

# Ben's Bid

How the Chickens Saved the Farm.

By F. C. W.

"Why don't you raise chickens for the market?" suggested Hiram Bassett, the village store keeper, to Ben Singer. Ben was 14 years old. His mother had died a short time before. His father was a carpenter by trade, but had been crippled by rheumatism so that he could not work. Ben, who always looked on Mr. Bassett as a friend of undoubted fidelity and great resources, had been telling the storekeeper how much he wished he could get some steady work. Mr. Singer's little stock of money was exhausted; he had already sold some of his tools to get the food for his father. Ben realized that the day was rapidly coming when there would be no way of getting more, unless he managed to do something of greater profit than the odd jobs he picked up now and then from the surrounding farmers.

"I'll do it," said Ben, in response to Mr. Bassett's suggestion, turned about, tramped home and all the way was planning how he might begin.

A week later the "chicken farm," as Ben called it, was a fact, at least he had made a start. In his spare time he had constructed some coops from old barrels and a box or two. The pay for two days' work he had invested in three dozen eggs, and with the money obtained by sorting some vegetables for the storekeeper bought two hens, which were just about to "set." He and his father already had five pullets, and within a couple of weeks more there were five "clutches" of eggs under as many of his hens.

He fed his chickens from the screenings he got at a small price from several of the farmers. The hens managed, too, to pick up

and he would have shown his satisfaction more if it had not been for the impending trouble, which made his father so miserable that he could not leave his bed. Ben bought some fruit for a quarter of a dollar and took it home to him, but Mr. Singer was feeling so badly that he ate of it only sparingly.

On a Monday in the early part of the next month the sheriff, in pursuance of formal notice, arrived at the house to make a sale to satisfy Mr. Singer's creditor. The crowd had gathered about the cottage and there was not one of those present who did not sympathize with the carpenter and his son. Ben's father was very ill that morning, and could not leave the bed. The sheriff mounted a box in the yard, and began a description of the goods to be sold.

It was a pitiful array after all. A few tools, a miscellaneous assortment of cheap furniture, a kitchen stove, with some cooking utensils and china and some linen and blankets. But one item in the lot—the chickens—the sheriff counted on as his drawing card. Half a hundred of fine hens and marketable chickens were cooped in a nearby pen, and upon the value of these the county officer dwelt at length. Then, when he thought he had the crowd sufficiently aroused, he named a starting figure in default of an actual bid.

"Sixty dollars for this choice lot of chickens and household goods!" he cried.

There was no response. He repeated the announcement, then dropped the figure to \$50. Still no one spoke.

The sheriff made some further remarks about the articles for sale and tried again at \$40. But the crowd was dumb. No one felt inclined to buy out the crippled carpenter and his son.

The sheriff tried again and again, dropping the figures lower and lower, and all the time growing more vociferous in the expression of the bargain which he offered. He did not specially like the job, for he had been told by the case by some of the village peeps, but he had a duty to perform and he must get as much out of the sale as he could.

The figures had dropped to \$10, but silence reigned, except for a faint cry from one of the roosters in the pen. Mr. Singer's creditor, evidently, had no representative on the ground and, even the low price named, was not taken up with.

The sheriff dropped his offer, now a dollar at a time, but apparently in vain. It looked as if the sale would come to nothing.

"Nine! eight! seven! six! five! four! not a response came from those about."

"Three dollars!" the sheriff was smiling at the ridiculous offer, and was just about to name \$2 and \$1 in quick succession, when for no reply, when a boyish voice, close at hand, answered:

"I bid \$3!"

The officer looked down on the speaker and saw Ben. The boy held up three \$1 notes in his hand.

The sheriff smiled. More than one man in the crowd felt like cheering the bidder. But the officer knew he could not accept the offer at once.

"Three dollars I am bid!" he announced.

"Who bids four?"

No one spoke.

"Three and a half, then?" he said.

Everyone was silent, and the suggestion of \$3.25, likewise, went unanswered. Three dollars was the one bid offered and after one expostulation the sheriff took the offer.

Ben handed the money to the sheriff, who congratulated him on his purchase with an earnestness he had seldom felt on occasions of the kind, and there was not one of the farmers who didn't come forward and speak a kindly word of praise and encouragement to the boy.

But Ben was listening to little of all this; he slipped away to his father, who could only strain the boy to him, while the tears streamed down his face.

The chicken farm was saved, and the chicken farm proved a success. A year later, when Mr. Singer was once more working steadily, and his rheumatism was gone, his creditor was paid in full the amount borrowed from him, and the proceeds from Ben's chicken farm did not a little to make up the sum required.



"Mr. Bassett, how does a sheriff sell you out?"

a good deal of food among the bushes and in the tiny garden back of the house. Ben worked hard at the small jobs he was given roundabout and waited with confidence for the time when he should be able to make something from his venture.

