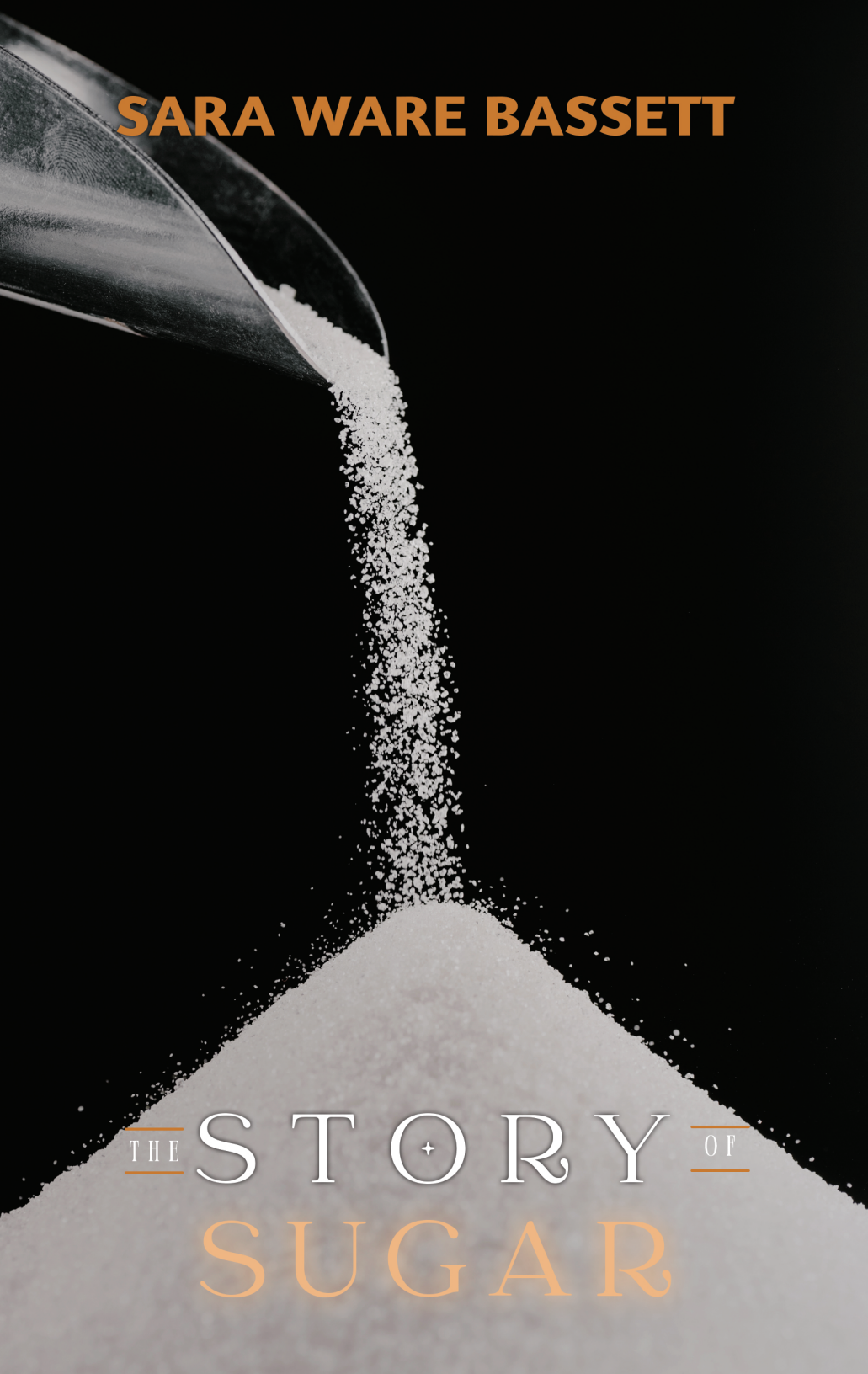
SARA WARE BASSETT



THE STORY OF SUGAR

To my cousin
William Pittman Huxley
this book is affectionately inscribed

This edition published 2025
by Living Book Press

ISBN: 978-1-76153-463-8 (hardcover) 978-1-76153-471-3 (softcover)

First published in 1917.

