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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydow
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Schlegel
Weber Freiligrath Ernst Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Richthofen Frommel
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Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch
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The Gentleman from Everywhere

James Henry Foss

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THE GENTLEMAN FROM EVERYWHERE

BY

JAMES HENRY FOSS

ILLUSTRATED

1903

TO

MY BELOVED, ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN,

THIS BOOK IS

MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

IN THE EARNEST HOPE THAT

BY ITS PERUSAL

Many sailing o'er life's solemn main,
Forlorn and shipwrecked brothers, may take heart again.

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[Illustration: *[cursive]* Your friend, the Author
James H. Foss]

CHAPTER I.

LAUNCHING OF MY LIFE-BOAT.

Wild was the night, yet a wilder night
Hung around o'er the mother's pillow;
In her bosom there waged a fiercer fight
Than the fight on the wrathful billow.

Already there were more children than potatoes in her hut of logs, and yet, another unwelcome guest was coming, to whom fate had ordained that it would have been money in his pocket had he never been born.

A sympathizing neighbor held over the suffering woman an umbrella to shield her from the rain which poured through the dilapidated roof, and when the dreary light of that Sunday morning dawned, my frail bark was launched on the stormy, sullen sea of life.

My father, a good man, but a ne'er-do-well financially, had loaned his best clothes, watch and pocketbook to a friend to enable him to call on his best girl in captivating style, and said friend expressed his gratitude by eloping with the girl and all the borrowed finery.

That same night the boom broke, and allowed all the savings of our family invested in logs, cut by my father and his lumbermen, to float down the river and be lost in the sea.

Thus storm, flood, calamity and sorrow, far in advance heralded the future of myself, the fourth son of a fourth son who, on that Sunday, in the dog-days of 1841, reluctantly came into this world.

The howling of the wolves in the surrounding wild-woods, the screaming of the catamounts in the near-by tree-tops, the sterile dog-star drying up the crops, the marching of my father to fight in

the threatened Aroostook war, all conspired for months before this fateful night to awaken a restlessness, discontent, and gloomy forebodings in the lonely mother's heart which prenatal influences impressed upon the mind of the baby yet unborn.

All through that wretched summer, scorching drought alternating with cloud-bursts vied with each other in blasting the hopes of the farmers, and premature frost destroyed the few remaining stalks of corn, so that when the winter snows came, gaunt famine stared our family fiercely in the face.

My father and three brothers faced the withering storms bravely, unpacking their internal stores of sunshine, as the camel in the desert draws refreshment from his inner tank when outward water fails.

We were isolated from human companionship, except when occasionally the doctor came on the tops of the fences and branches of the pine-trees to soothe the pains of my sickly mother. At this time the snow was so deep that a tunnel was cut to the neighboring hovel where shivered our ancient horse and cow.

My father and brothers tramped with snare and gun on snowshoes through the woods, securing occasionally a partridge or squirrel, and semi-occasionally a deer, or pickerel from the lake. On one of these occasions, two of my brothers and the dog met with an adventure which nearly gave them deliverance from all earthly sorrows. As they faced the terrible cold of a January morning, the wailing of the winds in the tree-tops, and the few flying snowflakes foreboded a storm which burst upon them in great fury while about two miles from home. Bewildered and benumbed, they dug a hole in the snow down to the earth, and were soon buried many feet deep, thus affording them some relief from the cold; but they nearly famished with hunger and gave themselves up for lost. Suddenly, the dog, who was huddled with them for warmth, jumped away whining and scratching in great excitement. He refused to obey their orders to be still and die in peace, but, digging for some minutes, his claws struck a tree, then, rushing over the boys and back again to the trees repeatedly, he roused them from their lethargy to follow him; but nothing was visible but a hole in a tree through which the dog jumped and barked furiously.