He would have felt much happier if it hadn't been for his father's condition. Mr. Singer did not complain of the rheumatism, though it still kept him confined to his big chair. But something worried him very much, the boy could see that. He asked what it was several times, but Mr. Singer's only reply was that he suffered, he felt downhearted on account of being so crippled. He tried to make Ben think that that was all that distressed him, but the boy could not believe it.

Slowly the flock of chickens grew. The eggs hatched remarkably well, fifty downy little balls were soon running in and out of the coops, where their mothers were confined. Four more "clutches" of eggs were under that number of new chicks, he had bought and paid for in installments of work. The first days of summer saw him with seventy young chickens, some of them able to scratch for themselves. It took all he could make now to keep his father and himself in food and to provide for his farm, but he was always on alert for a job and was as cheerful as he could be, so that his neighbors all liked to employ him when they could. Ben had told his father of his plan and explained that, as few of the farmers raised chickens, except for their own use, he thought there ought to be a chance to make something by shipping them to Weynesboro, the nearest town five miles away. Mr. Singer was not altogether confident of the success of such an experiment, but he said nothing to discourage the boy and used to sit near the windows and watch the broods and talk to Ben about them. July and August went by, and the young chickens thrived. Only a few of them were lost. A prowling weasand got several before Ben trapped the marauder. Cold and rains killed off a few more. But the lot of September came and more than sixty chickens were the boys' property.

Ben planned to sell thirty or forty in the early autumn and to keep the remainder till the next summer, to stock his farm with fresh. He intended to go in on a bigger scale, and he hoped to realize enough from his sales to keep him through the winter with the part of his flock he retained.

Then, one day in September, as he and his father sat in the doorway of the cottage, Ben noticed a couple of tears trickle down his father's face. He jumped up and threw his arms around his father's neck. He was frightened and he did not understand just what was the matter.

Presently Mr. Singer unclasped the boy's hands and looked him in the face. "Ben," he said, "I'm afraid we're in for hard times yet."

"What do you mean, Dad?" asked Ben.

"The house is only rented," said Mr. Singer slowly, "they can't take that, but they can take all our furniture and everything else."

"Why they belong to us!" exclaimed Ben.

"So they do, Ben, but the law gives another man the right to sell them and take the money they bring. If I owe him money and can't pay it."

"And we owe somebody money? I thought Dr. James was paid."

"So he was. There is some one else to whom I owe money—a man I borrowed from when your mother was sick. I owe him \$100. He has what they call my note. I haven't been able to pay him, and now he says he must have it. He is entitled to it right off, and will get as much of it as possible by selling what we have. He was here to see me about it the other day and I tried to get him to wait. But he says he's tired of waiting, and the sheriff'll come and sell us out."

Ben had a fairly good idea now of the situation. He tried to comfort his father, but it was of little avail. Mr. Singer felt his helplessness and the disgrace keenly, and did not know what would become of them. Ben worried over what he had heard all night long, but he could find no way out of their difficulty.

The next day he took ten of his biggest chickens to the village store. He had already arranged with Mr. Bassett to have them sent to the commission merchant on Weynesboro and sold. After he had delivered the chickens and Mr. Bassett had promised to get him the money for them as quickly as possible, the idea struck Ben of asking the storekeeper about a sheriff's sale. The thing puzzled him a bit yet, and he indulged a faint hope that, if he knew just how it was done, he might be able to hit on a way out of it. "Mr. Bassett," he said, "how does a sheriff sell you out?"

Perhaps the storekeeper had an idea of the trouble. But, if he did, he gave no sign of it and tried to explain to Ben how such a sale was conducted. "And the people at the sale," he concluded, "offer to buy what is offered and the sheriff sells to the one who makes the highest bid."

Ben asked several questions before he left. Then he walked slowly home and all the while, in his mind, he was turning over a dimly defined project which had been suggested to him by what he had heard.

A week later Ben received the money for his chickens—\$30. He was a proud boy,

## A BOY POET.

William Cullen Bryant Wrote Verses

Just a century ago William Cullen Bryant was born in a log farm house in the beautiful Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts. His father was the country doctor and the child was named after a celebrated physician. He began his school days in a log school house beside a little brook that crept down the hills and went singing on its way to the valley.

All around stood the great forest-covered hills, haunted by wolves, bears, deer and wildcats, which occasionally crept down even to the settlements. Whenever the storms were cleared, the farm lands had taken possession.

From the door yard of the Bryant homestead the whole world seemed to be made up of hills and forests, and fertile fields, white in the woods grew the exquisite New England wild flowers, and laurel and arbutus, the violet, the tiger lily, and the fringed gentian. Here also lived the summer birds of New England, the robins, the blue birds and the thrush, hunting the woods from early spring until late autumn.

