At The Old Swimming Hole

The conference at Conway had been brief. The man from the city had met the disabled master of railways and talked with him for a brief hour, and then the eminent physician had called a halt and ordered his patient back to his bath and his bed.

The man from the city had virtually completed his work, however. He was the sick man's successor, self appointed, it is true, but with none to contest his claim.

He was conscious when he shook the old captain of industry by the hand, that it might be for the last time, and the feeling added an unaccustomed tenderness to his parting words.

The man from the city had anticipated a two days' stay. He had used but one. And then a sudden whim seized him. The village where he had spent his boyhood the old home he had never revisited was but forty miles away. It was not on the railway line, but he could rent a conveyance of some kind perhaps an automobile. Anyway he had made up his mind to see the village again.

It was a mild curiosity that prompted him. He had no old friends to reward. No grudges to settle. Yes there was one.

He felt a sudden wave of bitterness cross his mind. It was absurd of course the thing had happened so long ago. But the anger was there, anger against the man who had robbed him of Lucy Dalton's love.

He knew he had been robbed. He had found it out when too late. John Ingram had slandered him to the girl and had brought up in his distance a cruel untruth. And Lucy had married John Ingram and all the world had grown dark and hollow for Jim Atherton.

He laughed at himself for his romantic folly and yet despite the years that had elapsed those moments of anguish seemed very real.

He thought awhile. If he had married Lucy Dalton he would have settled down to Winsted and might to-day be a plodding old rheumatic farmer. As it was, the loss of the girl he had loved had driven him from the village to the great city and to-day his was a name that all men were forced to respect and many men feared.

Yet, unworthy as the thought seemed to him, he felt that it would please him to know that John Ingram had not prospered and he had a keen desire to meet this false friend and remind him of his perfidy.

"Seeing poor old Barton has made me sentimental," he growled. "What has Jim Atherton to do with old home and early loves? Just the same I'm going over."

He stayed all night at the hotel and after breakfast secured an automobile to carry him across the ridge.

It was a pleasant ride, clear and cool, and Jim Atherton enjoyed it in his quiet way. He remembered walking over the same road the day he had turned his back forever on Winsted. Yes, there was the grist mill where the farmer had given him a lift. How well he recalled the sleek team of jogging horses. He was a kind old man and had shown a friendly interest in the adventurous boy. Jim Atherton suddenly wished he could do something for the man who had extended the first helping hand to him in his earliest venture, but no doubt he had been dead many years.

"Pretty country," said the chauffeur.

"Yes," his passenger agreed.

"Ever this way before?"

"Not for many years."

"It doesn't change," said the chauffeur.

A moment later they came within sight of a white steeple and a cluster of houses nestling among the trees.

"That's Winsted," said the chauffeur. "It's too sound asleep to ever wake up."

Jim Atherton looked around.

"You may let me off here," he said. "I'll walk down the hill. I'm not going back to Conway. I'll reach the railway on the other side."

He pushed some bills into the chauffeur's hand and walked briskly down the hill.

The chauffeur stared at the money and then at the retreating figure.

"Who in blazes can the old chap be?" he muttered. He looked again at the money. He's too good a proposition for Conway to lose."

Then he regretfully turned the car and started on the return journey.

Jim Atherton sniffed the morning air. It seemed to have a familiar odor. There was something ozonic about it that put new life into his cramped legs. It gave a fresh briskness to his gait.

Yes there was the old butternut grove where the farmer had caught him and made him saw wood. He laughed aloud at his early discomfiture. And there was the old schoolhouse—no, this was a newer building. But the maple trees were the same, and the noisy stream where he went fishing for shiners and bullheads was still there. He could hear it brawling along behind the bushes on the lower level.

A man was sitting on the top rail of a near by fence. He was a limp looking man and his attitude suggested an extreme degree of comfort. He was a man of perhaps 40, with pale blue eyes and a straggling growth of whiskers. Jim Atherton hailed this wayside figure.

"Good morning," he said, as he paused and removing his hat let the cool breeze lift his gray hair.

The pale blue eyes surveyed him leisurely.

"'Mornin'."

"Fine weather."

"Yes but we need rain."

"Lived here long?"

"Born over there on th' Potter section."

