

The Free Press Short Story

STEP BY STEP

By EDGAR L. VINCENT

"I am afraid father has it now, Miss Leslie." Wallace Bromley's voice trembled a little and his face was drawn and white.

"Oh, I hope not!" Sympathy and solicitude were in the words. "Well, he had a hard cold last night, and this morning his pulse is remaining the same. The worst of it is, I don't know which way to turn for help. You know the doctor is away out in the woods, nobody knows where, with his hands full of sick folk."

"A braver spirit came to the young man at that moment. 'It might be worse, Miss Leslie. I might be sick myself.'"

The smile that struggled through the young man's anxiety may have been rather wan, but it brought cheeriness down the girl. "That's a good way to look at it and it may be you and I can bring your father through."

"You cannot know how grateful your words make me, Miss Leslie. I shall be so glad if you can help me."

"Put how is Mr. Bromley? It may be only a hard cold or something like that. Let's not be too discouraged yet."

Mary Leslie was the only nurse at that moment to be had in all the great lumber camp. Scores of men were sick in their cabins. An epidemic of colds and influenza, complicated in many instances with pneumonia, had swept the camp. If Mary had confessed to the true state of mind which just then possessed her, she would have been compelled to admit that she had been working so hard and so long that she had little courage with which to take up this new case. She had been a long time without any good sleep. Many a night she had not taken off her clothes or lain down from sunset until sunrise.

As she listened to the disconsolate words of Wallace Bromley, however, she felt his sorrow settling down on her own heart. She would help the father and his son, if she could and do it with the same smile and the same gracious manner that had endeared her to every one in Big Lodge Camp.

The moment she stepped into the room where Mr. Bromley lay, she knew that here was a case far more serious than she had dreamed. If her three years' experience as a nurse had taught her anything, it was that this flushed face, hot breath, and restless tossing body told the story of that dread disease, pneumonia. This was no simple cold, nor could she diagnose it as a case of influenza, severe though it might be.

For a moment all she could do was to stand there and look at her husband's face. Her heart was beating fast as she tried to think what had better be done under the circumstances.

"How are you, Father?" Wallace was leaning close down over his father, who lay with his eyes closed.

"If I could keep from thinking, Wallace, I am sure my heart would not beat so hard. But I keep thinking of the men down at the mill. They need me to keep things going. You know I have been there so long they won't know what to do without me."

Mary Leslie stepped to the bedside. "Just try hard, Mr. Bromley, not to worry. The mill will be all right if I am sure. We are going to try to help you think of other things for a little while."

She then made a more careful examination of the sick man, and her previous diagnosis was speedily verified. Here was a case of pneumonia that called for medical care of the most skilled nature. As soon as she could, she beckoned Wallace aside, and whispered, "What we need as soon as possible, is pneumonia serum!"

Bromley sprang back startled. "Pneumonia! Oh, Miss Leslie, is it as bad as that? Surely you must be mistaken!"

"It only means I am sure, but I do not think I am mistaken."

"If we had the medicine you speak of, would it make father well? If it will, we will get it, at whatever cost." Young Bromley spoke eagerly, looking into the face of the nurse.

"It would greatly increase his chance of recovery. Our doctors are all far away, and it is not likely that they would have what we need even if we could find them, but the hospital at Coyden no doubt could furnish us a supply."

"Twenty-five miles away. But I will get it!" Already he was starting.

The nurse glanced toward the sick man. "He is calling for you. He will need you more than anyone else in the world. You cannot be spared, but I go!"

"You, Miss Leslie! That is too hard a trip. You must not do it! I am sure we can find some one else to go."

"You probably know that there are several kinds of serum. I would not want to trust everybody to get it for us. If I were there, I could tell the doctors about the case, and I think they would know how to put up the serum. Do not be afraid to let me go. My horse, Billy, needs exercise. The roads are good. There is snow enough to make the sleigh run well. I'll be back sooner than you think."

"No, no, no! You could not, however, without coming to make it seem as if the young man that she should under-

take such a trip. "It is a man's job," he protested. "If anything should happen to you, I never would forgive myself. You cannot reach Gordon before dark. You could not start back before morning."

