Stumps of Good Timber

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE By Raymond S. Spears

Old Drew Nuckle was mad; for years, and years, grim greed had led him into the depths of selfishness, grasping for other men's lands and money; his cunning had enabled him to lead his neighbors in the mountains into desperate financial straits to his advantage. He had at last, held in his hands a great fortune, but he lacked the knowledge that would enable him to profit by it—or even to recognize the presence of the fortune in the 2400 rough mountain acres of the Range 4 Lots.

Now Old Drew wandered up and down the mountain crying:

"A skun log floats! A skun log floats!"

People said Old Drew's madness was the direct punishment of his sins which were many and varied; others said that it was his ignorance which had fallen upon him; others even more philosophical, declared that if Old Drew hadn't been ignorant he wouldn't have committed so many sins and that sin was ignorance, anyhow.

Accordingly, Old Drew became the subject and the warning of many mountain sermons in the white church, the block schoolhouse, and in the revivals. He came to the meetings and his shrill, weird voice would rise uncannily at the services as he shouted:

"A skun log floats! A skun log floats!"

All this petty little knowledge, trickery, craft and perseverence in greed had come to that one phrase and fact. He would take his little hatchet in bark-peeling time, and ross the bark from hardwoods, gums, beeches, sugar-woods. He would stand the poles in the sunshine and carry them, in the autumn to see them float in Clinch river, or any of the tributary creeks and runs. A fact that had escaped his ignorance was now all that remained of his intelligence.

Because Sal-Bet Legere was of good heart and her man Tip was willing, she gave Old Drew a cabin to live in and kept him eating. Really, the old man was happier than he had ever been before. Fear of not making money, fear of being beaten in a bargain, fear of poverty had given way at least to sheer contentment of knowing one thing, the thing that had made him mad!

So now he rambled up and down telling everyone what was no longer a secret. Time had been when possession of such a secret would have led him to the meanest and most despicable of expedients to prevent others from knowing and profiting by it. Now his mad mind rejoiced in telling it to all, which was a complete reversal of habit of thought and mind. He had a madness for giving away what had been a precious secret!

So little by little the tendency to help someone else became brighter in Drew Nuckle's darkened soul. From a flickering sparkle, it widened and deepened till he would carry his hat full of berries down to the seven-pupil district school and give to each child and to the teacher a sweet handful to go with the pone lunches. He carried bushels of nuts to that wretched cabins of the poverty-stricken, where dwelt a stupidity denser than his own madness. He returned to the craftiness of his own chilhood and caught mink, coon, musk-rats and other furs with wire snares and deadfalls, and somehow managed to trade them off for the benefit of some one else.

The jeers and delight with which people had greeted the downfall of the old skinflint gave way now to pity and wonder, as they saw his generosity grow before their eyes, and counted it the most remarkable phenomenon of his change of mind.

Once mad, always mad! People liked Old Drew better insane than sane, however. No one feared him now, and he was more welcome than many a man who despised his weakness and hated him for what he had been. Away down in the madness was something which showed that he remembered the old days and acts and was ashamed of them. When he met someone whom he had misused of old, he would turn his head away, like a dog caught stealing chickens or killing sheep. He avoided the people from whom he had taken profits, whose lands he had lawed away, or whom he had beaten in unfair trades. Yet to the children of these families eh always showed special favor. He brought them wild fruits and nuts, and gave them hints for catching fish or trapping fur.

One day in early summer, when the big war began, he disappeared. His cabin on the Gospel and Literature lot was abandoned. He had been seen on the new Contract road going down grade out of the mountains, just at dusk, but whither he was going none could tell or know.

Days lengthened into weeks and months, and people decided that Old Drew had fallen into some deep river eddy, or he had wandered up into the mountains where he had died, perhaps from sickness, perhaps from injury. As he belonged to no one, no one went to seek him. Hard times came on all the mountain people. Markets for their timber closed; the prices of furs came away down; there was no place left to sell sang or herbs; revenue officers were more active, cutting off the market for their crops of grain and fruit by destroying moonshine stills. Everything that was purchased "outside" began to go up and up—sugar, coffee, flour, salt and the like, as well as all cooking utensils, all manufactured fabrics, leather and rubber boots and hats.

Poverty among the people grew so intense that nothing else could be thought about. Old Drew had taken his departure—and the people had other things to think about, which were, as they supposed, much more important.

Old Drew Nuckle, however, returned in the winter that followed. He looked ten years younger; he walked with brisk footsteps; he had a strange light in his eyes—madness, but not the old insanity. Not once did he say "A skun log floats!" Instead he cried:

"Boys! They wouldn't take me for warring, but I kin he'p! I kin he'p!"