"This your farm?"

"Nope. This is Ab Coleman's farm. I'm hirin' out to him. Ab's down in th' village with a load of stuff."

Jim Atherton faintly smiled. He fancied the genus hired man had changed but little.

"I suppose you know pretty nearly everybody in the valley?"

"Guess I do. There ain't 'nough newcomers to bother me."

"Then, of course, you know all th' old families?"

The pale blue eyes half closed.

"What you sellin'?"

Jim Atherton suddenly laughed.

"Nothing that Winsted would buy," he answered.

"There was a feller here writin' up th' history of th' village once," said the hired man. "You got your picter an' some stuff written 'bout you in th' book for $1. Hi Quigg paid him an' Rodney Gear an' Sile Barnes an' mebby some others. Feller put up at th' tavern fer a week an' then him an' th' money he'd collected an' Sam Henderson's board bill an' Ted Brown's very best ... went away together an' never come back."

He laughed noiselessly and Jim Atherton laughed too.

"I don't write histories," he said, and laughed again. "Perhaps I've done a ... something toward making history of a certain sort, but there were no unpaid bills."

The owner of the blue eyes accepted the statement with a tranquil air.

"How'd you get over here?" he asked.

"I came in an automobile from Conway."

The straggly red whiskers suddenly quivered.

"I want to know," said the owner. "Anythin' give out?"

"Nothing."

"There was a feller come through here last September or mebby it was later an' somethin' give out with th' machine and Tom Sturges, he's th' blacksmith, was workin' on it for hours. He charged the feller two an' a half and Dave Pitts says he paid Tom from a roll o' bills as big as your arm."

Jim Atherton nodded.

"No doubt he needed it all. Any amusements in Winsted?"

"Nothin'. Just Sunday school picnic in th' grove an' a church fair in the winter. Boys tried to org'nize a brass band but it fell through." His blue eyes suddenly brightened. "There's goin' to be a circus next week over to Monticello an' they say it's a clipper."

"You are going, of course?"

"I guess I be. I dunno. A lot o' th' boys are talkin' of goin' over together."

Jim Atherton produced a silver dollar and passed it to the man on the fence.

"Get a good seat," he laughingly said, "and don't forget the red lemonade."

The straggly red whiskers quivered again and the pale blue eyes scrutinized the dollar closely.

"I'll be dummed," he muttered and slid the coin into his trousers pocket.

"You say you know all the old Winsted families," Jim Atherton remarked. "Do you know a man named Ingram, John Ingram?"

"Yep. Know him well. John Ingram lives th' other side o' th' village on th' Ingram farm. He's pooty badly crippled up with rheumatiz. Can't do much of anythin' 'cept hobble round. Old Doc Peasely says he won't be no better here. Only hope for him is to get out to Col'rado where it's dryer than it is here, but I dunno as he can afford to go, not, anyway, till he can sell his farm an' nobody wants it."

"Is he alone there?"

"He's got his son Phil with him. Phil's doin' th' work. He's a pooty good boy Phil is, mebby a mite stuck up, but not so you'd notice it much. An' he's mighty good to his old dad. The boy's mother was determined he should have a college education an' he got it—though how she managed it I can't understand. But it ain't doin' him any good. He's jest tied down thar to the old man an' th' farm."

Jim Atherton stirred uneasily.

"And the boy's mother?"

"She died 'bout four years ago."

The man from the city put on his hat.

"Thank you," he said. "Goodby."

"Goodby," drawled the man on the fence. He looked after the retreating figure. Then he drew the silver coin from his pocket and bit on it. Evidently satisfied with the test he slipped the dollar back and grinned until his blue eyes were almost closed.

Jim Atherton went down the main street to the old tavern and drank a glass of buttermilk and asked about his lunch and the means of transportation to Monticello, the nearest railway town. And after he had sat on the porch awhile and half dozed in the sleepy atmosphere, he ate the simple fare that the tavern provided and started out for a walk.

The air was warm and he walked slowly. Somehow he turned toward the Ingram farm. He remembered that the old swimming hole in the Four-mile creek, a favorite resort in that boyhood time was just off the road in the ravine and close to the line of the old farm. He would visit the ancient resort.

