

CHAPTER V

MISCHIEF

Mischief from the standpoint of the kid who does it doubtless looks as though it would appear to others interesting - perhaps clever - but from the standpoint of the teacher, mischief is dull and stupid, and a school principal gets bored nearly to death by it.

The reason for the drabness of mischief is that mischief is always "old stuff" - the same prank has been played forty times before - and the teacher sighs with disgust at the lack of originality displayed by the mischief workers.

Usually a kid hears some other kid tell with glee of what he did to annoy the teacher and tries the same thing. Sometimes a kid thinks he is the original inventor of a piece of mischief, but it is only that which forty kids before him have likewise invented. So the teacher gets only a bored and tired feeling out of mischief.

Grandfather, however, did have one pupil who really invented mischief - not a bad kind of mischief, but highly original - and hence likely to give the teacher the thrill of novelty in dullast of all endeavors - mischief.

Stanley Latshaw was a good student with an uncommon bent for thinking of interesting things to do. He had a whole army of youthful lackeys who followed him about asking him what they could do for him. Grandfather said once: "Stanley, how do you get all these kids to follow you around and do your bidding? So far as I can see, you never do anything for them except call them your 'coolie laborers'". "Well," said Stanley, "I give them interesting things to do and occasionally when they least expect it, I give them a little money."

One year, on April 30, all the boys in the Senior class were absent from high school. Stanley was at the bottom of the mischief. That much, of course, was clear. It was no use to inquire what was up. If anyone knew, he would not tell. The best way was to await the outcome.

Next morning (May Day) when Grandfather hastened over to school to sift to the bottom this prank, what do you suppose he saw? Why, right in a corner of the schoolyard, intended for trees but never planted, there was a whole grove of trees - good sized young trees they were - one for every member of the Senior class, and each decorated with the Senior colors. Stanley, it seems, had hired some wagons, taken all the boys out to the woods and required each boy to dig two trees - one for himself and one for a girl in the class, there being, by chance, an equal number of boys and girls in the class.

They had waited until after Grandfather had retired for the night and then had planted the trees, working until almost morning. (Most of the trees lived and today are one of the finest little groves in the city.)

Grandfather had all the Seniors in a History class the first period in the morning. The boys were all in their places, sleepy but waiting to see what Grandfather might say. Grandfather said that some unforeseen duties the night before had interfered with his preparation of the lesson and that he would dismiss the class with the suggestion that the boys might be excused for the morning to take a nap and a request that they be on hand for the afternoon session.

A little later a Senior flag flew from the flagpole on top of the high school cupola. The high school building was three stories above basement, capped with a steep roof which was surmounted by a tall cupola. The door to the cupola was always kept locked and apparently the lock had not

been tampered with. Stanley again was doubtless the originator of the mischief. The rope had been tied to the bottom of the flagstaff and the janitor could not climb on top the cupola to get at the ropes. Hence, the flag was allowed to fly. Meanwhile, an extra Yale lock was put on the door to the cupola and Grandfather took possession of the only two keys the lock had. Shortly after this, the Senior numbers, which had been pasted on the flag, came off, all except half of a number naught. It was now Grandfather's turn to laugh - "All there was left of the Senior class was half of zero."

A few days later a new Senior flag floated at the masthead, this time with the numbers sewed on instead of pasted and the ropes fastened to the bottom of the cupola. How anyone could have gotten up without breaking the lock on the door was a mystery. Years later Grandfather learned that Stanley had climbed up the corner of the building, the bricks at the corner being laid so as to give a precarious foothold to a steeple climber. It was highly dangerous as the building was high, the eaves projected out over the corner and even after the roof was attained, it was steep and slippery - no lad should ever take such a risk.

Grandfather ordered the janitor to let the flag fly, and since no underclassman knew how to get it down, it flew triumphantly until one day a heavy wind broke the rope and took it through the pulley at the top of the mast. Now we were out of luck, because no one could put another rope through the pulley and the school could not again fly the Stars and Stripes from its cupola.

Stanley, however, promptly appeared, expressed regrets that he had not foreseen that the rope was old and should have been replaced, but if Grandfather would let him on the roof on some calm day, he would put a new

rope through the pulley. It seemed very unlikely he would attempt this, but the janitor was told to let Stanley on the roof any time he requested.

One day there was great shouting in the schoolyard. Stanley had "shinneyed" up the gas pipe pole and put a rope through the pulley - skillfully executed, but too great a risk. He should not have been allowed to try.

When Stanley asked for credentials to attend University of Wisconsin, Grandfather had misgivings. His predilection for original mischief might bring him to grief.

At the University, military drill was compulsory, and all Freshmen were assembled on a certain afternoon in the big armory by the lake for first drill. It was the custom of the school for the Sophs to seize the Freshies as they emerged from this first drill and throw them into the lake. But as soon as the first drill was over, Stanley took charge of the Freshmen. He had brought a bit of the class colors and needles in plenty so that each Freshman could sew the colors firmly onto his sweater - also many boxes of shoe blacking so that every Freshman could blacken his face.

There had always been more Freshmen than Sophs, but the Freshmen did not know who were Sophs and through this confusion, usually helped throw their own classmates into the water. This time the Freshmen were plainly identified. They sallied forth and quickly tossed the Sophs into the lake.

Next year Stanley was a Soph and must lead the minority, for the idea of identification having been taught, each Freshman class thereafter would be identified. When the Freshmen sallied forth to throw the Sophs into the lake, there were no Sophs in sight, but out in the lake was a raft with four men and a big Sophomore flag. "Hurrah," the Freshmen threw

themselves into the lake, but when they got near the raft they found there was a barb wire entanglement under the water which prevented their reaching the raft. After a long delay, wire cutters were brought up from town, but then it appeared that the four men on the raft had long poles to beat on the head of anyone who attempted to cut the wires.

Gradually the Freshmen crowd dwindled and disappeared. Then the raft was poled ashore at a point where the Sophs were in rendezvous and the Soph class happily paraded the town, bearing their banner aloft.

Stanley soon turned his ingenuity to financial account. He got a concession to advertise an entertainment for 10 per cent of the proceeds and did so well that soon he was managing practically all the entertainments at the University on a 10 per cent commission basis and was making a living and quite a lot more - more money, in fact, than any student at Wisconsin up to that time had ever dreamed of making.

Just one illustration of his original methods. Grandfather in one of his frequent trips to Madison saw that every street car had a banner covering its entire side below the windows, carrying the one word ELIJAH. But he was shocked to see that on every sign the letter J had been turned the wrong way.

"Stanley, after the experience you had printing signs in high school," said Grandfather, "how could you make such a mistake?" "Hush," said Stanley, "don't say a word about it. It's the talk of the town, they won't be able to get the crowds into the hall."

He established a college literary magazine and demonstrated that it could be made to pay. Perhaps his greatest service in college was when the State Capitol burned and all officialdom had lost its head, Stanley

organized a band of volunteer workers and saved the very valuable law library.

From college he went into advertising, and it was through him, as recorded elsewhere, that Grandfather entered The Curtis Publishing Company.