

## How John Duff Found His Mind.

(*'The Youth's Companion.'*)

John Duff is the solidest man in the old town of Britton. While making handsome additions to his modest inheritance, he has been open-handed in public benefactions and private charities. Even Schmidt, the socialist tailor, and Gorton, the anarchist shoemaker, have been heard to admit that if all men got property so fairly and used it so honorably, the mischiefs and miseries of the present economic order would soon mend themselves.

In fact, Squire Duff, as they call him, has never been suspected of enriching himself by impoverishing others, and many of his townsmen might testify that his prosperity had contributed largely to their own.

His rugged integrity is in partnership with a clear and broad intelligence. He is not a lawyer; yet from near and far men come to him for counsel, and refer their disputes to him for settlement. In the town meeting, after other voices have been heard, the doubtful scale is generally tipped by a few cool words from John Duff. His name has even been suggested for a place in the governor's council.

The village schoolmaster once called him 'Old Brains,' and the title has stuck, just as if Dartmouth College had decorated him with a degree.

But now comes a pretty piece of history. In his youth John Duff was looked upon as the most unpromising lad in Britton. Old Peter Duff and his wife were among 'the excellent of the earth'; and people wondered that so worthy a couple should be burdened and cursed with such a rattle-pated, good-for-nothing son—their only child! As parental admonitions seemed to fall upon him like sunshine and rain on desert sand, there remained only the resource of secret prayers and tears. The mother's heart was wrung; the father grew old before his time.

As John neared his twenty-first birthday, he exulted in the thought that in a few weeks the last restraint would fall away, and he should be 'his own man.' But one day the kind-voiced doctor started him with a message: 'Your father can live but a few hours, and he wishes to see you.' 'About the disposition of the property?' was John's inward question.

But a feeling of awe crept over him as he stood by the bed of death and saw the strange change which had come over the face so familiar to him from childhood.

A feeble hand reached out to clasp his own. The voice seemed to come from far away—from the boundary-line of words.

'My son, I only ask from you one promise. After I am gone, will you go down to the wood-lot every day for a week, and spend half an hour alone, in thinking?'

Deeply agitated, yet half-relieved at being let off so easily, John made the promise.

The day after the funeral he repaired to the wood. As he sat among the trees, the image of his vanished father rose before him with a solemn and commanding grandeur, which seemed to reprove his own pettiness and worthlessness. 'What would he have me think about, and how am I to begin? I seem to have no mind.'

Could this be the place where he had gone bird-nesting, chasing squirrels, gathering nuts and hallooing with the other boys—often to the neglect of his duties?

He was here now on a different errand, and the place was changed. For the first time in his life he was impressed with silence and solitude, with the soft air, the breadths of sunlight and shade, the pomp of the sky, the unfolding life and beauty of the springtime.

Some slighted lessons about creation and the creator seemed to mix with the scene, as if he were a part of the vast order, and yet not in full harmony with it.

Then came penitent memories of his father, whose forgiveness he could never ask; a stirring of tenderness toward his lone and sorrowing mother; with anger and shame toward himself for having caused them bitter years.

But he could not dwell on the wasted, wretched past. The future rose to meet him with a challenge and a voice of hope. Then all his newly roused forces of thought and feeling gathered to a prayer and a purpose. By the heavenly help, might he not yet be a man?

A half-hour is a long time for an undisciplined youth to spend in solitary reflection; but John Duff did not emerge from the grove for three full hours.

'Mother,' said he, in a voice she had never heard before, 'you may trust me now. I have found my mind.'

There was much craning of necks on Sunday morning as the widow walked to her pew, leaning on the arm of her son. But not even the pastor could realize the fitness and force of one verse in the Psalm for the day: 'I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.'

## Farmer Webber's Views.

[A story sermon preached by Rev. R. W. Churchill to the young people of his society.]

(*'Morning Star.'*)

Farmer Webber dwelt upon his few acres, and in his own humble home; the children were married and in their own homes in distant localities. The passing years, with their experiences, had left Farmer Webber—by nature of keen perception and strong powers—somewhat of a philosopher. As a result the long winter evenings, before the old fireplace with its glowing coals and dancing flames, were often enlivened by discussion and argument, so that as

'The old rude-furnished room  
Burst flower-like into rosy bloom,'

the mind of many a youth, and maid as well, went with rosy light, and more abounding hope, out into the world. In the early days of November, preceding the winter of which my story tells, a young man had found his way across from the lumbering regions of eastern Maine, and sought and found work with a lumberman of this section.

I need not describe to you the typical New England grocery store, that served as bulletin board and daily paper to every rural New England village. Hither the men hied themselves, after the 'chores' were done, and returned at a later hour, to repeat with many a comment the news to their home-keeping spouse, deploring the while that women were such gossips. At the village grocery, our young friend of the lumber camp, whom we will call John Campbell, met Farmer Webber, the humble but keen philosopher of the village, and a pleasant acquaintance had its initial stages there. It was at an early

evening hour, following a day in which the storm had been

'Heaping field and highway  
With its garments deep and white.'

when Campbell, as was the custom in the rural districts, stamped the snow from his feet, and walked directly into the spacious kitchen of Farmer Webber, where the two aged ones sat in the twilight, having just finished the evening meal.

'Thought I'd better come here; danger of being converted at the revival meetings.'

'Yes,' replied his host, 'walk into the sitting-room, John, where there's more light. By the way, John, isn't that what the boys are doing at the church—coming into the light?'

A brief silence ensued, as both men gazed into the open fire.

'You don't believe that it will be the salvation of a soul just to believe, do you? And just as if a man could believe what he wished to believe. I've heard it until I'm tired—sick of it all.'

'Well, now,' said the farmer in rural phrase, 'you read the papers. It does seem as if in politics men believe about as they wish; and when my boy Hezekiah fell in love with Ruth his wife—Land! he wouldn't believe that she wasn't perfect. Believed just what he wanted to. Yes, John, there's a kind of truth in it after all. People believe about as they like. Why, John, Bill Hunt actually believed that he had the best colt in the country till he was distanced in ten races, and then he reckoned something was wrong in the weather, or time of the moon, not in the horse. But, John,' continued the farmer, 'I reckon this matter of religion is another thing altogether.'

'Why?' said John, impatiently.

The old man leaned over, reached for the tongs (a habit of his), and picked up a bit here and another there and threw them into the fire, thinking the while. Then he placed them in their corner again, and looked at the young man.

'What's all that got to do with religion?' said John, almost rudely.

'Well, now,' said the host, 'seems if when a man believes what he wants to, and finds it hard to believe in the Son of God, he ought kind o' naturally to ask why he's got a moral twist that way, and don't wish to believe, and how he come by it, and, kind o' naturally, how he can get rid of it. I planted a field of corn up in the medder lot, and every hot day it curled up and sunshine didn't agree with it. One day Colonel Blake leaned over the fence and said, "What ails that corn, William?" "You say, colonel," said I. "That corn has something too strong for it in the hill," said the colonel. "It's feeding on the wrong thing," an' when a man curls up under the light of God or a field of corn curls up under the sun in the heavens, John, there's danger.'

'What did you do with that corn?' said the young man.

'Put the plough under it the next day, and then put in new seed. One day in the fall the colonel reined up his horse and looked at that corn. "I vow, William," said he, "I thought that corn would die."

"So it did, colonel," said I. "I ploughed it under." Bad thing when a man don't like the light; better ask why. The book says "only believe," John.'

'What sense is there in it, I'd like to know?'