It hadn't changed. It was still the same quiet, shaded spot. He dipped his fingers in the water. It was just of a proper coolness.

Jim Atherton was fond of the water. He had been a clever swimmer when he was a boy. It was an art he had practiced whenever opportunity offered. At the seaside resorts he had visited he always improved the chances for enjoying his favorite sport.

A sudden desire to get into the water came to him. He looked around. The place was absolutely quiet and deserted.

He rapidly removed his clothes and laid them on the big flat stone he had used for the same purpose seven-and-twenty years before.

Then he slipped into the water.

It gave him a pleasant sensation. The temperature seemed exactly right. He waded out to the deeper places and presently found himself swimming easily and lightly.

The old swimming hole had lost none of its alluring charms.

He was floating on his back looking up at the interlacing branches of the trees and the patches of bright blue sky beyond and the drifting white clouds when without warning his legs were seized by a terrible contraction. He tried to kick it off. He was powerless. He felt himself sinking and uttered a wild cry of terror.

He knew what had seized him. It was cramp. His mind was quite clear despite the drumming in his ears. He realized that he was drowning. He wondered how the street would take it and what the papers would say. He offered no resistance as the waters drew him down. His head roared; there was fire before his eyes.

Then he was fighting and struggling. He struck out with his clinched hands. He clung madly to the dark thing that was attacking him.

The next thing he remembered was the sound of a pleasant voice. He was lying on the soft sod beside the swimming hole with his face downward. Somebody was rubbing him briskly with a coarse towel.

"You're coming back all right," said a pleasant voice. "Lie still until I get the circulation going. I fancy the cramp has gone. It was lucky I saw you leaving the road. And it was lucky too that I heard you call for help. You were in the deepest hole of all and you gave me a hard fight for a moment or two. But you're all right. There. Now you can put on your clothes. No symptoms of a chill, eh?"

He was a fine looking young fellow, clear eyed and dark haired, alert and quick and cheery. He brought Jim Atherton his clothes and helped him dress.

"Sit here in the sun until you are warmed all through," he said. "Now you are looking yourself again."

The rescued man found his voice.

"Fine boy," he murmured. "Fate sent a worthy messenger. It's a good thing she didn't send a laggard. But, boy you are dripping. Take care of yourself. Don't mind me."

"I'm all right," laughed the young man. "I warmed up working over you. I've a coat on the fence yonder and I'll slip it on too."

Jim Atherton eagerly watched him.

"Boy," he said, "a good many people will think you have done a good afternoon's work. I confess I'm one of them. Give me your hand." He took the young man's hand and stared into his face. "You need not tell me your name. It is Philip Ingram."

The young man started.

"That is a very good guess," he said.

"It is not a good guess," Jim Atherton answered. "I knew your mother." He paused a moment. "Twenty-seven years ago and to-day her son saves my life."

The young man had drawn back a little. Now he came nearer.

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"James Atherton."

"Why, why," cried the young man, "you once lived here! And you knew the old swimming hole. Of course, of course. I've heard of you very often, sir. The village is quite proud of you. You are really the Mr James Atherton of—of Wall street?"

The financier slowly smiled.

"I think I am the Atherton you mean."

"Then," said the young man, "I have a packet for you."

"A packet?"

"Yes. It is at the house. My mother gave it to me just before—before she died. It contains all the letters you sent to her when you were children together. She wanted me to give it into your hands some time and say to you that she had not forgotten."

There was a little silence.

"I want the packet," said Jim Atherton slowly, "and I want you."

The young man started and drew back.

"Wait," said Atherton. "I am doing this not so much for you as for your mother's memory. I know she would wish it. She gave you an education to fit you for better things. It is in my power to help you, to develop you, to make a useful and influential man of you. I have no son. I am alone in the world."

The face of the young man was pale.

"No," he said, "I cannot accept. I have a father who needs me."

"I know about your father," said Atherton. "I know about the western journey he is advised to take. Here." He quickly drew money from his pocket and thrust it into the young man's hands. "That's an advance on your salary. You will take your father to Colorado. You will see that he is comfortably settled. You will provide everything for him that he needs. And then you will come to me. Is it a promise?"

The young man hesitated a moment longer.

"Yes," he said, "I promise."

