Spring Truants

By W. F. BRYAN.

"Where are you going, Buster?" Halvord looked down upon the sturdy figure of Dick Bennington, otherwise "Buster," with a twinkle in the kindly gray eyes.

"Playin' hookey," explained Buster promptly. "Wanter come fishin'?"

For a moment Brian Halvord regarded the boy with judicial gravity.

"You know very well," he began, "that after such a confession it is my bounden duty to see that you are delivered into the tender clutches of Miss Spofford," he reminded. "And yet here I am seriously considering sharing in your crimes and your pleasures, Buster. It's not only schoolboys who play hookey. I think I shall become your accomplice and play hookey myself."

Buster looked up in surprise. Halvord was a grown man! Men did not play hookey. Halvord read the question in the big blue eyes.

"There is a report that I should get out today," he explained. "Not to fulfill business promises is playing hookey just the same as staying away from school."

"The fish are bitin' fine. Jimmy Morrow got 'leven yesterday," said Buster defensively. "I got two lines. I brought one for Bud Schenck, but Bud was 'fraid."

"Clearly this is the intervention of Providence," declared Halvord laughingly. "Lead on, my youthful tempter! But suppose we stop for lunch first."

"BUT IT WILL BE NEXT SATURDAY, WILL IT NOT?"

Halvord's boarding place was just around the corner, and soon he had an ample lunch put up to supplement Buster's well filled box. Together they turned their steps from the village across the fields to where the "river," scarcely more than a brook, tumbled over the rocks in its haste to join the larger stream beyond.

They found a little nook in the rocky wall where the gray rocks widened slightly to form a grassy lawn fringed with trees just unfolding their leaves. There was still sufficient hint of chill in the air to lend sparkle to the sunny warmth, and to Halvord, long buried at his desk and the intricate analysis which formed his work, it seemed as though he had become a boy again as he dug angleworms with a bit of broken branch and placed them in a box.

Never on his fishing trips during vacation time had he enjoyed half the sport with costly rods and reels that he found in the grimy length of line which Buster extracted from his pocket. It required some surgical tailoring to remove the barb of the hook, which had fastened itself in the lining, and Halvord watched the proceeding with eyes suddenly grown young.

It was too early in the season for the fish to be finical as to fare, so the worms were more eagerly accepted than the fanciest flies would be later in the season. By noon the two had caught a goodly string, and Halvord, finding a suitable place of slate in the stream, decided to add some of the fish to their picnic fare. So he built a rude stove with the flat slab of slate for the broiler.

Buster, delighted with this novelty, assisted with a will, and they were so engrossed with their task that neither noticed the approach of a slender girlish figure until a laughing voice demanded an explanation of Buster's presence so far from the schoolhouse.

"We're playing hookey," explained Halvord shamelessly. "Won't you play hookey, too, Miss Bennington? If you will you may have some of the fish."

As he spoke he pointed to the contents of the combined lunch boxes spread upon a stone and proffered a well broiled fish upon a bit of clean birch bark. Margaret Bennington looked, hesitated and was lost.

"I suppose that I should make Dicky go right to school," she said severely, "but I haven't the heart."

"I should be at work," Halvord admitted, "but, like Buster, I have the fishing fever, and I am a worse truant than he. The morning has been well worth it, though, and there is still the long afternoon."

As he spoke he deftly lifted other fish from the flat top of the improvised stove and announced that lunch was served. The salt packed for the hard boiled eggs also served to season the fish, and to two of the trio at least the exertions of the morning gave added zest to appetite.

Margaret, too, seemed to fall under the spell of the day, and after lunch Halvord resigned his line to her, well content to merely superintend her fishing.

Ever since he had come to Chester he had worshiped Margaret Bennington from afar, but he had absorbing work in hand and had not been able to contest with the younger members of her court. Margaret, on her part, finding Halvord at first decidedly entertaining, had in pique decided that he was an old man and oblivious to her many charms. And here she found him as much a boy as her ten-year-old brother. His unexpected enthusiasm and obvious capacity for enjoyment captivated her. It was all so different from the affectation of world weariness which was the approved pose among the wealthy youth of Chester.

