

Sam Solves the Mystery

STRANGE and hardly credible were the stories which had been drifting into the little village of Grandville. Strange, not so much on account of their improbability as from the fact that the village had been dozing so long and had become so accustomed to a settled routine of events that it could not comprehend an innovation. Incredible because, like every other dozer, it misinterpreted the excitement which tended to awaken it and wove it into the fabric of its dreams.

The older inhabitants, who perhaps felt a certain responsibility for the morale of the place, refused to believe. Quite logically they argued since the thing had not happened before, since they had heard neither their father nor their father's fathers speak of it, it could not be. The younger element, however, in spite of the admonitions of their elders, continued to discuss the thing, and to cross-question the little band of witnesses. These latter had lately sprung into great popularity, they were looked upon as more or less of heroes and were lionized by Granville society. They had tales to tell of a strange ship being seen in the Bay beyond Gull Cape, of the sound of oars overheard at dead of night, and of lights gleaming over the waters from Gull Rock where the steep and craggy shore traditionally rendered landing impossible. Last of all—and this was spoken of in hushed voices when the embers burned low and the smoke wreaths hung above—they told of a rumbling heard beneath the ground rolling now away from, and now towards the Cape, as if providence in its mercy was warning the delinquents ere it smote them in its wrath. Thus they talked and wondered but never did it occur to any one of them to investigate; to take such an initiative would be an innovation too great even for the most liberal-minded member of the more youthful village caucus. It was true that the Custom's officers had come down, their curiosity aroused by some rumour which had drifted

out from the village but two day's investigation revealed nothing to them and they returned home satisfied that what they heard had been idle village talk.

Jim Gillis held the farm at the Cape and it was his testimony which most of all brought confusion upon the erstwhile popular and heroic witnesses and confirmed the elders more stubbornly in their belief. For, though these witnesses had testified that the above mentioned rumblings were most distinctly audible in the vicinity of Jim's home, Jim denied having ever heard them and spoke of the witnesses in terms hardly complimentary to their wisdom and understanding. Jim was a shrewd, hard-headed, gruff-voiced widower. His farm consisted of two hundred acres of rocky arid land stretching from the mysterious Cape to the village. There he "batched" with Sam his eighteen-year old son, and Pete a farm-hand of many years standing whom he consulted in all his enterprises and considered more as a partner than a subordinate. Sam was a tall, dark lad, with an appetite for the marvellous and a runaway imagination inherited from some ancestor forgotten and probably disgraced. Because of these attributes perhaps, he was not recognized as a member of the farm partnership and was never consulted by his father or by Pete for he was looked upon by them as a person hardly responsible, being a dreamer and a desinger of the architectural plans according to which air castles are constructed. Naturally, Sam resented this treatment and sought consolation in weaving all sorts of delicious romances of which he was invariably the hero.

Pete was wont, on certain nights to betake himself to the village tavern. He always returned long after Sam had gone to bed and to sleep, but appeared in the morning wonderfully fresh considering his protracted carousal. He seemed to take a great delight in rehearsing the tavern theories concerning those mysterious happenings and had many a laugh with Jim at the credulity of the villagers. Sam heartily wished there was some truth in these same rumours, his romantic nature felt itself sorely straitened by the

restrictions of farm life and his imagination found little scope in the limited course of everyday affairs. Many a night had he sat before the log fire and listened to his father's speculations on the probability of the current rumors, for at that hour, so favorable to rumination, even his incredulous parent was prone to be less sceptical. Pete, however, never allowed himself to step from the firm ground of certitude into the treacherous quicksand of doubt. One night Pete had gone off to the tavern and Sam and his father had retired to bed at an early hour. Sleep eluded the boy and he lay staring through the open window into the inky blackness of the night. He pitied Pete's having to make his way through the darkness from the village and thought how strange it was that only on such a night as this did Pete absent himself from home and seek the company of his convivial friends.

