

(Continued from previous page).

put 'em ter sleep in no time. What 'm I bid for this 'ere 'riginal long-pendulum gigantical, cyclone-avalanche, dynamite, thunder an' lightnin', Niagry baby-rattler? Twelve cents—thirteen cent—fifteen cent—fifteen—an' gone—to Mis' Homer Millet—at fifteen cent. An' well done, say I. Now then, meetin's broke up. Thank ye for yer kind attention. Farewell. Adew—an' all the rest o' the s'ciety trimmin's."

But the excitement was not yet over. For Dose Ellery's horse, exasperated by his long and tedious anchorage to a fence post, at the first loosening of the hitchline had backed into the adjacent barn and smashed the tail-board of the wagon and with it the rickety incubator which Dose had bid off early in the afternoon as a mysterious prize which was to sprinkle his dooryard with early chickens.

"Never mind, Dose," said Captain Belcher unofficially, on his way from the auction ground. "It's money in yer pocket ter git shet o' the thing. Now look here," he lifted a row of mathematical fingers. "Ye paid twenty five cents f'r that ol' fool-wrack o' an artificial breeder, didn't ye? An' ye'd a rot-roasted about fifteen dozen o' eggs in 'er fore ye'd a give 'er up as a bad job an' kicked 'er to the sunny side o' Jericho. Eggs at this present minute is ten cents a dozen. Reckon on 'er up, an' ye're a dollar an' a quarter to the good, Dose; say nothing o' the bad langwidge pilin' up agin' ye in the ledger what's so full now t' the leds to the cover won't hardly stay shet. You take that dollar an' a quarter and git some oats f'r th old hoss what's been savin' ye good money."

"You can talk, Belcher," said the sorrowful Dose; "twan't your money nor your incubator."

"I wouldn't set up any pelly-loo over it, Dose," said the woman with the quiltful of treasures, and she paused so that their rattling might not obstruct the wisdom and condolence of her speech. "The A'mighty has writ it down an' set it goin', that the 's nothin' like a

old hen to raise chickens; an' when you go ag'in natur' you've got your hands full—you've got 'em too full."

"I know that the A'mighty set it goin' that the 's nothin' like a old hen ter raise chickens, but I never heered afore that He writ it down," said Belcher.

"Well, He did so," said the woman of the quilt; and she was one of the sort that could face out Belcher or any other mortal.

"Whar' abouts?"

"In the Bible, Stu Belcher. That's whar'."

"I seen it thar' myself," said a meek little woman, who was the quilt-woman's next door neighbor and had acquired a wise habit of courting her good-will perennially and conciliating her on all occasions.

"What part o' the Bible?" persisted the foolhardy and thunderous Belcher. "You open the leds o' yourn, ef you've got one, an' read tell you come to it," said the quilt woman; "an' you'll see some more things there that you never heern tell on afore, Stu Belcher."

She went rattling down the road, the meek woman maintaining a gait of stout partisanship at her side.

"That's a cute gal," said Belcher, pointing his finger after her, to Rob, who dispossessed of the babies but with his lilacs still in hand, approached at this moment; "cute old gal. My mother an' father kind o' wanted me ter make up to 'er when we was young folks together, but I kind o' ducked my flyin'-jib an' wriggled out o' the channel an' laid by in the cove till the danger was over, an' she got spliced onto somebody else."

Captain Belcher, being in a meditative mood, regarded Rob and his wilted lilacs with unusual pensiveness and interest.

"This gittin' spliced is a resky business, Rob. Ye seem to think a good deal o' yer flowers. Old Mis' Skipper giv' 'em to ye?"

"Yes."

"She's of the natur' of laylocks herself; so's Mis' Belcher, my woman; but

that old gal heavin' out o' sight over yander, she's more like them other flowers ye're holdin'."

"The delilahs and pineys?"

"Aye; though I suppose the proper way ter pronounce 'em is dallyers and pe-o-nys; all the same, they're a flauntin' high-steppin' sassy kind o' flower Cuby, now—Cuby Tee-boo—she's a good deal on the dallyer an' pe-o-ny line."

Rob's face was fine and sad; his stalwart physical development at Power Lot, God Help Us, had edified Captain Belcher beyond measure, it was a winsome face, too, and Captain Belcher spoke again.