The sun was dropping toward the west before Buster reluctantly wound up his lines and thrust them, all dripping, into his long suffering pockets. Even then the trio lingered to gather flowers, and it was twilight before they reached the road at last and came to a parting of the ways.

"It has been a most pleasant afternoon," said Margaret as she extended her slim, cold hand to Halvord. "I am very grateful to you."

"It is I who should be grateful," said Halvord softly, forgetting to relinquish her hand. "May I hope that some time again"—

"It sets a bad example to Dicky," she said laughingly, "but some Saturday when he does not have to play truant we may come again."

"Saturday is a long way off, four days," Halvord said dismally. "But it will be next Saturday, will it not?"

"Next Saturday," she promised as she withdrew her hand.

"Gee," exclaimed Buster as he and Margaret swung down the tree arched lane, leaving the chemist-author standing, hat in hand, "but I've had a bully day! Aren't you glad you came?"

He held up his string of fish, thrilling with pardonable pride.

"I've got a fine catch too!"

The girl looked straight ahead into the purple twilight.

"Yes, Buster, dear; I'm glad I came. And I think we made a fine catch."

Full Grown Children.

"At an out of the way little station," said a railway guard, "a party of workingmen wished to book to a town in the midlands to see a football match. Unfortunately the booking clerk had only a limited number of tickets for that journey at his disposal. Eventually he got out of his difficulty by dividing the pieces of pasteboard and issuing children's tickets to the party, at the same time explaining to me how matters stood.

"'They've paid the full fare, of course,' he remarked, 'so you must see 'em through.'

"I had almost forgotten the matter when a ticket examiner at B. came to me and remarked, with a sorrowful shake of the head:

"'This under age dodge is getting too warm!'

"'What's the matter?' I asked.

"'Matter?' he echoed disgustedly. 'Why, here's a whole carriage full o' children wot plays cards, drinks whisky and wears whiskers!'"—London Tit-Bits.

A Subtle Distinction.

Ned, the friend of Bill, the fish merchant, surveyed him reproachfully.

"Bill," he said solemnly, "I ain't the chap to round on a pal, but that there fish you sold my missus this mornin' was—well, the cat ain't been near the house since and"—

"Ned," replied the friend of his youth sadly, "mine's a difficult job. I've got to make a living, and if the fish is good I sells it and does pretty well. If it ain't good I sells it and does pretty well also. It ain't my fault; I never sent the stuff wrong. But you're a pal o' mine, and I'll let you know 'ow you can find out for yourself 'ow things are."

"Yes," said Ned eagerly.

"If you 'ears me shout 'Fine fresh fish!' you can reckon it is fresh fish, but if I shout 'Fish, oh!'—well, it is fish, oh!"—London Tit-Bits.

Moon Blindness in Horses.

It is said that "moon blindness" in a horse is caused by "wolf teeth"—two small surplus teeth just in front of the first upper premolars, one on each side of the upper jaw. An authority says: "The 'wolf teeth' do not cause eye disease or any other harm and usually are not discovered until the eye disease appears. The eye trouble is 'periodic ophthalmia' (moon blindness), which is hereditary and incurable. Thousands upon thousands of horses suffer from this eye disease, yet have not a 'wolf tooth' in their heads. The important matter to remember in connection with periodic ophthalmia is not the significance of the 'wolf tooth,' but the necessity and importance of rejecting from breeding operations all afflicted with periodic ophthalmia, or cataract, which results from repeated attacks."

Do You Count Your Steps?

Do you count your steps? It is a silly and useless practice, but at the back of his head this writer is always counting his steps. He can tell you the number of steps that lead from his flat in Kensington to South Kensington station (there is an unlucky thirteen at the station) until he has mounted to the office window. And when he put the question to his wife she could not tell the number of the stairs she had climbed (they are twenty) for three years to the first floor flat.—London Chronicle.

Her First Trophy.

