tired that he did not stay awake to worry. But his first thought when he awoke in the morning was of the temperature. He sprang from the bed and looked out of the window. The grass seemed to be covered with a thick, white frost—or could it be a very heavy dew? He hurried into his clothes. As he went to open the outside door, he met the man of the house coming in. "Was there a frost?" he asked.

"A heavy one," the man answered. "It's killed my beans and tomatoes, and probably most everything else. It'll cost the farmers of the state thousands of dollars."

"My strawberries are gone, sure," thought David.

On the way home he noted that the new growth of the grape-vines by the roadside, the ferns, and all the tender vegetation, had wilted and turned black, and the same was true of the cultivated crops that had tender leaves. He did not stop to unharness the horse, when he reached home, but jumped from the buggy and ran over to his strawberries. He examined blossoms and picked open blossom buds from all parts of the patch. Not one but had a black center.

When he went back to the barn, his father and brothers were there. "Been over to your strawberries?" they asked.

"Yes—and the blossoms are all blasted, everyone."

"Too bad!" his father said. "I didn't realize how cold it was till 'twas too late to do anything. We might have covered them over with something, perhaps, or raked the mulch back."

"They were too tall and bushy for the mulch to cover," David answered mournfully, "and you wouldn't have had enough of anything to cover a quarter of them."

"Well, I don't know but that you're right," his father agreed.

"If you'd only go into hens, you wouldn't get into any such scrape as this," said Joe, who was a poultry enthusiast.

"Hoh!" sniffed David. "More things happen to hens than to berries. No hens in mine, thank you."

Rufe stayed behind to help David put up the horse, after his father and brother had gone to their work. "Well, what are you going to do now?" he asked.

"I've been thinking about it as I came along," said David slowly. "They all say it doesn't pay to keep a bed over, so I suppose I'll plow it up and set out another one. It isn't any later than 'twas last year."

"Good for you!" said Rufe. "You're growing up."

"I thought I'd send out to that man out west, who advertises such fine plants. It won't cost so very much."

"I would," said Rufe.

The order was made out that evening and sent the next morning. While he was waiting David once more prepared his ground for planting. A week passed, and he got a postal saying, "All out of the varieties you mention, Shall we substitute?"

David was disappointed, but he wrote again, naming three different kinds. No answer came to this for ten days. Then David wrote once more and a week later came another postal "Stock exhausted. Can get the plants for you, but they will be of inferior quality. We do not recommend setting plants so late in the season as this, anyway."

It was the last of June, and the ground was very dry. David went to a neighbor who went to the city every day, and sent by him for some seed popcorn, and two days afterwards it was all in the ground, and David had

"strung" the piece to keep off the crows. The crop might not be salable for a year after harvesting, but as David wanted the money for an education and he had several years more at the common school, he could not afford to wait.

"That ground is very rich," he said to his father. "It seems as if it ought to produce more than just the corn."

"You might sow parsnip seed between the corn and between the rows," his father suggested. "You would have to cultivate it all with the wheel hoe, by hand, and there'd be a good deal of weeding to do, but I think you could raise quite a crop, and parsnips always sell well."

So in went a heavy seeding of parsnips. There was a great deal of work to it, but, as David said, he was "good for it."

The corn grew thriftily, and set so many ears that David felt assured that his luck had turned. In due time he gathered the crop, selling the stalks for enough to pay for the seed. But disappointment awaited him when he came to husk the corn, for there was hardly a perfect ear in the lot. In nearly every ear there were missing kernels, and sometimes not more than half the cob would be filled out. Then it was recalled that when the corn was in tassel there had been a long, wet spell, which must have prevented thorough pollination.

Even Rufe took a dismal view of the situation. "There's no size to the parsnips, either," he said. "That piece of ground is hoodooed. I advise you to give the corn to the cows and not bother to husk the rest of it, and turn the pigs in, on to the parsnips."

"Not much!" said David, stoutly. "I'm going to sell the corn shelled. It won't bring as much as I expected, but 't will be something. And I'll see how the parsnips look next spring, before I throw them away."

"I believe you've got more grit than I have, after all," said Rufe, a little ashamed of his outburst.

David was in the ninth grade at school, now, and the ninth grade were in the high school building. The hours were different from what they had been in the other grades, school beginning at eight in the morning and closing at half-past one. A few scholars brought their lunch, but by far the greater number bought something to eat from the bakers' carts. David was idly watching the crowd around one of these carts one day, when an idea came to him. He could not study for thinking it over.

