

When darkness fell around him the one-armed man was well upon his way. The night seemed darker from the pall of smoke that hung about, and the wind moaned and whistled through the tree-tops. On and on he went, with the pangs of hunger growing keener every minute. In time he reached a bridge, and stopped to rest awhile. The man had told him that he would have to cross the second bridge before he reached McEwan's. How lonely it all seemed. There was not a house in sight, and no sound but the gurgling of the river and the wailing of the wind. The country round about seemed very wild and grand. The railway seemed to run through a kind of gorge or gully, skirting round by the side of a steep sloping hill, with the river down below on the other side. The bush, with which it had formerly been covered, had been partly cleared by fire to put the railway through. Higher up, however, some charred gaunt trees were standing out against the sky. One of these kept creaking in the wind, and it seemed to him as though a soul had been encased in it and was trying to get free. He stood and looked at it, the tall gaunt trunk, with one blackened arm extended. Somehow it seemed to remind him of himself—counted out, just a lumberer of the ground.

He looked over at the swiftly-flowing river, gurgling in the darkness down below, which all the time seemed calling him to come. It would be so easy just to sink to rest. Suddenly he pulled himself together with a start.

Was it he, who wondered, who had almost done this thing? He who had always thought a man a coward and a shirker who would throw away his life. He set his jaw more firmly, and continued on his way. No doubt, weariness and hunger had begun to tell upon his mind. He squared his shoulders sternly and got a firmer grip upon himself. The wind rose sobbing, ending in a wail, and the dead tree creaked desisively.

He could hardly keep his footing. The wind seemed suddenly to gain in force as it came rushing through the gully. He had only walked a few steps further when he heard a spitting, rending, crash. He started, and looked round. The wind had blown the dead tree over and it was rolling down the hill.

A convulsive shudder shook him, as he stood and watched it. It had fallen on the very spot where he had just been standing. A little while before he had wished to die; little had he known how near his death was passing. Had he not moved on just then as he did, he would now probably be dead. There must surely be some reason for his living—why he had been thus spared.

The thought had hardly flashed across his brain when he had seen the reason; the dead tree as it lay was half across the line, and in a little while the train would come, rushing onwards to its fate.

All the tales which he had heard of trains derailed and wrecked, came rushing through his mind. With one comprehensive glance he took the situation in, and shuddered as he saw what must be the inevitable results; the tree across the line and the river down below. The water seemed to gurgle with malicious spite, as if it knew already of the lives that it would claim. The man looked round him in a hopeless way, as the magnitude of his responsibility dawned suddenly upon him; and his soul was filled with blank despair. He had not even a match, that he might light a fire, as a kind of warning signal. It was but another instance of the irony of fate, that this thing should have happened in such a lonely place, with no one near to help except a one-armed man.

Again there came the wailing of the wind, and the sound of running water, while all the while the precious time was flying. It was so long since he had prayed he had almost forgotten how. Even now, it was not for himself, but for those whose lives depended on his strength.

"O God," he breathed in anguish, "give me strength that I may do this thing."

With every muscle straining, he tugged and pulled with all his might, while beads of sweat stood out upon his brow. If only he had had his other arm, it would have been so easy. He had been noted in his college days for the weights that he could lift. Still, the time that he had spent at Oxford in training and athletics, now stood him in good stead. On, and on, he worked, seemingly with little headway, and yet the log was moving inch by inch.

A singing noise was rushing through his head; his brain seemed dizzy, and he

felt faint from lack of food. But he dared not stop to rest. At last some work had been entrusted to his care, and it was up to him to see it through.

From the distance came a rumbling noise growing louder every minute. With a start he realised its meaning. The train was drawing nearer, it was on the second bridge. His breath was coming quickly, in short heaving gasps; and his hand and arm were torn and blistered, and blood was running down.

The rumbling sound was drawing nearer, he could see the engine's lights shining in the distance.

Again he breathed in anguish, "O God, let my strength last out that I may do it." He dared not look towards those eyes of fire. He could hear the snorting breath, as the big iron steed came rushing on. With an almost superhuman effort he tugged and pulled again.

He breathed a silent prayer of thanksgiving to his God; his strength had lasted out, and now the line was clear. His brain was reeling from the strain. Now that it was over, reaction had set in. The next moment he had fallen forwards fainting, and lay across the line. . . . The passengers aboard the train, wondered why a sudden jolt occurred, and why the train pulled up. The men got out, and went to see the cause, while frightened women put their heads out through the windows. Soon, all was clear, to those who went to see.

Fortunately a doctor was amongst the passengers aboard the train, and hurriedly he made an examination, then quietly shook his head.

"He's dead, poor chap," he murmured, "but the only comfort is, that death was instantaneous."

