

Tales and Sketches

From HEARTH AND HOME.

The Mystery OF METROPOLISVILLE.

BY EDWARD EGGLESTON, Author of "The Hoosier School-Master," "The End of the World," etc.

CHAPTER XIII. A SHELTER.

ALBERT drove up the stream, and in a fit of desperation again essayed to ford it. The staying in the rain all night with Katy was so terrible to him that he determined to cross at all hazards. It were better to drown together than to perish here. But here again the prudent stubbornness of the old horse saved them. He stood in the water as immovable as the ass of Balaam. Then for the sheer sake of doing something, Charlton drove down the stream to a point opposite where the bluff seemed of easy ascent. Here he again attempted to cross, and was again balked by the horse's regard for his own safety. Charlton did not appreciate the depth and swiftness of the stream, nor the consequent certainty of drowning in any attempt to ford it. Not until he got out of the buggy and tried to cross alone did he understand how impossible it was.

When Albert had returned to the vehicle he sat still. The current rippled against the body of the horse and the wheels of the buggy. The incessant rain roared in the water before him. There was nothing to be done. In the sheer exhaustion of his resources, in his numb despondency, he neglected even to drive the horse out of the water. How long he sat there it would be hard to say. Several times he roused himself to utter a "Hallo!" But the roar of the rain swallowed up his voice, which was husky with emotion.

After a while he heard a plashing in the water, which was not that of the rain. He thought it must be the sound of a canoe-paddle. Could anybody row against such a torrent? But he distinctly heard the plashing, and it was below him. Even Katy roused herself to listen, and strained her eyes against the blackness of the night to discover what it might be. It did not grow any nearer. It did not retreat. At the end of ten minutes this irregular but distinct dipping sound, which seemed to be in some way due to human agency, was neither farther nor nearer, neither slower nor more rapid than at first. Albert hallooed again and again at it, but the mysterious cause of this dipping and dashing was deaf to all cries for help. Or if not deaf, this oarsman seemed as incapable of giving reply as the "dumb old man" that rowed the "lily maid of Astolat" to the palace of Arthur.

But it was no oarsman, not even a dumb one. The lightning for which Albert prayed came at last, and illumined the water and the shores, dispelling all dreams of canoes or oarsmen. Charlton saw in an instant that there was a fence a few rods away, and that where the fence crossed the stream, or crossed from bank to bank of what was the stream at its average stage, long poles had been used, and one of these long and supple poles was partly submerged. The swift current bent it in the middle until it would spring out of the water and drop back higher up. It was thus kept in a rotary motion by the water, making the sound which he had mistaken for the paddling of a canoe. With this discovery departed all thought of human help from that quarter.

But with the dissipating of the illusion came a new hope. Charlton turned the head of the horse back and drove him out of the water, or at least to a part of the meadow where the overflowed water did not reach to his knees. Here he tied him to a tree, and told Katy she must stay alone until he should cross the stream and find help, if help there should be, and return. It might take him half an hour. But poor Katy said that she could not live half an hour longer in this rain. And, besides, she knew that Albert would be drowned in crossing. So that it was with much ado that he managed to get away from her, and, indeed, I think she cried after he had gone. He called back to her when he got to the brook's bank, "All right Katy," but Katy heard him through the roar of the rain, and it seemed to her that he was being swallowed up in a Noachian deluge.

Charlton climbed along the precarious footing afforded by the submerged pole, holding to the poles above while the water rushed about his feet. These poles were each of them held by a single large nail at each end, and the support was doubly doubtful. He might fall off, or the nails might come out. Even had he not been paralyzed by long exposure to the cold, he could have no hope of being able to swim in such a torrent.

In the middle of the stream he found a new difficulty. The posts to which these limber poles were nailed at either end sloped in opposite directions, so that while he started across on the upper side he found that when he got to the middle the pole fence began to slant so much up the stream that he must needs climb to

the other side, a most difficult and dangerous performance, on a fence of wobbling popple poles in the middle of a stream on a very dark night. However, he got across the stream and found himself in the midst of a hazel thicket higher than his head. He hallooed to Katy, and she was sure this time that it was his last drowning cry. Working his way out of the hazel-brush, he came to a halt against a fence and waited for lightning. That there was a house in the neighborhood he could not doubt, but whether it were inhabited or not was a question. And where was it?

