

FICTION

Edward Sylvester Ellis

Brave Tom

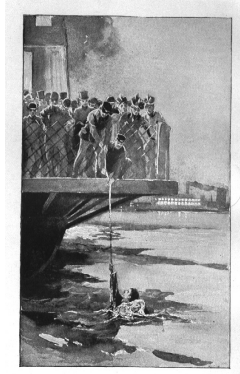
A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



"Pull up; I'm all right."

Page 50

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BRAVE AND HONEST SERIES. No. 1

BRAVE TOM
OR THE BATTLE THAT WON

By

EDWARD S. ELLIS

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"HONEST NED," "RIGHTING THE WRONG," ETC.**

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CHAPTER I.

On a certain summer day, a few years ago, the little village of Briggsville, in Pennsylvania, was thrown into a state of excitement, the like of which was never known since the fearful night, a hundred years before, when a band of red men descended like a cyclone upon the little hamlet with its block-house, and left barely a dozen settlers alive to tell the story of the visitation to their descendants.

Tom Gordon lived a mile from Briggsville with his widowed mother and his Aunt Cynthia, a sister to his father, who had died five years before.

The boy had no brother or sister; and as he was bright, truthful, good-tempered, quick of perception, and obedient, it can be well understood that he was the pride and hope of his mother and aunt, whose circumstances were of the humblest nature. He attended the village school, where he was the most popular and promising of the threescore pupils under the care of the crabbed Mr. Jenkins. He was as active of body as mind, and took the lead among boys of his own age in athletic sports and feats of dexterity.

One summer day the village of Briggsville blazed out in black and red and white, every available space being covered with immense posters, which in flaming scenes and gigantic type announced the coming of "Jones's & Co.'s Great Moral Menagerie and Transcontinental Circus, on its triumphal tour through the United States and Canada."

Naturally a tremendous excitement set in among the boys, who began hoarding their pennies and behaving with supernatural propriety, so that nothing should interfere with the treat, which in exquisite enjoyment can never be equaled by anything that could come to them in after-life.

Tom Gordon had never yet seen the inside of a circus and menagerie; and as his mother promised him that the enjoyment should be his, it is impossible to describe his state of mind for the days and nights preceding the visit of the grand aggregation, the like of which (according to the overwhelming posters) the world had never known before. He studied the enormous pictures, with their tigers, bears, leopards, and panthers, the size of a meeting-house; their elephants of mountainous proportions, and the daring acrobats, contortionists, and performers, whose feats made one hold one's breath while gazing in awe at their impossible performances. The lad dreamed of them at night, talked about them through the day, and discussed with his most intimate friends the project of forming a circus of their own when they became bigger and older. The latter project, it may be added, owing to unforeseen obstacles, never assumed definite form.

But alas! this is a world of disappointment. On the morning of the circus Tom was seized with a violent chill, which almost shook him out of his shoes. He tried with might and main to master it; for he well knew that if he did not, his visit to the wonderful show must be postponed indefinitely. He strove like a hero, and was actually sick several hours before the watchful eyes of his mother and aunt discovered his plight. The moment came when he could hold out no longer, with his teeth rattling like castanets, and his red face so hot that it was painful to the touch. Since the performance did not open until two o'clock in the afternoon, he did not as yet abandon all hope.

His mother and aunt sympathized with him; but although he rallied to a great extent from his illness, they could not give consent for him to leave the house. He partook of refreshment, and left his bed at noon. At two o'clock he was able to sit in the chair by the window, with his fever greatly abated, and an hour later he was as free from all traces of the ague as you or I.

But it was then too late to go to the circus. The disappointment was a sore one, but the lad stood it like the really brave fellow he was. He swallowed the lump in his throat, and smiled as he said to his aunt,--

"When the circus comes again, I don't think I'll have a chill."

"And you shall see it, if you are alive then,--of that be assured."

The day was one of the most pleasant and balmy of the season, and Tom walked out of the house, leaned on the gate, and looked up and down the highway.

Suddenly he observed a span of horses coming on a gallop, while the driver of the open wagon was lashing them with his whip and urging them to still greater speed.

"They aren't running away," mused the astonished boy; "for, if they were, the man wouldn't be trying to make them run faster. It's Mr. MacDowell! I never saw him drive faster than a walk before; something dreadful must have happened."

As Mr. MacDowell caught sight of the boy, and came opposite, he shouted something, and with an expression of terror glanced around and pointed with his whip behind him. The furious rattle of the wagon prevented Tom's catching the words, and the terrified farmer did not repeat them, but lashed his team harder than ever, vanishing in a cloud of dust raised by his own wheels.

"He must be crazy," said Tom, unable to think of any other explanation of the old man's frantic behavior.

The lad stood with his head turned toward the cloud of dust, wondering and speculating over the strange affair, when hurried footsteps caused him to turn quickly and look again in the direction of the village.

This time it was Jim Travers, who was panting from his running, and whose face was a picture of consternation, equal to that of Farmer MacDowell.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Tom as his schoolmate reached him.

"O Tom, ain't it awful?" gasped the new arrival, coming to a halt, still panting, and casting affrighted glances in the direction of Briggsville.

"Ain't *what* awful?"

"Gracious! hain't you heard the news? I thought everybody knowed it."

And the tired boy took off his hat and rubbed his sleeve across his steaming forehead, as though his expression of surprise at Tom's ignorance communicated of itself the news to him. Tom, as may be supposed, was on needles; for, as yet, he had not received the first hint of the occurrence, which certainly must have been of a stirring nature.

"Sam Harper, Jack Habersham, and Bill Dunham--*all killed* before any one could help 'em! Did you ever hear of anything like it?" continued Jim.

"I haven't heard of *that* yet. I don't know what you're talking about, Jim; if you can't tell me, why, shut up!"

"So you hain't heard the news? I forgot; it scared me almost to death. I thought everybody knowed it. I must hurry home."

And the bewildered youngster was on the point of dashing off again, after partially recovering his wind, when he seemed to awaken to the fact that he owed something in the way of enlightenment to his friend.

"I forgot, Tom; but I did think you knowed it: guess you're the only boy in a thousand miles that hain't heard of it. Well, you see the way of it was this: there was the biggest crowd I ever seed at the circus,--don't believe any other circus in the country ever had so many people there. Everything was going 'long all right, when what did Sam Harper do, but reach out with a stick and punch it in the eye of the tiger, Tippto Sahib? The minute he done it, the tiger let out a yell that you would have heerd a mile off, and, afore Sam could get out of the way, the tiger smashed right out of the cage and was among the people, chawing them up. He had his well eye on Sam, and crushed his head like an eggshell, with one bite! Then he made a sweep with his paw, and knocked Jack Habersham clean out the tent. He must have gone a

hundred feet through the air, for he come down on top of the steeple, and is there yet with the spire sticking up through him. Then he hit Bill Dunham such a clip that he sailed out through the same hole in the tent that Jack passed through. When I left, Bill hadn't been seed by anybody. Guess he hasn't come down yet.

"Then the tiger come for *me*!

"I seen him make a spring, and ducked my head. He went clean over, and landed among the women and children, and begun chawing 'em up. Why, Tom, the sound of their bones cracking and snapping in his jaws was like the fire-crackers going off on the Fourth of July. Them as warn't swallered or killed scattered right and left, and begun climbing trees, jumping through winders, and fastening the doors. All this time the tiger kept on chawing. He never took more than one bite at a man!"

"Did you see him kill any one?" asked the scared Tom, somewhat confused by the tremendous narrative of his friend.

"Did I see him kill any one? I should say I did. I seed him kill more than forty!"

"Did he eat 'em all?"

"Of course he did! That is, all but their boots and shoes. He don't seem to like leather," added Jim thoughtfully; "for I noticed that when the men were going down his throat, he kind of shet his jaws, so as to slip off their boots."

"Jim, he must be a big tiger to hold so many folks inside of him."

"Course he is! The biggest that was ever catched in Greenland! He didn't not only swaller the men and boys and women that I'm telling you 'bout, but he took in horses, cows, dogs, and anything in his way. If I ain't mistook, he swallered Mr. MacDowell's two horses with him."

"No, he didn't; for they went by a few minutes ago. But, Jim, what makes you in such a hurry?"

"I'm trying to get away from Tippo Sahib," replied the frightened lad, glancing furtively again toward the village.

"Where's the tiger now?"

"He ain't fur off, and," added Jim, speaking the truth this time, "*the tiger's coming this way, and will soon be here.*"

CHAPTER II.

It was Tom Gordon's turn now to be frightened.

"What!" he exclaimed, almost leaping from his feet; "the tiger coming this way! How do you know that?"

"I seed him! Ain't that enough? He started right up the road on a gallop, with the blood dripping from his jaws!"

"But where is he now?"

"He went a little way, stopping now and then to swaller some one that warn't quick 'nough to git out of his path; he went over the hill this side of Briggsville, where you know we couldn't see him. By that time a whole lot of the folks had guns, and started after him. Being on my way home, I jined 'em. When we got to the top of the hill, old Tippo Sahib couldn't be seen anywhere."

"Aren't you afeard to go home?"

"No, of course not," replied Jimmy, rapidly regaining courage; "I know how to fix him if he comes after me."

"How's that?"

"All I've got to do is to stop short and look him right in the eye. A chap mustn't tremble, but look hard and stern."

"Why didn't you do that, Jim, when he first broke out of his cage?"

"I hadn't time! I'll do it if I meet him agin. Remember, Tom, if you run against him, you must fix your eyes on him and not wink. *That'll* fetch him every time."

"But s'posin' it doesn't?"

"If you should have to wink, and he comes for you, why all you've got to do is to haul off with your foot and kick him awful hard under the jaw; that'll fix him! But you mustn't be barefooted, or you'll hurt your toes. And you must kick hard 'nough too," added the budding naturalist, "to knock his jaw off. Then of course he can't bite."

The scheme was a brilliant one, perhaps; but young as was Tom Gordon, he felt that the difficulty lay in its application.

"Gracious! Jim! the tiger is stirring up things, isn't he? We've got a gun in the house, and if he visits us I think I'll try that."

"Do you know where to hit him?" asked Jim, who, having fully recovered his wind, seemed at the same time to have regained a vast amount of curious knowledge of natural history.

"I s'pose in the head is as good as any place."

"Don't you think of such a thing! He don't mind being hit in the head more than you do getting hit by a spit-ball. You must aim for his tail!"

"How can that hurt him?" asked the amazed Tom.

"Why, I seed the balls that hit his head glance off and scoot up in the air, like skipping stones over the water. A tiger uses his tail to balance himself with. Shoot off his tail, and he loses his balance. Every time he tries to walk, he tips over. Don't forget, Tom, if you shoot, to aim at his tail, just where it is stuck onto his body. If you miss, look him in the eye; and if that doesn't stop him, let drive with your foot under the jaw, and don't forget to have your shoes on. Well, I must go home to tell the folks to git ready," added Jim, loping off like an Indian starting on a

long journey.

Tom had caught the contagion of excitement, and the moment his friend left he made a dash for the door of his home, bursting in upon his mother and aunt with the astounding news just received from his playmate.

Strange women would they have been not to have been wrought up by the alarming tidings. Brushing aside the chaff, there remained the wheat in Jim's words to the effect that the tiger, one of the finest of his kind ever seen in captivity, had broken out of his cage, injured, if not killed, a number of people, and was in the immediate neighborhood, with the prospect of paying a visit to this home.

"The gun is loaded," said the mother, turning slightly pale; "but I don't think one of those animals will attempt to enter a house."

"I have read that in India," remarked her sister-in-law, "they follow the natives into their houses, and tear down the structures in their fury."

"But their dwellings are made of light bamboo, and are frail structures."

"We may as well be on the right side," remarked the other, stepping hastily to the door. But just before reaching it, the latch flew up, and Jim Travers plunged in, falling on his hands and knees, the picture of terror itself.

"Shut the door quick!" he gasped. "The tiger is coming; he's coming; he's right behind me."

In a twinkling, Aunt Cynthia sprang forward, caught the latch, and slid the heavy bar in place, while the mother hastened to the window.

