

Chapter 9 – Teddy's adventure (Part 2), October 1923



Mother read the message aloud: - "Teddy safe with me; en route for China. Return him tomorrow."

"MICHAEL."

"Thank God! Now we must kneel and give thanks to Him and His Holy Mother."

"Let me run and tell Father, so's he can tell the p'lice," said Mick. He didn't think there was any need for more prayers just then, although he was jolly glad Teddy was safe and "all that." But Dad's step was heard in the hall as he returned from his tenth visit to the police station.

"Teddy's found. He's quite safe! He's with Uncle Michael," all the children shouted together, and Mother's first tears since the alarm rolled slowly down her flushed face.

Father made no threats this time against the runaway, but meekly knelt, at Mother's command, to thank God for finding his son who was lost.

Teddy had set off early that morning. He carried all the clothes he could "stuff" into his bag, and all the money he could shake out of his box. Teddy had set out to be a "real live" missionary - gathering pennies was too slow a way to help. Time was too slow. He wouldn't be a man for years and years. Why not "cut over" to China at once, while the need of help was greatest? By the time he was a man nearly all the hardest work would be done.

There was no use offering his services at Mentone; they'd say he was too young. Everyone, all grown-up people, thought children too young to do anything. But, if he got to China, if he were on the spot, he would be jolly useful. Couldn't he help the Christian Brothers? Didn't he often help the "slow kids" in his class? Had he not explained the mystery of long division to quite a lot of "dopey chaps"? Of course, he would be mighty useful to the Brothers. There were so few of them, and they had so many pupils. Why, they'd be delighted; and he would be doing something "big" for the Mission.

Teddy had enough money to take him to the capital; from there, so he planned, he could stow away on a boat bound for China. His parents would not let him go, he knew. It would pain them to part with him. Better slip away quietly.

So he slipped away.

The first part of his journey was very interesting. Teddy enjoyed it, and had not time to think about the cruel way he had treated his family.

His first shock came shortly after midday, when the man beside him, who had chatted so pleasantly, got off at a little station and did not come back. Why did Teddy watch so anxiously for him? Why should Teddy care if this stranger missed the train? But he did care, for the man had borrowed his little bag of money. He had borrowed it at the big town they passed at lunch-time. Money was waiting for him at the "next stop"; he had to pay a little debt to a poor woman; he did not like to keep her waiting until his return next week. He had forgotten his pocket-book, but had telephoned to his manager (he had a very large place in the city - motor cars - Teddy believed), and money would be awaiting him at the little station a few miles ahead.

Teddy felt so big and important lending the money - thirty shillings seemed a very large sum to him. It happened to be the exact amount of the debt owed to the poor woman and her ten starving children! So the man got off, paid the debt, had a good lunch, no doubt, and returned to the train. Teddy was too proud to say he had no more money except the "tuppence ha' - penny" in his pocket, and, therefore, had no lunch at all. The pleasant traveller had easily led Teddy to tell him the amount in his purse; consequently, his debt was no more and no less.

Poor Teddy was very hungry. Never mind, at the "next stop" the man's money would be waiting for him, and Teddy could buy some lunch there. Any misgivings he had at sight of the man's flushed face and unsteady hands, Teddy quickly stifled. Of course it was alright. He would not have come back if he had done anything mean; he could have got into another carriage, without Teddy's knowing he was on the train at all. But he had come back, and now he was gone again. Teddy saw him hurrying up the station steps, looking back guiltily over his shoulder towards Teddy's carriage. What was he carrying? It did not look like the same bag. Teddy's eyes anxiously sought the rack. His bag was gone. In its place was a battered old thing.

Teddy jumped up fiercely. An old lady, who had got in a few stations back (Teddy and the traveller had had the carriage to themselves for half an hour of the journey), said kindly:

"Did your father get left behind?"

"He wasn't my father! My father is worth a million like that cow."

The old lady looked horrified.

"My boy, try to learn to speak decently to ladies," she said, severely.

Again Teddy was too proud to explain. If he had told the old lady, she would, probably, have told the guard, and the telephone would have "got busy" after the mean thief. But Teddy

could not bear to acknowledge his foolishness. He looked in the bag - it was empty. Teddy thought of his "best" suit, his new shirts, his ties and socks - all "squashed" into the limited space of that bag. And the bag itself? It was quite new!



Anger at the man's meanness, at his own "greenness," made the rest of the journey miserable. He had been so sure of himself, he had thought himself so capable of looking after himself.

The train sped on, on, and so did the hours. Teddy did not think the clock had stopped; he thought the whole world was rushing onwards ten times quicker than it had ever travelled before. He felt ill. His head ached, his heart ached, his pride was shattered in the dust. Oh, what a little fool he had been to leave Mother and Dad! He drew back into a corner and closed his eyes, pretending, for the benefit of the curious old lady and the new people who had got in, that he was sleepy. But he was the most miserable Little Missionary in the whole world. Dusk came

down. Oh, that he were home amidst the love and cheer and laughter of his dear family! How could he get back without money?