This edition is based on the The Penn Publishing Company printing by 1917.

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

The Story of Sugar

by

Sara Ware Bassett

LIVING BOOK PRESS

OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES AVAILABLE FROM LIVING BOOK PRESS

The Story of Glass
The Story of Leather
The Story of Silk
The Story of Sugar
The Story of Porcelain
The Story of Lumber
The Story of Wool
The Story of Cotton
The Story of Iron
The Story of Gold and Silver

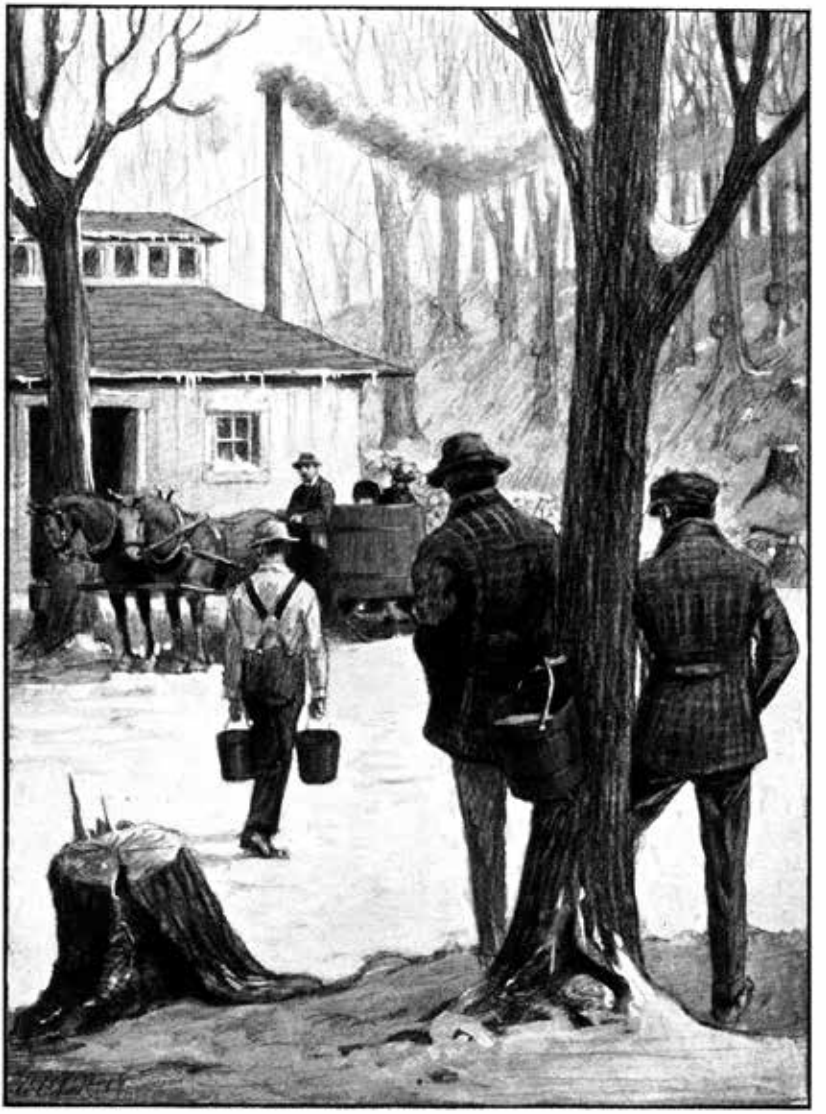
PLEASE NOTE

These books were written about 100 years ago and show the way people talked, thought, and acted back then. They tell the story of how resources like cotton, lumber, leather, and gold were developed—a process that depended on the hard work of many people. Sometimes the work was done by those who made the profits, and other times it was done by people who were not free, including enslaved individuals.

We know that some parts of these stories include ideas that we now understand to be hurtful and unfair. Our aim in republishing these books is not to support those old views but to share our history so we can all learn from it. By looking at the past, including its mistakes, we hope to learn important lessons that will help us create a kinder and fairer future.

