

FICTION

James Otis

An Amateur Fireman

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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AN AMATEUR FIREMAN

JAMES OTIS



LIFE-SAVING CORPS AT WORK. *Frontispiece.*

AN AMATEUR FIREMAN

BY

JAMES OTIS

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JIP AND THE FIRE-ALARM.--Page 40

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AN AMATEUR FIREMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMATEUR.

"I ain't sayin' as how I could run a whole fire, same as some of the chiefs do; but when it comes to drivin' an engine, Dan Roberts, an' doin' it in time to get the first water, or layin' hose, I wouldn't knuckle down to the biggest man in the Department."

"Now see here, Seth Bartlett, what's the sense of talkin' that way? It would be a good deal better, an' I ain't the only one who says it, if you'd stick right to shinin', an' stop playin' fireman, for that's 'bout the biggest part of the work you do."

"Do you s'pose I count on shinin' boots for a livin' all my life?"

"You've got to make a better fist at it than you have done for a year or more, else you'll never get into anythin' else. I tell you what it is, Seth Bartlett, when a man wants to hire a boy, he ain't pickin' out the feller that's failed up two or three times over; but he generally looks for the one what's makin' a go of it, whether it's shinin' or sellin' papers."

"I ain't sayin' but you're right, Dan, an' I s'pose it's a good thing for you to keep right on rememberin'; but it's different with me. I don't count on any one man hirin' me when I strike out for somethin' better'n shinin'."

"Oh, you don't, eh? What little game *have* you got? Goin' to run a bank, or keep a hotel, or do somethin' like that?"

"You think you're funny, but you ain't. I'm goin' into the Fire Department when the right time comes, an' don't you make any mistake about it."

Dan laughed loud and long at this announcement, and Seth gazed at him in grim silence until the explosion of mirth was somewhat subsided, when he said sharply:

"I guess trade must have been pretty good with you to-day, else you wouldn't be feelin' so terrible funny."

"Well, it hasn't. I got stuck on four *Heralds* this mornin', an' five *Expresses* to-night. That comes pretty near cleanin' off all the profits, 'cause it's awful dull nowadays in my business, Seth."

"Then I can't guess why you got so dreadful silly when I said I was goin' into the Department some day."

"It would make anybody laugh, Seth, to hear a feller no bigger'n you talk of such things. You must be a man to get that kind of a job."

"Well, shan't I be in time--and not such a terrible long while either? I'm fourteen now, leastways, that's the way I figger it out, an' if I could get one of them early spring moustaches like Sim Jepson is raisin', folks would think I was a man when I wasn't only eighteen. Don't you reckon all the firemen were boys once?"

"Yes," Dan replied doubtfully, "I s'pose they was," and he added quickly as a sudden thought occurred to him, "but they had to know a good deal about the business before they could get a job."

"Course they did, an' it was a case of learnin'. That's jest what I'm doin' when I tend out on fires. I'm gettin' posted, an' by an' by when I'm old enough you'll see me in the Department, that's all there is about it."

Seth Bartlett and Dan Roberts were old friends, having made each other's acquaintance no less than three months previous, when the former, who had disagreed with Jip Collins on a matter regarding household affairs, was in search of a new roommate.

Seth owned, or believed he did, certain rights in a small shed situate in the rear of Baxter Brothers' carpenter shop, where he made his home.

It was a rude affair, originally built for the purpose of sheltering Mr. Baxter's horse and carriage, but afterward used as a storage place for such odds and ends as accumulate in a carpenter's work-shop.

Seth had made his home in this shed for nearly a year, having been given permission to sleep there by one of the owners on a certain cold, stormy night, and he was not averse to telling his friends how he "worked the snap."

This is his version of what may perhaps be called a business transaction:

"I did start in to live with Jim Wardwell's folks. You see, business was mighty good for a spell, an' I got to feelin' way up toney where nothin' short of a reg'lar room would do me. I paid a dollar a week jest for sleepin' there. Ten big, round plunks for ten weeks, an' then I tumbled to myself! You see, it was too rich for my blood when there come a long spell

of bad weather, an' I wasn't takin' in more'n twenty-five cents a day, so I snooped 'round to see if I couldn't find somethin' that would be cheaper. Then I struck this shed, an' I says to myself, says I, 'That's jest my size'; but I knew it wouldn't do to try to bite it out of the carpenter's ear 'less I had a pretty good story to put up. I waited four whole days till it turned 'round so cold that the hair on your head would freeze, an' long towards the middle of the afternoon it began to snow. Then I said to myself that the time had come when I'd got to make the trade. I crawled into the carpenter's shop an' give him a pretty straight story. Told him how bad business was--Well, he could see for himself nobody would want boots shined in that weather. He said if I promised him I wouldn't freeze to death, 'cause he didn't want any dead bootblacks on his hands, I could come in for a spell. An' don't you think I wasn't fixed! All the shavings I wanted for a bed right there on the floor, an' if the boss of the Astor House had got down on his knees beggin' me to come to his hotel to stop, I'd said 'no,' 'cause I couldn't be bothered with the airs they put on down that way. How long can I stay here? I ain't troublin' my head 'bout that. I don't let the man what owns the place see me any oftener than I can help, an' so long's I keep out of sight there ain't much chance of my bein' fired."

Seth's home in which he took so much pride was by no means as uncomfortable as one might suppose. With ample material in the shape of short lengths of boards, he had constructed a tiny apartment in one end with so great care that only such wind as was necessary for perfect ventilation found its way in to him, while his bed of shavings was more rest-inviting and probably more cleanly than was the well-worn mattress on which he had slept at Mrs. Wardwell's home.

Once having taken possession of this abode, Seth set about making an honest penny out of his new possessions by allowing Jip Collins to become his roommate upon the payment of fifteen cents each week, and for several months these two lived in apparent harmony, although Seth afterward said that "Jip tired him" by finding so much fault with the Fire Department.

Then came the time when the lodger insisted upon the use of candles at night, and in smoking cigarettes inside the apartment, both of which luxuries or pleasures had been expressly forbidden by Mr. Baxter when he gave the bootblack permission to occupy the premises.

Jip had not departed in a friendly manner. He believed he had good cause for grievance against Seth, and on the day he left the lodgings threatened with many a needless word to "make it hot" for the would-be fireman.

Then Master Bartlett had taken Dan Roberts as a tenant, and the two had been living as peacefully and comfortably as could be expected, save at such times as they heard of new and more startling threats from Jip, up to this moment when the lodger took it upon himself to criticise his landlord's admiration of a fireman's calling.

Seth Bartlett was not a general favorite among the merchants in the boot-blackening and newspaper business, owing to the general belief that he "put on airs" because of his acquaintance with 'Lish Davis, driver of Ninety-four engine, which was stationed near Mr. Baxter's shed.

When trade was dull, instead of joining his brother merchants in pitching pennies or such other games as they might chance to indulge in, Seth spent his time about the engine-house, on the alert for an opportunity to be of benefit to some of the men, hoping thereby to so far earn their favor that he might be looked upon as a welcome visitor.

During no less than two months had he thus apparently loitered around, bent on one object, and pursuing that steadily, without having been so fortunate as to attract particular attention. Then on a certain day, Elisha Davis, the driver, called upon the small workman for a shine.

Seth's freckled face was radiant with delight as he entered the engine-house for the first time, and his big brown eyes wandered from the glittering machine, above the pole of which hung the shining harness, to the apparently complicated apparatus of brass and walnut over the house-watchman's desk.

'Lish, as his comrades spoke of him, was not in the mood to wait until the boy's curiosity had been satisfied, for at any instant an alarm might summon him to duty, and he impatiently called upon Seth to set about his work, or "clear out."

Never before had the bootblack spent so much time over a single pair of boots; he polished them with his brushes until they shone like mirrors, then hardened the gloss with a piece of flannel, and when it seemed as if his work had been done to perfection, blackened the brilliant surface again with the hope of improving what had apparently been a great success.

"You're not any too quick about the job; but there ain't a lad around here that could have done it better," 'Lish said approvingly, and would have given the boy a nickel, but that the latter drew back quickly.

"I don't want anythin' for the shine; I'd like mighty well to give you one every day."

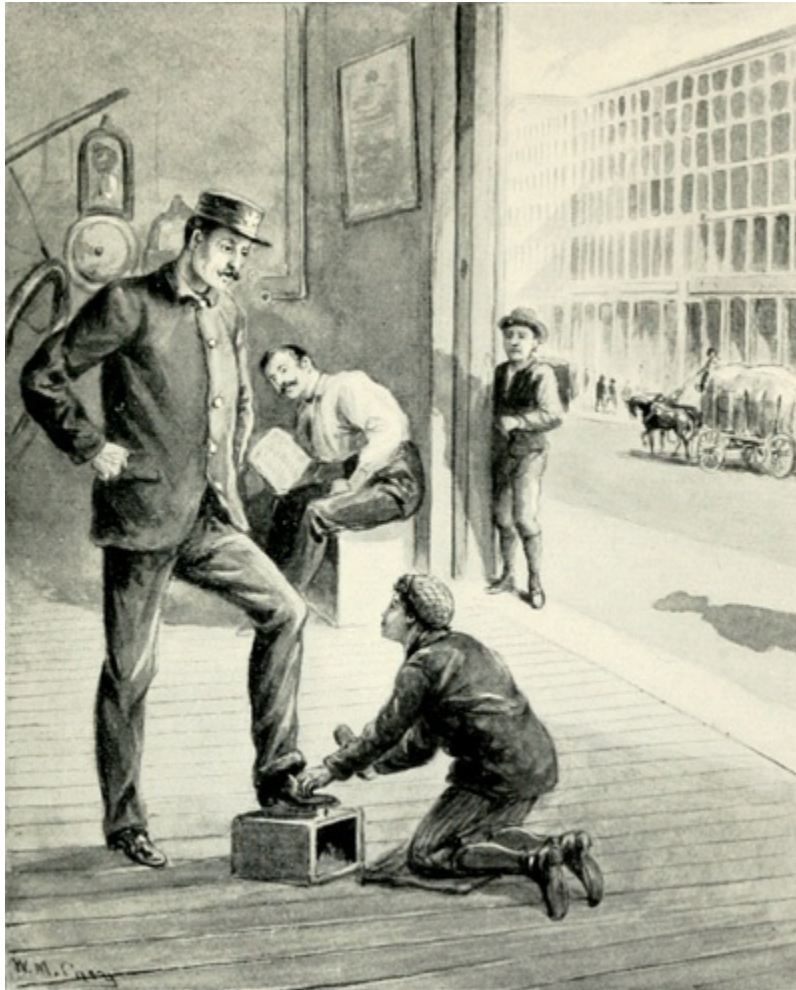
"Do you go around working for thanks?" the driver asked with no little surprise.

"Of course I take my pay from other folks; but I wouldn't let any fireman put up for a shine."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I'm jest the same as one myself--that is, I'm goin' into the Department when I'm old enough."

"Stuck on the business, eh?"



'LISH DAVIS AND SETH Page 8.

"That's jest the size of it!" Seth cried enthusiastically. "I tend out on most all the fires in Ninety-four's district, an' sometimes I get a chance to sneak inside the lines."

"You do, eh? Well, I'll have an eye out after this, and if I get my hands on you there won't be any more such sneaking."

"Now, what's the matter with my doin' a little thing like that? It don't hurt anybody, an' I pick up a good many points."

"Some day a falling wall will knock you down, or you'll find yourself under the wheels of an engine, and then your 'points' won't be of any particular advantage."

"I can take care of myself as well as you, an' if I don't knock 'round when there's a fire, how am I ever goin' to learn the business?"

"You don't want to learn what's a dog's life at the best. Steer clear of it, lad, and put your mind on anything else, for a man don't last long at this kind of work; even if he doesn't get killed offhand, it's only a question of time--and in many cases a precious short time--before a fireman is laid on the shelf, worn out. Now, clear away from here if you won't take pay for the shine, and remember that I'll have my eye out after this to see you don't get inside the lines."

Seth obeyed promptly with never a protest, and 'Lish said to the watchman at the desk:

"That's a decent kind of a lad, and if he hangs around here any more there's no reason why we shouldn't throw a job in

his way now and then."

"How does that fit in with the lesson you read to him?"

"I didn't try to make it fit. If I can scare him out of the notion he's got in his head, it'll show he ain't suited for this kind of a life; but if he sticks at it, I'll believe it's worth while to give him a lift now and then."

If Seth could have heard this brief conversation he would, most likely, have indulged in the latest jig-step he had learned, and perhaps neglected his work as bootblack until hunger forced him to take up the brushes again; but he was ignorant of 'Lish's good intentions, and went away with a heavy heart, yet having no idea of abandoning his efforts to "learn the business."

He did not cease to spend his spare moments about Ninety-four's house, and after 'Lish Davis had many times threatened the direst punishment if he persisted in such a course, but without effect, the members of the company came to look upon Seth as a boy of pluck, who would one day force his way into the Department.

However, no one of Ninety-four's men had given him an opportunity for doing other than blacking boots, and the boy was entirely ignorant of their friendliness toward him.

Such was the general position of affairs on the night when Dan Roberts believed it his duty to mildly reprove Seth for spending so much time in what seemed to be idleness when he should be looking for customers.

After the master of the shed-home had announced so positively that he would be a fireman in due course of time, Dan, remembering how Jip Collins had lost his footing in the household, decided he had done his whole duty in the matter, and straight-way changed the subject of conversation by saying:

"Sam Barney had mighty bad luck to-day. First off, somebody passed a lead dime on him, an' then he lost as many as fifteen cents at one slap."

"How?" Seth asked with no slight show of interest.

"That's what he can't make out. He had the money in the same pocket where he always carries it, when all of a sudden it was gone."

"Somebody touched him."

"Must be, an' Sam thinks he's got an idea who it is."

"Can't be any of the reg'lar gang, 'cause I don't know a feller what would do a trick like that."

"Sam's keepin' mighty close about it, an' I wouldn't wonder if he found the whole business out before long. He comes near to bein' a reg'lar detective, you know."

"Who? Sam?"

"Sure."

"But what does he know about the detective business?"

"Perhaps he's learnin' it same's you are the fireman's racket."

This reduced Seth to silence, and Dan, fearing that he might have given offence, hastened to say in a most friendly tone:

"Of course if a feller studies over anything of that kind he'll soon come somewhere near knowin' a little about it, an' Sam is posted in more ways than one."

"Then how does it happen he let anybody go through him?"

"That's the funny part of it, an' the folks what did it must have been mighty slick, 'cause, you see----"

Dan was interrupted by the sound of footsteps near at hand, and ever on the alert against possible danger, Seth made his way to the door of the shed as he asked sharply:

"Who's there?"

"It's only me," a familiar voice replied, and he knew that the visitor was none other than the boy of whom he and his lodger had just been speaking.

"Dan was tellin' me you'd lost your money. Didn't come up here reckonin' he or I'd got it, did you?"

"I ain't any sich fool as that; but Jip Collins has been makin' a good deal of cheap talk this afternoon, an' I thought perhaps you'd like to know 'bout it."

"He's allers doin' that, an' I reckon it's more wind than anythin' else."

"I wouldn't wonder if this time he got right down to business, an' you ought'er keep a pretty sharp lookout, Seth. These are too snug quarters for you to lose through a feller like Jip."

"Come inside and set down," Master Bartlett said as his lodger joined him at the door of the shed. "Dan an' me is here alone, an' you won't mind if it's dark, 'cause you see I promised Mr. Baxter straight out an' out that there shouldn't ever be any kind of a light inside. That's one of the things Jip kicked about, you know."

Sam Barney promptly accepted the invitation. Being an old friend of Seth's, he was familiar with the household arrangements, and despite the darkness made his way through the shed to the box-like home in one corner, where, after some difficulty, he found a block of wood that served as chair.

Seth threw himself upon the bed of shavings, and Dan lounged negligently near the entrance.

"I should think it would be kind er lonesome in here nights when it's like this," Sam suggested as he tried in vain to distinguish the form of either of his companions.

"Well, it ain't, 'cause Dan an' me don't spend a great deal of time settin' 'round after we once get in. We should have been asleep before this if he hadn't had considerable to say 'bout my tryin' to be a fireman. He'd jest got through when you came."

"Well, say, Seth, you don't b'lieve you're ever goin' to get on to the Department, jest 'cause you run to every fire Ninety-four goes to, do you?"

"I don't know why I can't be a fireman jest as easy as you can a detective, an' some of the fellers say you're workin' mighty hard to be one."

"Well, s'posen I am?" and Sam spoke sharply.

"I ain't kickin' against it; but was only sayin' that it's jest as easy for me to get what I'm tryin' for, as it is for you."

Sam's opinion on the subject may have differed from that of his host, but he refrained from making any reply, and at once began to speak concerning the purpose of his visit.

"Jip Collins is goin' to work some kind of a racket on you, an' I reckon I can guess pretty nigh what it is. He was makin' a good deal of talk this afternoon, an' it seems as though the time had come when you'd better have your eyes open."

"Jip's allers had a good deal to say since I told him he couldn't sleep here any longer; but it never 'mounted to anythin'."

"But look here, Seth, this time I b'lieve he'll do some mischief. He's been tellin' that he'll give you a chance to show how much of a fireman you are, an' I heard him talkin' 'bout touchin' a match to shavings, so's to smoke you out, till I've made up my mind that he's goin' to set fire to this place."

Seth laughed derisively.

"I ain't 'fraid of a feller like him."

"Then it's all right, an' no harm done in my tellin' you; but if I was in your place I'd keep my eyes open pretty wide. Now, Jip Collins can't scare me a little bit; but yet if I was in a snap like this, an' I knew he'd threatened to set fire, it would kind er stir me up a bit."

"Don't you go to thinkin' I ain't glad 'cause you told me, Sam, for I am, only it don't stand to reason a feller like Jip Collins can do much of anythin'."

"Don't you be so sure of that," Dan Roberts cried. "I've heard somethin' 'bout what Jip's been sayin', though I never b'lieved he had it in his head to burn the place up; but this much is sure: if it could be done without his takin' too many chances, he's jest the kind of a feller what would try it. He claims that, accordin' to the trade, you give him the right to stay in this place jest as long as *you* did, and that it was the same as swindlin' him when I come in."

"He knows better than that. I told him we'd try it a spell, an' see how we got along; the very first night I went all over

the business with him, an' said if we couldn't hitch together easy like, why we didn't want to stay in the same place, an' he was satisfied with it. Now, I don't see how I can do anythin' if he's bent on settin' fire to the shed, more'n lookin' 'round pretty sharp before I go to bed."

"If I owned this place same's you do, I should set up nights, 'cause then's when he'll try his game," Sam said with an air of wisdom. "It ain't likely he'll come 'round here in the daytime; but after the men have gone away from the shop it wouldn't be anyways hard for him to get in an' strike a match to some of these shavin's."

"But accordin' to that you couldn't do very much work, if you set up all night watchin' for Jip Collins. You'd have to sleep in the daytime. I don't see how a feller is goin' to earn his livin' any sich way."

"I didn't say you ought'er do it," Sam replied quickly; "but was only tellin' what I believed in. It ain't likely you'd have to stand watch many nights, 'cause the first time you caught Jip you'd put an end to it by pretty nigh thumpin' the life out er him; then I don't reckon he'd come again."

"Do you s'pose he's countin' on doin' this all alone?"

"No; he's got a couple of fellers from Brooklyn that he's chummin' with jest now, an' most likely they're comin' into the game."

"If they do, an' I should watch for Jip till I caught him, there ain't any great show of my thumpin' him very bad if he's got two others to lend a hand."

"You ain't scared of him, are you?" Sam asked quickly.

"Not much I ain't; but I'll keep clear from that kind of a racket till I know somethin' 'bout it. I can't 'ford to have a row, don't you see, 'cause if any of Ninety-four's men heard I was fightin' my way along, as likely as not they'd shut me off from goin' to the engine-house, an' then ag'in when the time comes for me to get into the Department it would give me a black eye if I had the name of doin' sich things. I don't s'pose that would hurt a detective; but they're mighty careful what kind of fellers they have in the Department, an' I don't count on havin' a bad mark to my name four years from now."

"Well, suit yourself about that, of course. It ain't any of my business, only I thought I'd tell you what Jip's sayin', an' I've got to get along over towards Hoboken."

Then, from the noise he made, his hosts understood that Sam Barney was making his way out of the apartment, and Dan asked in a friendly tone if he had made any new discoveries regarding the theft of his money.

"I'm follerin' up a pretty good clue now," Sam replied in a tone calculated to give the hearer an impression that he could tell more if it was necessary, and then with a cheery "So long," he rapidly made his way across the lumber-yard to the street.



CHAPTER II.

'LISH DAVIS.

When their visitor had departed Seth and Dan held a long consultation as to the advisability of following Sam's advice in the matter of standing guard during the hours of darkness.

Dan believed that, owing to his having made a study of the detective business, Sam Barney knew better than they what should be done toward warding off the threatened attack, and, regardless of the labor involved, he proposed that a sentinel be stationed just outside the shed door.

"I'll go on guard until twelve o'clock, and you can sleep all that time; then I'll call you an' take my turn at it," Dan said after they had discussed the matter in all its bearings for ten minutes or more.

"How do you count on keepin' awake?"

"That can easily be done, 'cause I'll walk 'round the yard, an' the nights are just about cold enough to make a feller want to move lively."

"I don't believe Jip Collins would dare do what he threatens."

"He would if he thought the game could be worked without too much risk, an' I tell you, Seth, if both of us turn in an' go to sleep he might carry the whole shed away without our knowin' it."

"All right; I'll 'gree to it, though if he should come 'round we mustn't have too much of a row, 'cause you remember what I told Sam 'bout not wantin' to be taken for a fighter in this neighborhood, else I'll never get into the Department."

"You can be pretty certain I shouldn't tackle him alone, an' if them two fellers from Brooklyn 'mount to anythin', why you an' I together wouldn't have too much of a show."

Then, after repeating that he was to be called at midnight in order to perform his full share of the labor, Seth went into the box-like apartment, and Dan began his work as watchman.

During the first half-hour he paced to and from one end of the yard to the other, scrutinizing carefully every unfamiliar object, until it seemed to him the night was more than half spent.

"I must have been here four hours now, an' Sam Barney left 'bout half-past seven, so I haven't got a great while to tramp 'round," he said to himself, and just at that moment the clock on a neighboring steeple struck the hour of eight.

He was both surprised and discouraged at thus learning that the time was passing so slowly, and it suddenly came into his mind that he was very tired.

It was foolish to keep constantly moving around, because if Jip Collins should come he would see the sentinel and make no effort to carry out his threats until the coast was clear.

Therefore it was that Master Roberts built a seat from pieces of board just inside the shed, and seating himself where he could have a full view of the yard while remaining unseen, he continued his duties in what appeared to him to be a much wiser, and certainly a more comfortable fashion.

Here he was protected from the chill wind, and as was only natural, here also he fell asleep even while saying to himself that nothing should tempt him to close his eyes even for a single moment.

When the near-by clock struck the hour of twelve Dan was still wrapped in slumber.

At three o'clock in the morning his repose was most profound, and just at daylight Seth shook him by the shoulder as he asked with a laugh:

"How long have you been asleep?"

Dan's most intimate friends claimed that he never told a lie, and he was not tempted to do so on this occasion, even though the truth provoked mirth at his expense.

"It couldn't have been a great while after eight o'clock. It didn't seem possible I'd go to sleep here, Seth, an' sure I meant to keep my eyes wide open; but the first thing I knew it was done, an' I haven't woke up since."

"Well, that shows how much need there is to watch for Jip Collins. He's all wind, that feller is, an' likes to go 'round

town braggin' what he'll do to us; but you'll find every night will be jest like this. As soon as it's dark he gets where he belongs, an' don't take the chances of bein' out too late. Comin' up here in the night an' tryin' any funny business is too much for a coward like him, an' I tell you we might as well go to sleep as to stand guard."

Nothing could have been more convincing to Dan than this experience. When the amateur detective left them it seemed positive Jip Collins would attempt to work mischief before daybreak, and had he been forced to lie down on the bed of shavings by the side of his landlord, Dan Roberts would have felt decidedly uneasy in mind.

Now, however, since he had kept such poor watch, and it was evident the enemy had not been in that vicinity, he came to look at the matter much as did Seth.

Although no absolute decision was arrived at regarding what should be done in the future as to standing guard, it was understood between these two inmates of the shed-home, that such precaution was unnecessary.

Among his other conveniences for housekeeping Seth had a tin biscuit-box which served him as cupboard, and the two were in the custom of bringing home at night sufficient for their breakfast next morning.

It was necessary Dan should be ready to begin business at a very early hour, and when the sun rose these two merchants were usually making ready for the day's work.

On this particular morning, however, they lingered over the meal, having much spare time at their disposal because of Seth's early awakening, and shortly after daybreak both set out, one to visit the newspaper offices and the other to loiter in the vicinity of the engine-house until the firemen should require his services, for now nearly all the company patronized the lad, whom they were pleased to call "the amateur."

It is but right, however, to state that he was paid for such services. After that first morning when Seth had refused to take money from 'Lish Davis, he was given to understand that when the members of the company wanted boots blacked they were to pay for the labor, otherwise some other of the fraternity would be called upon.

Seth begged for the privilege of "shinin' for the crowd free," declaring that he should not lose any money through such gratuitous labor, for he would be familiarizing himself with the indoor details of a fireman's life.

To this, however, 'Lish Davis made answer:

"See here, my son, you've got your living to earn, and can't afford to give up bread an' butter for the sake of getting on to our work. We'll pay for the shines, or you don't put your nose inside this house, and as for finding out what we do hereabout, why it's nothing but drudgery. Cleaning harnesses, setting the machines to rights, and keeping the place neat as a new pin make up the bulk of the work. So take a nickel for every shine you give, or out you go, never to come back."

From that hour Seth had been paid regularly, and, thanks to such patronage, he was in a great measure independent of other customers, because there was seldom a day when he did not earn at least twenty-five cents from Ninety-four's men.

Thus it can be understood that he was warranted in loitering near the engine-house until his patrons should be ready for his services, and on this particular morning the first man who came out of doors found him seated on his box, leaning against the building, whistling cheerily.

"Feeling pretty good this morning, ain't you, kid?" the fireman asked rather as a greeting than for the purpose of gaining information, and the boy replied in a tone of perplexity:

"I ain't certain about that, Mr. Walters."

"Not sure whether you're feeling good or not?"

"No, an' that's a fact. Has Mr. Davis turned out yet?"

"Well, s'pose he has? Do you want to consult with him?"

"That's 'bout the size of it."

"He's inside with the horses; go right through."

In order that he might not be an unwelcome visitor, Seth had had sufficient good sense never to enter the building without an express invitation or permission, and perhaps because he was thus scrupulous the men were all the more willing to admit him.

"Hello! What's up?" Lish Davis asked as the boy appeared thus unannounced.

"If you ain't very busy I'd like to talk with you 'bout somethin' that's botherin' my pardner an' me a good bit since last night."

"Fire away, lad. I reckon I've got time enough to listen to the story, unless it is in more than one chapter."

"It ain't so very long, an' I'll be quick as I can," Seth replied, and then he told, without going too much into detail, of his trouble with Jip Collins, and of the latest threats which the boy had made, according to Sam Barney's statement, concluding by saying:

"Now, I don't believe Jip's got sand enough to do any sich thing as settin' fire to the shed, an' it's sure he didn't try it last night, 'cause he had every chance; but I've been thinkin' 'bout it while I was waitin' for the house to be opened, an' it kind-er come into my mind that perhaps he might make a bluff at it."

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything some of these young villains did," Lish Davis said after a brief time of reflection. "The general run of street boys get an idea into their heads, and don't stop to realize what the consequences may be. Let me see, you live in the rear of Baxter's carpenter shop, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's a brick building butts up against the back end of that lot, so your only chance of getting out would be to come through the lumber-yard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it wouldn't amount to very much as a fire; but in case one got started there, you and your partner would stand a good show of getting a dose."

Seth understood the driver to mean that there was danger of being suffocated by the smoke, and he admitted that such might be the case, but added:

"We can't do as Sam Barney says, an' set up every night watchin', else when would we sleep?"

"Why don't you leave this place for two or three days, and find some other quarters?"

"That never'd do, 'cause jest as soon as the fellers knew I'd gone, they'd snoop 'round, an' I'd be thrown out of a home mighty quick."

"You might get Baxter to let you put a lock on the shed; that would keep them out."

"I wouldn't like to do it, 'cause you see I've got an idea the carpenter has forgot all about my sleepin' there, an' perhaps if I was to flash up so fresh askin' for a lock on the bedroom door he'd think it was 'bout time for me to skip."

"Well, look here, Seth, you might as well give me a shine, and while you 're doing that I'll see if I can think of a way out for you. I'm inclined to believe the same as your detective friend does, that it stands you in hand to keep a pretty good watch, and I'll speak to the cop on this beat."

Seth set about his professional duties without delay, and by the time one boot had been polished so perfectly that it reflected surrounding objects almost as well as a mirror, the fireman asked abruptly:

"How old are you, kid?"

"Fourteen, accordin' to the way I figger it."

"Don't you know?"

"Well, you see, old Miss Washburn--she was the woman that claimed to bring me up, though it's precious little she did towards it--wasn't no ways certain herself, but that's what she allowed, so it's good enough for me."

"Haven't got any folks, eh?"

"Well, I did have a mother, you know, till I was a couple of years old, so Miss Washburn says."

"Where's your father?"

"You see, I never had one, leastways not what you would call a real father, 'cause when a man is a reg'lar gin-pig, no decent feller is goin' to own up that he's his relation. The last time I saw him he was goin' down on the Island for ninety days, an' that was as much as three years ago."

"You've still got the fool idea in your mind that you're going to be a fireman?"

"It ain't any fool idea, Mr. Davis, 'cause it's a fact. That's jest what I count on bein'."

"Look here, my son, I've been thinking about you a considerable bit since I found it was no use trying to scare you out of the plan, and in a year's time or so, I reckon, between the captain and Walters and me, we can get you in up to headquarters. Now, don't jump so! I didn't mean we allowed you could go there as a recruit; but the captain was saying the other night that we might work it so's you could get some kind of a berth there--sweeping floors, washing windows, and the like of that, which, if you keep your ears and eyes open, would amount to the same as if you went into actual training. You ain't the lad I've got in my eye if you couldn't soon work your way into one of the classes."

"If I only might!" Seth replied emphatically, with a long indrawing of the breath. "If I only might!"

"I allow we'll work it, lad; but you must grow a good bit 'twixt now and then."

"I'm hopin' to get an early spring moustache before long. Sim Jepson's got one, an' I'm goin' to do the same as he did, 'cause the fellers say he put somethin' on to make the hair grow."

The driver laughed long and loud at this announcement made in the gravest tone, and called upon every idle man in the building to come and hear the "amateur's" latest scheme for getting into the Department.

The boy's face flushed a deep red before 'Lish Davis was willing to cease laughing at or repeating the proposition; but finally he wearied of his sport, and, his boots having long since been polished, said in a serious tone:

"I'll speak to the cop on this beat about your friend Collins, and in the meantime make it your business to hunt him up. Let the little scoundrel know you've told me; that I'm going to post the policeman, and that he'll get a mighty hot reception if he should try any of his firebug business. I reckon some such hint will knock the mischief out of his head, unless he's a born idiot."

Then Mr. Davis walked away, intent on the morning duties, and Seth set about his regular work until all the company had been served, after which he started down-town in accordance with the plan proposed by the driver.

Owing to customers, and they were unusually plentiful on this day, it was not until late in the afternoon that he arrived at City Hall Square, where Jip Collins was most often to be found, and here he met his partner.

Dan was delighted at learning what steps had been taken for their safety, although because of the previous night's experience he had begun to doubt if their enemy would dare carry his threats into effect, and the two at once made search for Master Collins.

He had been seen thereabouts within an hour by more than one of Seth's acquaintances; but now although the two searched until nightfall it was impossible to accomplish their purpose.

It seemed much as if Jip Collins, learning that Seth was in the vicinity, believed it wisest to keep out of sight, and after the night had fully come Dan said impatiently:

"It's no use spendin' so much time on that duffer, 'cause he won't show up again to-night. We've told so many of the fellers what 'Lish Davis said, that Jip will be sure to hear of it before he goes to bed, an' perhaps that will be just as well as if you had met him, 'cause there might have been a row. Let's go up and get a bowl of five-cent soup and a piece of pie. I can stand a ten-cent spread to-night, an' business has been good enough with you."

To this proposition Seth assented, and the two made their way to a certain restaurant on Chatham Street, where, after an unusually profitable day's work, they were in the custom of feasting.

If there was any one thing in which Dan Roberts excelled it was in his ability to eat very fast and for a long while.

He ordered the waiter to bring him the pie and the soup at the same time, and it seemed to Seth as if he had but just begun before his partner was finished.

"I reckon I can take one more bowl of that soup, an' then be through before you are," he said, thoughtfully. "I made pretty near forty cents, an' it's kind'er tough if a feller can't spend fifteen of it, eh?"

"Go ahead if you want the soup, an' are willin' to pay for it. It don't make any difference to me, 'cause I'll stay here till you're filled plum full; but I tell you what it is, Dan, you're gettin' into an awful habit of eatin'!"

"Is that what you call a habit?"

"Course it is. If you didn't think about it every minute, you wouldn't be so hungry."

"I'm pretty near starved all the time as it is, an' I don't know how I'd get along with any less," Dan replied apologetically, and then, the soup having been brought, he gave his undivided attention to the pleasing task.

After the feast the boys, having nothing of special importance to do, lounged leisurely towards their home in the shed, and it was nearly nine o'clock before they crept into the box that served as chamber, both feeling tired and sleepy.

Not until they were inside did Seth realize that they had not searched the lumber-yard, and he insisted that they go at once to make certain no enemy was hidden near at hand.

"What's the use of that?" Dan asked petulantly. "You can be sure Jip Collins ain't anywhere 'round here, 'cause some of the fellers have told him what we said long before this, an' he'll give the place a wide berth."

"You ain't sure he knows that I told 'Lish Davis 'bout the threats he was makin'."

"Well, he didn't come last night, an' you was the one that said he wouldn't dare to show his nose 'round."

"I know it; but somehow or other, Dan, it seems as if we ought'er look out a little sharper, 'cause he might be fool enough to try such a game."

"An' if he did after tellin' everybody about it, he'd go up the river ten or fifteen years, sure--I ain't certain but that it would be a life sentence."

"Yes, I know all that, Dan, but Jip ain't the kind of a feller to figger on sich things, an' if he gets a notion right solid in his head, there's no knowin' how big a fool he might make of himself, so let's go out an' have a look 'round."

It was with an ill grace that Dan followed Seth, and even then his share in the search was of but little service owing to the fact that he hurried from one part of the yard to the other without making an effort to ascertain if any one was secreted in the many convenient hiding-places near at hand.

After ten minutes or more had been spent by the two boys, Seth performing his work faithfully and Dan shirking, the partners retired, and it was as if they had but just stretched themselves at full length on the bed of shavings when both were asleep.

If Dan had been acting the part of sentinel just inside the shed door an hour after the two retired, he would have seen in the gloom three dark forms emerge from behind a pile of boards which he had failed to look over carefully, and advance cautiously toward the shed door, halting when they were twenty feet or more away.

Had he been there he would have recognized one of these as Jip Collins, and most probably suspected that the other two were the boys from Brooklyn spoken of by the amateur detective.

He would also have heard the conversation which followed; but he did not because he was asleep, and the lad who was willing to commit a crime in order to compass his revenge found no impediment in the way.

"They're snorin' by this time, that's certain," Jip said to his comrades, "an' even if they wasn't we might talk here for an hour without their hearin', 'cause Seth's room is in the farther end of the shed, and there's a whole pile of lumber between him an' the door. He don't believe in going out much after he's got inside the yard, for fear the carpenter will see him, so we can make up our minds that there's nothin' to stop us."

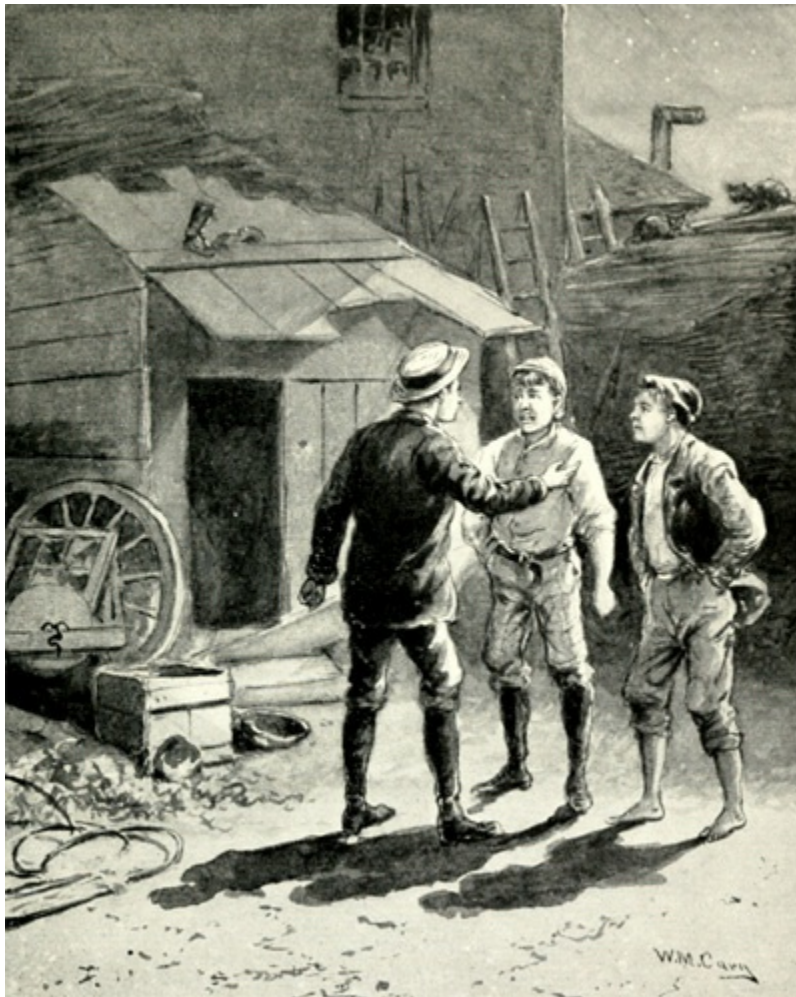
"Where do you count on starting the fire?"

"Right close by the shed door, of course. I know where to get a lot of shavings."

"But it won't do to set it so near, because the fellers might be burned to death, an' that would be a pretty piece of business, Jip Collins."

"Gettin' scared, eh?"

"You don't want to talk to me 'bout gettin' scared, a feller who'd let another only half his size back him down same's you did last night."



JIP COLLINS AND THE BOYS FROM BROOKLYN. Page 34.

"If you ain't scared, what are you makin' a row 'bout now? We 'greed to put a fire here so's to singe Seth an' Dan a little."

"Yes, I agreed to that much; but I don't count on killing 'em."

"Neither do I."

"But how can you help it if you build the fire right close to the door, when there's no other way for 'em to get out?"

"Don't you s'pose they've got sense enough to wake up before the thing gets too far along?"

"I've heard of folks bein' smothered to death while they was asleep, an' I ain't in this game if that's the way you're goin' to work it."

"Then back out if you're scared, an' I'll do it."

Without paying any further attention to his companions, Jip made his way to the rear of the carpenter's shop, where he knew would be found an ample supply of light wood and shavings, and when he returned, his arms filled with the inflammable material, neither of his friends from Brooklyn could be seen.

CHAPTER III.

JIP'S REVENGE.

If Jip Collins had not accused the Brooklyn boys of being afraid, it is doubtful if he would have dared to set fire to the shed.

Now it seemed to him as if he must carry out the proposed crime, or set himself down as a coward, and because of being deficient in bravery his one fear was lest such fact should be generally known.

He was on the spot; the materials for kindling a blaze were in his arms, and it appeared at that moment to him as if it was absolutely necessary he should perform what he had so often threatened without really intending to do.

The shavings and light wood were laid at the door of the shed. Jip was careful not to place them in such a manner as would be best calculated to produce the fiercest blaze; but dropped them without heed, as if saying to himself that chance should decide whether the building caught fire or not.

He drew several matches from his pocket, and looked around apprehensively, hearing in every noise the footsteps of an officer coming to drag him to prison.

After thus hesitating several moments he understood beyond a peradventure that he was alone--that nothing save his own conscience prevented him from carrying into effect his plan of revenge.

It should be said that at this moment Jip failed to realize what might be the consequences of such an act.

One of the Brooklyn boys had suggested the possibility that those in the shed might be burned to death if the fire was started near the door; but to this Jip had given little heed. He could not believe that two active lads like Seth and Dan would be overpowered by a little smoke, and felt assured the firemen would arrive so soon after the blaze had been kindled that very little damage could ensue.

After this brief time of hesitation he turned toward the pile of wood and shavings once more, with a gesture as if impatient with himself for delaying.

Then he lighted a match, protecting the tiny flame with both hands until it was a sturdy blaze, after which, instead of holding it to the shavings, he threw it away.

For one instant his conscience had triumphed; but it was only for an instant.

He lighted another match, hurriedly this time, as if fearing he might not have the courage to apply it, and when it was fully on fire muttered to himself:

"I'll drop it an' take the chances. If she burns, it's a go, an' if she don't, I've done as much as I've threatened."

He suited the action to the words, and not daring to wait for the result, ran hurriedly into the deserted street.

It was his intention to continue on, halting only when having arrived at his home; but now that the mischief might have been done he was so thoroughly alarmed that it seemed impossible he could leave the vicinity.

Partially concealing himself in a doorway he waited almost breathlessly, hoping fervently the match had been extinguished when it fell, and as the seconds passed, each one seeming a full minute, a great hope came into his heart, for he believed chance had decreed that the fire should not be kindled.

Then a stifled cry of fear burst from his lips, for he had suddenly seen a bright tongue of flame leap up, and he knew the crime had been committed in fact as well as spirit.

