

# The Roanoke Beacon.

\$1.00 a Year, in Advance.

"FOR GOD, FOR COUNTRY, AND FOR TRUTH."

Single Copy, 5 Cents.

VOL. XIII.

PLYMOUTH, N. C., FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 1902.

NO. 7.



## 'TWEEN EARTH AND SKY.

BY NORMAN DUNCAN.

HE was a strong, quick lad of sixteen years. If big bones, blue eyes and a towhead count for anything, he had Swedish blood in his veins.

It was his duty for eight hours of every working-day to fetch and carry over the girders and crosspieces, as the great cantilever bridge grew, foot by foot, out over the ravine. Bolts, tools, water and what not he took nimbly from place to place at the call of the workers. Most of his waking hours were spent in perilous places, high in the air, where a misstep meant death.

Nobody knew who he was, and only the foreman knew where he came from. The men of the gang called him "Johnson's kid." Johnson, the brusque, gigantic foreman, called him plain "kid," and, curiously, seemed to value the dumb affection and loyalty the waif gave him. The foreman was ready enough to respond with his fists when the kid needed protection from the baiting of the men, which was often; but a show of tenderness was far from him.

The kid's regard for Johnson was past the understanding of the gang. In the sight of the men, who hated him for his abusive tongue, the foreman had no traits to win love. It was commonly put down to a queer twist in the boy's nature that he should care for Johnson. As a matter of fact, this affection had its source in a happening of two years before, when the White Rock Bridge was built over one of the great rivers in the far Northwest, and the kid was new at the work. It was there, one day, when he was walking a twelve-inch girder two hundred and seven feet above the river, that the kid lost his presence of mind for the first and last time.

This loss of courage, or self-possession, may come upon any bridge-builder, no matter how used to high places. It is unaccountable and comes suddenly. Generally it puts an end to the man's career. Either he falls to his death, or, so fearful is the shock, he can never again summon courage to venture out on the structure.

On this occasion the kid had dropped his pail of water and sunk to the girder. He lay flat on his stomach, gripping the iron with his arms and knees. His case was desperate. Terror of the space below had utterly overcome him. It seemed inevitable that he should faint of sheer fear, and tumble through two hundred and seven feet of space to the river. His arms were fast becoming nerveless.

It was Johnson who perceived the boy's predicament. He was quick to act, and his experience made him fertile in expedients. Calmly, and whistling, he walked along a parallel girder to where the kid lay, just out of reach. Then, for as long as he dared, he looked up and down the river, humming the chorus of an old song. He observed his near presence and self-possession seemed to quiet the lad's terror.

"Here, kid," said the foreman, quietly, "get to land an' tell Bill Oleson to hurry up with them rivets. And say," he added, sharply, "don't you lose any time about it!"

The boy did not move. It was evident, however, that the firm, familiar command had steadied him somewhat.

"Hear me?" roared the foreman. "Get up, when I tell you! Hurry them rivets up, now, and be lively!"

Then the boy got to his feet. While, pale and shaking, he made his way over fifty feet of narrow foothold, the foreman kept roaring his command to make haste. When the boy reached the platform of the abutment he fell in a faint; but the foreman was there to catch him, and carried him the rest of the way to the bluff.

It was for this that the kid loved Johnson. It was for what occurred the next day that Johnson came as near to loving the kid as he could come, perhaps, to loving anything.

In the noon hour, which is the time for skylarking, the boy climbed the outpost upright, bent on proving his courage, that he might put a stop to

the gibes of the men once and for all. There was an eighteen-inch plate riveted securely to the top of the upright. Upon this he clambered, persevering against the warning cries of the men, who had gathered to watch him. Then he stood erect, looked at the sky and the river and all around, and danced a breakdown.

"What'd you do that for?" the foreman asked him angrily, when he had come down. "Eh? What'd you do that fool thing for? Don't you know any better?"

"My feet was cold, boss," said the kid, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Say, kid," exclaimed Johnson, moved for once to enthusiasm, "you stick to me and I'll stand by you! Understand? You stick to me."

In this way it came about that the foreman and the kid traveled East in company; and when Johnson was put to work on the big cantilever at Rocky Gorge, they were still together. "Where I go you can come," the foreman had said to the boy. "You're a bridge-builder born."