"Look out!" called Jim, clambering to his feet; "he'll spring right through and chaw you up, quicker'n lightning."

But the brave parent not only threw up the window and bolted the shutters, but did it coolly and deftly with each window, front and back, thus shrouding the room in obscurity.

Tom climbed into a chair set in front of the fireplace, and took down the loaded rifle, which he knew how to use as well as any boy of his years.

"Come, Jim, let's go up-stairs to my bedroom; maybe we can get a shot at him."

At the top of the stairs the leader paused and turned about.

"Say, Jim, did you try to look in the tiger's eye?" he asked.

"Don't bother me with such foolish questions; I hadn't a chance."

"How was it?"

"Why, I hadn't got far from the house, when I heered a growl, and there was the tiger in the field, looking over the fence at me."

"Seems to me that was just the chance you wanted, if he was looking at you."

"I s'pose it was; but to own up, Tom, I didn't think of it. I was afeard he would go for your folks. So I thought I would walk down and tell you."

"Did you walk all the way?"

"I may have hurried a little,--that is, a part of the way. I would have turned round and let him have my foot under the jaw, but I was afeard my shoe would give out."

Meanwhile, the two boys walked softly to the front window of Tom's bedroom, and cautiously peered out.

"Sh! I b'lieve I see him," whispered the young host.

"Where?" asked his companion in the same guarded manner.

"Under the oak; he's standing still just now. There! he's creeping off toward the woodshed."

"Yes, that's him! that's him! I know it. Hadn't you better let me take a shot?"

"I can shoot as well as you."

Tom was right. He was looking upon the royal Bengal tiger and no mistake. He had halted under a large oak, standing on the other side of the road, and seemed to be debating with himself what he should do next.

The rattle of a coming wagon attracted his attention, and he crouched down, as if preparing to spring upon the driver and his animals.

"Just watch him chaw up the horses and the man!" whispered Jim.

"If he means to do that, I'd better shoot," said Tom, setting down his gun and silently raising the window.

"You can't do it now, for he's almost behind the tree."

"His head shows, and I guess that's better than his tail."

Tom rested the heavy barrel of the rifle on the window-sill, and knelt down to make his aim sure. Before, however, he could obtain a good sight, the old farmer came so nearly opposite that he was obliged to restrain his fire through fear of hitting him or his horses.

The boys held their breath, certain of the awful occurrence at hand. But the tiger just then seemed to be in a magnanimous mood. Possibly he was satiated with what he had already devoured in the way of horses, men, women, and children. Be that as it may, the farmer and his team never suspected their peril, if, in point of fact, any peril threatened them. The animals jogged along, with the man half asleep on the front seat, his idle whip sloping over his shoulder. The king of the jungle made not the least demonstration against them.

"That must be 'cause he isn't hungry," remarked Jim.

"Then I should think he would go away and leave us."

"Don't you understand? We're tender, and juicier than that old man."

"Jingo! if that's what he's after, I'm going to shoot."

Tom again sighted along the barrel; but at the moment his finger began pressing the trigger, the beast rose to his feet and looked directly at the house, as if trying to decide the best avenue of entering,--the door, the windows, or possibly the chimney.

He formed a striking picture, this fearful king of the jungle, whose terrific strength, as scientific tests have proven, is one-fifth greater than that of the African lion. His massive head was erect; his eyes shone, and his sinewy, graceful body, covered with its soft, velvety and spotted fur was like the beauty of some deadly serpent. His long tail slightly swayed from side to side, and, although the boys could not hear it, they were sure he was growling in his anger.

Once his blood-red tongue was projected for an instant from his mouth, and licked his jaws, as the cat species are fond of doing; and occasionally he moved his head from side to side.

"He means to chaw us all up," said Jim. "Why don't you fire?"

At that instant Tom Gordon pressed the trigger.

CHAPTER III.

The shot, however, was a poor one.

The bullet struck the tiger, wounding him slightly, but not enough to disable him. Naturally it added to the fury of the beast, and really increased the peril of the people within the humble home, against whom the brute seemed to have formed a strong and curious antipathy.

He wheeled about, leaped the fence behind him, galloped a number of paces, and then paused abruptly, with his head up, and stared at the building, as if trying to learn the point whence the shot came, that he might punish the offenders.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Jim Travers, "he's going to jump up here and eat us up! Let's run."

"Where'll we run?" was the sensible question of Tom. "I'd load up again, but the powder and bullets are down-stairs, and before I could do it he'd be on us, if he means to jump into this window."

The halt of the tiger was only momentary. He trotted round to the rear of the house, vanishing from sight for the moment.

A brilliant idea struck Jim Travers.

"I can do better than that, Tom," he called out, clattering down-stairs. "Come with me, and I'll show you."

"Are you going to try to look him in the eye?" asked Tom, following after him, and scarcely less excited than he. "It won't work."

But the other lad paid no attention to the inquiry, so flurried was he over his new scheme for frightening off the dreaded beast.

The closing of the shutters on the lower floor, as we have explained, cast it in deep shadow. The mother had been so thorough in her work, that all the three rooms were thus obscured. Aunt Cynthia had lit a lamp, which sat on the table, and served to light up the interior.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked of the boys, as they rushed into her presence.

"I'm going to load the gun," replied Tom. "I don't know what Jim is driving at."

The women were naturally alarmed at the persistency of the wild animal in his demonstration against the dwelling. It did look as if he was bent on revenging himself for the hurt that had been inflicted. Many of the wild beasts of India, like the frightful cobra, often show great tenacity in attacking those from whom they have received injury.

"If the tiger will go away, you had better leave him alone," said Aunt Cynthia. "Your shot doesn't seem to have hurt him at all."

"Yes, it did," insisted Tom. "I hit him, for he jumped."

"But you only made him more angry; I am afraid we are not through with him yet."

The rifle was of the old-fashioned, muzzle-loading kind, and Aunt Cynthia gave what help she could to her nephew, as he began reloading it. From the powder flask she poured a charge down the barrel, upon which Tom pressed the conical bullet, wrapped about with a small bit of greased muslin. Then he had only to place a percussion-cap on the tube, and he was ready for business.

But before this stage of the proceedings was reached, something startling happened.

Jim Travers paid no heed to what his young friend was doing. Stooping over the burning wood in the fireplace, the flame of which was quite feeble, because the day was mild, he began

fanning it with his hat. He was thus employed, and Tom was in the act of capping the rifle, when a crash against the nearest shutter made the building tremble.

The startled inmates stared trembling in each other's faces.

"It's the tiger!" whispered Mrs. Gordon, uttering a truth that was manifest to every one.

"He is determined to get at us," added Aunt Cynthia. "What shall we do?"

"I'll fetch him this time," was the confident response of Tom, "if I can only get a fair aim."

"You had better let me have the gun," said his mother, who was in a momentary panic.

"Let me try it once more."

"But there is no chance here; it will not do to open the shutter: he will spring right in among us."

"Up-stairs is the best place," said Tom, hurrying up the steps again.

Meanwhile, Jim Travers, who had been so terrified, displayed more coolness than any one in the house. Probably he felt so much confidence in his new scheme, that he was warranted in this self-possession.

Like the rest, he was startled by the crash against the shutter. He rose to his feet, stared at the window, and, seeing that the beast had not broken through, stooped and resumed fanning the blaze with more vigor than ever. At this juncture Tom called from above,--

"Where is he? I can't see him."

He had peered from the front and rear windows without catching sight of the tiger. The reason was evident: the animal was so near the house that he could not be observed without raising the sash and thrusting out the head. It was well the lad was too prudent to do that.

Afraid that their voices might rouse his anger, the mother stepped to the foot of the stairs and called to her boy,--

"Keep quiet, Tom! He is somewhere near, but we can't see him any more than you. If we remain still, perhaps he will go away."

Jim Travers, having fanned the pieces of wood on the hearth into a crackling blaze, stepped softly to the window against which the tiger had flung himself, and bent his head in close attention.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Aunt Cynthia in an undertone, "come away; if he jumps through, he will land on top of your head."

"*Sh!*" whispered the boy, holding up one hand as a warning for them to keep silent; "*I hear him!*"

So he did. The tiger was trotting back and forth and round the building, evidently seeking some mode of entrance. Clearly he was resolved to punish the inmates for firing at him.

All stood still and listened. In the profound stillness the women caught the faint sound made by the velvety feet of the brute in trotting to and fro. He was traced as he made a complete circuit of the house, and then paused at the window where he had attempted to leap through.

The low, threatening growl which escaped him sent a shiver through all. Neither of the women dared to stir or speak. They expected every moment that his effort would be repeated with success.

And now to the dismay of the two, Jim Travers did an extraordinary thing,--one that almost took away their breath.

Running to the fireplace, he caught up the largest brand, with which he hurried to the window, and raised the sash with one hand.

"What are you doing?" demanded Aunt Cynthia in consternation.

"Never mind me," replied the youth; "I'm all right."

And then they literally became speechless when they saw him slide back the bolt which held the shutter in place. It looked as if he meant to open the way for the tiger to enter the house.

While thus busy, Jim thought proper to add a word of explanation,--

"There's nothing that wild beasts is so afeard of as fire; that's what I'm going to play on this chap."

The women were too frightened to protest.

After sliding back the fastenings, Jim stood leaning slightly forward, the torch in one hand, while the other rested against the shutter, which was not yet pushed open.

He was listening, and awaiting the opportune moment.

He plainly heard the *tip, tip*, of those feet, amid which a cavernous growl now and then mingled; but he hesitated, for the tiger appeared to be too far off to spring his scheme upon him.

Jim's coolness was marvelous. None was more terrified than he when the beast broke out of the cage, and he was among the most panic-stricken that dashed from the tent and fled homeward.

But here he was, like a veteran sportsman of the jungle, awaiting the critical moment with what looked like nerves of steel. He listened with all the acuteness of which he was master, and his keen ears did not deceive him.

Suddenly he flung both shutters wide open, and let in the flood of sunshine, which rendered useless the lamp on the table.

There was the tiger, no more than a dozen feet distant. The slight noise caused him to stop abruptly and turn his head while walking away.

The sight of the lad seemed to whet his fury. He lashed his tail, growled, and, swinging himself lightly round, cautiously approached the daring youngster, as if not quite satisfied with the look of things.

Jim leaned farther through the window, and swung his torch round and round, extending it at the same time toward the beast, which paused a few steps off, as if to gather himself for the spring.

The lad felt the need of vigor. He whirled the torch harder, and reached farther, shouting,--

"Get out, or I'll burn your head off! Come any nearer if you dare!"--

At this moment Jim, in his enthusiasm, leaned a trifle too far. His feet slipped over the floor, and he sprawled headfirst out of the window.

CHAPTER IV.

Jim Travers felt that he was lost. The women uttered cries of anguish, clasped their hands, and almost fainted.

Sometimes, however, a person instinctively does the best thing possible, when, if he took time for thought, he would do the worst.

The antipathy of wild beasts to fire is well known, but it must be remembered that the full degree of this terror is felt only during the darkness of night. The sun was in the horizon when the stirring events we have set out to narrate were going on.

When Jim came tumbling through the window, he held fast to the blazing torch, even while trying to save himself from falling. His dexterity enabled him to keep fair command of his limbs, and he bounded to his feet in a twinkling, at the moment when he expected Tippto Sahib to come down upon him like a clawing avalanche.

Then, instead of turning about and clambering back through the window (the surest means of inviting the attack of the beast), he uttered a shout, and, holding the torch in front, ran straight at the tiger!

It may be doubted whether the fiercest of wild creatures would have withstood such an assault. Even though the sun was shining, the tiger knew something of the meaning of that glowing brand. Wheeling about like a cat, he trotted off, turning his head from side to side, and frequently glancing at his pursuer.

His flight brought him into the field of vision of Tom Gordon up-stairs, who had been mystified to understand what was going on below.

"I'll finish him this time," was his conclusion, as he flung up the window, thrust the barrel of the weapon through, and dropped on one knee.

But it seemed as if fate held that particular royal Bengal tiger in its special keeping that day. Before Tom could make his aim certain, Jim Travers popped in front, so in line with the beast that the young marksman could not fire at one without risk of hitting the other.