"Perhaps not, but I am not afraid, Mr. Bromley. Let me give you a word that has been a great source of strength to me since I found it. It is an old Hebrew translation of a verse in Proverbs. She, then, very reverently, quoted these words:

"As thou goest step by step I will open up the way before thee."

Eagerly the young man listened. "I shall keep that in mind, Miss Leslie. Thank you for it. It may be I have not thought about these things as I ought."

With a caution to be sure to keep the windows open and to give the sick man all possible rest and pure water, Mary opened the door and stepped out into the afternoon quiet. Down at the stable while harnessing the fine horse she loved so well, she now and then patted his glossy neck lovingly and talked to him as though he were a human friend.

"You and I can do it, Billy. Step by step, you know. It will be just a glorious trip for you and me."

Quickly she climbed into the sleigh and gathered the robes about her. Billy tossed his head high in the air. He bowed—the snow impatiently while his mistress was tucking herself in, and the moment he had the word to go, he dashed away into the face of what seemed to be an oncoming storm.

Back in the sick room, Wallace Bromley chafed the hot head of his father until he went to sleep. He then stood at the window watching until the first flakes of snow fluttered ominously against the glass. In his mind he was following the flight of Mary Leslie and wondering if that old word from the long ago would really be of any value to her now. He then did a thing which he had not thought of since he was a little boy at his mother's knee. He dropped by the side of his father's bed and asked that Mary's trust might be his also. Gradually a sense of peace came over him.

Darkness had settled over the city when Mary reached the hospital. To the man who came to care for her horse she said, "Be good to Billy. There never was a better horse! Rub him down well and do not give him too much supper. I shall want him in an hour."

Mary's description of Mr. Bromley's case was sufficiently accurate so that the hospital physician was able to select the proper medicine. Without waiting to eat anything herself, the nurse went to the stable and directed that her horse be made ready. "We're going back, Billy," she said to the faithful animal.

"It may be a worse storm than we can foresee now, but we'll make it before the snow is too deep. I am sure."

In that Mary was mistaken, however, for she was not halfway back to the camp before she realized that the task to which she had set herself was going to be far more serious than she had thought. Steadily the snow came drifting down. The track was beginning to fill so that it was not easy to keep the way. Sometimes Billy was knee-deep in the banks.

His breath began to come harder. He was beginning to lag. The wind blew directly into his face.

"Whoa, Billy," the girl knew that the horse would go on until he dropped in his tracks if she did not give him the word to stop. In spite of the fact that the snow was almost up to his body she climbed out of the sleigh and went around to his head. She smoothed his neck, now fairly dripping wet, not more from the storm than from the sweat due to the hard work he was doing. "It is the worst storm you and I ever were out in, Billy; but we will get back home. We must!"

And the old lines came to her. She repeated them aloud. "As thou goest step by step I will open up the way before thee."

She burned more brightly in the girl's bosom, and it seemed almost as though a new impulse came to the loyal Billy, for which Mary took her place in the sleigh. He bounded ahead for a while very bravely. Mary gave him a free rein now, however. Her eyes were so blinded by the storm that she could not see any distance ahead, and Billy himself seemed to be uncertain just where the road lay. Were his eyes, too, dim from the wind and snow, now striking like crystals of ice? Her heart trembled for a moment as she asked herself whether the horse might not fall, after all. She could not but notice that he was going more slowly.

"They were now entering a stretch of road that led through a long, deep, narrow canyon. Always a fearsome place, the defile seemed doubly forbidding now. Whatever light there had been before now seemed to fall, shut out by the overhanging rocks. All signs of the road were lost under the great blanket of snow. All the horse could do was simply to keep his feet going the best he could."

Finally he ceased doing even this. Strength, light, courage, spent, the splendid animal came to a standstill. Mary clambered out of the sleigh again, to try to find out what had happened. When she was within reach of Billy's head, she reached out and put her hand against a

SUGGEST CANADIAN EVENTS OF 1933

By J. E. Doehman

What were the ten leading Canadian events of 1933? Please do not give too much an interpretation to the word "Canadian". This is rather to mean any event which influences the life of the people of Canada. Think over the past year and attempt to pick out those ten events in the order of their importance. You may have a little trouble with it. At least so thought a score or more to whom I handed this question in the closing days of 1933.

