

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Charles Eli O'Reilley awoke with a start. The clear moon of a September night shed its beams through the cracked and dilapidated window of his father's palatial mansion of three rooms and a back porch, at Skunkvale.

For a time he stared, blinked, and rubbed his eyes, but gradually, as his unwieldy mind began to take on the form of lucid thought, he realized that this night would mark an epoch in his career. A wonderful ambition had assailed the battlements of his slow-moving mind.

As romantically as a cow, who, on being rudely awakened, climbs aboard her feet, stretches her hind leg and makes concave her previously humped back, Charles arose from his bed, folded his arms and began to pace the floor. As he walked to and fro in this thoughtful mood, he placed his foot on the pan of a set rat-trap which immediately performed a *la zybisco*, putting a perfect toe-hold on young Charlie. With a howl he grabbed his foot in his hand and went hopping around the room on the remaining foot until he planted it on the business end of a carpet tack.

Somewhat dampened in spirit and sore in body, he crawled back to bed, but not to sleep. He had reached the dividing line; he pictured himself as upon a great ridge—on one side was yesterday, on the other to-morrow—he looked back upon yesterday, a hard rough ridge of toil, softened and alleviated, however, with a touch of home love and family friendship.

Charlie's family was the first to settle in Skunkvale; they came out from Ireland in the early sixties, and had hewn, from the forest primeval, a home for the O'Reilleys. Ephraim O'Reilley was but twelve years old when he left the old sod, but had, with his father, helped to make a home for his family in the wilds of America. He and Maria were old now, and their sole support was Charlie—a fine strapping lad of twenty years.

Charley grew up the pride of his parents' hearts, and the boast of Skunkvale. No weakling was he, used only to the silver spoon; the bloom on his cheeks was Nature's kiss a reward for faithful service at the plough handles. The home of the O'Reilleys had one boast—it was the oldest as well as the ugliest in the vicinity. Charlie was proud of his home, and he would stand for hours in the front room

gazing at the old tin type of Grandfather O'Reilly, driving the last nail in the saddle board of the pantry roof.

It was the old man's wish that this illustrious property—an old house, a barn, two cows, a horse and other minor domestics—should not pass into strange hands, but should rest in Charlie's hands when old Ephraim and Maria should have presented themselves at the great white throne.

But alas! The old home did not hold such attractions for Charlie; it was but yesterday—one side of the ridge. On the other side of this ridge he saw to-morrow, and how entrancing it looked, or rather was it the enchantment of distance? It appeared fascinating, yet over it all hung the dimming mist of uncertainty, but the venture was worth trying, and he was resolved.

"I am going to New York," he said. Just as Columbus said in the old days, "Doggone it, I'm going to America."

He yawned again, and turned his face to the laths and finally dropped into an uneasy slumber.

"Get up, Charles boy, its' six oclock and the cows are in the stable yet," shouted his father, looking over the top of the back stairs.

Charlie at first pretended to be asleep, but finally groaned: "The same old drag, the same old thing over and over again."

"If yer don't move yer lazy carcass out'a that bed I'll be over to you, me fine buchy," returned his father. Charlie knew his father's temper when he tried to swing the lead, so, without further ado he arose, dressed himself, and thumped down the back stairs.

Over the morning porridge the first scene of the prodigal son was enacted.

"I'm leaving the farm, Pa, it's too dull for me. I want to see life, and a fellow can't see it weedin' turnips or cuttin' longers," began Charlie. The old man's eyes widened and he gasped.

"You don't mean it, Charles, do you? What am I gonna do if you go; and all the work to do and help so hard to get Are ye gone plumb crazy, or has them infernal Alger books ruined you?"

Here he stopped and waited for his son to speak.

"Yes, Pa, I am going. I hate to leave the old homestead, but I got to see the world."



"How are you going to go, son?" returned his dad.

"On the train, I suppose" exclaimed Charlie.

"I know that," said Ephraim, "but have you got the wherewith to get a ticket?" This last retort left Charlie speechless for a moment, but he recovered himself and replied:

"Well I—I've got twenty bushels of potatoes that I got for painting Bill Malone's woodshed, and that runt pig that Sam Kelly gave me for giving him a lift with the threshing, and besides, that eight bushels of turnips that Jack Murphy gave me for helping him to get his two year old cow out of Jim Fitzgerald's bog, so with that and a few dollars, that I've saved up, I think I could get part of the way and I could work the rest."

Old Ephraim leaned back in his chair, lit his pipe and proceeded with some parental advice. "Well, Charlie, since you've made up your mind to go, I suppose it's just as well to let you have your own way, but remember this, you'll have to be more particular about things when you leave Skunkvale. It was only the other day that old man Rogers was telling me about people off there that take a bath every Christmas, and if a fellow can believe them movin' pictures, it seems to me that I saw bits of trains runnin' around the streets up there in New York, without an engine or a thing pullin' them, so, Charlie, be careful, for you never could tell where you might meet one."

But the blood of O'Reilley ancestry flowed through Charlie's veins, and in spite of all these terrors he was resolved to face the issue.

The next morning Charlie was up at daybreak, and had all his belongings packed. His fare to New York was packed in the rear of the truck waggon, and a few hours later father and son drove down the elm tree lane.

It was a beautiful Autumn morning, the birds were singing sweetly, and the rising sun, as its rays broke through the morning mist, tinted the trees with gold. All nature seemed to be on the alert for Charlie's departure, here a brown rabbit was perched on the road way, and there a crow on an old picket fence cawed a fond adieu to this robust son of Skunkvale.

The two did not utter a word until finally the old station house loomed up in the distance. The proximity of the station house roused the old man to speech, and,

giving the reins a chuck, thus moving old Bess a trifle faster, he broke in:

"Well, Charlie me boy, we all hate to see you goin', but maybe it's for the best. Don't forget to drop us a line and tell us how you are gettin' along, and if you can't land a job, don't be one bit ashamed to come back home."