"I daresen't do it," he decided, leaning his gun against the wall beside him; "I'm afeard of hitting Jim."

Although the latter had displayed an extraordinary degree of coolness at a critical point in the events, it must not be supposed that he possessed any unusual share of courage. It was his implicit faith in the blazing torch that inspired him to a daring that few men would have shown; but on the outside he lost his head.

He was hardly conscious of what he was doing when he sat off after the fleeing animal, and there's no saying what the end would have been, or rather there's no doubt that he would have feared ill, had not Tom called to him,--

"Come back, Jim! Your torch will soon go out, and then he'll have you sure!"

"Golly! that's so!" muttered Jim, stopping like a flash, and dashing for the house again; "I didn't think of that!"

Good Mrs. Gordon and Aunt Cynthia had recovered in a degree their senses. Unspeakably shocked by the peril of the youth, whose courage they estimated too highly, they shrank from no risk that could aid his final escape. They had not closed the shutter after his mishap, and, when they saw him wheel and run back, they stood by the window ready to receive him.

Jim Travers was a good runner; and when it is stated that he was certain Tippto Sahib was skurrying at his heels, it need not be added that he "surpassed himself" in the way of fleetness. Finding, after running a short way, that the beast was not after him, Jim flung aside the torch and went through the window like a cannon shot, rolling over and striking the other

side of the room before his flight was checked. A lad of his years, however, rarely suffers from hard knocks and bumps, and he was on his feet the next moment.

"Shut the window quick!" he called, "or he'll be in here."

No need of the appeal, for the mother with deft fingers quickly secured the shutter as before; and but for the lamp, all would have been in darkness again.

Jim darted up-stairs to learn how his playmate was making out.

"Why don't you shoot, Tom?" he called, hurrying to his side.

"Cause I don't see anything to shoot at," was the answer.

"What's become of the tiger?"

"I guess you scared him off."

Jim peeped cautiously out of the window.

"That's so; he isn't anywhere round, but he was out there a few minutes ago."

"So was you; but you aren't there now."

"I thought he chased me clean up to the window."

"He didn't follow you a single step; when you struck out for the window, he stopped short and laughed ready to die to see you run."

"The tiger laughed at me!" exclaimed Jim angrily; "who ever heard of such a thing?"

"Well, he looked as though he wanted to laugh, and then trotted down the road; I seen him jump over the fence and make for the woods."

"That's where he's gone! I guess I'll go home now, while I have the chance."

"Better wait, Jim, till you're sure he isn't round."

Jim followed this sensible advice, staying to supper, to which he was always welcome.

The women had received so great a shock, that they could not recover from it as quickly as the volatile youngsters. The shutters and doors were kept fastened, and every few minutes they peeped out in quest of the tiger that showed so much enmity toward them. When darkness closed in, however, not the first glimpse had been caught of him, and all began to hope he had taken his final departure. Mrs. Gordon gave her consent that Jimmy Travers should start homeward; and, promising to keep a sharp lookout for the creature, he departed. It may as well be added that he saw nothing more of Tippto Sahib, nor did the animal pay any visit to his home.

"Helloa! the house there!"

This was the startling summons that rang out in the stillness of the night, about two hours after the departure of Jimmy Travers. Mrs. Gordon stepped to the door, and with some misgiving drew it open. The full moon was shining brightly, and she saw two horsemen who had halted in the highway opposite the gate.

"Good-evening!" said the spokesman, lifting his hat in salutation when he observed the woman; "have you seen anything of a strange animal in this neighborhood, madam? We have traced him almost to this spot, but have lost track of him."

"Do you refer to the tiger that escaped from the menagerie this afternoon?"

"That's the animal we're looking for."

"Yes; he was here late in the afternoon, and tried to jump through the window."

"Did he hurt any one?" asked the man in alarm.

"No; we did not receive a scratch. My son shot him."

"What!" exclaimed the other; "did he kill the animal?"

"Oh, no," answered Mrs. Gordon (who was joined by Aunt Cynthia and Tom), smiling at the fear of the visitors; "my boy is quite young, and isn't much of a marksman; he thinks he hit the beast"--

"And I did too," interjected the lad, not pleased with this slur upon his skill with the gun.

"Possibly he did; but he was not injured much."

"I am glad to learn that. The tiger is one of the most valuable animals we have in the menagerie; I should be very sorry to lose him."

"But," interposed Aunt Cynthia, "it may become necessary to shoot him in self-defense."

"Not likely; he is not apt to injure any one if he is let alone."

Tom had not forgotten the appalling stories told by Jim Travers on his arrival from the exhibition.

"I heered he chawed up Sam Harper, Jack Habersham, Bill Dunham, and a whole lot of folks that was at the circus."

The laughter of the two horsemen was hearty.

"Those youngsters are alive and well. The boy who punched the tiger in the eye, and caused all this rumpus, was knocked down and scratched somewhat, but not half as much as he deserved. No one else, so far as we can learn, has been injured; though, as I remarked just now, Tippo Sahib will fight if he is driven into a corner."

"He tried to jump through our window," said Aunt Cynthia.

"Before or after you fired at him?"

"Afterward."

"I suppose it was caused by the hullabaloo of the people, frightened out of their wits. It is the same as when a hue and cry is raised about a dog. If he isn't mad, he will soon become so. But, madam, we are very anxious to secure the animal before he is killed or seriously injured. We will pay a good reward for his recapture."

"How much?" asked Tom, to the surprise of his relatives.

"One hundred dollars to any one who will secure him without injury, or fixes it so we can recapture him. May I ask where the tiger seemed to be going when you last saw him?"

"The last we seen of him," replied Tom, "he was cutting 'cross the field toward the woods over yonder."

Thanking the boy and the ladies for their information, the horsemen rode off, soon disappearing up the highway.

The fact that these men, experienced in their knowledge of wild animals, were searching for the escaped tiger, naturally lifted much of the fear of the beast from the hearts of the Gordon family. They believed the keepers would recapture him before he could do much harm in the community. They were convinced, too, that they were not the only ones looking for him.

The shutters of all the windows were never more carefully barred than before the three inmates retired to their beds.

Tom Gordon, being a rugged, healthy boy, generally passed the night in refreshing slumber. Not a trace of the ague which kept him from the circus showed itself in his system when he went up-stairs to his room; but, somehow or other, after he lay down he could not sleep.

No doubt the excitement through which he had gone so wrought upon his nerves as to drive away all drowsiness; but the thought that was running through his brain found expression in the words:--

"A hundred dollars! What a fortune that is! It would make us comfortable for life. I wonder if there is any way of catching Tippo Sahib before the men find him.

"I don't believe there's anything in what Jim said about looking the creature in the eye. S'pose I should meet him in the woods, and fix him that way, what good would it do? I'd have to stand there till the keepers come along, and they might not do that for a week or two. By that time I'd be starved to death, and so would the tiger, and they want him alive.

"Jim must be mistaken, too, 'bout shooting off his tail. Jim and me haven't got any tails, and we don't have any trouble in walking. I can't see how it would make any difference with the tiger, either. I wonder where Jim got all them ideas,--I guess where he got the stories 'bout so many people being chewed up."

The lad lay for a while on one side, and then flung himself on the other. Several times he was on the point of dropping into an uneasy slumber, but some slight noise always came at the critical moment to make him wider awake than he was in the first instance.

What is more disturbing than the occasional rattle of a window sash when we are trying to woo sleep? By and by Tom discovered it was that which had played the mischief with his rest. He sprang impatiently out of bed, and hurried to the window, with the intention of righting matters.

The bright moon shining from an unclouded sky made it almost as light as day. He stood a minute, looking out upon the beautiful scene; for, young as he was, he could not fail to be impressed by the striking loveliness of everything out-doors.

"I wonder whether they've caught Tippo Sahib"--

The lad caught his breath, for just then he saw something moving in the shadow of the woodshed. A second look showed it to be some sort of quadruped, and the third--could he believe his eyes?--revealed the tiger himself!

Yes, it was the terrible brute and no mistake. The boy rubbed his eyes and looked again. Some unaccountable attraction seemed to have brought Tippo Sahib back to the dwelling where he had met with so interesting an experience that afternoon.

But all this being so, Tom Gordon might well ask himself what good the presence of the animal promised to be to him. Hitherto, he and his friends had counted themselves lucky in being able to keep out of his way when he showed a desire to explore the interior of the house. How, then, could he expect to get the hundred dollars offered for the capture of the brute?

Mingled with the eager wish of the lad to earn the munificent sum, was a slight misgiving as to the meaning of this return of the tiger. Having eluded the men sent after him, had he come back to revenge himself upon those who had treated him so ill?

This discomforting thought was dissipated by the action of Tippo Sahib. He did not move around as on his former visit, but seemed to be prowling about the woodshed, as if in quest of something. Surely he would not act thus if he meditated an attack upon the inmates of the home!

But Tom had learned from his aunt and mother that if the tiger chose, he could readily leap

from the ground to the windows of the upper story, and, therefore, would have little difficulty in entering, if he was bent on doing so.

"I'll get my gun, so as to be ready to shoot him. But if I shoot him, I won't get the reward that was promised; but it's better to kill him than to have him chew us to pieces."

Just then the animal worked his way round the corner of the structure, out of the shadow, into the bright moonlight. He showed no interest in the house itself, but confined his attention to the woodshed,--a fact which lessened the lad's fear, and held him at the window, closely watching the beast.

His change of location brought him to the front of the strong wooden building, and near the partially open door.

The heart of the lad gave a great bound.

"S'pose he goes inside, and I slip up and shut him in!"

All the indications pointed to the tiger entering the structure, though it was impossible to imagine his purpose, unless he scented the waste food kept there in a barrel for the pigs belonging to the Widow Gordon.

The attempt the lad had in mind involved a fearful risk; for there could be no doubt that if the beast detected him, he would make him serve for supper.

Probably if Tom had been given a few more minutes to think over the matter, he would have abandoned the design in his mind; but that one hundred dollars looked as big to him as a million does to most people. Hastily drawing on his trousers, he began stealthily descending the stairs. Fortunately for him, his aunt and mother were asleep, else they would have put an emphatic veto on his foolhardy scheme. The bolts of the door were softly slid back, the door itself silently drawn inward an inch or two, and the lad peeped out. His position gave a full view of the front of the woodshed, and the sight was an interesting one. The tiger had partially entered. Indeed, little was seen more than his tail, which, projecting from the darkness of the structure, swayed slowly from side to side, as if he had detected something not altogether pleasing.

"If he goes in, I'll slip out and hook the door; but, if he comes back, it won't do to let him see me."

This was the thought that stirred Tom Gordon, as he peered stealthily out of the crack made by the door. Could he have thought of any way by which to drive the tiger inside, he would have done so; but there was none. He could only wait and watch, and hope for a favorable issue of the undertaking.

It struck him as strange that the beast should stand so long with only his tail in the outer air. The lad fancied it had disappeared entirely; but at the moment he was about to slip forward, he detected the tuft agitating the chips and dirt about the entrance. He therefore held back and still watched and waited.

There! the brute must have taken another step farther, for no part of his appendage was visible. He was wholly within the shed.

It was now or never.

Tom left the door open a few inches, so that if he should find it necessary to retreat, he would meet with no trouble in re-entering his home. In that event, however, it wasn't likely Tipoo Sahib would meet with any trouble in following him.

The heart of the youth throbbed violently when he stepped out in the moonlight and comprehended the perilous nature of the business.

"If he comes out tail first," was his thought, "I'll have a chance to dodge him; but if he comes

head first, I'll be a goner."

He was not idle while these imaginings were passing through his mind. Step by step, and on tiptoe, he stole forward, until he stood within a couple of paces of the fastening. Then it was that his courage almost deserted him, and the desire to turn about and make a dash for the door behind him was well-nigh irresistible.

But the thought of that magnificent hundred dollars restrained and nerved him to push on. Another step and he had but to lean forward with outstretched arm, seize the door, and snap it toward him. He was in the act of doing so, when he heard a guttural growl from within. Had this reached his ears when he was a few feet farther off, Tom would have turned and fled for life. He would have done so now but for his belief that it was too late. He could only save himself by shutting that door before the beast came through it.

