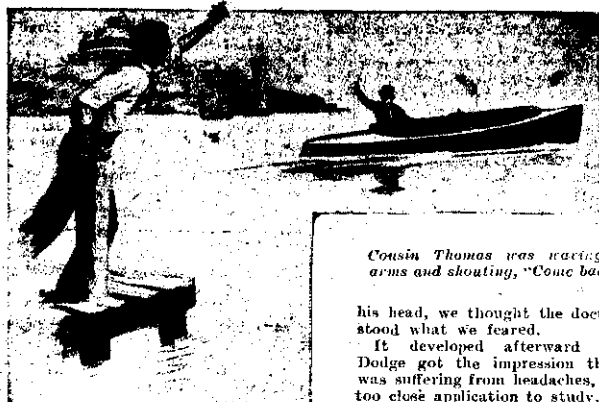


FATHER'S REBELLION

By FREEMAN PUTNEY, Jr.



Cousin Thomas was waving his arms and shouting, "Come back!"

UP to the time when mother died, and Aunt Amelia came to live with us, I had taken father's absentmindedness as a matter of course, and something to be expected in a college professor. It was always part of our family routine to make sure that he did not start for his classes in the morning without his necktie, or with one of my shopping-bags in place of the green one that holds his books.

Father always says that he is absorbed in thinking of his work; and that his mind, instead of being absent, is very present, although occupied with affairs other than unimportant trifles. That was what he told Aunt Amelia when she scolded him for having worn to church, in place of his high silk hat, a battered and cobwebby old derby which he uses when he rakes up the lawn. I couldn't blame Aunt Amelia for feeling annoyed, although I did not think she fully understood father. She had not really known him since he was a boy, for she had lived in the West ever since she was married, until her husband died.

"Really, Edith," she confided to me later, "I am anxious about your father's mental condition. All the Adams family for generations, even the scholars, have been practical—extremely practical."

Aunt Amelia herself is extremely practical. I knew that from the way she had set her son, Cousin Thomas, after me; as soon as she found out that mama's money had been left in my name. But to smooth things over, I spoke to father.

He did try for a few days, and Aunt Amelia was very much encouraged until the evening when he brought home Mr. Elliot's family cat in place of the basket of lettuce he had gone to fetch.

We hoped, then, that he would do better when college had closed, and his classes were off his mind; so, as soon as possible after commencement, we hurried down to the seashore at Hardyport and opened our cottage. But before we had been there a week, Aunt Amelia, with a face of gloom, confided to me in a corner of the piazza:

"Your father, Edith, is certainly not improving. I don't dare to say what I am afraid of."

I knew she meant insanity, but I wouldn't mention it. Father had been spending most of his time in his study on his scientific work, and it certainly had seemed once or twice, from things he did, that he wasn't quite right. That very afternoon, when we routed him out to take a swim, we found that he had retired to his room to change his clothes for his bathing-suit, and had gone to bed by mistake.

"Let's go to town to-morrow and see Dr. Dodge," I suggested.

Dr. Dodge is our family physician, and I suppose we didn't go into details about father as with a stranger. First, Aunt Amelia talked, and then I chimed in. We didn't either of us mention insanity; but when we told how we were afraid of father's having trouble with

his head, we thought the doctor understood what we feared.

It developed afterward that Dr. Dodge got the impression that father was suffering from headaches, caused by too close application to study, and that what we women wanted was a physician's authority to make him take care of himself. So he said that, while he couldn't attempt a thorough diagnosis without seeing the patient, he thought father's condition would improve if he limited himself strictly to working not more than two hours at a time, alternated by periods of recreation, preferably out of doors.

"And I will appoint you ladies," he concluded pleasantly, "to make sure that my directions are observed."

Father seldom makes a fuss about anything, and he submitted beautifully to the doctor's orders. We timed his working periods; and if he stayed locked up in his room for more than two hours, one of us would invite him to go for a walk, or boating, or to play croquet.

One morning, when we had been at the shore about a week, I took father to visit the wharves of one of the big fish companies over in town. It was all very interesting; but father got into trouble, as usual. He sat down on what he took to be the solid cover of an upturned barrel, but it was really the open top of a barrel of brine. Some of the men laughed; but a young man in overalls hurried up and helped father out, and was very kind, not even smiling. He spoke sharply to the men, and it was remarkable how quickly they sobered up, and helped father to clean his clothes.

The young man, who seemed to be some sort of a foreman, lent father his own overcoat to wear home. Although I was so much afraid that father would take cold, I did remember to thank the young man, whose name was Mr. McGarragh, and to tell him that we would send back the coat. He was a very pleasant young man, tall and square-shouldered. His face was not a bit handsome, but his forehead looked calm and collected, and his eyes didn't seem to have much nonsense in them. I liked him; but, somehow, when he looked at me squarely, I was embarrassed a little, to my own disgust.

Of course, Aunt Amelia went wild when father came home wet. She spoke to him so sharply that he stayed in his room all that evening, in spite of us, and most of the following day. Then, almost by force, Aunt Amelia dragged him out and sent him up to the hotel for a newspaper.

