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A SUGAR-BOILING SCRAPE.

When I was a boy we lived in the country, where I think all boys ought to live for a few years, and we didn't get coddled as you youngsters do, nor have so many things to play, nor such schools and books, and other helps to learning and fun, as you have. But we had plenty of good times in coasting, skating, riding, fishing, hunting and trapping. And in the Spring we always had a special "lark" when they made maple sugar.

Father used to let us go to the woods with the men when we were quite little shavers, and we would bring dry brush for the fire, and watch the big kettle when the sap was boiling, so as to call the men or throw in a piece of pork or some cold sap, to keep it from boiling over. I can almost smell the sweet steam now, and see the little pieces of pork bobbing around in the kettle, and remember how my eyes watered when the smoke blew in them, and how good the first taste of the sugar was when they began to cool it on snow, to see if it was done.

But the "sugaring off" was the greatest fun. When the sap was boiled down into clear, sweet syrup, they would put four or five pailfuls in the kettle and cook it slowly and carefully till it was done enough to "cake" into sugar. And then we would wax some on snow, and stir some in saucers until it cooled, and eat it warm and cold until we couldn't hold any more—and a long while after father wondered how we could hold so much.

Well, one time, when we were about twelve or fourteen years old, we thought the sugar would taste a good deal sweeter if we could get it in some sly and mischievous way. That's the way with foolish boys and men in other things. Stolen sweets makes half the trouble in the world. And so we went around to half-a-dozen of the neighbors' boys, asking them to a sugar bee in our woods the next night, but telling them not to let anybody know it. We knew there was a churn full and two big jugs of syrup waiting to be "sugared off" down in our bush, and we thought we'd steal a march on the men, and show 'em a trick or two. So after the chores were done, we asked mother if we could go and see the boys, and she said yes, if we would be back by nine o'clock.

We "saw" the boys, but it was in the lane leading to the woods, where they were waiting, whilst as mice. It was growing dark fast, and we cut for the woods as fast as we could go. There was a big bed of coals, snugly covered with ashes, and we snugly had it raked out, put new wood on, and made a blazing fire. Then we all took hold of the long pole and swung the big kettle over it. How to get the syrup in was the next question, as we couldn't lift the big jugs up. But I found the dipper, and we dipped it out of the churn used to store it in, until there was a pailful or more in the kettle, and it began to boil up, as yellow and sweet as could be.

By this time it was dark as a pocket. The fire lighted up the woods for a little ways, but it seemed all the blacker in the shadows beyond. We had never been out alone before, and the strange stillness began to make us feel very queerly. Our shadow, thrown by the firelight across the little clearing, looked like big, black giants, and there wasn't much fun in our laughs as we watched them. One of the little boys vowed he saw somebody hiding behind a tree, and another thought he heard some animal stepping in the brush a little way off. You see we knew we weren't doing right, and that makes boys—and men, too—very uneasy.

But we kept close to the fire, and talked as bravely as we could, until the boy who was stirring the sugar said: "It hairs!—it must be done! Who'll try it first?"

"Who! Who!" said a loud voice out of the darkness of the woods.

Every boy started up as if a panther had come upon us. Jim dropped his stirring stick into the fire. Harry tipped over the pans of snow on the bench. Charlie stumbled over a root and fell head first into a sap-bucket; and then we all held our breaths and hearkened. "Who! Who!" said the voice again, loud and solemn.

shouted Frank, the boldest boy in the party—"and what-ye doing in this sugar-bush, this time of night?" No answer came.

"Let's smoke him out!" said Frank, grabbing a blazing stick from the fire and starting for the brush, using it as a torch. He hadn't gone many yards before a great white owl flew from its perch in a tree calling "Who-wh-o-o-o To-whit-to-who-o!"

And then we all laughed at our scare, and turned to the sugar just as a dreadful smoke and smell began to come out of the kettle. While we had been "owling it" the sugar had burned! We had just got the kettle swung off from the fire when another voice sounded close behind us, and this time it wasn't an owl, but father himself, who had seen the light of the fire, and come down to find out what it all meant.

"So, so," he said, "very industrious boys, I see!—like to work nights! Well we can't have anything wasted. You can just go at that beautiful sugar you have made and eat it up." And he was a man that meant business, and no fooling, when he spoke.

Well, we tried it on snow, and tried it warm, but couldn't tell which way it tasted the worst. Burnt sugar is about the bitterest stuff I ever got hold of, and a few mouthfuls of it were enough to set us all to begging. Father let us upon the eating, but made us scrape and wash the kettle and dishes, and bank up the fire again. And then he put me ahead, and made Will take hold of my coat-tail and the next boy hold of Will's and so on to the end, and marched us all single file through the woods up to the house, a giggling, but rather sheepish procession.

Mother said she didn't think we were a very happy looking set for boys who had been off for such a sweet time; and—well, we didn't do any more sly sugaring off after that. There didn't seem to be much fun in it, you know.—Golden Rule.

HANS AND PETER.

Hans and Peter met one fine morning on the way to market. Hans was large and stout; the world always went easy with him; he churned himself as little as possible about the cares of life, and seemed to grow plumper every day. Peter, on the other hand, was thin and slim. He was continually worrying himself about some trifle, and his face grew more and more care worn every day.

"Good morning, friend Peter," said plump Hans, in a hearty tone of cheer. "Good day neighbor!" answered Peter, solemnly. "Why are you so downcast?" asked Hans.

"Downcast? Have you no troubles," retorted Peter, "that you can not understand why people look downcast?" "I?" said jovial Hans. "I've only one trouble in the world, and that does not trouble me. My wife complains I have become so stout."

"Happy man!" exclaimed Peter. "My friends complain because I am so thin." "My friends say it makes me move too slowly," said Hans.

"My wife upbraids me," returned Peter, "because I move so very quickly."

"Suppose we change bodies!" said they both in a breath.

And they changed. Again, in a few months, Hans and Peter met one fine morning; and Hans was again large and stout while Peter had become thin and slim.

"What have you done to my body?" asked Hans.

"What have you done to my body?" asked Peter.

"I was puzzled at first," said Hans, "to know whether I was Hans or Peter; but it soon came right."

"At first," returned Peter, "I knew not whether I was Peter or Hans, but as you say, it soon came right."

"Then the difference," remarked Hans, "is not my body."

"Nor mine," put in Peter.

"But," said they both, "ourselves!"

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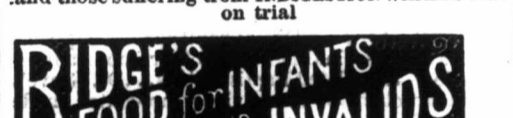
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