With bared heads the men stood round, and by flickering lights, took the situation in.

For those with seeing eyes, everything was clear; the blood-stained tree trunk, and the man's torn and bleeding arm, told far too plainly of the struggle there had been.

"Poor chap!" someone murmured, "and to think he did it with a single arm, and that his left one too!"

Many eyes were dim, and voices hushed to whispers.

Quietly and reverently they laid him in the van; and in a little while the train went on again, while all the time the wind kept up the sobbing plaintive cry.

For the most part, people talked in whispers, or else sat still in silence. When one has been so near the brink of death it makes one stop and think. And, back there in the van, lying so silently

and still, was the body of the brave courageous man, whose life had been the toll so ungrudgingly paid down, that they might go in safety.

A Humorist's Relaxation.

Calling one day upon a humorist—not one whose name appears upon the title-page of bound volumes, but a prolific writer of magazine and newspaper jokes, verse, and stories—a friend was not a little puzzled to find him seriously perusing that greatest of all classics, the Bible.

Hardly knowing in what mood to speak of it, the caller half-jocularly asked: "What kind of funny idea do you expect to work up from that?"

The humorist carefully inserted a book mark where he had been reading, and laid down the volume with that caressing gentleness which one accords a literary treasure, and, somewhat regretfully, answered his questioner: "Years ago I would never miss a day without reading something from either the Old or New Testament. But I have become so busy in my line of work that I have to limit my reading of The Book so as to get in something from the other great works of inspiration.

"I am now trying a plan of alternation. One day, for the limited time I can spare, I take the Bible; another day Shakespeare, another Plato, another Goethe, and so on. Then I have to find time for Dante, for Carlyle, for Emerson, and other philosophers. And I must also fit in a little from the French and Italian writers. Then there are the Oriental religions and mythologies to be considered—in translation. Also a smattering of the moderns—of Ibsen, of James, even of Shaw and Chesterton. Then I must slip in a few minutes of Browning, of Tennyson, of Whitman and a score of other English and American poets. Likewise there is to be snatched at intervals a chapter of fiction, both from the Masters and the near-masters.

"You will readily see from this rapid and skeletonized sketch, that I can hardly give a very exhaustive reading to any one of these, much as I should like to delve deeper into certain of them."

"But," gasped the caller incredulously—still suspecting a hidden "joker"—"you do not really mean that you read all that stuff seriously? You do it to get suggestions for your own writing, don't you? I do not mean from the Bible, of course. But you find a whole lot you can jolly in the others, I suppose?"

The humorist regarded the speaker with a quizzical smile. "I see," he said, "You are one of those people who imagine that a professional 'funny man' must be constantly jingling the jester's bells, and whacking somebody with a bladder. Now, you are a doctor—or expect to be when you have paid for that sheepskin you are after. If I should call on you sometime when you are an established medico, with a large and increasing practice, may I expect to find you immersed in treatises on medicine and surgery? Would it not seem more reasonable that you were seeking relaxation in a bit of exciting fiction, or a laughable story?"

"Oh, well, that is different. Of course I should likely enough want to relieve the strain of professional duties by something of a lighter nature than clinical notes. But why you, who can write those clever things to make folks chuckle, should want to dig into such stuff as you have mentioned, is more than I can comprehend. The cases are not reversed; they have nothing in common."

The humorist touched his forehead: "My work is done here; but my life lies deeper. I make perhaps a passable quality of gingerbread trifles which please the people who care for such dainties. But for my own mental and spiritual sustenance I must draw upon the vital nourishment of such mind and heart stuff as can only be found in the real writers—especially from those whom the world has rightly agreed to call 'inspired.'"

The talk turned in other channels; but as the caller rose to leave, he still had in mind the opening conversation, and with a more understanding sympathy he said to the humorist (meaning it in a different sense than it needed), "You jokers are mighty funny folks."

An amusing story is told of a cubist artist's picture sent to the Autumn Salon in Paris. A painting was placed upside down before the fatigued jury (hanging committee), as the porters were not sufficiently educated in cubism (which sees cubes in everything and everything in cubes) to determine which way up the picture should go. The picture was accepted, when suddenly someone remarked that it was the wrong way up. On being righted some deer were discerned at its base, and on examination proved to be so extremely cubical that the picture was rejected.

£150 GIVEN AWAY IN PRIZES £150

WINFRED

CIGARETTE

COMPETITION

1st prize, £1 per week for 12 months

2nd prize Piano

3rd prize Gold Watch (Ladies' or Gents')

4th prize Bicycle (do. " do.)

Also 3 consolation prizes of £5 each.

Collect empty packets and tins by 30th November, 1912

to ARDATH TOBACCO AGENCY

25 Elliott St., Auckland.