At this moment he remembered the words of his friends from Brooklyn as distinctly as if they had but just been spoken, and like a flash came the realization that perhaps he had done that which would result in the loss of human life.

The flames increased until they were reflected on the wall of brick in the rear, and it seemed to Jip as if the shed must already be in a blaze.

"Why don't somebody send in an alarm?" he said, speaking aloud in his anxiety, although there was no one at hand to hear him. "Seth an' Dan will be burned to death if the engines don't get here mighty soon!"

Then came the thought, for he believed the fire was already beyond control, that it would be impossible to rescue the boys--that he was indeed a murderer, for it seemed to him as if an exceedingly long time had elapsed since he first saw

the tiny ray of light.

Now his one desire was that an alarm might be sent in, yet no one could be seen or heard in either direction.

Each moment of delay increased the peril, and when he had waited in most painful suspense for ten seconds it was impossible to remain inactive any longer.

Far down the street a red light could be seen, denoting the location of a fire-alarm station, and he ran toward it as he had never run before, so nervous when he would have opened the outer door of the box that for two or three seconds it was impossible to turn the handle.

When he did so the sound of the warning gong, intended to notify the policeman on that beat that the box was being opened, caused him to start back in alarm, for he fancied the officers of justice were already on his trail.

Jip had many times seen a call rung in, and in the merest fraction of time he recovered from his fears as he understood the cause of this sudden noise.

Then he opened the outer door and pulled down the lever once; and from that instant until the first engine appeared, which was Ninety-four, it seemed to him as if an hour had passed, although in fact the company of which Seth considered himself in a certain degree a member, had responded to the call in less than three minutes.

Jip was standing by the signal-box when a rumble and roar in the distance told of the coming of Ninety-four, and he watched as if fascinated the fountain of sparks which went up from the smoke-stack; listened to the sharp clicking of the horses' shoes on the pavement; to the din of the gongs, and the cries of startled pedestrians in the rear--hearing everything, seeing everything, but yet all the while as if in a dream.

Nearer and nearer came the puffing engine drawn by three plunging horses as if it had been no more than a toy, and then, his brain still in a whirl, Jip heard as if from afar off, the question:

"Where's the fire?"

"In Baxter's carpenter shop!"

The engine was some distance beyond him by the time he had answered the question, and from the opposite direction he heard the rush of a second on-coming machine; then here and there the rumble of wheels and hoof-beats of horses driven at their utmost speed, until it seemed as if by that one pull on the lever of the signal-box he had aroused the entire city.

Now Seth and Dan would be saved if they were yet alive.

At that moment there was no hope in Jip's mind that they could still be living.

It was as if he had lighted that match an hour ago, so slowly had the seconds passed, and with the thought of them as dead--burned to death through his act--came wildest terror.

He fancied every fireman on Ninety-four had recognized him as they rode past in such mad haste, and knew him to be the one who had committed the crime.

There was no place in his mind for any thought save that of his own danger, and instantly he started at full speed down the street, never daring to so much as glance behind him, although no man pursued.

When the "joker," which is the name given by firemen to the combination-bell, in Ninety-four's house rang out the number of the call sent in by Jip, and as the horses, released by the mechanical trip moved by the joker, dashed out of their stalls, 'Lish Davis believed he knew beyond a question to what particular building they were summoned.

Instantly that which Seth had told him came into his mind, and with it the painful thought that perhaps by his own neglect he had contributed to what might be a fatal disaster.

"And I never so much as warned the policeman on this beat!" he said to himself as he leaped to his seat on the engine, snapped into place the belt that would hold him there, and with a quick jerk on the reins released the harness-catch.

Ninety-Four had seldom left the house more quickly, and certainly the horses were never urged to a higher rate of speed than now, when 'Lish Davis charged himself with criminal neglect.

During the minute and a half which intervened before they reached the station from which the alarm had been sent, the driver of Ninety-four conceived an absolute affection for the boy who had so persistently followed up his idea of becoming a fireman, and, prompted by the prickings of his own conscience, perhaps, he muttered to himself:

"The kid shall go into the Department if I can put him there, providing it so be we find----"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant it was to 'Lish Davis as if he must in a certain degree take upon himself the results of this night's work.

When they dashed past the station he needed not Jip's reply to tell him whence came the glow of light which could now be seen reflected on the taller buildings, and Ninety-four got water a full two minutes before any other engine.

"That little bootblack, Seth Bartlett, sleeps in the shed behind the shop," 'Lish called hoarsely as the men ran swiftly through the lumber-yard, and, hearing the words even above the tooting of whistles, the sounding of gongs from the on-coming engines, and the puffing of steam, Jerry Walters cried:

"I'll look out for him, 'Lish!"

Every man heard the driver's cry, and knew that the amateur fireman was in danger.

They also knew where he slept, having been given by the boy himself a description of his home, and with the first crash of Jerry's axe as he burst in the door of the shed, the men set up a shout which sounded like music in 'Lish's ears.

It was Jip Collins who had started the fire, and he also was the means of saving the lives of Seth and Dan after the mischief had been wrought, for the firemen gained the box-like apartment not one moment too soon.

All unconscious of the danger which threatened, the boys had slept on until the noisome vapor overcame without awakening them, and when Jerry carried the two out into the street through the piles of lumber which were already beginning to blaze, he said to Joe Black as the latter advanced to help him take the apparently lifeless bodies to one of the patrol-wagons drawn up near at hand:

"I'm afraid the amateur has got more of a dose than he can well stand."

Ten minutes later, when Seth woke to consciousness, Dan was lying by his side in the bottom of the wagon, and 'Lish Davis bent over him.

"It must be that Jip Collins did what he threatened," he said, speaking with difficulty because of the parched, burning sensation in his throat.

"Ay, lad, that's what he did, and this town won't be big enough to hold him after daylight to-morrow morning."

"But why are you here, Mr. Davis? What about the team?"

"Ben Dunton is on hand, and I'm off duty for the time being till I can make sure whether you're alive or not."

Seth knew that Ben Dunton was 'Lish's "relief," therefore the driver was not neglecting his duty by thus staying with him.

"Is it a bad fire?" he asked.

"The shop and about half the lumber-yard will go. It's nothing to speak of, lad, save for the fact of its having been kindled that murder might be done."

"I don't believe Jip Collins really meant to kill us. He most likely thought we would get out before it was very bad. Is Dan all right?"

"There's nothing much the matter with me," Master Roberts replied in what he intended should be a cheery tone. "I've been awake quite a spell, an' thought you'd never open your eyes."

"Sure you're all right?" 'Lish asked, shaking Seth gently as if doubting whether the boy was fully conscious.

"Of course I am, an' now we're inside the lines there's a good chance for me to look 'round after points. I'm going into the yard to see what Ninety-four's men are doin'."

"I reckon you'll lay where you are for a spell," 'Lish said with a grim smile, speaking half to himself, and in such a low tone that neither of the boys heard the words.

Seth attempted to rise; but had no more than gotten up on one elbow when a most violent nausea assailed him, and he fell back on the rubber blankets which had served as pillow, feeling much as he looked--desperately ill.

"Don't feel like wiggling 'round to any great extent, eh?" 'Lish asked, understanding full well the boy's sensations, and so relieved at knowing his life had been saved that the temporary sickness seemed as nothing.

"I don't see what makes me feel so bad," and Seth did his best to speak in a careless tone.

"If it so be you ever get into the Department, lad, this ain't the first dose you'll take, nor the heaviest. It's the smoke which came nigh to strangling you, and there ain't a man that answers to Ninety-four's roll-call who can't tell exactly how you feel."

"I've got to brace up pretty soon, or Dan an' me will have to walk 'round the streets the balance of the night, now our housekeepin' is broken up."

"Don't worry about that, lad. I reckon the captain will give you a shelter till daylight, and after that we'll see what can be done."

Then 'Lish, understanding that he could render no assistance, left the two boys to join his comrades, who were fighting the fire as gallantly in the lumber-yard as they would have done at a palatial residence.

"So Jip Collins had sand enough to try an' burn us out, didn't he?" Dan said interrogatively. "I'll run across that duffer one of these days, and when I get through with him he won't set anybody else's shed on fire!"

"The police will most likely get hold of him, 'cause Mr. Davis knows all about what he threatened, an' even if Sam Barney didn't let out the whole story, the driver will."

Having said this Seth relapsed into silence, for his bodily condition was such that it seemed a severe exertion to so much as speak.

The fire was subdued, but not extinguished, when the patrol-wagon was driven away with Ben Dunton on the front seat, and Dan asked in a tone of awe:

"Do you s'pose they're goin' to carry us up to the engine-house?"

"It seemed as though that was what Mr. Davis meant; but yet I'm afraid we're bound for the hospital."

"Well, say, you don't catch me inside of one! I ain't goin' to flock in with a lot of dyin' folks jest 'cause I've got a little smoke down my throat," and Dan, who was not suffering as much as his partner, attempted to scramble to his feet, whereat Ben Dunton shouted gruffly:

"Lay still there, you two kids, or I'll come down and know the reason why!"

"We ain't goin' to no hospital!" Dan cried angrily.

"Who asked you to? You don't allow we're running an ambulance for such kids as you, eh?"

"Where are we goin'?"

"Lay still and you'll find out."

Seth had learned enough regarding a fireman's life to know that the first engine at the scene of a conflagration must be the last to leave, therefore wherever Ben Dunton might be taking them, there was little chance of seeing 'Lish Davis until the following morning.

To the great delight of both the boys the patrol-wagon was drawn up in front of Ninety-four's house, and Dunton asked:

"Can you lads get out alone, or shall I lend a hand?"

"Are we goin' to stay here all night?" Dan asked suspiciously.

"Of course you are. It's the captain's orders, and you're to have 'Lish Davis's bed."

This was sufficient to cause a decided change in Seth's condition.

The fact that he was to sleep in the engine-house as if he had been a member of the Department was so great an honor that for the time being his illness was banished.

The boys alighted from the vehicle without assistance and followed Ben Dunton into the building, where a report was made to the house-watchman regarding the guests, who were then conducted to the floor above.

"There's where you're to sleep," the fireman said, pointing to the driver's bed. "And you want to get in some precious big licks, for it ain't often 'Lish Davis puts himself out in this fashion for anybody, especially when he's likely to be on duty six or eight hours. No skylarking, now, but get between the sheets as quick as you know how."

No second bidding was necessary, and five minutes later the two boys were enjoying a greater degree of comfort than they had ever fancied would be possible, Seth refusing to join in the conversation which his partner would have started, in order to give himself wholly up to building air-castles, all based on the Fire Department with himself rising from the grade of recruit to that of battalion-chief.

Slumber closed their eyelids in due time, however, and they journeyed so far into the recesses of Dreamland that neither heard the home-coming of Ninety-four, nor the bustle consequent upon cleaning up and making ready for duty once more.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Seth awakened, and for the first time since having been told he was to sleep in 'Lish's bed, he realized how much inconvenience and possible discomfort he might have caused the driver.

"Say, Dan, we did a mighty mean thing to sleep here, an' perhaps Mr. Davis had to set up all night. Hustle your clothes on as quick as you know how, so's we can get down-stairs an' tell him we're ashamed of it."

Neither of the boys was feeling any the worse for the painful experience of the previous night, and in a remarkably short space of time they were ready to descend, but not by the stairs.

For the first time in his life Seth enjoyed the pleasure of sliding down the pole to the floor below, and this method of descending served to strengthen certain portions of the air-castles he had built just before falling asleep.

The driver was found grooming one of the horses, and greeted the boys before either could speak, by saying cheerily:

"Well, how are you getting along after your dose of last night?"

"First-rate, sir. We're as well as ever; but feelin' mighty mean to think we used your bed an' kept you up all night."

"You didn't do anything of the kind, lad. We got back about four o'clock, and I found plenty of spare beds for the short nap I wanted. I reckon you lost everything you owned, eh?"

"Yes, sir; but that wasn't very much. My box, brushes, and what we had brought home for breakfast."

"How will you get another outfit?"

"I guess I've got money enough for a second-hand box and brushes; but if I haven't some of the fellers will lend me what's needed, an' I'm goin' now to pick up the things, so's to get back in time to do the shinin' here."

"There are brushes and blacking belonging to the house, and you can use them this morning, which will give you a little extra towards buying a new outfit. Haven't been to breakfast yet, have you?"

"That don't count, even if we haven't, 'cause we can get something later," and Seth, knowing where to find the tools of his trade, set about his customary morning's work, while Dan lounged here and there, feeling that he was a very fortunate lad in thus being a guest of Ninety-four's men.

Half an hour later, in company with Dan, Seth, richer by thirty cents, set out in search of a second-hand box and brushes.

Save in the way of questioning him concerning the boy who was believed to have started the fire in the lumber-yard, none of the men treated the bootblack other than in their customary manner, and Seth departed with the fear in his mind that they were glad to be rid of him.

No sooner had he gone, however, than 'Lish Davis addressed three or four of his comrades who were near at hand, saying emphatically:

"Look here, that boy Seth is bent on getting into the Department, and I tell you when a lad sticks to one thing as he's stuck to that for the last year, some one ought to lend him a hand."

"You ain't thinking of getting him taken on here, are you, 'Lish?" Walters asked with a laugh.

"I've got a plan in my head, and allow that the rest of you can help me through with it. If all hands of us turn to we can get the boy a job at headquarters, and he ain't the lad I've taken him to be if he don't put himself in the way of being received as a recruit when he's grown stouter and a little older. Now, such a lift as that won't be much for us, and it may be the making of him."

"Do you allow it's a good idea, 'Lish Davis, to help a boy into the Department when he might learn a trade which wouldn't be that of risking his life two or three times every day?"

"Would you turn tinker, or tailor, or candlestick-maker, Jerry Walters, in order to avoid risking your life two or three times a day?"

"It's different with me, 'Lish. I've been here so long I couldn't give it up."

"And it would be almost as hard for that lad to give up his idea. I tried to frighten it out of him when he first came around here; but he didn't scare worth a cent, and I tell you again that he'll make a cracking good man for some company one of these days."

"If there's anything I can do to help the thing along, you may count me in," Walters replied, and the other members of the company who heard the remark pledged themselves to the same thing.

"We'll let him hoe his own row till everything is ready, 'cause it may do harm if he gets to thinking somebody is trying to give him a lift."

"What's to be done with the kid who started the fire?"

"I repeated to the captain all the "amateur" told me, so I reckon he'll be attended to. Is Ben Dunton in the house?"

"Upstairs asleep."

"Then I'm going out for a bit. I want to see the battalion-chief."

"Going to strike for Seth while the iron's hot, eh?"

"That's what I'm thinking of, Jerry," and while Seth Bartlett was making ready to continue his business of blacking boots, 'Lish Davis began in his behalf the efforts which he believed would result favorably, so far as the boy's ambition was concerned.



CHAPTER IV.

SAM THE DETECTIVE.

The sidewalk merchants in the vicinity of the post-office were well informed of Seth Bartlett's loss by the time he arrived in that section of the city.

Those who had not heard the story from Dan Roberts read an account of the destruction of Baxter Brothers' carpenter-shop in the morning papers during the early part of the day before the business rush began, and thus it was Seth found himself the centre of a sympathizing crowd of acquaintances as soon as he crossed City Hall Park.

Master Barney had but just returned from a journey supposed to have been taken in search of the boy who had robbed him, and he immediately cast aside his own business troubles in order to "work the case against Jip Collins," as he expressed it.

Sam was among the throng gathered to meet the homeless bootblack, and when others would have asked for further particulars regarding the conflagration, even though Dan had given all the information in his possession, the amateur detective checked the curious ones by saying sharply:

"This ain't any time to talk foolishness, 'cause if I'm goin' to take up this case I must get right down to it before Jip has a chance to run very far."

"What do you mean by takin' up the case?" Seth asked in surprise, and Dan Roberts replied quickly:

"Sam says he's willin' to go after Jip Collins, an' will stick at it till he catches him."

"That's what I've 'greed to, an' I'm in dead earnest, Seth. Of course you can't afford to pay a reg'lar detective a whole lot of money jest to find Jip for you; but I can do the work as well, an' you needn't put out a cent more'n I'm called on to spend for expenses."

"What do *you* want of Jip?" Seth asked in surprise.

"To have him 'rested for settin' fire to your shed, of course."

"I don't want anythin' of the kind. I reckon he's sorry enough for what he did without my tryin' to make more trouble for him."

"Do you mean to say you're willin' he should burn the shed an' come pretty nigh killin' you?"

"Course I ain't willin'; but now it's been done there's no need for me to try to put him in jail, 'cause it won't do any good, an' I'd feel bad to think any feller I knew was up to Sing Sing doin' time."

It was evident that but few of the sidewalk merchants agreed with Seth in the view he took of the matter.

The majority of them believed Jip should be pursued until captured, and then punished to the full extent of the law.

Some were inclined to the opinion that Sam Barney might possibly succeed in running down the culprit, but these credulous ones were the most intimate friends of the amateur detective, and by far the larger number of the throng thought a formal complaint should be lodged with the officers of the law against the boy who had so nearly caused the death of Seth and Dan.

Sam Barney was literally astounded at the forgiving spirit which the would-be fireman displayed, and this first burst of astonishment soon gave way to something like anger.

He said in what was intended to be a fine tone of irony:

"Well, you're too good, Seth Bartlett, that's what's the matter with you! Here's Dan been tellin' that you were jest about the same as dead when Ninety-four's men got in there. The snugest house in town burned, an' you thrown out of a home! After all that you've got the nerve to say there's no reason why we should catch Jip Collins! I ain't certain as you've got anythin' to do with it. S'posen the cops find out what was done--an' most likely Ninety-four's driver that you claim is a chum of yours will tell 'em--how are you goin' to help it if they try to find him?"

"I can't, an' that's a fact; but I haven't got to start the thing myself."

"What would you do if you should meet him right here this very minute?"

"I'm 'fraid I'd thump him."

"'Fraid!" Sam repeated sarcastically. "Why, you ought'er pound his head off, an' then have him jugged."

"You see, it's jest like this, fellers," Seth said in an apologetic tone as he looked around at his friends and acquaintances, understanding full well that they disapproved of his leniency. "It's jest like this: If a feller gets to fightin' on the street he's likely to be pulled in for it, an' then perhaps he has to go down to the Island for ten days or so. Now you all know I'm tryin' to work into the Department, an' what kind of show would I stand if there was a record like that against me? Fellers who get up a name for fightin' don't 'mount to very much, 'cordin' to what I've seen, an' that's why I said I was 'fraid I might thump Jip. You see, what's done now will stand against me when I'm old enough to be a fireman, an' I've got to look out mighty careful for that. Now, so far's puttin' Jip in jail goes, I don't want anythin' to do with it."

"I can't see how that's goin' to give you a bad name," some one of the throng cried.

"I reckon it couldn't; but it might stand against Jip when he grows up, an' if I should let Sam take the case I'd be hurtin' Jip more'n he did me, so it wouldn't be fair."

"But you don't allow folks can go 'round settin' fire to houses an' tryin' to burn other people up without havin' to pay for it?"

"Course I don't, an' Jip ought'er get it hot for what he's done; but I won't be the one to send him up the river."

"If that's the way Seth feels 'bout it we haven't got any right to kick," Dan suggested, and Sam Barney cried sharply:

"I say we have! Jest 'cause Seth is gettin' so awful good on account of wantin' to go into the Department, there's no reason why we should let Jip Collins sneak away after what's been done, an' I'll take up the case on my own hook rather than see him wiggle out of it."

"Have you got the feller yet what stole your money?" Dan asked in a meaning tone, wherent the remainder of the company set up a loud shout of derision, much to the amateur detective's discomfort.

"If I haven't that's no sign I can't. I reckon I know enough 'bout the business to handle two cases at the same time, if I want to, an' you'll see if I don't pull Jip Collins over the coals before I'm a week older."

Then Sam stalked away with the bearing of one who feels that he has been injured, and the remainder of the party discussed the events of the previous night without further reference to the arrest of the evil-doer.

When the subject had been exhausted Seth made inquiries concerning any bootblack's outfit which might be for sale, and half an hour later he was once more the owner of a box and brushes.

"The fire has cost me seventy cents, besides the breakfast we lost when the place was burned," he said to Dan, and the latter replied mournfully:

"I'd have been willin' to give a good deal more'n that right out of my own pocket, poor as trade has been, than to lose the snugget lodgin'-place in this town. We'll never find anythin' that will come up with that shed."

"Cryin' won't help out on it. What we've got to do is to hunt up another shanty where we can bunk in without givin' up too much money, for after havin' to buy a new outfit I can't afford to fool away good dollars payin' for a bed at a reg'lar lodgin'-house."

"You'll never get anythin' that will come up to the shanty Jip Collins set on fire," Dan replied sadly, and as the realization of their loss came to him with redoubled force now that the time had arrived when they must search for new lodgings, he gave way to anger against the boy who had wrought them so much mischief, as if believing this would mend matters.

Seth waited patiently until his partner had indulged in such outburst several moments, after which he said sagely:

"Now, look here, Dan, scoldin' won't fix things the least little bit, an' there's no sense in keepin' on tellin' 'bout how big a villain Jip Collins is. What we've got to do is to hustle, an' in the long run we'll find that will pay better'n ravin'. Do you know of any place where we can stop for a night or two till I've had time to look 'round more?"

"If I did I'd taken it long ago, instead of payin' you fifteen cents a week for half of your quarters."

"Well, we've got to find one; that's all there is to it. Now, s'posen, instead of tryin' to do any more business to-day, we mosey right along about it."

"Where you goin'?"

"I don't exactly know. We'll kind-er loaf 'round; that's the way I found the carpenter-shop, an' if it turns out we don't see a place, why, it'll be a case of puttin' up the stuff for one night's lodgin's."

"I ain't sure as I've got money enough left to pay for a reg'lar bed."

"I reckon I can squeeze out what'll pay the bills if you're broke. Now, come on."

Unconsciously Seth led the way toward Ninety-four's house, not really being aware he was proceeding in that direction, and after walking several blocks in silence Dan asked almost sharply:

"Are you countin' on their lettin' us hang 'round the engine-house?"

"Course not. The firemen can't do nothin' like that, you know. We was mighty lucky to get a bed there last night, an' wouldn't had it except that we'd been burned out."

"Then what are you goin' up this way for?"

"There's jest as much chance 'round here as anywhere, an' of course I'd sooner live near Ninety-four, 'cause I do a good deal of shinin' for the men. Then ag'in, I don't want to lose run of 'em, for perhaps some day 'Lish Davis'll give me a lift into the Department."

"There's no use lookin' here, 'cause we'd known if there was any place that would suit us."

"I ain't so sure of that. You see, we wasn't lookin' for one, an' now if we go along with our eyes open there's no tellin' but what we may run----"

Seth ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant the clanging of gongs could be heard far up the street, and Dan exclaimed:

"That sounds like Ninety-four."

"Course it is. I'd know her if she was in the middle of a hundred, an' all of 'em comin' straight for me."

There was no longer a thought in the mind of either of the boys regarding the necessity of finding a home that night.

Under no ordinary circumstances would Seth have allowed himself to be prevented from getting possible "points," and although Dan did not share in the aspirations of his friend, he was equally excited by the prospect of "going to a fire."

The two waited breathlessly an instant, expecting Ninety-four would continue straight on toward them, when from the opposite direction came the clatter of wheels and the booming notes of the gongs telling of the coming of a second engine, and they knew that at some point midway the two engines would be turned at right angles with their present course.

"Come this way! It looks to me as though Ninety-four was slackenin' up!" Master Bartlett cried as he darted forward, and Dan readily followed the advice, for while he did not approve of his friend's devotion to the Fire Department, he understood full well that Seth was thoroughly conversant with all such matters as might be learned by an outsider.

"There she goes, an' I wouldn't wonder if the alarm came from some of them big storage warehouses, for Ninety-four is headin' straight toward them."

The first engine had swung sharply around to the left, and the driver of the second was urging his horses forward at yet greater speed, in the hope, perhaps, of getting first water, when the two boys dashed up the street at their best pace, for to Seth at least there was but one engine and one point of attraction at any conflagration, however extensive.

While it is probable he could have "picked up as many points" from other companies, it did not so appear to him, and in his mind it was only from the crew of Ninety-four he could gather such information as was most desired.

Before they neared the station from which the alarm had been sent the throng on the sidewalks, added to from nearly every house, had so increased that it was only by taking to the street regardless of the danger to be apprehended from hose-carts, hook-and-ladder trucks, patrol-wagons, or water-towers, that the boys could make any satisfactory headway, and because of their being thus hampered in their movements Ninety-four's men had already begun their work when Seth and Dan arrived at a point outside the fire lines where they could see the machine.

Here a single policeman kept the crowd in check, and Seth whispered excitedly to his partner:

"Now's our time! If we're anyways smart we'll get in before that copper can catch us. Wait till somebody tries to pass, an' then scoot. Don't stop if he yells, 'cause he won't dare leave here to chase us."

"I thought 'Lish Davis said he'd have his eye out so's you couldn't get into the fire lines?"

"That's what he said."

"Ain't you 'fraid he'll be mad if he finds you in there?"

"He knows I've got to do this thing, else I'll never get posted on the business; but of course if we should sneak in an' he told us to march straight out ag'in, I'd feel as though I ought'er go. We won't stand very near Ninety-four, an' then there'll be less chance of his knowin' we're around."

The opportunity which Seth desired came a few seconds later.

Two gentlemen who were curious to see the workings of the Fire Department nearer at hand than was possible while they remained outside the lines, approached the officer on duty with the idea that it was only necessary to bluster or threaten a little in order to pass him without difficulty, and while they were alternately entreating and threatening Seth gave the signal.

Stooping until their heads were beneath the rope, the two boys darted up the street, which was covered with a veritable network of hose, and before the officer was fully aware of their intentions they were lost to his view amid the panting, quivering monsters of steel and iron whose mission is to save, rather than destroy.

"There's 'Lish Davis on the engine!" Dan said, speaking indistinctly because of his breath, which came thick and fast. "It looks to me as if he has seen us."

"We'll keep over this way a bit where there's no danger of his comin'. Watch our men try to get up that stairway! Ain't they the dandies!"

The fire was, as Seth had first surmised, in a storage warehouse, and it appeared from the outside as if the entire second floor of the building was in a blaze.

The men had battered in the doors only to be met by a mass of flames which seemed to roll in huge columns down the staircase to the new outlet which had thus been made, and just as the boys arrived the brave fellows were momentarily beaten back by the scorching element until they stood on the first landing in plain sight of Seth and Dan.

Jerry Walters and Joe Black were at the nozzle, with Ben Dunton close in the rear, and at the moment Seth called his partner's attention to the scene the captain of Ninety-four shouted encouragingly:

"Now, hit it up, boys! Get in there! Get in! Get in!"

Then it was the flames retreated momentarily, and those who were doing such gallant battle advanced step by step up the stairs seemingly into the very midst of the fiery cloud, until they were entirely hidden by the downpour of black smoke which came from the open doorway in volume sufficient to drive back even those on the sidewalk.

While this desperate fight was in progress other men had raised a ladder and were prying open one of the iron shutters on the second floor in order to use more hose, and, yet trembling with apprehension for the safety of those friends who had last been seen in the very midst of the fiery element, Seth involuntarily glanced toward the remainder of the company on the outside, while Dan looked back to make certain 'Lish Davis was not preparing to drive them from their place of vantage.

That which he saw reassured him so far as any immediate danger of such kind was to be feared, for the driver of Ninety-four was unhitching his horses, knowing from the general appearance of the blazing building that the company had a long task before them.

At that instant a crashing, rending noise as of an explosion sounded high above the din, and one of the iron shutters which the men had been trying to force open was hurled from its fastenings and thrown outward into the street, falling within half a dozen feet of where Davis was busy with his horses.

Following it was a mighty rush of flame as if the interior was a seething mass of fire; loud shouts of command rang out, and then came even above all the din the clatter of a horse's iron-shod hoofs as he dashed madly away in affright. Involuntarily Seth had followed with his eyes the flight of the shutter, and, unconscious of even having made a movement, he sprang toward Ninety-four as if in the time of danger that was his post of duty.

He saw the heavy mass of metal as it struck the pavement, and instantly afterward was aware of what very few gave heed to because of the fact that all eyes were fixed upon the building, from whence might naturally be expected another explosion.

The nigh horse of the team, one that had been in service only a few weeks, leaped forward in frantic terror, and by some strange mishap was dragging his driver behind him.

At the moment Seth had no thought of possible danger to himself. His mind was upon 'Lish Davis's peril to the exclusion of everything else, and almost involuntarily he sprang toward the maddened animal, Dan close at his heels.

It was by accident rather than good judgment that he succeeded in gaining a hold of the bridle just above the bit, swinging himself outward by aid of his elbow to avoid being struck by the beast's forefeet.

His weight was not sufficient to bring the frightened animal to a standstill instantly; but he succeeded in checking his speed so far that the engineer of Ninety-four had time to come to his assistance, and between the two the runaway was stopped.

A buckle on Davis's coat had caught in one of the rings of the harness, and this it was which held him prisoner after having been thrown from his feet by the animal's sudden plunge.

"Are you hurt?" Seth asked anxiously, still retaining his hold of the bridle, and the driver replied grimly as he scrambled to his feet:

"A man is bound to get a few knocks after such a course of treatment; but I reckon that all the harm which has been done is a little skin broken here and there. Do you know, lad, it's a mighty dangerous thing to jump for a horse in that fashion?"



SETH CATCHES THE HORSE. Page 68.

"I caught him all right, sir."

"Yes, that I know, else I wouldn't be standing on my feet this minute; but suppose you had missed your hold? He would have had you under his feet in a jiffy."

"But he didn't, so I can't see as that counts very much; but all the same, I was willin' to take the chances."

'Lish Davis, having assured himself that he had spoken correctly so far as personal injuries were concerned, took charge of the horse; the engineer went back to his post, and Seth, fearing lest he should be driven outside the line, was making his way toward the building once more with Dan by his side when the driver shouted:

"Come back here, you young rattle-brain! How did you get inside the lines?"

"Crept under the rope when the copper wasn't lookin'. It ain't any very hard job to do that."

"Don't you know you're liable to be arrested for doing anything of that sort?"

"Well, we had to take the chances, you see, 'cause it wouldn't do to miss a fire like this," Seth replied, half apologetically, and Dan cried in his shrill tone:

"It's mighty lucky for you, Mr. Davis, that he did sneak inside this once."

"I ain't likely to forget that, you rascalion; but it has got nothing to do with you lads being where you don't belong, and that's right about here."

"Please don't send us away!" Seth cried imploringly. "We'll keep out of sight so the chief won't see us, an' nobody will know where we are."

"I'll take precious good care you can't get into more mischief. Come over here, both of you, an' stick right by Ninety-four till I give the word to leave. Don't you dare to so much as move till the engine does, an' if there's any more mishaps, steer clear of them instead of doing your level best to run into trouble. Are you hearing what I'm saying?"

"Yes, sir," Seth replied meekly, and then the boys obeyed readily, for Mr. Davis had stationed them in the very place above all others where they could see everything which occurred, and Dan said in a tone of satisfaction:

"It was a mighty good thing, your stoppin' that horse. You never had a better chance to see a fire than this is, an' we'd better hold on to it precious close."

"That's a fact; but I ain't gettin' so many points as I might if we walked 'round."

"You'd better be satisfied with what's a soft snap, even if you don't get points," Master Roberts replied grimly, and then he gave himself up to the pleasure of watching the battle between the firemen and the elements, for a third alarm had been rung in, and the number of men at work round about was more than either he or Seth had ever seen engaged at any one time before.

The hours passed to these two small but decidedly interested spectators as if they were composed of no more than one quarter the usual number of minutes, and when night came the conflagration was subdued but not extinguished.

Ninety-four had gotten first water, and, consequently, would be the last to leave the scene.

Here and there the companies dismissed from this particular duty were taking up their hose, or already driving away in order to be ready for the next alarm.

The throng of spectators just outside the lines had diminished in number until no more than an hundred remained, and 'Lish Davis came up with the appearance of one who has already done his full duty.

"Hello, Amateur! Still here, eh?"

"You told us to stay, sir."

"I didn't allow that you'd hold on to go out with us. We're like to be here till well towards morning, an' if you lads have got the price of a bed about your clothes you'd better be leaving. If you haven't, I'll ante up something to hire one."

"We've got the money, sir," Seth replied; "but seein' 's we belong to Ninety-four jest now, why can't we stay till she pulls out?"

"Please yourself, Amateur, please yourself," was the grim reply, and as the driver turned away he muttered, "If that bloomin' little duffer don't get into the Department it won't be 'Lish Davis's fault, an' that goes for a fact."

CHAPTER V.

TARDY REPENTANCE.

Seth was as happy and proud as a boy well could be.

Never before had he dared to remain very long near any particular engine lest some of the firemen should take it upon themselves to send him outside the lines, consequently all his "points" had been gathered as he moved from place to place.

Now, however, he was in a certain sense attached to Ninety-four, and each member of the company had some kindly word with which to greet him, for it had become known to all that if the amateur did not actually save 'Lish Davis's life, he had assisted in preventing that gentleman from receiving severe injury.

Dan was enjoying the advantages thus arising from his partner's popularity, which was quite sufficient for him, since, not aspiring to become a fireman, he thought only of the present moment, and the privilege of remaining by the engine as if he were really a member of the Department was some thing of which he could boast in the future among his comrades.

It is true there was little of interest to be seen after the fire was apparently extinguished, when the men had nothing more to do than remain on the lookout for any smoldering embers which might be fanned into a blaze; but Seth's interest was almost as great as when the flames were fiercest.

Shortly after sunset hot coffee and sandwiches were served to the weary firemen, and Master Bartlett believed he had taken a long stride toward the goal he had set himself, when the captain shouted:

"Come here, you two kids, and get your rations. While doing duty with Ninety-four you're entitled to all that's going."

Dan ran forward eagerly, intent only on getting his share of the food, for he was very hungry; but Seth walked slowly in order to prolong the pleasure of obeying the captain's command, and could almost fancy he was wearing the city's uniform.

He stood by 'Lish Davis's side when the lunch was passed around, and that gentleman said grimly as Seth blew on the steaming coffee to cool it:

"You mustn't do that if you ever count on being a fireman, Amateur."

"Why not?" and Seth looked up in surprise.

"Because you must get used to hot things. Supposing you could drink that while it was boiling? Don't you reckon you'd stand the heat from a blaze better and longer than them who need to have it mighty nigh cold?"

This seemed reasonable to Seth, and without stopping to further consider the matter he instantly raised the cup to his lips, drinking the hot liquid until the pain was so great as to bring tears to his eyes.

Then he lowered the cup slowly, striving manfully to repress any sign of suffering, and the driver gazed at him admiringly.

"That kid has got sand, eh?" Davis said half interrogatively as he turned toward Jerry Walters, and the latter replied:

"He showed it when he jumped for the horse. I believe if you should tell him to roll over on the embers in that 'ere cellar, he'd do it."

"I guess you're right, Jerry. Here, Amateur, don't try to drink any more of that coffee till it cools a bit! I was only stuffing you when I said you'd stand a better show of being a fireman if you could scald your throat without feeling it."

This evidence of solicitude for his welfare was sufficient reward for all Seth had suffered, and he glanced at Dan as if to make certain that young gentleman was fully aware of the great honor which was being bestowed upon his partner.

Dan had no eyes except for the rapidly decreasing store of sandwiches, and no thought save as to how he might get his full share without appearing absolutely greedy, therefore all this by-play had passed while he remained in ignorance of it.

Once his hunger was appeased Dan curled himself up on a bale of half-burned merchandise near at hand, and immediately fell asleep.

For him this association with Ninety-four's men was nothing of more importance than the gaining of a meal and so much of a night's lodging as might be possible; but to Seth it was as if the gates guarding the approach to his desires had been left ajar, permitting him to obtain a glimpse of that goal he so ardently longed to reach, and he patrolled the ruins of the building as if upon his shoulders rested all the responsibility of making certain the fire had been wholly extinguished.

Not until fully an hour after midnight was the welcome word given for Ninety-four to pull out, and Seth awakened his partner lest he should be in the way of the tired men.

"Get a move on you!" he shouted in Dan's ear as he shook him roughly. "There's nothin' more to be done here, an' we don't want to act like as if we was hangin' 'round, when the machine goes into her quarters."

"Why don't you kind er loaf here till they have hitched up, an' perhaps we'll get another chance to stay in the engine-house?" Dan asked sleepily.

"Because I'd be ashamed to do anythin' like that. Get up so's we can be off before they pull out."

Jerry Walters had overheard this brief conversation, although neither of the boys was aware of the fact, and he asked as the two were making their way out through and over the debris into the darkness:

"Where are you kids going?"

"I reckon it's time we was home," Seth replied, giving his partner a warning shake lest he should say that which would seem to indicate that they were sadly in need of a bed.

"What do you call home now the carpenter-shop has gone up in smoke?"

"We haven't hired any house yet; but we've got our eye on one up in Fifth Avenoo, an' if the price ain't more'n we've got in our pockets, I reckon we'll take it."

"Where are you counting on sleeping to-night?"

"Most anywhere; it don't go hard with Dan an' me to find a place," Seth replied with an assumption of carelessness, and again shaking his partner to remind him that there must be no approach to begging.

"Look here, Amateur, I don't reckon you know where you're going to sleep!"

"We'll turn in somewhere; that part of it will be all right. So long!"

"Hold on here, you kid!" and Jerry Walters spoke in a tone which sounded unusually stern. "Have you been with Ninety-four's crew at this 'ere fire, or not?"

"I reckon we have," Seth replied, with a laugh.

"Then we'll take care you have a roof over your heads for the balance of this night. Wait till 'Lish Davis shows up, and see what he has to say about letting the kid who pulled him out of a big hole go off to bunk in the streets. Come back, I say, till the driver gets here."

"We ain't begging for a bed, Mr. Walters," Seth said decidedly, as he obeyed the command, "an' if we turn anybody out as we did last night----"

"If you *was* begging a bed I reckon you wouldn't get it from me; but since you're so mighty independent I'm just contrary enough to see that you have one. I reckon it won't strain the rules very hard if you sleep on the straw, an' that's about the best you'll get up at the house to-night, unless another alarm is sent in."

At this moment 'Lish Davis returned with the horses, and Jerry Walters held a short, whispered conversation with him, at the conclusion of which the latter said gruffly:

"Amateur, go on with your partner up to the house--there's no need of your riding--an' wait there till I come. We ain't going to have any sulking jest because we've taken it into our heads to see that you get some sleep 'twixt now and morning."

"We ain't sulkin', Mr. Davis," Seth made haste to say, "an' we'll go wherever you say; but I don't want you to think we can't find a lodgin'-place."

"Get on with you!" the driver roared as if in a fury of passion, and when the boys obeyed he said in a low tone to Jerry Walters:

"The Amateur has got a good bit of spirit in him, and that's what I like to see. He shall come into the Department, eh?"

"I'd like to see him there, for sure, and hope you'll be able to work it."

"I don't know as a fireman's life counts much to the city; but if it does something ought'er be done for the Amateur, 'cause if it hadn't been for him there'd be one driver short in the Department by this time."

Dan was in high glee at the prospect of spending another night in the engine-house, and said in a tone of satisfaction as the two made their way rapidly up the street:

"This is great luck, eh?"

"Yes, though I almost wish we was to shirk for ourselves."

"What's makin' you so foolish all of a sudden? Don't you think a bed on the straw in Ninety-four's house is better'n bunkin' in anywhere, or perhaps walkin' the streets for the rest of the night?"

"Of course it is; but I'm 'fraid the men will think we hung 'round for jest such a chance."

"After your stoppin' that hoss in time to save 'Lish Davis from gettin' all mashed up, I don't reckon they can accuse you of coaxin' for a bed."

Seth made no reply to this remark.

He appreciated the invitation which had been given, even more highly than did Dan, yet feared it might appear to some of the company as if he should have gone away when the fire was gotten under control, and that by waiting when there was really nothing to be seen he had laid himself open to the possible charge of "hangin' round."

If Dan Roberts expected Seth would be petted and praised because of having rendered such a signal service to the driver of Ninety-four, he was disappointed.

The two boys arrived at the house a few moments in advance of the engine, and Seth at once set about trying to make himself useful in the work of "cleaning up," with the result that he rendered no slight assistance to the weary men; but yet not one of them commented upon the fact, or even so much as thanked him.

After the horses were cared for 'Lish Davis went to where Seth was at work and said gruffly, as if offended:

"I've shaken some straw out for you kids, an' when you're through with that job, turn in. Don't get to skylarkin', but keep quiet."

Then the driver went upstairs.

Dan, who was not in favor of working save when it might be absolutely necessary, crept slyly to the straw and lay down; but Seth continued at his self-imposed task, and gained much pleasure thereby, for the men treated the matter as if it was proper he should perform his share of the labor, which made it seem very much as if he was in fact a member of the company.

Not until fully an hour after the engine had arrived at quarters did Seth "turn in," and then he was so weary that his eyes closed in slumber almost as soon as he was stretched at full length on the straw.

The last thought in his mind was a pleasing one; none of the company had thanked him for assisting in the work, and this was exactly as he would have had it.

It seemed to the boys as if they had no more than fallen asleep, although as a matter of fact they had both been in Dreamland fully two hours, when the clanging of the gong, the thud of horses' feet on the floor, and the rapid movements of the men aroused them.

Seth had longed for and dreamed of just such an opportunity as this.

To go out with Ninety-four from quarters was very near to being a member of the Department, and he made all haste to station himself by the big doors ready to follow the engine.

"Get out of there, Amateur!" Mr. Davis shouted as he swung himself into the driver's seat. "One fire in a night is enough for you. Lay down an' sleep; then you'll be in better trim to help with the clean-up when we get back."

Under no circumstances would Seth have ventured to remonstrate against any order 'Lish Davis might give, and even had he been disposed to do so, there was not time.

The driver had hardly ceased speaking before the doors were swung open, and Ninety-four was drawn out with a rush and a clatter that sounded like sweetest music in Seth's ears.

"Lish kind er took the wind out of your sails that time, Amateur," the house-watchman said with a smile as he closed the heavy doors. "Ain't one fire in twenty-four hours enough for you?"