By J. LUDLUM LEE.

Harriet Lake was indolent by nature. She knew it and admitted it. On warm mornings she preferred a rocking chair on the piazza to any outdoor sport. But Harriet at twenty-four was taking on flesh, and the specialist whom she consulted said, "Play golf, take long walks and eat no rich food." So Harriet went in for golf.

She had just driven her ball from the second tee, a very short and crooked drive, when a cry from the bushes reached her ears. She glanced at her caddie, and, as if having received a silent command, he started in the direction of the ball. Harriet's face wore a somewhat bored expression. Waits between drives were so long. The caddie returned breathless.

"You certainly did swat that gentleman one, Miss Lake," he announced. "Your ball hit him right on the back of the hand as he was pulling some bushes aside looking for his own ball."

"Lucky fellow!" replied Harriet. "I wish something would hit me on the back of the hand so I wouldn't have to trail around this green every day in the week!"

They had reached the fourth green when the skies suddenly clouded over. Glad of an excuse to stop, Harriet directed the caddie to take her sticks back to her locker, while she would cut across lots home for luncheon.

She walked slowly through the old orchard that adjoined the links and was startled by the rumbling of thunder. Realizing that there was no protection in sight, she hurried on until she reached a broad lane that must lead to a house.

Large drops of rain had begun to descend. Another clap of terrific thunder, and Harriet began to run. When the lightning flashed her ambition and energy seemed blighted by it. At the end of the lane stood an old barn. With renewed efforts she started for its sheltering roof and, breathless, reached the door and dashed in.

Her hat had blown off. Her black hair was falling in tiny ringlets about

"MAYBE YOU CAN SAY 'YES.'"

her forehead. Her petticoats were held at ankle length to lend fleetness to her strides. She certainly made a stunning picture as she stood in the barn door.

What was that queer noise? It might be a horrid rat. But before she had time to decide she was confronted by a tall chap clad in white flannels.

"H'm—I beg pardon," he began. "Perhaps we are poaching?"

"We?" repeated Harriet. "Are there two of you?"

"Well, almost," said her companion. "That is, I am here intact, but my friend over there is a bit damaged by a blow he got on the links. Otherwise he's a very decent sort of chap. We ran in out of the rain, you know," he added.

Harriet glanced guiltily in the direction of the "friend," who seemed busy opening a basket.

"I ran in out of the wet, too," she announced finally. "You don't mind if I stay until the lightning stops, do you?"

"Mind? Well, I guess not!" assured the man, promptly turning host. "Come over and meet my friend, Mr. Burch, won't you? Billy, here's a lady come to our feast."

Billy rose and beamed on the unexpected guest. He was taking a most delicious looking lunch from a large automobile hamper.

"I wish I could shake hands with you, Miss—Miss"— he stammered.

"My name is Lake," supplied Harriet.

"Considering the day," said the chap in white flannels, "it's very appropriate."

"Shut up, Arthur, will you, and let me finish my speech?" Billy interposed. "What I was saying when my married friend, Mr. Ralston, interrupted"—considerable emphasis on the word married—"was that I cannot shake you by the hand owing to the fact that some clumsy gawk selected me as a target this morning. Really there should be a law preventing such persons running at large."

Harriet was getting up courage to confess when Ralston came to her rescue.

"Why talk about personalities, Billy?" he began. "Suppose you ask Miss Lake to share our repast?"

The three of them sat down, tailor fashion, on the floor of the old barn and made inroads on the luncheon. Nothing was wanting. Cold drink in patent bottles, sandwiches, salads, strawberries and a jar of cream. Such a feast! And when they had finished they were old friends.

"I say, Billy, Violet certainly does put up a fine luncheon," said Ralston.

"She's the greatest girl a man ever found," agreed Billy.

Violet! Who was she? Harriet could not explain why she felt a touch of disappointment on finding that Billy, too, was a married man.

"I guess I'll be running along," said she, after thanking the men for their hospitality. "Oh, no; you need not drive me over in the machine. The fact is I just live in that big shingled house beyond this fence." With a wave of her hand she was gone, and the men watched her slip under the fence and disappear behind the tall hedge on the other side.

