

OUR SECULAR STORY

FRIGHTENED BY AN ECHO;

OR,

Ignorance is the Mother of Fear.

A low-roofed hut, half log cabin and half dugout, clung to the side of a steep, wind-swept slope, which was brown with dry, rustling tufts of bunch grass and flooded with the light of the full moon sailing through an unclouded sky above the great bare foothills and the low, dim ridge of the mountains.

An old man was sitting up in his bed in one corner of the room, waving his arms and humming a tune softly to himself; a fevered light shone in his eyes, and as his wandering gaze went out to the vast brown shoulder of the hill he saw it not, but rather caught the gleam of the light on the clustered leaves of the terraced vineyards of his own home valley and heard the women singing as they descended the mountain side bearing their bundles of hay and with their sickles in their hands.

His companions were sound asleep, rolled in their blankets on the dirt floor; a swarthy half-breed boy, with his dark hair falling across his closed eyes, and a cowboy, weary with his day's long ride, with his arms outstretched and his strong features looking pallid in the square of moonlight that fell across the room.

The old man rose noiselessly, dressed himself, drew a violin from its case under the bed, and passed out into the glory of the night. It was not the first time he had eluded them thus and had stolen away and returned in the morning while they yet slept.

That night the half-breed awoke; the light just then fell across the bed—it was empty. He sprang to his feet and called the cowboy and they searched in and about the cabin, but the old man seemed to have disappeared as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. The white man gave up and stood rubbing his drowsy eyes, inclined to go back and go to sleep, but the half-breed ran round and round the cabin like a hound with its nose to the trail. All at once he raised his hands aloft and began to gesticulate wildly and point up the hill, talking rapidly in his own peculiar jargon of Chinook and French. Up the hill they went, the dust rising in little puffs as they crushed the dry grass beneath their feet, the half-breed leading the way, while the cowboy followed, wondering what whim could have seized the half crazed old man that he should run away like that.

Over the rise of the hill they came to the breaks of a narrow, rocky canon. Its walls were precipitous, and dangerous breaks yawned in the narrow pathway for the destruction

of pedestrians. Sharp and splinted pinacles thrust themselves up from the depths like spears of a crouching foe. They would have called, but feared that the object of their search would hide from them, so they swung themselves down into the depths. Even as they did so a familiar sound fell upon their ears—familiar, yet seeming strangely wild and unreal heard in that unaccustomed spot; it was the sound of a violin. They climbed on over the slippery rocks and reached a small opening at the foot of a narrow waterfall.

The stunted pines that grew on the canon walls stretched out dark arms that strove to clasp hands across the chasm, and out of their shadow leapt the water, everchanging like some riotous living thing, now plunging straight and white into the abyss, now flinging out an airy veil of spray that broke in a shower of mist upon the rocks.

Upon a jagged point that reached a crumbling edge almost to the very face of the fall stood the old fiddler, his chin resting on his beloved instrument as with nervous fingers grasping the bow he drew from the strings such music as his listeners had never heard before.

Suddenly the superstitious half-breed crouched down upon the rocks, crossing himself. The cowboy's face even wore a look of surprise that was almost fear. Soft and clear, with an unearthly sweetness, the sound of another violin was heard. It seemed to come from the very heart of the fall itself, and its liquid notes blended with the rush of the waters. Then stealing on the senses so gradually that they could hardly tell when it began, a third instrument was heard, plainly distinguishable from the others.

The bow moved slower in the old man's trembling grasp, he ceased to play, and lifted his face, alight with ecstasy toward the falls.

Still, the wonderful melody poured down between the scarred walls of the canon—one after another unseen instrument seemed to take up the strain until the night throbbled with the breath of the harmony. The water shook out its filmy length into the moonlight and the pine boughs seemed to bend lower and lower. Yet, as the sounds multiplied they grew more faint, as they died away they were sweeter still and more entrancing, sweeter—fainter—until the three watchers breathless, listening, heard only the night wind blowing through the dead grass at the top of the cliff and the low rush of the water.