Cutting the hole larger with their axe, they found the interior to be dry punk, which at once suggested the exhilarating thought of a fire, and soon a delightful heat from the burning drywood permeated their snow cave, the smoke being more endurable than the previous cold. All at once they heard a strange snorting and scratching above in the tree with whines which drove the dog wild with excitement, then, with burning embers and suffocating smoke, down came a huge animal, well-nigh breaking the necks of frantic dog and "rubbering" boys.

After this came the tug of war. Teeth, axe, gun, fire, dog, bear, and boys all mixed up in a fight to the finish. Finally, as bruin was not fully recovered from the comatose state of his winter hibernating, after many scratches and thumps, cuts and shots, came the survival of the fittest.

Not even imperial Caesar, with the world at his feet, could have been prouder than were boys and dog when they looked at their prostrate foe, and reflected that this conquest meant the physical salvation of our entire family. Soon the chips flew from the tree, and over a cheerful fire they roasted and devoured bear steaks to repletion.

Digging to the surface, they found that the storm had subsided, and rigging a temporary sled from the boughs of the tree, they dragged home this "meat in due season."

All through the hours of the following night the wolves, attracted by the scent of blood, howled and scratched frantically around the hut, calling for their share in that "chain of destruction," by which the laws of the universe have ordained that all creatures shall subsist. The infant, of course, joined lustily in the chorus until the boys almost wished themselves back in their shroud of snow.

So, with alternate feasting and fasting we passed the long weeks of that Arctic winter until the frogs in the neighboring swamp crying: "Knee deep, knee deep," and "better go round, better go round," proclaimed the season of freshets when the vast plain below us was traversible only in boats. Then the birds returned from the far South, but brought no seed-time or harvest, for that was the ever to be remembered "Year without a summer," and but for the wild ducks and geese shot on the lake, and the wary and uncertain fish

caught with the hook, all human lives in that region would have returned to the invisible from whence they came.

It seemed as if chaos and dark night had come back to those wild woods. The migratory fever seized upon us all, and my parents determined to seek some unknown far away, to sail to the beautiful land of somewhere, for they felt sure that —

Somewhere the sun is shining,
Elsewhere the song-birds dwell;
And they hushed their sad repining
In the faith that somewhere all is well.

Somewhere the load is lifted
Close by an open gate;
Out there the clouds are rifted,
Somewhere the angels wait.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST VOYAGE.

My father and brothers constructed a "prairie schooner" from our scanty belongings, and one forlorn morning in early autumn, with the skeleton horse and cow harnessed tandem for motive power, we all set sail for far-off Massachusetts.

We slept beneath our canopy of canvas and blankets; those of our number able to do so worked occasionally for any who would hire, but employers were few, as this was one of the crazy seasons in the history of our Republic when the people voted for semi-free trade, and the mill wheels were nearly all silent for the benefit of the mills of foreign nations. They shot squirrels and partridges when ammunition could be obtained, forded rivers, narrowly escaping drowning in the swift currents, and suffered from chills and fever.

One dark night some gypsies stole our antediluvian horse and cow. The barking of the faithful dog awakened father and brothers who rushed to the rescue, leaving mother half dead with fear; but at length the marauders were overtaken, shots were exchanged, heads were broken, and after a fierce struggle and long wandering, lost in the woods, our fiery steeds were once more chained to our chariot wheels.

The next day we came to a wide river which it was impossible to ford, but mercy, which sometimes "tempers the blast to the shorn lamb," sent us relief in the shape of an antiquated gundalow floating on the tide. Like Noah and family of old, we managed to embark on this ancient ark, and paddled to the further shore.

There we miraculously escaped the scalping knife and tomahawk. While painfully making our way through the primeval forest, we were suddenly saluted by the ferocious war-whoop, and a dozen Indians barred our way, flourishing their primitive implements of warfare. A shot from father's double-barreled gun sent them flying

to cover, our steeds rushed forward with a speed hitherto unknown, the prairie schooner rocked like a boat in a cyclone, the mother shrieked, the *enfant terrible* howled like a bull of Bashan, and just as the "Red devils" were closing in from the rear, the mouth of a cave loomed up in the hillside into which dashed "pegasus and mooly cow" pell-mell.

