

The Evolution of Matty.

From "Caesar's" Commentaries

The old buck-board rattled out of the gate and down the road that led to the station. It was drawn by a Clyde, whose unwonted activity was the effect of an early feed of oats and an important occasion. Matthias Black, President of the Farmers' Institute, Secretary of the School Trustees, Road Inspector and Convener of the Poll, with one foot dangling negligently, held the reins and spoke encouraging words to the horse. By his side sat his son, young Matty, watching eagerly for the turn in the road from which the approaching train would be visible, and anon casting an anxious glance backward to see if his little trunk was being held securely by the stout ropes which bound it.

"We won't have too much time," said Matthias, as a distant whistle sounded. "You put the horse up at the livery stable while I get the tickets. I guess I'll get them through to town, for I don't think she stops at the College."

"Yah," drawled young Matty dutifully.

The train drew up at the station just as Matty came running from the stable. He had never ridden on the train before and he was all excitement with the prospect of this novel experience. He watched his trunk go aboard and attempted to clamber in after it, but the baggage-master interfered and explained rather heatedly that that was not the place for him. Turning away in some confusion he saw his father coming out of the station with the tickets and followed him into the second class smoker just as the train pulled out.

They found a number of other passengers in this car and with these Mr. Black soon fell into conversation. Young Matty was at first too much engrossed with his own novel experiences to pay any heed to talk of taxes and indignation meetings. His whole attention was concentrated on the country side through which they were passing, and he gazed now out of one window, now out of another in an earnest endeavor not to miss any of the panorama of fleeting scenery. Tiring of this, he amused himself in trying to pick up snatches of the conversation of his elders which were occasionally

audible above the din and rattle of the train.

"D'at your boy?" he heard a bewiskered gentleman from St. Louis ask his father.

"Yep, that's Matty. I'm taking him to St. Dunstan's," was the reply.

"What you go to make of him?"

"Oh, Matty can be anything he likes. He's got the brains. They had to put him out of our school; he knew too much."

The young fellow straightened up at this, and stood up intending to join the smokers and lend a hand in the conversation himself, but the train stopped up with a lurch and he sat down again very suddenly. They had reached the switch at the crossing and soon pulled into the station at Charlottetown.

There was a great rush as the passengers alighted and it was quite confusing for Matty to be jostled about by so many people, but he kept his father's broad back in sight until they passed through the station and emerged on Weymouth Street. There were a number of men with cars and carriages waiting here, and they expressed themselves as being very anxious to drive himself and his father to their destination. He was surprised at his father's ignoring their offers without so much as a "thank you," but he followed him in silence across the Square and up to the Highland Hotel. All during this walk young Matty was in a sort of daze. It surprised him to meet so many people whom he did not know and he wondered where they were all going and why they were in such a hurry.

Dinner over, Matthias paid the bill, filled his pipe with "Twist" and got it going properly, picked up the little leather satchel, which he always carried with him to town, though "It ain't much use nowadays," and informed young Matty that they had a long walk before them and had better get under way.

They were silent as they walked out the Malpeque Road. The father puffed at his pipe and looked with a critical eye at the gardens and fields which they passed; the son thought on the new life he was entering, and the pleasures and triumphs in store for him. Soon the College buildings came in sight and the nearness of their objective became impressed on both father and son. The latter found

some of his self-possession begin to desert him; the former thought the occasion ripe for a few words of paternal advice.

"Now, Matty, don't forget what yer mother told you before you left home. We're working hard to put you through college and you must do your best. Steady hard, but not so hard as to hurt yer-self. Always git up prompt in the mornin,—never be caught in bed after eight o'clock. Try to be in bed airy,—its bad to set up after midnight. It needn't be all work, you know. To git a good all-round eddication you'll have to go in fer athletics; football an hookey and them things, but don't do anything that'll git you all tired out and het up. And another thing; don't take tea with your lunch before you go to bed; a couple of glasses of milk will do you more good."

"Yes, father," answered young Matty with unwonted submission.

Just then they rounded the corner and the College buildings came into full view. The broad verandah in front was crowded with students, most of them bigger and more sophisticated looking than Matty. He felt considerable trepidation of spirit now, and, feeling the need of companionship and protection, slipped his hand into his father's. All eyes were turned on them as they approached and many, not inaudible comments on their appearance were thrown back and forth among the crowd.

"Half-mast," said one, "there must be somebody dead."

"The Cardigan train is in," said another, and dodged away from Sullivan's boot.

"Another thirsty traveller, who comes to drink at the Pierian Spring," remarked Paul glancing over his monocle.

"You fellows are too critical," replied his friend, "As Edgar Allan Poe says, 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

Passing through this barrage of comment, Matty and his father entered the College doors, climbed the broad stairway and inquired for the head of the College. They were directed to the Rector's office and there they paused and knocked at the door.

"Come, sir, come," was the hearty response from within, and they opened the door and entered.

"I've brought in my son Matty to finish his education," began

Mr. Black.

"Fine, sir, fine," replied the big man at the desk. "What is your name sir?"—as he began to write.

"Matthias J. Black of Serftown. I'm a Road Inspector."

"And your son's name?"

"Matthias C. Black. The 'C' stands fer his mother's people, she was a Casey."

"How old is your boy?"

"Fifteen, growing on sixteen."

"What work have you done?"—this to the young fellow.

"I used to help around the barn 'times."

"No, no, I mean your school work."

"Well," interjected the father, as the young fellow hesitated, "he larned everything they could teach him in our school. He had to leave school, he knew too much."

"Preparatory," wrote the Rector.