The old man stood with his arms outstretched in silent adoration, the violin slipped from his hold and fell unheeded into the chasm, still he listened as if the echo of the music yet thrilled his brain, then staggered and would have fallen had not the cowboy sprung forward

to catch him, but the half-breed, wild with terror, turned and fled.

Travelers by the Malor trail sometimes turn aside to hear the wonderful echo of the Rocky Canon, and the people in the little mining camp perched like an eagle's nest on the cliff, tell of a poor Swiss fiddler who played to the echo until he went mad. But that was away back in the sixty's, and the floods of thirty years together with the vandal touch of the miner's blast have so changed the profile of crumbling rock, that the walls but answer back in grumbling monotone, and the wild, sweet voice of the canon is forever still.—[Sel.]

The Use of Flies.

"Yes, Bobby," said the minister, who was dining with the family, "everything in this world has its use, although we may not know what it is. Now, there is the fly, for instance. You would not think that flies are good for anything, yet—"

"Oh, yes, I would," interrupted Bobby. "I know what flies are good for."

"What, Bobby?"

"Pa says that they are the only thing what keeps him awake when you are preaching."

A Discovery.

A little girl, on looking up into the sky, asked her mother what those bright things were.

"Stars," she replied.

"What are stars?"

"I don't know," said her mother.

The little girl then happening to look down to the front door steps, saw her father and several gentlemen smoking cigars. She turned to her mother, saying:

"Oh! I know what the stars are. They are the angels smoking cigars."

Who Said Grace?

Sothorn once played an absurd trick on twelve of his friends. He invited them to supper, and wrote a private note to each man beforehand, to ask him to be so good as to say grace, as the chairman was unavoidably prevented from attending the dinner. The faces of those twelve men when they rose in a body to say grace must have been a sight indeed.

God's Apology.

Small Boy.—"Does God ever make apologies?"

Clerical Visitor.—"Certainly not."

S. B.—"Well, pa says you are only an apology for a man."

To say to a man; "I can trust you," speaks more for his religion than to say: "I do not doubt your faith."

The Lambeth Conference.

BY MRS. M. M. TURNER.

Thoughts suggested by passages of the Conference, held in London, England, May, 1897, as rendered by Current History.

"American and Colonial Bishops, the Primates of England, Ireland and Scotland" composed the conference. "The sessions were held behind closed doors."

A good note in the sweet music of liberty of conscience and reason was sounded when a "recoil against centralization and absolutism was revealed, in which the American bishops took a leading part."

"At the close of the conference an encyclical letter supposed to have been written by the Archbishop of Canterbury and signed by the bishops of Gloucester and Winchester summing up the net results of the discussion, was addressed to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

This letter contains the following: "Inasmuch as moral conduct is made by our Lord the test of reality in religious life," etc. This is another note! Moral conduct, not faith, is the "test of reality in religious life".

The letter goes on to say: "The critical study of the bible by competent scholars is essential to the maintenance in the church of a healthy faith. That faith is already in serious danger which refuses to face questions that may be raised either on the authority or genuineness of any part of the scriptures which have come down to us."

"It is quite true that there have been instances where inquiry has led to doubt and ultimately to infidelity. But the best safeguard against such a peril lies in that deep reverence which never fails to accompany real faith."

The writers of the letter do not say, as in all truth they might have said, that doubt and infidelity are found in the ranks of the most profound thinkers and reasoners; honest minded men and women, not committed to any creed, who have searched far and wide for truths "that can be proven without our ceasing to be men," in the bible of the universe and books of our earth.

The bishops have assumed the amusing, though pitiable, position of approving of critical study of the bible "by competent scholars", but this study must be accompanied by "real faith" and the "deep reverence" it engenders, to hold the fort against criticism, reason and science.

The bishops say, "The central object of Christian faith must always be the Lord Jesus Christ himself."

The ropes of "faith" and "reverence" bind these gentlemen to strange, unscientific beliefs, such as the trap in the garden story and the fall of man; an universal del-