Our red admirers halted almost at the muzzle of the gun and the blades of my brothers' axes. Luckily the Indians had neither fire-arms nor bows and arrows. They made rushes occasionally, but the shotgun wounded several, the axes intimidated, and they seemed about to settle down to a siege when, with a tremendous shouting and singing of "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," a band of picturesquely arrayed white men came marching along the trail. The enemy took to their heels, and we learned that our rescuers had been to a William Henry Harrison parade and barbecue, for this was the time of the famous "hard cider" campaign.

The Indians had been there too and, filling up with "fire water," their former war-path proclivities had returned to their "empty, swept, and garnished" minds, to the extent that they yearned to decorate their belts with our scalps.

Our preservers scattered to their homes, and the would-be scalpers were seen no more, leaving the world to darkness and to us in the woods. The woods, where Adam and Eve lived and loved, where Pan piped, and Satyrs danced, the opera house of birds; the woods, green, imparadisaical, mystic, tranquillizing—to the poet perhaps when all is well—but to us, they seemed haunted by spirits of evil, the yells of the demons seemed to echo and reecho; but an indefinable something seemed to sympathize with the infinite pathos of our lives, and at last sleep, "the brother of death," folded us in his arms, and the curtain fell.

"There is a place called Pillow-land,
Where gales can never sweep
Across the pebbles on the strand
That girds the Sea of Sleep.

'Tis here where grief lets loose the rein,
And age forgets to weep,

For all are children once again,
Who cross the Sea of Sleep.

The gates are ope'd at daylight close,
When weary ones may creep,
Lulled in the arms of sweet repose,
Across the Sea of Sleep.

Oh weary heart, and toil-worn hand,
At eve comes rest to thee,
When ply the boats to Pillow-land,
Across the Sleepy sea.

Thank God for this sweet Pillow-land,
Where weary ones may creep,
And breathe the perfume on the strand
That girds the Sea of Sleep."

It is pleasant in this sunset of life, to recall the testimony of my brothers that through all those troublous scenes, father and mother were soothed and consoled by an unfaltering faith in the ultimate triumph of the good and true, that their faces were often illumined as they repeated to each other those priceless words of the sweet singer,

"Drifting over a sunless sea, cold dreary mists encircling me,
Toiling over a dusty road with foes within and foes abroad,
Weary, I cast my soul on Thee, mighty to save even me,
Jesus Thou Son of God."

At last the "perils by land and perils by sea, and perils from false brethren," this long, long journey ended and we reached the promised land. We halted in old Byfield, in the state of Massachusetts, with worldly goods consisting of a bushel of barberries, threadbare toilets, and the ancient equipage dilapidated as aforesaid.

After much tribulation, father took a farm "on shares," which was found to result in endless toil to us, and the lion's share of the crops

going to the owners, who toiled not, neither did they spin, but reaped with gusto where we had sown.

After a few years of this profitless drudgery, my father bought an old run-down farm with dilapidated buildings in the neighboring town of R— —, mortgaging all, and our souls and bodies besides, for its payment. We hoped we had rounded the cape of storms which sooner or later looms up before every ship which sails the sea of life, for we had fully realized the truth of the poem —

We may steer our boats by the compass,
Or may follow the northern star;
We may carry a chart on shipboard
As we sail o'er the seas afar;
But, whether by star or by compass
We may guide our boats on our way,
The grim cape of storms is before us,
And we'll see it ahead some day.

How the prow may point is no matter,
Nor of what the cargo may be,
If we sail on the northern ocean,
Or away on the southern sea;
It matters not who is the pilot,
To what guidance our course conforms;
No vessel sails o'er the sea of life
But must pass the cape of storms.

Sometimes we can first sight the headland
On the distant horizon's rim;
We enter the dangerous waters
With our vessels taut and trim;
But often the cape in its grimness
Will before us suddenly rise,
Because of the clouds that have hid it
Or the blinding sun in our eyes.