For full five minutes—an eternal five minutes—the pitiless rain poured down upon Charlton as he stood there by the fence, his eyes going forward to find a house, his heart running back to the perishing Katy. At last the lightning showed him a house, and from the roof of the house he saw a stove-pipe. The best proof that it was not a deserted claim shanty!

Stumbling round the fence in the darkness, Charlton came upon a house, a mere cabin, and tried three sides of it before he found the entrance. When he knocked, the door was opened by a tall man, who said:

"Right smart sprinkle, stranger! Where did you come from? Must 'a' rained down like a frog."

But Albert had no time for compliments. He told his story very briefly, and asked permission to bring his sister over.

"Fetch her right along, stranger. No lady never staid in this 'ere shed afore, but she's mighty welcome."

Albert now hurried back, seized with a fear that he would find Katy dead. He crossed on the poles again, shouting to Katy as he went. He found her almost senseless. He quickly loosed old Prince from the buggy, and tethered him where he would not suffer for either water or grass, and then he lifted Katy from the buggy, and literally carried her to the place where they must needs climb along the poles. It was with much difficulty that he partly carried her, partly persuaded her to climb along that slender fence. How he ever got the almost helpless girl over into that hazel-brush thicket he never exactly knew; but as they approached the house, guided by a candle set in the window, she grew more and more feeble, until Albert was obliged to carry her in and lay her down in a swoon of utter exhaustion.

The inhabitant of the cabin ran to a little cupboard, made of a packing-box, and brought out a whisky-flask, and essayed to put it to her lips; but as he saw her lying there, white and lovely in her helplessness, he started back and said with a rude reverence, "Stranger, gin her some of this 'ere—I never could tech such a creetur!"

And Albert gave her some of the spirits and watched her revive. He warmed her hands and chafed her feet before the fire, which the backwoodsman had made. As she came back to consciousness, Charlton happened to think he had no dry clothes for her. He would have gone immediately back to the buggy, where there was a carpet-bag carefully stored under the seat, but that the Inhabitant had gone out and he was left alone with Katy, and he feared that she would faint again if he should leave her. Presently the tall, lank, long-haired man came in.

"Mister," he said, "I made kinder sorter free with your things. I thought as how as the young woman might want to shed some of them wet feathers of her'n, and so I jist ventur'd to go and get this yer bag 'bout axin' no leave nor license while you was a-bringing' on her to. Looks poety peart, by hokey! Now, mister, we ha'n't got no spar rooms here. But you and me'll jes' take to the loff thar fer a while, seein' our room is better nor our comp'ny. You kin change up stars."

They went to the loft by an outside ladder, the Inhabitant speaking very reverently in a whisper, evidently feeling sure that there was an angel down-stairs. They went down again after a while, and the Inhabitant piled on wood so prodigally that the room became too warm; he boiled a pot of coffee, fried some salt-pork, baked some biscuit, a little yellow and a little too short, but to the hungry travelers very palatable. Even Charlton found it easy to forego his Grahamism and eat salt-pork, especially as he had a glass of milk. Katy, for her part, drank a cup of coffee but ate little, though the Inhabitant offered her the best he had with a voice stammering with emotion. He could not speak to her without blushing to the temples. He tried to apologize for the biscuit and the coffee, but could hardly ever get through his sentences intelligibly, he was so full of a sentiment of adoration for the first lady into whose presence he had come in years. Albert felt a profound respect for the man on account of his reverence for Katy. And Katy of course loved him as she did everybody who was kind to her or to her friends, and she essayed to make him feel comfortable by speaking to him; but so great was his agitation when spoken to by the divine creature, that he came near dropping a plate of biscuit the first time she spoke, and almost upset the coffee the next time. I have often noticed that the

anchorites of the frontier belong to two classes—those who have left humanity and civilization from sheer antagonism to men, a selfish, crabbed love of solitude, and those who have fled from their fellows from a morbid sensitiveness. The Inhabitant was of the latter sort.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INHABITANT.

WHEN Albert awoke next morning from a sound sleep on the buffalo-robe in the loft of the cabin of the Inhabitant, the strange being who had slept at his side had gone. He found him leaning against the foot of the ladder outside.