We invite you to read these stories with an awareness of their time and to think about how far we have come—and how much work there is still to do.

Contents



"Sugar It Is, Then !"

CHAPTER I

COLVERSHAM

H, say, Bobbie, quit that algebra and come on out! You've stuck at it a full hour already. What's the use of cramming any more? You'll get through the exam all right; you know you always do," protested Van Blake as he flipped a scrap of blotting paper across the study table at his roommate.

Bob Carlton looked up from his book. "Perhaps you're right, Van," he replied, "but you see I can't be too sure on this stuff. Math isn't my strong point, and I simply must not fall down on it; if I should flunk it would break my father all up."

"You flunk! I'd like to see you doing it." Van smiled derisively. "When you fall down on an exam the rest of us better give up. You know perfectly well you'll get by. You are always worrying your head off when there's no earthly need of it. Now look at me. If there is any worrying to be done I'm the one that ought to be doing it. Do I look fussed? You don't catch your uncle losing any sleep over his exams—and yet I generally manage to scrape along, too."

"I know you do—you old eel!" Bob glanced admiringly at

his friend. "I believe you just wriggle by on the strength of your grin."

"Well, if you are such a believer in a grin why don't you cultivate one yourself and see how far it will carry you?" chuckled Van. "The trouble with you, Bobbie, is your conscience; you ought to be operated on for it. Why are you so afraid you won't get good marks all the time?"

"I'm not afraid; but I'd be ashamed if I didn't," was the serious reply. "I promised my father that if he'd let me come to Colversham to school I'd do my best, and I mean to. It costs a pile of money for him to send me here, and it's only decent of me to hold up my end of the bargain."

Van Cortlandt Blake stretched his arms and gazed thoughtfully down at the ruler he was twirling in his fingers.

"Bobbie, you're a trump; I wish more fellows were like you. The difference between us is that while I perfectly agree with you I sit back and talk about it; you go ahead and do something. It's rotten of me not to work harder down here. I know my father is sore on it, and every time he writes I mean to take a brace and do better—honest I do, no kidding. But you know how it goes. Somebody wants me on the ball nine, or on the hockey team, or in the next play, and I say yes to every one of them. The first I know I haven't a minute to study and then I get ragged on the exams.

"You are too popular for your own good, Van. No, I'm not throwing spinach, straight I'm not. What I mean is that everybody likes you. Why, there isn't a more popular boy in the school! That's why you get pulled into every sort of thing that's going. It's all right, too, only if you expect to study any you've got to rise up in your boots and take a stand. That's

why I shut myself up and grind regularly part of every evening. I don't enjoy doing it, but it's the only way."

Van rose and began to roam round the room uneasily.

"Goodness knows, Bobbie, if one of us didn't grind neither of us would get anywhere. By the way, did you manage to dig out that Caesar for to-morrow? Fire away and give me the product of your mighty brain. I guess I can memorize the translation if you read it to me enough times."

Bob did not reply.

"Well?"

"I don't think it is a straight thing for me to translate your Latin for you every day, Van," he said at last. "You ought not to ask me to do it."

"I know it; it's mighty low down—I acknowledge that," answered Van frankly. "But what would you have me do? Flunk it? Come on. I'll get it myself next time."

"That's what you always say, Van, but you never do."

"But I tell you I will. This week I've been so rushed with the Glee Club rehearsals I couldn't do a thing. But you wait and view yours truly next week."

Reluctantly Bob took up his Caesar and opened it.

"That's a gentleman, Bobbie. Some time when you're drowning I'll throw a plank to you. I knew you'd save my life."

"I do not approve of doing it at all," Bob observed, still searching for the place in the much worn brown text-book. "I've done about all your studying this term."

"I own it, oh Benefactor. Are you not my brain—my intellectual machinery? Could I live a day without you?"

Leaning across the table Van affectionately rumpled up Bob's tidy locks until every individual hair stood on end.