1. The Report of the Banking Commission. All these considerations will be vital but there will be an aftermath to the presidential election in the United States this year such as has not followed such events in the past.

2. The Elections in British Columbia. This was important because it reflected the development of the C. C. F. Naturally it will be looked on as a blessing or a curse, or simply an event, but for good or evil it will have its effect on Canadian public life.

3. The Elections in Nova Scotia. This contest was interesting if it reflects the changed public feeling in that Province and reveals the trend of thought in the Dominion. The opposing side, however, will take the other view and will say that it means nothing at all so far as national politics is concerned.

4. The Summer Schools of the Liberal and Conservative Parties. These events recognized a divergence towards new lines of thought in both political organizations and definitely represent a new approach to political problems. It is a move towards, and not away from, democracy, and to that extent is against the current drift of the times.

5. Legislation for carrying out the Provisions of the Duff Report on the Railways. Although this legislation has not, up to date, been acted upon it is an attempt to reach a solution of our much vexed railway problem and will, no doubt, be the fruitful step-mother of much subsequent legislation and of many arguments throughout the country and in Parliament.

6. The Bottom of the Depression. History will probably mark the year 1933 as definitely the turning point in the depression. This is an important event. The change is not by any means so great as our optimists would have us believe, but throughout the world there is a feeling that we have started once more on the slow, long, toilsome upward course.

7. The Failure of the World Conference. This is important because, in proportion to population, Canada is probably more directly interested in this event than any other nation. We are one of the world's greatest importing and exporting countries and cannot ignore an event which at one time gave promise of breaking down some of the restrictions to trade.

8. The Wheat Agreement. The reasons for placing it so high in the rank of important events is stated in a previous paragraph. It may influence profoundly the economic future of the Dominion.

9. Mr. Roosevelt's election in the United States. While this is certainly not a Canadian event, yet Canada's relationship to the United States is so close that all the new conceptions and new-fangled ideas introduced by Mr. Roosevelt, whether they succeed or fail, will influence very profoundly the economic life of this country. We may profit from its failures, we may imitate them. We may fall to

recognize that our conditions are different. All these considerations will be vital but there will be an aftermath to the presidential election in the United States this year such as has not followed such events in the past.

10. The Report of the Banking Commission. I leave this to the last because its influence will not be definite and immediate. The establishment of a Central Bank and the other changes in our banking legislation are not likely to bring into existence a new heaven and a new earth. However necessary the changes may be, the effect will be gradual although 1933 may probably be their starting point.

I read this list to a friend his answer was: "Why not write about the future instead of the past?" In other words, let us have an era of national planning. Let us arrange for next year instead of recording the events of the past. So I took him the story which I now pass on to you. If you quarrel with my list of the ten greatest events, perhaps you will accept the following as one of the good short stories of the year. Uncertainty of the future makes us always want to write of the past—in these more than usually uncertain times it is hard to peer into the unknown—who can tell what lies beyond to-morrow—sufficient unto the day is its own joy and sorrow.

Here is the story:
Sitting before a grate fire one day late in December, the star reporter of "The Daily Planet" fell asleep. A strange spirit, as one from another world, came to him and said: "I have read your paper during the past year. I have admired your work. I am willing to give you as a reward for your services, one wish. Anything you like, no matter what it is, say it and I will grant it to you."

A bright thought came to the reporter: "Give me, oh great spirit from the unknown," said he, "the privilege of looking into next year's volumes of 'The Daily Planet'."

"It is done," said the spirit, and in an instant on the table beside him there appeared four volumes covering three months each, bound just as they are bound in the Library of the House of Commons.

The reporter started to work at the issue of December 31, 1934. He wanted to view the world of a year hence. He went backward over the pages. Copious notes on stock market and grain market fluctuations were taken. He made mental calculations of how rich he would become by taking advantage of the shifts of prices which would come about during the year. He read the political events

and thought of the great record he might have for precedence and foresight by writing of the things which would happen, and then commenting on them as they took place. He studied the news columns, the murders, the accidents, the disasters by land and sea. He thought of the leads he might write for these stories when he knew in advance that they were going to happen and could give them a little bit of advance thought instead of hurried and immediate action. He wondered vaguely where the columns, if he should not do something to warn the victims of what was going to happen and then, with the fatalism of his craft, he said: "All is in the lap of the gods. I probably could not prevent these happenings and would only get myself into trouble anyway."

