A RATTLESNAKE AS A BEDFELLOW.

BY CLARENCE BULLER.

PEAKING of snakes in one's boots,' said the old-timer,' it was on this road in the time of its building, and in this same rising country we are now passing through, that a man had the worst case of a snake in his clothes that I ever knew of. But this was no mirage, but a real, sure-enough rattler that crawled under the shirt of a sober man.'

The Union Pacific train was then entering the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains. A little party of passengers, accidental acquaintances, were in the smoking compartment of the palace car enjoying their cigars and talking of matters relating to the country through which we were travelling. Conversation had turned upon snakes. The 'old-timer,' a portly capitalist from the mining region, went on with his narration, and we all listened.

'A party of us were in those hills yonder,' he said, 'when the railroad was building, getting out ties on contract, and were camping one night in a little grassy valley among the bluffs. We were sleeping on the bare ground in the open air. It was late in September, and the nights were getting cool in the mountains, and each man had turned in with his clothes on and rolled up in all the blankets he could muster. Next to me lay an Illinois man named Robert Jellison, a cool, moderate sort of fellow, but with plenty of nerve, as you shall hear. Some time about midnight I was awakened by hearing Jellison calling to me in a low voice. My first thought on waking was that some one might be tampering with the horses, and not wishing to make any demonstration until I found out what quarter the trouble was in, I got my hand on my revolver and whispered, without moving:

"'What's up, Bob? Indians?"

'Jellison was lying on his back perfectly motionless. Without stirring, he spoke in the same tone as before:

'"No; I wish it were. I think a snake has crawled up my trousers leg. Don't move only as I tell you. Don't wake the boys. He's quiet now and I don't want him set agoing. But get up easy and start a fire.'

'So I slipped out of my blankets, and moving around, raked the brands of the camp-fire together, piled on some wood, and soon had a blaze. While I did this Jellison was speaking in a monotonous tone without moving his lips.

'"He's feeling his way along under my shirt, but he keeps moving up all the time. His head is as far up as my armpits already and his tail isn't over my instep yet. I think he's a mile long and weighs a thousand pounds to the inch. The fire's all right, isn't it? Now come here and get the blankets away from me. The reptile is lying on top of me along my left leg and side. Begin on the right side, and work easy."

'Jellison's blankets were tucked tightly under him, and it was a ticklish proceeding to pull their edge from beneath him without moving his body, with the chance that at any moment I might encounter the head of his unwelcome visitor. Jellison growled from time to time with suppressed emotion as I jarred him ever so little and kept saying "Work easy." Finally I got the blankets clear on one side, and gently lifted them away from his body. He had turned in with his shirt, trousers and stockings on, and by the firelight I saw protruding from the left trousers leg six inches of the tail of a snake tipped with a big rattle. The reptile which had sought his present quarters for warmth evidently did not like the sensation of the cold air on the exposed extremity, for there was immediately an ugly wriggling movement under Jellison's clothes, and the snake's tail disappeared upward clear to the rattle.

'With all his nerve and coolness, the suspense was telling on Jellison. His face showed white in the firelight and the cold sweat stood in big drops on his forehead. "The snake's head is up to my shirt collar now," he gasped. "Take your hunting knife and rip my clothes open on the right side. His cold body is taking all the strength out of me. Work quick and don't mind the risk of cutting me."

'My hunting knife was as sharp as a razor, but I strapped it a little on my boot to give it an extra fine edge, and, working so as not to disturb the snake, I began at Jellison's right shoulder and cut clean through his clothes from the shirt collar to the bottom of the left trousers leg. Then stepping round to the other side and holding the garments so as they would serve as a shield, I laid them over on the left so as to leave Jellison's body exposed. A huge rattlesnake lay the whole length of the man's body, its tail resting on his instep, and its big triangular head reposing in the hollow of his throat. The reptile, on being uncovered, curved his neck a little by drawing up his body so as to look behind and see the cause of its being disturbed, then threw itself half in a coil, assuming the form of the letter S, with its head turned backward toward me. It then lay wholly on the body of Jellison. I remained perfectly still, except to take a position so that I should not be between the snake and the fire, and there waited.

'The reptile kept his position for awhile, and Jellison was beginning to feel the chill of the frosty air, so that his body shook in spite of himself. But the cold was telling on the snake likewise, and the warmth of the fire appealed to its feelings. As I kept quiet, it ceased to regard me, and began to move slowly toward the blaze, and presently slid entirely off the body of the man and glided over the blankets toward the fire.

'By the time the snake was a length away I had caught Jellison by the shoulders and pulled him up standing. I threw a pair of blankets over his shoulders, for he was shaking as with a fit of the ague.

'"Now, old man," I said, "you're all right. Hold still till I kill the snake."

'"H-h-hold on," said Jellison, his teeth clicking as he shivered with cold and the reaction from his nervous tension. "N-n-no n-n-man k-kills that snake but w-w-me."