The big cantilever job was a difficult one, and Johnson was more harsh and abusive than ever. As a consequence, when the men were making ready for the great strike which took place that year, three or four scamps in Johnson's gang, who cared neither for one side nor the other, thought they had found their opportunity for revenge. They gave loud expression to their pretended sympathy with the men, and soon accused the burly foreman of having disclosed the strikers' plans to the superintendent. Johnson did not take the trouble to deny the charge, but he resented it with ugly-tempered commands and a brimming measure of labor for every hour of the day. The hatred of his enemies grew more menacing, and their number increased.

From suspicion to threats of vengeance is a short and easy path for men who have already undertaken a lawless course. Johnson was thrice anonymously warned to seek work elsewhere, and that quickly. A coffin and bleeding heart, rudely scrawled in black and red on the last notice, gave point to the warning. Upon each occasion the foreman had taken pains to show his contempt by a more flagrant abuse of the worst of the malcontents, whom, recklessly, he soon roused to a pitch of fury that boded ill for him.

The kid observed this cloud of danger rising. He had nothing to fear for himself, but he was no less distressed on this account. On the October night which just preceded the first day of the big strike the foreman had gone on some small errand down to the superintendent's office in the ravine, under the bluff opposite to that upon which the workmen's shack was set. There was but one path; running along the edge of the cliff for half a mile, it then descended steeply to the gorge, and led over a rickety bridge to the opposite side.

At various points the path turned sharp angles, and ran all through a fringe of bushes. The night was thick. A thin rain had fallen in the afternoon, and the fog now lay like a blanket in the ravine. It appeared to the kid that the foreman's return, being made at a late hour, would be attended with some danger.

The men had made a fire in the big box stove in the rear of the shack, for the night was cold. Gathered round the fire, a group of the foreman's personal enemies began to talk freely, and soon worked themselves into a rage.

"Where's the kid?" exclaimed Big Red Smith, suddenly and somewhat anxiously. Several men turned and spied the boy idling innocently near the door.

"He's all right," one of them whispered.

An intense, close conversation in whispers ensued. The kid heard the name of Johnson coupled with the word "even" spoken with deep passion. It needed nothing more to make him prick up his ears. The stray words that came to him increased his uneasiness. He fancied that the men were

to "take it out of Johnson" while they had the chance.

Soon four men passed him on their way out into the night. Their faces were flushed and scowling. One of them the foreman had thrashed for insubordination three weeks before. When they had gone, the boy felt himself to be under the surveillance of all the men left in the room. Nevertheless, he made up his mind that, cost what it might, he would be good to Johnson, who had been good to him.

"Fetch the kid here," he heard some one say in a whisper.

"Naw," was the reply. "Leave him alone. He can't get away. Keep your eye on him, Bill."

This was sufficient to convince him that some evil was awaiting the foreman. What was it? How could it be averted? Possibly it was a beating at some turn in the road, where men could easily lie in wait, and attack from behind. Certainly it was not murder. No man of them was so foolhardy as to put his own neck in danger. But might not the end of it, when passions were aroused to the boiling point, be murder?

The kid began to edge toward the door. He moved with exceeding care—quietly, slowly, and as if aimlessly. When he had come near to the threshold Big Red Smith called sharply:

"Where's the kid?"

"Here!" some one shouted. "Come back here!"

The kid was making speedily for the door. Four men, Big Red in the lead, followed in hot haste; but the boy was not to be caught. He escaped through the open door and sped down the path to the edge of the bluff. He had planned clearly in his mind what to do, and in all he did that night he hesitated not once.

The path to the ravine was closed to him by the four men who had gone ahead.

The eastern abutment of the big cantilever had at that time been finished. The ironwork of the structure stretched out one hundred feet into the air, reaching for the middle of the gorge, where it was to meet the opposite section then under construction. Half-way up the bluff, on a broad ledge, the big steam derrick had its place. The lean, black arm, which lifted the ponderous girders from the bottom of the ravine to their stations in the span, extended from this ledge beyond the point to which the structure had been carried. From its extremity hung the mighty tackle and blocks. The ropes fell to the ground below—where, for convenience, the ironwork had been transported from the town above over a makeshift railroad.

The plan of the kid was to walk the girder to the ropes, and descend thence by the "standing fall" to the bottom of the ravine.