"Waitin', you know," he said when he saw Albert, "tell she gits up. I was tryin' to think what I could do to make this house fit for her to stay in; fer, you see, stranger, they's no movin' on till to-morry, fer although the rain's stopped, I 'low you can't git that buggy over afore to-morry mornin'. But blam'd ef 'ta'n't too bad fer sech as her to stay in sech a cabin! I never wanted no better place tell las' night, but ever sence that creetur crossed the docr-sill I've wished it was a palace of diamonds. She hadn't orter live in nothin' poorer."

"Where did you come from?" asked Charlton.

"From the Wawbosh. You see I couldn't stay. They treated me bad. I had a idee. I wanted to write somethin' or nother in country talk. I used to try to write poetry in big dictionary words, but I hadn't, but 'mazin little schoolin', and lived along of a set of folks that talked jes' like I do. But a Scotchman what I worked along of one winter, he read me some poetry, writ out by a Mr. Burns, in the sort of bad grammar, why couldn't a Hoosier jest as well write poetry in the sort of lingo we talk down on the Wawbosh? I don't see why. Do you now?"

Albert was captivated to find a "child of nature" with such an idea, and he gave it his entire approval.

"Wal, you see, when I got to makin' verses I found the folks down on the Wawbosh didn't take to verses wrote out in their own talk. They liked the real dictionary poetry, like 'The boy stood on the burnin' deck' and 'A life on the ocean wave,' but they made fun of me and when the boys got hold of my poorest verses, and said 'em over and over as they was comin' from school, and larfed at me, and the gals kinder fooled me, gittin' me to do some verses for their birthdays, and then makin' 'em, I couldn't bar it no ways, and so I jist cleaned out and left to get shed of their talk. But I stuck to my idee all the same. I made verses in the country talk all the same, and sent 'em to editors, but they couldn't see nothin' in 'em. Writ back that I'd better larn to spell. When I could a-spelt down any one of 'em the best day they ever seed!"

"I'd like to see some of your verses," said Albert.

"I thought mabe you mout," and with that he took out a soiled blue paper on which was witten in blue ink some verses.

"Now, you see, I could spell right if I wanted to, but I noticed that Mr. Burns had writ his Scotch like it was spoke, and so I thought I'd write my country talk, by the same rule.

And the picturesque inhabitant, standing there in the morning light in his trapper's wolf-skin cap, from the apex of which the tail of wolf hung down his back, read aloud the verses which he had written in the Hoosier dialect, or, as he called it, the country talk of the Wawbosh. In inscribing them, I have inserted one or two apostrophes, for the poet always complained that though he could spell like sixty, he never could mind his stops.

WHAT DUMB CRITTERS SAYS

The cat-bird poorty nigh splits his throat,  
Ef nobody's thar to see,  
The cat-bird poorty nigh slits his throat,  
But ef I say, "Sing out, green coat,"  
Why, "I can't" and "I shan't" says he.  
I 'low'd the crows mout be afeard  
Of a man made outen straw.  
I 'low'd the crows mout be afeard,  
But laws! they warn't the least bit skeered,  
They larfed out. "Haw! haw-haw!"  
A long tail squir'l up in th' top  
Of thar air ellum-tree,  
A long tail squir'l up in th' top,  
A liss'nin' to the acorns drop,  
Says, "Sh! sh-sh!" at me.  
The big-eyed owl a settin' on a limb  
With nary a wink nor nod,  
The big-eyed owl a settin' on a limb,  
Is a-singin' a sort of a solemn hymn  
Of "Hoo! hoo-ah!" at God.

Albert could not resist a temptation to smile at this last line.

"I know, stranger. You think a owl can't sing to God. But I'd like to know why! Ef a mockin'-bird kin sing God's praises a-singin' treble, and so on through all the parts—you see I larn't the squar notes onet at a singin'—why, I don't see to save me why the bass of the owl a'n't jest as good praisin' ef ta'n't quite sech fine singin'. Do you, now? An' I kinder had a feller-feelin' fer the owl. Well, ole feller, you and me is jestlike in one thing. Our notes a'n't appreciated by the public. But maybe God thinks about as much of the real glowin' hootin' of a owl as he does of the high falgeon whistlin' of a mockin'-bird all stole from somebody else. An' ef my verses is kinder humbly to hear, anyway they a'n't made like other folkses;

they're all of 'em outen my head—sech as it is."