'Up to this point no snake had ever been treated with greater consideration, and we had deferred to its prejudices at every stage of the proceedings. The reptile—a mountain monster over five feet long—was lying in coil near the fire, basking comfortably in the glow, but keeping his eye on us at every turn. Jellison picked up a revolver, and approaching to within a few feet of the snake, fired six shots into the coil as if it did him good to do so. By the time he had emptied the pistol the snake was dead, and pretty thoroughly cut to pieces. The rest of the boys had slept through all that had been going on, but at the sound of the first shot they came tumbling up in a hurry, with their guns in hand, ready for Indians. The business was over, however, and there was nothing for them to do.

'Jellison spent the next day in camp, with a needle and thread, trying to get his clothes sewed together. He said for weeks that he could feel that snake on his body wherever he laid down, and he dreamed of it at nights. He was with us for several months after, and to the last asserted that he had never got warm all over, but had always a cold streak on his body where the snake had lain.'

THE CHILDREN'S PAGE.

SOLUTIONS OF PUZZLE.

DEAR COUSIN KATE,—One cold, snowy morning a little boy called Harry Johnson went out for a walk across a large field. When he got to the end of it he came to a stile, which he jumped over, but he came upon his head instead of upon his feet. Some of his enemies who had seen his fall, ran up to him, and before he could rise they rolled him over and over till he was just like a big snowball, then they stuck him up by a fence and left him there. After he had been there for a long time a policeman found him, and to him Harry cried out for help. The policeman got a spade, and with it scraped off all the snow from Harry, who went home feeling very cold and uncomfortable. You can print it if you like.—MILTON FARQUHAR, 9 years old. Franklin Road, Ponsonby.

[Thank you, Milton. Yours is a nice story, but not right, as the boy had no enemies. Write again whenever you like. —COUSIN KATE.]

DEAR COUSIN KATE,—Having seen the picture puzzle in your issue of the 8th July, I beg to tender an answer which I think will suit. Cut No. 1 is a little Irish lad standing on a hill with a handkerchief tied round his head, as it is a cold July morning, and the snow lies thick upon the ground. The second picture is the same boy bent on enjoying a roll down the hill, and is in the act of starting. No. 3 is the same lad hardly recognisable, for he has rolled down the hill, and by so doing has accumulated the snow all round him. The fourth picture is where he is stopped by a post, and a man (maybe his father) is endeavouring to excavate him from the encircling mass of snow. This is the first time I have answered anything of this sort, and I trust it will not be the last. If this story should happen to take the first place, I should like to see it in print.—ALFRED ZACHARIAH. Christchurch.

[Your story is first-rate, but I almost think it is too good, and so is the writing, for anyone under twelve. Is that your age? Write again soon.—COUSIN KATE.]

JET BLACK.

BY GORHAM SILVA.

DURING two consecutive seasons the same pair of robins had made their home in a healthy thick-leaved young maple that grows near the porch of my dwelling. Devoted to the pair, my little daughter watches their nest-building every year with great interest. By creeping out on the porch roof, and carefully parting aside the branches, she is able to get a sight of the old bird brooding, and farther on a peep at the nestlings. The third year the robins built late, and their eggs cracked at the same time as those of a crow hatching in the top of a tall hickory not far away. A few days later, as I sat with my little daughter on the porch, we heard a sudden thrashing of heavy wings through the maple boughs overhead, followed by frightened chirps from the young robins; then all was quiet again. The little girl, anxious and excited, jumped to her feet, and seizing my hand, drew me upstairs to the roof. Treading cautiously to the edge, we peered into the nest, determined to find out if possible what had happened.

I had not long to wait. Flapping its wings fiercely, a large crow suddenly burst through the thick leaves down to the nest, and seizing in his beak the last of the young robins, flew away with it to feed its own young. Before the crow was fairly out of sight, and before we could get away, the robin mother was back to her rifled nest. Not finding her brood, she swirled distractedly about our heads, reproaching us with grieved, discordant cries. Distressed at the loss of her pets, my daughter declared she should hate crows as long as she lived, and implored me to get my gun, and go out and shoot the wretched crow that had made so much trouble. I did not wait to be urged, but seizing my bird-gun, soon had the old crow at my feet, my oldest boy climbing up to the nest to bring down the young crows, to rescue them from starvation by a speedy death.

No sooner did my little girl behold the woolly, impish-looking young crows than she forgot her grief for the robins, and begged one for her very own, asserting that they were 'too cunning for anything.'

Before the crow was fully feathered, he answered to his name Jet Black as intelligently as a dog, and followed us about with equal fidelity. He was so fine and so mischievous a crow, I believe, as ever lived. Nothing that sparkled escaped his beak. Every day we missed something; spectacles, a ring, brooch, thimble, penknife, or silver spoon. Only my little girl's tearful pleading saved Jet Black's neck from wringing. She was always searching for the missing articles, but it was a long time before we discovered the rogue's storehouse, though he usually flew toward the barn with his plunder. One day, however, when the boys were hunting in the big mow for eggs, they came unexpectedly upon it, cunningly hidden under a wisp of straw.