"I did *so* want to go out once with Ninety-four, an' it seems too bad to miss this chance for I'm not likely to get another."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I can't expect to sleep here very often, an' there's no show of my happenin' 'round at the very minute an alarm comes in."

"Don't be so certain about that. You'll go out with them yet, or I'm mightily mistaken. You'd better take pattern by your partner, and get what sleep you can. That's a rule we in the Department have, and it comes handy at times."

Dan had leaped from the straw when the alarm first sounded; but instead of making any attempt to follow the engine, crept back again with a smile of content.

It is not probable he would have deprived himself of sleep even if permission had been given for him to ride on the engine.

Seth lay down by Dan's side, and despite his disappointment was soon slumbering peacefully; but only for half an hour, because at the end of that time he was awakened once more by the noisy return of Ninety-four.

The alarm had been sent in for a small blaze in one room of an apartment house, and was extinguished almost immediately by the company whose quarters were nearest the signal station, therefore Ninety-four's men had no labor to perform.

However, it became necessary to wash down, make ready for a new fire in the furnace of the engine, roll Ninety-four and her tender to their respective places on the floor, adjust the harness, start the clock once more (for it had been stopped by the weight set free when the first stroke of the alarm rang out), and replace the weight which fastened the horses in their stalls.

In a portion of this work Seth assisted while Dan remained apparently asleep on the straw, and when the captain had sent in to headquarters the three-fours, followed by Ninety-four's number, thus telling that she was again ready for duty, 'Lish Davis said to the amateur:

"You didn't miss much that time, eh?"

"I missed going out with the company, sir."

"I don't allow that cuts any very great figger, for there'll be many another chance when you're in better trim than you were this night."

"Anyway, I've helped wash up twice, an' that counts for something, 'cause I'm just so much ahead on points."

"Take care you don't stick your nose too near a fire some time, and get one point too many," the driver said with a smile as he ascended the stairs wearily, and Seth called after him:

"I'd rather it would be that way, Mr. Davis, than never know anythin' about the business."

"You'll do, Amateur, you'll do, if you're driven with a tight curb, an' that's what I count on seein' that you have."

Then Seth lay down on the straw once more, and slept soundly during the two hours which followed.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when he finally arose, and although he would have been pleased to remain there a while longer, the boy knew it was time to begin his day's work.

Dan grumbled not a little because Seth insisted he should "turn out," declaring he had hardly slept a wink; but, understanding he would not be permitted to remain there very many moments longer now the men were already astir, he arose to his feet and lounged lazily around until Seth had polished the boots of those members of the company who called upon him for such service.

'Lish Davis came down-stairs just as Seth, his labor finished, was on the point of leaving the building, and he stopped the boy by asking in a friendly tone:

"Where are you off to now, Amateur?"

"Out chasin' nickels. It's time we hustled if we expect to find lodgin's between now an' night."

"Flash up here about three o'clock this afternoon, and if I ain't in, wait for me."

"All right, sir."

Then Seth went out of doors followed by Dan, and when they were on the sidewalk Master Roberts asked curiously:

"What do you s'pose he's got on hand for you at three o'clock?"

"Most likely he don't want his boots shined till then."

"It must be somethin' more'n that," Dan replied, sagely.

"Of course it ain't. What else could he want of me?"

"Perhaps he's goin' to give you somethin' for what you did last night."

"I'll feel awful bad if he does."

"I'd like to know why?"

"'Cause then it would seem all the more as if I was really an outsider; he wouldn't give Jerry Walters anythin' for helpin' him out of a scrape."

"I don't see as--Jimminy! but there's Jip Collins! Ain't he got the nerve to be snoopin' 'round here? Say, we can nab him easy as a wink if you say the word!"

"I don't want to have him arrested. Anything like that wouldn't bring back our lodgin's."

To the great surprise of the boys Jip Collins appeared relieved rather than frightened at seeing them, and instead of running away advanced rapidly, almost eagerly.

"Look here, Seth, I'm mighty sorry I set fire to your place the other night, an' if there's any way to square it I'll hump myself the best I know how," he cried while yet some distance away.

"It's a big pity you wasn't took in this style before you touched her off, for then Seth and me wouldn't be huntin' a place to sleep," Dan said sternly before his partner could speak.

"I know that," Jip wailed, and Seth fancied there was a ring of real sorrow in his tones. "I must have been crazy to do it, an' after the match was dropped in the shavings I hoped they wouldn't catch fire. Then I sent in the alarm, 'cause the light kept growin' brighter, an' nobody else saw it."

"But you touched her off all the same," and it could readily be seen that Dan's anger was getting the best of him.

"Yes, I did, an' of course you can have me sent up the river for it; but what good will that do you? Say, Seth, won't you let me square it somehow?"

"It's all over now, Jip, an' the only way to fix things is by keepin' mighty straight after this. I don't want to send you up the river, nor I won't; but if the cops get to know who did it I'm afraid they'll run you in without tryin' to see whether I want it done or not."

"I know all that, Seth; but I don't believe I'll get jugged if Sam Barney keeps quiet. He says he's taken up the case, an' is goin' to push it straight through so's to show how good a detective he can be when there's a chance to spread hisself."

"How do you know that?" Dan asked suspiciously.

"Bill Dean told me so. I met him up to the Erie Basin, where I've been hidin'."

"Why didn't you stay there?"

"I did till I was 'most starved, an' had to come out to earn some money so's to buy grub. Bill was round there last night lookin' for a feller what runs on a canal-boat, an' jest the same as tumbled over me."

"You'd stood as good a show of earnin' money over in Brooklyn or Jersey City as here, an' then there wouldn't be so much danger of runnin' across anybody who knew you."

"I'm goin' to Williamsburg; but wanted to talk with you fellers first, so come up here where I could see if you was in

Ninety-four's house."

"What are you countin' on doin' right now?" Seth asked in a friendly tone.

"Find Joe Carter an' try to get the ten cents he owes me, so's I'll have somethin' to buy the first lot of papers with."

"Joe's gone to Baltimore to live; went off last night," Dan said promptly, and an expression of disappointment came over Jip's face.

"Is he the only feller who owes you anythin'?" Seth asked.

"Yes, an' I reckon he's the only one who would try to give me a lift after what I've done. He was----"

"Where's them swell Brooklyn chums of yours?" Dan interrupted.

"They went dead back on me after I started the fire, an' Bill Dean says they told Sam Barney all about it. If Sam would only let up on me I'd show that I could be as square as any of the fellers."

"I don't reckon you'll ever do that," Dan cried angrily, and Seth added soothingly:

"I'll see Sam to-day, an' do all I can to make him drop the case, 'cause it don't seem to me he's got any right to take it up unless I say the word. Now, I'm goin' to lend you fifteen cents, Jip, an' you needn't worry 'bout payin' it back for quite a spell. There's plenty of places to sell papers in where the fellers don't know you, an' after a while you can come 'round City Hall again."

"You're goin' to lend me money after what I did?" Jip cried in astonishment not unmixed with fear, for he failed to understand why the boy he had tried to injure should be so generous. "I counted on your thumpin' me, an' I'd stood still to let you do it----"

"If Seth Bartlett has gone crazy there's no reason why I shouldn't serve you out, Jip Collins!" and Dan advanced threateningly. "I ain't sich a chump as to pay a feller for tryin' to burn me to death, an' I'm goin' to knock your two eyes into one, 'stead of throwin' away good money on a duffer like you!"

Jip made no effort to defend himself, and Dan had raised his hand to strike the first blow when Seth stepped in front of him.

"Don't do anythin' like that, Dan! Jip is sorry, an' there's nothin' more he can do or say."

"There's a good deal more I can do!" and by this time Master Roberts had worked himself into a towering passion.

"Go away, Jip!" Seth cried, clasping Dan by the body in such a manner as to pin the boy's arms to his side. "Clear out, an' after he gets over his mad a little he'll come 'round all right."

"It would only be servin' me in decent shape if he should jest about knock my head off," Jip replied penitently, making no move toward seeking safety in flight.

"I won't have Dan fightin' in the streets, an' there's no reason now why you should be thumped," Seth cried, speaking indistinctly because of his efforts to hold Master Roberts in check. "Get away as quick as you can!"

"I'll go if you say the word, though I ain't certain but he'd better do what he's tryin' for. You're a jim dandy, Seth Bartlett, an' I'll square everythin' with you some day. I'm sleepin' in a boat up at the Erie Basin, an' I wish you'd come there to see me; I'd like to let you know how sorry I am for what I did."

Dan was making the most strenuous efforts to free himself from Seth's grasp, and the latter held him captive only by the greatest exertion.

"Don't hang 'round here any longer, Jip! Get away quick, an' I'll see you again some time."

"Will you come up to the Basin?"

"Yes, yes," Seth replied hurriedly, hardly understanding the promise he made because of his anxiety to prevent a fight, and Jip started off rapidly, crying as he ran:

"You're a dandy, Seth Bartlett, an' I'll pay you off for this as true as I live!"

Not until Jip was two blocks or more away did Seth release his hold and turn to face Dan in his wrath.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OBSTINATE DETECTIVE.

Dan was in a fine temper when Seth finally released his hold, and after understanding that it would be useless to pursue the fugitive he turned upon his partner savagely.

"A nice kind of a chump you are! Let a feller burn your house down, an' then pay him fifteen cents for doin' it! After that, when I make up my mind to give him the dose he needs, you turn against me to help him! I s'pose that's what you call bein' a chum of mine?"

"That's exactly what it is, Dan," Seth replied soothingly. "After you've cooled off a bit you'll be glad I didn't let you pitch into a feller who wouldn't raise his hands."

"He didn't 'cause he don't dare."

"If a feller had any spunk about him he would dare to do all he could while somebody else was thumpin' him. Jip feels bad for what he did to us, an' would stand still to let you pound him; but it couldn't have done you any good, Dan. You don't want to get the name of bein' a bruiser."

"I'd be willin' to take 'most any kind of a name rather'n let Jip Collins off without so much as turnin' a hair on his head!"

"That's the way you feel jest now 'cause you're off your base; but wait a couple of hours, an' then you'll talk different."

"I won't if I live to be twice as gray-headed as ever Methuselah was, for it's a downright shame to let him go with money in his pockets after tryin' to kill us."

"He was hungry."

"It would do him solid good to starve to death."

"He turned in the alarm, an' if he hadn't done that we'd been burned to death."

"I notice he didn't do it till the fire got a mighty good start, an' then I reckon it was only 'cause he grew scared. If you're so 'fraid of gettin' your name up for fightin', you might er stood still and let me have a whack at him. I don't see how that could have hindered your slippin' into the Department. I wouldn't be quite so mad if you hadn't given him the money."

"He was hungry, Dan, an' I'd do that much for the biggest duffer in the town."

Dan made no reply to this remark; but with his hands plunged deep in his pockets walked swiftly away in the direction of City Hall as if his one desire was to be free from his partner.

Seth was not minded to let him go while in a temper, but at the same time he knew full well that it would be useless to attempt to stop him with words, therefore he followed without further remark, biding his time until the proper moment should come when the "soft answer" could be given.

Without looking to the right or the left Dan continued on, much as if bent on running away from his partner, until ten minutes had elapsed, when he halted suddenly, wheeled about and addressed Seth with his usual friendly manner:

"There's Sam Barney over by that alley!"

Glancing in the direction indicated by Dan's outstretched finger, Seth saw the would-be detective moving cautiously along, looking stealthily around, and otherwise behaving as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Do you s'pose he's countin' on findin' Jip Collins in that fool way?"

"I reckon he thinks he's doin' the detective act in great shape," Dan replied with a laugh, all traces of ill-humor having vanished. "He says a feller in his line of business has to keep his eyes open every minute, an' sneakin' along in that style is what he 'most likely calls bein' wide awake."

Sam had arrived at the corner of the alley, and instead of walking boldly in to make a search, was standing where he might be partially screened by the building, craning his head forward for a single glance, and then drawing it back suddenly, repeating these movements about every thirty seconds with great regularity.

Dan gave full rein to his mirth, for this method of playing the detective seemed to him very comical; but Seth checked him whenever his laughter became boisterous.

"If he sees us pokin' fun at him we won't be able to make any kind of a trade, an' I don't want to stir the feller up till things are fixed."

"What things?"

"I want him to promise that he won't go prowlin' 'round the town after Jip Collins."

"See here, Seth, are you countin' on keepin' that racket up?"

"If you mean am I goin' to give Jip a lift by tryin' to keep that imitation detective quiet, I'll say 'yes.' We both have got good reason to be mighty ugly because he burned us out; but it's all over now, an' he's sorry. Let's give him one more show--you an' I--an' if he goes wrong after this I won't say a word against your doin' whatever you like."

The lines on Dan's face hardened as if he was determined nothing should turn him from his purpose of punishing Jip in such manner as he believed the latter's misdemeanors warranted; but after one glance at his partner the anger vanished.

"Go ahead, Seth, an' fix it up to suit you; I'll do what I can this time, even if it does rub against the grain. It ain't because I'm feelin' sorry for Jip; but jest to please you."

"So long as you do what I ask it don't make very much difference whether it's for Jip or me, an' you won't be sorry, old man. Now we'll tackle Sam, an' see if we can make him behave himself for a spell."

"I reckon you'll find that a mighty hard job. He's stuck on the detective business as bad as you are on gettin' into the Department, an' this is the kind of a case he don't get a whack at very often. I s'pose he thinks that catchin' Jip would put him way up on the top notch."

Seth did not spend any time arguing the matter with his partner; but called loudly to the would-be detective:

"Hi! Sam! Come over here a minute!"

Master Barney pretended not to have heard the summons, although the words rang out clear and distinct above the noises of the street; but continued his grotesque manner of reconnoitering the alley, and again Seth shouted:

"Come over here, Sam! There's no need of your bobbin' 'round in that style, 'cause nobody is in the alley except a couple of little kids, who wouldn't be very much frightened if you walked right up on 'em."

This time Sam turned, affected to be greatly surprised at seeing these acquaintances, and then crossed the street, apparently in an ill-temper.

"Don't you know any better'n to break up what a feller's fixin'?" he asked angrily as he stood before Seth and Dan. "I was doin' some mighty fine work, an' you've spoiled it all by yellin' so loud. Now the folks in there know I'm 'round, an' won't so much as show theirselves."

"Do you reckon they believe you're a detective?" Dan asked, trying in vain to check his mirth.

"Of course I do!" Sam replied hotly. "Folks have heard of me before this, an' it stands me in hand to keep out of sight all I can."

"Who did you think was in the alley?" Seth asked.

"I'm lookin' for more'n one in this town, an' counted on finishin' up two or three little jobs in the detective line before I lighted out to nab Jip Collins."

"Do you know where he is?" and Seth appeared disturbed.

"What kind of a detective do you allow I am if I don't know that? I've got it all figgered out, an' most likely I'll take a spin over to Philadelpy to-night. If I do, you'll see him in court to-morrow mornin'."

"Oh, has he gone over there?" Dan asked with a great show of interest, pursing his mouth into shape for whistling to prevent an outburst of laughter.

"That's about the size of it; but he needn't think he can run away from me."

"Look here, Sam," and now Seth spoke in a serious tone; "Jip didn't try to hurt anybody but Dan an' me, an' we don't want you to bother him. We're willin' to give him a fair show, 'cause he'll take a big turn after this."

"I can't help what you want," the detective replied obstinately. "When I know that a feller has been burnin' up houses it's my business to run him in, an' I'm goin' to do it."

"What is it to you, so long as we're satisfied?" Dan asked sharply.

"See here, ain't I a detective?"

"I ain't so certain of that," Master Roberts cried promptly.

"I guess other people know it if you don't, 'cause I've had more'n one case in this town. Now, so long as that is my business I'm bound to take up anythin' I hear about, an'----"

"Other detectives don't do that; they wait till the chief sends 'em out, or somebody hires 'em."

Dan's reply staggered Sam for an instant; but he soon bethought himself of what seemed to be the proper answer, and replied:

"That would be all right if I was on the force; but so long as I ain't it stands me in hand to work my way along, same's Seth's tryin' to do in the Fire Department. If I can catch Jip Collins and send him up the river, it'll be a big feather in my cap."

"Would you be willin' to send a feller to jail so's you might get ahead in the business?" Seth asked reproachfully.

"Course I would."

"Ain't there anythin' we can do to stop you from tryin' to run Jip down?"

"You might talk till you was black in the face, an' then I wouldn't let up."

Understanding that it was useless to hold any further converse with this obstinate detective in the hope of turning him from his purpose, Seth motioned to Dan, and set off down-town without a word to Sam by way of adieu.

"I'll be in Philadelphy to-night, an' to-morrow mornin' Jip Collins will be in the lock-up!" Master Barney shouted vindictively, and, glancing back, Dan saw him approaching the alley once more with cautious steps, as if it were beneath his dignity as an officer of the law to move in any other fashion.

"It'll be all right if he goes to Philadelphy," Dan said sagely; "but I'm mightily afraid he won't get money enough to buy a ticket on the cars."

"I don't believe he ever thought of goin' there till we talked with him, an' then only said it to let us believe he knew where Jip was. Sam ain't any kind of a detective; but he can make a lot of trouble for Jip."

Seth was disturbed in mind because of the possibilities that Master Barney would work mischief for Jip Collins, and Dan shared in such forebodings, although in a much less degree.

The two were walking on in silence, each trying to devise some plan whereby it would be possible to divert the amateur detective from his purpose, when they suddenly came face to face with Bill Dean.

"Hello, where are you fellers goin'?"

"To work."

"Kind-er late this mornin', eh?"

"Yes; but we'll make up for it by pluggin' in all the harder after we begin."

Bill hesitated an instant as if hardly daring to say that which was in his mind, and then asked in a meaning tone:

"Seen anybody in partic'lar this mornin'?"

"Yes, we saw Jip, an' then run across Sam Barney," Seth replied.

"I suppose Sam still holds to it that he'll pull Jip in?"

"Yes, an' he counted on findin' him in Philadelphy, 'cordin' to his talk."

"Look here, Seth, you've got good reason to make it hot for Jip after all he's----"

"I wouldn't do a thing to hurt him, an' stand ready to give him a lift if he needs it."

"You're straight as a die, Seth Bartlett, an' I'll bet you won't be sorry for lettin' up on him, for I'm thinkin' Jip will run different after this."

"I hope so; but he ain't out of the woods till somebody sets down on Sam Barney. We've been tryin' to make him stop; but he won't, 'cause he thinks it'll give him a big name if he arrests Jip. He's up by Sweeney's Alley bobbin' round like a jumpin'-jack."

"Say!" Dan cried, as a sudden and what seemed like a happy thought came into his mind. "Sam says Jip is in Philadelphia; now, s'posen all hands chipped in enough to buy a ticket for him to go there? He'd never get back, 'cause he don't earn a dollar in a month, an' Jip wouldn't be bothered."

This plan appealed strongly to both Seth and Dan, and the latter asked as to the probable cost of such a scheme.

This was a question neither of the boys could answer, and after some thought Master Dean agreed to make the necessary inquiries without delay.

"Dan an' me will ante up a nickel apiece to get rid of him, an' in case you don't have to pay too much, the other fellers who wouldn't want to see Jip sent to jail ought'er put in the balance."

Master Dean was quite as eager to aid Jip as was Seth, and without waiting to discuss the matter further started off on his errand of mercy.

Then the partners were at liberty to set about the work of the day; but it was now so late that they could not expect to earn very much money.

"We'll come out mighty slim for supper, I'm thinkin'," Dan said grimly. "You've got to knock off in time to meet 'Lish Davis at three o'clock, an' the trade in evenin' papers won't be much more'n begun by then."

"You needn't go up with me if you don't want to--I can meet you after the day's work is over."

"But I do want to go; I wouldn't miss knowin' what the driver has got to say, not if I went without supper an' breakfast too."

"I could tell you all about it."

"Yes; but I want to hear for myself," Dan replied decidedly, and thus the matter was concluded.

Seth worked industriously once he was in that section of the city where certain rights he claimed were respected by his brother artisans, and although the majority of the fraternity were fully occupied in discussing the question of what Sam Barney might succeed in doing, he refused to spend any idle time, however much interest he felt in the matter.

Dan also attended strictly to business, regardless of the many temptations to remain idle, and at two o'clock in the afternoon the partners had earned as much as would suffice to provide them with food during at least two days; but the question of lodgings yet remained to be settled.

"We'll go up now to see what Mr. Davis wants, an' then we must hustle for lodgin's. There'll be no more hangin' 'round Ninety-four's house after dark, 'cause it looks too much as if we was beggin'," Seth said as he met Dan, who reported that it wouldn't pay to buy another stock of papers that day.

Master Roberts made no reply to this remark.

He secretly hoped that it might be possible for them to sleep in the engine-house one more night at least, and believed Seth was foolishly sensitive about the matter.

According to his views on the subject, there was no good reason why they should not go even so far as to ask the firemen for a shelter, more particularly since they appeared to be so well disposed toward Seth.

The two boys arrived in the vicinity of the engine-house ten minutes before the time set, and Seth insisted that they should not present themselves until the hour named, consequently both lounged around near by until the clock struck three, when they marched boldly up to the open door.

The driver was on the lower floor as if awaiting their arrival, and greeted Seth in a manner both familiar and kind:

"So you've come, have you, Amateur? I was beginning to think you'd struck a business rush, and I shouldn't see you before to-morrow."

"You said we was to come at three o'clock, so I waited 'round till then."

"Afraid to get here ahead of time, eh?"

"I thought it was best to do as you told us, though we've been loafin' outside for ten minutes."

Mr. Davis chuckled audibly, as if in the statement was something very comical, and not until after several seconds had elapsed did he speak, when it was to ask:

"Well, what have you two kids done about finding a place where you can sleep?"

"We're goin' to hustle lively after we leave here. We had to earn a little money first, an' it was pretty late when we got down-town, so we couldn't do any huntin'; but you can make certain some place will flash up before dark."

"I wouldn't wonder if it did, Amateur, I wouldn't wonder if it did. What made you late in getting down-town? I thought you left here earlier than usual."

"So we did, sir; but we met Jip Collins, an'----"

"The kid who started the fire in the lumber-yard?"

"Yes, sir, an' he's mighty sorry for what he did."

Then Seth repeated what had been said by the repentant boy, and gave a detailed account of the interview with Sam Barney, all of which appeared wonderfully amusing, not only to 'Lish Davis, but to all the men on the floor.

"And are you allowing to adopt this 'ere kid who is setting himself up as a firebug?" the driver asked when Seth had concluded the story.

"I'd like to give him one more show, for I don't believe he'll go wrong again, an' if we can get Sam Barney so far away that he can't come back, it may be done."

"But what about us? We're bound to give up all such information as we may happen to run across, and it's a serious matter to keep a close tongue on anything of that kind."

"Have you *got* to get Jip arrested?" Seth asked in alarm.

"It's our duty, and I ain't so certain that he's reformed."

"But you never can know till he's been given a chance, an' it would be mighty tough if he had to have it put down against him when he grows up, that he's been in jail."

"I grant you all that, Amateur, yet the law says man or boy must pay the penalty for arson, and it wouldn't be fair to make an exception in his case."

"What do you mean by arson?"

"That's the name given to the crime of setting fires, and when the trick is played in the night, in a building where people are living, it costs the criminal a good many years of his life."

'Lish Davis was speaking very seriously now, and Seth literally trembled with apprehension for Jip.

"Ain't there anything I can do to help the poor feller out of the scrape?" he asked in a tone which told that the tears were very near his eyelids.

"That's what I can't say right on the spur of the minute; but I'll think the matter over, and it may be we'll see a way out if you're dead sure he won't try any more such games."

"I don't believe he will, 'cause he's feelin' mighty bad, an' promises to be straight after this."

"I've thought all along that he ought'er be sent up for startin' the fire," Dan said with an air of exceeding wisdom; "but Seth has been makin' such a row about givin' him another chance that I had to hold my tongue."

"I wouldn't be surprised if the amateur was nearer in the right than you are, Daniel, though the officers of the law may look at the matter in a different light. However, the young reprobate hasn't been caught yet, even if that keen-eyed detective of yours is on his track, and we'll drop the subject for a spell. What I wanted to see the amateur about was lodgings."

Dan's eyes sparkled, for he felt certain they were to be given quarters in the engine-house, and Seth looked really distressed.

"What's the matter?" 'Lish Davis asked in surprise as he noted the expression on the boy's face. "It don't seem to strike you right because I'm thinking of where you'll find a shelter."

"I'm 'fraid it'll seem like as if Dan an' I were beggin' for a bed. We can find one after a spell, an' it wouldn't be any new

thing if we knocked around the streets a few nights."

"Now, don't distress yourself on the score of begging," the driver said with a hearty laugh. "I've come to know how thin-skinned you are on that point, and ain't counting on giving either of you the value of a pin. But it so happens that a friend of mine lives in the next block, and he's got a room in his attic that he's just dying to let. I was telling him about you kids, and he'll make what I call a fair trade."

"Do you mean that we're to hire a reg'lar room?" Seth asked in surprise.

"Why not, if it comes cheap enough? Now, this 'ere place I'm speaking of ain't very swell, and I don't allow he could let it to any but boys like you. He'll give a lease of it, with bed and such furniture thrown in as his wife can scare up, for fifty cents a week. By blacking Ben Dunton's and my boots five mornings a week you'll have the price earned, and it'll pay a heap better than skinning 'round the streets, likely to be moved on by a policeman a dozen times 'twixt sunset and sunrise."

Seth looked suspiciously at 'Lish Davis.

The possibility of hiring a "reg'lar room" at such a low price had never before entered his mind, and he feared there might be something in regard to the transaction which was being kept a secret from him.

"Now, then, Amateur, what are you staring at? Do you think I'd give you any fairy story about the place? You'd better have a look at it before thinking it's a very big bargain," and the driver leaned back in his chair laughing heartily, although Seth could not understand what had so excited his mirth.

"We'll be mighty glad to get lodgin's at that price," Dan said promptly, and Mr. Davis handed him a card, on the back of which was written an address, saying as he did so:

"Go to that place, and ask to see the room 'Lish Davis was talking about. If it suits you, take it, and if it don't there's been no great harm done."

"You're mighty good to think of us in this way," Seth said, feeling almost ashamed because of his previous mistrust.

"Yes, I reckon I am; but we'll hope it don't spoil me," and again the driver gave way to his mirth.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW LODGINGS.

Dan was so eager to see the new lodgings that he could not wait with any degree of patience until Seth had fully satisfied himself regarding certain matters connected with the leasing of them, but insisted on setting out at once, and his partner felt obliged to accompany him.

Arriving at the address given them by Lish Davis, they found affairs exactly as he had stated.

The room which had been offered at such a low rental was in the attic of an old-fashioned, pitch-roof house, and although it was not such an apartment as could readily have been let to adults, to the boys it appeared as the acme of comfort and even luxury.

Mrs. Hanson, the mistress of the dwelling, had provided a fairly good bed for the lodgers, and the clothing on it looked so rest-inviting that Dan declared that it was hard to resist the temptation to "turn in" at once.

There were two chairs, a rude stand on which were a water-pitcher and a basin, a small mirror, and an old table.

The window boasted of a curtain; but the floor was carpetless, save for two well-worn rugs.

Dan, fearing lest Seth might refuse to hire this very swell apartment because of the suspicion that some of Ninety-four's men had agreed to pay a certain portion of the rental in order that it might be offered at an exceedingly low price, promptly announced his willingness to take the room, and when this had been done it seemed to Master Bartlett as if he was in duty bound to ratify the bargain.

"We'll pay in advance," he said, as he counted out the required amount, thereby reducing his cash account to an exceedingly small margin.

"There's no need of your doing anything like that," Mrs. Hanson replied kindly. "Mr. Davis says he'll guarantee that the rent is paid promptly, and that should be enough for me, without taking money before it is due."

"Mr. Davis is mighty good, but there's no reason why he should back a couple of boys who are able to pay their own way. The rent is so cheap I was 'fraid he'd been puttin' up money on our account, so's we could afford to hire it."

"He said you were mighty independent, and I guess he's right; but you needn't be afraid of getting any more than you pay for. This room couldn't be let to many people, and those who would be willing to live in such a place we would not want in the house, except in a case like yours, where a friend of ours says everything is as it should be. Mr. Davis is a very nice man."

"You can jest bet he is," Seth replied emphatically. "He's been mighty good to me."

Then, having counted the money and promised to give a receipt in due form for the same, Mrs. Hanson left her new lodgers, and Dan cried when they were alone:

"Say, Seth, this kind-er knocks the spots out er Baxter's shed, eh? It ain't costin' me but ten cents a week more'n the other place did, an' that bed is worth three times them figgers. Talk 'bout fifteen-cent lodgin's! Why, the best I ever saw wasn't a marker alongside of this!"

"It's fine, an' no mistake; but we've got to put up twenty-five cents every week for it."

"That'll be all right. I owe you a quarter for this week's rent, an' I'll pay it to-morrow or next day; I've got enough in my pocket now, but kind-er reckoned on havin' a swell lay-out to-night for a celebration. Hold on here, an' I'll go after some grub."

"Do you s'pose we ought'er thank Mr. Davis now for findin' the room for us?"

"It'll do jest as well in the mornin', an' you're so 'fraid of hangin' 'round the engine-house that it don't seem as if you'd better go there for nothin' else but to tell him what we think of the place."

Seth would have been pleased could he have told Ninety-four's driver what he thought of the new quarters, but Dan's suggestion as to "hangin' round" was sufficient to prevent him from venturing out.

Then he tried to dissuade Dan from squandering his money on a feast, arguing that it would be wiser to keep what he had lest there should be a sudden lull in business; but Master Roberts refused to listen.

"Unless you're 'fraid to trust me for my share of the rent, I'm goin' to spread myself to-night. It's too bad we hadn't known 'bout this before we come up-town, for then we might er knocked the eyes out er some of the fellers by showin' it to 'em."

"I don't believe we'd better have too much company, or Miss Hanson will make a kick. It ain't likely she's willin' to have a crowd of fellers rushin' in and out for fifty cents a week."

"I s'pose that's so; but all the same I'd like to have the gang see how we're fixed."

Then Master Roberts went out to make the purchases, and Seth was left alone to familiarize himself with his seemingly luxurious surroundings.

Fully half an hour elapsed before Dan returned, and then he was accompanied by Master Dean.

"I found Bill hangin' 'round Ninety-four's house lookin' for you, an' thought the best thing I could do was to bring him right up here," Dan said as he ostentatiously placed half a dozen small packages on the table.

"Ain't you fellers slingin' a terrible lot of style?" Bill asked, as he gazed around him. "It strikes me that business must be boomin' if you can afford all this."

"It'll only cost twenty-five cents a week for each one of us," Seth replied, as if thinking something in the way of an apology was necessary.

"What?" and Master Dean was so thoroughly astonished as to be unable to speak for several seconds. Then he cried eagerly: "Say, you don't want to take another feller in, I s'pose? I'd like to get sich a snap as this!"

"I don't know as Miss Hanson would want to take another lodger. You might ask her, though, after we've been here a spell."

"Why not have it settled now?"

"It seems to me as if you'd better hold off for a while till she sees how we flash up. 'Cordin' to what she said, I don't believe we'd got in here if it hadn't been for Mr. Davis."

"I'd like to come mighty well," Bill said longingly, and then his attention was attracted to Dan's movements.

Master Roberts was busily engaged displaying his purchases on the table in such a manner as to make the greatest possible show, and there was no question but that he had succeeded in "layin' himself out in great shape."

Fully a pound of bologna sausage cut in thick slices, four large crullers, two smoked herrings, two ham sandwiches, a pint of peanuts, and four apples caused the shaky table to look as if literally laden with dainties.

Dan pushed it toward the bed, that one of the party might sit there, placed the two chairs at either end, and invited his companions to join in the feast.

"Pitch in an' fill yourselves way up full! This is the first swell house I ever lived in, an' I'm willin' to pay for style. After this I reckon Seth an' me will skin along for grub same's we've allers done, but I'm goin' to have one blow-out if it takes every cent I've got."

No second invitation was needed, and not until a goodly portion of the eatables had disappeared did either speak. Then it was Bill Dean who broke the partial silence.

"Say, I've raised money enough to send Sam Barney to Philadelphy, if you fellers come up with the nickels you promised."

"How much will it cost?" and Dan began searching his pockets for the contribution which had been promised in his name.

"I can get the duffer over there for seventy-five cents, by sendin' him with the emigrants. I gave him a big stiff this afternoon 'bout how we fellers would give him a chance to show how much of a detective he is, an' he puffed 'way up, allowin' there wasn't many men on the force in this town who could beat him. He believes it's a great snap to go off huntin' after Jip, an' hasn't got head enough to think of how he'll get back."

"Here's my nickel," and Seth produced the money, Dan following his partner's example. "I'll be glad if we can get rid of Sam; but I'm 'fraid that won't settle things for Jip."

Then he repeated all 'Lish Davis had said regarding the matter, and when he concluded Master Dean was looking

remarkably serious.

"If the firemen are goin' to run Jip down, there ain't much show we can keep him out er trouble. Don't you s'pose the driver would kind-er help somehow?"

"From what he said this afternoon it didn't seem as if he would, but perhaps he'll change his mind after a while," Dan replied, not minded to cloud this first merry-making in the new home by disagreeable thoughts, and attempted to change the subject of the conversation by speculating as to what sort of a welcome Sam Barney was most likely to receive from the Philadelphia boys.

"They'll think he's a mighty good feller till he lets out strong on what he can do in the detective business, an' then they'll tumble to him," Bill Dean replied with the air of one who has closed an argument finally. "So long as he leaves town we needn't bother our heads about him; it's Jip I'm thinkin' of, an' it seems to me as if we ought'er see him mighty soon."

"Why?" Dan asked in surprise.

"Because he must know what 'Lish Davis says, else he's likely to knock 'round Ninety-four's house 'most any time."

"Why don't you hunt him up?"

"It's too late to tackle the job to-night; but what's to stop all three of us from goin' to the Erie Basin after Sam Barney leaves town? Of course you're countin' on seein' him off?"

"I ought'er 'tend right out on business," Seth replied thoughtfully; "but perhaps I can waste time enough for that."

"Course you can. If you don't get through with the shinin' at the engine-house as early as usual, I'll hold him over till the next train. Then we can skip up to the Basin, an' be back in time to start in with the last editions of the evenin' papers."

After some reflection and many misgivings as to whether he was warranted in devoting so much of his time to others, Seth decided to do as Bill had suggested, and a place of meeting was agreed on.

Then Master Dean took his departure, after congratulating the partners on having found such pleasant quarters, and reminding them for at least the tenth time that they had promised to ask Mrs. Hanson if she would take another lodger.

When they were alone once more Seth set about clearing away the remnants of the feast, and while he was thus employed Dan paced to and fro, admiring himself in the mirror as he passed and repassed it in such attitudes as he believed befitted a boy who was the lessee of such a swell apartment.

Seth was not in a mood for conversation. The question in his mind was as to whether he was bettering or weakening his chances for admission into the Department by thus occupying regular lodgings.

The argument was very equally balanced. In the first place, he had followed 'Lish Davis's advice, and by so doing it hardly seemed as if he could go astray; but as opposed to this was the fact that he was not as likely to be awakened by Ninety-four when she responded to an alarm, and, consequently, his opportunities for getting points would scarcely be as good.

However, he settled the matter with himself finally by reflecting that he had already taken the step, and could not well back out now after having agreed to occupy the apartment, therefore it was unwise to indulge in misgivings.

There was no trouble in Dan's mind; he was thoroughly well satisfied with the situation, and instead of discussing any possibilities, he congratulated Seth and himself very heartily.

"All this swellin' will cost us twenty-five cents a week, an' it stands us in hand to scoop the biggest good time out of it we can. I'm goin' to turn in, for what's the use of payin' for a bed if you only get into it for the sake of sleepin'? I want 'er lay awake a spell so's to know what a great racket I'm havin'."

He had made his preparations for retiring while Seth yet stood at the window looking out thoughtfully, and once beneath the clothing cried excitedly:

"Say, hurry up an' get in here! This is the greatest snap I ever struck! It's twice as soft as what we slept in over to Ninety-four's house, an' when trade is dull I'll come up here an' snooze all the time."

"You'll stand a good chance of goin' broke if you do," Seth replied with a laugh, and then he joined his partner.

Dan was not able to remain awake very long for the purpose of realizing what a "great racket" he was having, for

slumber closed his eyes shortly after he lay down, and the day had fully dawned before he was again aware of his surroundings.

But for Seth, Master Roberts might have slept until noon, and even when he was aroused the desire to linger in that rest-inviting bed was so great that he proposed to neglect work in order to remain there.

"You go over to the engine-house, an' I'll stay here till you've finished your job there. I don't b'lieve papers will sell very well to-day."

"See here, Dan, if you're goin' to loaf in bed half the time it'll be best for us to stop swellin', else we shan't earn enough to pay the rent. You must come down to business, an' might as well begin now, for it won't be any easier to get up to-morrow."

Dan was disposed to grumble a little at thus being forced to arise; but once he had plunged his face into a basin of cold water his indolence vanished.

The boys made a hearty breakfast from the remains of the previous night's feast, and then Dan hurried away to purchase his stock of papers while Seth went to the engine-house.

"Well, how did you sleep last night?" the driver asked as he entered.

"Great! That place is away up in G; but the only trouble is that I shan't know when Ninety-four goes out."

"It won't hurt if you don't. I've about made up my mind that such business must be stopped."

Seth looked at 'Lish in pained surprise, and there was an ominous quivering of his lip as he asked:

"What's the reason I can't turn out at the fires? I'll never get ahead if I don't pick up points."

"That isn't the best way to do it, my boy," the driver said in a kindly tone. "I've been thinking about your plan of getting into the Department, and come to the conclusion that, seeing's you're so set on it, we'd better lend a hand."

The expression of sorrow on Seth's face changed very suddenly as the driver ceased speaking an instant, and in its place came a flush of joy so great as to seemingly prevent him from speaking.

"Yes, Amateur, all of us have taken up the idea that you're to be a fireman, though I don't say as it's the kind of a life a boy should hanker for, and we've been working to get you into a place where you can learn the business."

"Do you really mean that?" Seth cried, fearing lest he had misunderstood the words.

"I shouldn't be saying it if I didn't, Amateur," Davis continued, gravely. "Of course you can't expect any promise of a place in the Department till you've got more years on your head; but we've struck a plan which will work all right if you're the lad I've always taken you to be."

Seth was literally breathless now. It would have been impossible for him to speak, and seeing how great was the suspense Mr. Davis added quickly:

"We've got a job for you up at headquarters. You'll be called on to sweep floors, wash windows, build fires, and do odd jobs generally; but at the same time you'll be in what's called the general school of instruction—where the men who want to get into the Department are put on probation, so to speak. It's been promised us who run with Ninety-four, that if you behave yourself you shall have a chance to learn the drill, and once that has been done, Amateur, you'll be in shape to join us as soon's you've got size to your body."

Big tears of delight stood in Seth's eyes as he stammered and hesitated in trying to give words to his gratitude, and understanding what was in his mind, 'Lish Davis added:

"Never mind about trying to say anything, Amateur. We don't want thanks now, because we'll get them when you show yourself the kind of a boy we've claimed you are. It's a case of your picking up points all the time; but you'll have plenty of hard work, and mighty poor pay. You'll get two dollars a week and your grub. Later I'm reckoning you can sleep in the building; but at the start it's a case of having a home elsewhere, and Mrs. Hanson's house about fills the bill."

"Two dollars every week is big money," Seth managed to say.

"Not so much as it seems just now, because you'll need to come out a bit stronger in the way of clothes. We can't afford to have you go there togged out the way you are, because we've said you were a kid that belonged to us. All hands here have chipped in to buy a full suit like our own, with the exception of the brass buttons, and you must take it

as a present from us. There'll be no squirming on account of accepting the present, otherwise you don't go on the new job. We'll have the togs ready in a couple of days, and from this out you'll do no more shining 'round the town. Spend to-day and to-morrow in settling up your business, and then we'll launch you into the berth from which you'll come out a fireman, if it so be you 'tend right close to work. We've cracked you up mighty high, Amateur, and if you don't toe the mark it'll be the same as proving us liars."

Again Seth tried to speak, and again he failed, whereupon 'Lish Davis said gruffly:

"I reckon you want time to think it over, Amateur. Take a spin 'round town closing out your boot-blackening business, and flash up here this evening. Remember, there's to be no more running to fires except you get a straight invitation from some of Ninety-four's men."

"Of course I'll black boots here same as I've allers done?" Seth said in a tremulous voice.

"It won't look well, Amateur, it won't look well."

"But I'd a good deal rather, Mr. Davis. You an' all hands here have been mighty good to me, an' there's no other way I can show how I feel about it."

"You can keep your eyes wide open up to headquarters, and that'll do us more good than if you kept our boots in a regular patent-leather polish all the time."

"Please let me do somethin' for you, Mr. Davis. I'll get on up at headquarters as fast as any feller can; but I want to keep my job here so's to show how I feel on account of what you're doin' for me."

All the members of the company who were on the lower floor had listened to this conversation, and now, when 'Lish Davis hesitated to give the desired permission, Ben Dunton cried:

"Let Amateur manoeuvre as he likes, 'Lish. I don't wonder he wants to do what he can, an' so long as he doesn't black boots anywhere except here, I can't see that it'll work any harm."

"All right, Amateur," Mr. Davis said after a brief hesitation; "you shall do as Ben thinks is right, though there must be no more of that business outside of this house, 'cause you've just the same as begun to hatch into a fireman, and we can't afford to have it said we couldn't ante up enough to keep you going."

Seth was delighted at receiving such permission, for by thus being allowed to work for Ninety-four's men it was as if he occupied a definite place among them; whereas if this had been denied it would have seemed almost as if he had been cast out.

He blacked every pair of boots he could find, and at first refused to take pay for the labor; but 'Lish Davis prevented such gratuitous work by saying sternly:

"Take your pay like a man, Amateur, and look pleasant about it. There'll be no chance for you to handle the city's money until after being at headquarters a month, and in the meantime you've got to pay your bills. I did count on lending you enough to pull through on; but perhaps this will be the best way. What about that firebug of yours? Has the imitation detective caught him yet?"