Crazy? Crazier than ever! Poor Old Drew had something wrong in his head, somewhere. A laugh went up, but Drew persisted in saying that they could all help, up there in the mountains.

He set the example for them; he went out into the clearings and old cutovers and gathered up chunks of old stumps that stood in the fields the pieces of wood that had set and weather hardened while all the rest of the stumps and roots decayed. He had lost his mind, people reminded one another, in a dicker over 2400 acres of land where black walnut grew in fine stand. Now he gathered pieces of black walnut stumps, gnarled boles and knots and roots. He dug them out with pickax and shovel, and toted them down to his Gospel and Literature Lot cabin, piece by piece. Some of the chunks were no longer than his forearm; others were so large and heavy that he had to up-end them over and over, or roll them down to his front yard.

"What are yo' doin', Drew?" people would ask.

"I'm he'pin' in the war!" the old man would reply, not pausing in his efforts. "I'm a he'pin'!"

There was a laugh in every time Drew Nuckle made his reply. The old man had somehow picked up the notion that he was helping wage war for civilization, liberty and oppressed nations by gathering the material fit for a snag-stump fence. He was not satisfied to work alone, at that.

When he went mad he had had several thousands of dollars buried in the ground, and for a long time neither he nor anyone else could find the money. Now he brought out mysterious gold, silver, nickel and copper coins. Shrewdly he held silence about the source of his supply, and no one could follow him to where he tapped his hidden hoard. He hired help gathering those ridiculous chunks of wood.

Old Drew's madness was a boon to his mountain neighbors; the pennies and small silver which paid the little children for gathering black walnut chunks salted many a dinner, got raisings for many a mess of hot bread and added necessities to many a poverty stricken cabin.

The unfeeling laughed as they gazed at that shimmering, gnarled, black heap of walnut chun ks raising in Old Drew Nuckle's yard. From a little pile, like a section of stump fence, it grew till it covered square yards, then square rods. The mass increased till it was as large as a cabin, and finally, till it was as big as the famous Marble palace over on Holston.

From a few score chucks, it grew until there were fairly hundreds of cords of chunks, to which thousands of acres of cut-over lands had contributed. Only black walnut pieces were in the mass. Old Drew Nuckle knew woods, none better. He could recognize by feel the smooth, beautiful texture in the blackest night when some mountain fugitive from justice dickered with him; he knew the swell of a shaving of walnut from any other kind of wood; light knot or deadweight bole, he was not to be fooled.

"What yo' goin' to do with it?" a man asked.

"I'm gwine to he'p fight in the war!" Old Drew grinned.

"But how are yo' goin' to he'p fight the war with that stuff?" the man persisted.

Old Drew puzzled to find an answer. The observers saw his mad face twitching and his tongue wrapping itself around, trying to put forth the answer that clove in his throat. He could not answer. Out of the days before he was insane had lingered the old reticence—he could not betray this secret of his industry, much as he wanted to, so strong had been the habit of silence that he had lost the power of clear expression.

The Legeres, in their friendliness tried to stop Old Drew from spending all his money which he began now to recover from its hiding places. He refused to take their advice. Instead, he begged them to take money in return for the hundreds of unrotted black walnut stumps up onto the Range 4 lots. Out of the pity in their hearts, they took the 10-cent, 50-cent and dollar silver pieces, even pieces of gold, but saved his money for him for the day when he should need it again.

They watched Old Drew and his young helpers grubbing out the old stumps and dragging them down to his cabin, which was beside the new Contract road, over which the automobile stage now carried the mail and which the Legeres drove their own little gasoline machine.

Old Drew Nuckle's industry and perseverence never flagged. He put himself in possession of all the old black walnut stumps and chunks on that side of the mountains for miles and miles around. Old fields were grubbed out, new cut-overs cleaned, even old fences replaced by new, and the abandoned ruins of log cabins were taxed, seeking the waste for which Old Drew would pay real money.

At the last, adults were bringing in old timber on their wagons or even strapped across the saddles of their horses, glad to have the pennies which the madman would give them.

How long Old Drew would have gone on collecting those chunks no one could tell. Somewhere, somehow, he had caught one fleeting fact in the welter of ideas and opportunities that grew up with the outbreak of the big war. Somehow, his mad mind had seized upon the fact of one real need in the world crisis. He had set about trying to supply that need. He had gathered thousands upon thousands of chunks, every one of black walnut, some whole stumps, wind polished roots and knots.