Holding his breath, the lad seized the handle, and with a quick flirt drew the door toward him. The strong iron hook was slipped into the staple, and he had done all he could. Yielding then to the panic which had been struggling so long within him, he bounded upon the front porch, shot through the door, and closed and fastened it in a twinkling. Not even then did Tom feel safe, but bounded up-stairs with so much haste and noise, that the wonder was he did not awaken his aunt and mother. They slept too soundly, however, to be disturbed.

He ran to the window of his bedroom, and looked out again, fearing that the royal prisoner had already freed himself and would proceed to punish the one that had taken such liberties with him. Strange to say, everything looked as if there was no tiger within a score of miles. The door of the woodshed was fastened as it had been many times; but no noise or disturbance, so far as the lad could judge, sounded from within the structure. The prisoner seemed to have accepted his misfortune philosophically, and, perhaps, had lain down to rest himself after his stirring experiences of the afternoon.

"I wonder if he can get out of there. It's pretty strong, and there isn't any back-door or window that he can use."

The youth was so deeply interested in the question that he brought his chair beside the window and sat down to await results. It was not strange, perhaps, considering the lateness of the hour, that the sleep which he had long sought in vain now came to him. By and by his head began nodding, and, despite the cramped position, he slumbered soundly until awakened by the call of his mother.

As soon as Tom could collect his senses, he looked at the woodshed. So far as he saw, no change had taken place. Then he hurried down-stairs and told the astounding tidings.

"Mercy!" gasped Aunt Cynthia, "I was just about going to the shed for some wood, you were so long coming down. Suppose I had!"

"It would have been all over with you," replied Tom, hardly less startled than they; "I meant to stay awake all night, but forgot myself."

"Perhaps he has got out," suggested the mother; "I don't understand why he has kept so quiet."

While they were talking, a call came from the roadway again. When they looked out, four horsemen were seen.

"We find it impossible to locate that beast," explained the one that had done the talking the night before; "I hardly suppose you have seen anything more of him."

Before Mrs. Gordon or Aunt Cynthia could reply, Tom asked,--

"Did you say you would give a hundred dollars to any one that gets that tiger without hurting him?"

"We'll be glad to do that, sonny, or if he will show us where he is so we can capture him."

"Will you give a hundred dollars to have him in the woodshed there?"

"Indeed we will."

"Very well; *he's there!*"

CHAPTER V.

The men looked at Tom Gordon as if doubting his words.

"Are you in earnest?" asked one of them.

"Look for yourselves."

The horseman was out of the saddle in a twinkling, and walked quickly to the woodshed, whose cracks were so numerous that it was easy to see every part of the interior. Placing his eyes at one of these openings, he peered through.

"By George, boys!" he exclaimed, turning about, "the youngster's right; Tippo is in there."

The others hastily dismounted, tied their horses, and joined him. All took a look before they were satisfied no mistake had been made.

The tiger was stretched out in one corner, and had been asleep, when he was awakened by the noise. He raised his head, opened his eyes and growled, but showed no special anger at being disturbed.

While the men were debating as to the best means of securing him, Jack Durrick, who had done most of the talking, explained to the ladies and Tom what must have puzzled them concerning the action of the beast.

Durrick, it should be stated, figured on the stupendous posters as "Professor De La Cordova, Successor of the Renowned Van Amberg, and Fully his Equal in his Amazing Power and Control over the Wild Beasts of the Forest and Jungle." In this case, it must be added, the professor possessed fair claim to this distinction. He displayed great skill in the management of wild animals. No one could handle Tippo Sahib as did he. Had he been near the cage when Sam Harper angered him, he never would have permitted the beast to escape.

He said Tippo was frightened and nervous through his suddenly acquired freedom. He suffered pain from the jab in his eye, and was made more restless and fidgety by the excitement and his strange surroundings. The slight wound received by him renewed his anger; but, when he withdrew from the immediate vicinity, he undoubtedly made a raid on some farmer's live-stock, and had devoured a calf, pig, or sheep. He had eaten his fill, and thereupon became so docile as to be comparatively harmless, provided he was treated with consideration.

His return to the scene of his most stirring experience was one of those whims which his species sometimes show. Tired from his flight and filled to satiety, he had lain down to rest in the woodshed, so satisfied with his quarters that he offered no objection when Tom Gordon slipped up and fastened the door. So powerful and active an animal, had he chosen, could have broken out of the place in a twinkling; but he was content to stay where he was until fully rested.

"I assure you," added the professor, "you wouldn't have kept him much longer; when he awoke, hungry and thirsty, he would have placed himself on the outside before you could say Jack Robinson, and *then* there would have been trouble."

The actions of the professor proved his faith in his own words. He coolly unhooked the door, gently pushed it back, and stepped within the structure. Tippo Sahib uttered a growl, and Tom and his friends shrank farther away. The men, however, one of whom carried a coil of rope, held their places.

Professor De La Cordova displayed admirable coolness and tact. He was not rough in manner, but acted like one who felt himself master of the situation. His course, indeed, suggested to Tom that there was much truth in Jim Travers's declaration about the power of the human eye over the denizens of the jungle. Standing erect, the man remained motionless for a full minute, during which he kept his gaze fixed on the tiger, staring into those orbs as if he would "look him through."

Tippo Sahib was uneasy for a brief while, and then succumbed to that mysterious hypnotic influence which, in some cases, is equally potent with persons. He became humble, meek, and, if the term can be allowed, penitent.

Fully understanding his condition, the professor reached his hand behind him, without removing his gaze from the beast.

"The rope!" he said in a low voice.

The next moment, to the amazement of Tom and his relatives, he stepped gently forward, and fastened the rope around the unresisting neck of Tippo Sahib, who was led outside like a thoroughly subdued dog. Tom gave him plenty of room, and closely watched proceedings. While doing so, he observed a slight scratch on the hip of the beast, barely sufficient to break the skin; that was the path of the bullet fired by the lad the day previous.

Other ropes were fastened about the tiger, who took it all as a matter of course, and calmly followed when his guards moved in the direction of the horses. These resented the approach of the huge cat, so the professor and one of his men walked some distance behind the others, who took care of the animals.

Before their departure, Professor De La Cordova told Tom to call at the hotel between six and seven that evening, and he would be paid the hundred dollars with the thanks of Mr. Jones and all connected with the menagerie and circus.

"I wonder if they mean to cheat me out of it?" said the boy that afternoon, when he looked at the clock and saw it was nearly time to start.

"I hardly think so," replied his mother.

"Why didn't they give the money before they took the tiger away?"

"Probably they hadn't so much with them," suggested Aunt Cynthia, who plainly felt some misgiving over matters; "most likely the money has to be paid by some officer connected with the show."

"And he may say he never gave his men the right to make such an offer," remarked Tom.

"That may be," said the mother, thinking it wise to prepare her son for a probable disappointment; "the circus is to exhibit at Boorman's to-night. That is twenty miles off, and all may have gone thither. If those men choose to disregard their word, I see no help for it."

"It will be awful mean in them," declared the boy, who had become quite nervous; "I'll never catch any more tigers for them."

Tom loitered on his way to Briggsville, striving not to reach there before the time named; but despite the effort, he was in town fully a quarter of an hour too early.

A surprise awaited him. The news of the recapture of the runaway tiger had preceded him; and, as was natural, the story was exaggerated to an absurd degree. Jim Travers had told the wondering people that he saw Tom capture Sipo Tahib, as he called him, by jumping on his back and bending his forepaws over his neck. (Peter Parley's History, which Jim read at school, contained a picture of the naturalist Chatterton thus navigating an alligator, and Jim couldn't see why a tiger should not be handled the same way. He preferred, however, that some other boy should be the one to make the experiment.)

So it was that Tom found himself the hero of the hour. The boys and all his acquaintances gathered round him, and he had to tell the story over and over, until he became tired. When Jim Travers was reminded that Tom's modest account did not agree with his flamboyant yarn, he said he feared he had got things a little mixed, but that was the way he or Tom would have conducted the recapture had the chance been given them.

"Are you the young man that caught the runaway tiger?" asked a pleasant looking gentleman,

somewhat loudly dressed, as he laid his hand on the shoulder of Tom Gordon, while he was standing among a group of his friends on the porch of the hotel.

"I didn't exactly capture him," replied the blushing lad; "but I shut the door of the woodhouse, and he stayed there till the owners came and took him away."

"It's all the same; you deserve as much credit as if you had brought him here without help. I believe they promised you a hundred dollars reward, didn't they?"

"Yes, sir; one of the men said if I would call here between six and seven he would give me the money; but I don't see anything of him," added Tom, looking around, in the hope of catching a glimpse of Professor De La Cordova. "Has he gone away?"

"Yes; he is to appear in the show to-night at Boorman's, and could not wait. But I am Mr. Jones, the proprietor, and if you will step inside with me, it won't take us long to fix it. I was only waiting to make sure you were the right lad."

Tom delightedly followed the gentleman into an inner room, where the door was closed and the transaction quickly completed.

Mr. Jones made some sympathetic inquiries of the youth, and when he learned of his mother's moderate circumstances, expressed great pleasure that the reward had fallen to him. Then he handed him ten bright, crisp ten-dollar bills.

"That is quite a sum of money for a lad like you to have about him," added Mr. Jones. "You must be careful not to lose it."

"I am very thankful to you, and shall take good care of it," replied Tom.

"Where are you going to carry it?"

"In my inside coat pocket; then I will button my coat over it."

"That's right; and don't unbutton the coat till you reach your own home."

The money was put away as Tom indicated, and, thanking his kind friend again, Tom bade him good-by and withdrew.

CHAPTER VI.

Tom Gordon could not be blamed for failing to note several suggestive occurrences during this memorable visit to Briggsville.

Seated on the porch of the hotel, while he was talking to the group of young persons and acquaintances, were two strangers, whose dilapidated dress, frowzy heads, and surly faces, showed they belonged to that pestiferous class of vagrants known as tramps. They sat apart, after taking a drink in the bar-room, and with scowling but interested looks listened to the chatter going on around them. It did not take them long to catch the drift of matters. They talked together in low tones, with furtive glances at the young hero, and kept their places, with a few muttered remarks that no one else could catch, while Tom was inside.

When the smiling lad reappeared, his friends besieged him with inquiries.

"Did he give you the money, Tom? How much is it?"

Being a sturdy boy, Tom naturally did not wish to appear too much elated over his good fortune.

"Yes," he replied, with an assumption of indifference; "he paid me the hundred dollars like a gentleman, and I've got it in my pocket."

"What are you going to do with so much money?" asked a mischievous acquaintance; "buy a farm, or go in partnership with Vanderbilt?"

"I'm going to give every cent of it to my mother," replied Tom, with a compression of his fine lips and a flash of his eye.

"That's right!" commented an elderly gentleman; "you couldn't put it into safer hands, and I mean that for all of you youngsters."

It was at this juncture that the two tramps rose to their feet, and slouched down the road in the direction of Tom Gordon's home. In the flurry of the moment no one noticed their departure, which indeed might not have attracted attention at any time.

"You've got a loaded gun in your house?" was the inquiring remark of the same gentleman.

"Yes, sir; we always keep one. I fired at the tiger with it, but I didn't hurt him much," remarked Tom with a laugh.

"Well, tigers aren't the only creatures you've got to look out for in these times. There are plenty of people that would break into your house and murder you and your mother and aunt for the sake of that money."

Tom blanched a little at these words, and one of the bystanders said,--

"I don't think we have such people about here, Uncle Jed."

"I hope not, but you can't be too careful; I've been robbed myself when I hadn't any more thought of it than that boy there."

Had Tom Gordon been a few years older or younger he would have acted differently; that is to say he would have returned home without delay. But he did not wish to appear frightened by the words of the old gentleman; and, though he was eager to hurry home to his mother and aunt with the good news, he remained talking with his friends and trying to act as though he had forgotten about his great fortune, until the long summer day ended and twilight began closing in. Then when he started, he looked around to see whether any one was going in the same direction. He would have been glad of company, but it so happened that he set out alone in the gathering gloom to walk the mile that must be passed before he could reach his home.