"If it weren't for me you'd be dropped back into the next class—that's what would happen to you; and you deserve it, too."

Van was silent.

"I know it. I haven't put in an hour of solid work for a month, Bob I ought to be ashamed, and I am." He paused. "But there's no use jumping all over myself if I haven't," he resumed, shifting to a more sprightly tone. "I've said I was going to take a spurt soon and I mean it. I'll begin next week."

"Why not start to-day?"

There was a rap at the door.

"Why not?" echoed Van, moving toward the door with evident relief. "Don't you see I can't? Somebody's always breaking in on my work. Here's somebody this very minute."

He flung open the door.

"Mail. A parcels-post package for you, Bob. I'll bet it's eats. Your mother's a corker at sending you things; I wish my mother sent me something now and then."

"Well, it's a little different with you. Your family live so far out west they can't very well mail grub to you; but Mater is right here in New York, and of course as she's near by she'd be no sort of a mother if she didn't send me something beside this prison fare. Come on and see what it is this time."

Bob loosened the string from the big box and began unwinding the wrappings.

"Plum-cake!" he cried. "A dandy great loaf! And here's olives, and preserved ginger, and sweet chocolate. She's put in salted almonds, too; and look—here's a tin box of Hannah's molasses cookies, the kind I used to like when I was a kid. Isn't my mother a peach?"

"She sure is; and she must think a lot of you," said Van slowly. "I wish my mother'd ever—"

"Maybe if you pitched in a little harder here she'd feel—"

"Oh, cut out the preaching, Bobbie," was the impatient retort. "I've had enough for one day."

Bob did not speak, but tore open the letter that had come with the bundle.

"Oh, listen to this, Van," he shouted excitedly. "Mother says they have decided to open the New Hampshire house for Easter. They're going up for my spring vacation and take in the sugaring off. What a lark! And listen to this. She writes: 'You'd better arrange to bring your roommate home with you for the holiday unless he has other plans.'"

"Oh, I say!"

"Could you go, Van?"

Bob eyed his chum eagerly.

"I don't see why I couldn't. I'm not going home to Colorado. It's too far. I was thinking of going to Boston with Ted Talbot, but I'd a good sight rather go batting with you, Bobbie, old man. It was fine of your mother to ask me. Where is the place?"

"Our farm? It's in Allenville, New Hampshire, near Mount Monadnock. It used to be my grandfather's home, and after he died and we all moved to New York Father fixed it over and kept it so we could go there summers. I've never been up in the spring, though. It will be no end of fun."

"I hope you do not call this weather spring," put in Van, sarcastically, pointing to the snow-buried hills outside.

"Well, it is the middle of March, and it ought to be spring, if it isn't," answered Bob. "Just think! Only a week more of

cramming; then the exams, and we're off. I'm awfully glad you can go."

"You speak pretty cheerfully of the exams. I don't suppose you dread them much." Van lapsed into a moody silence, kicking the crumpled wrapping-paper into the fireplace. "You don't need to worry, Bob. But look at me. I'll be lucky if I squeak through at all. Of course I've never really flunked, but I've been so on the ragged edge of going under so many times that it's no fun."

"Cheer up! You'll get through. Why, man alive, you've got to. Now come on and get at this Latin and afterward we'll pitch into the plum-cake."

"What do you say we pitch into the cake first?"

"No, sir. Not a bite of cake will you get until you have done your Caesar. Come on, Van, like a good kid, and have it over; then we'll eat and talk about Allenville."

Once more Bob opened the book.

"Here we are! You've got to do it, Van, and to-morrow you'll be glad that you did. Stop fooling with that paper and bring your chair round this side of the desk. Begin here: *Cum Caesar esset*—"

Persistently Bob followed each line of the lesson down the page, translating and explaining as he went, and ungraciously Van Blake listened.

The little brass clock on the mantelpiece ticked noisily, and the late afternoon sun that streamed in through the windows lighted into scarlet the crimson wall-paper and threw into prominence the posters tacked upon it. It was a cozy room with its deep rattan chairs and pillow-strewn couch. Snow-shoes, fencing foils, boxing-gloves, and tennis

racquets littered the corners, and on every side a general air of boyish untidiness prevailed.