He had them, but his poor enfeebled mind did not tell him what to do with them. He was like the young, untrained robin with the insinct to build a nest, gathering bushels and busheis of twigs and mud and grass and other material, spreading it along all the beam of a barn, but not understanding building.

So Sal-Bet Leigere wondered about his idea. She grappled with the fact that the old fellow must have some incentive, somewhere, to start him gathering those chunks. Little by little, she applied the shrewdness inherited from her father, Old Crumby, first at one point, then at another.

Black walnut, in long timber was valuable, of course. Her own fortune was based on the sales of walnut tree logs. But here was a vast mass of mere little chunks. Old Drew had paid as high as five cents a dozen for walnut pieces, no larger than her wrist and hand. He had received an impulse somewhere, he had seen an opportunity—seized it, worked it out, and now he had forgotten what it was. He could not remember what he had had in mind.

"He's like a miser who sets out to get money enough to buy a farm, and then forgets what he wants the gold for, and he keeps on saving, and saving, never knowing when he has had enough, or when to stop!" she thought.

One day she heard a rumor. Some of the wild young men were going to have some fun with Old Drew. They were going down to the old man's place and build a fire in one end of the great snag pile, and set back and enjoy seeing the old man romp and rage around. Sal-Bet knew that the young scoundrels would do what they were talking about. It seemed to her to be a wanton shame, but she could not see her way clear to preventing it. Teasing the crazy old man was common enough.

"It's his own wood!" she agreed with one youth. "You have no right to burn it!"

"Yah—hit's no count—old sticks an' stumps!" she was told. "Hit'd be fun to see it blaze up, an' Old Drew roarin', tearin' around——"

"He'd sure kill somebody," she suggested.

"Shucks!" the youth retorted. "He ain't got no gun——"

"Well, I have!" she exclaimed. "I'm goin' down there, an' I'll shoot any young scoundrel I find tryin 'to burn Old Drew's wood pile!"

She had a rifle of her own, a 25-35 caliber, which her husband had given her to shoot at wild turkeys and squirrels and other game. She took it and started on her horse down the road, with her belt of ammunition. She found Old Drew sitting on the sunny side of his heap of chunks, fondling a piece about 20 inches long, seven inches wide and shaped like the folded wing of a bird.

"Hit's a purty! Hit's a purty!" he was mumbling to himself. "Yas, suh, hit's a purty!"

"Hello, Drew!" she roused him from his dreams. "Some young scoundrels 'lowed they'd burn yo' wood pile, an' hyar's a rifle, if they try hit!"

"Burn my wood pile?" he repeated stupidly. "I ain't got no wood pile, but, Lawse! I got this yeah chunks—look't Mis' Legere! Yo' kin have this yeah one, 'count of yo' bein' good to me. See—fo' yo' rifle, an' hyar, fo' yo' hand grip—when yo' fight them as—them as ain' peaceable to'd we'uns, an' rowdy aroun'!"

"Wha-wha—" the shrewd mountain woman gasped, as she saw what the old man had almost forgotten, "yas, suh, Drew! Hit's so! Yo'-all's he'pin make rifles!"

"Jes' so!" he smiled. "Hit' my little shares, yes, indeed! was too mean an' onery, back in our Civil War times to he'p ary side. Now, I'm too ole to fight, so I grubbed out these yeah all these heah! I couldn't do no mo', Mis' Cal-Bet! I see you got yo' rifle. This yeah'd make a purtier butt, hit'd fit better, an' when yo' youn-uns git to shootin'—Lawse! Mebby—mebby yo'-all will sort of think of me, all crippled up an' no 'count, he'pin' make yo' rifles!"

"Indeed the boys'll remember she cried, and as she turned her horse to gallop to find her man, she called, "I'm a coming right back Drew!"

When Tip Leigere heard the thing that Sal-Bet had devined, and when he knew that old Drew Nuckle had collected black walnut for tens of thousands of rifle butts and barrel grips, he laughed aloud with joy. It was just so! He rode out, then, and gathered young men to guard that great heap of chunks, stumps, knots and pieces, so that they would be preserved against any raiders.

Then he rode down to the railroad station, and when he returned, he brought a telegram offering a fortune for Old Drew's collection of old pieces of black walnut, fit especially for making rifle butts and hand grips.

And with that message old Drew's mind opened up a little more. He could see a brighter light. He felt that he had been doing something to help.

"I cayn't shoot none," he shook his head, "but I kin he'p make rifles, yes, indeedy."