"Perhaps—I ain't saying nothin'," he continued guardedly; "but I'm goin' to look inter some matters o' law a leetle, an' ef it don't make none o' the innercent folk 'round here liable, and ef Cuby kind o' huffs ye off an' gives ye the cold shoulder, way she done terday—mebby it c'n be proved 't that old loafin' demmy-rip of a jestic o' the peace what was asked ter jine you two warn't in no condition for the job, in which case you could each go yer own way hawk-free an' freedom-wild. I ain't promisin' nothin', but I'm mixin' up my tar with an eye to seein' what c'n be done. F'r I like you, Rob. Ye ain't no nincompoop sech as I thought ye might be when ye first hove in sight; ye're as honest an' stanch a young craft as I ever hailed, an' I would like ter see ye free ter selec' somethin' tasty in the line of a laylock f'r a partner, f'r I reckon ye kind o' favor 'em, same as I do."

Rob smiled as he took the captain's friendly outstretched hand, although he made no confidences of his own. He pursued his solitary way up the Steeps in a leisurely manner, often pausing, having no incentive for hastening to any waiting heart the world over, and night having settled down on the potato patch and every other field of labor. He saw Mrs. Byjo piloting her boarder home for the evening they had spent with Mary. He reached the Stingaree house and stood by the dim door, his heart as

peaceful within him as it was sad and without hope.

Then he knocked and entered. The light, though only of a feeble oil lamp, appeared to dazzle him. He stood silent as if he had dropped from the inter-lunar spaces, his wilted lilacs clasped in his hand.

(To be continued).

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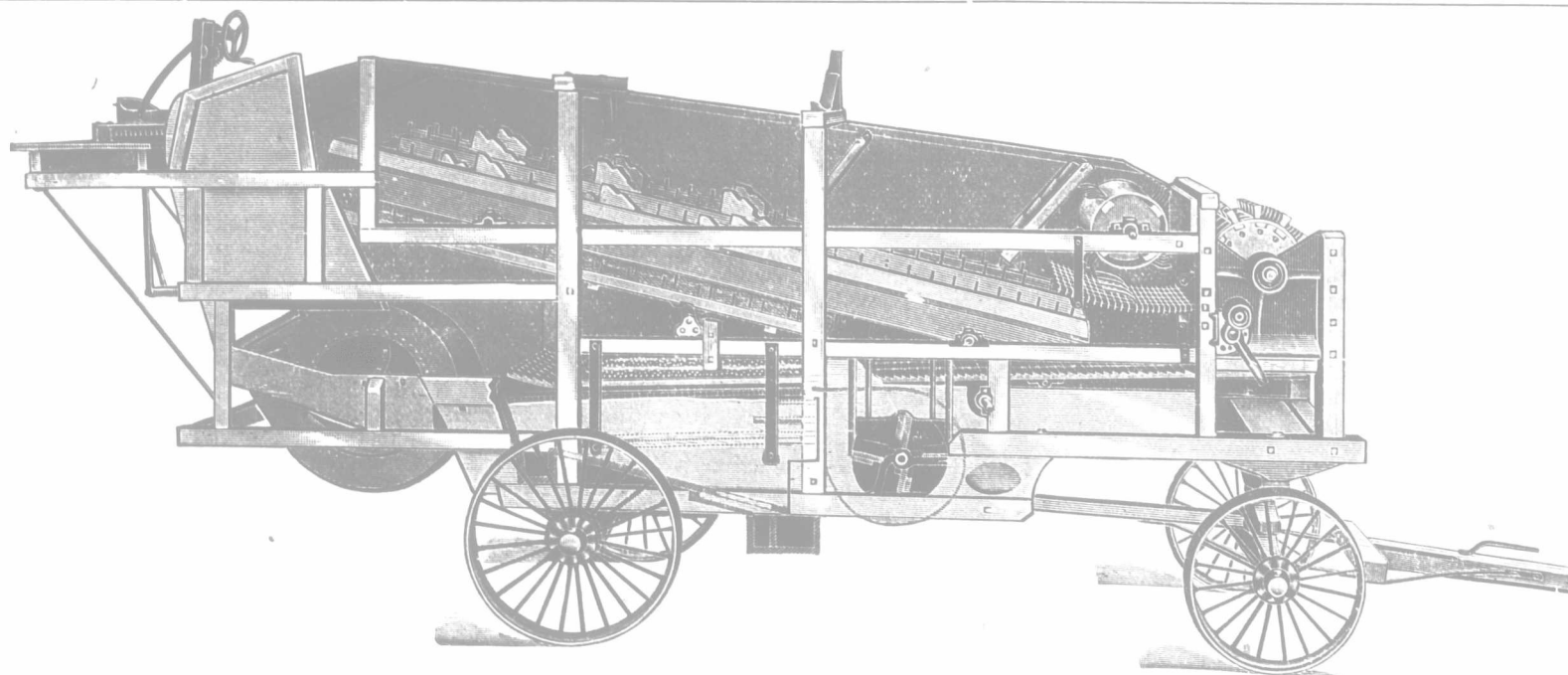
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