Seth told of Bill Dean's plan to prevent Sam from working mischief, and the story caused the men to laugh heartily.

"That boy Bill must have quite a head on his shoulders," 'Lish Davis said when his mirth had so far subsided that it was possible for him to speak. "You can tell the firebug that he'd better give this section of the city a wide berth for a spell, and if he walks a chalk-line it may be he won't be troubled about that crime of his. If he should get funny in that way again, however, we'll bring this case up in a jiffy, and he'll get a long taste of prison life."

"Then you will keep the officers from arrestin' him?" Seth asked eagerly.

"I didn't say that, Amateur. It may happen that he won't be troubled while he does what is right; but there's been no promises made."

When Seth had finally finished the work of blacking boots to his satisfaction, he put the box and brushes away upstairs, and approaching 'Lish Davis, said in a whisper:

"You've been awful good to me, an' I promise you shan't be sorry for it."

"I believe you, Amateur, I believe you, else I wouldn't have turned a hand in the business, even though you did do me a precious good turn the other night. You're now in a fair way to get into the Department; but from this out it all depends upon yourself. Keep moving as you've been doing since I first saw you, and it'll come out all right in the long

run."

Then Seth left the building on his way down-town, and it is safe to say that in all the city of New York there was not another as happy as he, for it seemed just then as if the goal he had set himself was very near at hand.



CHAPTER VIII.

JIP COLLINS'S RETREAT.

So excited was Seth by this sudden and unexpected change in his fortunes that he could not bring himself to walk demurely down-town as he was in the custom of doing; but ran swiftly more than half the distance, repeating to himself over and over again:

"I'm really goin' into the Department after all!"

He was so highly elated when he met Dan that the latter instantly understood something of the utmost importance had transpired, and asked eagerly:

"What's flashed up on you, Seth? Got a big job?"

"Indeed I have! I'm goin' into the Department!"

"Wha--wha--what?"

"I'm goin' into the Department. Mr. Davis an' the rest of Ninety-four's men have got me a job up at headquarters where I'll have a chance to learn all the business, an' then when I'm big enough, if my record is all right, I'll slip in for a fireman as easy as winkin'."

"Look here, Seth, what kind of a stiff are you tryin' to give me?" Dan asked sharply.

"It's a straight tip, old man. Mr. Davis jest told me all about it, an' says I mustn't black boots any more except for Ninety-four's men. He didn't even want me to do that; but I hung on till Mr. Dunton backed me up, an' he finally gave in. Say, do you know they've bought a uniform for me jest like they wear, only there's no brass buttons on it."

"Oh, go 'way, Seth. You've slipped your trolley."

"No, it's all straight goods, Dan. What kept me up there so long this mornin' was talkin' 'bout it. I'm to go to-night and get the clothes. The only thing that worries me is I can't pay for them myself."

"Anybody'd think to hear you talk that was hard luck. Look here, Seth, if what you've been givin' me is straight, you've struck a terrible snap, an' a feller who'd kick 'cause somebody gives him a suit of clothes, ought'er go bare-backed."

"It would look a good deal better, Dan, if I had the money to buy the things, rather than let them give 'em to me."

"I ain't so certain 'bout that. The biggest part of it is gettin' 'em, an' if they're willin' to put up I'd say let 'em buy anythin' they wanted. Look here, I can't quite get it through my head that things is the way you tell, 'cause it don't seem likely a boy could get in at headquarters."

Seth repeated to his partner all that 'Lish Davis had said, and when the story was concluded Master Roberts commented on it in this fashion:

"You'll be out er sight, Seth; that's all there is to it!" Then, realizing how his brother news-venders might be surprised, he added, "Come on quick, an' let's tell as many fellers as we can before we go to see Bill Dean ship Sam Barney to Philadelphia!"

Seth was by no means averse to making known his good fortune, and very shortly afterward the two were surrounded by a throng of incredulous news-venders and bootblacks, the majority of whom insisted that "they wouldn't be stuffed with any such yarns, 'cause of course a feller as small as Seth Bartlett couldn't get a job in the Department, even if it was only to sweep floors, wash windows, an' that sort of thing. Besides, if he was taken on at headquarters, nobody would give him a show of learnin' the drill."

Bill Dean called Dan aside, and after first persuading him to cross his throat with his fingers in order that he should be put on oath, as it were, asked regarding the truth of the statements made.

"It's jest as I said, an' he's goin' to have a reg'lar uniform, all but the buttons, to-night."

"Did you hear any of Ninety-four's men say so?"

"I wasn't there, of course; but you know Seth Bartlett don't go 'round shootin' his mouth off the way some of the fellers do, an' you can hang up to everythin' he says; so I'm certain it's true."

"It must be," Bill replied in a tone of conviction, and then approaching Seth gravely he extended his hand, saying as the amateur fireman grasped it:

"I'm mighty glad you've struck it so rich, old man, an' that's a fact. All of us know you've been runnin' to fires pretty reg'lar; but we never b'lieved you'd really get into the Department."

"I ain't there yet," Seth replied modestly; "but Mr. Davis says it'll be my own fault if I don't get in, so you can make up your mind I'll keep my eyes open mighty wide."

One by one Seth's business acquaintances followed Bill's example in the matter of giving credence to the wonderful story, until it was a generally accepted fact that no more than the truth had been told.

There were some doubters, however; but they were so few in number that it seemed as if there was no longer any question regarding the matter, and during the half-hour which followed Seth was kept busy answering the questions of the curious and, perhaps, envious ones.

The astounding news brought by Seth and Dan had caused Sam Barney's friends and acquaintances to forget for the time being that this promising detective was about to depart from New York; but Bill Dean, who had taken it upon himself to thus aid Jip Collins, soon bethought himself of the business in hand, and reminded the others of their duty by saying:

"Look here, fellers, we mustn't hang 'round here much longer, else there won't be a chance of gettin' Sam away to-day. He's got to go on the emigrant train, an' the railroad folks will look for him jest as I said, 'cause I made a good deal of talk 'bout his bein' a detective. You see I thought they'd be glad to have him go on their cars if we could make 'em b'lieve half as much as Sam tells 'bout himself."

Thus reminded of their duty the young merchants set out in a body for the Cortlandt Street Ferry, much to the annoyance of those pedestrians against whom they jostled and tumbled in their eagerness to make way through the crowded thoroughfare.

The amateur detective was found at the corner of West Street, where he had promised to await Bill Dean's coming, and one glance at the throng which had gathered to do him honor, as he believed, filled his heart with pride.

"They're beginnin' to find out that I'm no slouch of a detective after all, hey?" he said in a confidential whisper to Bill, and the latter replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I ain't certain you'd have seen so many of 'em, Sam, if it hadn't been that they was all in a bunch listenin' to the news 'bout Seth Bartlett, an' after hearin' it was in good trim for anythin'."

"What's the news 'bout Seth?" Sam asked with mild curiosity.

"Why, he's goin' into the Department."

"Who? Seth Bartlett?"

"Yep. That is, it's jest 'bout the same thing. Ninety-four's men have found him a job up to headquarters where he'll have a chance to learn the business, 'cause there's what you might call a school for firemen up there."

Sam remained silent fully an instant gazing at his friend in open-mouthed astonishment, and then he said emphatically if not a trifle viciously:

"I don't b'lieve a word of it; that's one of Seth Bartlett's yarns!"

"He ain't the kind of feller that goes 'round lyin', an' it would be a chump trick for him to begin it now, 'cause if he don't flash up in that uniform by to-morrow night we'll know he's been stuffin' us."

"Well, maybe there's *somethin'* in it," Sam replied grudgingly, after a brief hesitation; "but it seems to me the Fire Department must be pretty hard up when they'll take in a feller like Seth."

"I don't know why he wouldn't make as good a fireman as you will a detective. He's been runnin' with Ninety-four for more'n a year."

"What does that 'mount to? He's never done anythin' same's I have, to show that he had the stuff in him."

"They say he come pretty nigh savin' 'Lish Davis's life the other night when them storage warehouses burned."

"Oh, that's all in your eye. Dan Roberts told the yarn so's to make hisself solid with Seth."

There was no further opportunity for Sam to cast discredit upon Seth's story, because the time was near at hand when he should take his departure, and those who had contributed to this important event were eager to hear in what way he proposed to distinguish himself.

"I'll catch Jip Collins an' send him up the river for five or ten years," he said in reply to the questions of his friends, "an' then I reckon people will find out whether I 'mount to anything as a detective, or not."

"Are you sure he's over in Philadelphia?" one of the boys asked of Sam.

"Course I am."

"How did you find it out?"

"It wouldn't be any use for me to try to tell, 'cause you couldn't understand it; but that's where the detective business comes in. I've figgered it all out, an' in less than half an hour from the time the train strikes the town I'll have him 'rested."

Some of those who were in the secret smiled; but Bill Dean and his friends refrained from any display of mirth, lest Sam, grown suspicious of his own wisdom, should at the last moment refuse to leave the city.

The would-be detective had desired to purchase his own ticket, but to this proposition those who had the matter in charge would not consent, and Bill Dean, in response to the suggestion made by several of the party, proceeded, as he expressed it, to "ship off Sam."

That he had spoken the truth when he told of having had a conversation with the railroad officials regarding Master Barney's departure, was proven when he approached the ticket-office, for the clerk recognized him at once, and when the money was placed on the ledge in front of him, immediately passed out that form of a ticket which would give to Jip's pursuer a passage to Philadelphia.

Master Barney's companions were eager to see him on board the cars; but after learning that such pleasure must be purchased by paying for a passage across to Jersey City and back, the majority of them decided the price was altogether too high.

"It'll cost pretty nigh a dollar for this whole gang to go over," Dan Roberts said after making a hurried calculation, "an' Sam ain't worth it. I'd like to see how he swings hisself in the cars; but don't count on puttin' out my good money for it."

There were very many of Dan's opinion in the party, and after some discussion it was decided that Bill Dean and Seth Bartlett should accompany the detective during this first stage of the journey, and these two were instructed to "remember all Sam said, an' how he looked, so's to tell it to the rest of the crowd when they got back."

The would-be detective gravely shook hands with his followers, and, after cautioning those who were to accompany him to remain at a respectable distance lest they interfere with his plans, stole on board the ferry-boat in a manner well calculated to attract the attention and excite the mirth of every one who saw him.

"He thinks reg'lar detectives go snoopin' 'round in that style," Bill said in a whisper to Seth, "an' jest as long as he keeps up such a fool idea he'll never 'mount to anythin'. I ain't sayin' but what he might turn out to be quite a feller if he would only act decent."

Sam appeared to think it necessary that he remain by himself during the short voyage, and when the boat arrived at the Jersey City slip refused to go on shore until after having satisfied himself, in his own grotesque fashion, that there were no enemies in the vicinity.

He entered the depot much in the same manner, and peered into the car fully five minutes before venturing to take a seat, after which he said in a tone of satisfaction to his companions:

"I reckon I've done this thing pretty nigh right so far, an' if I don't bring Jip Collins back with me it'll be 'cause some of them Philadelphia people spoil my game."

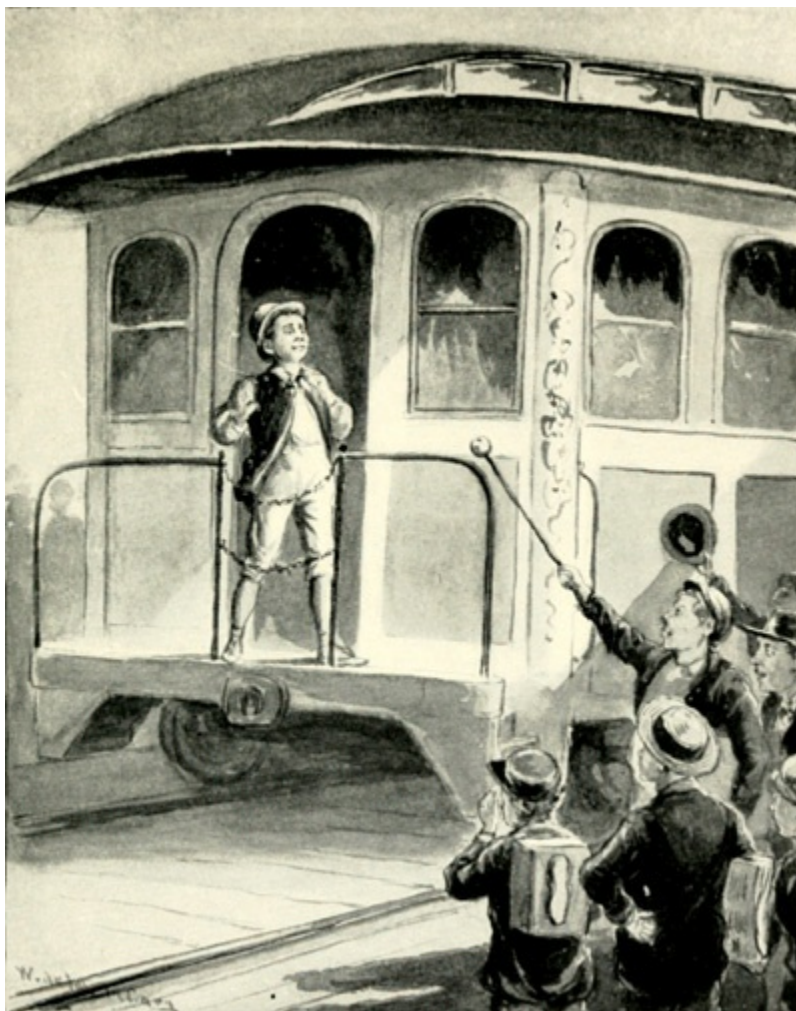
"Are you reckonin' on stayin' there till you catch him?" Bill asked with a wink at Seth, and Master Barney replied confidently:

"I can put my hands on him within an hour; but it may be we'll stay overnight so's I can bring him into town in the mornin'."

"How are you countin' on gettin' your ticket to come back?" Seth asked.

"Oh, I've got that figured out. You see, jest as soon as I've nabbed Jip I'll go to police headquarters an' tell 'em who he is, an' of course they'll see that I get back."

Bill had considerable difficulty in keeping his face straight during this portion of the conversation, and, fearing lest he might inadvertently betray the secret, made short work of the leave-taking.



SAM GOING TO PHILADELPHIA. Page 146.

Sam was in the car with the ticket in his hand, and it was hardly probable he would do other than proceed to his destination as had been agreed upon, therefore Bill said in an exceedingly friendly tone:

"Well, we'd better be goin', old man. I'll see you when you get back."

Until this moment Seth had not realized that by supplying Master Barney with the means of transportation to Philadelphia, they were virtually exiling him from his home, and his heart misgave him as such phase of the case suddenly presented itself.

"Look here, Sam, s'posen it turns out that you don't find Jip, how'll you get home?" he asked, and there was in his mind the thought that he would divide his scanty store of money with the alleged detective; but the latter soon made it plain that he was, or believed he was, able to take care of himself.

"Don't bother your head 'bout me, 'cause even if you have got a show of gettin' into the Fire Department, you ain't very well posted on the detective business. I'll get back without any of your help, an' I'll bring Jip with me."

All Seth's sympathy fled, and without further attempt at leave-taking the two walked out of the car, glancing back from the door an instant at the alleged detective, who was looking as important and satisfied as a boy well could look.

It was decided between Bill and Seth during the voyage across the river, that after having made a report to those who awaited their coming they would visit Jip Collins in his retreat at the Erie Basin.

"There's only a few of us knows where he is, an' of course we've got to keep it a secret for a spell, so you, an' Dan, an' I

must give the other fellers the slip if we can."

Seth agreed to this after having been assured that there would be no difficulty in getting back to the engine-house as Mr. Davis had commanded, and once they were on the New York shore Bill fulfilled his duty to his friends by giving a detailed account of all Sam had said and done.

Some members of the party--and there were a few who considered Master Barney one of the most promising young detectives in the city--were fully satisfied with the manner in which he was reported to have borne himself when he set out to bring to a successful close this his first important case; but those who believed that Sam's ability existed only in his own mind were inclined to ridicule his fantastic behavior, and one of the company was applauded loudly as he said:

"If Sam cavorts 'round Philadelphia the same way he went on board the ferry-boat, they'll run him in for a lunatic, an' we'll never see him again till he turns over a mighty big leaf."

Then the would-be detective's acquaintances separated, each intent on his own business or pleasure, and there was nothing to prevent the three who were bent upon aiding Jip Collins, from proceeding on their errand of mercy.

Now that Sam Barney's departure was an accomplished fact, Seth began to reproach himself with having aided in sending the boy so far from home that it might be many weeks before he could return, and while walking toward Hoboken Ferry gave words to these thoughts.

Bill Dean, however, was not troubled with any pangs of conscience because he had in a certain degree deceived Master Barney.

"It ain't us who sent him over there. He spouted up and told how Jip was in Philadelphia, an' we hadn't any call to tell him it wasn't so."

"But how'll he get back?"

"Well, if I was in that town, or any other where the railroad folks only charge seventy-five cents to fetch me home, you can bet I wouldn't hang 'round the streets very long cryin' baby; I'd hustle an' earn money. That's the way Sam can get back, an' the more you feel bad 'bout him the bigger fool you're makin' of yourself. I ain't stickin' up for Jip Collins, 'cause when he set fire to Baxter's lumber-yard he knew he was doin' what would send him to jail; but at the same time 'twixt him an' Sam I ain't certain but I'd rather give Jip a boost."

Then Bill discussed the affair in its different phases, laying great stress upon what was apparently to him a fact, that by giving Sam Barney an opportunity of learning that he was not really a detective, they were conferring a benefit upon him.

As Master Dean presented the case, there had been no deception practised, because they could only have convinced Sam of his error by betraying Jip, who had placed himself in the hands of his friends, and Master Barney never once asked for information, but, instead, asserted that he knew where the fugitive was concealed.

In this wise was the time spent during what was a reasonably long journey, and Bill had hardly more than come to the end of his arguments when they arrived at the Erie Basin.

"There's where Jip is hidin'," Master Dean said as he pointed to a dilapidated boat lying at the opposite side of the Basin, and at that moment Dan and Seth saw what at first sight appeared to be a dark-colored ball placed in the combing of the companionway hatch.

When it suddenly disappeared, and a certain portion of it came again into view, they understood it was the head of the young gentleman they had journeyed thus far to visit, and Dan shouted loudly:

"Hi! It's only us! Don't get scared!"

Not until he had assured himself by actual survey that there were none other than these three friends in the vicinity, did the disconsolate-looking firebug venture to show himself, and then he came out on the deck with a certain humility that was in marked contrast with his former swagger.

"Is Sam Barney still on my trail?" he asked piteously, and that he might not be kept in suspense, Bill gave a detailed account of the afternoon's proceedings so far as the detective was concerned.

A long-drawn sigh of relief escaped from the fugitive's lips as he said:

"I was terrible 'fraid he'd find me out up here, cause whether he's a detective or not, Sam has a way of snoopin' 'round an' gettin' at things that other fellers don't want him to know. Do you reckon I can show myself down-town now?"

Seth was forced to repeat what 'Lish Davis had told him, and again a gloom gathered on the firebug's face, but it was lightened somewhat when the amateur fireman added:

"There's no reason, Jip, why you can't come out an' earn your livin' so long's you walk straight, for I don't b'lieve anybody will try to 'rest you, now Sam is away from the city; but remember what Mr. Davis said, that if you should do anythin' more crooked, this would all come up against you."

"Look here, Seth, I know I did a mighty mean thing when I set fire to the shed in Baxter's yard, an' whether you believe it or not, I was terrible sorry the minute the shavin's caught fire; but don't think I ain't been served out. It's awful to stay all night on this boat; I hear all kinds of noises an' it seems to me as if the place was reg'larly ha'nted. I'd almost rather go to jail than stay here any longer."

"But you've got to live somehow, Jip."

"It won't be here. I've been thinkin' if I could get rid of Sam Barney I'd go over by the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry. Nobody knows me there an' it ought to be a good place for sellin' papers."

Bill Dean thought this a wise plan, providing Jip could find lodgings round about that locality, and then came the question as to how it would be possible for him to start in business again, for he confessed that all his money had been spent in the purchase of food.

"What with helpin' Sam Barney off, layin' out for a spread last night, an' gettin' money together to pay the room-rent, this is kind of a tough week for me," Dan said thoughtfully; "but I'll be willin' to chip in a nickel toward helpin' you along, Jip."

Bill and Seth made the same generous proposition, and when the money had been handed to the fugitive it was as if he found it difficult to swallow a certain lump which had arisen in his throat.

"You fellers have been terrible good to me after I come pretty near killin' you, an' I want you to b'lieve I'm goin' to be straight. I'll try to show that I can be decent."

"Of course you can, Jip," Seth said soothingly, "and there's no need of your tellin' us 'bout it. Jest plug right ahead an' do the best you know how; then things will come out all right, I'm certain. By the time Sam gets back we'll take care he don't meddle with the case, an' I reckon Mr. Davis will fix the balance. When you goin' to leave here?"

"Jest as soon as I can. I made up my mind this noon that I'd let Sam Barney lug me off to jail rather than stay any longer."

"Then come with us, an' there'll be time for you to get in some of the evenin' trade if we hurry. Bill an' Dan will go over with you an' see if there's any fellers 'round the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry that might make trouble, an' most likely I'll see you again to-morrow."

At this point Dan would have told the firebug of Seth's good fortune, but that the latter checked him, believing at such a time the information had best be withheld, and the three Good Samaritans with their penitent friend set out for New York.



CHAPTER IX.

THE UNIFORM.

When Jip Collins and those who had befriended him arrived at the point nearest Ninety-four's house, on their way to the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry, Seth halted to take leave of his companions, and knowing what he was about to do, Dan urged that he be allowed to accompany him.

"You're goin' down to get your uniform on, an' I want to see it the very first thing."

"So you shall, Dan; but I'd rather you wouldn't come with me now, 'cause there was nothin' said about my bringin' anybody. Keep on with Bill an' Jip, an' I'll go over to our room jest as soon as I get through at the engine-house."

This did not please Master Roberts; but Bill Dean urged that Seth was in the right, and was very emphatic in the assertion that it would "be 'way off color to shove in" at such a time.

Therefore Dan ceased to insist, although it was with a very ill grace that he accepted the situation.

As a matter of course, once such a conversation was started, it became necessary to explain to Jip what important business called Seth away, and he said with a sigh:

"I'm glad you're playin' in such luck, Seth, for you're mighty square. I s'posed after what I'd done nobody would let me come 'round their houses, an' as for my gettin' into any Department, why there never'll be a show of such a thing as that."

"Now don't you get down in the dumps, Jip, 'cause you'll soon pull up where you was before. All that's needed is to go on straight from this out, an' show people you're sorry for meddlin' in such crooked business."

After this attempt at consolation Seth parted with his companions, and ten minutes later was standing before 'Lish Davis on the lower floor of Ninety-four's house.

"Well, what have you done with your firebug?" the driver asked, and such of the men as were idle gathered around to hear the conversation.

"We've shipped Sam Barney, an' Jip's gone down Thirty-fourth Street way sellin' papers."

"Do you allow he'll run straight after this?"

"I'm almost certain of it, Mr. Davis. He feels terrible bad, an' if Sam gives him the chance he'll show that he can be a decent feller."

"I hope so, because I hate to see a boy go wrong. Do you know, Amateur, that what's done while you're young hangs on after you get to be a man. Then, when you're getting along swimmingly, up comes somebody and tells of the mean trick you played when you was a kid. It always counts against a man. Now, I ain't saying that your firebug won't pull out of this, but he's taking the chances that it'll be thrown up in his face a hundred times 'twixt now and the next ten years, however straight he walks. If a boy would only bear that in mind I allow he'd be a heap more careful about what he did. Howsomever, you ain't here for a lecture of that kind, and what's more you don't need one. I allow you're counting on that suit of clothes?"

"I s'posed that was what you wanted me to come for, sir."

"Well, it was, Amateur, it was; and if you'll go upstairs and look on my bed you'll find the togs laid out there. Put 'em on, and come down to show us how you look."

"Are they new clothes, sir?"

"Of course they are. You don't allow that when this 'ere company takes it into their heads to fit out a kid they're going to do it on second-hand rigging, do you?"

"I only asked the question 'cause I thought perhaps if they was all new I'd better wash my face an' hands first."

"That's right, Amateur; fix yourself out the best you know how. We want to see what kind of a looking kid we've taken on our hands."

Instead of immediately acting upon his own suggestion Seth hesitated, and after a moment the driver asked:

"What are you hanging in the wind now for? Got anything on your mind?"

"I'd like to know, sir, if I'm to be allowed to pay for these clothes when I get so I can earn money enough?"

"Bless your heart, Amateur, when you're regularly in the Department you shall come up and square the bills with Ninety-four if it so be you're inclined; if not, why, what we do comes free as air, and we're glad to give you a boost. All the payment we want is that you'll do us credit. I'd like to have the boys up at headquarters, when they look at you, say to themselves, 'That kid belongs to Ninety-four,' and in the saying of it I'd have 'em think you was way up--something out of the ordinary run of kids, don't you understand, Amateur?"

"If I can do anything to make you feel proud of me, Mr. Davis, I'll be mighty glad; but I promise you shan't be ashamed of having sent me there."

"I ain't counting on the possibility of that, Amateur, 'cause I believe I know you better. Now, get along and put yourself into condition, 'cause there's no knowing how soon we may get a call."

Before looking at the new clothing Seth washed his face and hands with scrupulous care, used the comb and brush again and again until positive each single hair was in its proper place, and then went to the floor above.

He expected to see garments which somewhat resembled those worn by the firemen; but was unprepared for that which met his gaze.

'Lish Davis, if indeed it was he who ordered the uniform, had seen to it that each article was a facsimile, both as to texture and style, of what he himself wore, the one difference being that the buttons were plain black instead of gilt with raised letters.

During several moments Seth stood as if spell-bound, gazing at this, to him, first real evidence that he was in a certain degree, however remote, connected with the Department, and perhaps never again will he feel the same honest pride which was his at that moment, for he knew without being told that he had gotten this far toward the goal he had set himself by straightforward dealing and careful attention to all the duties which might be expected of him.

He did not say in so many words that he had earned them; but there was in his mind a sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that they would not have been presented unless he had shown himself to be in some degree deserving.

After a long survey of the garments, he put them on, and never was transformation more complete than when he was thus changed from a ragged boy of the street, to what, in the mirror at least, looked almost like a young gentleman.

"They're mighty fine," he said to himself as he examined first one coat-sleeve and then the other. "They're mighty fine, an' it'll be a terrible big tumble for me if I can't satisfy 'em up to headquarters."

Then came the fear that now, having reached the threshold of the Department, as it were, he might fail in his purpose, and Seth literally trembled with apprehension until 'Lish Davis's voice was heard from below ordering him to "hurry up."

"I won't go back on Ninety-four's men," the boy said to himself resolutely. "It's jest as the driver says, all depends on me, an' knowin' what's to be gained I'm a chump if I can't pull through."

Then, acting on an impulse, he slid down one of the poles, instead of going by the way of the stairs, and suddenly stood before the entire company, who were awaiting his appearance.

"Well done, Amateur, well done," 'Lish Davis cried in a tone of approbation. "I declare I wouldn't have known who it was if I'd met you sudden-like on the street. Why, you're a corker, Amateur, a regular corker!"

"I do look pretty nice, an' that's a fact," Seth replied complacently, whereat the men laughed heartily.

Then each member of the company in turn came forward and shook him by the hand, congratulating him upon his first appearance as a member of the Department, at the same time that they wished him success in the effort to gain a permanent foothold among them.

"You're a credit to us, Amateur, and that much I must say. The money we spent on the toggery ain't been thrown away even if you do get fired out of headquarters after a spell. From this time forth you're much the same as a probationary fireman, and the bootblack part of it has disappeared, except when you're 'round here where there's no one to know what you're doing. Though, mark you, lad, I'm not saying anything against a boy's shining boots for a living. If you hadn't done it well, and taken some pride in your calling, Seth Bartlett wouldn't be standing in that 'ere suit of blue this minute. Now that we've launched you, as it were, Amateur, I, and I'm speaking for my mates as well, want you to understand that it's a hard row ahead. You've got to work early and late; put up with a good many disagreeable things

and look pleasant all the while; do considerable more'n your duty, and be always on the jump. Keep up as we've known you, Amateur, my boy, and you'll win."

When this speech--for it could be called by no other name--was concluded, the driver's comrades applauded loudly, and then 'Lish stepped back a few paces as if expecting Seth to respond.

The "probationary" fireman understood the movement; but the words in his mind would not come; instead of making what he considered a worthy reply, he said, and to him it sounded lame and poor:

"I'll do my best so's you won't be ashamed of me."

"That's all we're asking for, Amateur, and to-morrow noon at twelve o'clock I've got leave of absence to take you up to headquarters. You're your own boss till then, and you'd better make the most of the holiday, 'cause it'll be a long spell before you get another."

"There's only one thing I'd like to say, sir, an' that I s'pose I mustn't think of."

"Do you mean you're hankering to run to a fire with them good clothes on?"

"I'd like to shift 'em an' go, sir, for----"

At that instant the click caused by the opening of the electric circuit in the alarm was heard, followed by the striking of the joker.

The weight fell--the lever flew up--the horses were released, and before Seth could have spoken, even if he had had anything to say, the animals were under the swinging harness, while every man stood at his station.

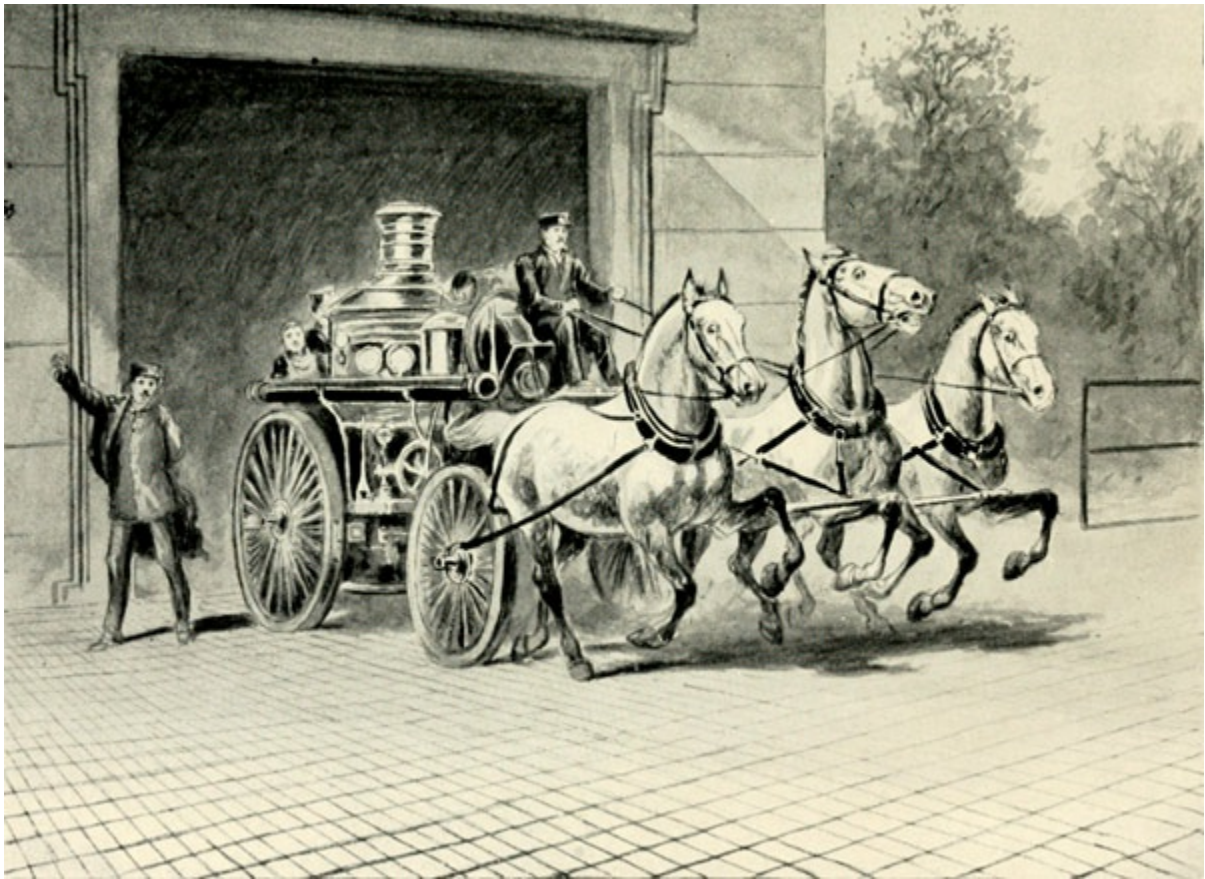
"Get on, Amateur; get on alongside the engineer. This may be the last time you'll run with Ninety-four for quite a spell, and I'm minded to give you the advantage of it," the captain cried as 'Lish Davis sprang to his seat, snapped into place the catch on his belt, and released the harness.

Almost before the last word was spoken Seth had leaped to the side of the engineer, and never a boy in New York City was more proud than he, when the ponderous engine, drawn by the plunging horses, left the building with a rattle and roar which could have been heard blocks away.

In a uniform hardly to be distinguished from the members of the company the Amateur was riding to his first fire in what seemed to him like an official capacity.

One portion of his dream was being realized, and he said to himself as he clung to the rail, swung to and fro by the swaying of the ponderous machine, that when the time came for him to be regularly enrolled in the Department he would use every effort toward being assigned to Ninety-four.

"You are our mascot, Amateur," Jerry Walters, who stood next to Seth, shouted at the full strength of his lungs in order that the words might be heard above the clanging of the gong and rattle of wheels, "and if you're to bring us good luck we shall get first water to-night."



THE FIRE-ENGINE GOING OUT. Page 152.

Seth's heart sank. For the moment he believed Walters was in earnest, and knew full well, having the location of each signal station in mind, that there were two engines whose houses were nearer the call than was Ninety-four's.

To get first water under such circumstances seemed impossible, and timidly Seth reminded Walters of the fact.

"I know it, Amateur, and am not counting that we'll win; but if we should, and if there be such things as mascots, then I'm free to admit you'll be a lucky one for us."

Perhaps 'Lish Davis had in his mind some idea similar to that expressed by Walters, for although Seth had seen him urge his horses to their utmost speed time and again, never before had he known him to press them so hard.

The mass of steel and iron was drawn over the pavement as if it had been but a feather's weight, and 'Lish Davis guided the horses, without checking their speed in the slightest, around a sharp corner so suddenly that Seth was nearly overthrown, while the clanging of gongs in the distance told of the approach of a second engine.

"It's Fifty-three!" Jerry Walters shouted in the boy's ear. "It's Fifty-three, and we've got thirty seconds the start of her. How about getting first water now, Amateur?"

Seth pointed straight ahead where could be seen a cloud of sparks arising from the stack of a third engine which was coming directly toward them.

"Yes, Amateur, it's her or Ninety-four; Fifty-three is distanced, and I'll hold that you're bringing good luck to us if we do no more than beat one of 'em out."

Every man of that company, however eager he had previously been to be first at the scene of conflict, seemed now to outdo himself in activity.

A cloud of black smoke issuing from the second floor of a dwelling located the fire, and Ninety-four's tender was making a run for the nearest hydrant, passing the engine just as 'Lish Davis slackened speed.

Joe Black had gained the desired spot in advance of his rival, and as Ninety-four's tender dashed by, fifteen or twenty feet of the hose had been run off of the reel.

Then it was that Jerry Walters and 'Lish Davis gave vent to a loud cry of triumph, for Joe Black had made the

connection.

Ninety-four's tender was stretching in just as the other company reached the hydrant, beaten by no more than ten seconds.

"We've got first water, Amateur, we've got first water!" Jerry Walters shouted as if having taken leave of his senses. "It ain't that we've never done such a thing; but this time it didn't belong to us, and we took it on your first run! If that ain't being a mascot for Ninety-four I don't know what you will call it."

Then there was no time for congratulations or further discussion regarding the matter, for the men had work to do which could not be delayed, and Seth was about to follow Joe Black when 'Lish Davis shouted:

"Come back here, Amateur! Come back! This is no time for you to be gettin' points when you're wearing the first decent suit of clothes you ever owned. Get alongside and behave yourself. I didn't allow you was to do any work when the captain let you in on this trick."

Under other circumstances Seth would have been grievously disappointed at being thus commanded to remain where he could see little or nothing of what was being done; but now he was so elated at the victory won that all else seemed but slight by comparison.

"I s'pose you'd have gone in there if you was wearing the finest coat ever made, eh?" the driver asked gravely, and Seth replied with another question:

"Wouldn't you, sir?"

"What I'd do don't cut any figger, Amateur. It's my business to go in there, but not yours yet a while. When the time comes that you're bound to step up with the foremost, I'm expecting to see you there, and wouldn't say a word that might hold you back. Now you're playing the gentleman, and you'll stay with me; besides, it ain't going to turn out anything after all. A curtain or some such flummery is blazing. It can't be much more."

In this surmise 'Lish Davis was correct.

Within ten minutes after Ninety-four was ready for work word came to "shut off," and the men set about disconnecting the hose.

So slight had been the fire that only two members of the company were detailed to do the overhauling--that, is to thoroughly go through the building from top to bottom to make certain no spark had been left which might be fanned into a flame--and the remainder of the men were ordered back to the house.

"It's what we may call a howling success, this first run of yours, Amateur," 'Lish Davis said as he drove leisurely homeward. "We've beat 'em all out, had little work to do, and it wasn't much more than good practice, with a precious fine record at the bottom of it. But don't you get puffed up thinking everything is going your way just 'cause you've started in easy and slick."

"There's no reason why I should be puffed up, Mr. Davis, except that I've had a chance to do what I've been longin' for--and that is to go out with Ninety-four as if I belonged to her."

"*As if* you belonged to her! That's what we allow you do, Amateur. From this out, unless it so be you turn about wonderfully and go crooked, you're one of us--an honorary member, so to speak."

"Put down on the roll as the official mascot," Jerry Walters cried, whereat the remainder of the company laughed heartily, and in this jovial mood was Ninety-four returned to her quarters; but Seth was not allowed to take part in the washing-up lest he should soil his fine feathers.

"I'm counting on your striking in at headquarters lookin' just as fine as silk, which you couldn't do if we let you hang 'round here helping with the dirty work," 'Lish Davis said when Seth would have claimed it as his right to be allowed to assist in the labor. "You're to toddle straight home now, for you've hung 'round this house long enough; stay there till morning, come over here for a bit about your usual time, and then take a spell at swelling down-town until nigh on to twelve o'clock, when I'll be ready to go with you. Well, why don't you start?"

"I wanted to thank you for lettin' me run with Ninety-four the first night I had my uniform on."

"You needn't do anything of the kind. The captain happened to be soft just as the alarm struck, else you wouldn't have got away with us. Now clear out, and take care you don't get into mischief."

As Seth went toward his lodgings he wondered whether the people whom he met in the street were not surprised at

seeing him thus clad like a fireman, and so intent was he on walking erect with his shoulders thrown well back, that he might the better look the part he hoped one day to play, that he failed to observe Dan Roberts until the latter, suddenly recognizing his partner, shouted shrilly:

"Hi! Seth! Do you mean that's really you?"

"Don't make such a row on the street, Dan, 'cause folks will wonder what's the matter. But say, I do look pretty fine, eh?"

"Fine? Why, that's no name for it, old man. You're out of sight! Where did you get 'em?"

"This is the uniform I was tellin' you 'bout. Mr. Davis gave it to me when I was over to the engine-house, an' do you know I hadn't more'n got into it when there was an alarm, an' I rode to the fire on Ninety-four jest as if I belonged to her."

"No!"

"I did for a fact."

"Well, if they let you do that there ain't much question 'bout your gettin' into the Department."

"Mr. Davis says it all depends on me now, an' you can bet I'll work mighty hard, Dan Roberts."

"If you don't you're a bloomin' idjut! Why, I wouldn't ever knowed you if I'd been goin' fast! I was kind-er loafin' along wonderin' when you'd be home, an' thinkin' of Jip, so had time to look 'round. First off I couldn't make up my mind to holler, you looked so bloomin' swell. Now, I don't see why I shouldn't go in for somethin' same's you did, an' flash up in sich style; but no, I'll stick to sellin' papers, that'll be the way with me, an' think I'm playin' in great luck if I get to own a stand on some corner."

"You talk as if I was already in the Department, instead of havin' to work my way up to it."

"I only wish I was as near there. By the time you're captain of a company I'll jest about get so I can pay my own way, with never two cents ahead."

"Now, don't begin to jump on yourself 'cause it seems as if I was gettin' along pretty fast; but wait an' see how I pan out, an' as for doin' nothin' but sellin' papers, why, that's 'cordin' to the way you want it. There ain't any need of stickin' to sich business unless you hanker for it."

"Yes there is, except I'm willin' to starve," Dan replied mournfully, and to raise him from the depths of despondency into which he had been plunged by a sight of the uniform, Seth began to ask him questions concerning Jip.

"We left him down at the ferry. Bill Dean struck a feller there who promised to give Jip a lift now an' then. I don't reckon he'll have any trouble, 'cause them as are sellin' papers down that way don't seem to have much sand to 'em. He's goin' to sleep with Bill's friend, an' take it all in all I think he's gettin' along mighty well, considerin' it ain't a week since he burned us out. Say, goin' into the house now, or do you count on swellin' 'round a spell first?"

"We'll go home, Dan, an' in the mornin', after I've shined for Ninety-four's men, I'll meet you down-town."

"What? You goin' to do any more shinin'?"

"I am for them in that house, an' I'll keep it up till I get to be reg'larly in the Department. They've done so much for me, Dan, that if I should spend half my time as long as I live blackin' their boots, I wouldn't square things."

"If I counted on bein' a fireman I'd be one; I wouldn't black boots for anybody."

"Neither will I when I'm really in the Department; but I'm a long ways from there yet a while. Come home, an' to-night I'll stand a spread so's to celebrate wearin' the new uniform."

