

The Free Press Short Story

BUSHROD WALKS ALONE

By FREDERICK HALL

TWO stories may give an idea of Bushrod Grizzle.

The boys of Caldustry had an odd fashion that year in neckties. During the warm weather they wore their shirts open at the neck with bow ties hanging loose, one end on each side, perhaps to show that they had ties, and could arrange them more formally if they chose.

One day Dean Wilmarth met Bushrod and asked casually: "Why is it that you never wear a tie?"

Bushrod thought seriously a moment before he answered: "I dunno. Everybody wears a tie."

"And," said the dean afterward, "I found it a perfectly good answer. I had not a word to say against it."

That happened in Bushrod Grizzle's second semester. During his first he and young Professor Eaton had the encounter that the professor always delighted in telling about. He had made some incidental mention of the distance, to the sun when Bushrod, unembarrassed by the presence of fellow students, remarked skeptically:

"It don't look as fur as that."

"No," the professor admitted, "it doesn't."

"Then how do you know it's so?"

"The astronomers tell us."

"In this books?"

"Yes."

Bushrod asked one more question. "Didn't you never read nuthin in a book that you didn't think was so?"

The class laughed and the professor said: "Grizzle, if you'll drop in at my room this evening, I'll try to give you more light on the matter."

They spent an hour together. If Bushrod did not wholly fathom the secret of astronomical measurements, he at least convinced himself that there was perhaps something in it, which some day he might learn.

"I ain't book-learned like you be," he said, to the two parted. "I ain't never had nary chance to be; but I learned one thing for myself—no believe all I hear said or see printed. I've been told things and I've read things that weren't so. It's been so all-fired fur off to the sun-bull though, I reckon that's mebbe right. I've took time that ye ain't paid fur givin' me and I'm obliged to ye."

Bushrod Grizzle came from "bloody Basium," a feud county notorious in his state for the number of its killings, where his father, two uncles, a great-uncle and two older brothers had all been killed off in a private war. The duty of carrying on the feud had been one of the things told him which he had decided was not true. At any rate, he turned his back on it. Into his lap from a coal company—it might as well have been from the blue sky—was dropped ten thousand dollars. Influenced by an ignorant mountain preacher, he came down into the low country, searching for an education and knowing as little of that which he sought as Launcelot knew of the Holy Grail. His mother, who feared the feud more than she feared death, had placed with a sister in Ohio. His own sister—only the two left—she sent to a girls' school and he himself came to Caldustry. He was in his middle twenties, a year or two younger than Professor Eaton.

During his second year, after his "hit" had become "it," he fell foul of Martin Eada, or Martin fell foul of him: a mistake which might have been tragic but was not. Martin, for that matter, was hardly a figure for tragedy. Physically fit, doing his share of athletics, he was no bully nor was he mean, or cruel, though often inflicting large doses of thoughtless pain. Far from setting his own course and going his own way, as Bushrod did, he took pride in conforming in codes, manners, speech and dress. He stood well in his classes to him lessons came easy; facts that Bushrod must learn by hard, chin-in-the-hand study, Martin had always known and he found it queer that anyone should have to learn them.

Bushrod learned from a book and map that San Francisco is on our western coast, built on hills overlooking a fine harbor. Martin had been there twice. Bushrod saw in the parlor of Stewart Hall a pretty picture of a woman with a baby, and in perfect good faith asked who they were. Martin told him that it was Dean Wilmarth in childhood, which was not true, the picture being a reproduction of "The Madonna of the Chair." Martin, it will be noted, was something of a "Smart Aleck," a type rare in Caldustry.

Bushrod could have far outshone Martin in skills and knowledge, as plenty, but they were things seldom encountered in the classroom or upon the campus. Martin made the mistake of deciding that Bushrod was stupid. Bushrod probably never gave one thought to his feelings about the matter, or, if he did, he decided that he had none, he seldom showed any. Martin produced and popped him as if he were some biological specimen.

Martin, it was who, as a brownish hawk, gave Bushrod his nickname. Martin took Bushrod as his theme for a character sketch and depicted him to the life:

yet somehow grossly distorted. "I have christened him Lonesome," he said, "not that he is solitary or unfriended. The name is descriptive, pictorial—he looks it. If his hair were but green, instead of red, the birds of the air would be deceived and see in him what I see—The Trail of the Lonesome Pine."

The members laughed, all except Ledford Barr, who that night was presiding, and Bushrod himself, who did not laugh, nor look hurt, nor resentful. He merely listened with respectful attention.

"I wouldn't stand for it, Bush," Ledford said later.

He, too, came from the mountains. "You wouldn't?"

Bushrod plainly was asking to be informed.

"No, I wouldn't. It wasn't just tonight. He's always—"

"I thought about shootin' him," Bushrod nodded.