Although the apartment was not, perhaps, as luxurious as a college room, it was nevertheless entirely comfortable, for the Colversham School boasted among its members not only boys of moderate means but the sons of some of the richest families in the country. It aimed to be a democratic institution, and in so far as this was possible it was; the school, however, was richly endowed and therefore its every appointment from its perfectly rolled tennis courts to its instructors and the Gothic architecture of its buildings was of the best.

Van Cortlandt Blake, whose father was a western manufacturer, had by pure chance stumbled upon Bob Carlton the day the two had alighted from the train and stood helpless among the new boys on the station platform, awaiting the motor-car which was to meet them and carry them up to the school. Before the five mile ride was finished and the automobile had turned into the avenue of Colversham the boys had agreed to room together. Bob came from New York City. He was younger than Van, slender, dark, and very much in earnest; he might even have passed for a grind had it not been for his sense of humor and his love for skating and tennis. As it was he proved to be a master at hockey, as the school team soon discovered, and before he had been a week at Colversham his classmates also found that he was most loyal in his friendships and a lad of unusual generosity.

Van Blake was of an entirely different type. Big, husky, happy-go-lucky—a poor student but a right jolly companion; a fellow who could pitch into any kind of sport and play an uncommonly good game at almost anything. More than that,

he could rattle off ragtime untiringly and his nimble fingers could catch up on the piano any tune he heard whistled. What wonder he speedily became the idol of Colversham? He was a born leader, tactfully marshaling at will the boys who were his own age, and good-naturedly bullying those who were younger.

To the school authorities he presented a problem. His influence was strong and, they felt, not always good; yet there was not a teacher on the premises who did not like him. Intellectually they were forced to own that he was demoralizing. He was, moreover, a disturber of the social order. But his pranks were, after all, pure mischief and never malicious or underhanded. With a boy like Bob Carlton as a roommate and drag anchor the principal argued he could not go far astray.

And so the first year had passed without mishap, and already the second was nearing its close. The school board congratulated itself. Had the faculty known that for most of his scholarship, poor as it often was, Van Blake was indebted to the sheer will power of Bob Carlton they might have felt less sanguine. Day after day Bob had patiently tutored his big chum in order that he might contrive to scrape through his lessons. It was Bob who did the work and Van who serenely accepted the fruits of it—accepted it but too frequently with scant thanks and even with grumbling. Bob, however, doggedly kept at his self-imposed task. To-day's Latin translation was but an illustration of the daily program; Bob did the pioneering and Van came upon the field when the path was cleared of difficulties. And yet it was a glance of genuine affection that Bob cast at his friend stretched so comfortably in the big Morris chair with a pillow at his back.

"There, you lazy villain, I think you'll do!" he declared at last. "Don't forget about the hostages in the second line; you seem pretty shaky on that. I guess, though, you'll pull through alive."

"Bobbie, you're my guiding angel," returned the elder boy yawning. "When I make my pile and die rich I'm going to leave you all my money."

"Great Hat! Hear him. Leave me your money! What do you suppose I'm going to be doing while you're rolling up your millions? I intend to be rich myself, thank you," retorted Bob, throwing down his book. "Now for the plum-cake! You deserve about half the loaf, old man, but I shan't give it to you, for it would make you sick as a dog, and then I'd have you to take care of. Oh, I say, listen a minute! Isn't that the crowd coming from the gym? Open the window and whistle to them. Tell 'em to pile up here for a feed. And get your muscle to work on this olive bottle, Van. I can't get the cork out."

CHAPTER II

A NARROW ESCAPE

THE dreaded examinations came and went and, as Van Blake expressed it, were passed with honor by Bobbie and with dishonor by himself. After the last one was over it was with a breath of relief that the two lads tossed pajamas and fresh linen into their suit-cases; collected snow-shoes and sweaters; and set out on their New Hampshire visit.

It had been a late spring and therefore although the buds were swelling and a few pussy-willows venturing from their houses the country was still in the grip of winter; great drifts buried roadside and valley and continued to obstruct those highways where travel was infrequent.