On Mondays Jet Black was usually in high feather. The sound of the clothes rubbed on the board and the smell of the suds seemed to exhilarate him. He hovered about the kitchen and poked his beak into everything, and was a great nuisance to Bridget, particularly if the earth under the clothes-lines was moist or dusty. When the clothes were hung out, until his little game was discovered, the mischievous thing would perch on the long lines of clean white clothes, and, gingerly treading over them, he would pull out one by one every clothes-pin, until the whole mass of spotless linen lay on the ground bedraggled with mud or dust. At such times Bridget's ire was something to be dreaded, and we were compelled on washing days to keep an eye on Jet Black.

The persistent rainfall delayed our planting this year. The seed onions were particularly late. It was fully ten days past the usual time of setting them, when one cloudy morning I resolved, 'rain or shine,' they should go into the ground, and I set my hired man, a slow, dull, painstaking, unobservant German, at the work. The patch to be planted was large, the drills long; a full day's work lay before him. Just before noon a drizzling rain began, but it did not prevent my going to see how the onion-planting progressed. As I approached the field I noticed the unplanted portion was strewn completely over with seedlings. Surprised, I looked closer. The German was creeping along the face of a drill, and behind him the crow was following cautiously, his feathers dripping with the rain.

'What can the villain be up to?' I thought.

I was soon made aware of the bird's little scheme. After planting a multiplier with great care, the faithful German shoved himself clumsily along on his knees, and began setting another; the crow, marching stealthily after him with equal certainty, beat over to the ground, jerked up the multiplier, and with a saucy fling of his knowing head tossed it on the field ahead of him. And so it went on to the end of the drill, as the man commenced on a returning drill, the crow noiselessly tripped to the rear, and the performance I had witnessed was resumed: the man setting a seedling, the crow pulling it up as he had done all through the morning.

The spectacle was so ludicrous that I could not resist laughing, vexatious as it was at this hurried time of the year, not to have a single onion planted on the whole field, and the day half spent. Provoked, I called to the man. He dragged himself stiffly to his feet.

'I hat dot field haf blanted,' he said, with satisfaction.

'No, you have nothing of the kind, John. The crow has pulled up every onion as fast as you have set it.'

Amazed, the man stared over the back drills, then his glance fell upon the crow waiting patiently at his side to resume his mischief.

'Dat isht a goot bird der kill,' he remarked, calmly; and going over to the first drill began his work over again.

KATIE'S STORY.

KATIE was going to bed, after a day of toil minding her sick and maimed dolls—chronic invalids all of them—and her b-e-a-u-tiful duck, the one old quacker that travelled with the hens because he had no better company. The robin that had been watching her out of the corners of his bright eyes, as he ran over the lawn and listened to her prattle, was asleep already, with his head under his wing, and Katie's hung heavily on mother's shoulder while she was undressing her. 'Now I lay me' had been said, with many yawns in between, and mamma's pet had been tucked in snugly; but just as the sleepy eyes were closing, she sat suddenly bolt-upright.

'Mamma,' she said, 'I want Johnny's picture-book—that with the lambs.'

'Hush, Katie!' said her mother, the least bit wearily; for the little feet and the little tongue had never ceased going one moment all day. 'Now we will go to sleep.'

'But, mamma,' and the big eyes pleaded earnestly, 'can't I have Johnny's picture-book this once?'

'Not to-night, dearie: it is too late.'

'Mamma,' said Katie, sitting up very straight and looking very solemn indeed, 'I heard a story of a little girl—she was a good little girl—that asked her mamma once, when she was put to bed, for the picture-book with the lambs. And the mamma told her she couldn't have it, and—and'—the baby voice fell to an awed whisper, and the eyes grew very big—'in just—about—two—minutes—she was dead!'

'My, Katie! And what killed her so quick?'

'Because,' said Katie, with conviction—'because she didn't get the book.'

She got it, and in five minutes was asleep with it in her arms.

CHILDREN'S SAYINGS.

ONE Sabbath evening, not long ago, Edith was at the tea-table, and noticed some cheese on a plate before her. 'Mamma,' said she, 'is that the cheese we sang about in Sunday school to-day?' 'Why, no, Edith, you did not sing about cheese in Sunday school.' 'Yes'm, we did. We sung "Bringing in the cheese."' Which was her rendering of the familiar 'Bringing in the sheaves.'

One day at luncheon Mamie was very greatly delighted with some honey which had been sent her by a friend who lives in the country and keeps bees. After eating a while in silence, she exclaimed, 'Doesn't Mrs Lepley teach her bees to make nice honey?'

A LONG NECK AND A SHORT LEG.—'Charlie, I've forgotten whether it's the neck or the leg that you are fond of.' 'What is it—a goose?' 'Yes.' 'Then give me the neck, please.'