"And then I decided, all over again, that it wasn't right. He wasn't raised the way I was and mebbe don't see things like I do. Preacher Davis says shootin' is always wrong and after he talked to me, I throwed my gun away. I ain't goin' to shoot. What would you do?"

"I wouldn't shoot," Ledford was really a bit alarmed. "I declare though, I believe I'd smash him one."

"Fightin' against the rules," Bushrod reminded him.

"I know, but—"

"I come hyar seekin' for an education an' I aim to stay till I git one."

"That's right, Bush, that's right, but—"

"I don't aim to discege no rules and get throwed out."

Ledford recalled a case in point.

"Three years ago there was a feller that picked on us mountain boys and we throwed him into the gold-fish pond."

"That wasn't against the rules?"

"Yes, I reckon that it was, but nobody didn't get fired for it."

Bushrod sighed. "Well," he assented. "I won't say that he don't deserve it, but I'm expectin' Celia to keep the rules in her school. Thurr's may be some things is worth fightin' fur—Preacher Davis and I never agreed about that. But I reckon a lot o' things just better be not noticed."

"You don't need to do a thing," Ledford suggested. "If you say the word why, there's fellows here—"

"No," Bushrod said, firmly. "You tell 'em no. Nobody takes up nary quarrel o' mine."

Applause is intoxicating and the success of his skit perhaps emboldened Martin. At any rate, he made Bushrod his favorite theme, joked about him, told funny stories he had done and said true enough, but hardly worth the circulation or distortion he gave them. One day in a group he remarked:

"Where on earth do you suppose he got such a hick name, Bushrod Grizzle?"

"You don't happen to remember that the Father of this country had a nephew named Bushrod—Bushrod Washington?"

Wade Thompson, a Senior, spoke up.

"Did he have any nephews named Grizzle?"

"Don't you think," Professor Eaton asked Martin one day, "that your little pleasantries are just a bit overdone sometimes?"

"Perhaps they can't. If they are equal to pleasant for all concerned."

"Lonesome, you think, doesn't relish my quips, cracks, and wanton wibes?"

"I wouldn't, if I were in his place."

"That professor, is something quite different. You would see things where old Lonesome just burns in ignorance. No, he doesn't burn, doesn't even swell up. That boy is as funny as a crutch."

"I knew a chap who got knocked down by a crutch one time."

"Well, forewarned is forearmed." Martin was not forearmed and the crisis took him quite off his guard. Coming to class one day, Bushrod passed a group of which Martin was the centre and that youth scooped him airy.

"Hello, Lonesome."

It was the first time Bushrod had ever been called that name to his face. He stopped and looked at Martin steadily, his manner serious, attentive, but by no means resentful.

"Bushrod is my name," he said, "an' I ain't never give no permission to nobody to call me nothin' else."

"You ain't?" inquired Martin.

The tone was provocative.

"I reckon it's a fight you're hopin' for," Bushrod spoke slowly, gently. "I come from the lightest county in this state and I shorely would enjoy to oblige you; but fightin' against the rules and I pretty nigh promised a man up in the mountains that I wouldn't fight no more. He says, and I dunno but it's true, that it's mighty seldom a fight settles anything and, when it does, mebbe it's settled the wrong way. I reckon you don't like my deeds and ways. Mebbe you'd like to tell me why."

The group looked at Martin and the proper course was not quite clear to him. His tone was conciliatory and he spoke almost with embarrassment. "I've really got nothing against you, Bush."

"You ain't?"

Martin did not retreat and he continued: "Then mebbe you'd play a game with me. It would settle some things between us, I reckon. I ain't no wish to see you hurt, but I'd like for you to know that thurr's a feller in the mountains that could lick you, if he was a-minded the way I am; and thurr's one other thing that I'd like for you to know: that thurr's things to be learned that ain't in books. One of 'em is to be respectful to folks that is mebbe as good as you, but different."

The group grinned at one another. "What's your game?" one of them inquired.

"An' easy game: atekin' to it is all it needs."

"I'm with you," Martin spoke jauntily. He had no intention of being bluff, nor could he think of any game in which he would not stand a fair chance of winning. Bushrod had not gone out for athletics.

"What's your game?" demanded Martin.

"It's follow the leader. You've played it?"

"When I was a boy."

"All right."

"I'm with you."

Bushrod turned down the road toward the hills. Martin following. After Martin the crowd followed, laughing, joking and giving whimsical advice. It was then about four o'clock.

Bushrod passed down the hill, across the creek, at an even, steady stride, and followed the highway for two miles from there a trail branches off for Spy Rock and he took it at the same measured pace, which looked easy, and was not so easy as it looked.

Martin had started off whistling, but stopped as the trail grew steeper. He was presently perspiring and panting. Once, when he tripped, he asked, "Does that put me out?"