"There certainly is nothing very summerish about this New England weather of yours, Bob," remarked Van, as, on alighting from the train at Allenville, he buttoned closer his raccoon coat and stepped into the waiting sleigh which had come to meet them.

"The State did not realize you were coming, old man; otherwise they would have had some weather especially prepared

for your benefit," Bob replied, springing into the sleigh beside his chum. "My, but this is a jolly old pung! Hear it creak. I say," he leaned forward to address the driver, "where did my father get this heirloom, David?"

"Law, Mr. Bob, this ain't your father's," David drawled. "He ain't got anything but wheeled vehicles in the barn, and not one of 'em will be a mite of use till April. I borrowed this turnout of the McMasters', who live a piece down the road; the foreman, you know. It was either this or a straight sledge, and we happened to be using the sledges collecting sap."

"Are you sugaring off already?" questioned Bob with evident disappointment. "I understood Father to say we'd get here in time to be in on that."

"Bless your soul, Mr. Bob, you'll see all you want of it," was David's quick answer. "There's gallons of sap that hasn't been boiled down yet. It's a great year for maple-sugar, a great year."

"Are some years better than others?" Van inquired.

"Yes, indeed. What you want to make the sap run is a good cold snap, followed by a thaw. That's just what we've been having. It's a prime combination."

He jerked the reins impatiently.

"Get up there, Admiral! He's the very worst horse to stop that ever was made. You see in summer he drags a hay-cart, and he has to keep halting for the hay to be piled on; then in the fall we use him for working on the road, and he has to wait while we pick up stones and spread gravel; in the spring he makes the rounds of the sugar orchard every morning and stands round on three legs while we empty the sap buckets into the cask on the sledge. Poor soul, he never seems to get

going that he ain't hauled up. He's so used to it now that he'd rather stop than go, I reckon."

David's prophecy appeared to be quite true, for the Admiral proved to be so loath to proceed that every few paces he would hesitate, turn his head, and seem to be inquiring where the hay, stones, or sap buckets were to-day. It was only David's repeated urging which kept him moving at all. In consequence it was dark before the boys caught sight of the "Pine Ridge" lights gleaming through the tangle of hemlock boughs that screened the drive, and saw the door of the hospitable old farmhouse swing open.

"Well, I'll wager you're pretty hungry," a cheery voice called.

"Hungry, Mother! We're starved—hollow down to our shoe-strings!" Swinging himself out upon the steps Bob bent and kissed his mother. "Mother, this is my roommate, Van Blake," he added.

"I'm very glad to see you, Van," Mrs. Carlton said, putting both her hands into those of the big fellow who smiled down at her. "How strange it is that although you and Bob are such friends and he is continually talking and writing of you that you and I should never have met!"

"I don't just know how it's happened, Mrs. Carlton," Van answered. "It seems as if the times you've been at the school to visit I've either been away or shut up in the infirmary with chicken-pox or something. I'm great at catching diseases, you know—I get everything that's going. Father says he thinks I can't bear to let anything get by me."

He laughed boyishly.

"Speaking of fathers, where's Dad, Mater?"

"He stopped to put another log on the fire. Come in and see what a blaze we have ready for you."

The two boys followed her into the hall, while David staggered at the rear of the procession with the luggage.

Mr. Carlton came forward.

"This is Van Blake, Father," Bob said, proudly introducing his chum.

"I'm glad to see you, young man," Mr. Carlton responded. "Bob's friends will always find a welcome from us."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Carlton reflected a moment then asked abruptly:

"I don't suppose you happen to be a connection of the Colorado Blakes."

"I come from Colorado," replied Van quickly.

"You're not one of the sugar Blakes; not Asa Blake's son."

"Yes," cried Van. "Mr. Asa Blake is my father, and he is in the beet sugar business. Do you know him?"

"I believe I've met him," Mr. Carlton admitted hurriedly, stooping to push the glowing back-log a little further forward.

"Why, Father—"

Bob was interrupted.