The storm did not clear away entirely, and Harriet realized that the lawn dance which the Williamses were holding in honor of their first anniversary must be given indoors instead of on the lawn, so she donned her prettiest frock. Harriet was never on time for anything, and when she arrived the dance was in full swing. Mrs. Williams greeted her at the door.

"You do look peachy, Harriet," said her hostess. "What have you been doing to yourself? You are more lovely than ever. Oh, the poor, poor men!" added Mrs. Williams mockingly.

They stood together for a moment, and the beaming face of Billy Burch confronted them.

"Mr. Burch, this is Miss Lake," said Mrs. Williams. "I know you two will get along immensely. Poor Billy was hit in the hand today by some straggling lunatic who thinks she can play golf. But, barring his injured right hand, he's the dearest man in the world—except one."

At supper time Billy discovered a cozy corner in the conservatory, where they could "eat in peace without being interrupted by that married man, Ralston," as he expressed it. Harriet was eating salad and studying Billy with her big, dreamy black eyes.

"I wish Violet was here," Billy exclaimed as he tasted the salad.

"Really, Mr. Burch, I am sorry that I am not sufficient company."

Billy actually snickered, but Harriet was plainly in earnest, so Billy explained:

"You see, Violet is my colored cook that I brought up with me from the south, and if she were here she could taste this salad and then go home and make a better one. See?"

"But, Mr. Burch, I, too, have a confession to make."

"Spare me!" cried Billy. "I will run for Arthur if you wish a father confessor. He's listened to my sins for years and really borne with them very leniently."

But Harriet insisted.

"I want you to know that I am the 'clumsy gawk,' the 'straggling lunatic' who hit your hand today."

Billy beamed.

"That's not the only place you hit," he said. "That'll get well. But you gave my old heart such a blow that it is completely broken in two, Miss Harriet, and only you can mend it."

"But, Mr. Burch"— began Harriet.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," interrupted Billy, "but don't say it yet. I'm in love, and I know it, though I don't expect you to fall in love with a cripple on sight; but some day, Harriet," he continued in softer and more earnest tones, "maybe you can say 'Yes.'"

Harriet looked once more into his clear, honest eyes. She, too, was in love, and she knew it. He had none the best of her there.

"I haven't said 'No,' have I?" she asked. And Billy felt that in time his heart would be mended.

A Cure For Despondency.

A large, fleshy man with whiskers told me of a sovereign cure for despondency the other day. He had a number of girls in his employ, among them one that he knew was in struggling circumstances and supporting a sick mother on a none too healthy salary. She had come into the store and laid her purse and somber widow hat on the counter while she did something about the place. The large fleshy man got between her and the purse, and when she was not looking he slipped a five dollar bill into it and moved unconsciously about his business. In the afternoon he noticed that she had a red spot in each cheek, and she was heard asking other girls if they believed in fairies. She never solved the mystery—it was two years ago—and never will unless she reads this. But the five dollar bill was very useful in its little way, and the large despondent man felt so good for two whole days that he hip-hopped on the sidewalk on his way home.—Minneapolis Journal.

Living on Next to Nothing.

Most people do not need the evidence of recently published statistics to prove to them that it costs more to live in London than it once did. But it is doubtful if any Londoner now living was ever able to do it on £80 a year, as Boswell's poor Irish painter did. "He allowed £10 for clothes and linen. He said a man might live in a garret at 18 pence a week. Few people would inquire where he lived, and if they did it was easy to say, 'Sir, I am to be found at such a place.' By spending threepence at a coffee house he might be for some hours a day in very good company. He might dine for sixpence, breakfast on bread and milk for a penny and do without supper." Of course expenses can always be reduced to a minimum by doing without things. The question is, Which of our various expenses is unessential? Boswell's Irishman hinted at one. "On clean shirt days he went abroad and paid visits," says his ingenious chronicler.—London Chronicle.