As soon as he reached home that afternoon, he shelled a few ears of his popcorn and tried popping it, and found it very nearly dry enough.

"Could you stand it, mother," he asked, "to have the apple-dryer up over the stove from now on?"

"Why—I suppose I could, if it were necessary," she answered.

This apple-dryer was a home-made affair, a frame covered with coarse cloth, with two very long legs that rested on the stove hearth, and two shorter ones to rest on the back of the stove. David shelled a quantity of corn, and set it drying, and then he took a trip to a neighboring town and looked up a man who supplied one of the stores there with sugared popcorn, corn-cakes, corn-balls and popcorn-brittle. This man was very willing to impart his methods, when he found that David would not enter into competition with him, and David came home in high feather.

"You must do it out in the summer kitchen," his mother said, "I can't have you messing in here."

The corn drying worked well, and David bought sugar and molasses and embarked on his new enterprise.

"Well, how did it go?" the family were all anxious to learn, when he came home from school after carrying his first basketful of the finished product.

"Literally like hot cakes," he answered "It really made the bake-cart folks look at me a little cross-eyed."

The products must be fresh, and so every afternoon, in the summer kitchen, there was the enlivening sound of popping corn and the appetizing fragrance of boiling sugar and molasses. Everything he made found ready sale. Competition sprang up, but no one else was so painstaking and conscientious as David, and the inferior goods of the others were soon driven from the market.

"And the beauty of it is there is absolutely no waste," said David. "The few kernels that don't pop I put a good brown on and grind up in the old coffee-mill, and they go into the corn-cakes and make them all the better."

So altogether, with his studies, and helping about the chores, and working up his corn, David was a very busy boy.

The corn was hardly out of the way in the spring, when the ground thawed enough to dig parsnips. David started on it reluctantly, or it did not seem as if it would pay to dig such little things. But lo! when he got at it he found that they had grown so much in the fall that they were of very fair size, and as they were a vegetable that few of the farmers around cared to bother with, there was a good demand for them at fancy prices. So now, instead of kitchen work, David dug and dug. It seemed as if there were no end to those parsnips, but the last of April saw the last one dug and delivered and paid for.

"Now tell us what you've made out of it?" Joe said, as they all sat at supper that night. "I'll bet it isn't as much as I've cleared on my Wyandottes."

David smiled as he went to get the tin baking-powder box that had served him as a bank, but he said nothing. His mother smiled too. He extracted thirteen cents from the box, which he held below the table edge so no one could see into it, and laid them on the tablecloth. Everybody laughed.

Then he put on a twenty-dollar bill a five and a two.

"Ho!" said Joe, a little contemptuously "is that all?"

"Not quite," said David, and placed another ten on the table.

"Thirty-seven dollars and thirteen cents. That isn't bad," said Rufe patronizingly.

"Well, that isn't quite all," said David, and another ten lay beside the others.

"Well, well!" said the father, "that's pretty good."

"It's a little better than my hens did," admitted Joe, reluctantly.

Then David added two more tens to the pile on the table, and held up the box to show it was empty. "Sixty-seven dollars and thirteen cents," he said, "and I took out the cost of the sugar and the molasses."

"You've earned it," said Rufus. "And now I suppose you'll keep on raising popcorn and parsnips?"

"No, sir!" said David.

"Why not?" demanded Joe.

"Because I set out to raise strawberries on that piece of ground," David answered, "and strawberries I mean to raise there, if I have to keep trying the rest of my life."

They laughed a little incredulously, but the determined expression of his face convinced them.

"Good for you!" said Rufe.

"You've got sand, all right," said Joe.

"Bravo, David," said his father.

His mother said nothing, but the look in her eyes meant more to him than all the rest.—ELIZABETH ROBBINS in *Montreal Witness*.

My little boy is eight years old,

He goes to school each day;

He doesn't mind the tasks they set—

They seem to him but play.

He heads his class at raffia work,

And also takes the lead

At making dinky paper boats—

But I wish that he could read.

They teach him physiology,

And, O, it chills our hearts

To hear our prattling innocent

Mix up his inward parts.

He also learns astronomy

And names the stars by night—

Of course he's very up-to-date,

But I wish that he could write.

They teach him things botanical,

They teach him how to draw,

He babbles of mythology

And gravitation's law;

Thus science's discoveries

With him are quite a fad.

They tell me he's a clever boy,

But I wish that he could add.

"So you are not interested in polar exploration?"

"No," answered Sirius Barker, "I can see enough fuel problems staring us in the face right here at home without annexing any more."—*Washington Star*.