CHAPTER X.

AT HEADQUARTERS.

When he first saw Seth in his new uniform a certain feeling of envy came into Dan Roberts's heart; but he was not a fellow who could give himself up to this kind of thoughts very long, and within a few moments all that had passed away, leaving in its stead rejoicings that his partner had taken such rapid strides toward the desired end.

Before they had gained the seclusion of their own room Dan was his old self once more, and from that moment it is safe to say he was never again envious of Seth's good fortune, but sufficiently wise to profit by his partner's example.

When they entered the house, Mrs. Hanson, who must have been informed by 'Lish Davis of the expected change in Seth's condition, came to the door to see the boy in his uniform, and when she ceased her words of praise his cheeks were glowing red.

"You'll cut a terrible swath down-town to-morrow morning," Dan said sagely when they were alone. "Here's a woman that never saw either of us till yesterday, an' she goes pretty nigh crazy over the way you look. I reckon Sam Barney would have a reg'lar fit if he should run up against you now."

To Seth's mind there was nothing wrong in admiring himself, or listening to words of praise from others, and he enjoyed to the utmost these speculations of his partner until Master Roberts, wearied of gazing at the amateur fireman, hinted broadly that if there was to be a spread set out in honor of the uniform, now was the time to "start her goin'."

"How much did that lay-out cost you last night?"

"Twenty-three cents."

"That's pretty stiff to pay for one supper; but it ain't every day I get a uniform, an' I guess I can stand it this once. We shan't spread ourselves in the same way ag'in, though," Seth said thoughtfully, speaking half to himself, and then taking some coins from his pocket, he added, "You go out and buy the stuff. I'll wait here."

"Why don't you come with me?"

"I'm 'fraid if Ninety-four's men should see me they'd think I was runnin' 'round swellin'."

"Well, s'posed they should? Haven't you got the right? Wouldn't most any feller who's got as near into the Department as you have?"

"Mr. Davis said I was to go down-town to-morrow mornin', an' perhaps that's all he thought I ought'er do, so I'll hang on here instead of goin' out ag'in."

Dan was not averse to making the purchases, and so deeply occupied was Seth with pleasant thoughts that it seemed to him Master Roberts had no more than left the room before he returned laden with packages.

As on the previous night he was accompanied by Bill Dean, who exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction as he entered the room:

"It seems like as if I'm allers 'round when you fellers are puttin' up swell lay-outs, don't it?" Then getting a full view of Seth for the first time he cried in an accent of unquestionable admiration, "Well, I'll be jiggered! Dan said you was lookin' mighty fine; but I never thought you could flash up like this! Why, you're a reg'lar fireman already."

"You wouldn't think that if you could hear what Ninety-four's men say, an', besides, there's no brass buttons on this uniform, you know."

"I ain't certain but it looks better without 'em. Anyhow, you're way up in G."

"He ought'er know it by this time," Dan added with a laugh. "Everybody has been tellin' him so, an' he come mighty near paralyzin' Miss Hanson. She jest threw up both hands when we opened the door."

"Well, I don't wonder; but say, I didn't come round to sponge off you fellers, 'cause I never thought of your havin' two such lay-outs one right after the other. I didn't know but you'd like to hear how we'd left Jip, an' then agin I wanted to talk 'bout bunkin' in here with you fellers."

"This is Seth's spread; but you'll hold on an' get your share of it now you're here," and Dan began to arrange the food on the table in the most tempting manner possible.

"Of course you'll stop," Seth added, "an' even if you'd known we was goin' to kind of celebrate, what would be the harm in comin' round an' gettin' some?"

"Well, I don't want you to think I'm playin' it on you, that's all; but it struck me a little while ago that if we could make a trade with the woman what runs this house, it would come easier on all hands. Now, that bed is plenty big enough for three, an' it ain't likely you'll be here much of the time, except to sleep, so why wouldn't it be a good idea to see how much extra she'll charge to let me in with you fellers?"

Seth knew of no good reason why Bill should not be allowed to share their palatial quarters, providing Mrs. Hanson did not object.

He knew Master Dean to be an industrious, well-intentioned boy, whose company, now that he was to be absent from home so much, might be desirable to Dan, and at once signified his willingness that the landlady should be consulted.

"I reckon Dan will be lonesome here when I'm gone so much, an' perhaps it would be a good plan. S'pose you two fellers go down an' see what she's got to say."

"Why don't you tackle her?" Master Roberts suggested. "She'll be so busy lookin' at your uniform that perhaps you could make a better trade."

Seth hesitated only an instant, and then went down-stairs.

When he returned his companions knew from the expression on his face, before he made a report, that the mission had been successful.

"She says if we keep quiet an' don't have a crowd hangin' round, or too many visitors, that we needn't pay any more for three than we do for two. I didn't think that would be jest the square thing, an' besides, we couldn't divide half a dollar up in three parts, so I told her we'd call it sixty cents, an' that will make the lodgin' come mighty cheap for all hands of us."

"When are you willin' I should come?" Bill Dean asked eagerly.

"Whenever you want to."

"Then I'll start right in to-night an' pay the same as you fellers do, for you've only got one day ahead of me."

And thus the matter was settled to the manifest delight of the new lodger.

The feast was an unusually satisfactory one on this particular evening.

Seth was as happy as a boy well could be because of the good fortune which had come to him through Ninety-four's men; Bill believed himself unusually lucky in having secured such desirable lodgings at an exceedingly low price; and Master Roberts had suddenly conceived an idea which seemed to him a remarkably happy one.

Not until his hunger had been appeased did Dan give words to his new train of thoughts, and then he announced with the air of one who has made a great discovery:

"If Seth hadn't laid himself right out to get into the Department, an' stuck to it whether the fellers were makin' fun of him or not, he wouldn't be wearin' that uniform now, would he? Course not. If I keep on sellin' papers an' don't try to do anything else, I'll never get some other kind of a job, will I? Course not. Now, I've made up my mind to own a store on Third Avenoo where I'll sell papers, an' books, an' sich truck, an' keep a lot of kids to do the outside work."

"An' you can do it, too, Dan, if you stick right at it," Seth replied confidently.

"Well, she goes from this out! I shan't spend any more money buyin' swell grub same's this is, an' if I don't get down-town every mornin' by daylight it'll be 'cause I'm broke up so bad I can't move."

Then the feasters discussed this new idea of Dan's, approaching it from every point of view, until the Third Avenue store was to Master Roberts an accomplished fact; nothing stood between it and him save hard work and a strict adherence to his purpose.

After this subject was exhausted a certain amount of their attention was given to Jip Collins's affairs. They speculated briefly as to what Sam Barney might be doing at that particular moment, or regarding matters connected with his departure, and it was not yet nine o'clock when all three were lying comfortably in bed, sleeping peacefully.

Dan awakened shortly after daybreak, and, strong in his purpose of one day owning a Third Avenue store, lost no time in making ready for business.

He and Bill Dean started down-town before sunrise, and Seth made his way to Ninety-four's house, where he busied himself in doing such work as came to his hand.

Before seven o'clock he had blackened the boots of all the men, swept the floors, and groomed one of the horses.

'Lish Davis came down just as this last task was performed, and observing what had been done said gravely:

"Look here, Amateur, we don't count on your doing up all the odd jobs 'round this place, else the rest of us will rust out for lack of exercise."

"I got 'round pretty early, sir, an' 'd rather be at work than layin' still."

"After this noon you won't complain of having too much spare time on your hands. Been to breakfast?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then clear out an' go down-town, 'cause this is likely to be your last day off for quite a spell. I'll look after the other horses."

Seth would have been better pleased to remain in the engine-house two or three hours longer, but 'Lish Davis's injunctions, although given as a permission rather than a command, were not to be disobeyed, and without protesting he left the building.

It is hardly necessary to attempt to describe the reception accorded the amateur fireman, when he arrived at Printing House Square.

Every bootblack or newsboy in that section of the city had heard from Bill or Dan the fullest possible particulars regarding the new uniform, and all were expecting to see a great change in Seth's appearance, but not prepared for such a decided transformation.

During at least two hours business was practically suspended, and Seth was literally forced to remain on exhibition because of the throng which surrounded him.

Many times did the policemen in the vicinity disperse the gathering; but the admiring ones reassembled immediately afterward, regardless of the threats of the officers, and thus the Society for the Admiration of Seth Bartlett was virtually in continuous session.

Those who had laughed the loudest because of his ambition were now the most extravagant in their praises, and there was not a boy on Printing House Square who did not realize as never before how much might be accomplished by persistent effort. Until eleven o'clock Seth "visited" with his friends and acquaintances, and then made his way up to keep the appointment with 'Lish Davis.

The driver, clad in his best uniform, was awaiting the boy's arrival, and cried good-naturedly when the latter appeared:

"Well, Amateur, you've spread yourself, eh? Been swelling all the morning till your head is so big that you need to borrow a new cap?"

"There's no danger of that yet a while, Mr. Davis. I'll wait till I see how I get along at headquarters before puffin' myself out very much."

"That's a good idea, Amateur, though at the same time I believe you'll pull through in great shape, providing you hang on as you've done since I knew you. Now, if it so be you've tended to all your business and are ready to duf into the work, we'll mosey along toward Sixty-seventh Street."

"The sooner I get to work the quicker we'll know whether the folks up there are goin' to let me stay," Seth replied, and with words expressive of kindly cheer and friendly wishes ringing in his ears, the Amateur set out on this his first real step toward a position in the Department.

"I don't want them as you'll meet at headquarters to think you're a dummy, Amateur, and it's in my mind to give you a little outline, so to speak, of this 'ere school, after which there'll be no need of your showing ignorance by asking questions. In the first place it ain't counted on that this 'ere branch of the service is to educate anybody and everybody that may come along. It's for such men as are admitted to the Department on trial, 'probationary firemen' chiefly; but the old hands have had a deal of good out of it.

"This plan was started long about '83 for no other reason than to show the men who were then in the service how to use the scaling ladder which had just been introduced, and the idea seemed to work so well that it gradually grew, kind of swelled out, so to speak, till it became a reg'lar school. First off, before the new headquarters was built, the city hired

an old sugar warehouse on One Hundred and Fifty-eighth Street and North River, where the men were shown how to use scaling ladders and a life net, and I've been there when one class counted up sixty scholars, all of us old hands at the business. Remember this, Amateur, you'll never be too old to go to school, leastways that's what I've found.

"After the new headquarters building was opened in '87 the sugar warehouse was given up, and we firemen had what you might almost call a college. There's a yard at the back of the building nigh on to a hundred feet square, which is put up in such shape that water can be used the same as you would at a fire, and here drills go on like this, for instance: An alarm is sent out for a certain company when they least expect it, and the men find themselves called into headquarters to show what they can do. All that you're going to see, lad, and talking about getting points, why, you can learn more there in one exhibition drill than you could at forty fires, 'cause you're understanding just how the thing is going to be done.

"You'll find when one of these unexpected drills comes off that the engine is run into the yard, hose coupled on to the hydrant, dragged up to the top of the building, water started and shut off, ladders used, and in fact the whole business gone through the same as if a hundred lives were in danger."

"Do the men really work as hard there as they do at a fire?" Seth asked.

"Do they, Amateur? Well, now, you can be mighty certain they do, 'cause it's owing to what they show at such times that gives them their rating. Now, for instance, Ninety-four's company is in the first grade; Eighty-six, that we bucked up against on that storage warehouse, is in the second grade; and there ain't a great many third grade nowadays, 'cause the men are drilled too well. And here's a point I want you to understand, Amateur: In case some man comes along and tries to tell you that the Department in this city or that is better than what we've got here, stick straight up for the fact that the New York Fire Department heads the world, and you won't be a grain away from the truth. Taking it all in all I'm free to say, open and above board, that you can't find a Department anywhere that can beat this, and I'm reckoning pretty strong that you wouldn't find one to equal us, taking all things into consideration.

"Now, we'll suppose you was old enough, and stout enough, and plucky enough, and knew enough to pass a civil-service and a physical examination for admission to the Department. You wouldn't be put into regular service, but sent up to headquarters, where we're going now, and drilled in the yard, raising ladders, tossing 'em 'round, setting 'em up, and keeping at that kind of work till you could handle one the same's you might a knife or fork. Now, considering the fact that the lightest of 'em weighs twenty and the heaviest sixty-five pounds, with a length of from fourteen to twenty feet, you can see that you've got to be pretty nimble before getting through the first lesson, eh?

"Then we'll allow you've satisfied them as are giving the lesson. You'll be set at climbing up to the first window to start with; after you can do that, to the second, and so on till you've got to the top of the building by aid of the scaling ladders. It ain't such a mighty easy thing when you come to do it yourself as it looks while you're watching somebody else; about the time you're half-way up the hair on your head will come pretty nigh to standing on end; but bless you, Amateur, a man soon gets over that, till shinning outside of a building don't seem more'n child's play.

"Then there's the drill of building a chain--making a line of ladders from the roof to the street--and getting from the upper window out over the cornice. Straddling sills is another lesson you'll have to learn, till you can get astride of one, and by holding on with your knees, work as handy as on the ground. Standing on sills; working the life-line; climbing crosswise so's to step from one window and go to the next story on a slant, instead of straight up; using the life net by jumping down, or holding it for others to leap into--and if it so chances that you are ever set to holding one, Amateur, my boy, you'll find it ain't child's play. I've heard it said that when a man weighing one hundred and fifty pounds jumps from the sixth floor of a building, he strikes the net with a force of nigh on to eighteen hundred pounds, and I tell you them as are holding it have to keep scratching."

"Do you reckon I'll be allowed to practise with the men, Mr. Davis?" Seth asked as the driver paused an instant.

"I'm counting on it, lad; but don't make up your mind it'll be right away. We of Ninety-four's company believe we know what kind of a boy you are, because we've tried you, so to speak; but up here where we're going they've got only our word for it, and won't count very much on that till they've found it out for themselves. It may take a long time, and then again it mayn't; but every boy, whatever business he goes into, is bound to prove himself before he's thought to be of much account. It'll be the same at headquarters. Turn to, Amateur, the same as you've done since we knew you, and before a year goes by I reckon on seeing you in the drill."

"Are the men always practising?"

"Not every minute of the time, you know, because it comes precious nigh being hard work; but you can count on their doing all a man ought to do in the twelve hours. When it's storming, or too cold to work in the yard, you'll find them 'ere grown-up scholars in the gymnasium on the fifth floor, at work coupling or uncoupling hose; learning how to fight

cellar fires, or practising with the tin-cutters for opening roofs. They're told about battering-rams, axes, hooks, and, finally, everything that we use, until the man who graduates up at headquarters is fit to handle a company all by himself, save, of course, that he lacks experience. Now, if it so happens that one don't learn quick enough, or shows he hasn't got a good head for the business, he's switched right off, and that ends his chance of getting into the Department. Of course kids are never taken on, and it ain't held out to you that you're going there on probation. We've got a job for you as a boy in the building, that's all, but with what little influence Ninety-four's men can use, and some thrown in from the other companies that we're friendly with, the idea is to slip you through on the sly, so to speak. If you please them at headquarters there'll be no voice raised agin your practising now and again with the others, and then is the time that everything depends on you.

"You've run to fires for the sake of getting points; but never had a chance to see whether you could carry them out or not. Now the opportunity is coming; if it's in you to do the work, why, when you're sizable we shan't have any trouble in getting you taken on probation, providing, of course, you can pass both examinations, and about that we've got to talk later. I don't want you to think a fireman is a regular idiot when it comes to book-learning. The older hands of us may be 'way off on such things; but them as goes through the civil-service examination have got to be pretty well posted, an' I'm counting on your working into some night-school."

Seth had listened attentively to the old driver's words; but there was a cloud on his face when mention was made of the fact that a fireman must have a certain amount of book-learning.

"I don't know hardly anythin' at all, Mr. Davis," he said in a mournful tone.

"You can read, can't you?"

"Yes, if the words ain't too long."

"And write?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say I really could, 'cause it's just puttin' down letters same as they're printed."

"Didn't you ever go to school, Amateur?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I've allers had to hustle for my livin,' an' it never seemed as though I had the time; but now since you've begun to talk I know I might have done it evenings, instead of hangin' 'round with the fellers, or sleepin'. If I'd known folks had to go to school before they could be firemen, I'd been studyin' these last two years."

"I believe you, my boy, and if you had put into the work at books anywhere near as hard as you have on what you call 'picking up points,' you'd have been pretty well along by this time. Howsomer, we can remedy that, though we can't call back lost time. Jerry Walters and I'll figger up what's to be done, and explain further as soon as we've settled matters, 'cause you see, Amateur, you belong to Ninety-four, an' we ain't of the mind to have you fail in what you set out after."

"Shall I have any chance to see you?"

"Bless you, lad, yes. You'll be through between six and seven o'clock, and we'll be glad to have you drop in any evening till you set about studying; then I allow we'll fix up some place so's you can be away from your partner and his friends. We won't have any soft talk after we get inside, so I'll say it all now. Keep your upper lip stiff, Amateur; don't get down at the heel if them as are in charge seem to bear on a little too hard; remember that all hands of Ninety-four's company are counting on you to make good their words, and be a man. Unless we get a call you'll see us to-night, so there ain't need of saying very much more just now."

By this time they had arrived at headquarters, and 'Lish Davis entered the building with the air of one who has no especial interest in whoever may be following him.

CHAPTER XI.

SAM'S RETURN.

It was nearly eight o'clock on the evening of the day Seth paid his first visit to headquarters and he was greeted warmly by such of the men as were on the lower floor.

"Where's Mr. Davis?" he asked.

"He had twenty-four hours' leave an' ain't likely to flash up before to-morrow noon," Jerry Walters replied. "How did you get along at headquarters?"

"That I ain't quite so certain of," Seth replied doubtfully.

"Why not? Anything gone wrong?"

"No; but it don't seem as though the men up there had very much to say to me."

"Found you plenty of work, eh?"

"Oh, yes; there was enough of that."

"A little too much, I reckon, if it kept you till this hour."

"I was told that I should knock off at six o'clock, but then I hadn't finished the job I was workin' on, an' so stayed till it was done."

"How did 'Lish Davis swell 'round?"

"I didn't see anythin' of him after we got inside. He told a man there who I was, an' two or three of 'em hunted 'round to find work for me."

"Well, how do you like it so far's you've gone?" Jerry Walters asked with a smile, and the remainder of the company gathered around to hear the reply.

"I'd like anythin' that was givin' me a show of gettin' into the Department. Of course it ain't so pleasant in the house doin' all kinds of work as it is out of doors layin' still when you want to, or talkin' with the fellers."

"Then you don't feel like backin' out yet?"

"No sir-ee! I'll never feel like that. Look here, I've got to be up at seven o'clock to-morrow mornin', an' why couldn't I shine your boots to-night?"

"Cause then is the time for you to rest, Amateur. Don't bother your head about our boots being shined, for we'll tend to that part of it. I reckon there'll be as much work at headquarters as you can comfortably do, so there's no need to come 'round here except to make a friendly call. Of course we're expectin' to see you pretty nigh every evenin' so's to have a report of how things are goin'; but so far's your blackin' our boots, that's all nonsense, and if 'Lish Davis was here this minute he'd tell you the same."

"But I want to do it, an' Mr. Davis promised me I should, 'cause it'll make it seem as if I was tryin' to square up for what all of you have done for me."

Jerry Walters tried to persuade Seth that he had better not attempt to do so much, particularly at the outset; but it could readily be told from the expression on the boy's face that he was not convinced, and Mr. Walters refrained from making further efforts in that line.

After answering a few more questions and promising to visit the engine-house on the following evening, Seth, feeling even more tired than he looked, set out for home, and Mr. Walters said to his comrades:

"That kid will work himself down to skin an' bones for the sake of tryin' to show he's thankful for the lift we've given him, and as for making his way into the Department, why, there ain't a ghost of a show that he'll fail."

And every member of the company appeared to share Jerry's opinion regarding the matter.

When Seth arrived at Mrs. Hanson's he found Bill Dean and Dan making ready to retire, and the latter cried in a joyful tone:

"I'm mighty glad you've come, Seth. Bill an' me was jest figgerin' that they'd fixed it up to have you sleep there nights."

"There wasn't anythin' said about that, and I reckon they don't want boys 'round," the amateur fireman replied gloomily, and Bill asked in surprise:

"Why, what's the matter, old man? Ain't gettin' discouraged so soon, are you?"

"I reckon it'll be all right after a spell, an' I wouldn't want any of Ninety-four's men to know that I wasn't jest as chipper as a sparrer; but things are different up there from what they are down here. They jest set you to work an' let you keep hummin' without sayin' a word. I don't believe a single one of 'em has spoke to me since Mr. Davis went away."

"What you been doin'?"

"Cleanin' windows; an' I tell you they're so big that one of 'em makes considerable work. I hung on to it till I'd finished all on that floor, even though they told me to go home at six o'clock."

"What are you goin' to do to-morrow?"

"I don't know. Anythin' that comes up, I s'pose."

"Didn't they give you any lessons in the school?"

"I haven't even seen it yet. There might have been a hundred men 'round there practisin' for all I'd know, 'cause I was in the front of the buildin'."

"Why, I thought you'd go right to work learnin' to be a fireman," Dan said in surprise.

"Mr. Davis never allowed anythin' like that. He said after a spell, when I'd showed 'em I could 'tend to business, I might get a show; but you see, it ain't anyways certain that they'll do what Ninety-four's men have been countin' on. I've got to take the chances, you know, and work my way in."

Both Dan and Bill were disappointed by this report. They had fancied certain tasks might be required of Seth; but firmly believed he would be given instructions at once.

In fact, Dan had told his roommate several times during the day that he expected to see Seth an enrolled member of the Department within a few months, adding in support of such belief:

"When that feller tackles anythin' he goes right through with it, an' if he ain't big enough now he's got the nerve in him to grow terribly. It seems like he does everythin' he starts for."

Now that Seth appeared despondent his comrades believed it their duty to cheer him, and during half an hour or more they set about such task in earnest.

It seemed to them as if he was already growing more cheerful when the shrill whistling of a peculiar note was heard several times repeated, apparently on the sidewalk in front of the dwelling.

"That's Teddy Bowser!" Bill Dean exclaimed as he leaped to his feet. "He wanted to come up here to-night, but I told him he mustn't, 'cause if the fellers hung 'round I'd lose my show for a tony lodgin'."

"Go down and see what he wants," Dan suggested. "I don't believe we'd better let him come in, for there are three of us here now, an' Miss Hanson might think she was havin' too many fellers 'round for sixty cents a week."

Bill descended the stairs swiftly but noiselessly, returning in less than five minutes with a look of consternation upon his face.

"Say, Sam Barney's got back!"

"Got back!" Seth cried in astonishment and dismay. "Why, how'd he raise the money?"

"That's what Teddy didn't know. He said Sam flashed up 'bout an hour ago lookin' as chipper as you please, an' with cash in his pocket. He's tumbled to our racket, an' is promenadin' 'round town sayin' he'll catch Jip Collins before to-morrow night."

The three boys gazed at each other in perplexity, and fully a moment elapsed before the almost painful silence was broken.

Then Seth said interrogatively:

"Of course Teddy knew what he was talkin' 'bout?"

"Oh yes, he hasn't made any mistake, 'cause he saw Sam and heard him blow 'bout what a swell time he had in Philadelphia."

"He couldn't have been there very long."

"I don't understand it," and Bill plunged his hands deep in his pocket as he looked gloomily around. "I thought when we shipped him off that we'd settled the detective business, an' now it ain't any dead certain thing he won't run right across Jip Collins, 'cause the poor feller thinks Sam's so far away there's no danger of meetin' him."

"Where's Teddy?" Dan asked.

"Down on the sidewalk."

"What's he waitin' for?"

"I told him he'd better hold on a spell, 'cause we've got to do *somethin'*, fellers, an' perhaps he can help us."

"But if Sam's here with money in his pocket, how shall we stop him from workin' up the case?" Dan asked helplessly.

"First off we must tell Jip," Seth replied promptly. "To-morrow mornin' you an' Bill will have to see what can be done with Sam. It won't do to let him keep on the way he was goin' before we sent him off."

"I reckon you can't stop him if he's set on doin' it, an' he likely will be now he finds you're in the Department, 'cause he said he was goin' to be an out-an'-out detective long before you ever dreamed of gettin' a fireman's job."

"If he only knew how little of a fireman I am he wouldn't feel very bad 'bout it," Seth said with a sigh, and then added more cheerily, "Come on, fellers, we must find Jip, an' not stay out too late either, else Miss Hanson will raise a row."

The three went down the stairs softly, crept out on the sidewalk as if their own lives might be in jeopardy if the slightest noise was made, and there met Teddy Bowser.

"Oh yes, I saw him," Teddy said in reply to Seth's question. "He's been swingin' himself 'round Grand Street big as life for more'n an hour; says he had a great time in Philadelphia, an' ain't certain but he'll go over there to live after he gets Jip in jail. Sam must have struck some mighty soft snap, 'cause when he left this town he had only sixteen cents to his name."

"Do you s'pose he could find any one chump enough to lend him money?" Dan asked musingly, and Seth said almost sharply:

"It won't pay for us to stand here tryin' to figger how he's fixed things, 'cause we must be back mighty soon, and it may take quite a spell to find Jip."

"I reckon it will," Teddy added emphatically. "I hunted all 'round the ferry for him."

"Why, how did you know where he was?"

"The fellers told me. I didn't think it was a secret."

"It ought to have been," and Seth looked more distressed than before. "If all hands know, it won't take Sam Barney a great while to find out."

"He was talkin' 'bout it when I left; said there was no need of goin' to the ferry till mornin', 'cause he could put his hands on him when he wanted to. Some of Jip's chums must have gone back on him, an' I wouldn't wonder if I knew who. You see, Denny Macey was tellin' 'round that if Jip didn't ante up the dime he borrowed two weeks ago, he'd make trouble for him."

"Don't let's stand here any longer," and Seth led the way at a rapid pace toward the ferry.

Beyond speculating as to how the would-be detective had been enabled to return from Philadelphia, those who were seeking to do Jip Collins an additional favor indulged in little conversation during the hurried journey across the city.

As they neared the ferry each kept a sharp watch in the hope of meeting the boy whom he sought, but when they stood at the very entrance of the slip no sign of Jip had been seen, and then the difficulty of the search began to be apparent.

Master Collins was a stranger in this section of the city, and they might question a dozen boys without finding one who had so much as heard of him, therefore the quest was likely to be a long if not a vain one.

"It'll soon be too late to do anything if we don't hustle," Seth said when he realized all the possibilities against success. "Let each feller start out alone, and there'll be jest so many more chances of runnin' across him. We'll meet here by the ferry slip in half an hour."

This plan was acted upon without delay, and each member of the searching party did his best to bring the labor to a speedy and final conclusion; but when at the expiration of the time set the four met once more, nothing had been discovered.

"He's turned in," Bill Dean said in a tone of conviction.

"If it's with that chum of yourn it ought'er be easy to find him."

"He wasn't a chum of mine, an' I don't so much as know his name. It's a feller I've run across two or three times down-town, that's all."

"Then I can't see but what we must call it a bad job, for there's no kind of use in foolin' 'round here any longer."

"But if we don't find him now all Sam Barney's got to do is to walk over here in the mornin'," Dan said mournfully, and Bill Dean cried emphatically:

"I'll get ahead of that bloomin' detective if I have to set up all night! You can count on my bein' right here at daylight, an' that's the best anybody can do. You ought to get to bed, Seth, 'cause you've got to turn out pretty early in the mornin'."

That it was useless to remain in that vicinity any longer with the hope of meeting Jip by chance, all understood, and mournfully they turned their faces homeward, Teddy Bowser suggesting that he might be able to do the repentant firebug a friendly turn by delaying Sam a certain length of time next morning.

"I'll ask him to tell me about his detective work, an' you can bet he won't lose such a chance, 'cause there's nothin' in this world he likes to talk about as well as himself."

"All right, you do that, Teddy, an' I'll snoop over here," Bill added. "Of course Seth can't take a hand in this work, on account of havin' to go to headquarters, but Dan will kind-er lay 'round anywhere, either to head Sam off, or find Jip."

Then Teddy Bowser took his departure for the night, and Mrs. Hanson's three lodgers returned to their room thoroughly distressed in mind.

The greater portion of the night might have been spent by them in discussing this new phase of affairs but for Seth, who said when his comrades began to hold forth on the subject:

"You fellers can't do any good talkin'. I've got to get some sleep if I count on bein' up early enough in the mornin' to do the work over to the engine-house an' get to my job at seven o'clock, so s'pose you quiet down and give me a chance?"

This was no more than a reasonable request, and soon Mrs. Hanson's lodgers were enjoying their needed repose, despite the troubles which had come upon them.

Seth, whose last thought had been that he must waken early, opened his eyes just as the day was dawning, and aroused his comrades.

"You fellers must turn out if you count on helpin' Jip this mornin', an' I'm goin' to get right off. Seems to me it would be a good idea if Bill was at the ferry right soon."

"I'll start now," Master Dean replied, and, since their plans had been fully arranged the night previous, there was nothing to prevent Seth from going at once to Ninety-four's house.

The watchman on duty admitted him with a reproof for trying to crowd too much work into one day; but made no further objection when the amateur fireman declared that he should "feel better if he did the shinin' the same's ever."

Not a man was awake save the one on duty, when, his work finished, Seth hurried toward headquarters.

When he arrived it lacked twenty minutes of the time set for him to begin work, and the first person he met inside the building was a gray-haired man wearing such a uniform as did Jerry Walters, the driver of Ninety-four, and all Seth's particular friends.

"What are you doing here?" the official asked in a not very friendly tone.

"I began to work 'round this place yesterday noon," Seth replied in an apologetic manner.

"Oh, you did, eh? You must be the kid 'Lish Davis made so much talk about."

"I am the boy he got the job for, sir."

"Well, what are you doing here so early? Seven o'clock is the hour."

"Yes, sir; but I don't s'pose it can make much difference if I'm here a little before time, 'cause then I'll get more done, don't you see?"

"And you were figuring on that same thing when you stayed here until eight o'clock last night, eh?"

"No, sir; I stayed 'cause I wasn't through washin' all the windows on the second floor, an' didn't want to leave the job half done."

"Well, in the future you'd better go home when the clock strikes six, the same as others do. What task have they set for you this morning?"

"Nothing as yet, sir."

"That's because you did your work too well yesterday. I suppose they allowed you had enough to last through the balance of this day."

"It would be a pretty poor kind of a boy who couldn't do more'n wash that many windows in a day an' a half," Seth replied laughingly, fancying that this man's gruff manner was no indication of bad temper, but rather the reverse.

"They tell me you're counting on being a fireman one of these days?"

"Yes, sir," Seth replied promptly and decisively.

"You seem to be pretty certain of it."

"So I am, sir, 'cause I'll get there after a time if I work hard."

"You will for a fact, my son, if you believe it as firmly as you seem to. How much have you seen of the building so far?"

"I've only been in the room where I was workin' yesterday."

"Come up into the gymnasium with me. I'm running things in that quarter, an' it might be we can work you in with better profit there, than at window-washing."

It was as if Seth's heart gave a great bound just then, for in the gymnasium was begun the first of the fireman's lessons, and if he should be so fortunate as to be set at work there it seemed that advancement must necessarily be rapid.

Even though he had had less reason of wishing to be occupied in this portion of the building, he could not but have been delighted when he entered the well-appointed place, and he gazed around in what was very like an ecstasy of joy until suddenly aroused by the voice of this new acquaintance.

"Do you think you could keep things in proper shape here? There's plenty of work to be done, and at present we are getting none of the best."

"I'd like to have a chance to try, sir."

"Very well; I'll see to the red tape of the business down-stairs and in the meanwhile do you set about doing whatever you think is necessary. If 'Lish Davis wasn't mistaken, I'll see to it you get all the instruction in this portion of the building that you can stagger under, and it may be we'll put a little more muscle into you 'twixt now and the next few months."

Then, without having specified what it was he wished Seth to busy himself with, the gray-haired man turned to leave the gymnasium, when he suddenly stopped and asked sharply:

"Have you been to breakfast?"

"No, sir; I was told that I'd get my grub here."

"Then why didn't you 'tend to it when you first came in?"

"'Cause I met you, sir."

"I suppose you hadn't thought you might be needing something to eat?"

"It would have been no great matter, sir. I've got along until noon a good many days without anythin', an' can do it again."

"There's no need of that here, my son. Remember to get your meals on time, for regularity of habits,--although that will become a luxury if you are ever made a fireman,--regularity of habits is quite as necessary for the strength and building up of your body as any exercise you can take here. So far as possible eat at the same hour each day; go to bed early, get up early, and at all times see to it that your body is properly cared for. When did you have a bath last?"

"It's been quite a spell since I went in swimmin', sir."

"Well, you can begin the day with that. Use plenty of cold water, and I reckon the towels are coarse enough. Then get your breakfast, come up here, and go to work."

"At anything special, sir?"

"Whatever you see that's needed to be done."

Then this employer, who had given him such good advice, walked quietly away, and Seth was left to find the bathroom as best he might.

During this day Master Bartlett worked as industriously as ever; but with better heart than while employed about the first task set him at headquarters, for he had reason to believe there was at least one in the building who would lend him a helping hand, and the future seemed much brighter than it had twenty-four hours previous.

This new friend, who was spoken of as "Josh" by those who seemed to be best acquainted with him, and by others as "Mr. Fernald," apparently gave no heed to the boy, and Seth did whatever seemed to him most necessary, although there were many times when he was tempted to stop in order to watch the men at their exercises, until half-past five in the afternoon, when the man whom he was beginning to look upon as a friend said sharply:

"Get your supper, now, Seth Bartlett, and to-morrow morning see to it that you have breakfast before coming up here."

Seth wanted to say good-night to Mr. Fernald; but doubtful as to how such familiarity might be received, he departed in silence, turning around as soon as he was in the corridor where none could see him, to wave his hand in adieu.

Supper had been eaten, and he was on the sidewalk outside of headquarters just as the whistles were blowing for the hour of six.

"I'll have a chance to stop a good while in Ninety-four's house to-night, an' there may another alarm come so's I can go out with her again," he said to himself, and at that instant Teddy Bowser appeared from around the corner of the building and cried excitedly:

"Dan Roberts an' Bill Dean sent me up here to tell you that Sam Barney's had Jip Collins 'rested this afternoon 'bout three o'clock."



CHAPTER XII.

THE PRISONER.

It was several moments before Seth could bring himself to believe that Dan and Bill Dean had utterly failed in their efforts to save Jip Collins from the would-be detective.

During the day he had given the matter comparatively little thought, believing that, having set out on their mission of mercy at such an early hour, his roommates would succeed in their efforts.

Sam Barney was known to all his acquaintances as a boy opposed to rising very early, or working very hard, and it had been no more than reasonable to suppose Jip would be warned in time.

Teddy Bowser could give very little information, and that which he did impart only served to heighten the mystery.

He stated that he met Sam at about seven o'clock that morning, and talked with him concerning his visit to Philadelphia with the purpose, as previously agreed upon, of delaying him until nearly nine o'clock.

That then the alleged detective had gone toward Fulton Market with the avowed intention of meeting a friend, and Teddy was positive Jip had not been arrested until late in the afternoon.

"Where was Dan an' Bill when they sent you to tell me?"

"Over by Jefferson Market; that's where Jip's been jugged."

"Were they to wait there for me?"

"That's what they reckoned on, except you thought them firemen of yourn could help out."

"If Jip's really been 'rested I don't believe Ninety-four's men could do anything, 'cordin' to the way Mr. Davis talks. We'll go right down to the market."

During the long journey, for neither Seth nor Teddy could afford to pay ten cents for car-fare, the latter told as nearly as he could remember Sam Barney's version of his visit to "Philadelphia."

"He says the way he figgered it out at first, Jip Collins ought'er been over there; but he'd found out his mistake soon enough if you fellers hadn't hurried him off."

"He didn't go for most a day after he acted 'bout crazy to get away."

"That's one of his excuses, of course; I'm jest givin' you the fairy story he flashed up to me. He says he wasn't any sooner in the train than he began to work the plan over in his mind, same's all the detectives do, an' it didn't take him a great while to figger how it was. At the jump he thought it was mighty queer that Bill Dean should go 'round raisin' money to send him away, an' after he was in the cars he tumbled to himself, don't you see? To hear him tell it you'd believe all he had to do was to set down an' think over things to find out jest what was what."

"It's a big pity he couldn't think who stole his money," Seth interrupted. "'Cordin' to his story he's been after the thief ever since."

"He says he would have caught him if this case of Jip's hadn't turned up, an' seein's it was so much bigger he dropped everything else. Well, after he made up his mind that the fellers what chipped in the money was tryin' to run him out of town, the train started, so of course he had to keep on; but he'd fixed it with himself that he was bound to come straight back soon's he could. I reckon he swelled himself 'round the depot over in Philadelphia, blew in the sixteen cents he had, an' give some of the fellers a terrible stiff 'bout bein' a detective, till he borrowed money of 'em to come back. The way he tells it is that jest as soon as he got there people knew who he was, an' give him a great reception. He makes out that there was a slat of folks hangin' round the station tryin' to get a chance to see him; but that's all in your eye, of course."

"Sam Barney must be a fool if he thinks anybody is goin' to believe such yarns."

"He must think it, else he wouldn't tell 'em. Now, 'cordin' to his story, some of them fellers was jest loaded with the stuff, and they put up the price of a railroad ticket back. I don't know what he did with himself while he was in the town, 'cause you can't make out anything by what he says."

"Why didn't he come back on the next train if everybody was ready to lend him money?"

"He says he jest actually couldn't get away from the crowd that wanted to see him an' talk to him, so he stayed a spell to give 'em a good time by showin' himself. Then when he got ready he swings on board, an' over he comes. But he's chafin' under the collar, Seth, 'cause the fellers sent him off when he ought'er have stayed, an' that's why he's so down on Jip Collins."

"He was jest as bad before Bill Dean ever begun to raise money to get rid of him, else it would have been different. I tried to make him promise to let Jip alone, an' he wouldn't listen to any talk at all. He thinks it'll be a big thing for him in case he puts it through. If I couldn't get on in the world except it was by sendin' some feller to jail, I'd stick to sellin' papers or blackin' boots the rest of my life."

"Sam is pretty near green thinkin' you've got ahead so fast; but says that jest as soon as he has worked the case up against Jip he'll smash your racket all to pieces."

"Have you seen him since he did this terrible fine piece of detective work?"

"No; I hadn't heard anythin' 'bout it till Dan hailed me."

For some time after this Seth remained silent trying to devise a plan by which he could aid the unfortunate firebug; but the more he considered the matter the less probable did it seem that either he or his comrades could in any way benefit the prisoner.

"I'm 'fraid Jip will go up the river," he said at length, and Teddy replied mournfully:

"I guess he's a goner for a fact, an' all on account of Sam Barney's wantin' to show hisself a detective."

When the two had come to their journey's end Dan and Bill Dean were seen solemnly pacing to and fro on the sidewalk in front of the entrance to the court-room, looking sadly disheartened.

"Have you done anythin' yet?" Seth asked in a low tone as he joined them.

"There's nothin' we can do. Jip's locked up, an' Sam Barney's struttin' 'round the streets showin' hisself off for a first-class detective," Dan replied in a tone of irritation.

"Do you know how he happened to nab him?"

"It must have been that Denny Macey give him away," Bill Dean replied, "for I saw Jip this mornin' early, an' he 'greed to keep out er sight."

"Do you s'pose he stayed on the street after that?"

"Denny knew where he slept last night, and must have told Sam, jest as some of the fellers say he threatened to do."

"Well," Seth said after a brief reflection, "if you can't help him, what's the use of standin' here?"

"We was waitin' for you. I thought, an' so did Dan, that perhaps the driver of Ninety-four might cook up some kind of a plan we could work through. Anyhow, it don't seem as though it would do much harm for you to talk with him."

"Of course it won't; but if it wasn't that Jip's likely to be sent to jail for a good many years I wouldn't bother him, 'cause it don't seem the square shake for me to keep runnin' there whenever things turn wrong."

"It would be pretty tough to let Jip be sent up for four or five years jest 'cause you didn't want to bother Ninety-four's crew."

"I know that, Bill, an' I'm goin' to talk to Mr. Davis now. I was only sayin' I wouldn't do it if things wasn't the way they are. I'll go ahead, an' you fellers meet me up to the room after I get through, 'cause it won't do for all hands to loaf 'round in front of the engine-house."

To this proposition those who were ready to sacrifice their own pleasure and interests in order to aid the penitent firebug made no demur, and Seth set out at full speed, leaving the others to follow at a more leisurely pace.

"Hello, Amateur! It seems to me you've knocked off work kind-er late to-night?" 'Lish Davis cried as the boy entered the engine-house.

"Mr. Fernald, the man who runs the gymnasium, told me I was to go away every night at six o'clock----"

"So Josh has taken you in hand as he promised, eh?"

"He's given me a chance up in the gymnasium, where I can't help seein' a good deal of the drillin' even when I'm workin',

an' it seems as though it was a mighty soft snap."

"Josh ain't a man who'll make it very soft for any boy. You've got to toe the mark pretty straight with him, Amateur; but if it so be you strike him just right things will move along in great shape. Why didn't you leave headquarters as he told you?"

"I did, sir; but Teddy Bowser was waitin' outside to tell me that Sam Barney has had Jip Collins 'rested for settin' fire to the lumber-yard."

"So, so! He has, eh? I thought you shipped that bloomin' detective over to Philadelphia?"

"That's what we did, Mr. Davis; but he managed to get back, an' tumbled to the trick we played on him, so the very first thing he does is to get Jip pulled."

"Well, whether it be boys or men who go wrong, sooner or later they've got to pay the penalty in some fashion, and perhaps it's just as well this Collins chap should square matters now as at any other time."

"But it seems terrible, Mr. Davis, to have him sent to jail for nobody knows how many years."

"It'll be a good many if he's convicted on the charge of arson; that I can give you as a straight tip."

"I was in hopes you'd feel kind of bad about it, Mr. Davis," Seth said, hesitatingly.

