

The Burnt Child Dreads the Fire.

GEORGE ROBINSON was a prospering farmer residing some ten or twelve miles from the beautiful city of Bayford. He was a robust old gentleman with those silver locks which usually bespeak wisdom. His face was clean shaven except for a goat-whisker which he was wont to encourage along by pulling. Mrs Robinson, a kind-hearted old woman, had taken great care in rearing her family in the love and fear of God. Jack the oldest was now twenty-four, and, like many young men of the neighborhood, had found his way to Western Canada, where he hoped to make his fortune in the gold fields of the Yukon. Marguerite, next oldest in the family, was a duteous young girl of eighteen and a great help to her weak mother. Frank, a boy of fifteen, aided his father on the farm. And lastly little Vera, only seven, was ever occupied with her few school books or play things.

Bayford was fast increasing in population, having now reached the 60,000 mark. The problem of heating and lighting the numerous homes at a low expense was one not easily dealt with. There were no waterfalls nor even rivers within miles for the generation of electricity. Until now artifical gas or acteylene gas were chiefly used, both of which were expensive. The City Coucil Board decided on sending for expert engineers who might discover a substitute for artifical gas, within easy reach of the city, and thus greatly lower the price of fuel.

These men claimed that some fifteen miles north of Bayford lay a great source of natural gas. Immediately Messrs. Braken and Sharkey, in company with a few of the other rich men of Bayford, formed what was known as the Bayford Natural Gas Co., and having bought up most of the land in the said district, had a well dug in order to gain access to this long-desired treasure.

The Bayford Globe and Journal now found little room for war news. The principal pages were taken up with such reports as "Natural Gas a Sure Success", "Messrs. Braken and Sharkey Our Future Millionaires" etc. The news boy was ever busy yelling "Extra, Extra" and wore a smile in spite of those over-hanging clouds of misery that follow the paper-vender wherever he be.

A dial was placed outside the office of Braken and Sharkey which indicated to what depth the miners had reached, and it was wonderful to see the interest taken in the reading of it. Braken and Sharkey's office was crowded with people from morning till night, pleading for shares. Agents were soon sent about the country selling Natural gas shares, and it was an unlucky day for the Robinson family when one of these impostors put his foot on George's premises.

"Good morning sir."

"And the same be to ye, sir."

"I'm Mr. Fox, agent for Bayford Natural Gas; undoubtedly you have heard of the company by this name."

"Faith and I have, and ye say ye are an agent for this company? Come step inside."

The door being opened, Mr. Fox followed George into the house, and Mrs Robinson with a welcome smile gave the unknown visitor a chair.

"Pray be sated Mr. Fox," began Mr. Robinson.

"With the greatest of pleasure, Mr. Robinson."

Agent Fox brought his chair near the stove and drew from his pocket a number of documents, which he quickly ran over and presented to George.

"Well, Mr. Robinson, here are a few names of the people who in your district have purchased shares in the Natural Gas Co. They, as many other people, see the great opportunities we are placing at their disposal."

(Aside) "Frank, me bye, pass me over me specks. Ah' some of me best neighbours.—Haywood, Christie, Aird—"; and thus went on George reading aloud.

"Never has any company made such offerings to the public. Shares are selling at \$80 and will advance within short notice. Remember, friend, what an old proverb says:—"Opportunities neglected are irrecoverable."

"Ta be sure, I larnt that when a wee sonny at school; but neighbour we are very cosy here and this is like betting on the horses at the Country Fair, a mere game of luck."

"I beg your pardon Mr. Robinson, this is not luck, but a sure success. You know what it means to supply the fast increasing city of Bayford with gas—gas that costs us nothing but to mine and transport by means of pipes to the city."

"Ah' yes ; to the city ; we country folks niver git the benefit of anything. Ye want to make things convenient for the city guys."

"Oh' no, Mr. Robinson, we will, in time, have pipes running out into the country, so that you people too may benefit by our undertaking."

"Very good, very good, but just think of that supply stopping itself."

"Exhaust you mean?"

"Faith and that's the word, hexhaust, ta be sure, that's the word."

"Why, Mr. Lafferty, the great engineer, claims there is enough gas there for a city three times the size of Bayford, and that it will last 'till all your great-grand-children are dead. You would be sorry to see your neighbours spinning by in their autos, while you jog along with your horse and cart ; but it will be too late then. The shares will be selling too high for you to buy."

"What do you say, Ann," inquired George, turning to his wife."

"Plaise yerself, da ; you always know best."

"Well I reckon I'd better take five shares."

The deed was soon settled and Mr. Fox reached for his hat and coat that hung on the rack.

"Good day, Mr. Robinson ; I'll be around again when the dividends are due."

"Good day, neighbour, and remember dont ye dar come again if the company aint a success."

A year had elapsed since the agent's visit, and daily the Robinson family awaited a letter from the Bayford Natural Gas Co. At last their expectations were fulfilled, for a letter came informing them that their dividend was \$150 and also that an agent would come to visit them within a few days.

When Mr. Robinson's children heard the news of his success they came running to him each with his or her request. First came little Vera who pleaded that her father buy her a doll and carriage like the one Nellie Haywood had. Next came Frank who was confident of getting those skates and boots he had seen in Hardy's Athletic Store ; and of course Marguerite had to have her hat.

True enough was the news from the Bayford Natural Gas Co. Three days after the arrival of the letter, Mr. Fox was seen coming up the road.

Without hesitation Mr. Robinson invested all the money available and mortgaged his whole farm so as to invest more.