"Come, boys," said Mrs. Carlton bustling in. "I guess you've warmed your fingers by this time. Bob, take Van up-stairs and tumble out of those fur coats as fast as ever you can so to be ready for dinner."

The lads needed no second bidding. They were up-stairs and back in the dining-room in a twinkling, and so eagerly did they chatter of their plans for the morrow that hungry though they were they almost forgot to eat.

"There are so many things to do that it is hard to decide

where to begin," declared Bob. "Of course we want some coasting and some snow-shoeing; and we must climb Monadnock. Van says he hasn't seen a real mountain since he came East. Then we want to be on hand for the maple-sugar making. Why, ten days won't be half long enough to do everything we ought to do."

His mother laughed.

"You must have a good sleigh ride, too," she put in.

"I draw the line on a sleigh ride if we have to go with that horse that brought us up from the station," announced Bob.

"Me, too!" Van echoed.

"It would take you the entire ten days to get anywhere and back if you went sleighing with the Admiral," said Mr. Carlton.

Every one smiled.

"I'd advise your seizing upon the first clear day for your Monadnock tramp," Mr. Carlton continued. "You'd better make sure of good weather when you get it. It won't make so much difference with your other plans; but for the mountain trip you must have a good day."

"I do want Van to get the view from the top if he makes the climb," Bob answered.

So the chat went merrily on.

Yet despite the gaiety of the evening and Mr. Carlton's evident interest in the boys' holiday schemes Bob more than once caught his father furtively studying Van's profile. Obviously something either puzzled or annoyed him. There was, however, no want of cordiality in his hearty goodnight or in the zest with which he advocated that if the next morning proved to be unclouded the two lads better make certain of their mountain excursion. He even helped lay out the walk

and offered many helpful suggestions. Bob's uneasiness lest his father should not like his chum vanished, and when he dropped into bed the last vague misgiving took flight, and he fell into a slumber so profound that morning came only too soon.

It was David who, entering softly to start the fire in the bedroom fireplace, awakened Bob.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"What sort of a day is it, David?" he questioned in a whisper that he might not arouse Van, who was lying motionless beside him.

"It's a grand day, Mr. Bob. There ain't a cobweb in the sky."

David tiptoed out and Bob nestled down once more beneath the blankets. It was fun to lie there watching the logs blaze up and see your breath rise on the chilly air; it was fun, too, to know that no gong would sound as it did at school and compel you to rush madly into your clothes lest you be late for breakfast and chapel, and receive a black mark in consequence. No, for ten delicious days there was to be no such thing as hurry. Bob lay very still luxuriating in the thought. Then he glanced at Van, who was still immovable, his arm beneath his cheek. His friend's obliviousness to the world was irresistible. Bob raised himself carefully; caught up his pillow; took accurate aim; and let it fly.

It struck Van in the head, routing further possibility of sleep.

"Can't you let a fellow alone?" he snapped.

"Wake up, you old mummy!" shouted Bob. "A great mountain climber you are, sleeping here all day. Have you forgotten you're going up Monadnock to-day?"

"Hang Monadnock! I was sound asleep when you lammed that pillow at me, you heathen. What's the good of waking me up at this unearthly hour?" yawned Van.

"It's seven o'clock."

"Seven o'clock!" Van straightened up and stared. "Why, man alive, I haven't been asleep fifteen minutes."

"You've been lying like a log for nine mortal hours," chuckled Bob.

"Great Scott! Some sleep, isn't it? That's better than I do at Colversham."

"Rat*her!*"

"Well, I need sleep. I'm worn out with over-study."

"You are, like—"

"I am. I'm an intellectual wreck," moaned Van. "It's the Latin."

Bob burst into a shout, which was cut short by a rap at the door.

"Time to get up, boys," called the cheery voice of Mr. Carlton. "Step lively, please. Here's a can of hot water."

The boys wasted no more time in fooling.

They bathed, dressed, and almost before they knew it were at the table partaking of a hearty breakfast which was capped by heaps of golden brown pancakes rendered even more golden by the sea of maple-syrup in which they floated.