"I wish Uncle Jed hadn't said what he did," he mused, when fairly beyond the town, "it makes me feel kind of pokerish; why didn't I think to bring my gun along? If the folks he talks about would rob our house they would stop me on the road and take the money from me."

He walked faster as the darkness increased, for the moon would not rise for some time to come, glanced often behind him, and essayed a timid whistle. He soon ceased this, however, for it only increased his uneasiness. Every minute or two he pressed one of his hands against his breast to make sure the precious package was there. Then he glanced back again in the gloom, and started when he fancied he saw a man following him. But it was only fancy, and he increased his pace, wondering why the mile seemed longer than he had ever known it before.

The rattle of a wagon caused him almost to leap from his feet.

"That's lucky!" he exclaimed; "I will get the man to let me ride, and then no one will dare disturb me."

But it proved that the wagon was coming from the direction of his home, so it could not be turned to account. He watched it as it came nearer. An old gentleman sat on the front seat of the open vehicle which was jolting along at an easy rate. It was too dark to see the driver's features plainly, but Tom believed he knew him and called out a greeting. The response showed he was right as to the identity of the individual.

Two-thirds of the way home came the most trying ordeal. The lad was obliged to follow quite a stretch of road where there was woods on both sides. This deepened the gloom, for the highway was so narrow that it was completely shadowed.

"If any robbers are waiting for me," he mused, "it will be in them woods."

He hesitated on the border of the shadows, meditating whether he could not reach home by some other course; but the forest, originally one that covered several hundred acres, was bisected by the highway, and the detour would be long. Still he decided to try it, for, somehow or other, the conviction was strong with him that danger lurked among the shadows. He turned about to retrace his steps for a short way, before leaving the road, when he stopped short, hardly repressing a gasp of affright.

He saw the unmistakable outlines of a man in the gloom, only a short distance behind him. Afraid to meet him face to face, Tom turned back and resumed his walk along the highway.

"When I get along a little farther," was his thought, "I'll slip over the fence among the trees and dodge him."

He began walking fast, continually glancing over his shoulder. His alarm increased upon discovering that the man had also quickened his footsteps, so that instead of holding his place, the pursuer, as he may be considered, was gaining.

The fact that not the slightest sound disturbed the stillness added to the oppression of the situation. The lad was on the point of breaking into a run, when the man, who was one of the tramps before referred to, called out,--

"Hold on there, sonny! don't be in such a hurry."

This salutation was not calculated to soothe Tom's agitation, and without any reply he started on a loping trot, still keeping his attention to the rear, and prepared to break into a dead run the moment it became necessary. He was fleet of foot, and believed he could make the fellow hustle.

"Didn't you hear me, sonny? If you don't want to get shot, stop!"

Tom had no wish to be shot, nor did he mean to have the company of the rascal who was bent on intruding upon him.

"Catch me if you can," he muttered, breaking into a swifter pace; "I'm glad it's night so I'll

have a chance to hide from you"--

"Hold on there! what's your hurry, younker?"

The boy almost sank to the ground, for this startling hail came not from the rear, but from the front. Stopping short, he saw a burly fellow, standing within ten feet of him in the middle of the road, so nigh indeed, that, despite the darkness, Tom had no earthly chance of eluding him, as he might have done had he detected his presence a moment sooner.

Rallying with a supreme effort, he addressed the one nearest him.

"What do you want, that you stop me this way?"

"What do I want?" repeated the tramp with a chuckle, "that's good; why I want to make the acquaintance of a purty young man like you. What's your name?"

"Tom Gordon," promptly replied the boy, seeing nothing to be gained by hiding his identity.

"I'm Count De Buffer, travelling incog. just now, 'cause you see I don't want the Americans to make so much fuss over me; I have enough of that at home, where they're not such tuft hunters as here. Glad to know you, Tom," added the tramp, extending his hand.

The boy with some hesitation accepted the grimy palm which almost crushed his own.

"This is my friend Duke De Sassy," said the "count," as the other came up; "him and me have got tired of the frivolities of court life, and are making a tower through America studying its institutions, and doing the country."

"This ere young man didn't seem to care for my company," remarked the last arrival; "for I called to him two or three times, but then, he couldn't have knowed that it was a real live dook he was treating that way, so I forgive him."

"The truth is," added the count, "we're down on our luck just now, and would like you to accommodate us with a trifle of a loan."

The tramps placed themselves while talking so as to forestall any attempt on the part of the lad to break away.

"I haven't any money to lend you," sturdily answered Tom.

"Do you mean to say you have no funds in your exchequer?" continued the count; "'cause if you haven't, of course we don't want anything to do with you."

It flashed upon Tom that he had only to speak an untruth to free himself of the presence of these miscreants. Would it be a sin for him to say he had no money with him?

Only for an instant did the temptation linger. His mother had taught him that a lie was never justifiable under any circumstances.

"I did not say I had no money," he said, "but that I had none to lend you."

"Ah, that's a different matter. I'm afeard, Duke," he continued, addressing his companion, "that we shall be under the necessity of making a forced loan; how does the proposition strike you?"

"I'm convinced we shall be reduced to that painful necessity. If I'm not mistook, this young gentleman was paid a hundred dollars this afternoon for his bravery in throwing a royal Bengal tiger over his shoulder and bringing him back to the circus, from which erstwhile the animal strayed."

Poor Tom saw it was all up with him. These wretches must have known about the reward from the moment he received it. They had planned the robbery, and he had walked straight into the trap set for him.

"Yes, I have a hundred dollars given to me for helping to catch the tiger; I was taking it home to my mother."

"That's a good boy," commented the count; "always think of your mother, for the market isn't overstocked with first-class mothers. But bear in mind, sonny, that we're only borering this for sixty days, and we'll give you ten per cent interest--that's our style of doing bus'ness, eh, Duke?"

"Well, if I must, I must," said Tom hopelessly, making a move of his hand as if to draw the money from his trousers pocket.

"That's right, allers take things philosophically, and be ready to extend a helping hand to them as"--

The count had got thus far in his observations, when the boy darted to one side, and made a desperate attempt to pass them and reach the fence on his right.

He came very nigh succeeding too. In fact, he did get to the fence, and was in the act of clambering over, when he was seized in the iron grip of Count De Buffer, who was angered at the narrow escape of the youth making off with the funds.

"If you try anything like that agin, I'll kill you!" he said, choking and shaking the boy; "we mean bus'ness, young man, and don't you forget it!"

Tom still struggled furiously, and pulled so hard that all three moved several paces along the highway. Nor did he cease his resistance until he had been struck several cruel blows.

"Now fork over them funds!" commanded the count, when the panting lad was exhausted.

"I sha'n't do it!" was the sturdy reply.

"Very well; then we'll do it for you."

The lad made no resistance, and the tramps searched him thoroughly from head to foot. Not a penny was found on him.

"We ought to break your head for that trick," said the duke, "and if it had done you any good we'd do so; but we understand it. You flung the money away when you made a rush for the fence."

"If I did," was the defiant response of the boy, "all you've got to do is to find it again."

"We'll soon do that; hold him fast till I get it, and then we'll settle with him."

The tousled scamp shuffled off to the side of the highway to search for the package, which he was convinced had been thrown there at the time their prisoner made his dash for freedom.

"That'll prove bad bus'ness for you," growled the duke, who was the custodian of Tom.

"Not any worse than if you had got it," replied the youth, who was thoroughly roused by his brutal treatment. He had been struck several times, but could not believe the ruffians would dare put him to death in revenge for the loss of the money, that is, provided they did recover it.

"Haven't you found it, Dick?" called the duke, forgetting the title of his comrade.

"No, confound it! I don't know where to look for it."

"Where did you fling it?" demanded the duke of his captive.

"I shall not tell you; you may kill me first."

"Very well; take that!"

But Tom managed to dodge the blow, and, by a quick leap, freed himself of the grip of his captor. The next minute he was off like a deer.

Possibly the tramp might have overtaken him, had he made the effort; but he chose to let him go while he joined his friend in hunting for the money.

They kept up the search for hours, and were then, obliged to give it up. Afraid that the boy, who must have reached home long before, would bring friends back, the tramps took their departure while the opportunity was theirs, and were seen no more.

Tom Gordon did a brave thing. The moment he discovered he was not pursued, he hid himself at the side of the road, and waited till the scamps departed. Then, when the moon had risen, he stole back again, and, remembering quite well where he had thrown the package of money, found it with little difficulty, and reaching home without further incident, told his stirring experience to his mother and aunt.

CHAPTER VII.

It will be admitted that Tom Gordon and Jim Travers had met with a pretty stirring experience, as a result of the visit of the circus and menagerie to Briggsville. Tom had not been able to attend the performance; but it may be said he was favored with a little "circus" of his own, in which he played the part of star performer. But all's well that ends well, and he had the pleasure of walking into his humble home and turning over to his mother the handsome reward paid for the restoration of Tippo Sahib, comparatively unharmed, to the owner. He was so well liked by teacher and playmates that all congratulated him. There was no jealousy of his good fortune, for there was none more deserving, and, it may be added, no more in need of the material help given by that one hundred dollars.

But what has been told was but an incident in the life of the two boys, whose fortunes I have set out to tell. A remarkable train of circumstances in due course involved the lads in a series of incidents which had an important bearing on their future lives, and taught a lesson which young lads cannot learn too often in this world.

Tom and Jim devoted themselves more closely than ever to their school studies, and, as a result, became two of the best-informed pupils at that crude institution of learning. They grew to be strong, sturdy youths, as fond of athletic sports as they were of study, and with a promise of the right sort of success in life. Neither dreamed of what the immediate future had in store for them.

A year after the incident of the tiger, Tom's Aunt Cynthia peacefully died, and a few months later, to his almost inconsolable grief, his beloved mother passed away. Thus he was left an orphan, without brother or sister. The blow was a crushing one, and for weeks he wished to die and join the dear ones that had gone before. He grieved until his friends feared he was falling into a decline, and became seriously concerned for him.

It has been truly said, however, that no person in the enjoyment of health and vigor of body can long be crushed by affliction. He will rally sooner or later. Thus it proved in the case of Tom Gordon. His former strength and spirits gradually came back to him. There were moments and hours when he was weighed down by his great loss; but it was gradually softened by the passage of time, until the day came when his friends believed he had fully recovered from the sorrow that had nearly driven the life from his body and soul.

One sad feature of his affliction was that he was left almost penniless. With all the thrift, frugality, and self-denial of mother and aunt, they had been able to leave the youth hardly anything at all when they died. The humble home, with all its belongings, was sold for less than the mortgage, and Tom found himself with little besides the clothes he wore and a few precious mementoes of those that had passed away.

In a community where he was so favorably known, it was impossible that he should suffer actual want. More than one home was offered him, not only until he could find some situation or engage in some trade, but as long as he chose to avail himself of it.

Tom was forced to accept some one of these offers, and he went home with Jim Travers until he could decide what to do. He knew he was welcome there, and could stay as long as he wished, though he had no thought of becoming a burden upon the kind friends that had opened their doors to him.

Now, it was this change in the surroundings in the daily life of Tom Gordon that led to the singular incidents I have set out to tell.

Jim Travers lived alone with his father, who was in fair circumstances. His mother had died in his infancy; and his only sister, Maggie, was his playmate for a few years longer, when she departed to join the loved one that had preceded her. The husband and father became a lonely and bowed man, whose years were far less than they seemed. Although a farmer in a small way, he committed the sad error of engaging in stock speculations, more with a view of diverting his mind from his gnawing grief than with the hope of bettering his fortune. It is

hardly necessary to relate what followed. He was successful for a time, and improved his financial standing. He gladly welcomed Tom Gordon beneath his roof, for he knew his own boy could not have a playmate whose company would be more improving to him. Then Mr. Travers dipped more deeply into speculation. With brighter prospects than ever, there came the fateful hour in Wall Street, when every penny was swept from him.