Patently he went through the pages, month by month, till he came to January 1 of the New Year. He threw back his head and rested for a moment. "After all," he said, "to-morrow's happenings are not likely to be great news. For if great things happened on January 1 I would have seen the echo of them in the pages I have read." Mistakenly he recorded the notice of his own death. He read the story and marvelled at his own calmness and detachment, the absence of fear, the lack of amazement at the coming tragedy. "I wonder," said he, "if we all feel that way near the end—I suppose so—"

"We've warmed our hands before the fire of Life. It sinks. And we are ready to depart."

He turned to the editorial page and found that the editor had written in praise of his great work and devotion to duty. "Good stuff, both of them," he said, his professional appreciation of work well done over-riding any other feeling which might have crossed his mind. He stirred slightly. The room was getting colder. The fire flickered for a moment and then went out. He slumped further down in his chair. It was New Year's Eve!

For years Mother Graves' Worm Exterminator has ranked as a reliable worm preparation and it always maintains its reputation.

Teacher: "What is a synonym?"
Pupil: "A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell another."

SLAT'S DIARY

By BOBBY PARSONS

Friday—ma was a talking at the supper table about the new preacher's wife. she said she was a wonderful woman and he remarked that every woman which was quiet must be wonderful. the rest of the evening he said that nothing was the best thing he could possibly say and he did.

Saturday—Ed Trunk hassent ben to a doctor for over 30 yrs. becuos he says he gets beter treatment from a medicle book he boughten off a peddler over 30 yrs ago; but last week he tuk down real sick. His wife tried to get him to throw the book away but he said he wouldnt throw the hole book out just on acct of it havin' a little miss print in it.

Sunday—Cash Bromer witch is a old Bachelor says yung men are funny Propaashlous. he says that just when they reach the right age when they might do as they please most of them, go and get married.

Monday—Pa just finished reading a new Novel and he was very discusted becuos it ended with the man in the novel a telling the woman in the novel just what he thot of her and she said that isent how to live for the man to have the last word.

Tuesday—Charley Fenner was always very very kind and we use to hear people say he wood give you the shirt off his back and now sence his sister has grew up he has had to give her the pants off of—he has had to give her his pants it seems like.

Wednesday—Jerry Roberts is able to be out agen since he got to playing with Juniors Kemical set witch he had bought for Junior for a Christmas present and Jerry cudnt wait for Christmas to open it up.

Thursday—Today the teacher called us kids all up to her desk and set us if we had stole the 2 pound Box of Chocoket candy witch had ben in her desk. Jake said he was offy sorry but he didnt steal it. Well she mise represented it a little bit becuos about 1/4 of the peaces was not Chocoket emny ways.

DEFINED

Teacher: "What is a synonym?"

Pupil: "A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell another."

The ONE QUESTION THEY INVARIABLY ASK

CAN SHE COOK?

NO MORE SERIOUS WORDS WERE EVER SAID IN JEST.



FOR BEGINNERS or for any woman who does not feel she has mastered the Art of Cookery

The CANADIAN by COOKING SCHOOL Anna Lee Scott

A New Course of 12 EASY LESSONS

Commencing in the Acton Free Press

Thursday, January 18

The Acton Free Press

ONE of the tragedies of the age is the household wherein there is not a good cook—one who really knows food, for in that household there is sure to be waste which works against the family finances, just as improperly prepared and improperly combined foods work against the family health, causing unhappiness and no end of trouble. To those who do not consider the subject seriously it may not seem so important at the first glance. But it is the unmistakable truth that there is no accomplishment known to women which can compare with that of being a good cook. It does not matter whether the woman in question is to do her own work or have a staff of servants—these are the reasons for this new cookery course.

After five years of preparation, Anna Lee Scott is offering to all readers of this paper, her new 12 Lesson Course in the Art of Cookery, making it possible for everyone, regardless of their income, to find a new thrill in the preparation of food. These new easy ways are without a doubt the most interesting and economical ways.

The first lesson will appear on Thursday, January 18. The other eleven lessons in the course will appear on this same day each week for eleven weeks. Read and study every paragraph. You will find the lesson decidedly helpful in the future as well as the present.