At nine o'clock the train stopped at a small town, and there was again a cheerful bustle while the passengers scrambled for food at a small refreshment room. Teddy got out, and, in his hunger, thought dreadful things of the mean thief. He felt very ill and very cold. What could he do? He had no inclination now to stow away on a boat bound for China. If an angel had come and told him to have one wish, Teddy would have said: "To be at home - in bed, with Mother just saying goodnight."

But he must continue the journey; he couldn't stay there, with "tuppence ha'-penny" in his pocket. In the city he could, perhaps, find Uncle Michael - uncle Michael's business necessitated a great deal of travelling. Yes, he must go on. He crushed his way into the refreshment room. The smell of hot coffee made him hungry, and yet gave him a feeling of nausea. Jingling his three copper coins to warm his fingers, poor Teddy sat in a corner, sick, cold, hungry, sorry and ashamed. Perhaps he dozed.

A great noise, as of the end of innumerable worlds, a loud shrieking, as of millions of lost souls (so Teddy thought), brought him to his feet, his heart beating wildly. "What is it?" he cried, to the amusement of the sleepy-looking to wash up.

"Better hurry up, kid, if you're goin' in that puff-puff," said the sleepy boy.

Where was he? Where -

Teddy rushed out on the platform; he ran to the end of it. The train was fifty yards away - sixty - one hundred - it was turning under a bridge. It gave a derisive screech at Teddy's wild

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cry. It was gone!

What should he do now - in a strange town, with tuppence ha'penny? Should he "give himself up" to the police? Would they put' him in a home for wild boys?

Poor Teddy had often dreamed of travelling by land and sea and air; of meeting with wonderful adventures, of being the hero of every one of them, of beating the "other fellow" every time.

But now he was only a very little boy, very frightened and very sorry for all the anxiety he was causing the best father and mother, the dearest brothers and sisters, and the kindest old Kate in the world - and the best pup, too!

"I know Shamie'll be howling, and that will make it worse. He howls like as somebody was dead. Poor Mother. Oh, I am a horrible boy to have left like that! Perhaps the fright will kill her. And Dad - Dad thought I was a 'little man.' He said so. Oh, I'm meaner than that mean thief who took my bag and money. Bags and clothes and money are nothing. It's only mothers and f - f-fathers are any good in this old world! It was just showing off, too; I didn't really think of the glory of God (like Mother always tells us) or the good of the pagan kids. I just thought of the fun of going in the train and stowing away in the boat, like the boy in 'The Mysterious Island,' and the fun of helping the Chinese chaps, and how the Brothers would like to have me, and all the L.M's would hear about it, and write to me, and all, and my photo would be in the 'Far East.' It was all show-off and skite! And, now, I'm dead scared. I'm a real dud!"

In the good old days, when all Christians were Catholics, there was a beautiful custom called "Sanctuary." Any Knight who was pursued by his enemy - whether he were innocent or guilty - any poor man fleeing from the vengeance of the law - whether innocent or guilty - was safe if he could reach a church and claim Sanctuary. The Church would protect him and see justice done him. Perhaps some of Teddy's knightly forebears had hundreds of years ago claimed Sanctuary.

To a Catholic child the priest stands for help, help in all troubles, not only of soul, but of body. Teddy felt that the law was pursuing him - he was a law - breaker, a run-away from home. He would find the priest. Everywhere there was a church, a priest.

The police would deal harshly with him; not so the priest.

He left the station just as a telephone message about him was passed on to the local policeman. The little station was deserted, the little ill-lit street was quiet. A few men passed him, but Teddy's trust in passing men had been shaken. Hadn't a seemingly kind and pleasant traveller stolen his money and his bag?

A creaking old cab drew up at the station entrance, and a man alighted.

"I'll ask him, He looks rich. He won't want to steal. I've got nothing left, anyhow!"

"Please mister, can you tell me - Gee!" Teddy's voice broke.

"Teddo! What the - ?"

"Oh, Uncle Michael, I - "And for the first time since he had reached the use of reason Teddy burst into tears - real, big, sobby ones.

As he sobbed out his story a great big policeman came along the street. He should have been on the platform to watch the train for a little boy like Teddy. But the message had been delayed. However, he meant to inquire if anyone –

"Ah!" he said, with a little laugh, as he reached Uncle Michael's side.

"It's all right, Sergeant. He's not going to China this time." (Uncle Michael called all policemen Sergeant; he said it made them ambitious.)

So Teddy was found, and Uncle Michael took him home next day. He confessed humbly his ulterior motives in wanting to go to China. His humility was so great that even Father was moved by it. It was so real. Teddy was simply disgusted with himself - not at the failure of his plans, but at his own worthlessness, as he considered it. He was ill for several days.

"I think he's had lessons enough," Mother said, And so once again Father was saved using his strap.