"I am a beggar!" he gasped, when the whole dreadful truth broke upon him; "and I am too old to begin life again. It is better that I should die."

And die he did in the great city of New York. The shock was fatal; and his body was brought back to Briggsville, and laid to rest beside the forms of his wife and little Maggie, that had died long before. Jim was dazed by the unexpected blow. It became the privilege of Tom Gordon to act as his comforter, but it was a long time before the little fellow came out from the valley of shadow into the life-giving sunlight again.

But here was the solemn situation: Tom Gordon and Jim Travers were orphans, with no near relatives, and with only their own hands to earn their daily bread. What was the best thing for them to do?

This was the grave question which the two boys sat down to answer in the gloom of a wintry evening, when they were about fourteen years of age. They had received plenty of counsel, and much of it was excellent. The teacher, the minister, and numerous good neighbors had been as kind as they could possibly be, and the youths knew no real hardship could come to them as long as they stayed in or near the place where they were born.

But they were not satisfied to do so. They felt they ought to strike out for themselves, and Briggsville was not the place to do it. The opportunities were too few.

They talked for a long time in an aimless way, discussing numerous schemes, but without agreeing upon any.

"Jim, let's go to New York."

Tom made the proposition as though it had come to him that moment, when in truth it had been in his mind from the first, as it was with Jim, who was on the point of uttering it, but was waiting for his friend, because he was a few months older and took the lead in all matters.

"I wonder if that wouldn't be the best thing to do," remarked Jim, like one to whom the idea was new.

"Neither of us has ever been in New York. It is a great place, full of dangers of all kinds, but there are chances for every one to get along, if he will do what's right and isn't afraid to work."

"If we should tell the people what we have in mind, they would advise us to stay here or to try Philadelphia."

"We must pass Philadelphia to get to New York, but I don't feel like staying there, do you, Jim?"

"No; I don't fancy the place. Father took me there once when I was a wee youngster, and it struck me as being slow."

Tom laughed at the thought of a little fellow being impressed that way by one of the leading cities in the Union. He, too, had been in the large and handsome town, but for some reason, which he could not explain, had formed a prejudice against it. He shook his head at the proposition of trying their fortunes there.

"Philadelphia isn't big enough for us," he remarked quizzically; "New York is the only place where we can spread and grow."

"Then I propose we go to New York to seek our fortune. What do you say?"

"We'll stick together."

And the young friends reached their hands toward each other and clasped them in the dim light of Jim Travers's room.

It was an important decision they had reached, and they talked over the matter for a long time. Each had quite a little sum of money, which they had saved with scrupulous care. They had good serviceable clothing, with something extra in the way of change. The executors of Mr. Travers had completed their duty and made their report to court. As in the case of the Widow Gordon, not a penny was left for the boy, and the house and everything it contained was to pass into the hands of strangers.

Jim Travers and Tom Gordon were occupying their single room on sufferance. The new-comers were to take possession on the first of the following month, and a hint had been given the boys which it was impossible for them to misunderstand. Their room was preferable to their company.

"Next Tuesday is the first," remarked Jim; "I suppose we can stay here the few days until then."

"That's less than a week. What's the use of waiting when we have made up our minds to go?" was the pertinent question of Tom. "I prefer not to meet those folks that are coming here."

"That's the way I feel," assented the younger, striving to repress his ardor over the prospect. "They will put on airs, turn up their noses at us, and make themselves at home. I can't bear," he added, his voice slightly trembling, "to see them parading through the house which father owned, and walking into his room as if no one else had the right to go there."

"Well, I'm glad, Jim, that we think alike. Tomorrow we'll bid our friends good-by and take the afternoon train to New York."

"That suits me. It would hardly be right to slip off without saying anything to the fellows. We'll call on them all."

"Yes; that is right. I promised Sam Harper to let him know about it."

"I suppose you did, and you won't forget to tell Nellie."

Jim laughed at his own sly remark, and the handsome Tom blushed at this reference to the pretty sister of his playmate.

The hour grew late, but they sat a long time talking of what they would do when they made their home in the great metropolis. Bridget, the old servant, warned them once or twice that it was past bedtime; but seeing her words were unnoticed, she withdrew and left them together.

Ah, when are the dreams of life so radiant as in early youth? What pictures are so glowing, so beautiful, so vivid, so real, as those which come to the boy when he stands with his feet on the threshold, and looks far out over the limitless fields which spread before his view? The air "lets finer sunlight through," and the skies are more golden than they can ever be again. It is the hour when to him nothing in the whole wide world is impossible. It is a sweet, soul-stirring vision which, alas, too often is darkened or swept away by storm and mists and darkness and death.

The programme of the two boys was carried out, with some modification, the next day. They found, when they came to go around among their friends to bid them good-by, that it took longer than they had counted on. They separated; and when night arrived, Tom was urged so cordially to stay and take supper with Sam Harper that he did not refuse.

Then he had to remain a while in the evening, which proved to be a most pleasant one to the visitor. The parents of his playmate were sensible people, who, finding the caller had made up his mind to go, did not attempt to dissuade him. On the contrary, they reminded him that under heaven he had every reason to hope for success.

"The instruction received from your good mother," said Mr. Harper, "I am sure can never be forgotten by you. You have a fair education for your age; and I say to you as I did to Jimmy Travers, when he stopped here a while ago, be honest, truthful, obliging always, and your reward is certain. You will meet with disappointments and all sorts of trials, but keep up your courage. Never let go; hang fast; take whatever comes in your way and do it with all your might, and success is sure, sooner or later."

"I have made up my mind to that," replied Tom modestly. "Jimmy and I don't imagine that half the merchants in New York will be waiting at the ferry for us, and will scramble over each other to see who shall have our services."

The gentleman smiled at the picture, and his wife added,--

"There are so many dangers and pitfalls that I tremble at the thought of two boys like Tom and Jim going into such a great city, where they do not know a living person."

"It is a matter for serious thought, but hundreds have done the same before them, and have achieved success."

"Have not some failed?"

"Doubtless the majority have failed to attain what they expected. But the same is true right here in Briggsville, and is true everywhere. I hold the doctrine, that to the boy who is strong, rugged, honest, willing, not only to work, but to wait, that success is bound to come sooner or later."

Tom was much encouraged by these wise words, and felt a strengthening of the resolve he had formed the night before.

It was bright, pretty Nellie who now spoke.

"Won't it be splendid when Tom becomes a rich merchant, able to live in his fine house and have his horse and carriages and servants?"

"I am afraid it will be a long time before I get that far," replied the lad with a blush; "but I shall do it if there is any way possible."

"Riches are not the highest object in this life, though they are well enough in their way. Don't think so much about them as about doing your duty. Be content to begin at the bottom of the ladder. It is an old saying, but there never was a truer one, that you will always find plenty of room at the top."

After some more pleasant conversation, Tom shook hands with his friends and bade them good-by. He ventured to give the delicate palm of Nellie a little warmer squeeze than he had ever dared to do before, and looked meaningly in her eyes. But she was diffident and did not return the pressure, and he was not certain of the precise meaning of the look she gave him at parting.

He felt a trifle uncomfortable, while walking homeward in the crisp moonlight.

"I suppose Nellie would feel quite proud of me if I ever become a rich man; but suppose I don't. She always was a proud girl, and likely enough will turn up her nose if I fail, which *I won't!*" he added, compressing his lips and walking faster.

Tom found Jim at home and waiting for him. They sat up late again talking over their grand scheme of seeking their fortune, and even after they retired the hum of their conversation continued until far into the night.

The following morning they turned their backs upon Briggsville forever. The ride to Philadelphia was not far. They had decided to stop there for a time, as there was no call for haste. Neither held a thought of making their stay permanent. They strolled down Chestnut Street, looking at the pleasing sights that are always to be met in that fashionable thoroughfare, viewed some of

the fine structures, and stared until they were tired.

But they were eager to go on. The metropolis of the country was their destination, and they would never be satisfied until they reached it. Accordingly, when the afternoon was well along, they boarded the train and sped away to the northward. Everything thus far, even if interesting, had been dull and commonplace, but sooner than they anticipated, they entered upon the most stirring and momentous experience of their lives.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A Man overboard!"

This was the startling cry that rang out from the multitude swarming forward on the ferry-boat D. S. Gregory, one wintry night, as she was approaching the dock at the foot of Courtlandt Street, on her trip from Jersey City.

For a few seconds confusion and excitement reigned supreme.

The boat was crowded with passengers, many of whom had passed out of the forward cabin doors, and were pushing toward the bow, eager to be the first to leap ashore, scarcely willing to wait till the lattice-like gates were drawn aside to allow them to pass.

Some were smoking, many were talking, and no one was dreaming of anything wrong, when the alarming cry resounded through the frosty air.

The captain heard it on the instant, as did the engineer; for the latter checked the swinging of the ponderous working-beam at the same second that he received the signal from the captain--a thing which never happens unless in some such emergency.

As the throbbing of the engine ceased and the boat glided smoothly along, there was such a general rush toward the bow that a dangerous dipping of the craft followed--a peril which no one beside the officials on the vessel observed.

"Who is he?"

"Did he jump over?"

"Did he fall?"

"Was he pushed?"

"Can he be saved?"

"Where is he?"

These and similar questions were on a hundred lips; and before any intelligible answer could be given, a woman gave utterance to the most heart-rending scream, and made such frantic attempts to spring into the water, that the intervention of several strong men was required to prevent her.

"It must be her husband."

But the expression was yet in the mouth of the speaker, when, falling limp and despairing into the sturdy arms of the unknown friends, she wailed,--

"Will no one save my child? Let me go to her; she is all that is left to me--oh, let me die with her!"

"It's a little girl that fell overboard," called out some one who had seen the accident. "There she is--hello!"

The last exclamation was caused by a second splash, as a dark body clave the air and dropped into the water within a few yards of where the dress of the little girl could be faintly discerned.

"Heavens, that is only a little boy!" called out an excited individual. "Are all the children to be drowned before our eyes?"

The general belief was that this lad, through some strange mischance, had also fallen into the river, a belief which was quickly dispelled by another boy, no doubt his playmate, calling out,--

"That's my chum, Tom, and you needn't be afraid of him; he can outswim a duck and a goose and a fish all together; he jumped over to save that little girl, seeing as all you big men was afraid--and you can just bet he'll do it too."

There was a tone of absolute certainty in these remarkable words which lifted a mountain from more than one heart, and instantly transferred all interest to the brave young lad who had sprung into the water to save a little girl that was a stranger to him.

A cold wintry night was closing in when this accident took place, and the lights from the shipping and the great city twinkled like myriads of stars.

Great black hulls lay still and motionless in the water, as if they were enormous ogres of the deep waiting for human prey to come into their vast maws; steam-tugs were puffing and darting here and there, in and out among the shipping, as though they were playing hide-and-seek with each other; another ferry-boat was just putting out from the dock on the New York side, the paddle-wheels crunching and grinding the chunks of ice, as if masticating its food.

In the chilly gloom of the evening, the crowds that swarmed to the gunwales and peered forward could see something floating in the water; and though no one could define exactly what it was with the aid of the sight alone, yet, by a general consent, it was accepted as the form of the little girl that had fallen overboard.

A second figure was seen working his way toward the nerveless and silent one.

The two were no more than fairly out of the path of the steamer, which was gliding so closely by them that any movement of the wheels would have endangered both.

Among those who forced their way to the side of the boat was the lad who gave utterance to the words before recorded. It was natural that he should be deeply interested when his dearest friend was risking his life to save another. As soon as the lad on the boat caught fair sight of the other, he shouted,--

"Hello, Tom! do you want any help?"

"Three chaars for the wee one!" called out an Irishman, boiling over with enthusiasm, "and if there's a spalpeen on board that don't jine in, I'll crack the head of the same, or me name isn't Patsey McConough!"

But the deck-hands had not been idle spectators during the few minutes since the accident.

Prompt as they had been, the children were, however, so far off at the moment of tossing over the life-preservers and hurling out the ropes, that none reached the lad, who was too intent on saving the child to pay any attention to these little helps, which he did not need.

