

The Great Smoke Out

By J. W. Henson

ONE day I walked off into the valley behind our small, isolated cottage and turned south along the small stream that trickled and tinkled its way to the north between two rocks encrusted mountain ridges. They sat within close neighborhood to each other so that only in the midst of day did the sun reach the valley's floor. A trail, freshened by the constant travel of wildlife, followed the meandering stream and made my travel more certain if not pleasant. After a half hour's walk I came within sight of the small cabin that was inhabited by the Byrd family. Soon a most amazing sight caught my eye.

The cogent Ms. Byrd was warden over four healthy young people and one cripple. She was a sturdy woman of middle age and had no husband at home to assist with feeding, clothing and disciplining the children. The brood was a handful to say the least, and obedience difficult to maintain.

As I drew near I could see that the house appeared to be on fire. Smoke was belching from the windows and door, for it had but one door, and Ms. Byrd was out in the yard screaming, flailing her arms, and making a reasonable imitation of a windmill in a hurricane.

I immediately caught the humor of the situation for there on the roof sat Richard, the youngest of the crop, with his seat plopped down on a board across the opening in the top of the chimney. It was near lunchtime and the old wood cook stove was in full heat. To me it was some more funny sight, but I'm sure Ms. Byrd saw it differently!

Upon my arrival eventually the standoff ended and Richard lowered himself to the ground and she returned to the chores in her kitchen.

I was later to learn that the young scamp had been caught with his hand in the sugar jar. He had been warned against this infraction many times, but this time he exceeded the breaking point of his Mother's wrath. To escape her anger he darted around an oval table and stayed on the side opposite his furious Mother. Round and round they went. At last he was caught nearing the corner of the room and she pushed the table so as to trap him in the bend. He dropped down below the table and scurried out the door and onto the roof. *Now his Mother was the one caught with her back to a wall.*