All these sights and sounds sunk into the boy's heart and made themselves into a poem which he wrote down in words many years after, and which is as clear and fresh as the voice of the little brook itself after which it was named. The poem is called "The Rivulet," and one of its verses runs thus:

Thus unchanged from year to year  
Gaily shall play and glitter here  
Amid yew flowers and tender grass  
Thy endless infancy shall pass.

In Bryant's boyhood New England farm life was very simple. The farmers lived in log or slab houses, whose kitchens formed the living room, where the meals were generally prepared. Heat was supplied by the great fireplaces, that sometimes filled one whole side of the kitchen and were furnished with cranes, spits and pot hooks. Behind the kitchen door hung a bunch of birch rods, with which mischievous boys were kept in order, and in the recess of the afterward described incidents of his father and mother and the influence of his father and mother upon his art, the other developing his talent for composition and the direct tracing his imagination to the existing his sympathies with humanity. This poem shows the story of his mother's knee, reading the story of Pharoah and the Israelites, of David and Goliath and of the life of Christ. As he grew older



WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Bryant shared the usual amusements of country life. In the spring he took his turn in the maple sugar camp; in the autumn he attended to the huskings when the young people met to husk the corn in each neighborhood barn successively, until all was done. He helped at the cider making bees, and the apple parings when the cider and apple sauce was prepared for the year's need; and in the house raisings when men and boys raised the frame of a new house or barn. In these times the farmers depended upon each other for such friendly aid, and the community seemed like one great family.

On Sunday every one went three times to meeting, listened to long sermons, and sang out of the old Bay Psalm book. If an unlucky child fell asleep he was speedily waked up by the titling man, who would tickle his nose with a hare's foot. Once in a while a boy might be restless or noisy and then he was led out of the meeting house and punished with the titling man's rod, a terrible disgrace.

But Bryant had not yet reached manhood—when the true voice of his heart was heard in the most celebrated poem that he ever wrote and one of the most remarkable ever written by a youth. This was "Thanatopsis," which his father discovered among his papers and sent to the North American Review without his son's knowledge, so little did the poet of 18—who five years before had published the trade against Jefferson—realize that he had produced the most remarkable verse yet written in America.

"Thanatopsis" attracted instant attention in this country and in England. It had appeared anonymously, and American critics insisted that it could not be the work of an American author. No native poet approached it either in sublimity or thought or perfection of style. But "Thanatopsis" bears no trace of English influence, nor was it strange that an heir of the Puritan spirit, who had lived in daily communion with nature, should thus set to music the hopes and inspirations of his race.

In 1821 he published his first volume of poems under the title "Poems by William Cullen Bryant." It was a little book of forty pages, containing "Thanatopsis," "Green River," "To a Waterfowl" and other pieces, among which was the charming, "The Yel-

low Violet," a very breath of the spring. This little book was given to the world in the same year in which Cooper published "The Spy," and Irving completed "The Sketch Book."

In 1825 Bryant moved to New York to assume the editorship of a monthly review to which he gave many of his best known poems. A year later he joined the staff of the Evening Post, with which he was connected until his death.

The light of Bryant's imagination burned steadily to the end. In his 82d year he wrote his last important poem, "The Flood of Years." It is a beautiful confession of faith in the nobility of life and the immortality of the soul, and a fitting crown to an existence so beneficent and exalted.

## GRANDMOTHERS.

A BOY'S OPINION.

Grandmothers are very nice folks;  
They beat all the aunts in creation;  
They let a chap sit like a king,  
And don't worry about education.

Grandmothers have muffins for tea,  
And pies, a whole row in the cellar;  
And they're apt, if they know it in time,  
To make chicken pie for a feller.

And if he is bad now and then,  
And makes a gross racketing noise,  
They only look over their specs,  
And say, "Ah, those boys will be boys!"

Quite often, as twilight comes on,  
Grandmothers sing hymns, very low,  
To themselves, as they rock by the fire,  
About heaven and when they shall go.

And then a boy, stopping to think,  
Will find a hot tear in his eye,  
But "Thanatopsis" bears no trace of English influence, nor was it strange that an heir of the Puritan spirit, who had lived in daily communion with nature, should thus set to music the hopes and inspirations of his race.

Twenty years ago a woman in Minnesota sent her son on an errand. He was to get a clothes line. He returned last week. He brought a family with him, but he had not forgotten the clothes line.

## MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT.

A Boquet of Stories About Judges and Lawyers.

The written examination for candidates who seek admission to the bar of this state, says the Boston Standard, has been, comparatively speaking, recently instituted.

Not very long ago, when a candidate made an application for membership, his examination was assigned to a member of the bar, generally to one living in the applicant's district, and was conducted orally.