As his mind was occupied with these thoughts he heard a slight noise from the stable, a shuffling somewhat nearer and then the tramp of some animal by the side of the house remote from that which he and his father occupied. Thinking that a horse had broken loose, he dressed and went down-stairs noiselessly. No horse could be found about the house but a search of the stable revealed the fact that the grey was missing; then as he listened he thought he heard the thud of hoofs in the direction of the Cape. In spite of his romantic nature Sam was a lad of decision. He immediately saddled another horse and set off in the direction from which the sounds had proceeded. A mile of ploughed fields bare and unfenced intervened between him and the Cape and he readily understood how the grey had gotten away with so little noise. His own mount as he jogged through the yielding clay made no noise which his heavy breathing did not cover. Several times Sam stopped and listened for some clue as to the whereabouts of the missing horse but nothing could be heard. He finally reached the head of the Cape and could hear the lap of the waves on the rocks beneath his feet. There appeared to be quite a sea running outside, but here, at the Cape's head, where usually the breakers tossed and roared, the waters were ap-

parently calm and smooth. At this and at the faint smell of oil which greeted him, Sam vaguely wondered. From where he stood the cliff sloped sharply down full forty feet. At its base the land appeared to have been washed away for he could hear, at each surge of the tide the water rolling under him through subterranean passages. The Cape was almost treeless except where a high cliff reared itself, there on the leeward side, partly sheltered from showers of salt spray, was a small group of firs. Sam, satisfied that nothing could result from further quest in this quarter turned his horse towards home. As he passed the fir bush, a branch swayed by the wind struck lightly against the horse's head. The animal, already terrified by the noise of the sea, shied wildly, threw his unsuspecting rider, and bolted. Happily for Sam the bush broke his fall but he lay for some minutes stunned by the surprise rather than the violence of his descent. Soon his mind adjusted itself to its circumstances and, muttering an imprecation on the horse and a blessing on the bush, he prepared to make his way homeward. He arose stiffly and as he did so his foot struck a small stone. What was his surprise to hear it, not striking against the cliff's side, but rolling down and down some declivity and finally splashing into water far below. Concluding that the earth had caved in here, he was about to start off again when to his surprise and somewhat to his terror he heard voices rising from out the earth.

"The officers"! came up in clammy churchyard tones.

"Nonsense"! another and no less sepulchral voice replied "its only that the wind or some prowling animal has loosed a rock and sent it rolling down. At any rate let us listen."

An interval of silence followed during which Sam stood perfectly still and marvelled at a certain familiarity in the latter speakers voice. "Pshaw man," spoke the familiar voice once more. "It's nothing. Lets go back. The moon will soon be out."

Then the faint sound of retreating footsteps was echoed about and borne up to Sam. For a while he stood and considered. Should he return home or

should he endeavor to ferret out the mystery ; curiosity at length triumphed over any fear he may have had and he groped cautiously about to find the mouth of the cavern. Just then the moon breaking through the clouds came to his assistance and his search revealed a path, well beaten but almost hidden, which ran between the cliffs and the firs. Following this Sam soon found himself descending a declivity at first steep but soon of a more gentle angle. He moved slowly and cautiously so as not to disturb the mysterious inhabitants and for fear too that he after the manner of the stone might roll splashing into the waters below. At length he reached a smooth ledge ; here he stopped and looked about him. Away in the distance he saw a light gleaming apparently at the end of a branch of the main tunnel and looking in the other direction he perceived, at the end of a continuation of this side tunnel, the moonlit waters of the Bay. Even as he looked lights gleamed here as well, and dark figures moved about. In this direction he now set out and found that this tunnel in its turn branched into numerous others of smaller dimensions. As he moved towards the lights it became evident that they were moving towards him. Fearful, but with his curiosity yet much alive, he slipped into one of the side caverns and awaited their approach. The cave he had entered was admirably adapted for purposes of concealment and he stretched forth his neck to view the approach of the weird procession, ready to crouch back when discovery would be probable. As the object of his gaze drew nearer his heart throbbed madly and fear clutched at his throat. In very truth it was a sight well calculated to inspire terror. The weird light of dim lanterns cast grotesque shadows on the walls ; a dozen dwarfish creatures came on, doubled with loads and spectral-looking enough to have been the originals of the hob-goblin portraits of nursery days. In the midst of these stalked a huge white something followed by a slug-like, shapeless, groaning mass which emitted a continuous rumbling noise ; no other sound was heard save the footbeats on the hard rock. Nearer and nearer came the ghostly procession. Sam felt that it must all be a hideous

