

# Why They Quit Work

Boys Find That Made an Entire Family Rich.

Casper Miehle was a carpenter by trade and an idler by preference. He came to Old Town in the boom days of mining determined to strike it rich and after fifteen years of desultory prospecting, intermittent carpentering and rather steady loafing round the Gem saloon he now found himself the more or less happy possessor of seven children, a scolding wife, a tumble-down shop and a general reputation for all-round worthlessness.

Fifteen years of incessant drudgery is calculated to sour the sweetest temper, but Mrs. Miehle might have tolled on in weary contentment if her oldest son had shown any signs of being a comfort or a help. But he didn't. He "took after" his father, and even improved on the latter's constitutional aversion for work. The boy's name was Jake, and from the time he learned to walk till he was 14 years old his reputation was "ornery." For six months after he had achieved the art of walking he refused to take a step. When he had mastered the alphabet and learned to read his primer he began to play hooky, spending school hours fishing in the creek and lagging homeward only in time to sit at the evening meal.

The boy was sturdy of frame, mild of manner and quiet as an Indian. When other boys ran he walked; when they laughed, he smiled; when they talked, he listened. The quality of "poise" was all over him. He was as stubborn as a burro, and shared with that singular beast the characteristics that made toll, speed, mirth and enterprise abhorrent to them both. Fishing was his chief occupation till he was 13. Then he developed a hereditary passion for prospecting, and passed half his days roaming slowly over the foothills and up the silent canyons, filling his ruzed pockets with worthless bits of quartz, crystals that sparkled in vain and agates that he could barter for fishing tackle among the small boys of the town.

When he was 14 he came across a pocket in the hills, from which he scraped and gathered a score of bright red pebbles. That evening he wandered stealthily into the village jewelry store and spread out his "find."

"What they wuth?" he muttered to the proprietor.

The old man weighed them, washed them and held them to the lamp.

"Talfany 'll give you 50 cents an ounce, Jake. Them is Rocky Mountain rubies."

The jeweler sent the stones to New York, and in two weeks Jake got his half-dollar. This incident proved to be the turning point in Jake's life. First he divided the money between his five little brothers and sisters, and then he bought a rubber rattle for the baby. That proved his possession of the rare and incomparable quality of unselfishness. Second, he got an unmerciful "lamming" from his mother, because she was sure he had stolen the money and he wouldn't explain matters. This clinched his reputation for stubbornness and tacturnity, but it also had the effect of driving him into spite and deep-seamed rebellion. For days thereafter he moped about the town or sat on his father's dust-covered bench, dangling his legs and whistling softly to himself. If he felt any resentment against his mother he didn't show it by word or look. He watched her bending over the washtub and flipped gravel at the drying garments in the back yard till she gave him a cuff on the ear. But he was back to dinner, and at supper devoured more bacon and beans than all the other children together. Then he slunk down the main street with his brown hands deep in his pockets and his cap pulled over his eyes.

"Tain't no use bein' so plagued hard on Jake, mammy," said Casper to his wife as he filled his pipe.

"If 'spos you want me to raise up a family o' jasi birds," snapped the weary woman. "Lord knows that lad is sp'iled now, an' the fust thing we know he'll be robbin' a bank."

"But he never robbed nothin', He?"

"Whar'd he git them nickels he's been squanderin', then? Him lashin' money round like it growed on bushes,

an' me glavin' an' glavin' to save a penny. It's a' outrage, it'—

Here the poor woman burst into tears; all the children, as usual, joined in the doleful chorus, and Casper, always evasive of trouble, took his hat and strolled over to the Gem to watch a game of stud poker. It was midnight when he got into his room and found that Jake wasn't in bed.

"Mammy," he bawled, "Jake's gone!"

"Let him go," replied the wife from the next room; he'll git hungry 'fore he goes fur."

The boy didn't come home to breakfast, however. Noon passed without a word of him, and by dark the fretful but affectionate Mrs. Miehle was worried. Caspar started out to look for his son, and he did make a few inquiries en route to the Gem, but there he inquired till the game got "warm" and he got poor Jake. Meanwhile the boy's mother had scoured the town for him. She had found out about the rubies, and remorse for the unmerited trouncing she had given him intensified her grief over his departure. She could hardly wait for the sleepless night to pass, the second of his absence, and then she went to the marshal and enlisted his services. On Saturday the marshal had in it "a piece" about the disappearance of Jake Miehle, and half the townfolk spent Sunday in the hills looking for him. On Monday the mayor offered a reward of \$50 for information leading to the safe return, etc., and Tuesday morning a party of searchers, headed by the carpenter and equipped with provisions for a week, set forth into the mountains to look for Jake.

Seven miles as the crow flies from Old Town and twenty by the trail that sears the mountain sides, they saw Jake perched high above the beetling canyon on a narrow shelf of red and yellow rock. From their station below the searchers raised his name, but the crows of their voices did not move him.