Mr. A. was assigned for examination to Lawyer B., who made the appointment for the noon hour of a certain day. The candidate, trim and smooth looking, presented himself for the ordeal a little before the appointed time, and the following was the exact and the whole form of his examination:

Lawyer B.—When a client comes to you, Mr. A., what will be the first thing you'll ask of him?

Mr. A.—Money.

Lawyer B.—Good, very good! And the next?

Mr. A.—I shall ask him to state his case.

Lawyer B.—Very good, again. Now, Mr. A. (looking at his watch), it is nearing the hour of 12, and when you meet a gentleman like me at such a time, what will you ask him?

Mr. A.—I'll ask him to come and have a drink.

Lawyer B.—Very good, I'll join you; it is a go.

"A man who has his wits about him," remarked a learned jurist to a Washington Star writer, "is greater than a man who conquers a city, or words to that effect, for he is always sure of getting there."

"In respect of what?" was the inquiry, made with the ulterior purpose of drawing the judge out, "for he knows a good many things worth the telling."

"In many," he went on, "but in this particular case I refer to an experience I had when I had been practicing for two or three years and had an idea that Coke, Blackstone et al. were scarcely in it with me in the ordinary business of the courts. There were a lot of young fellows at our bar, and I

## are little things like this

free to confess that we did not always maintain that dignity of the law which is one of its strongest points. Sometimes we even exceeded the limits, and now and then somebody had a fine to pay for contempt. We had fun at times with visiting lawyers and the best practical joker in the lot was always held in great respect by the rest of us.

"One day an old lawyer from the neighboring county set was defending a prisoner for stealing a cow, I believe, and I had the other side and was quite sure of making my case. The old fellow had been in our court many times and he was the slowest and longest talker I think I ever listened to. He didn't seem to know when to let up. Well, on this occasion he had been talking until the young fellows were worn out and they thought they would teach him a lesson and at the same time help me in downing him. So they quietly went out to the telegraph office, got a blank and an envelope and fixed up a telegram which read: 'Great Caesar, governor, won't you ever stop talking?'

"Then they got a boy to bring the message into the court room and they sat around the bar to see the old man drop dead when he read the dispatch. The boy came in all right and the sheriff promptly delivered the message. Of course, everything became quiet when this point was reached and the lawyer asked permission of the court to read his message. He tore it open amid breathless silence, everybody watching him, and those who were in the joke expecting an explosion as soon as the end had been reached. But there was nothing of the kind. He read it over slowly once, then more slowly again, and then he looked up at the judge and over to the jury."

"May it please the court," he said in tremulous tones, "I have just received a message announcing the death of a very near and dear relative, one who," and his lip quivered, "was more to me than I can tell, and I must ask to be excused from speaking further."

"This was an entirely unexpected turn to the affair, and, of course, the jokers were powerless to change the current. They simply sat dumfounded, while the old fellow was asked to finish his speech. He finished very briefly, but it was to the point, and when my turn came to end the business I was not in it with the grief-stricken man by my side and I

## the jury gave the case to my opponent without leaving the room.

"After it was all over the old lawyer called one of the crowd aside and said something to him with a mild sort of a smile that resulted in his taking up a collection among us sufficient to pay for a fine dinner for the entire bar."

R. F. Hamilton of Biddeford, Me., never talks much about his defense of an individual who was arrested and arraigned for breaking into a jewelry store and stealing a lot of watches. The court assigned the shrewd and energetic Biddeford attorney to defend the prisoner.

"I didn't do it," the prisoner told the lawyer. "I wouldn't do such a thing as that on my life. Really, Mr. Hamilton, I didn't do it. You can take my word as you hear me tell you, but I suppose they'll railroad me."

The trial was held before Judge Virgin. The prisoner was acquitted, and when he met his lawyer in the afternoon said to him: "Well, about \$100," replied the lawyer. "Would you take \$25?" asked the free man.

"Well, that's better than nothing," said the lawyer, and he said: "Twenty-five it is."

They stepped outside, and the discharged man said to the lawyer: "Say, if you'll just until I get to Boston so I can sell those watches, I'll send you the \$25."

A week later Mr. Hamilton received his \$25.

The new woman prisoner locked over the jury of gentlemen in the box, relates the Detroit Free Press.

"May it please the court," she said with great hauteur, "I desire to be tried by a jury of my peers."

"That is impossible, madam. I am sorry to say," replied the gallant judge. "This court hasn't the power to summon angels to serve on juries."

Attorney (for defense)—You say you have not formed or expressed any opinion in this case? Now, sir, what do you understand by the word opinion?

Venue-man—Why, I have an idea.

Attorney—That will do. Your honor, I challenge this man for cause.

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