"You certainly have struck an original vein," said Albert, who had a passion for nature in the rough. "I wish you would read some of your verses to my sister."

"Couldn't do it," said the poet; "at least, I don't believe I could. My voice wouldn't hold up. Laid awake all las' night tryin' to make some verses about her. But sakes, stranger, I couldn't git two lines strung together. You mout as well try to put sunshine inter a gallon-jug, you know, as to write about that lovely creetur. An' I can't make poetry in nothin' 'cep'in in our country talk; but laws! it seems such a rough thing to use to say anything about a heavenly angel in. Seemed like as ef I was makin' a nosegay fer her, and hadn't no posays but jimson weeds, hollyhocks and big yellar sunflowers. I wished I could 'a' made real dictionary poetry like Casablanca and Hail Columby. But I didn't know enough about the words. I never got nary wink of sleep a-thinkin' about her, and a-wishin' my house was finer and my clo'es purtier an my hair shorter, and I was a eddicated gentleman. Never wished that air afore."

Katy woke up a little dull and quite hungry, but not sick, and she good-naturedly set herself to work to show her gratitude to the Inhabitant by helping him to get breakfast, at which he declared that he was never so frustrated in all his born days. Never.

They waited all that day for the waters to subside, and Katy taught the Poet several new culinary arts, while he showed her his traps and hunting gear, and initiated the two strangers into all the mysteries of mink and muskrat catching, telling them more about the habits of fur-bearing animals than they could have learned from books. And Charlton recited many pieces of "real dictionary poetry" to the poor fellow, who was at last prevailed on to read some of his dialect places in the presence of Katy. He read her on "What the Sunflower said to the Hollyhock," and a love-poem, called "Polly in the Spring-house." The first strophe of this inartistic idyl will doubtless be all the reader will care to see.

POLLY IN THE SPRING HOUSE.

Purtier'n dressed up gals in town  
Is peart and larfin' Polly Brown,  
With curly hair a-hangin' down,  
An' sleeves rolled clean above her elbow.  
Barefooted stan'in on the rocks,  
A pourin' milk in airthen crocks,  
An' kiverin' 'em with clean white blocks—  
Jest tis'en how my fool heart knocks—  
Shet up, my heart! what makes you tell so?

"You see," he said, blushing and stammering, "you see, miss, I had a sort of a prejudice agin town gals in them air days, I thought they was all stuck up and proud like; I didn't think the—the—well—you know I don't mean no harm nor nothin'—but I didn't expect the very purties on 'em all was ever agin' to come into my shanty and make herself at home like as ef I was a eddicated gentleman. All I said agin town gals I take back. I—I—you see—" but finding it impossible to get through, the Poet remembered something to be attended to out of doors.

The ever-active Charlton could not pass a day in idleness. By ten o'clock he had selected a claim and staked it out. It was just the place for his great school. When the country should have settled, he would found a farm-school here, and make a great institution out of it. The Inhabitant was delighted with the prospect of having the brother of an angel for a neighbour; and readily made a bargain to erect for Charlton a cabin like his own for purposes of pre-emption. Albert's lively imagination had already planned the building and grounds of his institution.

During the whole of that sunshiny day that Charlton waited for the waters of Pleasant Brook to subside George Gray, the inhabitant of the lone cabin, exhausted his ingenuity in endeavoring to make his hospitality as complete as possible. When Albert saw him standing by the lader in the morning, he had already shot some prairie chickens, which he carefully broiled. And after they had supped on wild strawberries and another night had passed, they breakfasted on some squirrels killed in a neighboring grove, and made into a delicious stew by the use of such vegetables as the garden of the Inhabitant afforded.—Charlton and the Poet got the horse and buggy through the stream. When everything was ready for a start, the inhabitant insisted that he would go "a piece" with them to show the way, and mounted on his indian pony, he kept them company to their destination. Then the trapper bade Albert an affectionate adieu, and gave a blushing, stammering, adoring farewell to Katy, and turned his little sorrel pony back toward his home, where he spent the next few days in trying to make some worthy verses in commemoration of the coming to the cabin of a trapper lonely, a purty angel bright as day, and how the trapper only wep' and cried when she went away. But his feelings were too deep for his rhymes, and his rhymes were poorer than his average, because his feeling was deeper. He must have burned up hundreds of complets, triplets, and sextuplets in the next fortnight. For besides this chivalrous and poetic gallantry toward womankind, he found himself hopelessly in love with a girl whom he would no more have thought of marrying than he would of wedding a real angel. Sometimes he dreamed of going to school and getting an education,