"I'll never be able to climb anything after this meal," Van gasped as he left the table and was thrusting his arms into his sweater.

Bob grinned.

"Don't expect us back before late afternoon, Father," he called over his shoulder. "We've a long slow climb ahead of

us because of the snow. Probably we shall find it drifted in lots of places. Then we shall want some time at the top of the mountain, you know. Besides, we're going to stop and cook chops, and that will delay us. So don't worry if we don't turn up much before dinner time."

"You're sure you know the trail, Bob?" his mother called as the trampers went down the steps.

"Why, Mother dear, what a question! Know the trail? Haven't I climbed that mountain so many times that I could go up it backwards and with my eyes shut?"

"I guess that's true, Mother," agreed Mr. Carlton reassuringly.

"Good-bye, then," said Bob's mother. "Have a fine day and don't freeze your noses."

The boys waved, and with a scuff of their snow-shoes were off.

The climb was indeed a stiff one. At first the trail led through low, flat woods, fragrant with hemlock and balsam; here it was sheltered and warm. But soon the real ascent began.

"We follow the bed of this brook almost to the top," explained Bob who was leading the way. "We come into it here, you see. In summer it is a narrow path clearly marked by rough stones; you wouldn't believe how different it looks now all covered with snow. It doesn't seem like the same place. I didn't realize what a difference the snow would make in everything. But, anyway, we can't miss the way with these great boulders along the sides of the path; and even if we did the trees are blazed."

They pushed on for some time.

Then the strap of Van's snow-shoe broke.

"Oh, thunder! Got a knife, Bob?" he called. "This darn thing's busted. I'll have to haul to for repairs."

Bob stopped impatiently.

"Why didn't you look at it before you started?" he said.

"Never thought of it, Old Preparedness," was the good-natured reply. "No matter, I have some string and I think I can fix it."

It took some time, however, to make the fastening to the shoe and moccasin secure, and in the meantime the sun went behind a cloud.

"I guess Father wasn't a very good weather prophet," remarked Bob, glancing at the sky. "It seems to be clouding up."

"Don't fret. What do we care?" was Van's easy answer. "We're not really after the view. I don't give a hurrah for what we see when we get to the top; what I want is the fun of doing it."

They shuffled on.

"I'll be glad when this luncheon is inside instead of outside of me, won't you?" puffed Bob. "It's almighty heavy to carry."

"It isn't the lunch I mind. It's all these infernal clothes," was Van's retort. "I don't see what on earth I wore so many things for."

"You'll want them by and by."

"I bet I won't!" protested Van. "I'm going to tie my red sweater to this tree and leave it here; I can't be bothered with so much stuff."

"You'll be cold when you get to the top."

"No, I won't. And anyway I'd rather be too cold then than too hot now. One's no better than the other."

Deaf to Bob's counsel Van resolutely wound the offending

sweater about a great white birch tree that stood at a fork of the path.

"You'll be sorry," was Bob's parting thrust as they plodded on.

The trail was now steep and so narrow that frequently Bob had to stop and search for the blazing on the trees.

"Of course I know my way, all right," he insisted. "Still, it is mighty different in winter from what it is at other seasons of the year, I'll admit that. Remember, I've never climbed this hill when the snow was on the ground. However, when we once get to the top the coming down will be a cinch, because we can follow our own tracks."

It was nearly two o'clock before the boys reached the top of the mountain. Over the landscape hung a mass of heavy gray clouds beneath which the sun was hidden; the wind was cutting as a knife, and while Van sought the shelter of an old shack Bob roamed about, delighting in the familiar scene.

"Why don't you come over here and look at the view?" he called to his companion. "It is fairly clear in spite of the clouds."

Van shivered.

"Oh, I don't want to. I don't care a hang for the view—I told you that before. I'm just hungry. Let's get a fire going and cook the chops. What do you say?"

"You're cold. I said you would be."

"I'm not. I'm starved, though. Where can we get some wood?"

Bob glanced about.

"There seems to be plenty of undergrowth down in that hollow. Take my knife and cut away some of it. There's a piece of an old stump, too, that ought to burn well if it isn't too wet."