When the craft stood at a dead halt, the engineer caused a slight and only partial reverse movement of the wheels, so as to approach the couple.

"Yes, there he comes," shouted a tall fellow, leaning so far over the rail that he was in danger of falling, "and I'm blessed if he ain't got the girl!"

Such was the fact, as all perceived the next moment. The boy was supporting the little form with one hand, while he propelled himself with the other.

As soon as Tom came within reach, another lasso-like fling was made, the coil dropping so near the boy that he succeeded in grasping it with his free hand.

Whoever the little fellow was that was acting the r^ve, he certainly was a genius in his way. His presence of mind was almost marvelous.

When the waves from the threshing-paddle so unexpectedly overwhelmed him, he had just time to draw a deep inspiration before he was environed by death. The most skillful swimmer in the world cannot sustain himself in sea-foam, or in the white caps of the breakers. The only

safe course when thus caught is to hold your breath and wait for "solid water," where you can paddle your own canoe.

Almost any one thus entrapped would have let go the rope and been drowned, but the boy held on with the grip of death, and as soon as he could catch a mouthful of fresh air, shouted,--

"Pull up; I'm all right."

A dozen hands were outstretched to help, and the next minute the brave lad, still holding the senseless girl with one arm, was drawn up on deck, and received into the crowd, who almost pulled him apart in their frenzied congratulations.

It was found that the little girl was alive, and carrying her into the cabin where her mother had just recovered from her swoon, a medical gentleman announced that there was nothing to fear.

The wheels of the ferry-boat were again in motion, and the slip was reached, while a hundred men were demanding the name of the young hero, praising him, offering to make up a purse, hurrahing, and going wild over what was unquestionably a most praiseworthy deed.

In the midst of the excitement and rattling of chains, the crowd swarmed off the boat, and the lads were lost sight of.

CHAPTER IX.

Tom Gordon was not only brave, but he was modest; and he hurried away from the swarming crowd as soon as he was free of the ferry-boat, for he found it anything but pleasant to be looked upon and treated as a lion. Turning off into one of the intersecting streets, the two lads walked along in silence, when Tom said,--

"Do you know, Jim, I'm half-frozen?"

The rattling teeth emphasized the question.

"I should think you would be. Here's a place of some kind; let's go in and have something to eat, and you can warm yourself."

Jim led the way; and as he pushed open the green-baize doors, which worked on springs, he saw they had entered one of those nondescript shops, so numerous in certain parts of New York, where a person can obtain any kind of alcoholic drink, a cigar, a lunch, a "square meal," or a night's lodging, or all.

Jim recognized the resort, and he would have withdrawn but through sympathy for his shivering companion. The latter could scarcely stand from cold, his clothing was soaked, and, in the keen air, had congealed so that it rattled like tarpauling as he walked.

Just back from the door was a large stove, whose bulging, white-washed cylinder, gleamed red with heat.

Tom immediately stepped up to this and began to thaw himself out.

"Ah, that feels nice!" he laughed to his companion.

"Well, young man, what do you want in here?" asked the bartender, in a sharp, business-like style, bustling from behind the counter with the evident intention of "bouncing" the lads.

"I want to get dry and warm," was the reply of Tom, from whose clothing the steam was beginning to ascend.

"This ain't a shop to dry out boys. Why don't you go home?"

"We haven't any home."

"That's played; go where you stayed last night."

"That's near a hundred miles from here."

Two or three loungers laughed at the rather pert style in which Tom made his replies, though in truth the lad meant no disrespect. The bartender turned red in the face, and was angered at being taken up as he was.

"Hello, my wharf-rat, how did you get so wet?"

"In the water."

"He jumped off the ferry-boat to save a little girl," said Jim, seeing the storm brewing, and desirous of putting in a good word for his friend.

This declaration was received with a guffaw, not one of the hearers believing a word of it.

"Jumped off to get away from the Bobbies," sneered the bartender. "If you don't get out of here quicker'n lightning I'll hand you over to them."

"We can go out if you say so," said Tom, in the same good-natured manner; "but we came in to get our supper and stay all night."

"Have you got the stamps to pay for it?"

"If we hadn't we'd know better than to come in here."

"All right; my terms are a half a dollar apiece for supper and lodging."

"What is it with breakfast?"

"Seventy-five cents."

"We might as well pay you now."

And in his off-hand fashion Tom drew from his water-soaked pocket his portemonnaie, remarking to Jim that they would arrange it between themselves, and handed the exact change to the somewhat surprised bartender and clerk.

That made a difference; and the servant became as obsequious as if he had just recognized in his visitor a millionaire that had dropped in to spend a part of his fortune with him.

The boys were hungry, as may be supposed, and they fell to eating like a couple of famished wanderers. Only a mouthful or two was swallowed when Jim exclaimed,--

"Hello, Tom; where did you get that gold chain?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Tom, looking up at his friend.

"I'll show you;" and, as Jim spoke, he reached over and unhooked a tiny gold chain from the upper button of his friend's coat, around which it was twined in a singular manner.

More than that, there was a locket attached to it.

"That's the strangest thing I ever heard tell of," said Tom, as he examined the chain and locket. "I never knew it was there till you spoke."

"You must have got it from that girl in the water, when you helped her out."

"That's so! Wait here till I come back!" and with this exclamation the lad sprang up and darted outdoors.

He was gone but a short time, when he returned.

"I've been down to the ferry-house to see whether I could find the woman and give her back her jewelry; but nobody there knows anything about her, and I'll have to keep it till I learn who she is."

On looking at the locket the boys agreed that it was the likeness of the girl that had so narrowly escaped drowning. They admired it a long time, after which Tom carefully put it away, and they finished their supper.

The supper finished, the boys sat in the hot room until Tom's clothing was fully dried, during which process the two were urged to drink fully a score of times, Tom being assured by several that the only way to escape a dangerous cold was to swallow a good supply of gin.

Like sensible lads they steadfastly refused, as they had never tasted spirituous liquors, and never intended to.

Finally, at a late hour, they retired to their humble room, where they were speedily asleep.

On the morrow it was agreed that they would make this place their headquarters, while they looked up something to do. They could separate and spend the day in the search, and return to their lodging-house after dark, both having fixed the location in their minds, and there being little excuse for losing their way, even in such a vast city.

Breakfast was eaten early, and the friends separated, not expecting to see each other till dusk again. Both were in high spirits, for in the clear sunshine of the winter's morning the world looked bright and radiant to them. The hurry and rush of Broadway, the crowds constantly surging forward, each one seemingly intent on his own business, the constant roll and rumble of trade,--all so different from the more sedate city they had left behind.

All these were so new and novel to the lads, threading their way through the great metropolis, that they forgot their real business for a time, and feasted their eyes and ears for hours.

Finally, they roused themselves and went to work. The experience of the two, for a time at least, was very similar. Tom first stopped in a dry-goods house, and asked whether they could give him anything to do. A short "No" was the reply, and the proprietor instantly turned his back upon him. Then he tried a drug-store, where he was treated in the same manner. In a hat and cap store, the rotund clerk tried to chaff him, but he didn't make much of a success of it. In answer to his question, the clerk replied that he didn't need a boy just then, but when he did he would send his carriage around to the Metropolitan for him.

When Tom timidly introduced his errand to an old gentleman in spectacles, as he sat at his desk in a large shipping-office, the old fellow exclaimed in an awed voice,--

"Great Heavens, no! I don't want to hire any boy."

And so it went, hour after hour, until the future, which had looked so beautiful in the morning, gradually became overcast with clouds, and the poor lad was forced to stop and rest from sheer weariness.

He kept it up bravely till night, when he started on his return to his lodgings. He found on inquiry that he was several miles distant, his wanderings having covered more ground than he supposed. He had made over thirty applications, and in no instance had he received one grain of encouragement. In more than one case he had been insulted and ordered from the store, followed by the intimation that he was some runaway or thief.

No wonder that Tom felt discouraged and depressed in spirits as he rode homeward in the street-car. He was so wearied that he dropped down in one corner, where he soon fell asleep, not waking until he had gone fully two miles beyond the point where he should have left the vehicle. This sleep so mixed him up that it was nearly ten o'clock when he reached his hotel, as we may call it.

He was hopeful that Jim would have a better story to tell; but to his amazement, he found that his friend, despite the lateness of the hour, had not yet come back. A shiver of alarm passed over Tom, for he was certain that some dreadful evil had befallen him.

Most likely he had been waylaid and killed in some of the hundred different ways which the police reports show are adopted by the assassins of New York in disposing of their victims.

CHAPTER X.

Tom's anxiety for his comrade drove all thought of sleep from his eyes for the time; and he sat long in the hot, smoky air of the room down-stairs, in the hope that Jim would come.

It seemed to the watcher that there was an unusually large number of visitors in the house that evening. There was a great deal of drinking and carousing going on, and many of the men gathered there, he was sure, belonged to the lowest grades of society.

A half-dozen foreign nations were represented, and one had but to listen to the talk for a short while to learn that among them were many whom one might well fear to meet on a lonely road at night.

Tom might have felt some dread but for the fact that, rather strangely, these men showed little disposition to engage in any brawl, and no one seemed to notice him.

Late in the evening a couple of policemen came in and waited a while around the stove. They only spoke to the bartender, who treated them with the greatest consideration; but they scrutinized the lad with a curious look, which caused him to wonder whether they held any suspicion of wrong-doing on his part. They said nothing to him, however, and shortly after went out.

Tom's great alarm for Jim drove nearly every other thought from his mind. Late as it was, he would have started out to search for him, could he have formed the least idea of the course to take; but, besides being a stranger in the city, he knew that a single man or a hundred might spend weeks in hunting for one in the metropolis, without the least probability of finding him.

It was near midnight when he concluded to make his way to the room, hoping that Jim would show up before morning.

The sounds of revelry below, mingled with shouts and the stamping of feet, together with the feverish condition of the lad, kept him awake another hour; but at last he fell into a light, uneasy sleep, haunted by all sorts of grotesque, awful visions.

Suddenly he awoke; in the dim light of his little room Tom saw the figure of a man standing by the bed.

"Who are you? What do you want?" whispered the terrified lad, struggling to rise to a sitting position.

"Mebbe ye doesn't know me, but I'm Patsey McConough, and it was mesilf that saw ye shtrike out so boldly last night and save the gal that had fallen overboard, and St. Patrick himself couldn't have done it any better than did yersilf."

"What do you mean by coming into my room this way?" asked Tom, whose fear greatly subsided under the words of the Irishman.

"I come up-stairs to wake ye, for I'm afeard ye are going to have trouble onless ye look mighty sharp."

"What do you mean?"

Patsey carefully closed and bolted the door behind him, and sat down on the edge of the bed, speaking in a low, guarded voice.

"There's a big crowd down-stairs, and Tim's grog is getting to their heads, and they're riddy for any sort of a job. There are a couple of Italian cut-throats, and though I can't understand much of their lingo, yet I cotched enough of the same to make me sartin they mean to rob ye."

"But would they dare try it in the house here?"

"Whisht now, there isn't anything they wouldn't thry, if they thought there was a chance of making a ha'pence at it. They've murdered men afore to-night, and they would just as lief slip up here and cut your wizen as they would ate a piece of macaroni. Whisht now, and I'll give ye the partic'lars and inshtuct ye what to do. It wouldn't be safe for ye to git up and go out, for they'll folly ye and garrote ye afore ye could raich a safe place. I would stay here and watch with ye, but that I've overstayed me time alriddy, and I'll catch thunder whin I git back home, 'cause I can't make the boss belave the raison why I staid. Here's a pistol," added the Irishman, shoving a five-shooter into the hand of the astonished lad, "and ivery barrel is loaded, and it niver misses fire, as the victims can tell ye as have been hit by the same. Do ye take this, bolt yer door, and if anybody comes poking in the room after I'm gone, just bore a hole through him, and then ax him if he ain't ashamed of himself to steal into a private apartment in that shtyle. Take me word for it, he won't come agin."

"I should think not," said Tom, who was dressing himself. "But I don't like the idea of shooting a man."

"Nor do I, but it's loikely to be a chice between shooting him or him shooting ye, and ye are at liberty to decide."