The night had cleared. Low in the sky to the west the moon was breaking through the thin clouds. It would be broad light soon. The boy picked his way over the encumbered abutment platform. He had come to the naked girder, which protruded into the air, when his pursuers found him out.

"You're all safe, kid!" Big Red shouted. "You're as good there as anywhere!"

The men sat down, panting and laughing, for they were tired with the run and amused by the issue.

The kid made his way cautiously, balancing himself with his arms. The light was barely sufficient. The path he must tread lay darkly before him; but the girder was solidly fixed in its place. It did not sway under his weight. Thus far, the way had not been difficult to his experienced feet and trained nerves. He saw the ropes hanging just beyond the end of the path.

Far below—two hundred and fifty feet below—and far beyond, the lights in the superintendent's house and in the group of executive offices shone cheerfully. It was for those lights he was bound. When he came to the end of the girder, he paused, for a moment, to breathe. His feet rested on an iron plank, sixteen inches wide. There was nothing above—nothing on either side; all about was misty space, all that was solid was underfoot.

"Hi!" Big Red roared, of a sudden. The kid had reached for the tackle. It was now plain to the men on the bluff that he meant to descend by it. They came after him, threatening him with violence if he should persevere.

"Come back or I'll throw you off!" Big Red shouted, hoarsely.

Unhappily for the kid, he could not catch the ropes. Three times he tried

vainly to grasp them; each time, so desperate was the effort, he placed his balance in fearful jeopardy. At last his finger brushed the nearest strand. This gave him an idea. He brought his feet together, and advanced them until the tips of his toes were flush with the end of the girder. He reached again, and failed again. He allowed himself half an inch more. Then, by leaning out so far that a breath of air might have toppled him over, he was able to touch the rope again, and to push it. This nearly cost him his balance. He tottered for the space of a breath; but recovered, cleverly, and leaned forward again, nothing daunted.

Meanwhile, Big Red was tiptoeing after him. The kid felt the girder vibrate. He turned his head, but kept his feet in their place.

"Get out of there!" he said grimly. "Let me alone, you! Don't you come here! Get back!"

"Come back, kid!" he whined. "It'll be all right if you come back. We won't hurt you."

For an answer the kid reached again for the rope, bearing himself as if Big Red Smith were nowhere about. He was teetering on his toes, and had as much of his body thrust forward as his balance could sustain. Another push on the rope set the block below swinging like a pendulum. He pushed it again—and again—and again. With each touch its swing was greater. At last one rope came within reach. He crooked his forefinger about it, and held it.

The weight of the block, on its return swing, was a heavy strain to put upon his delicate poise. For an instant he was on the point of leaping for the rope before he should be wrenched from his place. He met the strain, however; fixed his grip, pulled the arm of the derrick in, and selected the standing fall—the only stationary rope of all the tackle. It was but the work of a moment to wind this about his leg, swing far out, and slide swiftly toward the ground, leaving Big Red to vent his rage as best he might.

Johnson was bidding the superintendent good night when the kid, out of breath, brought his warning to the office door. Johnson was saved, and you may be sure his friendship for the kid was not diminished by this latest exploit.—Youth's Companion.

### The Billboard Nuisance.

The Springfield (Ohio) Republic takes a sensible view of the sign-board advertising nuisance, which it comments upon as follows:

In Columbus there is a discussion on at present about street signs. The Capital is much in need of labels for the corners (a subject which Springfield ought to be investigating, by the way), but it is the display of popular sentiment in another direction that has been most interesting.

Owing to the expense of manufacturing and placing suitable signs, the feasibility of granting the contract to some advertising company who would pay for the privilege of putting up sign posts with eulogies of its various wares displayed on them, was talked over.

Instantly the people were up in arms. They declared that such a procedure would deface the streets and make Columbus a laughing stock. Street signs, they said, were already too numerous, and they would rather foot the bill for any proper signs Council might see fit to buy, than have money put into the city treasury by an advertising scheme.

All this goes to show which way the wind is blowing. It may be years, but some day fence signs and bill boards and barn placards will go. The people are getting tired of them.

We are glad to note the fact that newspapers in all sections of the country are beginning to take up this fight. The ranks are growing day by day, and, as the Republic truly says, "the people are getting tired of them and they must go." This matter is in the hands of the newspaper publishers themselves. They can, by making one solid, united front, wipe out the nuisance in the twinkling of an eye—and if they but knew it, the great American people are anxiously waiting for the eye to twinkle.—Fourth Estate.

