

Faith Dixon's Ladder.

BY JACK CLERMONT.

THE weather was warm even for the first of May, and the snow on the mountain side was melting rapidly. The canons and gorges were wild, rushing torrents, roaring and tumbling down to the sunny plain below, where they became tranquil rivers—but all were rivers, even the little brooks, rendered so by the recent rains and thaws.

Far up the mountain side nestled a dot of a house, and in its doorway this pleasant afternoon stood a young woman with a baby in her arms.

She appeared to be anxiously looking for some one who came not, for, presently, she disappeared in the house only to return to the door with a bonnet on her head and a shawl wrapped about the baby.

"We must go and see if we can not find papa, Ray, darling. He never stays away from his dinner unless he is detained by something unusual."

She was a strong young lass, accustomed to the mountains all her life, to their dangers and pitfalls as well as their rugged sides, and her steps, even encumbered with the plump youngster, were light and free.

Faith Dixon was a brave girl naturally, but she had never supposed herself to be a heroine, nor was conscious of all the strength she possessed when confronted with great peril.

Eagerly she pressed forward around the mountain side, where she knew her husband had been at work endeavoring to turn the course of a reckless mountain stream a little away from his few acres of tillable land.

When she reached the place where her husband had been at work, she found his tools, and even his old jean coat lay near them, but no Perry himself was in sight.

Faith looked about her with wildly beating heart, and lifted her strong, clear voice in a loud call:

"Perry! Oh, Perry!"

No answer! What could it mean? What had become of her husband?

She now turned her steps further up the mountain, where, near her, the gorge was deeper and the water dashed along more fiercely.

On, on, she pressed, clinging to boulders and vines for support; little Ray in her arms enjoying it all in baby delight, giving forth now and then a joyous little coo.

She had gone to where the mountain stream swept in through the narrow canon walls, and its roar was almost deafening.

Here she paused and peered down its sides, only to give forth a startled, horrified cry, for there, on a narrow ledge many feet below

her, lay her husband!

"Perry, Perry!" she sobbed. "Oh, are you dead?"

But even as she spoke he moved, turned his head and raised his face, over which the blood was flowing freely.

"Faith!" he called, "Faith, love, is that you? I thought you would come! I missed my footing and fell over the wall; fortunately, I lodged here. I'm only bruised and my head cut a little; but the water is rising gradually and before many hours will sweep me away—if you don't find a rope."

"Oh, Perry, what—tell me—"

"Go home! There are ropes in the stable—and—on the beds, bring anything you can find."

"Yes, I will; don't lose heart. I'll be back in ten minutes."

But even as she spoke she thought of her baby, and how he would impede her progress. "I'll have to leave you, darling, and I'm so afraid; but your father's life demands it."

She carried Ray away some distance, where a bush grew. Under this she placed him, first tying his chubby ankle with one apron string, while with the other she made it fast to the bush.

The water was slowly but surely nearing the poor, prisoned father. He watched it as it crept up inch by inch.

"It will reach me in less than an hour, and if Faith should not get back or meet with an accident—Well, life is sweeter as danger approaches, and she may be in time. I wonder if she took baby with her. Poor, Faith, my dear little wife!"

In the mean time seven months' old Ray had missed his mamma, had discovered that he was fast and set up a lusty squall.

But as the squall did not appear to mend matters, he began to tug at the apron string with all his sturdy strength, until the many kicks and pulls broke the frail strip of calico, and Ray was free.

He proceeded to crawl slowly up the mountain side, highly delighted to find he was really master of himself. On he went, of a truth very slowly, and with no end of slips backward and sidewise, but upward and onward nevertheless, until the infant mountaineer found himself upon the very extreme edge of that awful precipice over which his father had fallen.

"Dah! dah!" chirruped Ray, and his poor father, fancying he heard something, glanced upward only to give a low gasp of horror at sight of that sweet, infantile face, well daubed with yellow clay, it is true, but very sweet to the distracted father.

"Go back, baby!" he shouted. "Go back!" Where is Faith? The water is almost at my feet—and baby! Oh, must his life be sacrificed also?"