Here he stopped, and Charlie, perhaps a bit lonesome, returned:

"I—I'll write, Pa, so don't worry about that, and when I get a job, I won't forget you and ma, and I'll try to save forty or fifty dollars out of my first month's salary for you and her."

The old man looked at his son out of the corner of his eye and said; "Giddap Bess old girl." Whether the old mare anticipated a lash of the rawhide persuader, or whether a spark of the farmer's vitality returned, we do not know; but she gave a sudden spring. The lurch broke off a slab on one of the boxes and with a squeal and a grunt, away on four legs went part of Charlie's ticket for New York.

"Great Heavens" cried Charlie as he leaped from the waggon, "the pig is gone."

"So is my temper" returned Ephraim, as he hurled some hair-raising epithets at the old mare.

Charlie tore away in hot pursuit, but the pig cleared the picket fence and raced away past Red Murdock's cheese factory. Charlie, seeing that pursuit was in vain, returned to the waggon, and nothing more was said until they came to a halt at Skunkvale station.

"Mornin' Ephraim," ejaculated Big Jim Kearney, as he sauntered out on the platform. Jim was Skunkvale's station agent, a rough and ready chap of scarcely eighty summers. He was one of the oldest inhabitants of Skunkvale, and had the enviable reputation of eating four dozen eggs on Easter Sunday morning, and not requiring to have his stomach pumped or his vest let out. More than this, Jim was suited to the farming district of Skunkvale, and when some adventurous young fellow wanted to go away, Jim was ready and willing to take farm produce of any kind or quantity, in payment for a ticket.

As a result of his commercial proceedings, the station house and its surrounding plot looked more like an observation platform on Noah's Ark, rather than a respectable station house. In one corner of this plot was a pig,



tethered by one hind leg, eating raw potatoes out of the bottom part of an old discarded typewriter, while near about, basking in the sun, were hens, geese, turkeys, and here and there, a few ducks and under-fed calves.

"What's up this morning, Ephraim?" continued Jim. "Are you gonna take some of this rubbish off my hands?"

"No, but gonna give you a little addition. My son Charlie is goin' to New York, and we've fetched along some stuff here to help buy a recipe for that town."

"All right, suppose I'll have to take it, so let's see what you've got," returned Jim.

"Quite a collection" said Ephraim, "a few bushels of potatoes, some turnips, and a runt pig, but, be japers, he got out, the cursed beast."

In due time, however, Charlie's produce was placed with the others, and this, together with a few dollars of his savings, purchased his "recipe" for New York.

Ephraim O'Reilley watched the train until it disappeared around the turn, and then, with a sigh, headed old Bess for home.

Left to his thoughts, Charlie turned around the car, and his eyes resting upon a young chap with a gold band on his cap, he said;

"Are you the captain of this train, sir?"

"No, sir, I'm the newsy," returned the lad. Charlie was on the point of making further inquiries when a big man with brass buttons on his coat entered and shouted: "Tickets, please." He extended a hand in Charlie's direction and repeated the order.

"Won't my face do" said Charlie, attempting witticism.

"Perhaps it will, son, but I'll have to punch it," glibly returned the conductor. This last retort took both the starch and the ticket out of Charlie.

After this wordy conflict, Charlie stuffed the ticket in the breast pocket of his coat, spread the "Skunkvale Live Wire News" over his face, and, stretching his long legs out in the aisle, composed himself to sweet sorrows.

We shall now leave Charlie lying like a wilted flower—probably a wall flower—and return to his father.

Old Ephraim did not return to his home immediately, but, having some shopping to do, he spent the greater part of the day getting a few household necessities, and

acquainting all whom he met of Charlie's departure. The sun was well hidden in the western hills, when he climbed up on the cart, tightened the reins on old Bess, and, after some coaxing and expostulating, the old mare set her spavined legs in motion.

"Well, after all, perhaps, it's just as well," mused the old man. "It kind of smartens a fellow up to get away for a while. Charlie is smart at readin' and figgerin' and he'll make out all right, and just as sure as guns he'll be back here in a few years drivin' in one of them Gasoline engine rigs, all dressed up with a silk hat and a claw-hammer tail coat, and I wouldn't be a darn bit surprised if he'll be supportin' a fine punch, with a gold watch chain lying across it, and, sure, likely or not, he'll be a bank manager—he wouldn't be an O'Reilly if he hadn't some get up in him—and he said he was going to save forty dollars out of his first month's pay—poor Charlie, he meant well."

Here his musings were cut short. Up from the glen, borne on the evening breeze, came the loud, unmelodious sound of squeals and grunts. Bess pricked up her ears, snorted and stopped. Old Ephraim stood upright in the cart, bounced himself, and, as his spectacled eyes searched the glen they fell upon an approaching figure, which, on its nearer approach, proved to be human.

Old Ephraim's pupils dilated when they beheld a mud-bespattered figure wrestling with an undersized porker. His coat was reduced to shreds, and one of his boots, accompanied by its wollen companion, was thrust into the mouth of the pig, in a vain endeavour to keep it from howling its head off.

The old man's eyes stood out in his head, and between gasps, he managed to say:

"Charlie—where—did—you—come—from?"

For about two minutes Charlie never uttered a word, but, finally, as the struggling pig abandoned his efforts to escape, he sheepishly replied:

"Well, Dad, it was just like this. I fell asleep on the train, somebody stole my ticket, and at the next station I was put off. I started to walk home and found the pig tangled up in Con Landrigan's wire fence, so I caught him and brought him home, and, believe me, if Horatio Alger's heroes met with the same hardships that I have