### Furnished Artistically.

An Atchison woman who has an "artistically" furnished home, made a table cover, a dressing case scarf, and a pair of sash curtains out of one forty-nine cent curtain.—Atchison Globe.

There are 130,000,000 people on the face of the globe who don't know what soap is.

### TRACKIN' RABBITS.

The fleecy flakes come fallin' down  
Deep in the stillness of the night,  
An' robe the earth so bare an' brown  
In bridal dress o' purest white,  
An' memory goes a noisin' back  
Toward the happy long ago,  
When 'round the farm we used to track  
The bunnies rabbits through the snow.

All banded up with "comforters"  
Around our boyish necks an' ears  
We'd call the little huntin' curs  
To limber up their runnin' gears,  
An' round the snowy ol' straw stack,  
An' brush-heap clearin' we would go,  
Our hearts alive with fun, to track  
The skeery rabbits through the snow.

When one was started, Moses help!  
But how them hankerin' dogs'd fly!  
At every jump they'd give a yelp.  
Us kids a jinin' in the cry,  
Then through a dog-proof fence 'd cut  
An' to ards its home in safety go,  
A leavin' its pursuers but  
Its tracks cut down into the snow.

We've trailed the brown an' grizzly bear  
When in the mountain short o' meat,  
Have seen the elk with shaggy hair  
Lay dead an' bleedin' at our feet,  
The mountain lion's pelt have packed  
To camp, an' laid the blacktail log,  
But had no sport like when we tracked  
Them skeered up rabbits through the snow.

—Denver Post.



Madge—"Have you given Jack your final answer yet?" Mabel—"Not yet—but I have given him my final 'no.'"  
—Brooklyn Life.

"Why do you girls call Bertie 'The Poem'?" "Why, he's just like a poem. He's been rejected at least forty times!"  
—Chicago Daily News.

"Is that distinguished looking gentleman a man of letters?" "Yes, he's a D. D., LL. D., A. M., N. A., from Washington, D. C."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

"Why do you talk so much?" ma cried, reproving little May.  
"I s'pose it's cause," the child replied, "I's got so much to say."  
—Philadelphia Press.

Mrs. Brown—"You know I went to the employment agency—" Mrs. Jones—"Yes? Did you get a cook that suited you?" Mrs. Brown—"Why, no! I couldn't even get a cook that didn't suit me!"—Puck.

Mrs. Hauskeep—"You needn't deny it, Della, I saw you permit that policeman to kiss you last night." Della—"Av course, ma'am. Shure, ye wouldn't have me resist an officer, would ye?"  
—Philadelphia Press.

"Why don't you go to work?" asked the well meaning friend. "I don't dare to," answered Willie Washington. "People would think my father had disinherited me, and it would ruin my credit."  
—Washington Star.

George—"And if things do not go well with us the first year, darling, I hem—presume your father will not see us suffer?" Birdie (sighing)—"No, dear, poor papa's eyesight is rapidly growing worse, even now."  
—Tit-Bits.

Strange capers which oft may out-blame not in unrestricted terms.  
Of course you may not like it, but it's quite agreeable to gems.  
—Washington Star.

"Johnnie," said his mother, threateningly, to the factitious, "I am going to have your father whip you when he comes home to-night." "Please don't, mamma," replied Johnnie, obediently, "paw is allus so tired when he comes home."  
—Boston Post.—Chic.

Officer—"Is your hearing so deaf, any better?" "Sure, he'll be all right in the morning." Officer—"You don't say so." Bridget—"Yes; he was arrested yesterday, and he gets his hearin' in the morning."  
—Denver Republican.

"According to statistics," said the sweet girl graduate, "women live about ten years longer than men." "Yes," growled the old bachelor, "and they might live fifty years longer if they weren't so shy about passing the thirty mark."  
—Chicago Post.

A visitor to the farm was especially struck by the great ruggedness and strength of one of the stalwart harvest hands, and said to the farmer: "That fellow ought to be chieftain of of work." "He is," replied the farmer, "or he ought to be, because I hain't never been able to get none out of him."  
—Success.

### A Musical Note.

It is reported that 150,000 pianofortes were sold in the country last year. How many of them conduced to thoughts of harmony?—Boston Globe.