"Dah! dah!" repeated Ray, and

just then his mother's voice, raised into a terrified shriek as she discovered where he was, fell upon his ear. He turned his mud daubed, rosy face toward her, chirruped a gay cry of delight—and tumbled over the canon's wall!

Faith never knew how she dragged herself to the spot and looked down upon that, which she felt must be death, to her child at least.

At first she could see nothing. The ledge whereupon her husband had been was almost covered with water.

"Dead!" she moaned, "both dead! Oh, how can I bear it! Too late! too late!"

Then she fancied she heard a voice, a faint call, and looking closer in that mad whirl of waters, she beheld Perry clinging to the lower end of the ledge and—yes—with something in his arms.

"Make the ropes fast quickly, wifey!" he called; "I cannot cling here very many minutes."

There was a bush, a hardy one and strong, quite near. To this Faith tied the ladder she had constructed on her way up the mountain, flung it over the wall and guided it with her own hands until it swung near her fast weakening and nearly fainting husband.

He looked up and saw—not a mere dangling, frail rope as he expected, that he would have had great difficulty in climbing, and perhaps could not have climbed at all encumbered as he now was with the the baby, but a real ladder, rudely constructed, but with knots and straps here and there.

Wondering how Faith could have done it, he seized it and began slowly to drag himself up, feeling a strange dizziness creeping over him, but not only his life, but perhaps his child's, depended upon his reaching solid earth once more.

On, on, slowly, slowly, for poor little limp Ray hung like a lump of lead on his arm; but at last he felt Faith's strong, young arms seize him and pull him over the dangerous edge of the canyon, and he was saved.

"My baby! oh, my baby! is he dead?" moaned the poor mother.

"I don't know. I caught him as he fell by his skirts, and it threw me off my balance and I tumbled into the torrent, but managed to grasp the rocks. Ah, he's all right except the shock and jar. There! he's coming round, wifey!"

The baby opened his sweet eyes and seeing his mother weeping, joined in with a lusty squall for company.

"But the rope," said Perry, when he could speak calmly; "I don't see how you managed."

"Oh, I did it on my way back. It detained me a little, but grandfather was a sea captain, you know, and he used to teach us children all about ropes and ladders, and—

and I feared you could not get up if I did not make it easy."

"You saved my life and Ray's, and I guess my own little wife is a real heroine, though neither she nor I knew it before."

The Stone in the Road.

BY SUSAN H. WIXON.

THERE was once a duke who disguised himself and placed a great rock in the middle of the the road near his palace. Next morning a peasant came that way with his ox cart.

"Oh, these lazy people!" said he, "here is this stone lying right in the middle of the road and no one will take the trouble to put it out of the way." And so Hans went on, scolding about the laziness of the people.

Next came a gay soldier. His head was held so far back that he did not notice the stone, and so he stumbled over it. He began to storm the country people around there for leaving a huge rock in the road. Then he went on.

Next came a company of merchants. When they came to the stone in the road they went off in single file on the other side. One of them cried out:

"Did any one ever see the like of that big stone lying here the whole of the morning and not a single person stopping to take it away!"

It lay there for three weeks, and no one tried to move it. No one inquired how it came there. Then the duke sent around to all the people on his lands to meet him where the rock lay, as he had something to tell them. The day came and a great crowd gathered. Old Hans, the farmer, was there and so were the merchants and the soldier. A horr was heard and a splendid cavalcade came galloping up. The duke alighted and began to speak to the assembled people.

"My friends," said he, "it was I who put this stone here three weeks ago. Every passer-by has left it just where it was and scolded his neighbor for not taking it out of the way."

He stooped and lifted up the stone. Directly underneath it was a round hollow, and in the hollow was a small leathern bag and upon it was written:

"For him who lifts up the stone."

He untied the bag and turned it upside down, and out upon the stone fell a beautiful gold ring and twenty large, bright gold coins. So they all lost the prize because they had not learned the lesson of inquiry, or formed the habit of reasoning, united with dilligence.

Thus may be lost many a golden truth, many a valuable prize, by neglecting to freely inquire into the nature of things, and to use the reasoning faculty.—[Right Living.