Our souls will be caught in the waters
That are hurled at the storm cape's face;
Our pleasures and joys, our hopes and fears,

Will join in the maddening race.
Our prayers, desires, our penitent griefs,
Our longings and passionate pain,
Be dashed to spray on the stormy cape
And fly in our faces like rain.

But there's always hope for the sailor,
There is ever a passage through;
No life goes down at the cape of storms,
If the life and the heart lie true.
If in purpose the soul is steadfast,
If faithful in mind and in will,
The boat will glide to the other side,
Where the ocean of life is still.

[Illustration: "It was a Fair Scene of Tranquillity."]

CHAPTER III.

NEAR TO NATURE'S HEART.

It seems but yesterday, although more than a half century ago, that I, a puny boy, stood on the hilltop and looked for the first time upon this, the earliest home of which I have any vivid recollection. It was a fair scene of rustic tranquillity, where a contented mind might delight to spend a lifetime mid hum of bees and low of kine.

Along the eastern horizon's rim loomed the blue sea beyond the sandy dunes of old Plum Island; the lazy river born in babbling brooks and bubbling springs flowing languidly mid wooded islands, and picturesque stacks of salt hay, representing the arduous toil of farmers and dry-as-dust fodder for reluctant cows. Nearer, the two church spires of the little village, striving to lift the sordid minds of the natives from earthly clods to the clouds, and where beckoning hands strove vainly to inspire them with heavenly hopes; around them, glistening in the sunlight, the marble slabs where sleep the rude forefathers of the hamlet, some mute inglorious Miltons who came from England in the early sixties, whose tombstones are pierced by rifle bullets fired at the marauding red skins. These are the cities of the dead, far more populous than the town of the living.

Nearer, the willowy brook that turns the mill; to the south the dense pine woods, peopled in our imaginations, with fairy elves, owls, and hobgoblins—now, alas, owing to the rapacity of the sawmills, naught but a howling wilderness of stumps and underbrush.

Directly below me, stands our half-century old house with its eaves sloping to the ground, down which generations of boys had ruined their pants in hilarious coasting; near by, the ancient well-swipe, and the old oaken bucket which rose from the well; beyond this, of course, as usual, the piggery and hennery to contaminate the

water and breed typhoid fever, and in the house cellar, the usual dampness from the hillside to supply us all with rheumatism and chills.

There existed apparently in the early dawn of the nineteenth century, an unwritten law which required the farmers to violate all the laws of sanitation, and then to ascribe all ills the flesh is heir to, to the mysterious will of an inscrutable Providence whose desire it was to make the heart better by the sorrows of the countenance, and to save the soul from hell by the punishment of the body. Vegetables were allowed to rot in the cellars, and to make everybody sick with their noxious odors so that we might not be too much wedded to this transitory existence. Pork, beans, and cabbage must be devoured in enormous quantities just before going to bed for the purpose of inspiring midnight groans and prayers to be delivered from the pangs of the civil war in the inner man.

This moralizing is inspired by the pessimism of disenchanted age; but on that beautiful morning of the long ago, naught occurred to me save the wedlock of earth and heaven: I was near to nature's heart, listening to the ecstatic songs of the robins, the orioles and sweetest of all the bobolink.

"Oh, winged rapture, feathered soul of spring:
Blithe voice of woods, fields, waters, all in one,
Pipe blown through by the warm, mild breath of June,
Shepherding her white flocks of woolly clouds,
The bobolink has come, and climbs the wind
With rippling wings that quiver not for flight
But only joy, or yielding to its will
Runs down, a brook of laughter through the air."

After the charm of the novelty of the scene had vanished, I descended from my perch to explore this sleepy hollow: the barn door hung suspended on a single hinge, like a bird with but one unbroken wing to soar upon. The swallows twittered their love-songs under the eaves; chipmunks scolded my intrusion and threw nuts at my head from the beams; a lone, lorn hen proclaimed her triumph over a new laid egg, and then, with fiery eyes, assaulted me with profanity as I filled my hat with her choicest treasures. A litter of