There came a timid rapping at the door and an intellectual young gentleman entered, who seemed to hold some official position with the Institution, for he made inquiries concerning the ringing of the College bell. When he had received his instructions and was about to go, the Rector said:

"Just a moment Mr. Theodore, this young man is Mr. Black, a new student. I place him in your care and you may initiate him into the ways of the place."

Young Matty found himself being shaken by the hand and he had time only for one pathetic glance at his father before the door closed behind him.

"Are you sure that young fellow is the right sort of company for my Matty?" said Mr. Black anxiously. "I don't like the look of him none too well and I'd hate Matty to get into trouble first going off." When he had been reassured on this point, he continued, "Matty is an uncommon boy and I guess I can help you a lot by telling you just how to treat him. He aint ever used"—

A rapping on the door interrupted him here and another new student entered and went through the process of enrolment.

When he had gone Matthias continued, "He ain't ever used to other boys, so he'll have to have a separate room. He ain't ever"—

The tramping of many feet in the corridor rendered inaudible the remainder of this sentence and this time a dozen or more new students entered and were catechised and categorised. It took nearly an hour to dispose of them and during all this time Matthias stood by, nervously, for it was nearing his train time, but determined to do his duty and complete his instructions, if he had to stay all night. He hardly waited for the last boy to go before he began again.

"As I was sayin, he ain't ever been right well. His appetite is none too good and he just eats certain things. Maybe his mother spoiled him this way and perhaps it will be better for him to get plain simple food; beefsteak and eggs and milk and that sort of thing. I'm afraid his chest is a little weak and if you were to tie something around his throat at night, he"—

He stopped suddenly as the Rector bounded from his chair and hurried to the door saying, "I'm sorry sir, but I must run to meet a class. Good-bye, sir. Don't miss your train."

Mr. Black paused a moment and then hurried after. There were still a number of things he wanted to speak about in regard to Matty, but the Rector was nowhere in sight. He hastened down the stairs and out to the verandah, thinking to overtake him while yet there was time. As he stepped out the whistle of a train greeted his ears. He wavered a moment and then came the thought of the cows waiting at home to be milked; so, abandoning Matty to his fate, he dashed wildly for the station.

Meanwhile young Matty had been shown about the College and had been finally abandoned in the study-hall by his conductor. The latter had been rather unfavorably impressed by his rustic appearance and had found him sadly deficient in conversational ability. He had turned to him, when first they left the Rector's room with the remark, "Are you a philosopher?"

"What?" said Matty.

"Are you a philosopher? Do you study philosophy?"

"What's that?" said Matty.

"Oh, er—, it's everything, "Scientia rerum."

Matty looked at him in alarm. His mother had warned him.

against bad company and he thought he should leave this new acquaintance of his, but he followed him about until they had come to this big room full of strange boys, and he had been given a seat and a book which he didn't understand, and now he sat thinking that College was not going to be so pleasant a place as he expected.

He was even more firmly convinced of this as he lay in bed that night. He had been the centre of interest in his home and here nobody was paying any attention to him. No one came to see if his bed was comfortable, and he hadn't had a lunch. The conviction was fully established next morning at six o'clock, when some one came and shook him by the shoulder and told him it was time to get up. Why, it was'n't daylight and he thought at first the place must be on fire; but all the others were moving about and dressing as if getting up at this time were the natural thing to do and he couldn't understand it at all.

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Matthias Black paced the station platform at Serftown and listened for the whistle of the evening train. It was early in June and Matty was coming home from College. He had not been home since first he went away. At Xmas he had been sick and at Easter the roads were too bad and now his father as he waited for him, wondered what change all these months had made in him. He wondered the more, because his letters had been different of late. They were not at all like the letters of complaint of the first few months, and there were words and expressions in them which were quite unintelligible to Matthias.

The whistle sounded and soon the train swung around the curve and pulled up at the station. A few passengers stepped off, but Matthias could not see his son among them. There was one young fellow whose face seemed strangely familiar, but this was not Matty, surely. He wore a tight-fitting suit, sharp-toed boots and all the other accessories of the fashionable young blood, and Matthias set him down as a commercial man come to sell groceries to old Silas Power.

The young fellow looked about him for a moment and then he saw Matthias, who was turning away in disappointment. With a few strides he reached him, clapped him on the shoulder and seized

his hand.

"Salve, Pater, comment ca va?" he shouted.

"It ain't Matty?" said the old man in astonishment.

"But it is," said the young fellow.

Mr. Black stood for a moment too astonished to speak. Then he turned and led the way to the rear of the station, where the Clyde was tied.

"Ah! the same old equus," Matty remarked as they came round the corner.

"Yes," said Matthias, "and the front wheels are getting pretty shaky, too."

They climbed into the buck-board and rattled off toward home, the son keeping up a steady stream of conversation, the father risking an occasional monosyllabic reply. As they climbed the hill beyond the cross-roads, the sun was just sinking behind the woods which lay to their left.

"Look! Look at that, father!" said Matty.

"Sun's going down," said Matthias.

"Ah! but the beauty of it" his son replied, "the roseate tints, the azure, the sapphire, the purple, the blue; how they blend in one divine conglomeration of color!"

Matthias turned slowly and looked at his son. He leaned over him unobtrusively and sniffed. No, he could not detect any suspicious odor, but anyhow there was no doubt about it. He had seen strange things like that himself after coming from town in the old days. He shook his head and muttered to himself, "I didn't think it could be got."

When Matty had gone to bed that night, Matthias spoke to his wife.

"I've changed my mind about Matty," he said. "I thought we'd send him to college again next year, but we'd better keep him home. We'll have to keep an eye on him. I know what it is when that sort of thing gets a hold on a young fellow."