"Meaning to say you counted on my trying to help pull him through after he destroyed valuable property and come pretty nigh being the death of you and your partner?"

"Well, you see, he's awful sorry----"

"Yes, most of 'em are after the crime has been committed."

"But I don't b'lieve Jip really meant to do anythin' like that. He'd been blowin' 'bout how he'd serve us out, an' a good many of the fellers told him he didn't dare to so much as raise his hand. That kind-er started him, an' if he goes to jail now the shame of it will allers stick to him."

"Then you believe he'd work 'round and be a decently square kind of a boy if he got out of this scrape?"

"I'm almost certain of it."

"Well, look here, Amateur, it ain't for a fireman to go here and there, trying to defend them as have started a blaze; but I wouldn't wonder if we could find some lawyer to take charge of his case. Perhaps we can get him off on the same plea you're using now--that it would serve to make a criminal of him, rather than work the proper kind of reformation. There'll be plenty of time, lad, because you and your partner are bound to be called on as witnesses even on the preliminary examination, so until the officers find you two nothing can be done, for I don't reckon your imitation detective has any knowledge of what happened."

"He's heard the rest of the fellers talk 'bout it."

"That don't cut any figger; all he can testify to is what he's seen himself, or something the prisoner may have told him. I'll turn this thing over in my mind, and call on Jerry Walters and Ben Dunton for their advice. When you come 'round to-morrow night we'll be able to say what can be done. Now tell me everything you did to-day; that's of more interest to us of Ninety-four's company than the arrest of the firebug."

Seth gave a detailed account of his movements from the time he entered headquarters until the hour of leaving, and every man on the floor listened eagerly to the narration of unimportant doings, which was the best proof they could have given of the deep interest felt in the amateur fireman.

"I reckon you'll pull through all right," Lish Davis said approvingly when Seth brought the story to an end, "and now there's a word to be said about your behavior here this morning. You'll have plenty of work to do 'twixt 7 A.M. and 6 P.M. without hustling over here before daylight and blacking our boots; consequently we're going to hire another boy so's to remove the temptation from your path."

"Don't do it, please don't do it, Mr. Davis," Seth cried imploringly. "It don't seem like work to me. So long as I can be here every mornin' an' do somethin' of the kind, it 'pears as if I belong to the company. S'posen you get another feller to do the shinin' an' I come 'round evenin's to tell you what's been goin' on? Why, it would only look as if I was a visitor. I don't want to give up all my hold here, an' that's what will happen if somebody else does the shinin'!"

There could be no question but that Seth was deeply in earnest, and more than one of the men nodded to the driver as

if to say that the boy should be allowed to do as he pleased.

Jerry Walters took it upon himself to say very decidedly:

"I think, 'Lish, Amateur is right, an' you've got no call to cut him off from what he wants to do, 'specially after it's been once agreed upon. It ain't that I'm figgering to have my boots shined for nothing; but I'm feeling a good deal as he does. I'd like to have him come 'round regularly, an' we'll be certain of it if there's work to be done."

"Very well, very well," the driver replied. "He shall keep on for a spell, though it ain't to my liking. If Amateur was a kid that spent his time kiting 'round the streets it would be different; but he's got to have some little amusement, and how is it to be had if he starts in at daylight blacking boots, works until six o'clock at headquarters, then spends his evening at the school? Why, it'll come nigh to using him up."

"He ain't on at headquarters Sunday, is he?"

"No; but that's only one day in seven, and so long as Amateur is in our charge, so to speak, I ain't going to have him get an idea that he can spend the Sabbath cavorting 'round as some of his chums do."

"When I begin to take part in the drill at headquarters I shall have all the sport that's needed," Seth interrupted, "and besides, even if I go to the night-school, I'll get an hour in here between six an' seven----"

"And a heap of fun you'll have with a lot of old cronies like us," 'Lish added with a laugh.

"I'd rather be here than anywhere else, sir, an' if you want to give me a good time now and then, an' I happen to be 'round when there's an alarm, let me go out with Ninety-four; that'll be fun enough."

'Lish winked at his comrades as if this remark pleased him exceedingly, and put an end to the conversation by saying:

"Look in here to-morrow night, lad, and we'll see whether it's possible to help out your firebug or not. Now go home and turn in, for you can't get too much sleep while you're young."

Seth obeyed without delay what was little less than a command, and, hastening to Mrs. Hanson's dwelling, repeated to his roommates and Teddy Bowser all the driver had said to him concerning the possibilities of aiding Jip Collins.

The boys were sadly disappointed because there was no actual promise of assistance.

They had come to believe, because they hoped it would be so, that Mr. Davis could immediately devise some plan whereby Jip might be released from prison, and since he did not appear to be sympathetic and enthusiastic on the subject they feared he might fail to take any active part.

"I am certain he will get a lawyer for him anyhow," Seth said in reply to their complaint, "an' that's what we couldn't do ourselves. If it wasn't for goin' to headquarters I'd try to see the poor fellow to-morrow. Of course I wouldn't be able to do anythin' for him, but it would make him feel kind of good to know we was willin' to help."

"I'll go there to-morrow," Dan cried, pleased at the idea of doing something, even though he could not hope to effect any change in Jip's condition. "I'll tell him what we've tried to do, an' there'll be some satisfaction in that anyhow."

Then Seth proposed that Master Roberts should hang around outside the Department headquarters at about six o'clock in the afternoon in order to report the result of the interview, after which he would visit Mr. Davis again.

With this programme for the coming day thus settled upon, the amateur fireman suggested that Teddy Bowser go home in order that he and his roommates might retire, and half an hour later Mrs. Hanson's lodgers were sleeping soundly.

The sun had not shown his face above the eastern horizon next morning when Seth was at work in Ninety-four's quarters, performing such labor as came to hand, and, owing to the fact that the company had been fighting fire nearly all night, no one save the house watchman was stirring when the amateur set off for his regular duties.

At fifteen minutes before the hour of seven "Ninety-four's kid," as some of the clerks at headquarters had already designated Seth, entered the gymnasium with a bustling air as if the hardest tasks would be no more than a pleasure.

"Had your breakfast?" Mr. Fernald asked gruffly.

"Yes, sir."

"How long since you turned out?"

"It wasn't quite light when I left the house, sir."

"Have you been here all that time?"

"Oh no, sir. You see, I go over to Ninety-four's quarters to shine the company, an' it stands me in hand to be out of bed pretty early."

"What do you do to the company?" Mr. Fernald asked, as an expression of bewilderment came over his face.

"I shine for all hands--black their boots, you know."

"Yes, I understand now. Isn't the work here enough to satisfy you, but that you must needs look around for more?"

"But I belong to that company, sir, an' have to see my share of the business is done right up to the mark," Seth replied proudly, and then he explained to Mr. Fernald why he was eager to continue his connection with those who had already done so much to assist him.

"You seem precious eager to be a fireman."

"So I am, sir, an' I'm hopin' to get along here so Ninety-four's men won't think I'm a duffer for not pushin' ahead."

Fernald questioned him closely regarding his ambition to belong to the Department, and without being really aware of the fact Seth had soon told him all he knew concerning himself and his desires.

"I don't say as you've got it in you to be a fireman," the old man said, thoughtfully; "but it strikes me you carry a good bit of sand, an' I've a mind to do even more than I promised 'Lish Davis. See here, my lad, supposing you could practise here two or three hours a day, would it tire you out so that the regular duties might be slighted?"

"If you'll give me the chance, sir, I'll work enough later nights to make up for it all," the boy replied eagerly.

"I guess Davis didn't lay it on any too thick when he told me about you. Now see here, you'll begin the day with a regular course of training, working until nine o'clock, after which time you'll get down to a boy's business, see?"

"Yes, sir," Seth replied, trembling so violently with pleasure that only by the greatest exertion could he prevent his voice from quavering.

"Had a bath this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Then get one, and remember to tumble into cold water the first thing after coming here."

Seth was off like a flash, and when he returned, glowing with the healthful exercise, Josh Fernald gave him the first lesson in physical training.

Before it was concluded "Ninety-four's kid" came to understand that 'Lish Davis had only spoken the truth when he said the instructor was not a man who would "let up on boys to any extent," for Seth was forced to exert himself as he never remembered to have done during any previous two hours of his life.

Then the lesson was concluded, and the amateur set about his ordinary duties, working unusually hard lest Mr. Fernald should decide that he could not at the same time attend to gymnastics and perform the services for which he was paid by the city.

He was thoroughly tired when the hour for supper came around; but so happy at having made some slight advancement toward his goal in life that all else was as nothing.

That evening he bade Mr. Fernald "good-night," and received in reply the caution:

"Don't think you'll find any snap here; it's precious hard work, an' won't grow easier."

"I'll stick at it, sir, if you don't get tired showin' me how," Seth cried gleefully, and as he walked sturdily toward the staircase, holding himself erect and with head thrown well back like some animal glorying in his strength, the old instructor gazed after him in almost a friendly manner.

Seth was so elated with the idea that he could tell Ninety-four's men that he had actually begun his training, as to have nearly forgotten the appointment made with Dan; but he soon remembered it when Master Roberts darted out from a hiding-place near at hand.

"Well, I've seen him," he cried before Seth had time to speak.

"Who?"

"Jip Collins, of course."

"How'd you get in?"

"I was hangin' 'round there lookin' for a chance when your 'Lish Davis come along with a lawyer, an' I asked 'em to let me go in with them."

"Mr. Davis took a lawyer there?" Seth repeated in astonishment.

"That's what he did, an' I tell you, Seth, that fireman is a jim dandy, an' no mistake!"

"Don't you s'pose I know that after all this time?"

"Yes; but yet you didn't think he'd do so much, eh?"

"He's mighty good to everybody. How was Jip lookin'?"

"Terrible down. You'd think he was expectin' to be hanged by the way he takes on. I felt awful sorry for him, even if he did burn us out."

"What did he say?"

"Not much of anythin'; but kept cryin' 'bout all the time. Sam Barney must be feelin' awful good after makin' so much trouble."

"Have you seen *him*?" Seth asked, sharply.

"If I had he'd be lookin' for a doctor. I'm jest achin' to get my hands on that duffer in some side street where the perlice won't come snoopin' 'round."

"See here, Dan, you mustn't fight if you ever want to get that Third Avenoo store, for I tell you no feller gets ahead by bein' a tough. What did the lawyer say?"

"I didn't hear him yip; but reckon you'll know all about it after goin' over to Ninety-four's house."

"That's where I'm bound for now. Wait outside for me, an' I'll come to you as soon as I can."

"I don't suppose I could sneak in?"

"I'd rather you didn't, Dan, 'cause it would look as if I was gettin' mighty fresh to bring my chums along."

"All right, old man; I'll wait outside."

There was so much in Seth's mind that he could not indulge in conversation at that moment, and he walked so rapidly that Dan had but little opportunity for speaking, however much he might have desired to say.

At the engine-house he found nearly all the company on the lower floor much as if waiting for his report, and 'Lish Davis greeted him by asking:

"Well, Amateur, nothing but window-washing to-day?"

"No, sir-ee! Mr. Fernald has begun to give me lessons in the gymnasium, an' I'm to practise there two hours every day from this out--that is, so long as I do it an' keep my reg'lar work up in shape, which, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', will be every minute I have the chance of stayin' there."

"Did Josh really put you into physical training as quick as this?" Mr. Davis asked, almost incredulously.

"That's what he did, an' though I didn't get many points 'bout fires, it'll help me to grow in great shape."

Then Dan, waiting near the door on the outside, heard Ninety-four's crew cheering loudly, and he was sadly at a loss to understand the meaning of such merriment when he believed they were discussing poor Jip's sad situation.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE LETTER.

There could be no question but that Ninety-four's company were highly delighted with the news brought by Seth regarding his progress.

It was as if each man felt personally complimented by Mr. Fernald when he advanced the amateur so rapidly, and all united in declaring that "Josh was a right good fellow."

Seth was in the highest degree excited. He had expected that his friends of Ninety-four would be pleased at learning of his good fortune, but never fancied they could be so deeply interested, and now he began to understand what a gloom might be cast over the company if he should fail in this attempt to gain a foothold in the Department.

'Lish Davis would not be content until the boy gave an exhibition of what he had learned in the way of gymnastic exercises during the morning, and when this had been brought to a close amid the applause of all present, the driver said in a tone of satisfaction:

"You're getting on in great shape, Amateur, and if nothing happens to give you a pull-back, ought'er be well up in the drill 'twixt now and a year from to-day. Josh Fernald has the name of being precious hard on them as comes under him for instruction; but I've always allowed he'd boost along mighty fast any one who struck his fancy. He must have seen that you were in earnest, young fellow, for when I talked with him the best promise I could get was that he'd look you over in the course of a month or two."

"Do they keep you humpin' on the odd jobs, Amateur?" Jerry Walters asked solicitously.

"There's plenty to be done; but not enough to kill anybody. After I get used to the ways of the place I reckon it'll come pretty easy."

"That's the kind of talk to make, young fellow!" the driver cried approvingly. "Don't allow that your job's a hard one, however tough it may be, for a kid never gets any credit when he's always whining 'bout working to death."

Not until ten minutes or more had been spent in answering the questions asked by each member of the company, including the captain himself, was the curiosity of the men satisfied concerning the advancement of their *protege*, and then Seth had an opportunity of inquiring as to the charge against the firebug.

"Dan Roberts said you carried a lawyer down to see poor Jip, Mr. Davis," the amateur began, and instantly the look of pleasurable excitement faded from 'Lish Davis's face.

"So I did, Amateur, so I did. Jerry and I allowed we might do that much for the kid, even though he ain't deserving of any man's attention."

"Will he get out of the scrape?"

"Not before having a trial, Amateur, and then all must depend on the judge. It seems he owned up to the whole business when they first nabbed him, and the only thing he can do now is to plead guilty. The evidence that can be given by the kids from Brooklyn will be enough to convict him, even if he finds somebody to help him make a fight, which wouldn't be good sense."

"Then there's nothin' for the poor fellow but to go up the river?" and Seth's voice was tremulous with sorrow.

"That ain't altogether certain, lad. The lawyer thinks, and Jerry and I have the same idee, that if he owns up to the whole thing like a little man, it may be possible to have sentence suspended during good behavior."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Davis?" Seth asked in perplexity.

"Why, it's jest like this. When he's put on trial let him tell the truth. We of Ninety-four can testify that it was he who sent in the alarm, showing he was sorry as soon as the deed had been done. Then will come the time for the lawyer to get in his fine work. He'll do a lot of chinning 'bout the boy's being young, and that it'll most likely make a criminal of him to be sent up. In some such way as that the judge may be brought to believe that it'll be the wisest course to suspend sentence--that is to say, hold the conviction over him, but at the same time letting him go free. If he behaves himself, well and good; if not, he's brought before the court and sentenced on this same charge at some future time."

"Are you certain that can be done?" Seth asked, growing more hopeful.

"No, Amateur, we ain't certain; but the chances are it can be fixed that way, and we'll do our best at it, if for no other reason than to show how good we're feeling because you're doing us so much credit up at headquarters."

Seth had hoped that the members of Ninety-four's company would be able to effect the firebug's release, and it was a great disappointment to thus learn that nothing could be done save through the clemency of the judge; but, as he would have kept silent had it been himself who was in danger, he refrained from giving words to his sorrow.

Understanding what was in his mind, 'Lish Davis added in a kindly tone:

"Don't take it to heart, Amateur, for we'll do all that is possible, and I'm allowing it'll all come out straight in the end. It wouldn't be well if he pulled through too easy."

"If only he don't have to go to jail for two or three years!" Seth cried, and then fearing he might say that which would sound like a complaint, he took his leave after promising to report next evening.

"Well, I begun to think you was goin' to stop there all night," Master Roberts cried irritably when his partner appeared. "Seemed like you was havin' a mighty good time along at the first of it."

"That was when I was tellin' how I'd been gettin' on up at headquarters. Say, Jip will have to be tried in court!"

"What? Can't Ninety-four's men stop it?" Dan cried in surprise, for he had believed the firemen could do whatsoever they would, and Seth repeated all that 'Lish Davis had said, adding in conclusion:

"You'd better try to see him again, an' tell the poor fellow how things stand."

"He'll take it mighty hard."

"I'm 'fraid so; but there's nothin' else that can be done. Is Bill over to the room?"

"He allowed he'd have to stop down-town quite a spell to-night, an' I agreed to see him there after I'd met you. Why not take a spin as far as the post-office?"

Seth was not opposed to a stroll through the city, even though wearied by his labors of the day.

His heart was so sore because it would be impossible for him to do anything in Jip's behalf that he had no inclination to spend the time in his lodgings, where he could do nothing save dwell upon the painful situation of the boy who had tried to injure him.

After a short time Dan succeeded in partially banishing his partner's sorrowful thoughts by speaking of his own plans regarding the prospective store on Third Avenue, and broached the subject by paying to Seth his share of the room-rent.

"Did you make all that to-day?" the amateur asked in surprise.

"Yes, an' thirty-two cents more."

"You must have humped yourself."

"That's jest what I did do. You see, if I count on ever ownin' that store I've got to work, same's you did to get into the Department, an' I never lost a minute this mornin'. I'd made a big pile if it hadn't been for goin' to see Jip."

Then Dan pictured to his partner in words the establishment he intended one day to own, giving all the details with such exactness as to prove that he must have spent considerable time reflecting upon the matter.

"That's what I want," he said as he concluded his description of the store; "but when you come to think that I've only got thirty-two cents towards it, there don't seem much chance I'll ever pull through."

"You'll have twice as much to-morrow night, an' every day it'll keep on growin' till in a little while you'll have a pile that'll make your eyes stick out. A feller can do pretty near what he counts on, if he sticks right at it."

"You can bet I'll stick at the store part of it, though I ain't certain as I'd ever believed it could be done if you hadn't got into the Department. When you was runnin' to fires like as if there might be big money in it, I counted it was foolishness; but now the thing looks different."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by Sam Barney, who suddenly appeared from around a corner much as if he had popped out with the purpose of frightening them.

Seth would have passed the would-be detective without a word, for after what had been done he felt no desire to so

much as speak with him; but now was the hour of Master Barney's triumph, and he did not intend to lose any opportunity of sounding his own praises.

"Well," he cried, stepping directly in front of the boys, "what do you think *now* 'bout my bein' a detective?"

"If you are one, nobody knows it but yourself," Dan replied angrily.

"Didn't I get Jip Collins arrested?"

"Yes, an' anybody might er done the same thing, without startin' in by goin' to Philadelphia. It seems you wasn't much of a detective when you figgered that he was over there."

"If you fellers hadn't been so smart with your railroad ticket I'd never gone, 'cause it didn't take me very long to see how I'd made a mistake in figgerin', after I put my mind right down to it."

"I notice you hung 'round here two days waitin' for us to raise the money. Couldn't you find the mistake before then?"

"I didn't try; but when I started in without bein' mixed up with a crowd of duffers like you, I soon put the thing through."

"Yes, it was big detective work to walk over to Thirty-fourth Street Ferry an' find him."

"I snaked him right out er a house where he was hidin'."

"Then Denny Macey was the one who gave Jip away, an' I'll have a settlement with that chump some day!" Dan cried angrily.

Now for the first time Seth took part in the conversation, by saying curtly to Sam:

"You've got Jip in jail, an' think it's goin' to be a big thing to brag about; but I don't believe you'll make any great shakes out of it. Come on, Dan, we don't want to hang 'round here any longer."

"You're feelin' mighty fine, Seth Bartlett, jest 'cause you're given the chance to loaf 'round the Fire Department headquarters an' sweep the floors!" Sam cried angrily. "I s'pose you think you're pretty nigh the only feller in this town?"

"Come ahead, Dan," and Seth would have passed on but that the would-be detective barred his way.

"I don't want any talk with you, Sam Barney, an' what's more I won't have any."

"Won't, eh? Suppose I slap your face, how'll it be then?"

Instinctively Seth put himself in a posture of defence, and instantly afterward realized that he must not be accused of making a disturbance on the street lest it work to his harm in the Department.

Then once again he would have passed Master Barney.

The would-be detective was not brave save where he believed he had a decided advantage, and the fact that Seth seemed eager to avoid an encounter gave him great confidence in his own abilities.

He stepped up menacingly, brandishing his fists directly under Seth's nose, and Dan cried sharply to his partner:

"Why don't you knock his head off?"

"He don't dare to so much as raise his hands, except he's up 'round Ninety-four's house, where he thinks some of the firemen will back him!" Sam cried derisively as he redoubled his efforts to provoke the amateur.

Seth's cheeks were flaming red, and he clenched his fists until the knuckles were white, in the effort to restrain himself.

If he had been alone there is every probability he might have forgotten his determination to avoid such encounters, for the would-be detective was doing all he could to provoke a quarrel; but Dan Roberts, understanding full well why his partner remained inactive when the temptation to strike at least one blow was very great, took it upon himself to put an end to the scene.

Sam was standing directly in front of Seth, brandishing his fists, and indulging in such epithets as "coward" and "sneak," when Dan sprang forward suddenly, striking the bully a blow under the ear that sent him headlong into the gutter.

Then, after looking quickly around to make certain there were no policemen within ear-shot, he leaped upon the

discomfited detective, seizing him by the coat-collar in such a manner that it was impossible for Sam to raise his head.

"You're awful keen on havin' a row, an' I'm goin' to give you the chance! You knew Seth wouldn't put up his hands, because he don't count on havin' any black marks against him when he goes into the Department; but I ain't figgerin' on anythin' of that kind, an' can stand a little bit of a bad name for the sake of servin' you out."

"Come on, Dan, come on! Don't make a row here, 'cause in the first place Sam Barney ain't worth it, an' then again you mustn't get up a name for fightin'."

"I reckon that dressin' this chump down won't set me off very bad, an' I'm willin' to take the risks. Now stand up and show what you can do!" he added as he released his hold of the detective's collar.

Sam made no effort to rise, nor did he so much as reply.

"You was terrible sharp for a row with Seth, 'cause you counted on his not mixing up with sich as you. I'm a good bit smaller than he is, an' am ready to give you all the fightin' that's wanted. Come on, and be funny same's you was a minute ago."

"I ain't got any row with you, Dan Roberts," Sam muttered.

"What's the reason you haven't got as much of a one with me as you had with Seth? We're partners, an' he never said half the rough things about you that I have."

"Leave me alone, or I'll yell for the perlice!"

"I thought you wasn't achin' terrible bad for a fight," and Dan flourished his fists precisely as Sam had done while trying to provoke Seth. "Yell for the perlice, will yer? I've a precious good mind to give you a couple of black eyes, only that I hate to hit a feller who don't dare to put up his hands."

"Come on, Dan, don't spend your time with him!" Seth cried. "He won't fight, an' never would. There wouldn't been any bluff made if he hadn't known I'd promised myself not to get the name of bein' a bruiser."

Dan did as his partner suggested, and the would-be detective remained quietly in the gutter until the two were half a block away, when he arose and cried vindictively:

"I'll get square with you fellers yet! We'll see whether Seth Bartlett swells 'round headquarters much longer!"

"Don't say a word," Seth whispered as Dan half turned to make some reply. "All he wants is to get me into a row, an' it'll please the chump too well if we chin with him. I'm sorry you let yourself out."

"I ain't. I reckon that much of a fight won't count very hard against the Third Avenoo store, for I'll earn jest as big a pile of money to-morrow as if I'd let him make his bluff; but it might er been different with you."

Seth was by no means pleased with the outcome of this affair, although he did not say as much to his partner.

It seemed as if he had acted a cowardly part in allowing Sam to insult him, and then remain passive while Dan took up the quarrel.

He was positive he ought never to fight simply to please a bully, but equally confident that he was not manly to stand still while a fellow like Sam Barney imposed upon him.

It was a matter which he could not settle satisfactorily in his own mind, for whatever course he might have pursued seemed to be wrong.

"I'll see what Mr. Davis thinks about it," he said to himself, and then added to Dan, "It was mighty good of you, old man, to give Sam one clip for me; but I can't make out whether I ought'er stood still or put up my hands."

"Don't bother your head about it," Master Roberts replied carelessly. "That chump detective won't fool 'round us any more, an' we're well rid of him. Of course he'll do a pile of blowin' an' tellin' how he'll get square with us; but his talk ain't anythin' more'n wind."

This assurance did not content Seth. Now his only desire was to go home; but Dan had no idea of curtailing his enjoyment because of the encounter, therefore the amateur felt in duty bound to do as he wished.

That night Jip's friends were informed of what Lish Davis had said, and while the majority regretted the necessity which kept Master Collins a prisoner, all agreed that perhaps it might not be well for him to escape the consequences of his act too easily.

When Seth returned from headquarters on the following evening, with the report that Mr. Fernald had continued his instruction in gymnastics, he learned that Dan had, thanks to the lawyer employed by Ninety-four's men, been allowed to hold a long and private conversation with the prisoner.

Jip was still very penitent, and declared he deserved all the punishment which the law might inflict upon him; but at the same time it could readily be seen, according to Master Roberts's statement, that he was wonderfully relieved by the hope Lish Davis held out.

"From what the lawyer told me," Dan said when detailing to his partner all that had occurred during the interview, "it'll be quite a spell before Jip comes up for trial an' so long as he stays in jail I can't see but he's gettin' the best of it. Three square meals every day, an' at night a bed better'n he's had since he could remember."

"But he's locked in, an' that's what makes it hard to stand up under," Seth suggested, whereupon Dan cried with no little warmth:

"I'd be willin' to let 'em lock me up nights for the sake of havin' it as easy as it is for Jip. Nothin' to do, an' livin' off the fat of the land."

"I reckon after one day you'd be willin' to take less, an' have a chance to go where you pleased," Seth replied so emphatically that Master Roberts did not consider it wise to continue the argument.

During the three days which followed the amateur fireman worked so hard to win the approval of his teacher that Mr. Fernald finally told him he was trying to do too much, and cut down his tasks nearly one half, an act which won for him the unqualified approval of Ninety-four's crew.

It was on the morning of the fifth day after Jip Collins's arrest, and just as Josh Fernald was bringing Seth's lesson to a conclusion, that one of the employes entered the gymnasium with a letter, and cried in a loud voice:

"Does anybody here know a fellow by the name of Seth Bartlett?"

"That's me," the amateur replied after a moment's thought: "but I don't reckon I've got a letter, 'cause there's nobody who'd write to me."

"Here's what the address says," and the young man held the envelope in such a manner that both the boy and his instructor could see the superscription:

"Seth Bartlett, fireman up at headquarters, New York."

Seth made no attempt to take the missive until Mr. Fernald asked quite sharply:

"Why don't you take it? There's no other of that name here so far as I know."

"I never had a letter, an' it can't be for me."

"You're the only Seth Bartlett in the building, and it must belong to you," the messenger said impatiently, whereat he threw the missive toward Seth and went his way.

Not until Mr. Fernald had peremptorily ordered the boy to open the letter in order to see if it was intended for him, did the amateur as much as touch the soiled envelope; but after having torn it open the expression on his face told that the writer was not a stranger.

This is what Seth read in ill-formed letters, many of them occupying the depth of two lines, some in written and others in printed characters:

"Seth Bartlett, fireman up at headquarters.

DEER SETH:

"Sam Barney struck this town the other day, an' borrowed a dollar off er me. You know my folks stopped here on the way to Baltimore, an' I've been tryin' to earn a little money so's to see me threw. I'm in Philadelphy, an' Sam cum over here with a big stiff 'bout how you an' Bill Dean had cent him to hunt for Jip Collins. He was broke an' ced if I'd let him have money enuf to git home you or Bill would pay it back. It's been most a week sence he was here an' I ain't heard from you. Why don't you send the good dollar I put up to help you along. I'm livin' at 1451-1/2 Filbert Street an' want my stuff.

"Yours till deth shal part us,

"JOE CARTER."

"So the letter is for you, even though you never received one before?" Mr. Fernald quietly remarked as Seth, having read the lines after considerable difficulty, refolded the paper and returned it to the envelope.

"Yes, sir, an' it's from a feller in Philadelphia. I don't reckon you know who Jip Collins is; but this has got somethin' to do with his business."

As he spoke Seth unfolded the paper and handed it to his instructor, who, after deciphering it, quite naturally asked for an explanation.

"If you owe this boy money, send it to him at once, for people who do not pay their bills are in bad odor up here."

"I never borrowed a cent of him," Seth cried indignantly, and then he told Mr. Fernald the whole story.

The old instructor appeared to be amused by the recital, and when it was concluded asked if Seth wanted leave of absence to straighten the matter out.

"I'll have plenty of time after leaving here to-night; but what bothers me is that I may have a row with Sam Barney, 'cause I ain't goin' to let him swell 'round borrowin' money on my account."

"And in that you are perfectly right, my boy."

"He knows I don't dare to fight on the street, 'cause it may give me a black mark in the Department, an' that would never do, so I reckon he'll be mighty lippy 'bout it."

"Ask 'Lish Davis! I can't recommend you to create a disturbance, and yet it seems hard you should be imposed upon because of the situation. Whatever the driver of Ninety-four advises, you may do without fear of the consequences, for there isn't a more level-headed man in the Department, and it's only his lack of education that has prevented him from rising in the service."

"I'll see him to-night," Seth replied as he put the letter in his pocket, and then without further delay he set about his regular duties.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUBPOENA.

Impatient though Seth was to talk with 'Lish Davis and his roommates concerning what had been done by Sam Barney in the matter of borrowing money on the account of others, he made no attempt to leave headquarters a single moment earlier than usual.

When the hours of labor had come to an end, however, he did not linger, and with a cheery "good-night" to Mr. Fernald, for by this time the teacher and his pupil were on excellent terms, he set off at full speed for Ninety-four's house.

Unless they were out on duty, this particular company, since Seth went to work at headquarters, could always be found on the lower floor of the building at about six o'clock in the evening awaiting the arrival of "their kid," and here Master Bartlett found them.

From the expression on his face all hands understood that something unpleasant had occurred, and 'Lish Davis asked in a tone of anxiety:

"What's gone wrong, Amateur? Haven't been getting into trouble with Josh, I hope?"

"Mr. Fernald is mighty kind to me; he says I shall go in the yard next week for half an hour each day, an' then you know I'll have a great chance to pick up points."

"Once he starts you in there the road is pretty straight up to a job in the Department. You look so kind-er peaked I was afraid something had gone wrong."

"Read that, an' then I reckon you'll think somethin' *has* gone wrong!" Seth exclaimed as he gave the driver Joe Carter's letter, unfolding the sheet that there might be no needless time spent in mastering its contents.

"Read it aloud, 'Lish," Jerry Walters cried, and the driver glanced toward Seth as if asking permission to do so.

"Go ahead, Mr. Davis. Of course everybody belongin' to this company has a right to know all about my business."

Davis did as he was requested, reading slowly as if enjoying the matter hugely, and interrupted now and then by exclamations of surprise or amusement from his comrades.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Seth asked angrily when the driver, having come to the end, remained silent.

"It begins to look as if your friend the detective could manage to take care of himself by hook or by crook. I can't see that either you or Bill Dean is bound by any such a transaction, unless you gave Sam permission to borrow money on your account."

"Of course we wasn't such fools as to do that! It's a reg'lar swindle, that's what it is, an' if I'd known 'bout it when Dan and me met him down-town, I'm 'fraid I'd punched his head, even if it would be fightin' on the street!"

"What's that?" Mr. Davis asked sharply. "Something been going on that we haven't heard?"

"I counted on tellin' you; but it seems as if there's always a bother to talk 'bout, so I waited a spell."

Then Seth gave a detailed account of the encounter with the would-be detective, and when he had concluded the recital 'Lish Davis looked around at his companions as if waiting to hear their comments before he expressed an opinion.

"You ought'er lit right out on him," Jerry Walters cried warmly. "He thinks you won't fight, an' will keep on makin' trouble for you till he learns that it ain't safe."

"Don't listen to such advice, Seth," the captain added quickly. "You did perfectly right, and are to be praised for it, more particularly since the temptation must have been very great."

Then the men began what finally grew into a heated discussion, as to how the boy should have acted under such provoking circumstances, and not until it was brought to a close did 'Lish Davis give his opinion.

"I'm allowing that you can't afford to raise a brawl, Amateur," he said, deliberately. "If that imitation detective 'mounted to anything the case might be different, and though I'm free to say that every man or boy should defend himself when it's necessary, there's no wisdom in raising a disturbance while it's possible to walk on. The trouble is that too many of

us are apt to think we can't get away from what appears to be a bad scrape without coming to blows; but in nine cases out of ten that isn't the truth."

"But what am I to do 'bout this money he borrowed from Joe Carter?" Seth asked as the driver ceased speaking.

"I can't see that you've got any call to disturb yourself. Write and tell the boy in Philadelphia that the imitation detective had no authority to borrow money in your name, and let that settle it."

This did not appear to Seth the proper course, for he felt that he was in a certain sense bound to prevent Joe Carter from losing anything by being thus confiding; but yet he would not have questioned the driver's decision.

"It's mighty aggravating, Amateur, I'm free to confess," Lish Davis added as he noted the expression on the boy's face; "but you must remember that the poorest way to settle a difficulty is by fighting. When you're where it's got to be done in order to save yourself from being hurt or robbed, then put up your hands like a man, first making certain there's no other way out. If it's all the same to you, I'm counting on toddling down to Tenth Street to-night."

"Do you mean that I'm goin' to school now?"

"I reckon the time has come when you may as well begin. Jerry Walters and me have made the trade, so after you've slicked up a bit, drop in here and we'll start."

"All right, sir," Seth cried as he hurried away to make ready for what he knew must be a trying ordeal. He understood that he was remarkably ignorant for one of his years, and had an idea that every pupil in the school would make sport of him.

When the amateur fireman arrived at his lodgings he found his roommates awaiting him, and in the fewest possible words made known Sam Barney's misdemeanor, producing Joe Carter's letter in proof of his assertion.

It can well be imagined that both the boys were angry and surprised by the information, and Bill insisted that all three set out at once in search of the offender.

"I've got to start in on school to-night, an' so I can't go," Seth replied mournfully.

"How long are you goin' to keep up sich a racket as that?" Dan asked, as if personally aggrieved because such a course was to be pursued.

"Cordin' to the way Mr. Davis talks I'll have to stick at it till I'm a reg'lar fireman, an' perhaps a good bit after that."

"Then I'd give up tryin' to get into the Department!" Master Roberts replied emphatically. "I wouldn't do all that funny business if I never 'mounted to anythin' more'n a bootblack!"

"It's jest what you ought'er do, Dan, if you ever expect to own that Third Avenoo store."

"I'd like to know why?"

"Now, that's a foolish question. S'posen you got the shop this very minute, an' wanted to write a letter, or figger up how much anythin' cost? What kind of a fist would you make of it?"

Dan did not reply, but changed the subject of conversation by asking Bill:

"What er you goin' to do 'bout Sam Barney?"

"You an' me will hunt him up, an' by the time we're through with the chump he won't borrow money in sich a way ag'in, I reckon. Who'll write to Joe Carter 'bout it?"

"If Seth is goin' to school he ought'er do that much, 'cause it'll come right in his line of business."

"I'll do the best I can at it," the amateur fireman replied readily, and added as his friends turned to leave the room. "Now, don't have a reg'lar row with that chump. It'll be enough if you show him up to all the fellers as a reg'lar fraud, and then you won't stand any chance of gettin' into trouble with the perlice."

"We'll 'tend to the business in proper shape," Bill replied in a meaning tone, and Seth was not sadly disturbed in mind as he understood, or thought he did, that Sam Barney would spend a very unpleasant evening if these two acquaintances chanced to meet him.

When he was alone Seth set about making preparations for beginning his pursuit of knowledge, and the prospect before him was by no means pleasant.

Lish Davis was awaiting his arrival when he reentered the engine-house, and immediately began laughing heartily at the expression on the boy's face.

"It ain't going to be half as bad as you're counting on, Amateur," the driver cried as soon as he could control his mirth, and then the two set out.

Mr. Davis had but one remark of importance to make during the journey, and that impressed Seth more than anything which had been said to him that day.

"If I'd spent half or even a quarter of my spare time while I was a boy, in study, instead of being only the driver of Ninety-four, I might be her captain at the very least. You may have got it into your head that firemen don't know anything except how to use an axe or handle hose; but it's a big mistake. If you want to keep on rising in the Department, you've got to have more book-learning than I was willing to get."

When they arrived at the school, Lish did not spend very much time in introducing his *protege*.

"Here's the kid I was telling you about," he said, and then Seth was left to fight his own battle.

That going to school was not as hard as he had fancied was known at the engine-house when the amateur returned shortly after nine o'clock, for then he said with an air of relief:

"I ain't so certain but that I'll like it, after I kind-er get the hang of things."

"Course you will, Amateur, course you will; but it's bound to be hard work, and there don't seem to be much chance for play in your life the way we've mapped it out for you. All hands of us have been figgering how we'd kind-er let up on you, and it's been decided that you shall sleep here every Saturday night. What calls come in 'twixt the ending of the school business and midnight, you're to answer as if belonging reg'larly to the company."

Seth's eyes glistened with delight, and when he had gone to his room the driver said in a tone of satisfaction to his comrades:

"That kid is bound to make his mark in the Department some day, and we'll be patting ourselves on the head for having given him a show. Just think of a boy like him being tickled way up in G when you give him a chance to work at a fire! He was reg'larly born for the business."

When Seth arrived at Mrs. Hanson's he found his roommates awaiting his arrival.

"Didn't you find Sam?" he asked in surprise that they should have returned so soon.

"That's what we did; met him down by the post-office where there was a whole crowd of the fellers, an' by this time I reckon he don't think he's a terrible big man."

"What did he say 'bout givin' Joe Carter sich a yam?"

"First off he tried to say it wasn't so; but when we flashed up the letter, it was all over, an' the chump couldn't so much as yip, 'cept to promise to pay the bill with the very first money he could scrape together."

"Then you didn't have any row?"

"Not a bit of it."

"I was 'fraid you might thump him, an' the perlice would jump in."

"We didn't reckon on bein' jugged jest 'cause of him," Bill replied, quietly. "Instead of fightin', Dan jest shoved him inside the post-office quick-like an' I let him have a couple of mighty good clips alongside the head. When he yelled, we lit out an' come up here. If it hadn't been that you're tryin' so hard to get into the Department, we might er had a row with the duffer; but seein's anythin' of the kind would give you a black eye, we kept quiet."

Dan and Master Dean both appeared to think they deserved praise for having been so cautious, and Seth did not believe it would be wise to reproach them for what had been done.

After this affair there was nothing out of the ordinary in Seth's life for ten days or more, except during the two Saturday nights he slept at Ninety-four's house, where on each occasion it was his good fortune to go out with the engine.

At headquarters Mr. Fernald pushed him along in the drill as rapidly as possible, and he was allowed to devote considerably more than two hours each day to the lessons.

At school he made as much advancement as could have been expected, and really came to look forward with pleasure

upon his tasks there, for 'Lish Davis's remark as to the value of an education had not been forgotten.

Then came the day when he was summoned from the yard where he had been taking part in a drill with ladders, to meet a stranger who handed him a printed document, the meaning of which he failed to understand until Mr. Fernald explained that it was a subpoena, or, in other words, a command for him to appear in court on the following morning to give evidence in the case of the State vs. Jipson Collins.

The officer who brought the summons stated that he had served a similar document upon Dan Roberts a few hours previous, and cautioned Seth against failing to obey.

"I reckon they'll have to get along without me, 'cause I can't leave here," he replied, as if believing such an excuse must be accepted by any fair-minded judge.

Then it was Mr. Fernald explained the nature of a subpoena, and Seth was decidedly surprised at learning that he could, and probably would, be arrested if he refused to obey.

"There is no need of your coming here at all to-morrow," the old man said, "no matter how early you may get out of court. You're needing a holiday, lad, and I'm glad of an excuse for giving you one."

Not until he returned from school that evening did Seth see his roommates, and then he found them in a high state of excitement because of the approaching trial.

"Mr. Davis says he shall be there, an' the lawyer is to 'tend right out so's to say a good word for poor Jip when the time comes," Seth hastened to state, and from that moment until it seemed absolutely necessary they should retire, the boys discussed the probable fate of the firebug.

Next morning when Seth went to the engine-house to perform his customary task of blacking the men's boots, Dan set out with him, saying as they left Mrs. Hanson's:

"If it wasn't for that Third Avenoo store I wouldn't go down-town to-day, till it was time for the trial to begin; but I can't lose a whole mornin's work."

"That's the way to stick at it!" Seth cried approvingly. "How much money have you got laid up?"

"Three dollars an' five cents. Oh, I'm gettin' there, old man, though 'cordin' to the way things are workin' it'll take quite a spell."

"You'll strike a rush some day, an' then it'll pile up in great shape. Stick at it, Dan."

"That's what I'm reckonin' on doin', an' say, Seth, if it don't cost too much, I'm goin' to 'tend out on school, same's you do. Bill has 'greed to come into the snap, an' we'll make it lively all 'round."

"It won't cost you a cent; Mr. Davis says so."

"Then we'll begin to-night, but I don't want the fellers to know about it, 'cause they'd set up sich a terrible howl."

Dan did not waste any more time in conversation, but hurried away to take advantage of the early demand for papers, and 'Lish Davis said sagely when Seth had repeated the conversation to him:

"Now you can see the result of a good example, Amateur. If you had kicked against going to school, your roommates never'd thought of trying the same game, and so by helping yourself you've gone a long way towards helping others. Contrariwise, if you'd been cutting 'round town, raising rows and getting into all kinds of trouble, you'd find them as would follow in your track, so it's a pretty sure thing that a boy is bound to walk straight because of the effect it'll have on others, even if for no other reason."

Seth made no reply to this brief lecture; he was learning very much of life through his intercourse with Ninety-four's men, and it seemed to him as if each day some new idea regarding a boy's work was to be gained.

"Your firebug has his chance this forenoon, eh?" 'Lish asked after a short pause.

"Yes, sir, an' I'm hopin' mighty hard that he'll get off this time."

"I reckon a good deal depends on you and your partner."

"How do you mean?"

"If the firebug pleads guilty as his lawyer has advised him to, the judge will only call on you two witnesses to tell how it happened, so's he can get an idea of about how hard Jip ought'er be punished."