Father was so long in returning that I slipped out to look for him. I found that he had dropped the two pennies that Aunt Amelia had given him into a mail-box, under the impression that he had been sent to post a letter. When he woke up to the fact, he found he had no other money with him, and he was trying to screw up his courage to face aunt again.

I bought the newspaper and we went home together, enjoying the walk along the beach very much. At the door of our cottage, whom should we meet but Mr. McGarragh? He had come, he said, to save us the trouble of sending back his overcoat; and of course we invited him in.

When we introduced him to Aunt Amelia, she deliberately sniffed, and I knew she meant to suggest the odour of fish.

Mr. McGarragh didn't seem to notice it, nor did he mind when Cousin Thomas, who was staying with us for a few days, undertook to snub him; but I was indignant because they had picked at the poor fellow that way, so I treated him very nicely, out of sheer pity. Neither Thomas nor aunt seemed to enjoy that.

It was on the second afternoon following that Mr. McGarragh invited me to take the walk around Sunrise Point: Aunt Amelia rose up and said that I should not go without a chaperon—after all the years I had been at Hardyport without the suggestion of such a thing! If I hadn't known that she was working for Cousin Thomas, who had made two attempts that week to propose to me, I should have shown how indignant I was. Instead, I was very sweet, and told her how pleased I should be to have her come with us. Aunt hates walking, since she began to grow stout, and Mr. McGarragh and I went alone.

He talked less than any other young man I had ever known, but I didn't care—perhaps because I am such a chatter-box myself. After I got home, I found myself wondering how such a nice man could work all day in those slimy fish-sheds. That evening I nearly slipped Cousin Thomas' face when he spoke of Mr. McGarragh as a "fish-skinner."

II

The summer wore on, and somehow Mr. McGarragh seemed to take up more and more of my leisure time. He often came in the afternoon to take me for a drive, or for a skin in the harbour in a motor-boat, or for one of the beautiful walks about Hardyport. If he couldn't get off from his work in the afternoon, he was fairly certain to appear in the evening and sit out with the family on the verandah.

The first few times he did this, Aunt Amelia insulted him at every opportunity; but it seemed impossible to provoke him to answer back. It angered me so, however, that I treated him more prettily

If it had not been so near the end of the season, I think we should have disobeyed him; but Aunt Amelia said the summer was so nearly over we might as well wait until we got home.

Only a day or two later, Aunt Amelia, with a very sober face, brought me a solemn editorial in her conservative newspaper. It turned on some man who was being tried for murder, and on the evidence of insanity in his ancestors. Then it went on for half a column about the wickedness of people who married when there was insanity in their families, and the misery they might cause those they loved.

The horrible newspaper editorial sobered me, and I carried it on my nerves all day. I know why aunt had made me read it; and the more I thought about it, and about our anxiety for father, the more distressed I was. I wondered what my duty would be if there really was insanity in my family, and if I was asked to marry.

And that very evening Mr. McGarragh proposed to me!

It came so suddenly, and I was so flustered, that I could not shut it off. I hardly know just what I told him; but I gave him to understand that while I liked him, and hoped he would continue to be my friend, the thing he asked for could never be. He took it quietly, as he took everything; but as he went away his face was drawn, and I was so sorry for him.

Nor was he the only one hurt, for I cried myself to sleep that night.

He did not come the next day, nor afterward. As the week passed, I began to realise how much I cared for him. It was silly to think that a man in love, who had been rejected, would continue to force himself upon a girl who apparently did not care; but until he stayed away I had not known what his companionship meant.

That must have been a hard week for Aunt Amelia. Not only was I sulky,



The beach, clear down to the edge of the rising tide, was covered with mucks in the sun.

than ever; and when aunt discovered this, she took to ignoring him completely. Cousin Thomas, who had finally decided to spend the summer with us, kept out of his way.

About the middle of August we began to notice a new symptom in father. He was becoming irritable. We found more and more difficulty in keeping his schedule down to the allotted two hours of work. Aunt, however, stuck to the task like a hero.

We tried to get father to go and see Dr. Dodge, but he absolutely refused. He also forbade us to consult the doctor ourselves, or to bring him to the cottage, adding that, in his opinion, Dr. Dodge was a darned old fuddy-duddy. When father uses language as unscientific as that he is really angry.

but father grew more and more irritable, and objected more and more to being prodded out of his den. He said he had important work which must not be interrupted; but Aunt Amelia quoted the doctor's orders and was inexorable.

Then came the morning when father rebelled. It was a hot, bright day, at the very end of August; and I was up in my room, when I heard Aunt Amelia talking at the door of his study. It was evident that she was turning him out for his recreation period, and that he was decidedly unwilling. Finally I heard him go downstairs, actually stamping, and the front door slammed.

A little later aunt came to report: "I had absolutely to drag out your father, Edith; and, more than that, I caught him smuggling some paper and pencils out—planning to keep at his tire-