"Now bring me the packet," said Jim Atherton.—W. R. Rose in Cleveland Plain Dealer.

LEFT OUT.

I was waiting for Annie—or perhaps I should say Miss Hicks now—at Portland road station at 4 o'clock. I was wearing what was, practically, a Panama hat, though I do not mean to say I gave a fiver for it, and a pink tie; she was always rather a girl for pink. I stuck a cigarette in my head and mooned up and down waiting. Her manner had been a bit queer when I asked her to come, she seemed to think it over a good deal before she said she would. I shouldn't have been suprised if she had never turned up at all, but at 4.20 there she was, looking like a duchess as usual. Whatever I may have against her, it's no good saying she hasn't got style, because she has. When I'm serving anybody in the shop I'm never taken in. I know if they are the right thing or the imitation fast enough.

She stared rather disagreeably, I thought, by saying that she thought those big hats did no suit little men. There was not a word about her being late. Considering that I had only bought the hat because she said she liked Panamas I thought it a bit hard. But I said nothing. I mean I said nothing about the hat. I said, "Regent's Park I suppose?" And she said she supposed it was as good there as anywhere. "Or as bad," she added in rather a nasty way.

Presently she said to me: "What chance is there of you ever being able to make £3 a week?"

"Well," I said, "it may come, Annie. I think Mr Parkinson's satisfied with me."

"Do you?" she said. "I had tea with him last Sunday."

"My aunt!" I said. "You're getting on. You never told me anything about it. All the same you know the reputation he's got. He isn't the man to do anybody a good turn without expecting something for it."

"Don't be such a silly. It's like telling me I can't take care of myself. No, I'm not going off there. I'm going to stick to the walk. I like to see people."

Women change a good deal. A few Sundays before it was all, "Oh, take me out of this beastly crowd, George." And I did take her right out of it, and a very nice, quiet time we had.

"Any way you like," I said. "Of course with regard to Parkinson, I did not mean to imply anything. Let's say no more about it. Still I hope you'll give me the honor and pleasure of taking tea with me to-day."

"I can't," she said. "It's very kind of you, but I've promised Mr Parkinson for today. I shall have to be off in half an hour too. It doesn't do to keep him waiting. You see we've had to talk of it again, and I suppose you see which way the wind blows?"

A cold shudder seemed to run down my back. "Look here, Annie," I said, "tell us straight out what you mean. We're engaged, aren't we?"

"No," she said. "I'm very sorry, George. I'm sure you're as nice as a man could be in many ways, but of course you aren't Mr Parkinson. I've thought it all over and decided it couldn't be. Mr Parkinson has £5 a week and occasional commissions. Call it £300 a year altogether and you're inside the mark. Well, there you are. Of course I want to keep friends with you, but ——"

"Tell me straight," I said. "Do you mean to say that you're engaged to this Mr Parkinson?"

"Of course I do. That's what I've been telling you all this time."

"Ho! Very well! Very well indeed! Then Mr Parkinson will get his blooming head broken off."

"If you're going to use language like that I shan't stop. Suppose you had a row with Parkinson, what would be the good? You'd be into the police court, and my name be brought in. And that's a nice thing to do to a lady you pretend to love. Also you'd get the boot. Last time you were out of a berth you were out for a long time if I remember right."

She did remember right. I'm not likely to forget it as long as I live either. It weighed with me a good deal that.

"Can't you see which side your bread's buttered?" she said.

"What do you mean? Do you think it would do me any good if I went to Parkinson and told him that I resigned my claims?"

"How can you be so silly. Supposing he thought you had ever pretended to have any claims, it wouldn't hurt me but you would be out in the street on the first excuse. I know Mr Parkinson, and he's not one to stand anything of that kind. What I meant was that you should be sensible and remember that I'm your friend.

"You think that perhaps you might be able to put in a word for me with him. There will be Williamson's berth vacant after Christmas, and if you could say that from what you had noticed you thought——"

"I wouldn't do you that injury, George. I wouldn't indeed. Why, it would be as good as telling him that there was something between us, and that you hadn't been able to act like a man and give me up properly."

"I can act like a man fast enough if that's all you want. I'll soon show——"

"Great Scott!" she said, looking at the watch strapped on her wrist, "I've got to cut and run. Do believe it's all for the best, George. Look at it the right way. See you again one of these days."