No one laughed now when they heard him say that. They pitied him; they remembered, too, that he had spent all his money, keeping them in salt and sugar and coffee, trying with all his feeble mind's might to atone for the things that he had neglected to do in the war of his youthful years, there in the mountains.

Fill in the Front of the Coat

You may call them what you like, a gilet, vestee, blousette, waistcoat or guimpe, but you must have one or two if your wardrobe is to be considered anywhere near complete. It will be worn ont only with the spring suit, or the suit dress, but with the separate sports coat and tuxedo sweater. And the variety of "fronts" is legion.

First of all there is the dressy affair which turns the plainest suit into a thing of elegance. The very latest material for these is pique treated in many odd ways. It may be cut very long in the manner of Louis XV and made from colored pique, white, yellow or green. Arabesque stitchery in black or maroon silk may be emproidered in jet or steel, with buttons to match.

Blouse "Fronts"

A heavy crepe de chine makes blouse fronts of a dressy character for the tailored suit. These are very effective when embroidered or appliqued with black oilcloth or patent leather. Raffia and kid embroideries enliven the silk waistcoats, which are often cut like a blouse, with the embroidered panel in front. One of the most stunning of waistcoats is of white cashmere, with black oilcloth piping, buttonholes and jet buttons.

For wear with the jaunty little Eaton and bolero suits there are smart striped wash silk blousettes, many with Buster Brown collars, to be finished off with a Windsor tie. For the same use are gay Roman striped vestees, with wide girdle and sash attached or separate. Linen makes gilets of a sports nature and is given a military touch by horizontal rows of hemstitching or solid embroidery, ending in tailored arrowheads. These are narrow at the top, but widen towards the bottom when designed for the bolero suit.

Lingerie "Fronts"

Lingerie fronts come in organdie, fine batiste and net. The organdie are frequently colored, but the batiste and net are almost sure to be ecru. A novelty is the sashed vestee of organdie designed for use on the silk frock or colored organdie dress. The sash is also sold separately from the vest, though both are trimmed alike with the same lace or pleatings The vogue or short sleeves has brought about a fad for making a set of the trimmed "front" and a pair of sleeve puffs to match, which can be sewed into the short sleeve of the coat or frock to lengthen it or merely give it a lingerie finish. In the lingerie class, eyelet embroidery holds a high place.

Tale of a Scientist's Kite

The Weather Bureau of the U. S Department of Agriculture gathered a great deal of valuable information for Army and Navy aviators during the war and for mail service aviation since that time by means of kites to which is attached a self-recording instrument the meteorograph. Some of the difficulties experienced are shown by an incident that occurred March 16th at Leesburg, Ga. In order to attain the height desired, a number of kites had been sent up tandem. They consisted of storng wooden frames about 7x7x3 feet. Each kite was covered with about 12 yards of fine cambric and were attached to fine piano wire. They were let out and hauled in by a reel operated by elecrtric motor. Due to a defective splice, four of the kites with about three miles of wire broke away and flew about 18 miles before the wire became entangled in a tree. A farmer telephoned the news to the aerological station, but before the party sent out to recover the kites could reach them some negroes had wrecked the first one and stolen the cloth which was later found in nine pieces in various cabins. The other three kites when the first one was seperated from them, escaped and flew about three miles farther. During the flight, however, the wire became entagled with a boy and a mule plowing in a field. The boy grasped the wire and cut and burned his hands. The mule became so entangled in the wire that the help of three men was required to release him. The three kites were finally caught in another tree which was dismantled by the negroes. The two remaining kites again escaped flew about three miles farther and landed in one of the tallest pine trees in the region. The third kite had a meteorograph attached which was recovered undamaged. A heavy rain came on, however, and the two remaining kites were broken up and finally abandoned.

O, for the Good Old Days

When There Were No Buttons to Push

Will you tell us, Mr. Genius, where we're heading for these days—we common, funny humans, with our queer and freakish ways? In baby flats you tucks us, when the shades of evening fall, in abed that has a mirror—one that hung upon the wall. Then you've taken old-time pantries, where a fat man could not get, and you've fitted them up snugly and you've called them kitchenet. In our fireplace in the parlor, with its comcomfort (there's the rub) you have made us push a button—hokus pokus—on bathtub. And today, so we've discovered you have reached the limit. quite—you have made our parlor table so 'twill be abed at night. So we ask you, Mr. Genius, as you rip our flat apart, why not just use serving tables—let us all live a la carte?

