

Youthful Recollections.

PART II.

BY RUFUS REDDY.

There were even times in which we had our little jokes at our parents' expense, with the good fortune of escaping detection. But it was necessary to handle the matter very delicately to ensure such favourable results. If there was one subject upon which the old gentleman never tired, it was of personal courage, specially applicable to himself. His many tales of adventure in his early hunting days invariably terminated with some incident highly favourable to his reputation for courage. I was however never thoroughly convinced as to the exact extent of all this bravery, visions of recent derelictions in that line, floated continually before me.

The old gentleman was once relating a thrilling adventure with a bear which he had discovered in the pig pen and though only armed with a small cudgel, immediately attacked it, but after a desperate fight the bear escaped. The story was taking well, when with childlike simplicity I broke in with a few enquiries. "Pa!" I asked, "a bear is a very big animal, eh?" "Yes my son," was the reply. "And very strong and savage, eh?" "Yes, very savage." "And you attacked it at once, eh?" "Yes, at once." A pause. "How many bears would it take pa, to kill a dog?" "Now, now, what infernal nonsense are you talking about," replied the old man bristling up at my run of questions. "Oh nothing, only Mr. Brown's dog you know—". The sentence was never finished, as I was immediately led off for repairs. Mr. Brown's dog had treed the old gentleman that morning and kept him there till his cries attracted half the neighbourhood, and my allusion had spoilt his bear story.

I felt very sore over the result of my enquiries, and bemoaned my ill treatment to brother Jim, whom we had nicknamed the Philosopher. "Rufus," remarked the Philosopher. "You are an ass, or something closely allied thereto, have you not yet learned that one of the most glorious privileges of old age is to prevaricate on the question of youthful prowess. Did you ever hear of any old man, who in his youth, wasn't the hardest man in the town to knock off his feet, or who didn't out jump all creation at one particular time, and who didn't excel in numerous other feats. And though one is morally convinced that, after making all due allowance for shrinkage, through the ravages of time, those old men must have been but very average youths, still these statements are allowed to pass unchallenged, consoling ourselves with the thought that we also hope to reach that age, coupled with all its privileges. No, Rufus. You are too much inclined to question such statements. Now the other day when the governor related that fish story, you gave a long whistle, which fortunately attracted the attention of the dog, and thereby conveying a doubt to the old man's mind as to its exact meaning, or otherwise you would have likely whistled to another tune that morning." I acknowledged the force of these remarks and promised to reform.

The old gentleman possibly possessed a very fair allowance of that ennobling virtue courage. Upon the subject of earthquakes however, he was particularly nervous. He had often been heard to remark that a man could hear up against nearly all dangers, but it seemed beyond human power to resist the terrifying effect of the solid earth's heaving and rolling under one's feet.

One dull November afternoon several friends were congregated in the old gentleman's office, discussing the various questions of the day, when a low rumbling noise was heard, soon a slight tremor startled those present. A second vibration was felt. Some one cried "earthquake," and there was a sudden rush for the door. Though the exit was general and extremely hurried our parent was noticed to have been particularly anxious

to leave the edifice. His scrambles indicated a fervent desire to head the stampede, and altogether his actions betrayed a lamentable lack of coolness. The vibrations presently ceased, the rumblings travelled rapidly eastward and soon died away, and we returned to the office.

The conversation naturally turned on earthquakes and the like; the old gentleman, likely fearing that his hasty exit at the first alarm might reflect upon him began describing the result of his observations during the tremors, a convincing proof that his coolness had not deserted him; how he noticed the rows of brick grinding against each other, the mortar flying out in clouds of dust. He also remembered reading that the brick buildings in the terrible Lisbon earthquakes stood the shocks better than those of stone, offering by their construction more resistance to the heavings of the earth's surface, in fact the interior of a brick building was considered a place of safety during an earthquake, though he invariably went outside at these times to take observations for scientific purposes. He would judge by the movement of the ground as indicated by the peculiar motion of the grass, that this earthquake, which was a slight one anyway, travelled in north east by eastwardly direction. And so the old man discoursed till he considered himself firmly re-established among his listeners.

At about the close of his harangue, my brother's attention was drawn to a heavy loaded lumber waggon approaching the rear of the office, with a low rumbling noise. Soon furtive glances passed between those present, who were all ignorant of the waggon's approach. The governor stops his discourse, a breathless silence ensues, broken by the rumbling of the lumber waggon, which gradually increases. Jim takes in the situation at a glance. "Watch the old man!" he whispers in my ear, and with a yell of "earthquake!" makes a dash for the door.

Gentle reader, would that you were present to have seen the old gentleman pile out for the second time. All was forgotten in his mad rush for the door, with a howl he dashed through the railing that surmounted his desk, the broken panels hanging to his shoulders like a garden gate about the horns of a refractory ox. His first spring landed him on all fours in the centre of the room, from which point he leaped clean through the door like a flea through a knot hole, to the edge of the veranda, down the steps of which he rolled till the centre of the grassy plot immediately in front, was reached. With a wild frightened look he rose to his feet, the garden gate still hanging to his neck, and stared vacantly around. The last few seconds had evidently been to him a blank. He wished to know if the force of the shock had hurled him there. Those present thought it had, at least to spare his feelings, they said so. With the appearance of one who was not quite satisfied with himself, he returned slowly to his desk, where he remained the rest of the day in silent reverie.

Jim's little scare had worked; earthquakes were seldom after the subject of conversation, at least not with the old gentleman.

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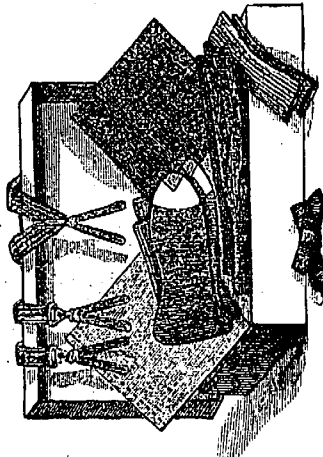
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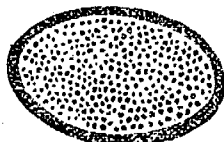
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