

## Where Big-Horn Got His Curved Horns

by Thornton W. Burgess

It was Digger the Badger who told Peter Rabbit the story of the great Ram who was the first of all the wild Sheep who live on the tops of the mountains bounding the great plains of the Far West on which Digger was born. It happened that Farmer Brown's flock of Sheep were grazing in the Old Pasture in plain sight of Digger as he sat on his doorstep watching his shadow grow longer. At the head of the flock was a Ram whose horns curved around in almost a circle, and whom Peter Rabbit often had admired.

Peter happened along as Digger sat there on his doorstep watching his shadow grow longer, so he sat down at a safe and respectful distance and helped Digger watch his shadow grow longer. Peter delights in doing things like this, because it isn't hard work at all. It is only when there is real work concerned that Peter loses interest. A lot of people are just like Peter in this respect.

Peter gazed over at the Old Pasture and he, too, saw Farmer Brown's Sheep and the big Ram with the curving horns at his head. For a long time Peter had greatly admired those horns, though he never had told any one so. He had admired those horns because they were different from any other horns Peter ever had seen. They looked perfectly useless for fighting because they curved so that the points never could be made to hurt any one, but just the same Peter admired them. Now as he watched he spoke aloud, without thinking what he was doing.

"I wish I had a pair of horns like those," said he wistfully.

Digger the Badger stopped watching his shadow, and turned to stare at Peter. Then he laughed until finally he choked. Peter looked at him in surprise.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Badger?" asked he. "What is there to laugh at?"

"Only you, Peter. Only you," replied Digger faintly, for he had laughed so hard that he had almost lost his voice. "I am afraid you would find a pair of horns like those rather heavy, Peter, rather heavy."

Peter grinned. "Of course I didn't really mean that," said he. "Of course not. I was just thinking how nice it would be to have such fine horns, if one were big enough to have horns. I don't believe there are any other such horns in all the Great World."

"And that shows how little you know about the Great World, Peter," retorted Digger the Badger.

"Did you ever see such horns before?" demanded Peter.

"No, I never did," confessed Digger, "but I've heard my grandfather tell of Sheep that live on the tops of the great mountains as free as Light-foot the Deer or any other of the Green Forest people, and with horns so large that they, the Sheep, are called Big-Horns. From what I have heard my grandfather say, those horns over there of Mr. Ram's are nothing to brag about. No, Sir, they are nothing to brag about. One of those wild, free cousins of Mr. Ram over there would laugh at those horns. But they are funny horns, and they've been like that always since the days of the first great Ram, the great-great-

ever-so-great-grandfather of all the Sheep, so my grandfather told me. It was way back in those long-ago days that they became curved and quite useless for fighting, and all because of old Big-Horn going about with a chip on his shoulder."

Peter pricked up his ears. "That was a funny thing for Big-Horn to be doing," said he. "What under the sun did he have a chip on his shoulder for? And what harm was there in that, even if he did?"

Once more Digger began to laugh. "Peter," said he, "you certainly are the funniest fellow I know. Of course old Big-Horn didn't really have a chip on his shoulder. That is just a saying, Peter, just a saying. When any one goes about looking for trouble and ready to quarrel at the least pretext, he is said to be carrying a chip on his shoulder and daring anybody to knock it off."

"Oh!" said Peter.

"And so," continued Digger, "Big-Horn didn't have anything to do with a really, truly chip, but just went about always trying to get somebody to fight with him. It wasn't that Big-Horn was ugly. He wasn't. You see Old Mother Nature had given him great strength. Yes, Sir, for his size Big-Horn was very strong, and in that strength he took great pride. And Mother Nature had given him a pair of very large and strong horns with which to defend himself if there should be need. Those horns were almost straight, and with Big-Horn's great strength behind them, they were truly dangerous weapons. He didn't think of that. No, Sir, he didn't think of that. He was just brimming full of life, and he dearly loved to try his strength against the strength of others. It got so that the instant he saw anybody, down would go his head and at them he would go full tilt.

"It was great fun—for him. Sometimes he got the worst of it, as when Old King Bear stepped aside at the very last instant and hit him such a clip with his great paw that Big-Horn was sent rolling over and over and lost his breath for a few minutes. But usually it was the other who got the worst of it, for those great, sharp-pointed horns of Big-Horn's tore and hurt. Indeed, even when he tried to be gentle with those smaller than himself he was forever hurting some one.