dream—a nightmare. As if suggested by this last idea came the talisman which broke the spell. “Gid-up Nell” shouted one of the hob-goblins less crooked than the rest and, as Sam pulled in his head and crouched back into his hiding-place he caught a glimpse of Pete driving the gray hitched to a loaded wagon as calmly as ever he drove a load to market. The smugglers for such Sam now knew them to be, had not gone far when he once more poked out his head and watched them. They did not turd up the sloping entrance as he had expected but proceeded straight forward towards the light gleaming at the other end. Whenever they had gone a sufficient distance to exclude Sam’s vicinity from the area illuminated by the lanterns he removed his boots, slipped softly out, and followed. The jagged rocks which paved the cavern’s floor were as knives against his unprotected feet, but so intent was he upon the moving figures before him that he gave this no heed. Onward the figures went until the light which seemed to be their goal became indistinguishable from the lights which they carried; then past the fixed light which fell in and followed them. Immediately upon the moving of this light some obstacle was interposed shutting out all the lights and all was dark save where, through a small crevice, a faint ray gleamed. Toward this Sam made his way keeping close to the tunnel’s rocky side. As he drew nearer a low murmur of voices reached him at first indistinct but gradually clearer. One gruff voice in low tones seemed to be giving commands to the others and as Sam crept up and put his ear to the crevice this gruff voice said, “Less noise lads. The youngster sleeps above.”

“He’ll think it’s rats” rejoined one of the hob-goblins—he of the familiar voice. Then over the face of Sam there crept a smile which developed into a grin of remarkable latitude and turning away he sped noiselessly up to the mouth of the cave by which he had entered and thence home. He had presence of mind enough to put away his horse which he found waiting at the barn, and then, ignoring the “rats” which we apparently having a high old time in the cellar, he sought the embrace of Morpheus.

Next morning Jim and Pete drove eight miles to the nearest station with a load of "produce." During their absence Sam investigated the cellar. To the casual observer there was nothing there to arouse suspicion, but the removal of some bags of coal revealed the portion of a sliding door; this, and a watch-guard found near it, Sam deemed sufficient evidence to establish his case. Jim returned alone in the afternoon and summoned forth his son to work at the hay. A stack was under construction and towards evening this had reached a lofty height. Jim was building it. His son pitched up the hay to him. Then, when the last load was in, Sam coolly removed the ladder and thus addressed his parent. "Pa, why was the grey so tired this morning?"

"Put up the ladder, you young scamp," was the gruff rejoinder. The paternal command Sam treated with unfilial disregard and proceeded with his cross-questioning. "Pa, why do you buy coal and burn wood?"

To this Jim made no reply but directed towards his son a look, perhaps of paternal love, but if so, wonderfully disguised.

Wholly unmoved Sam went on, "Pa, did you lose your watch guard?"

Silence—and the look of paternal love somewhat intensified. Once more the youth spoke, this time in an ingratiating tone. "Pa, I'd like to be a smuggler."

For a while the parent's face preserved its fierce aspect. Gradually it softened and then speaking in a voice whose natural gruffness was mellowed by emotion he thus addressed his son.

"Sam" he said, "I was afraid you were no good. You were never like us folks but I'm thinking you'll be a credit to me yet. Put up the ladder boy."

H. F. M.