"Then if we talk smooth he stands a better chance, eh?"

"That's 'bout the size of it, Amateur."

During the remainder of the time he spent in Ninety-four's quarters Seth was unusually thoughtful, and immediately his work was finished he asked the driver if there was any objection to his going down-town.

"Now see here, Amateur, there's no call for you to come 'round me with a question like that. I'm only too glad you've got a chance to get a holiday, and I advise you to spend all the time, till the hour for school, among your old chums. I don't reckon you've got any big pile of money left by this time, eh?"

"Well, I don't need a cent, 'cept for my rent, an' that ain't costin' such a terrible pile."

"Have you got enough to buy your breakfast with?"

"I'll get whatever I need."

"See here, Amateur, how much money have you on hand?" 'Lish asked so sternly that Seth could no longer evade the question.

"Well, I'm broke; but there's no need of my havin' a single cent. I ain't doin' much swellin' lately."

"Take this," and the driver thrust a dollar in Seth's hands. "I ain't giving it to you, so there's no call to kick. You've got to borrow it, or go hungry, and that I'm not minded you shall do."

"I haven't done anything of the kind yet a while," the Amateur replied, with a hearty laugh, and then he began to speak of Jip once more lest 'Lish Davis might take it into his head to ask how long he had thus been penniless, for it was nearly a week since he had so much as a nickel in his pocket.

"I'll pay back the dollar as soon as I get my month's wages," he said, as, his work finished, he made ready to go down-town, and the driver replied cheerily:

"I'm counting on it, Amateur, and I'm also reckoning that you'll come to me again when that's gone, else you and me will have a settling that won't be pleasant to one of us."

Then Seth started down-town with a smile on his face, as he repeated again and again to himself:

"Folks are mighty good to me, mighty good!"

When he arrived in that locality where he formerly transacted business, his old friends welcomed him heartily, and every one who claimed the slightest acquaintance had a great many questions to ask concerning his position at headquarters.

Not until nearly the hour set for the witnesses to be at court did Seth find an opportunity of speaking privately with his partner, and then he repeated what 'Lish Davis had said as to the possible effect their evidence might have in the case.

"We must be careful to tell the truth, Dan; but there's no need of our rubbin' it in very bad."

"That'll be all right," Master Roberts replied confidently. "Jest wait till the judge begins to pump me, an' you'll see how slick I'll make it for Jip."

"Don't put it on too thick."

"See here, Seth, I reckon I know how to run this thing. Don't you worry 'bout me; but be kind-er thinkin' up what you'll say."

"I don't s'pose we'll have a chance for anything 'cept to answer questions."

"I'll bet I can sneak in a good word now an' then, never mind how hard they try to stop me. Say, have you seen Sam Barney?"

"No; is he goin' to the court?"

"'Cordin' to the way he's been swellin' hisself out this mornin' you'd think he was countin' on runnin' the whole thing. He told some of the fellers that the trial wouldn't begin if he wasn't there, 'cause he's the only one who can send Jip up the river. Bill wanted me to go in with him for usin' the chump so rough he couldn't more'n crawl, an' that would fix things for Jip; but I was 'fraid it might make talk in the court so's you'd get the worst of it."

"It's better to let him alone, though I'm awful sorry he's so set on this detective business, 'cause if it hadn't been for

that, Jip never'd been 'rested."

At this moment Bill Dean joined his friends with the information that the would-be detective had already started for the court-room, and proposed that they set out at once.

"I'm goin' to get a seat close to that duffer, an' let him know he'll get his face into trouble if he tells any more'n is called for. I wonder why he couldn't be yanked up for lyin' to Joe Carter when he borrowed that money? If he should have a dose of it in jail, I reckon he wouldn't be so hot to see Jip sent up."

Dan was uncertain whether a charge might not have been brought against the would-be detective because of what he had done in Philadelphia, but dismissed the matter without very much study, on the ground that it was now too late to render such a course of advantage to the firebug.

Then the three, followed or accompanied by nearly all their acquaintances, went toward the court-room.



CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIAL.

The door-keeper of the court attempted to check the rush which began with the entrance of Seth, Dan, and Bill; but it was impossible because of his delay.

He had at first objected to admitting the amateur fireman and his partner, but they speedily proved they were entitled to enter, by producing the subpoenas, and as he stepped aside for them to go in, the following came on with a rush as powerful as it was unexpected.

The official would have swept down upon the offenders and literally dragged them out, but that 'Lish Davis, who was standing just inside the door, said with a laugh:

"I don't reckon you've got time to sort 'em, Mr. Officer. A kid is to be tried for arson this morning, and more'n likely as not half the crowd has been summoned as witnesses, for it's only through his acquaintances that anything can be proven."

The door-keeper looked for an instant at the buzzing throng which had settled down upon the front seats, and, understanding what a difficult task he might be setting himself, evidently decided that Mr. Davis was in the right.

Sam Barney already sat on the front row of seats allotted to spectators when Mrs. Hanson's lodgers entered, and although Seth would have been better pleased to remain at a greater distance from the would-be detective, Bill Dean forced him along until they were directly behind Jip's enemy.

"Don't speak to him," Seth whispered. "I'm sorry we're so near the duffer."

"It's jest where I counted on gettin'," Bill replied, in a tone of satisfaction. "I won't have any row with the chump, but only shake him up a bit."

"If we make any noise, all hands will be fired out."

"Watch an' see how quiet I'll be," Master Dean replied, and then before his companion could check him, he had leaned over and whispered in Sam's ear: "Be mighty careful you tell the truth in this court, or I'll let out to the judge what you did in Philadelphia, an' then perhaps Jip Collins won't be the only prisoner 'round here."

Master Barney turned quickly, and an expression of disquiet came over his face as he saw who were directly behind him.

He did not venture to make any remark, nor did Bill think it wise to repeat the threat; but he shook his fist warningly, which served the same purpose.

"Be quiet," Seth whispered imploringly. "It would be terrible if we got into a row here, for Mr. Davis is standing close by the door watchin' us."

"I won't do a thing till we get outside, unless it happens that I have to tell the judge 'bout Sam's borrowin' that money," Master Dean replied in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by the alleged detective.

Then the attention of all the sidewalk merchants was attracted to the opposite side of the room by Dan Roberts, who whispered loudly, pointing with outstretched finger:

"There he is! There's Jip!"

The prisoner was being led in by a burly policeman, who kept a firm hold on the boy's collar as if fearful he might make some desperate attempt at escape, and there was not a person in the court-room, with the probable exception of Sam Barney, who failed to feel a certain sympathy for the frightened lad.

"That's his lawyer--the little feller with the big nose," Dan whispered so loudly that not only his friends in the immediate vicinity, but all the attorneys within the enclosure, set apart for their especial use, heard the words, and much merriment ensued, during which the cause of it looked around in surprise, unable to discover the meaning of it.

Seth and Dan, who had never before attended the trial of a prisoner, expected there would be considerable ceremony, in which policemen would play a prominent part; therefore the case was begun and gone on with to some extent before they were aware of the fact.

It is true they saw Jip Collins standing up while the clerk read from a paper a quantity of words which had no meaning to them, and after a time, the prisoner was allowed to sit down again.

Then the "little man with the big nose" talked to the judge as if confiding in him some secret, after which the clerk called loudly:

"Daniel Roberts! Daniel Roberts!"

Seth's partner gazed about him curiously, never once thinking the clerk referred to him, until 'Lish Davis, coming swiftly down from his station near the door, leaned over and pinched Dan's ear as he asked:

"Why don't you answer to your name?"

"Is it me they mean?" Dan asked, and at that instant the clerk repeated the call.

Dan looked about him in perplexity, uncertain as to what he should do, until 'Lish reached over to seize him by the collar, when he cried in a shrill voice:

"Here I be, Mister!"

"Come forward to the witness-stand," the official said sharply, while the spectators laughed heartily.

It was several moments before Master Roberts could be made to understand exactly where he should go, and then, assisted by 'Lish Davis and the clerk, he finally gained the stand, where he stood gazing around with the most friendly expression on his face.

For some reason no question was asked immediately, and after waiting two or three moments, Dan, believing the judge was ready to hear his story, began earnestly:

"You see, it's jest this way: Jip, he didn't count on doin' anything off color, an' if it hadn't been for Sam Barney----"

"Silence in the court!" the crier called, and Dan looked up in surprise at being interrupted so soon.

"He didn't reckon on bein'----"

Dan stopped again as the same voice called loudly for silence in the court, and then the attorney employed to defend Jip explained matters by saying:

"You must wait until you are questioned, Daniel. There will be ample opportunity to give your evidence."

"Dan ain't goin' to let any chance slip him," Bill Dean whispered confidentially to Seth, and Sam Barney said in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by those immediately behind him:

"He's a reg'lar chump, else he'd know enough to behave hisself on the witness-stand."

"He'll behave himself outside on the sidewalk in a way you won't like if you shoot off your mouth too much," Bill whispered, and Seth shook his friend's arm warningly lest he disturb the court by his threats.

'Lish Davis evidently saw that there was bad blood between the alleged detective and Seth's roommate, and at once forced the boys on the front seat to move nearer together until he had room to sit where he could keep all of them under his eye, a proceeding which caused the amateur fireman great relief of mind.

After what seemed like a long time in waiting, Jip's attorney asked the witness:

"What is your name?"

Dan appeared surprised at such a question, and after some slight hesitation replied:

"Why, I'm the feller you told to come here. Didn't you hear the man call my name? This is where they said I was to stand."

The judge rapped smartly on the desk in front of him, and Dan turned quickly to see what had happened.

"Answer properly the questions asked of you!"

"That's what----"

The attorney interrupted him by asking as before:

"What is your name?"

"It's Dan Roberts, of course, an' I was----"

"Are you acquainted with the prisoner?"

"Do you mean Jip? Why, of course I am; him an' me used to work together when he lived with Seth Bartlett----"

"Answer only the questions asked of you!" the judge said sternly, and for the instant Dan was abashed; but quickly recovered himself as he remembered what Seth had said regarding the possibility of aiding Jip by his evidence.

"Where were you when he set fire to the shed in Baxter's lumber-yard?"

"Now, see here, mister, Jip never 'd done that----"

"Where were you?" the attorney repeated, speaking so sharply that for the moment Dan was startled.

"Why, in the shed, of course, we----"

"Had you heard the prisoner threaten to set fire to the shed?"

"He didn't mean a word of it; did you, Jip? He was----"

"Unless you answer the questions which are asked, and in a proper manner, we shall find some means of punishing you," the judge said sternly, and Jip's attorney whispered a few words in the ear of the witness, which had the effect of checking him for the time being.

He was questioned regarding what he had heard Jip say as to burning the shed; how many times such threat had been repeated in his presence, and what the prisoner had told concerning the crime after it had been committed.

It was the last question which set loose the floodgates of his speech, and, regardless of the judge's warnings or the attorney's nervous gestures, he said, speaking rapidly in order that all might be told before they should check him:

"Jip, he was awful sorry 'cause he'd done it, an' said he'd square things if we'd let him. He wouldn't even put up his hands when I was goin' to thump him, an' if Sam Barney hadn't wanted to show hisself off for a detective there wouldn't been any fuss like this. What does he know 'bout bein' a detective? Why, I wouldn't----"

By this time the court officials managed to stop the flow of words; but not before he had shaken his fist in the direction of Sam, and caused even the judge to smile.

"You may step down," the clerk said, after order had been restored, and Dan asked innocently:

"Ain't you goin' to give me a chance to----"

"Step down!" was the stern command and Master Roberts was forced to obey, much to his displeasure.

"I'll bet I'd fix things if they'd give me a chance," he whispered to Seth as he took his seat; "but that lawyer 'Lish Davis hired don't 'mount to a row of pins."

Then the amateur fireman's name was called, and he proved a more satisfactory witness to all concerned than had Master Roberts.

He replied briefly to the questions, and when the examination was ended the judge asked how Jip had behaved after the crime was committed.

Then it was that Seth had an opportunity of telling how penitent the firebug had appeared to be; how eager he was to do all in his power toward repairing the wrong, and declared he did not believe the prisoner would "go crooked again."

'Lish Davis next went on the stand, and although he could not swear to Jip's repentance, he testified that the prisoner himself had sent in the alarm, and succeeded in saying many a good word for the boy.

"That driver is a dandy!" Dan whispered approvingly. "I wish the lawyer was half as good."

Master Roberts was better satisfied with the attorney a short time later, when he made a plea that sentence be suspended on the prisoner, who had promptly confessed his guilt, and even at the moment when the crime had been committed did all in his power to repair the mischief.

Then two or three others had something to say; but they appeared to be talking privately with the judge, rather than conducting the case, and to the great surprise of all the small spectators Sam Barney was not called to the witness-stand.

The fact that he had compassed the arrest of the prisoner was not even mentioned, much to the delight of Dan and Bill Dean, each of whom leaned forward from time to time to ask in a cautious whisper as to when the "big detective work was goin' to be showed up?"

After a time it seemed to those in the front seats as if the prisoner had been forgotten by the court, for nothing was said to or about him, and Bill was on the point of asking Seth if the trial was concluded, when the judge ordered Jip to stand up.

Then he lectured him severely on the crime of arson, explained how many years of his life would be spent in prison if the provisions of the law were carried out to their fullest extent, and finally announced that sentence would be suspended during good behavior.

At this point 'Lish Davis left the court-room as if he no longer had any interest in the proceedings, and after a certain time the attorney led Jip out of the building, the latter's acquaintances following in a body.

"Is it all over?" Dan cried, seizing the attorney by the arm in order to hold his attention, and before the gentleman could speak, Sam Barney cried vindictively:

"You can bet it ain't all over! I've been buncoed by a lot of cheap firemen, an' don't count on holdin' my tongue. You'll see Jip Collins in jail again before he's a day older."

"Yes, it is all over," the attorney said in reply to Dan's question. "So long as Jip behaves himself, nothing more will be done; but if he should go wrong, sentence for this crime will be pronounced, and most likely he will be given the extreme penalty."

"Can Sam Barney have him arrested?" Dan asked.

"No one can trouble him on this charge while he lives an honest life."

"Then I'll see that that duffer holds his tongue!" and Bill started toward the would-be detective in a threatening manner; but the latter was not minded to take any chances of an encounter.

He turned and fled instantly Bill made the advance, and did not halt until he was half a block or more away, when he shouted:

"Wait an' see what I'll do to all you chumps who think you're so awful smart!"

"I'll give you a chance of seein' what I'll do, an' without much waitin', if you make any more cheap talk!"

With this threat Bill turned his back on the disappointed Sam, and Seth begged of him to remain quiet.

"It's all right now," he replied complacently. "I've had my say, an' if Sam knows what's good for him, he'll keep his tongue quiet. There ain't any reason why I shouldn't fight, an' he'll soon find it out."

Then Seth turned to the attorney, who was yet talking with Jip, and asked:

"How's he goin' to pay you for lookin' after him?"

"I don't expect he can. The bill was settled by some firemen belonging to Ninety-four engine."

With this the lawyer, after advising Jip to call upon him from time to time, went his way, and Mrs. Hanson's lodgers stood looking at each other as if expecting some important proposition was about to be made.

"It won't do to take you up to our house, Jip, 'cause there are three of us already, an' the boss of the place can't have all the boys in the city runnin' in an' out there for sixty cents a week," Seth said hesitatingly, wondering what could be done with the lad who had been put on probation.

"I ain't thinkin' you could take me there," Master Collins replied promptly. "Now I'm out, I'll begin to sell papers down by the ferry again, 'cause I've got fourteen cents left, an' if Sam Barney leaves me alone, I'll pull through all right."

"If he so much as looks crossways at you, I'll give him something to remember me by," Bill cried.

"It's a good thing to get right at your work," Seth said approvingly. "Stick at it, an' us fellers will come to see you whenever we get a chance."

"You've been mighty good to me, all three of you, an' I only wish I could----"

It was impossible for the penitent firebug to say anything more. The tears he had been holding back since he first

appeared in court now came out in full force, and, seated on the curbstone, he gave full sway to the sense of loneliness and shame in his heart.

Mrs. Hanson's lodgers soothed him as best they could, and not until he was ready for business once more, with a bundle of evening papers under his arm, did Seth think of leaving him.

Dan and Bill had both equipped themselves for work, and promised to have an eye out for Jip during the remainder of that day at least; therefore, Seth believed himself at liberty to follow his own inclinations.

"I want to go up to the engine-house for a spell; but I'll be in the room in time to go with you to school," he said to Dan, and the latter replied cheerily:

"All right, we'll flash up there by dark, and you needn't be 'fraid anybody will get the best of Jip while we're round."

Ten minutes later Seth was in Ninety-four's quarters, standing in front of 'Lish Davis, as the latter asked sternly:

"Why didn't you stay down-town an' enjoy yourself? That's what I told you to do."

"I can have more fun up here, an' I didn't think you'd care if I loafed 'round till it was time to go to school."

"Care? Of course we don't, Amateur; but you ought'er have some change; there's no sense in hanging on here all the time."

"I don't see very much of you, an' perhaps----"

"You're reckoning that we may get a call, and you'll have the chance to go out with us?"

"If there was one, I'd like----"

Mr. Davis interrupted him by saying with mock seriousness:

"I'm afraid, Amateur, we shall have to hire a back-yard somewhere, and keep a little blaze going so's to amuse you."

Seth laughed heartily at this conceit, and then bethinking himself that there was no reason why he should not give the men's boots an extra polish, brought his outfit from the chamber above, although Jerry Walters insisted strongly that he should sit still "and visit with 'em."

To do this work he had drawn on an old pair of overalls to protect his blue trousers, taken off his coat, and was in full working costume, when a "click" came from the Morse instrument, and the men were already on their feet as the alarm began to sound.

"Am I in it?" Seth cried eagerly, as the horses dashed out of their stall, and 'Lish Davis replied, while attending to his portion of the work:

"I reckon we shall have to take you along, Amateur, seeing 's this fire seems to have started jest when you got into trim for hard work. Swing alongside the engineer, and we'll allow you're one of the company."

By the time the driver ceased speaking the engine was on its way out of the building, and Seth, swaying to and fro, clung for dear life to the guard-rail, as the mighty machine was drawn swiftly over the pavement.

"There's no chance of our getting first water this time, even if we are taking the mascot with us," Jerry Walters said with a laugh, and Amateur knew there were no less than three engines stationed nearer the signal-box, from which had come this alarm, than was Ninety-four.

"A nasty place for a fire," the engineer said as the engine, following another an hundred yards or more in advance, rolled toward a block of apartment houses, from the centre of which could be seen dense clouds of black smoke ascending.

"And it seems to have a good start," Walters added.

Then Ninety-four's hose was coupled on, and, without attracting the attention of the driver, Seth followed Joe Black and Jerry as they dragged the nozzle up the steps to the entrance of the threatened building.

"Get back, Amateur!" one of them shouted, and the boy cried imploringly:

"Please let me go as far as you do! It's my first chance, an' I've got my old clothes on!"

"All right; but have an eye on yourself, and see to it the battalion chief don't spot you," Joe Black replied carelessly, and Seth congratulated himself that he had gone to Ninety-four's quarters instead of spending his time down-town.

The fire appeared to have its strongest hold in the shaft of the elevator, coming from the basement, and the two men whom Seth was following, joined by Ben Dunton, dragged the long length of hose up one flight of stairs to the landing where tongues of yellow flame were apparently coming through the very floor.

Once they were in position for battle with the foe directly before them, Jerry Walters ran into the adjoining apartment, and shouted through the open window.

Even where he stood, shielding his face with his arm as best he could from the intense heat and blinding smoke, Seth could hear the cry:

"Ninety-four! Start your water! Start your water!"

If there was any response those on the landing did not hear it; but a few seconds later the leathern hose began to stiffen and round out into shape, and then with a mighty rush that threatened to wrest the nozzle from the three strong men who were holding it, a jet of water struck the burning floor with a force that would have shattered less substantial timbers.

"Hurrah for Ninety-four!" and Seth sprang to the hose, intent on doing a full share of the work even though his face was almost blistered by the heat.

"Get back, Amateur, get back! It's too hot for you here!" and Ben Dunton thrust Seth aside with his elbow at the very instant a wild scream was heard on the stairway in the rear of the firemen.

Turning quickly Seth saw dimly through the volume of choking vapor the form of a woman, and it seemed to him that Ben Dunton was trying to force her down the stairs when she shrieked:

"There's a child on the next floor!"

Jerry Walters and Joe Black could not leave their places of duty; but Ben Dunton sprang forward, and almost instinctively Seth followed, the smoke being so dense at the top of the stairs as to screen his movements from the view of those at the nozzle.

For an instant he fancied Jerry called his name, and then he was groping his way upward, half-blinded, choking, but eager to do what he might toward a rescue.

He gained the second landing.

Here everything was obscured by the black smoke, and he could no longer see Dunton, although now and then a crashing noise as of wood being splintered under heavy blows told, as he believed, that the brave fireman was intent on the effort to save life even though his own might pay the forfeit.

Then with a roar the flames burst from the elevator shaft directly in front of him, and he staggered on along the hallway, hardly knowing in which direction he was going until, from behind a door near at hand came that which sounded like the crying of a child.

He had only to turn the knob in order to gain an entrance into the apartment, which seemed entirely free from smoke, as compared with the place he had just left.

On the floor near the window sat a child crying piteously, and Seth caught the little thing in his arms, thinking it would be possible to gain the foot of the stairs, where he had left Black and Walters, before either he or his charge should receive serious injury.

Thus laden he ran toward the hallway, but only to retreat.

The flames were pouring up through the shaft, spreading out in every direction, and forming such a barrier as he could not hope to pass.

He shouted for Dunton, but no reply came, and for the briefest interval of time he despaired.

Then came into his mind as clearly as if the words were yet being spoken, what he had heard said to one of the classes concerning just such peril as he was in at that moment, and without delay he returned to the room, closing the door behind him to shut out the noisome vapor as nearly as might be.

"Don't cry, baby, don't cry," he said soothingly to the screaming child as he ran here and there looking for something with which to carry into practice the lesson he had received.

CHAPTER XVI.

WINNING A MEDAL.

The struggles and screams of the child he was trying to save served to confuse Seth, and the smoke, which was growing more stifling each moment, bewildered at the same time that it choked him.

But for the lectures the boy had heard at headquarters, neither he nor the baby would have left the apartment alive.

He realized the vital necessity of keeping a "grip on himself," as Josh Fernald had expressed it, and, in order the better to do so, repeated again and again the words of the instructor.

During the first dozen seconds he tried to soothe the child, and then came the thought that the little one would suffocate more quickly by inhaling the smoke-laden atmosphere as she gasped and sobbed violently.

A garment--perhaps it was a table-cloth or a light blanket--hung over the back of a chair near at hand, and this Seth wound around the baby's face, regardless of its struggles.

"A clear head is the next best thing to a ladder," he said again and again, repeating the words of Mr. Fernald, and all the while searching for a rope, or something which would serve him in its stead.

By this time the room was completely filled with smoke, and his eyes were blinded, smarting, burning.

Near the window was a footstool, and seizing this with one hand he hurled it through the glass.

Fresh air was a necessity now; he must have it, or speedily succumb to the deadly vapor.

Holding the child, who was apparently in a paroxysm of fear, or a spasm caused by pain, close against his breast, he thrust the upper portion of his body through the aperture regardless of the sharp fragments of glass which cut his flesh cruelly.

What a blessed relief was this first indrawing of comparatively fresh air!

The "clear head" was coming to him rapidly, and he understood that unless aid could be summoned from below he must make immediate battle with the vapor again, for with every moment the flames on the landing were increasing.

"Ninety-four!" he shouted at the full strength of his lungs. "This way, Ninety-four!"

He could hear from below a tumult of shouts and commands; but none of them appeared to be an answer to his cry.

The roaring of the fire as it came through the elevator-shaft could be clearly distinguished even above all the noise, and he knew full well the blaze must soon make its way through the door, which presented but a frail barrier against the on-rush of flame.

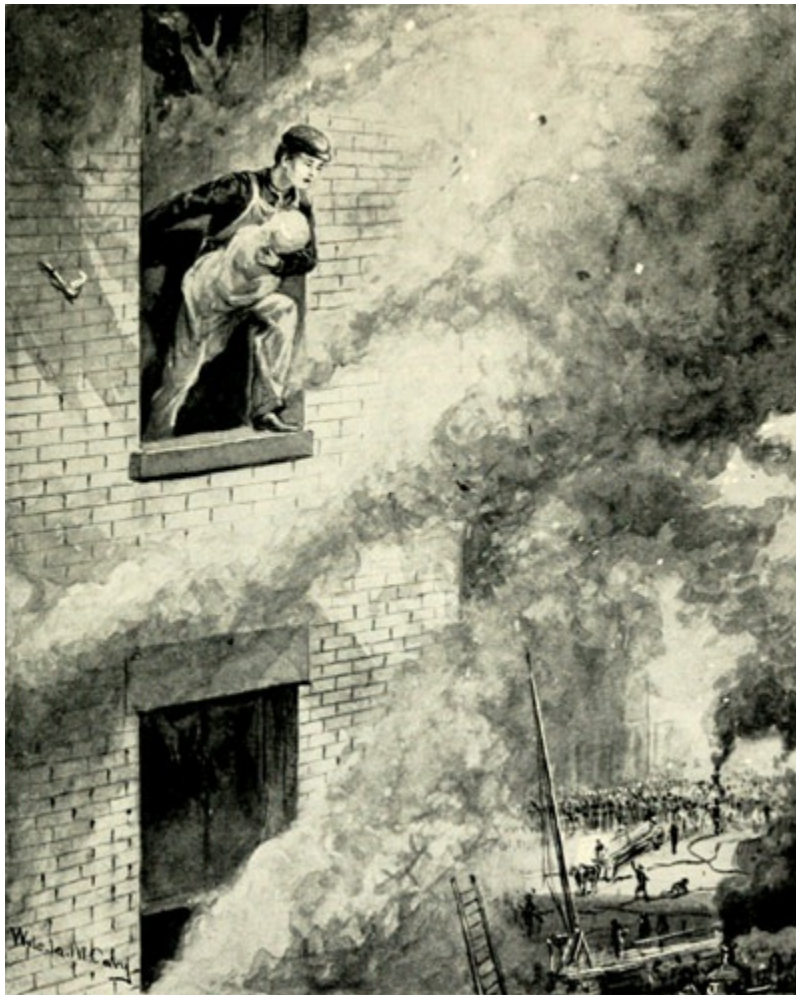
"Ninety-four! Here, Ninety-four!" he cried once more without receiving a reply, and feeling comparatively strong for another struggle against the smoke, he drew the covering more closely around the child's head, at the same time stepping back into the suffocating vapor.

He made his way by sense of touch rather than sight into the adjoining apartment.

It was the kitchen of the suite, and at one end, stretched across from wall to wall above the range, was a cord on which hung several articles of wearing apparel.

Placing the child, who had ceased to struggle, on the floor, he tore at this apology for a rope with all his strength, dragging it from its fastenings, and, taking up the baby once more, ran back to the window from which he had just come.

It was but the work of a few seconds to tie one end of the cord under the child's arms; but yet it seemed to him, half bewildered and suffering as he was, that more than five minutes passed before it had been completed.



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"Ninety-four!" he shouted as he thrust the seemingly lifeless body through the aperture, cutting his hands and arms again and again on the sharp points of glass.

Quickly, but at the same time gently, he lowered the burden until the cord was at its full length.

It did not seem possible this poor substitute for a life-line extended much below the top of the first story, and he dared not let go his hold lest the child should be dashed to death upon the pavement.

Once more he called for the men who he knew must be close at hand, leaning far out of the window in the faint hope he might be seen.

His eyes were so blinded that he could distinguish nothing; he was unable to say whether the smoke yet enveloped him or if he was in full view of the men below.

The sense of suffocation was heavy upon him; he tried to repeat Josh Fernald's words, but failed, and then came the knowledge—dim and unreal—that the cord was slipping, or being pulled, from his grasp.

He made a final effort to retain his hold, and at the instant there was in his mind, as if he dreamed, a fancy that strong arms were around him.

After that all was a blank until he opened his eyes to see 'Lish Davis bending over him as he had done on that night when Jip Collins set fire to the shed in Baxter's lumber-yard.

"Where's the baby?" he asked, attempting to rise, but forced back by the deathly faintness which assailed him.

"His mother has got him by this time, Amateur, and you've made a man of yourself in shorter order than the majority of us are able to do. It was a close shave, lad, and we'll have no more like it till the time comes when it's your duty to take such chances."

The driver's voice sounded oddly to the half-stupefied boy; usually it was gruff, like that of a man in a bad temper, but

now it quavered as if the speaker was making an unsuccessful effort to control his emotions.

Seth allowed his head to fall back on a pile of rubber blankets, and as his cheeks touched the smooth surface there came to him the thought that once more he was in the patrol-wagon.

How long he remained apparently unable to speak he had no idea, and then he heard the shout from afar off, but readily distinguishable above the panting of the engines:

"How is Ninety-four's kid?"

'Lish Davis rose to his feet and cried in reply:

"He's got his head again, and appears to be all right!"

At that moment some one stepped to the side of the wagon and asked the driver:

"Shall we send an ambulance?"

"I reckon he'll get along without it, Chief. It's only the reg'lar dose, as nigh as I can make out."

"How did he happen to be here instead of at headquarters?"

"It was his day off, owing to being a witness in an arson case, and he'd come up to the house to visit us."

"We shall have to put him in a straight-jacket until he is taken on as a fireman, else something serious may happen. This would be a case for a medal if he belonged to the Department."

"That's what he does, Chief. He comes as nigh being one of Ninety-four's men as I am, and if it so be a medal belongs to him, we'll see he gets it."

Seth heard, but did not understand this conversation.

He knew it was one of the battalion chiefs who had been talking with Mr. Davis, and it was enough for him that his name had been spoken in a friendly tone.

The driver leaned over him once more, and asked almost tenderly:

"Will I send you up to the house, Amateur?"

"Can't I stay till Ninety-four pulls out?"

"Well, of all gluttons, you're the worst!" 'Lish Davis cried as if in delight. "Dosed 'way up till you can hardly wink, and yet wanting to hold on to the last! Ben Dunton is caring for the team, and I reckon you and I had better pull out in this 'ere hurry-up."

"What about the fire?"

"It's under control, though I'm allowing it'll be a full two hours before Ninety-four gets the word to leave."

Then Davis left the boy a moment, and when he returned the patrol-wagon was driven slowly out past the laboring engines, through the throng of spectators, into the unobstructed streets, after which the horses were urged to their full speed.

"There's no need of takin' me back, Mr. Davis. I ain't much worse than I was the time Dan an' me was burned out."

"But then it needed a night's rest to put you into shape, and I'm not minded to run any risks. Ninety-four's kid is getting to be so near a man that we can't afford to take any chances with him."

"Hello! Amateur in trouble again?" the house watchman asked when 'Lish Davis helped Seth into the building, and the driver replied proudly:

"I don't allow he's an amateur any longer, Bob, but fit to be one of us in proper form. He saved a baby, and came mighty nigh knocking under."

"How did he get a chance to do anything like that?"

"Slipped past me, and followed Jerry and Joe; I don't rightly know the whole of it yet. The Chief allowed it was a medal job, though one can't be given, except to members of the Department."

"Then Seth is entitled to it, for he's on our rolls as if belongin' to us."

"We'll see that he gets all he's earned, Bob," 'Lish Davis replied, and then he conducted the boy upstairs, insisting that he should go to bed.

"I'll be all right after a spell," Seth protested, and the driver replied grimly, in his usual harsh tone:

"That's what I'm going to make certain of, kid. Peel off your clothes and turn in if you don't want to have trouble with me."

Seth obeyed with a laugh, and was equally tractable a few moments later when 'Lish Davis brought a glass half full of a certain disagreeable mixture for him to drink.

Then the boy's eyelids grew heavy; he said to himself he would remain awake until Ninety-four returned, but the thought was hardly more than formed in his mind before slumber overcame him.

It was late in the evening when he was awakened by the sound of voices near at hand, and on looking around Seth saw, to his great surprise, Mr. Fernald talking with 'Lish Davis.

"Hello! got your eyes open again, eh?" the old instructor cried, and Seth would have arisen to his feet but that Mr. Fernald's hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder.

"I'm all right now, sir, an' I promised to go to school with Bill an' Dan."

"It's a little late for anything of that kind now, my boy, seeing that the clock has just struck ten. What's all this talk I hear of your showing the members of the Department how to effect a rescue?"

"It wasn't me, sir. I only got the baby out of the window, an' somebody else must have taken him from there."

"It was Jerry Walters who came up the ladder," 'Lish Davis interrupted.

"The credit of saving the child belongs to you, Seth," Mr. Fernald said, decidedly, "and I hope there'll be no question about its being given. Tell us how it was done."

"There isn't much to tell, sir. I jest heard the baby yellin', an' went in after it. Then the smoke made me feel silly, an' I had to keep sayin' to myself what I heard you tellin' the class, about a clear head bein' the next best thing to a ladder, else I'd gone under before I found the rope."

"Now there's the kind of a pupil to have!" Mr. Fernald cried proudly. "There's some satisfaction in knowing that what a man says will be remembered when the time comes that it may be of profit. You shall go regularly into the class from this out, Seth Bartlett, whether the commissioners approve or not, and we'll find some one else to do the odd jobs."

"Do you really think I stand a better chance of gettin' into the Department because of tryin' to pull the kid through?" Seth asked in surprise, and Josh Fernald replied to the great delight of both the boy and Mr. Davis:

"If I can bring any influence to bear, you shall be there very soon, my lad, and at all events, from this time out you will be kept at work on the drill. Ninety-four's kid is of considerably more importance to-night than he was this morning."

After such praise as this it seemed impossible for Seth to remain in bed, and finally 'Lish Davis consented to his going down-stairs for a time.

The hour which Seth spent on the lower floor on this night was the most pleasant he had ever known.

The men did not occupy the time in praising him, but discussed the rescue again and again, and never once was the boy spoken to, or of, as the "Amateur."

'Lish Davis insisted on his remaining in the engine-house all night, but gave Seth distinctly to understand that however many alarms might come in, he was not to so much as think of going out with the company.

"You'll be on sick leave till to-morrow morning, when Josh Fernald is expecting you at headquarters, and then it'll be for him to say when we're to see you again."

"But of course I'll sleep at Mrs. Hanson's same's I've been doin'?"

"I can't say how it'll be, lad; but whatever Josh allows must be done will come nigh being right."

What between his happiness and the sleep he had indulged in during the early part of the evening, Seth Bartlett was unusually wakeful, and until past midnight he lay in a cot near 'Lish Davis's bed speculating upon what Mr. Fernald might be able to do in regard to procuring his admission to the school at headquarters.

Then slumber interfered with his waking dreams, and he knew no more until daylight next morning, when he crept softly out of bed to perform his customary task.

He did the work on the lower floor lest he should disturb those who were yet asleep, and was getting well along with it when Joe Black came down.

"How are you feelin' this mornin', kid?" he asked, in an unusually friendly tone.

"Fine as silk. That medicine Mr. Davis gave me fixed everything in great shape."

"I see you're still blackin' boots."

"Why shouldn't I be? It was the bargain that I could do it till I got into the Department."

"I'm allowin' 'Lish will claim you're so near there now that you must graduate from this kind of work."

"But, of course, I'm not near gettin' into the Department, for they don't make firemen of boys."

"As a rule they don't; but I'm reckonin' there'll be something in the way of an exception with you. I'm not allowin' you'll be allowed to swell around as full member of a company, but you are bound to be recognized as belonging to us."

Seth failed to understand how any immediate change could be effected in his standing, save that he might be admitted to the classes at headquarters, and before he could ask Joe Black to make an explanation a shrill voice was heard calling through the half-opened door:

"Say, Mister, is Seth Bartlett here?"

It was Dan, and Seth stepped forward to prevent him from coming in, when Joe Black said:

"There's no reason why you should go out on the sidewalk to talk with your friends. You've got the same privileges here that all hands have."

By this time Dan had stepped inside, and catching a glimpse of Seth he cried:

"Say, old man, you're goin' it mighty strong, but we're proud of you. The fellers count on givin' you a reg'lar blow-out to-morrow, if it's so you can come down-town."

"Do you mean 'cause of what was done last night, Dan?" Seth asked, surprised that his roommate should have learned of the affair so soon, and Joe Black gave way to his mirth, although why he thought there was anything comical in what had been said, neither of the boys understood.

"Course I'm talkin' 'bout your savin' the baby."

"How did you hear of it so soon?"

"Hear of it! Why, it's in all the papers! Look at this!" and Dan unfolded the morning *Herald* as he pointed to an article nearly a column in length, which was headed, "A Brave Boy."

Seth made no attempt to read the account, and Dan cried impatiently as he held the sheet in front of him:

"Why, don't you see what it says? The fellers down-town are pretty nigh wild 'cause you've showed the firemen that you ain't any slouch, even if you did black boots for a livin'. I reckon Sam Barney will get green when he sees it, an' Bill's hangin' 'round so's to make certain that duffer hears 'bout it the first thing. Say, can't you come down by the post-office now?"

"I've got to go up to headquarters same as ever, an' it's most time now."

"But the fellers are just crazy to see you."

"They'll have to wait till night," Seth replied with a laugh, "'cause I'm bound to be there right on the dot."

"I'll walk up with you."

"All right; I'm ready now as soon as I put on my coat."

Seth went to the floor above for the purpose of getting the garment, and while he was absent Joe Black asked Dan:

"What are you boys counting on doing with our kid?"

"We're goin' to give him one of the biggest blow-outs that's ever been seen in this town. Do you s'pose we'd lay still

after he's been an' done what he did? We'll show that we believe he's a dandy."

"What kind of a blow-out do you mean?"

"A reg'lar spread with plenty to eat, an' it won't cost Seth a cent. Bill an' Teddy Bowser are rushin' 'round seein' to it now. Folks think we fellers don't count for much, but some of 'em will sing a different tune after readin' what he did! You can bet we're reckonin' on givin' him a great send-off."

"Look here, Dan," Joe Black whispered. "I wouldn't mind seeing how you lads get up a thing of that sort, and if you'll give me an invite I'll chip in a dollar."

"Will you wear your uniform?" Dan asked eagerly.

"I'll put on every button I've got; but you are not to tell Seth I'm coming."

"It's a go," Master Roberts replied gravely, and then the arrival of Seth interrupted the conversation.

When they were outside the engine-house Dan insisted that his partner give him the full story of the rescue, and he was not satisfied with a general account, but demanded every particular from the time Ninety-four left her quarters until Josh Fernald had taken his departure.

"Well, it's bound to be a big thing for you," he said, thoughtfully, "even if you don't get a medal."

"See here, Dan, Mr. Davis has said considerable 'bout medals, an' I don't understand it."

"Are you claimin' to be posted in the fire business, an' don't know things like that are given to men who save folks from bein' burned up?"

"Of course I know it; but I'm talkin' about myself. I can't have a medal 'cause I ain't a fireman yet."

"If you'd read the *Herald* as I wanted, you'd seen that the printed piece said you earned one."

"I don't think I did, not even if I belonged reg'larly to the Department. It was Jerry Walters who did the most of the work, 'cause if he hadn't come jest then it would have been all day with me—I was mighty near gone."

"Don't you make such talk as that to anybody but me, Seth Bartlett," Dan cried sharply. "What's the use of givin' anything away when folks are howlin' 'bout your bein' so brave? A feller is bound to blow his own horn sometimes in this world, else he'd never get along, an' that's what you must do now."

"If I can't get into the Department without it, I'll go back to shinin' boots. Look at Sam Barney! He's always doin' that, an' what does he 'mount to?"

"Oh, a feller must have some sand to back him, else he won't pull through, an' you know there's nothin' to Sam but wind. Here's where you stop, an' I'll snoop back down-town. The fellers are countin' on givin' you a racket to-morrow night, an' you must be on hand."

"See here, Dan, don't you spend good money when you're needin' it for the store, jest for the sake of puffin' me up."

"I reckon what I'll put out won't bust me, even if we have 'greed to whack up fifteen cents apiece. Bill, Teddy, an' me will chip in for Jip, so's he can have a good time after all his hard luck, an' we'll make your eyes stick out before it's over."

"I'd a good deal rather you didn't do it."

"There's no use to kick now, 'cause it's too late. I wouldn't wonder if it was all fixed by this time. You see, Bill an' me was 'fraid you'd been hurt, seein' 's you didn't come over to the room last night, an' the fellers wanted me to find out 'bout it, so's if there was any trouble we could hold off the blow-out till you'd come 'round ag'in. So long; I'll see you to-night," and Dan was off like a flash.

Seth watched until his friend was lost to view in the distance, and then entered the building.

The first man he met shook hands with him in the most friendly manner, congratulating him upon the service he had done, and so did every one he saw, until he was absolutely astounded at the warmth of his reception.

For a moment it seemed as if the officials at headquarters were taking as deep an interest in him as did Ninety-four's company, and there were so many who thus had a kindly word that it was nearly an hour from the time he arrived before it was possible to present himself at the gymnasium.

There Mr. Fernald showed him marked attention before those of the class who were assembled, and, as Seth

confidentially told 'Lish Davis that evening, "he was afraid he'd get a big head if folks didn't let up on his saving the baby."

At noon Josh Fernald held a long conversation with Seth, the substance of which was that permission had been received to put him under instruction precisely as if he had been appointed a member of the Department on probation, and he would be taught the entire drill from that day forth.

"Next spring, when the Bennett, Stephenson, and Pulitzer medals are awarded, the Life-Saving Corps will give an exhibition drill at some public place, and I've decided that you shall be among them. Work hard, my lad, and on that day when the citizens of New York turn out to see those of the force who have distinguished themselves in the way of saving life, you can make your appearance in a manner that will give great pleasure to your comrades of Ninety-four."

Mr. Fernald did not give Seth an opportunity of thanking him, but suddenly walked away as if bent on important business at the other end of the room, and the boy said to himself with pride and delight:

"He called Ninety-four's men my *comrades*! That's a big step-up for a bootblack to make, an' I wonder how 'Lish Davis will like it?"



CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLOW-OUT.

Much to Dan's disappointment, Seth could not go down-town on this first evening after having distinguished himself in the Department.

When 'Lish Davis heard what Mr. Fernald had said he insisted on having a long and confidential chat with the boy, and it was not concluded until a very late hour in the evening.

"The time has now come, kid, when you're the same as one of us, and we of Ninety-four who counted on giving you such a boost have been cheated out of it by what you did for yourself," the driver began gravely, and in a tone sufficiently loud for the other members of the company to hear. "From this out you're in the Department, and we have no fear but that in due course of time you'll be assigned to some company--this one, if we can have our way. Now, there's a question of money to come up precious soon, for we here have got the idee that the city won't pay wages while you're under instruction."

"Of course, we may be in the wrong as to that, but if we ain't, how'll you live? That's what we've asked ourselves, and this is the way we answer it: Every man in the Department looks on you as Ninety-four's kid, and we can't allow anything that would go against our credit, consequently you have got to turn to us for support till you're under wages. We'll assess ourselves so much every month, and charge it up to you in reg'lar fashion so it can be paid back some time. Now, you're to make no kick, for we've settled it once and for all."

"Why couldn't I black boots at odd times?" Seth asked, pleadingly.

"Because there won't be any 'odd times' in the first place, and secondly we're not minded to have it said we couldn't see you through. Can't you understand that we're looked on by them as are in the Department as your father, or gardeen, or something of that kind, and it's our own credit we're bound to uphold? How would it look for a fireman to be around blackin' boots? And that's what you are this very minute, even though you haven't had an appointment."

Then one member of the company after another gave his views on the subject, until it would have been rank ingratitude had Seth refused the generous proposition.

It was agreed to by all that a strict account should be kept of the amounts advanced, and he be allowed to repay the company at the earliest opportunity after he was under salary.

When this matter had been settled by Seth's promise to take such sums of money as he needed, and "look pleasant about it," the men discussed his future, and spoke of the time when he would be running with Ninety-four, until it did not require a very great stretch of the imagination for the boy to fancy himself already a member of the company.

On reaching Mrs. Hanson's he found his roommates awake, and grumbling because he had not returned sooner.

"I s'pose we shan't see very much of you now you're gettin' so high up in the Department, eh?" Dan said in a tone of ill-humor.

"You'll see me all my spare time, providin' you an' Bill still agree to go to school, 'cause I've got to duf into study in great shape now, an' we'll be together every evening."

"Got to do it now? What else has come up?"

"Mr. Fernald has put me right into the drill, an' I don't have to tackle the odd jobs any more."

"Are you a fireman already?" and Dan sprang to his feet in astonishment.

"Of course not; but I'm to be drilled the same as if I was, an' in case I show sand enough you'll see me in the exhibition drill that's to be given on the street next spring."

Neither Dan nor Bill spoke for several seconds, and then the former exclaimed with emphasis:

"Say, but you're gettin' there with both feet, eh?"

It was midnight before the roommates could afford to retire, and then it was understood that on the following evening at seven o'clock Seth was to be at the main entrance to the post-office, in readiness for the "blow-out" to be given in his honor.

In vain he questioned his friends concerning the proposed feast.

They would give him no further information on the subject, declaring that he would "have his eye knocked out before the thing was over."

At daylight next morning Seth was at Ninety-four's house blacking boots, despite the fact that 'Lish Davis had given orders another boy should be engaged for such work, and before the members of the company were astir he departed for headquarters.

During this day the "new probationer," as he was called, was kept at work learning how to handle, raise, and balance ladders, and it is safe to say he never did more labor in a single twelve hours before.

He was exceedingly tired when supper-time arrived, but did his best to prevent Mr. Fernald from suspecting the fact.

"Feeling rather sore?" the instructor asked as the boy came to say good-night.

"I ain't played out, sir."

"If such was the case, would you admit it?"

"I'd hate to," Seth replied with a smile, and Mr. Fernald said in a friendly tone, as if speaking to a comrade instead of a pupil:

"It is hard work, this learning the trade of a fireman, my boy, and there may be times when you will feel discouraged; but keep a firm grip on yourself at all times, live regularly, avoid bad habits, or, in other words, keep in rigid training, and you will master it."

"I'm not afraid of failin' so far as I'm concerned, sir, but it may be I'll tire others out, an' so get me walkin' ticket."

"You need have no such fear on my account, lad, so long as you do your level best."

Seth understood that Mr. Fernald had brought the interview to an end, and he set out for the rendezvous at the post-office, wondering not a little what and whom he should find at the "blow-out."

As he neared the business locations of his different friends he was surprised because he failed to meet any whom he knew.

It was as if every news-vender and bootblack had suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth, although it was not yet so late but that considerable business might have been done.

Arriving at the post-office he met there Bill and Dan alone.

He had expected to see a great throng, and began to believe that for some good reason the "blow-out" had been postponed.

"Have you given it up?" he asked in what he intended should be a careless tone, for even though he had advised Dan not to "start the thing," it had given him no slight satisfaction because his acquaintances and friends should desire thus to do him honor.

"Give up nothin'!" Bill exclaimed. "Ain't we here on time?"

"I didn't know from what you said last night but that some of the other fellers were comin'."

"We've fixed everything jest as we want it, an' she's goin' along as smooth as a die," Master Roberts replied in a tone of satisfaction. "Them as don't know their business gets left; but we haven't got in with that crowd, eh, William?"

"We shan't mildew even if we ain't taken in for a considerable spell," Bill said contentedly, and added an instant later: "Now Seth's come I don't see why we should stand 'round here any longer."

"Let her go; I'm ready"; and Master Roberts set out in advance, leading the way toward Chat ham Street much as if believing every person whom they met knew he was conducting the boy who ran with Ninety-four.

"Where are we goin'?" Seth asked of Bill, believing now that the spread concerning which so much had been said was to be confined strictly to the lodgers in Mrs. Hanson's house.

"You'll see when we strike there, an' if it ain't tony enough for a swell from the Department, you can get out."

Seth gazed in surprise at his friend; but the latter's face was expressionless, and the guest of the evening began to fear some disaster had overtaken the plans of his roommates.

"Seen Sam Barney to-day?" the "probationary fireman" asked after a brief time of silence.

"I struck him mighty heavy yesterday, an' he's been layin' low ever since. I made up my mind that he should see the printed stuff about you in the papers, an' hung 'round till he flashed up. Then I acted as if he an' me was the best friends in the world, an' asked if he knowed what kind of a racket you'd been on. That was enough to make him read the paper I had, an' you can bet he was sick when he got through. Teddy Bowser hit him up ag'in 'bout an hour afterward, an' from that time till pretty nigh dark we kept him chafin' under the collar. Then he lit out, an' we haven't seen him since."

"How's Jip gettin' along?"

"First-class; tendin' right out on business, an' goin' to pull through into a decent kind of a feller. Say, you know Dan made up his mind to own a store on Third Avenoo?"

"Yes, an' I hope he won't back down."

"Well, I guess not! He can't, 'cause I've gone into partners with him, an' there won't be any funny business. We're goin' to take Jip for a clerk."

"But you haven't got the store yet."

"It ain't such a dreadful long ways off. We've got most twelve dollars towards it, an' I know of a man what'll sell out a bang-up good place for a hundred an' fifty. I'm allowin' we'll get that much before spring."

"What makes him sell it so cheap?"

"The reason is that he's a duffer; wants to lay back smokin' an' have the dollars come rollin' in without his raisin' a hair. Of course he ain't gettin' along very smart, an' we'll soon be ready to take it. With two fellers who are willin' to work there's a big thing in that place. We're countin' on settin' up a bootblackin' place with chairs an' all such kind of swellin', you know. It's going to be 'Roberts & Dean, Newsdealers an' Shiners.'"

"You'll make a go of it, Bill."

"Course we shall," was the complacent reply. "I knowed it was a good thing jest as soon as Dan flashed her up, an' said I'd come in before he got half through talkin'. This 'ere little blow-out is the only thing we're goin' to spend any money on till we get the shop paid for."

"It's too bad for you to put out good money on me."

"What we're doin' to-night won't break us, I reckon. First off we allowed it would cost fifteen cents apiece; but we had an offer of three dollars for that many tickets, which comes pretty nigh payin' all the bills."

"Three dollars for three tickets!" Seth repeated in perplexity. "What is it you've been gettin' up, Bill?"

"Hold on 'bout four minutes longer, an' then the whole thing will be flashed up. It's great!"

Before the time specified by Bill had elapsed, Dan suddenly turned into a German restaurant, walked the length of the lower floor, and led the way upstairs.

Seth felt that already was his "eye bein' knocked out."

He knew there were private supper-rooms in some of these Chatham Street establishments, but had never been fortunate enough to see one, and now he was to enter as a guest of honor.

Dan threw open the door at the head of the stairs.

Seth was conscious of a blaze of light, the hum of voices, and before it was possible to distinguish anything clearly, Bill cried:

"Three cheers for Ninety-four's kid!"

Then rang out a shout which seemed actually to rock the building to and fro, and by the time the tumult had subsided the guest of the evening saw a long table, on either side of which were seated all his friends and acquaintances among the sidewalk merchants, while at the head 'Lish Davis, Jerry Walters, and Joe Black presided with as much gravity as if it had been the swellest of swell functions.

Now Seth understood who had purchased supper tickets at one dollar a plate.

The honored guest was shown to a seat near Ninety-four's driver.

Dan and Bill took places opposite, and the former called in a loud, commanding voice for the benefit of Teddy Bowser, who was stationed at the door:

"Let 'em flash her up; we're all here!"

Teddy cried to some one below, and during the next ten minutes two waiters were kept busy bringing upstairs sandwiches, bologna in generous, thick slices, sauerkraut without stint, potato salad, and a variety of small cakes plentifully besprinkled with tiny seeds.

While this feast was being placed upon the table no one spoke, but instantly Teddy gave a peculiar sign by crossing his throat and winking one eye, Dan cried:

"Now pitch in, fellers, an' fill right up! We're doin' this 'cause Seth Bartlett has got into the Department, an' the one what don't eat all he ought'er will have trouble with me."

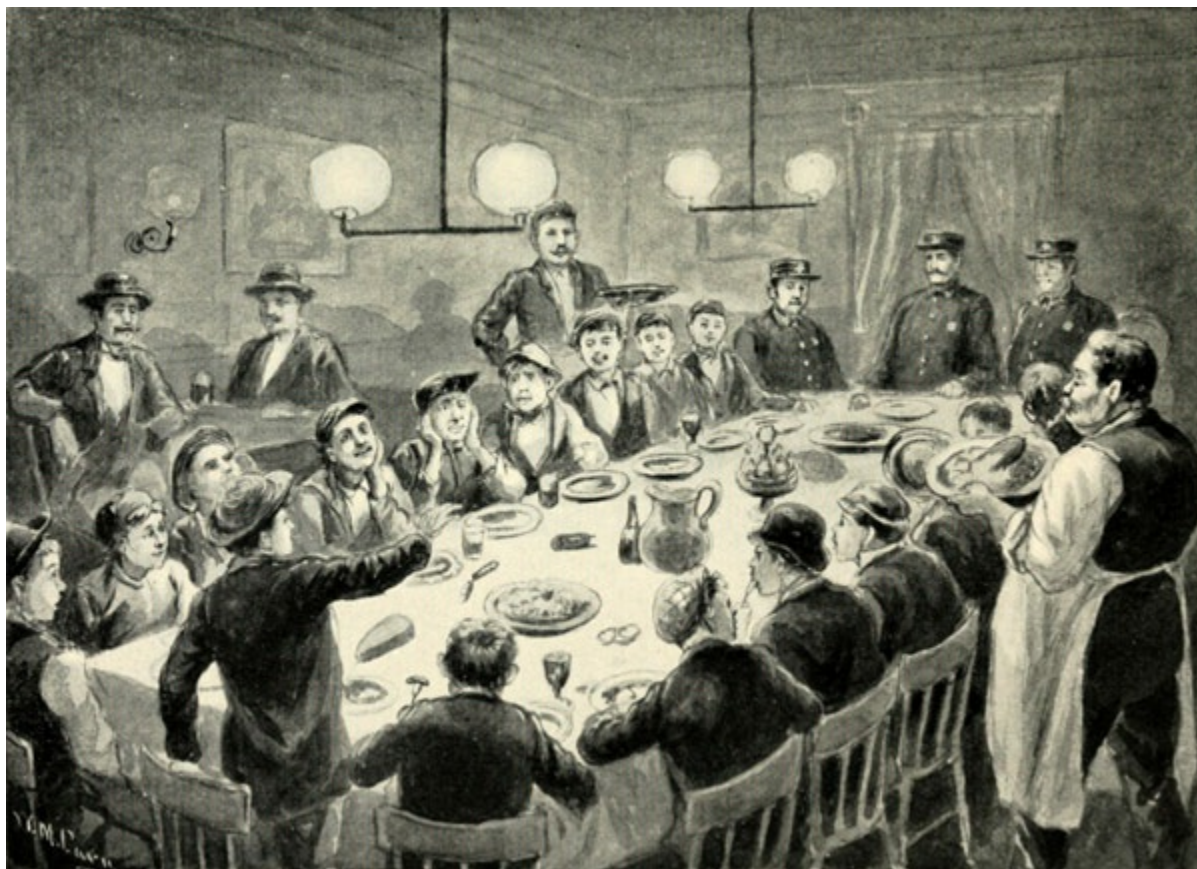
If Master Roberts had been a veritable giant seeking whom he might devour, the boys could not have shown more fear lest his command should not be obeyed.

Every fellow present felt that it was his duty to eat a generous portion of each dish before him, and he did it hurriedly lest Dan might have cause for complaint.

Nor were the guests who had paid "their cold dollars," as Dan explained, idle.

All three ate heartily to the evident satisfaction of the others, and 'Lish Davis even entered so thoroughly into the spirit of the affair as to suggest that they send for another dish of sauerkraut.

In ten minutes or less the hunger of the guests was in a measure appeased, and as they dallied with the dainties Dan set in motion that portion of the entertainment which, in his opinion, was to be the crowning feature.



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"It ain't many times that duffers like us has a chance to rub up against Ninety-four's men, an' we want to show 'em that we know what's what," he had said privately to Bill the evening previous, and now was come the moment when the exhibition should be made.

After making certain that all were giving him their attention, he rose slowly to his feet, looked round as if to collect his thoughts, and said in a loud tone, much as though repeating something he had committed to memory:

"Fellers, an' Ninety-four's men are in it, too: We spread ourselves on this 'ere blow-out 'cause Seth Bartlett has got into the Department owin' to havin' saved a kid, and now if all hands are 'way up full we'll have a little speech from Mr. 'Lish Davis, driver of Ninety-four engine, who's one of the three what gave up a big cold dollar for this lot of stuff."

Then Dan sat down with a complacent smile upon his face, as if believing he had said the right thing in the right place, and Mr. Davis actually appeared embarrassed.

He had come to the feast expecting to enjoy himself by listening to the sidewalk merchants, and found that it was himself who would provide a goodly portion of the entertainment.

Never doubting but that this had been all arranged beforehand, Seth gazed at the driver, wondering why he was so slow in making a response, while Jerry and Joe laughed heartily, for they knew that 'Lish had been taken wholly by surprise.

However, the driver of Ninety-four was not one who would be discomfited by such as Dan Roberts, and he began his speech, with considerable hesitation, but warming to his subject as he proceeded.

"I didn't allow that I was to be part of the show when I come here, and Dan Roberts has got one the best of me; but yet, I ain't quite downed. The man who couldn't say a good word now never ought to set in anywhere, because there's a deal more than something to eat, if you boys will only look at it in the right light. In the first place you've spread yourself because Ninety-four's kid has the same as got into the Department, and perhaps some of you think he's lucky. I tell you, kids, luck hadn't anything to do with it. Seth is being made a fireman because whatever he struck he stuck at, and never let a living chance go by him. When he first came up to Ninety-four's house we gave him the cold shoulder, but he kept plugging away till we grew to like his pluck; yet nobody held out a hand to him till he'd hung to his idea so long that we jest couldn't help ourselves. He worked in where he wanted to go, and so can every one of you. I ain't holding that all of us are born to be firemen, but whatever we count on being we've got to work for, and work hard. Do that, and you'll pull through in pretty nigh everything you tackle."

When 'Lish Davis sat down, blushing rosy red, Dan sprang up like a jumping-jack from a box, and proposed:

"Three cheers for the driver of Ninety-four!"

As may be imagined, these were given with a will, and then Master Roberts announced:

"Jerry Walters will now chip in with something."

It was now 'Lish Davis's turn to laugh, and he enjoyed his comrade's confusion mightily, for it was several moments before Jerry could think of the proper words.

Joe Black was called upon immediately afterward, and when he had concluded and been given a round of cheers, as in the case of the other speakers, the driver said gravely:

"We who come here to look on have done what we could towards making a success of this here 'blow-out,' and now, according to my way of thinking, it's time we heard from Mr. Daniel Roberts."

The suggestion came in the way of a big surprise to Dan, who, while making plans for this entertainment had entirely overlooked the possible fact that he might be asked to do that which he the same as demanded from others.

Dan's friends and acquaintances applauded 'Lish Davis's proposition loudly, and were so emphatic in their calls for him that the owner of the prospective Third-Avenue store was absolutely forced to rise.

"It's what I call a mighty mean trick for you fellers to howl 'bout my makin' a speech, 'cause you know we hadn't figgered that any but the 'dollar visitors' would do that. Of course 'Lish Davis an' the rest of the firemen didn't know, but pretty nigh every other feller was posted this afternoon. But don't think you've got me in a hole, though, for if makin' speeches is only talkin' 'bout Seth, I can do that an' not half try. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have my Third-Avenoo store,--and I've got it in my mind all right,--nor Bill an' me wouldn't be thinkin' of goin' to school, or we shouldn't be livin' in the toniest lodgin's in this 'ere town. An' if it hadn't been for him you fellers couldn't be settin' here so near filled up that some of you can't do much more'n wink. Now 'bout this blow-out: I made a trade with the Dutchman what runs the place that we should have all we could eat for four dollars; but he held to it that we mustn't stay more'n two hours, an' you can't blame him. A bang-up shop like this can't be kept goin' all night without somebody's chippin' in a stack of good money. Now seein' 's you fellers can't eat any more, an' the firemen have all made their speeches, I allow we'd better skin out."

Save for this last portion, Dan's speech would undoubtedly have been greeted with the same amount of applause as the others, but the guests were not well pleased at being asked to depart at such an early hour.

During several moments there was every indication that disagreeable remarks might be made, even if nothing more unpleasant occurred, and thus the harmony of the meeting would be sadly marred.

Understanding all this, 'Lish Davis came to the rescue by saying in a cheery tone:

"Mr. Daniel Roberts has, without knowing it, done us of Ninety-four a mighty good turn in bringing the meeting to a close. We'd feel kind-er sore to go before it was all over, and yet we couldn't stay many minutes longer because we only had leave of absence for three hours, and that time is about up. So if you fellows will look pleasant we'll do the same, and on the day Ninety-four's kid gets appointed to the Department I'll set out another spread in this same place for every one that's here to-night."

This generous proposition could not have failed of its purpose, and Lish' Davis was cheered to the echo, he and his two comrades taking their departure during the tumult which ensued.

The entire company escorted Mrs. Hanson's lodgers to their home, and before parting gave three hearty cheers and a series of yells in Seth's honor which aroused, if it did not alarm, the neighborhood, and brought nearly every policeman in the vicinity to the scene of the parting.

Dan and his partners escaped to their room before the blue-coated guardians of the city's peace arrived, and from their window watched the small throng as it scattered in every direction to avoid possible contact with the officers.

"It's what I call a howlin' success," Master Roberts said in a tone of satisfaction as he turned from the window after the last of his friends had disappeared. "It was a big mistake not to have had a lot of newspaper fellers there so's the whole thing would be in the mornin' editions."

"We can fix that straight enough," Bill replied carelessly, as if familiar with such methods. "I know a feller what helps clean up the *Herald* office where all the stuff is wrote out, and I'll get him to print a slat about the blow-out."

This appeared to satisfy Master Roberts that his mistake could readily be rectified, and he gave himself wholly up to a review of the late proceedings until Seth suggested that they retire.

"I had a hard day's work, an' it'll be jest as bad, if not worse, to-morrow, so I've got to turn in."

"It's too bad to wind up so soon," Dan suggested with a sigh; but Bill finally settled the matter by saying:

"If you an' I ever expect to have that Third-Avenoo store we've got to hump ourselves all the time, an' settin' up nights ain't the way to do it."

Two minutes later Dan was in bed, and as Seth extinguished the gas the former raised himself on his elbow to say:

"We'll have the store jest 'bout the time you get into the Department, old man; but you can bet the shop will be shut up when 'Lish Davis has his blow-out."



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EXHIBITION DRILL.

Seth Bartlett ceased to be an "amateur fireman" when he was admitted to the probationary class, even though he had not received an appointment, and, therefore this narrative was concluded, or should have been, with an account of the "blow-out" designed and arranged by Dan Roberts.

In case some of the readers care to know how Ninety-four's kid prospered, however, a brief account of his doings up to the day when he was honored even above any member of his own particular company, shall be given.

First, however, let it be said that Dan Roberts and Bill Dean did not abandon the idea of going to school.

On the night after the very pleasing entertainment on Chatham Street they set out with Seth, and from that time until the Third-Avenue store was a reality, they were in regular attendance.

Even after having engaged in what Dan called "real business," the partners continued their pursuit of knowledge by going to school on alternate nights.

Jip Collins gave good proof that he had reformed by attending closely to his work, and on the day when Messrs. Roberts & Dean purchased the establishment from the gentleman who did not believe in working, he was hired as clerk at wages to be proportionate with the sales.

Sam Barney disappeared on the day of the "blow-out," and was not seen by his former acquaintances for nearly eight months, when he suddenly showed himself once more, and announced that he was "partners with a city detective."

At first this statement was set down as false, but in due course of time it became understood that there was a glimmer of truth in it, inasmuch as he was employed now and then by the detective in question to carry messages, and it is possible that he may yet compass his desires, providing he can bring himself down to hard work and yet harder study.

It can well be fancied that Seth did not neglect his duties after having been admitted to the probationary class. As a matter of fact he worked so hard that more than once was Mr. Fernald forced to insist on his "taking matters easier," and when this advice did not prevail 'Lish Davis was called upon to interfere, which he did very effectually by commanding the boy's attendance at the house of Ninety-four's company at least two hours during every twenty-four.

Josh Fernald, for certain reasons which appeared to be a secret between himself and several other members of the Department had decided that Seth should take part in the exhibition drill to be given by the Life-Saving Corps on that day when the medals were to be awarded, and to such end all his efforts were directed.

After the boy had become so familiar with the handling of ladders that they appeared to be little more than playthings to him, he was taught, as 'Lish Davis had explained he would be, how to assist in "building a chain" with a line of ladders from the street to the roof, placed in position by a man at each window of the structure.

The driver had spoken of "straddling sills," and this name for the work puzzled Seth not a little until it came his turn to receive instructions. Then he found that it consisted in sitting astride the sill of a window, holding himself in place by the pressure of his knees much as though he had been in a saddle, drawing up one of the climbing ladders and passing the hook attached to the upper end into the window above.

This does not appear by the description thus given to be a very difficult task, and yet others beside Seth have found that it was a lesson extremely hard to learn, but once gained the pupil can readily make his way from the street even to the roof of a building with no other implements than the two ladders.

The lesson of "standing on sill" is always given to the pupils in pairs, and before explaining what Seth learned in this line it is necessary to describe the belt which is worn by members of the Life-Saving Corps.

It is broad, made of thick leather, with two stout buckles to hold it in place. Directly in front is a leathern handle, to which a steel "snap-hook" is attached by a stout ring, this hook being provided so the fireman may fasten himself to a ladder or any projection while he works, and is similar to that worn by the drivers. On one side of the belt in a leathern sheet is a hatchet with a heavy square head to be used either as a hammer or an axe, as occasion may require.

When a pupil is instructed in "standing on sills" he does exactly as the term implies, but on the inside of the building is his mate, who holds him in place by means of this belt-hook. In such position he raises the ladder to the window above, as when he was astride the sill.

Another lesson, which Seth often took, is that of coming down a rope alone, or bearing a burden. It was not difficult, and, with this particular "probationer," decidedly exhilarating.

A rope is made fast to the roof or window, of a building and two turns of it taken round the hook on the fireman's belt, thus forming a "brake" to prevent too rapid descent. By a pressure of the hand just below the hook it is possible for the operator to control his speed. In case of bringing down a burden, twice the number of turns are taken.

As a matter of course, Seth was taught to leap from the building into a net, and later to aid in holding it, in which last exercise he learned that 'Lish Davis had not spoken falsely when he declared it was exceedingly hard work.

It might not be entertaining to repeat all the lessons which Ninety-four's kid took part in; but suffice it to say that by the 1st of May Mr. Fernald announced that he was as nearly perfect in the drill as he could be until after having gained greater strength.

"You will participate in the exhibition, my boy, and I am expecting a good showing from you."

"Will Ninety-four's men be there?" Seth asked eagerly, trying hard not to show how delighted he was by this praise.

"Surely; they are to take part in the parade, and you can see 'Lish Davis display his skill at driving. There are no lack of spectators at such exhibitions, and you will show, not only to a vast throng of citizens, but the mayor and heads of the Department, whether you are worthy of receiving an appointment."

"Will that settle matters for me?" Seth asked in surprise.

"I don't say you will not be able to get the appointment without it; but it is an opportunity of making a leap directly into the Department, and of finding yourself suddenly on equal footing with Davis, Walters, or Black, for they are intending to make a strong effort to have you assigned to their company."

Seth hardly needed this incentive to labor, for he was already doing all a boy of his age could do; but it caused him to feel extremely anxious regarding the final result, and, noting this, 'Lish Davis said one evening in a fatherly tone:

"You are working yourself all up into a snarl over the fear of not pulling through, and the result will be, if you don't have a care, that your head won't be of the clearest when the big day comes."

"I'm not afraid but that I'll be able to go through with our part of the show all right, but the trouble is that I'll show up for no more than a boy, and that's what bothers me."

"You can't pose for anything else, lad, seeing as how you are a kid; but it won't work against you in face of the record. Go ahead as if there wasn't a thought in your mind but to show the people how we swarm over a building when the need arises, and that's all any man can do."

"Where is the exhibition to be held?"

"On the Riverside Drive. Number 38 is the house that's been loaned for the occasion, and you lads couldn't have a better building on which to work."

"Do you mean to say we're goin' to range a decent house? There'll be considerable damage done if we have the reg'lar scalin' ladders; the teeth can't fail to tear away a good bit of the woodwork."

"You'll only use the middle row of windows, and over the sills of these will be fastened timber shields, or casings, so that you can swing your ladders without fear of so much as a pin's scratch."

"Where are the medals to be presented?"

"A stand will be built on the Drive, and there all the swells will sit. The mayor does the act, and after it's over we poor duffers who haven't particularly distinguished ourselves will give a parade and drill. You'll see us respond to a call in great shape. It's always a high time of the Department, for it's the only day in the year when we have a chance to show what we can do when need comes."

The more Seth heard regarding the proposed manoeuvres the greater was his eagerness to receive further instruction, and had he been allowed to do as he pleased, the class would have drilled not less than eighteen hours out of every twenty-four.

"Practise as much as you please, Seth, but you are out of my jurisdiction now, for I can't suggest any improvement on your work," Mr. Fernald said, but the praise did not prevent this particular "probationer" from spending nearly every moment of his time at the drill.

Then came the night before the eventful day, and Seth, who was to sleep at headquarters, had come down for a chat with his roommates and the members of Ninety-four's company.

"You can bet we'll be there, Seth," Dan Roberts said emphatically. "If it hadn't been for the show you're goin' to give we'd bought the Third-Avenoo store yesterday; but Bill an' me both allowed it couldn't be done till to-morrow, 'cause we ain't to be cheated out of seein' how much you know 'bout the fire business. We'll be right in the front row, no matter how much the swells crowd for good places."

"Are you goin' to act jest like as if you was a reg'lar fireman?" Bill asked, much as if believing that would be impossible.

"I shall go through the same drill as the others."

"Well, old man, I hope you'll get along all right, an' it seems as if you ought'er after workin' so hard. Look for us when your crowd gets there, an' you can be certain of havin' more cheers than anybody else, for we'll yell ourselves blue in the face but that it shall go in good shape."

"Don't make too much noise," Seth said pleadingly. "You know I'm only a boy, an' there'll be lots of men who can work all 'round me, so it wouldn't be jest the thing for me to be cheered when I'm the poorest of the lot."

"We know our business," Dan said decidedly, "and you needn't worry but that we'll do the thing up brown."

After giving his friends a general outline of the exhibition, as he understood it, Seth went to Ninety-four's house, and was there received with an unusually hearty welcome.

"How are you feeling, kid?" 'Lish Davis asked solicitously.

"All right."

"Little fidgety about to-morrow's work?"

"I'm hopin' I won't make a fool of myself, of course."

"You needn't worry. Josh Fernald says you'll make as good a showing as any one there, and he knows. The only chance of your failing will come from borrowing too much trouble. Remember what you said to yourself the night the baby was saved: 'A clear head is the next best thing to a ladder,' and there mustn't be any cobwebs in yours. Don't pay attention to the crowd, but keep in mind that you're only going through the drill, so's the commissioners can see whether you're ripe for an appointment."

"What are you counting on wearing?" Jerry Walters asked in a peculiar tone.

"What I've got on, of course, seem' 's it's all the decent clothes I own, an' they belong to you of Ninety-four. I'm countin' on cleanin' 'em up in great shape, an' folks can't see where they've been mended. Miss Hanson fixed the coat so you wouldn't know the sleeve ever had a hole in it."

"I'm allowin' the others will shine terrible bright."

"They've all got new uniforms, an' are bound to look mighty fine."

"You don't seem to be sulking on account of having to wear old togs," 'Lish Davis said with a peculiar twinkle in his eyes.

"What would be the use? I can't have 'em, an' I'll go through my part of the drill jest the same as if I was covered with brass buttons."

"It's comin' kind of tough on Ninety-four, eh, Jerry?" the driver asked. "All hands of us swelling, and our kid rushing around at the head with patched trousers? The boys in the Department will think we haven't earned much money this year."

"I don't think you ought'er feel bad 'bout it if I don't," Seth said, trying hard to appear unconcerned. "People will know you have something else to do with your money than buy swell clothes for me."

"I ain't so certain about that, my boy. At all events we don't count on taking any chances," 'Lish said with a laugh. "This ain't the first time we've talked about a new uniform, and somehow or other the tailor happened around this afternoon with one that looks as if it might fit you. Bring it down, Jerry."

Now Seth understood why this conversation had been begun, and, while he was rejoiced by the thought that he would be dressed as well as the other members of the corps, there was in his mind a certain uneasiness about accepting such

a favor in addition to the many which had been bestowed upon him.

"I'm owin' Ninety-four so much, Mr. Davis, that it'll be terrible if I don't get an appointment after all, an' it wouldn't----"

"You can stop right where you are. This here uniform that Jerry is fetching ain't charged up against you, nor it never will be. We reckon on having the right to give a present the day you graduate, and if it'll make you feel half as good to wear it as it will us to see you in it, we'll be a mighty jolly crowd to-morrow."

By this time Jerry had returned with the garments over his arm, and Seth exclaimed as he saw them:

"Why there's a helmet, an' you've had brass buttons put on the coat, Mr. Davis!"

"Sure; the helmet belongs to the clothes, and on every button you'll see the letters 'N. Y. F. D.'"

"But only one who was really in the Department could wear them."

"I reckon you can tackle that kind of a job to-morrow, and if it so be that you get thrown out because of not being up in the drill, it won't take long to cut them off."

"Oh, if I should fail!" and the tears came into Seth's eyes despite all his efforts to keep them back.

"You will for a fact, if you get nervous over it. A clear head, forgetfulness of everything but the drill, and Ninety-four's kid will have an appointment, or the promise of one, before this time to-morrow night."

Then 'Lish Davis proposed to walk to headquarters with the boy in order to make certain he went directly to bed; the new uniform was wrapped carefully in paper, for it was not proposed that Seth should put it on until the following morning, and then every member of the company shook hands with "their kid," each giving him some bit of good advice.

During the walk the old driver cautioned Seth again and again not to speculate upon possible failure; but to believe he would surely succeed, and when the two parted, 'Lish Davis said feelingly:

"You're a good boy, Seth, and while every one of Ninety-four's crew is your friend, you're dearer to me than the whole boiling of them. I'm proud of what you have done, and will do to-morrow. God love you, my lad."

Then the driver turned away abruptly, as if there was some particular reason why he wished to hide his face, and as Seth wiped the moisture from his eyes lest perchance a tear should fall on the new uniform, he whispered to himself:

"God *must* love me, even if I am sich a terrible duffer, else He'd never let me run up against Ninety-four's company."

During the forenoon of the next day Seth wandered around the gymnasium trying to act upon the advice given by his friends in the matter of "keeping cool," and then came the time to put on the new uniform, for he had been assured by Mr. Fernald that it was perfectly proper for him to wear the helmet and the brass buttons, even though he was not a regular member of the corps.

When all was ready for the march to Riverside Drive something occurred which caused the boy considerable uneasiness, for, instead of setting out with the members of the corps, he, with six others were ordered to fall into line by themselves.

Fifty firemen, picked members of the Department, ranged themselves on either side, in advance and behind as an escort, and no less a person than Chief Bonner himself took a station at their head.

Why he was thus separated from the men with whom he had practised Seth could not imagine, and there came into his mind as the order to march was given, the thought that some serious mistake had been made--that he was in the wrong place, and, therefore, would utterly fail of acting his part properly.

His astonishment and uneasiness increased when the squad with their escort, having arrived at the Drive, were stationed in line facing the river, with their backs toward Seventy-Sixth Street, the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Band a short distance behind them.

Why these men, two of whom he had never seen before, should with himself be singled out and stationed apart from the others, was a mystery which Seth failed to unravel, speculate as he might.

He saw the Life-Saving Corps, in whose ranks he should have been, march up and take their station not far from the grand stand which was thronged with spectators.

Then, in line with the other engines, he saw Ninety-four with 'Lish Davis holding the reins, and he fancied the driver

winked at him in a most mysterious manner as he passed.

A moment later he heard a shrill cry:

"Hi! Get on to Seth! What's he standin' out there all by his lonesome for?"

He knew it was Dan who had made this remark; but could not see him without changing his position, therefore he remained motionless.

The band was playing, gayly-dressed people were watching curiously, and in many cases admiringly, the vast number of blue-coated men who represented the finest Department in the world, and of all those to be seen Seth was, perhaps, the only person troubled in mind.

Some order was given, the boy did not understand what, for he was watching the Life-Saving Corps in the hope that some of them, seeing he was out of position, would summon him to their ranks.

He saw that some one had arrived at the stand, and believed it to be the mayor.

The little squad and their escort saluted the gentleman by slowly raising their right hands to their helmets, and then as slowly lowering them.

Mechanically Seth copied the example of the men on either side of him, and thus, fortunately, had not neglected his duty.

The music of the band was hushed, the mayor began to speak, and as he went on Seth was plunged into even greater bewilderment than before.

"It is the very pleasantest task of my experience," said the mayor, "to acknowledge the great debt which New York owes to the Fire Department of the city. In our population of two million souls there is no one branch of the municipal service which renders such valuable services as the Fire Department. We are gathered here to-day to do honor to a few of the firemen who have rendered themselves famous during the year. These men have snatched persons from the jaws of death, but this is the duty of every fireman. The army and navy are called upon to destroy everything, but it is your duty to save everything."

"We are proud to-day to render you our homage for the magnificent manner in which you have discharged your duty all along the line, from the Chief down, in all perilous moments, and especially you who have been selected by the Department to receive these medals. This is the most pleasing duty I have ever performed."

The speech ended, Seth was more positive than before that he had made a mistake in position, and to his yet further bewilderment, after the mayor had handed to the Chief a medal, the latter pinned it to his coat--to the uniform which Ninety-four's company had presented, probably knowing at the time how it would be decorated.

While this was being done the mayor described in detail that which Seth had done when saving the baby's life, and as he concluded a great shout went up from the assembled multitude, high above which could be heard Dan's shrill notes.

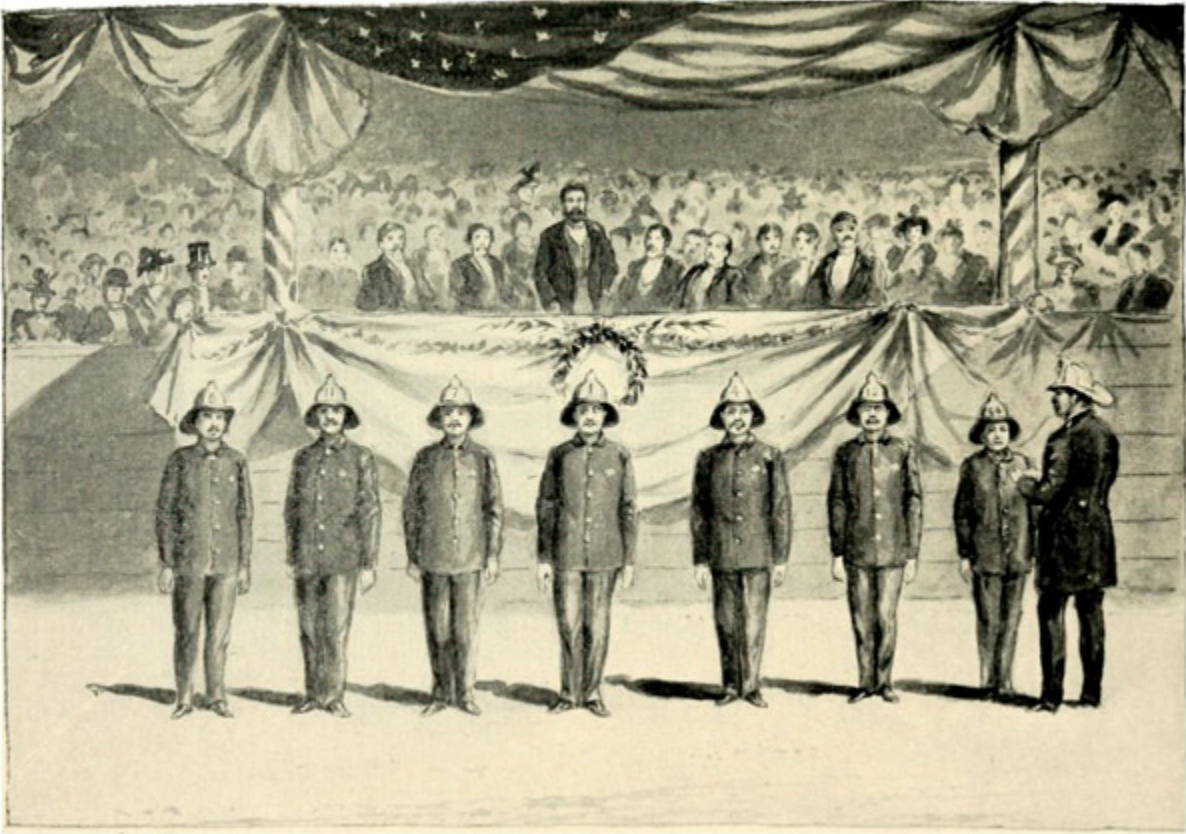
Then another medal was given to the Chief, who pinned it to the coat of the man standing next to the boy in line, the mayor meanwhile explaining why it had thus been bestowed, and Seth began to understand how greatly he was honored.

When each of the seven had been decorated, and while the throng were cheering themselves hoarse, the Chief said in a low tone to Seth:

"Mr. Fernald has the official notification of your appointment as substitute fireman, and you can get it on your return to headquarters. You are assigned to Company Ninety-four, and will report to their house for duty to-morrow morning."

Seth could not speak, and in fact the Chief moved away so quickly that there was no chance; but looking up toward where Ninety-four was stationed he saw every member of the company waving his helmet as if indulging in silent cheering.

Then he knew they were all in the secret--that it would be no news when he told them he was at last really their comrade.



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As to what followed immediately after this, Seth had no very clear idea.

He was not even conscious of how he left the squad of men who had just been decorated for their bravery, and found himself in his proper station among the Life-Saving Corps.

He hardly heard the order for the drill to be commenced, but followed the movements of those nearest him until it was as if he forgot everything else, and was once more back at headquarters fitting himself for what had already been accomplished.

Over the building which had been loaned for this purpose Mr. Fernald's pupils swarmed, as if clambering up a smooth surface of brick was a task more simple than the ordinary methods of locomotion, and each portion of the drill was gone through with mathematical exactness.

Concerning it, 'Lish Davis said to his comrades as Ninety-four was hauled into her quarters that evening:

"It was a great sight, boys, and what made it greater was that not a man among them outdid our kid. Josh Fernald himself couldn't go through a drill better, and we've reason to be mighty proud of what that little chap has done."

After the Life-Saving Corps had concluded their portion of the exhibition, two battalions were paraded by the Chief himself, ten engines, two hook and ladder companies, the water-tower and the fire-boat, *New Yorker*, taking part therein.

The men first marched past the reviewing stand to the music of the band, after which, in response to an alarm sounded by the mayor, the engines and their crews returned along the Drive at full tilt, with fires lighted, whistles blowing, and bells ringing, as if running to a fire.

During the early part of the evening after the exhibition on Riverside Drive, a boy clad in the full uniform of a fireman, wearing on the left breast of his coat a handsome gold medal suspended by a knot of red ribbon, walked rapidly down the street toward the headquarters of Ninety-four engine, and a crowd of lads, who might have been bootblacks or newsboys, gathered on the sidewalk, cheered him loudly as he came in view, after which the senior member of the firm of Roberts & Dean shouted shrilly:

"Now let's give three more rousers for the substitute fireman of Ninety-four engine!"

And the cheers were given with such a hearty will that citizens more than a block away turned hastily to ask one of the other why the police allowed such a disturbance to be made at that hour.

THE END.