"Finally some of his neighbors wished to go to Old Mother Nature and complain about Big-Horn, but others were against this plan because they knew that Old Mother Nature was quite loaded down with cares and worries as it was. So instead they called a meeting to which everybody except Big-Horn was invited. If Big-Horn could have heard all that was said about him, his ears surely would have burned. Every one was of the opinion that something must be done, but just what no one could suggest. At last, just when it seemed that the meeting would break up without anything being done, Old Man Coyote stepped forward. Now Old Man Coyote already was known as a very clever fellow, more clever even than Mr. Fox, though it would never have done to say so where it would get back to the ears of Mr. Fox.

"'Friends and neighbors,' said Old Man Coyote, 'it seems to me a very simple matter to teach Neighbor Big-Horn a lesson that he will not soon forget. Being rather bashful, I haven't liked to suggest it before, because I thought surely some one else would do it. I suggest that some one be selected to fight Big-Horn, and when that one can fight no longer, some one else be selected to fight him, and so on until he gets tired, and some one can whip him. Then I think he will have had enough of fighting.'

"Up spoke Mr. Fox and he winked at his neighbor on the right and he winked at his neighbor on the left. 'That is a very good idea of Neighbor Coyote's,' said he, 'a very good idea indeed, and I suggest that Mr. Coyote be selected for the honor of being the first one to fight Big-Horn.' Mr. Fox grinned in a

sly way, and everybody else grinned, for everybody knew that Old Man Coyote never was known to fight when there was a chance to run away. So with one accord everybody agreed with Mr. Fox, and Old Man Coyote was selected as the first one to face Big-Horn. To everybody's surprise, Old Man Coyote made no objections. Instead he expressed himself as highly honored, and said that he hoped to do so well that there would be no need for others to fight Big-Horn. So it was arranged that Big-Horn should be invited to fight Old Man Coyote the very next day.

"You may be sure that everybody was on hand the next day to see that fight. No one expected Old Man Coyote to appear. But he did. Yes, Sir, he did. He was right on hand at the appointed time. Big-Horn hadn't been told whom he was to fight, and when he found that it was Old Man Coyote, he was disappointed. You see, there was no anger in Big-Horn's fighting; he fought just for the love of using his great strength and big horns. Fighting was fun to him, and he wanted some one who would stand up to him. As soon as it was explained to him that when he had disposed of Old Man Coyote there would be some one else for him to fight (Mr. Deer had offered to be the next), he felt better. Mr. Deer had horns and was somewhere near his size.

"Old Man Coyote slipped around until he had his back to a great rock. 'I'm ready any time,' said he.

"Big-Horn, who had been stamping with impatience, lowered his head so that his horns pointed straight at Old Man Coyote. He grinned as he did it, for he saw that with that great rock behind him, Old Man Coyote would have no chance to run away as he always had done in the past. Everybody else saw the same thing, and wondered what could have happened to make Old Man Coyote so stupid as to do such a thing as that, he who always had been accounted so clever. But they had hardly time to think of this, for with a snort Big-Horn bounded forward. All the others held their breath as they saw those great horns driving straight at Old Man Coyote, who was crouched with his back to the great rock. Then everybody closed their eyes for a second, for nobody wanted to see Old Man Coyote killed, and everybody *knew* that that was what was going to happen.

"Then there was a crash, and everybody's eyes flew open. There lay Big-Horn on the ground, looking mighty puzzled, as if he wasn't quite sure what had happened. And there sat Old Man Coyote, grinning at him! They were still staring at Old Man Coyote as if they couldn't believe their own eyes when some one cried, 'Look at the horns of Big-Horn!'

"Instead of being long and straight, those great horns were curved over and round into almost a circle, and there was no longer danger from their sharp points. What had happened? Why, at just the right instant Old Man Coyote had leaped over Big-Horn, and Big-Horn had butted into that great rock with all his might. He had hit so hard, biff! bang! that he had bent his horns, just as crafty, clever Old Man Coyote had hoped he would.

"When Old Mother Nature heard of the affair and saw those bent horns, she chuckled at the cleverness of Old Man Coyote and decided to leave those horns just as they were for the safety of Big-Horn's neighbors. And so they remained as long as Big-Horn lived, and just so have been the horns in his family from that day to this," concluded Digger, and once more began to watch his shadow grow longer.

Source:

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