"puttin' some school-master's hair-ile onter his talk," as he called it, but then the hopelessness of any attempt to change himself deferred him. But thenceforth Katy became more to him than Laura was to Petrarch. Habits of intemperance had crept upon him in his isolation and pining for excitement, but now he set out to seek an ideal purity, he abolished even his pipe, he scrupulously pruned his conversation of profanity, so that he wouldn't be unfit to love her any way, ef he didn't never marry her.

Family Circle.

THE DEACON'S HOUSEHOLD.

BY PIPISSIWAY POTTIS.

No. I.

I, PIPESEY POTTIS, pride myself on being rather sharp on household matters, and though it is no credit to me, I will own up that I found something this morning I had not learned before. It was dark when I rose—the deacon wanted to go out to his chopping on the hillside, and I rose a little earlier than usual on his account. Since his attack of rheumatism I make the fires, and had laid the kindlings and chips, and small wood, and the pine to make shavings close under the kitchen stove, but forgot to place the knife on the window, to whittle the pine. I searched for it everywhere, and at last had to use the carving-knife instead. This was annoyance number one.

I had set the table the night before, thinking how much time I would save and how few steps I would take getting breakfast. The cold potatoes were already in the cupboard, the butter on the table, and I was getting along nicely.

But the deacon must have meat for breakfast, and there was not enough to wam over. I had been down cellar and strained the milk, and this bit of negligence made another trip. It is not safe to carry a lamp down the breezy cellar-stairs, so I keep a candlestick with a piece of candle in it, down there hanging from a hook overhead.

I made the second trip down the cellar-stairs, then, with a half-dozen matches in my pocket, but it happened that not one of them would ignite. This was vexation number two, and another trip up and down; then there was one more before we sat down to breakfast, for bread, butter and cream.

This set me to thinking how careful a woman should be to try and save steps. When we were all seated at the table I was so tired that I spread out my arms and sat like an old, brooding hen. My breath seemed gone. I had meant to save all my vitality and use the surplus to-day, in writing a story about the time when I worked out. I tried to laugh, but it sounded like a wheezy croak, or a rickety buggy crossing a culvert.

Well, let us reason together. I didn't get angry and allow the wrinkles to come in my face, and be soured for all day, but you tired women know that this might have been the consequence.

I'm only one of thousands, but as I have the floor, I'll speak first about saving steps.

I have found it an excellent plan to wash a peck or a half-bushel of potatoes at one time, say on washing-day, in the tub of rinse water when I am done with it. Let them drain until they are dry, then put them in the closet, or out-of-the-way place. I keep mine in a box in the pantry with a cover over it. This will save many and many a step for a woman when she is in a hurry. Of course, this plan is not so good in mid-winter, when there is danger of hard freezing, but in moderate weather this way will be found excellent.

It is not much trouble either, while your hands are about it, to prepare steak enough for two or three meals, or to cut pork enough to last through the day.

Whenever your cloak, or any garment is to be carried up-stairs—if you have a place for everything—lay that cloak or garment on the stairs, and let the first one who goes up carry it and put it where it belongs.

As to the matter of catching chickens, why half the women with whom I am acquainted think nothing of running down a chicken an hour or two before it is needed.

I have seen more than one gray head bobbing, now here, now there, under a burdock, among the thistles, through the raspberry vines and sprawling over tumble-down fences, running after a chicken; a leg-and-wing race—one of the most ludicrous and ridiculous sights I ever saw.—The first thing I think of is the foolish waste of nervous energy—one's precious vitality wasted on the air. That same nervous force if rightly applied could have been spent in giving a glowing, earnest, strong talk to one's growing daughters, or to the little boys who will "make men" in the years to come.

Sometimes I fear we will be held accountable for the energy we trifle away in a foolish manner, the same as for spending money or talents in a way that benefits no one.

The way to catch a chicken is to pick it off the roost after dark, put it in a tub until morning and when the tea kettle comes off, put on a kettle of water to scald it