"Not unless you say so," returned Bushrod. "I'm aimin' to go till you say quit."

They came to a place where hands must aid feet in the climbing. Bushrod still took it easily, his breath hardly quickened, and when they came out upon the summit, he waited until Martin's breathing grew regular. A few of the rooters had stayed with them but fully half waited on the trail below. Bushrod leaped to a lower ledge. Martin leaped, but not so well; and it was the only stunt set by Bushrod involving the least danger. The crowd was a bit disappointed. They had looked for something spectacular.

Bushrod took the road back to the campus, where the others made a break for the dining halls and supper. Followed by Martin, he turned off toward the dairy barns. They were back on the campus about seven and Ledford Barr walked with them until eight. The story had been told at supper to every one and they had a constantly changing, informal retinue of from two to twenty.

At midnight, when the two were three miles from town upon an unguarded side road, rain began to fall gently, a fact of which Bushrod seemed uncon-

scious. He did not seek shelter; the rain continued for three hours and water is not wetter than were the two pedestrians. Students crossing the campus to breakfast met, between the tennis courts and the gymnasium a couple of bedraggled figures that had now been walking for something like fifteen hours.

Chapel is at eleven o'clock and attendance compulsory. Bushrod, with Martin behind him, walked in at the last minute and stood at attention for fifty-four minutes. Sun and motion had dried their clothes, but the stains of mud were still conspicuous. They were among the first out the door and at once Bushrod resumed his steady stride. To Ledford he looked exactly as he had when he began his walk; while Martin, though still willing, was playing out.

The boys did not stop for lunch, which meant three consecutive meals skipped. Fresh volunteers, coming and going, attended them throughout the afternoon. Professor Eaton did not actually walk with them but he watched the procession, while a girl in one of his classes told him what it was all about. After exploring a mile or two of every road that led out of town, Bushrod had at last taken a regular circuit: from the college chapel to the railway station, thence by another road to the agriculture building and dairy barns, up the hill to the college hospital, from there to the cemetery, back to town, along Main Street to the campus and so once more to the chapel, to begin it all over.

At four o'clock that afternoon some one remembered that the two had now been walking for twenty-four hours straight. Bushrod might have been run by a constantly refueled engine, for his steady stride never wavered; but all could see that Martin's endurance was failing.

Had Bushrod wished to, he might have paraded his rival's waning power in conspicuous places but apparently such an idea never crossed his mind. He kept to his circuit, round and round; chapel, railway station, agriculture building, hospital, cemetery, back to town, chapel again and repeat. Supper, as a matter of course was skipped and at eight o'clock their dozen followers were augmented by several more, who hoped to be in at the finish.

At ten-thirty o'clock, when the two had been walking steadily for more than thirty hours, Martin, as one of the boys said, "folded up." Just at the door of

the hospital he stumbled, fell, started to get up, then his head dropped upon his arms and he lay as if asleep.

Bushrod offered to help the boys, who carried Martin into the hospital. He waited long enough to learn that nothing in the boy's condition was serious. At the same measured stride, he walked to his dormitory, took a shower, went to bed. He attended his regular classes the next day.

PETRIFIED FOREST

A petrified forest, where trees have been turned into solid stone, has been discovered in Northern Rhodesia. Thousands of these stone "logs" have been found in the bush. The marks of the grain, the annual rings, and even the bark, can be clearly seen in the stone, indicating beyond doubt their origin as wood.

The forest has been found by Messrs. F. B. MacCrae and D. Gordon Lancaster, both of whom are well known for archaeological work in South Africa. Mr. Gordon Lancaster holds the unusual position of "elephant control officer for the Eastern Province of Northern Rhodesia."

Known to the natives as the Viziwa Forest the petrified trees are in the Lundazi district of Northern Rhodesia, not far from the borders of Nyasaland. The forest is about seventy-five miles north of Port Jameson. In size, the remnants of the ancient trees are not considerable, the average length being eighteen inches and two feet; but there seem to be numbers of them hidden in the bush. The natives, it appears, have long known about the petrified forest, and have been in the habit of visiting it to gather fragments of the flinty stone to use for implements. Close to the site is a small river, known as the Viziwa. It is from this that the forest derives its name.

The reason why the timber turned to resemble stone hundreds of years ago is being debated by scientists. It is thought probable that the metamorphosis was due to the infiltration of lime and other mineral bearing water into deposits of wood.

Similar forests have been found in other parts of the world, a famous one being in Arizona but the one now reported in the Lundazi district is probably the most interesting in Africa. Stones chipped into various ingenious shapes, and tools found in the forest, indicate that the petrified trees have since ancient times formed a "toolshop" for the natives.

"You should always go forward but not too quickly. If you must have a car, you must have a brake." Andre Maurois

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