Most private automobile transportation companies would throw up their hands in despair if they were called upon in a hurry to haul a boa constrictor, or a dromedary, or a family of lions, or a man-eating tiger from one locality to another and deliver their charges intact in body and spirit. But a thing is all in a days work for the transportation company on the Pacific coast, where nothing is unusual where every celebrity comes some time, and where almost everything that could happen has already come to pass.

It has taken as many as 60 seven-passenger automobiles, all working at the same time, to care for the transportation needs of a single production There have often been forty auto trucks busy at the same time.

Protecting Woodlands from Injury

That young growth in the woods, known popularly as "brush," is something to be rid of, is a prevalent but mistaken conception, since, as forestry specialists of the United States Department of Agriculture point out, a forest cannot maintain itself long without reproduction. For the sake of getting a scattering of green grass in the spring, it is the short-sighted practice in hundreds of localities to fire the woods regularly. This results in killing of thousands of small trees needed to continue the forest in the future and also injures a large amount of marketable timber. Furthermore, such burning destroys a large amount of rich vegetable fertilizer.

Cattle and hogs in hardwood stands and hogs in long-leaf pines keep the forest from being restocked. Damage from insects can be reduced by cutting timber at the proper time of year and by utilizing lightning-killed trees without delay, since they harbor destructive pests. Cattle destroy the praductive leaf mulch which keeps the trees growing during long, dry spells. All large openings where light comes through into the forest should be filled with younger trees. Fully stocked woods contain little or no grass, but afford full shade, which prevents the soil drying out and keeps the trees growing.

Defective Flues and Overheated Stoves

Stoves, stovepipes, and chimneys, if improperly installed or carelessly used, always constitute a fire menace. Stoves and stovepipes should be placed at a good distance from the walls and woodwork and usually a piece of iron or tin, or preferably asbestos, should be used to cover the nearest surface. If iron or tin is used an air space should separate it from the wall or woodwork.

Stoves and stovepipes should be put up solidly. In general, stovepipes should not pass through wooden partitions or through ceilings, and in case such installation can not be avoided, a metal thimble, which can be purchased from any tinsmith or stove dealer, or a tile insulator should be placed around the pipe. Chimneys should be examined periodically for cracks. If cracks occur in a chimney they should be filled with plaster or cement at once, as fire often creeps through such cracks to the woodwork. Cracks that may be dangerous and that might not otherwise be found can be discovered by building a smudge in the stove and placing a board or wet sack over the chimney. Smoke will then be forced out of the cracks.

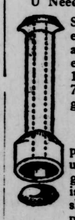
All chimneys and stovepipes should be cleaned regularly to remove the soot and other inflammable material that may have got into them. A chimney can best be cleaned by means of pieces of metal (such as scrap tin), limbs of an evergreen tree, or a bundle of brush attached to a rope, chain or wire, and worked up and down in the chimney from the top. A flue hole should never be filled with old cloths or other inflammable material, but should be covered in a secure manner with a metal flue-stop.

New Black Blouses

Some chic new blouses have been developed in black this season. Black lace and net are used for elaborate blouses of knee length, worn with skirts of satin or silk. Many are made of black georgette or crepe de chine.

Black cotton blouses are also very smart. Black organdie waists are trimmed with collars of white organdie, while black dotted Swiss blouses have collars of white batiste or organdie.

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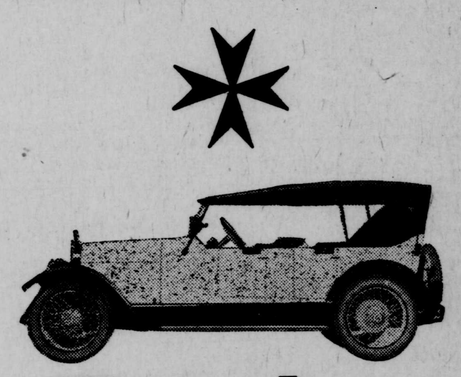
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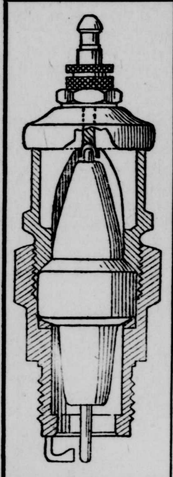
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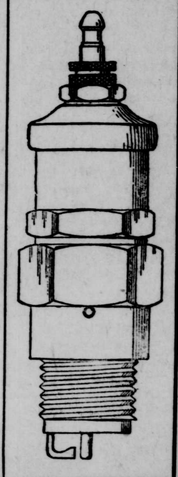
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