"So, Mr. Robinson" said the agent, "you see I didn't try to swindle you, did I"?

"No indade ye didn't and y'are the best friend I ever met. Y'are helping me to reap a fortune."

"Good day Mr. Robinson I hope you and your family will be well when I come around again."

"And I wish ye the same neighbour. 'Member y'are welcome to our house any time ye come."

Mr. Fox was gone and George started to finish some fencing that he had been doing when the agent came along, all the time thinking that some day he wouldn't be turning the sod to seek a living.

Time rolled on as the ceaseless waves, and soon four months had passed since the agent's last visit. It was noticed that the people were beginning to get weary and despair of ever striking the great source of natural gas. The news boy noticed a decline in the sale of his papers, and at last the Bedford Natural Gas Co. gave up the undertaking as worthless, perhaps fearing if they dug deeper they would reach Dante's Inferno.

Mr. Robinson was ruined. His land was soon sold by the lawyer and he and his family were thrown penniless out on the road. He pondered over the agent's words and said to himself: "It took a man as foxie as his name to persuade me to invest." But in truth he might strike his breast and say:—"It was due to lack of judgement on my part." It was no time for Mr. Robinson to recollect things of the past, for, penniless as he was, he had to do as best he could.

Little Vera was adopted by a kind neighbour, Mrs Haywood, Frank was hired on the Dolan farm. And Mrs Robinson and daughter went to live with some relations in Bayford. It was hard to find work, and Mr. Robinson had to content himself with shovelling coal for the Lakawana Coal Co. After a week or two he managed to secure a tenement in what might justly be called the slums of Bayford. Here Mrs Robinson and her beloved daughter Marguerite kept house living very scantily. In such state of affairs lived the Robinson family for about two years. The condition to which they were driven seemed to be a punishment for their past folly.

At last these chains of misery were broken, for one sunny day in the month of June came a boy neatly attired in a blue suit adorned with brass buttons and on his head he wore a small box-cap.

"Mr. Robinson," cried the boy up the steep and narrow stairs that led to the tenement.

George, opening the door, bid the boy come up.

"Telegram for George Robinson."

"I'm him; give me it."

George, eager to know what was on it, snatched it from the messenger's hand and began reading it.

"Ten cents sir, come across," growled the boy in his city slang.

"Marguerite, me gal, give this sonny ten cents."

The boy received his pay and was off.

"What's the news papa," said Marguerite.

"Well be still 'till I read ye it."

George with a loud voice began as follows :—

Prince Rupert B. C. June 4, 1916.

Mr. George Robinson,

Bayford.

Coming home in about eight days. With a fortune made in Yukon.

SON JOHN.

The happiness that reigned in this humble home can not be imagined. Three years had passed since last they heard from John, and they had given him up as dead. The sun once more shed its rays on the Robinson family. A week passed quietly by and Marguerite and her mother were busy cleaning up their little home to welcome back the lost boy.

Ten days after the telegram had been received John arrived at Bayford station and was conducted to where the Robinson family, much to his surprise, lived, and needless to say he received a hearty welcome.

A month later we find them all comfortably settled on the old homestead which John had purchased.

A few years quickly glided on in happiness. So contented was the Robinson family that these years seemed but as so many months.

Now just about this time an American firm, well instructed in oil mining, had started to dig a well some fifty miles north of Bayford, and many who had forgotten the lesson taught by the

Bayford Natural Gas Co., invested. The venture met with better success than that of the Natural Gas Co., and this induced many to buy shares.

It was on a bright sunny morning in the month of May when a light tap was heard on the door of Mr. Robinson's house and in walked an agent.

"I'm"——"

"Yes y'are", interrupted Mr. Robinson, "y'are a thief y'are the man who persuaded me to invest in that gas company. Yer meanly grin is well known Mr. Fox. I notice that ye took good care not to invest in that company yourself. ye came around to us country lads. Well what's yer business here to-day!"

"Oh ' I'm just selling shares for the Galt Oil Co. You know this company is ——"

"Yes, is another swindle game", interverned George, with a voice a little higher than usual.

"Oh no, Mr. Robinson, this is an unquestionable success. Why they are selling the Oil in Bayford to-day, and they have tried to find ——"

"I reckon ye had better try and find the door or I'll, I'll, I'll ——", and George, all in a frenzy, put his shivering hand on the nob and violently threw open the door.

Mr. Fox, noticing Mr. Robinson's irritated mood, immediately placed his hat on his head and, slamming the door behind him, snarled, "You'll be sorry when it is too late".

Mr. Fox was gone and George paced up and down the kitchen floor unconsciously pulling his little goat-whisker to keep time with each step. From time to time he would shake his fist in the air and twist his face in contempt, all the while mumbling words to himself. Occasionally he was heard to exclaim "The thief, the robber, the swindler; indade he knew who to come to, but fishing ain't as good as it was some years ago", or he would repeat the words which the agent had said to him on the occasion of his first visit :- "You may be sorry when you see your neighbors spinning by in their autos, while you jog along with your horse and cart." Then he would cry louder than ever: "I've got my auto, no thanks to that miserable, deceiving swindler."

And Mr. Robinson can be glad of his prudence, for the Galt mines ran dry after a few years mining, but George was as prosperous as ever. And instead of being out on the road as he was in a similar case of this some years previous, he, with his famliy, were gathered around the fire listening with the greatest of interest to the stories which John told them about his adventures in the west.

ALBERT WHELAN '20.