So I'm left out of everything, as usual.—Barry Pain, in London Sphere.

Some people know too much to believe anything.

A man would rather overlook his sins than overhear them.

HURRYING HIM A LITTLE.

In His Conversation He Reminded Her of a Steamboat.

The steamer was moving very slowly up the broad, swift river. Several miles ahead, where there was a bend, a sharp point of land projected a considerable distance into the stream. It had been in sight nearly an hour. On the upper deck sat a young couple, engaged in earnest conversation.

"Lucinda," he was saying, "we've known each other a long time, haven't we?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Five or six years, at least, isn't it?"

"I believe so."

"Don't you think a girl ought to know a fellow pretty well by that time?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"You've never heard anything bad about me, have you?"

"No."

"And in five or six years a young man ought to know a girl pretty well, oughtn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"We've been together a good deal, too, Lucinda."

Then there was a long pause.

"And of course you must have suspected."

Another protracted silence.

"Anybody would naturally suspect—though I've never been in a position until lately and yet my mind has been made up all the time—and I can't tell you how much I——"

Then Lucinda spoke.

"Henry," she said, "do you know you remind me of this steamboat?"

"Er—how?"

"It takes you such a long time to get to the point."

Applying the Closure

He was one of those long sad faced men who never seem to be able to resist talking to their fellow passengers in a train or any similar conveyance and seating himself next to an inoffensive individual smoking a big black cigar and reading a paper he at once began to worry him with questions.

"Sir," he said, "will you allow your boy to smoke cigarettes when he grows up?"

"I've never given the question a minute's thought," replied the other.

The other man panted for breath.

"And," he went on faintly, "will you allow him to drink?"

Again the smoker answered that he had never thought about it.

"Oh," gasped the sad faced man, "can such people exist. To think——"

But then the other man interrupted him.

"Look here, sir," he said. "You mean well no doubt, but let me tell you that I've been a confirmed bachelor for the last thirty five years!"

Then, at last, the sad faced man was silent. He had something to think about.

Couldn't Tell.

"Well, well, neighbor Weaver, I see as how ye've got a new hired man over to your place," remarked Uncle Charlie Seaver as he leaned over the pasture fence and accepted a chew from his friend's heart-case tobacco pouch. "Somethin' peculiar about the way that feller walks. Is he a mite lame?"

"Hub ding busted if I know whether the cuss's lame or not," ejaculated Mr Weaver, expectorating into the pig weed beside the fence. "To tell ye truth, neighbor Seaver, I never seen th' cuss move fast enough so's I could find out. That hired man may be lame in th' nigh leg, as ye say, but I guess we'll never know the truth. Huh!"—Puck.

The Witty Warden.

"You'd hardly expect to find a sense of humor in prison officials," says an American representative on the International Prison Commission, "but during an inspection made by some Americans interested in penal matters of a penitentiary in England one of us was thus surprised.

"'I presume,' observed the American, 'that here, as elsewhere, you prison officials find existence painful enough.'

"'I think you may fairly say so, sir,' responded the warden, with a grim smile, 'seeing the number of felons we have on our hands.'"—Lippincott's.

The Wonders of Science.

It was left for the exhibitor of a phonograph in the streets of Utrecht, according to an American traveller, to put the finishing touch to the wonderful invention.

There was the sound of a military band in full blast, and then suddenly the tune stopped and "Halt!" rang hoarsely out upon the air.

"Who's that interrupting the concert?" flippantly inquired the American, edging close to the operator.

"That," said the man, surveying him blandly, "was the voice of Napoleon Bonaparte, giving the order at the Battle of Waterloo."—Youth's Companion.

Good to Remember.

Physical defects can be turned into incentives to success instead of drawbacks, what we look upon as handicaps in the end may prove spurs to enable us to reach the goal of desire, if we know but how to use them. We make our own happiness, we carve our own successes.—Exchange.

Bleach Ivory in the Sun.

After cleaning ivory expose it to the sun. This assists in bleaching it.

'Ighly 'Armful.

If you are an Englishman, don't think that 'ugging is 'armless; it is 'armful.—Northwestern Academian.

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