"Come down here 'yer daddy, you young imp," shrieked Caspar, but the little brown head did not move, and the men with Casper held him back as he started to scale the rock.

"Let the marshal git him," they suggested, and the loons they cast upon the father were all dry.

The marshal clambered alone to Jake's dizzy aerial. The little fellow was sitting in a crevice in the rocks with his back against the trunk of a scrub oak tree. The greasy cap was pulled over his face, blackberry stains were on his sunken cheeks, and his ragged shirt and overalls hung in ribbons to his emaciated body. His skinny brown fists were clinched and crossed on his lap and his body was as motionless as the rock upon which he sat.

The marshal tenderly lifted away the cap and gently shook the bony shoulder.

"Come, Jakey, are you alive?"

The sunken eyes slowly opened, and the boy stared weakly round. Then he looked down at his hands and unclenched them. In each lay a nugget as big as a walnut, and when he looked back at the marshal he smiled feebly and said:

"Free gold, ain't it?"

In a delirium of joy the big officer howled like a Comanche at his comrades. They literally "fell up" the face of the rock.

"Why didn't you come home?" roared Casper, laughing and crying by turns.

"Tried it, daddy, but I was skeered I'd lose the mine," said the lad. "I found them nuggets in the hole, and thought I'd better set here till you come."

He was sitting in a true fissure that proved the opening of the best mine in Rout county, and the Miehles have never done a day's hard work since.—Chicago Record-Herald.

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### SOME SNAKE-KILLING BIRDS.

Plucky "Road-Runners" in the Bronx Park—Strangers from the Mesquit and Cactus of the West, and Rarely Seen in Captivity—Fighting, Not Singing, Their Strong Point—"Snake-Birds" Diving After Fish in Their Tank an Attractive Sight.

In the bird-house at the Bronx Zoological Park are two birds of a species not often seen in captivity, and known as road-runners or chaparralcocks. Their scientific name, Geococcyx, is the best definition for they are literally ground cuckoos. Their home is in the West among the mesquit and cactus plants, and they resemble their sandy environment in their brownish-white plumage, marked with darker streaks. They have long, hooked beaks and tails which are nearly as long as their bodies, and which by slow or quick jerks reflect the state of mind of the birds. A noticeable feature is a bare patch of skin near the eye, blue and orange in color. Long feathers on the head can be erected, forming a prominent crest, and the cuckoo-like arrangement of the toes—two in front and two behind—completes their appearance.

The road-runners are very active, running swiftly on the sandy floor of their cage, or leaping without any effort to perch on a limb, then going from limb to limb, ladder-like, to the top of their perch, and diving headlong off to the ground. Their legs and feet seem to contain springs, so lightly do they leap. No note or call has been heard since they have been in captivity. Their food consists chiefly of chopped meat, and their hooked beaks and occasional murderous attempts to get at small birds in adjoining cages suggested that a sparrow meal would be welcome. One was accordingly given to them, and by dint of much shaking the sparrow was denuded of almost every feather, but no attempt was made to eat it.

Road-runners are said, in their native haunts, to feed upon, or at least kill, various species of snakes, even rattlesnakes, and in fact they get their name of snake-killer from this supposed habit. Not long ago, to test their reputation, a large garter-snake was used, and the effect on the different birds was markedly different. Even carrying it past the cages of small birds, threw them into great commotion, and when allowed to wriggle for a moment in a cage with four magpies, the snake proved to be a source of great fear to them. They clung to the top wires of the cage, palpitating with fright. The snake was then placed in the road-

runner's cage, and met with a very different reception. The two birds slowly approached the reptile from opposite sides, holding themselves braced with legs far apart; why was not at first apparent. The wings were lowered and extended so as to partly protect the breast. Suddenly the snake struck at one of the birds, when the reason for the bracing was at once evident. Like a flash the road-runner leaped straight upwards, avoiding the snake's aim, and when it came down, appeared to come back first, and instantly grasped the snake by the neck just behind the head, the movement being so rapid that the eye could scarcely follow it. Then began a quick, terrific-like shaking from side to side with all the bird's strength, the snake then being dropped. It lay stunned, and in a moment was seized by the second road-runner, who treated it entirely differently, shaking it as a person would a piece of carpet, standing with feet braced far apart and giving long, deliberate shakes up and down, with a kind of lateral shaking which appeared like a long o-whip. This shaking killed the snake in a few moments, dislocating its vertebrae, and is evidently the typical road-runner method. The first frantic lateral shaking was probably intended only to stun the snake so that a deliberate "killing hold" might be obtained.

The snake-birds attract a good deal of attention on account of the big glass water-tank attached to their cage, in which they dive after fish, which is fed to them at 11 a. m. and 4 p. m. daily. It is a beautiful sight to see them covered with silvery bubbles of air as with curving necks they swim from end to end and top to bottom of their tank. Their webbed feet alternate like the blades of a propeller and curve around on the backward stroke as if grasping something substantial, and the rapidity with which they are able to go through the water is wonderful. Rising buoy-

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