

The Pinnacles of Fame

By Hopkins Moorhouse

B—ARD!" warned the conductor sonorously as he swung briskly to the platform; for even the pokey local did not stop at Tiverton longer than was imperative.

But Mr. Ashberry Emerson was not one to be bulldozed into unseemly haste by the officials of any rusty little railroad, even if his ticket did read through to such an insignificant place as Tiverton. He descended with all the unruffled self-possession that marks the experienced traveller and the man of large affairs.

Indeed, Mr. Emerson's personal appearance paid full tribute to such status. His gray Tuxedo was as spotless as it was uncreased; his fancy vest was of the latest cut, his linen immaculate, his soft lavender cravat tied in an artistic knot, his neat striped trousers—in very truth, from the soles of his gleaming patent-leathers to the crown of his nobby derby hat was Mr. Ashberry Emerson a man of metropolitan flavor. It needed not that he was good-looking to add to his air of distinguished affluence.

With rumpled tow hair and one big hand funnelled on either side of a surprisingly wide mouth, a rawboned youth was standing on the front seat of a democrat at the end of the platform, his only mission in life apparently being to bawl: "All 'board fer Ell-yott's You-reeka Hotel!" till his face was very red. One beckoning flip of the gentleman's pearl-gray gloves brought him tumbling heels over head out of the rig in an overwhelming desire to arrive before sundry loungers, propped against the station wall, awoke to the fact that there was business afoot. As they came for him, pell-mell in an eager scuffling bunch, Mr. Emerson smiled with the easy indulgence of one accustomed to being obeyed promptly; then, having relinquished his suit-case and baggage-checks, he advanced along the platform, jauntily swinging his shiny silver-tipped cane and looking about with interest.

A toothless old man, whose bony brown hands rested heavily on the knob of his stick, stooped towards him with the peer of failing sight. Mr. Emerson stopped abruptly.

"Well, bless my heart! if it isn't—Why, how are you, Jerry?" he greeted jovially.

"Wash ye a-shpeakin' to me, shir?" asked the old fellow nervously.

"To Jerry Rawlins and no one else. It's a long time, Jerry. No doubt I've outgrown your recollection, eh?"

"Mm—mm. Aye a'nt sheein' shpry 'sh Aye uster. Aye dunno who ye be, shir," admitted Jerry, peering close and rasping the gray stubble on his chin in growing bewilderment.

"Well, can't say I blame you," smiled Mr. Emerson. "Time brings its changes, and—let me see—it must be full fifteen years since I helped rob your cabbage-patch on Hallowe'en. Perhaps you remember a barefooted, freckle-faced young rascal by the name of Tommy Emerson?"

"Oo—aye!" nodded the old man slowly. "Jabe Emerson's boy! An' be ye a-tellin' me ye're him? Look ud thet, wud ye! Oh, look ud thet, now! Well, by Jing! An' now be ye, Tommy?" cried old Jerry in wheezy excitement.

"Fine as silk!" declared Mr. Emerson. "Shilk? Shilk, be thet? Look ud thet, wud ye, now!" he cackled. "Aye mush shay them do be fine duds!"

Mr. Emerson's amusement sobered

away suddenly. He laid a hesitant hand on the old fellow's shoulder.

"My mother—she is—quite well, I hope?"

"Hey? Oh, Lordy! an' thet she be—right shmart, Tommy. An' she were a-shayin' to me on'y yeshtiddy—"

"Come on, Jerry! Bus is waiting, and we'll ride down-town together. Got a hundred questions to ask you!"

Mr. Ashberry Emerson's laugh was buoyant. He breathed deeply; his eyes shone. He tossed a half-dollar to the towheaded driver of the democrat and told that lanky individual that if there was any change to buy himself an automobile with it; and the regular fare being only ten cents per passenger, Tow-Head spent his exuberance upon the bony horse with such lavish hand that they rolled the record all to flinders and pulled up in front of "Ell-yott's You-reeka Hotel" with a jolt that ran the shafts clean up to the horse's ears and sent old Jerry Rawlins sprawling from his seat.

But old Jerry didn't care. Nobody cared; for had not the station loungers already joined the hotel loungers, and were they not all lined up with a single thought? Assuredly. Nor did "the Widder Emerson's boy, Tom—him that runned away fifteen years ago" fail to interpret the full measure of his duty; he knew many things, did Mr. Ashberry Emerson, and after the third drink and a cigar all around, the crowd in Dick Elliot's bar were prepared to assert the fact with spirit could they have found anybody to question a thing so self-evident.

For after throwing a silver dollar to wee Johnny Bowser and sending him flying off to the little cottage on the outskirts with a warning of his arrival, Mr. Emerson with befitting liberality had passed around little white pasteboard cards from which the major portion of Tiverton's male population assimilated the fact that he was no less a personage than

T. Ashberry Emerson
Premier's Private Secretary
Toronto, Canada.

Whereupon Editor Bill Basset had taken it upon himself to explain that the word "Premier" was derived from the Latin *premo*, meaning first, and that in Canada the State-Governors were called Premiers, because they were the first or highest officials in their several States, only they were called Provinces instead of States, etc., etc.

Then Mayor Pratt had happened along and delivered a speech backing up what Editor Basset had said, and enlarging eloquently upon the national importance of Premiers and Premiers' Secretaries, and the magnificent success that had been attained by their fellow-townsmen—for they would always and had always considered him a fellow-townsmen, even though the glittering Pinnacles of Fame had called him from their midst, etc., etc.

So that finally, when Mr. Emerson had responded in ready appreciation of these beautiful sentiments, the cheer he evoked quite drowned the weak voice of old Jerry Rawlins, who was vainly trying to get somebody to listen to the important, if not wholly reliable, information that "Aye knowed 'm ash shoon 'sh Aye sot may aye on 'm."

And while all this was going on at the hotel, wee Johnny Bowser reached the Emerson cottage in a state of panting incoherency and frightened the good old woman half out of her wits and poor, simpering Sarah Ann completely out of the small quantity she had; so that they bustled madly about to straighten up the house, under the impression that the bishop of the diocese in a long-tailed coat had arrived and had sent them out a dollar to pay for his supper.

This way came back to the home of his boyhood, after fifteen long years, young Tommy Emerson, the village scamp of yore. The news of his advent spread abroad quite as swiftly as if he had murdered somebody or carried an epidemic of smallpox in his suit-case, the only difference being that the trail of talk was everywhere commendatory instead of condemnatory. And the story of his rise in life formed the chief topic of conversation at more than one hundred tea-tables that night.

"An' he's went an' brought his mother the mos' wunnerfullest, b'ufullest black silk dress y' ever seen!" vouchsafed Miss Susie Pratt's young sister, who had been lucky enough to chance into the Emerson cottage on her way home from school. "An' the's oh sech a purty bunnet to go



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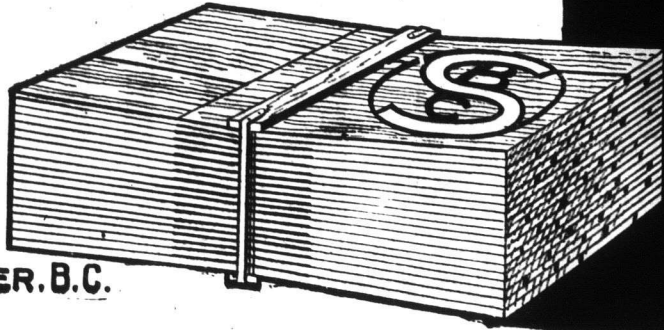
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