And with a few parting words of caution the Irishman took his departure, first pausing long enough to advise Tom to change his quarters if he was spared until the morrow, and suggesting that the wisest thing he could do was to get out of New York as speedily as he knew how.

As may well be imagined, Tom Gordon was not likely to fall asleep again that night, so, having fully dressed himself, he sat down on the edge of the bed to wait and watch.

A small transom over his door admitted enough light to discern objects with sufficient distinctness in the room, and he carefully shoved the bolt in place, feeling he was prepared for any emergency.

Even with such an exciting subject to occupy his thoughts, he could not fail to wonder and fear for his missing friend. He prayed Heaven to watch over the boy's footsteps and to prevent his wandering into any danger, while the feeling that the poor fellow was already beyond all human help weighed down the heart of Tom like a mountain of lead.

This suspense did not continue long when the watchful lad heard some one ascending the stairs--an action which might mean nothing or a great deal.

The room occupied by the boy was along a narrow hall, perhaps fifty feet in length, the apartment being half that distance from the head of the stairs.

It seemed to Tom that there was an attempt to smother the sound made by the feet, which plainly belonged to two people, though the effort was far from being a success.

"They may be going to their own room, after all"--

The heart of the lad gave a great bound, for at that instant the footsteps paused directly in front of his own door, and he could hear the men muttering to each other in low tones.

"They're looking for me," was the conclusion of the boy, who grasped his pistol more rigidly, and rose to the standing posture.

"If they want me, all they've got to do is to take me."

What was the amazement of the youth to see at this moment, while his eyes were fixed upon the door, the iron bolt slowly move back, without, so far as he could see, the least human agency.

This was a house, indeed, in which such characters were given every facility they could wish to ply their unholy vocation.

Immediately after the fastening went back, the latch was lifted, and the door swung noiselessly inward.

As it did so, a head, covered only with a mass of shock hair, which hung down like pieces of tarred rope, and with the lower part of the face veiled by a black, stringy beard, was thrust far enough within to show the shoulders. Directly behind appeared another face, placed on a shorter body, but none the less repellent in expression, and the two were forcing their way into the room, when they paused.

They seemed to conclude that it would be best to consider the matter further before rushing in there.

Instead of seeing a boy sound asleep in bed, waiting for them to rob him of all his earthly possessions, they found themselves confronted by a wide-awake lad, with his revolver pointed straight at their villainous heads.

"Why don't you come in?" asked Tom, never lowering his weapon.

"Put him down!" said the foremost of the villains, in broken English, hoping to frighten the lad.

"I don't feel like doing it just now," was the reply, while the arm remained as fixed as a bar of iron.

Tom did not intend to shoot unless they advanced upon him; but, not being accustomed to the weapon, he was unaware that a very slight pressure was enough to discharge it. Unconsciously he exerted that slight pressure, and, while the miscreants were glaring in the door, the pistol was fired.

What was more, the bullet struck one of the Italians, who, with a howl of pain, wheeled about and hurried down-stairs, followed by his terror-stricken companion.

Tom was half-frightened out of his wits, and made up his mind that the best thing he could do was to get out of the place without any further delay.

The only way to escape was to go down the stairs, the same as his assailants had done.

It was not a pleasant duty; but, remembering what the Irishman had told him, and filled with an uncontrollable aversion against staying any longer, he hurried out, pausing only long enough to catch up his small bundle of clothing.

In the smoky, hot room down-stairs, the scene was nearly the same as when he left it a couple of hours before to go to bed. The two Italians were invisible, and the little affray up-stairs seemed to have attracted no attention at all. The bartender was too much occupied to notice the lad, who made his way outside into the clear, frosty air, where he inhaled a few deep draughts to give him new life and courage.

He knew not which way to turn, but he was confident he could find some safe lodging-place without going far, and he moved along the street, where there were plenty of pedestrians abroad, even though the hour was so late.

He was quite near the river, and determined not to be caught in such a trap again. He walked slowly, scrutinizing as well as he could the exterior of each building in sight, where the wayfarer and traveler was invited to step within and secure food and lodging.

In this manner he passed several houses, and was on the point of turning into one which seemed to have an inviting look, when his attention was arrested by a lad who was running toward him from the rear.

He was panting and laboring along as though about exhausted.

As he reached the wondering Tom, who stopped and turned aside to let him pass, the stranger paused and said,--

"Say, sonny, just hold that watch, will you, till I come back?"

And before the boy fairly understood the question, the other shoved a gold watch and chain into his hands, then darted into an alleyway and disappeared.

He had scarcely done so when two swift footed policemen came dashing along, as if in pursuit.

"Here he is!" exclaimed one, catching hold of Tom's arm, and dealing him a stunning blow on the head with his locust.

"That's the little imp," added the other, the two guardians of the law pouncing upon the lad as if he were a Hercules, who meant to turn upon and rend them.

"I haven't done anything," remonstrated Tom, feeling that some fearful mistake had been made.

"Shut up, you little thief!" yelled the policeman, whacking him on the head again with his club.

"Ah, here is the watch on him! We've been looking for you, my boy, for a month, and we've got you at last."

CHAPTER XI.

When Tom Gordon comprehended that the two policemen had arrested him on the charge of stealing a gold watch, he understood the trick played upon him by the lad who had handed him the timepiece and then, darted into the alley.

Instead of throwing the property away, as a thief generally does under such circumstances, the young scamp preferred to get a stranger into difficulty.

"I didn't take the watch; that boy handed it"--

"Shet up!" broke in the burly officer.

"But let me finish what I want"--

"Shet up! Heavens and earth! have I got to kill you before you stop that clack of yours?"

The lad saw that the only way to save his crown was to keep quiet, and he did so, trusting that in some way or other the truth would become known, the guilty punished, and the innocent allowed to go free.

One policeman grasped his right and the other his left arm, and they held on like grim death as they marched off toward the station-house.

Turning the next corner, they entered a still lower part of the city, where the darkest crimes of humanity are perpetrated.

Within ten feet of where Tom was walking, he saw under the gas-lamp a poor wretch on the pavement, with two others pounding him.

"Murder! murder!" groaned the victim, with fast-failing strength, vainly struggling to free himself from his assassins.

Tom paused, expecting the policemen, or at least one of them, would rush in and save the man.

On the contrary, they strode along as if they were unconscious of the crime going on right before their eyes.

"They'll kill him," said the horrified boy, "why don't you stop"--

"Shet up!" and down came the club again.

Just then the second policeman added in a severe tone,--

"Young man, we know you; we understand the trick you are trying to play on us; you want us to let go of you and rush in there, and then you'll skip; we're too old birds to be caught with such chaff; we are convinced that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and so, understand, sir, we'll hold on to you!"

But at this juncture, fortunately for the under man, a champion appeared in the person of an Irishman, who with one blow knocked the largest of the assailants so violently backward that he turned a complete reverse somersault, and then lay still several minutes to try and understand things.

The other assailant was using his boot-heel on the prostrate man at that moment, when the Hibernian gave him a couple of blows in lightning-like succession. They landed upon the face of the coward with a sensation about the same as if a well-shod mule had planted his two hind feet there.

He, too, collapsed on the instant, and for a considerable time lost all interest in worldly affairs.

It is hard work to kill a drunken man; and, despite the terrible beating the victim had suffered,

he was scarcely relieved of his foes when he staggered to his feet.

"I'm obleeged to ye, young man, for assisting me, as ye did"--

"Dry up!" broke in the impatient Hibernian.

"Talk of being obleeged to me, 'cause I interfared. What did ye let them git ye down fur? That's what I want to know. Git out wid yees!"

And the disgusted champion turned the other fellow about and expressed his opinion of him by delivering a kick, which landed him several feet away.

"That was kind in yees," said the recipient, looking back with the droll humor of the Irish people. "They did their hammering in front, while I resave yees in the rear, and I fale as though they was about equal."

"What's this? what's this?" demanded one of the policemen in a brisk, business-like tone, swinging his locust, and looking sharply about him, as if in quest of some desperado upon whom to vent his wrath.

"It looks as if there was some trouble here."

"It's all done with now," replied the man that had finished it, and then, recognizing the officer, he extended his hand.

"How are ye, Billy?"

"Hello, Pat, is that you?"

"So it is, me, Patsey McConough, that happened down this way on the lookout for a wee boy, when I saw two men beating one, and I jist restored the aquilibrium, as ye may say. But what have ye there?" asked Patsey, peering through the gloom at the figure of a boy in the grip of the other policeman.

"A chap that we jerked for picking pockets; we've been shadowing him for a long time."

The Irishman seemed to suspect the identity of the boy, and, going forward, he took him by the hand, and asked him how it all came about.

Tom told the story as it is known to the reader, when Patsey turned to the policeman.

"There's some mistake here, Billy; that boy never took that watch--I'll bet my life on that. I know him, and the story he tells is the true one, and no mistake."

It didn't take the policeman long to agree with Patsey, and a satisfactory arrangement was made, by which the faithful guardian kept the gold timepiece, and the boy was allowed to go free.

"I didn't feel aisy," said Patsey, as he walked off in company with his young friend, "when I left ye in that place, and I hadn't been gone long whin I made up me mind to go back and fix it, whither the boss was mad or no. Whin I arrived the throuble was over, and ye had started out. I had to guess which way ye wint, but I seemed to hit it, and I was able to do ye a little hilp."

"That you did, indeed," replied the grateful boy. "I would have gone to jail but for you."

"Ye same to be a wide-awake boy, and ye kape yer sines about ye at all times. Ye are looking for a place to stay?"

"Yes."

"There isn't much of the night left, but I'll find ye what ye want."

A couple of blocks farther, Patsey conducted him into just the house the boy would have

picked out for himself, had he been given a week in which to hunt.

Patsey accompanied Tom to his room, where he gave him some earnest advice.

"This is a mighty avil village, is New York, and ye had better get out of the same while ye have the money to do it. It isn't a good thing for a lad to carry a pistol, but I wish ye to kaap the one I lint ye as long as ye are in danger, which is loikely to be all yer life."

"My money is nearly all gone," replied Tom, "and unless I get at something pretty soon, I shall have to beg. I would go out of the city to-morrow if I only had Jim."

"Perhaps it is as well that ye wait where ye are for a few days for him, spinding yer laisure in looking for a job. I'm a coochman in the employ of an old rapscaillon of a lawyer, who's stingy enough to pick the sugar out of the teeth of the flies he cotches in his sugar-bowl. I darsn't bring ye there, but if the worst comes and ye haven't anything to ate, I'll fix it some way."

The plan was that Tom should stay in this house, visiting the other morning and evening in quest of information of Jim, while the sunlight would be spent in hunting for work.

It would be useless to dwell on the particulars of the several days which followed. Morning and night Tom went over to the other saloon and inquired after his missing friend. Each time the bartender replied he had not seen him, and it was his belief that the boy had "skipped the town," as he expressed it. The little bundle containing all of Jim's possessions was given to Tom, who took it away with him, leaving word where his friend could find him.

Dull, leaden despair filled his heart; and, as he paid his board-bill each evening, he saw with feelings which can scarcely be pictured, the steady decrease of his pile, until it was close to the vanishing point.

Five days had passed since he entered the new hotel, during which not a word was heard of Jim, nor had he seen anything of his friend Patsey McConough.

It seemed to the boy that he had tramped New York from one end to the other in his search for work, and in not a single instance had he received the slightest encouragement. Two vocations, it may be said, were open to him from the beginning; they were to sell newspapers or to black shoes. To one of Tom's education and former life, it was the most bitter humiliation to contemplate adopting either of these employments. But the night came when he felt he must do it or beg.

He naturally preferred the newspaper line to that of polishing shoes, and he resolve to make his venture early the following morning.

Tom was unusually strong and active for one of his years, and he expected to have trouble from the envy of the other boys.

When he purchased his fifty *Heralds*, long before daylight, there seemed to be an army of newsboys ahead of him, and he was looked upon and muttered about in the most threatening manner.

He had scarcely reached the sidewalk when he was set upon by a couple of vigorous gamins, with the evident intent of discouraging him in the new business.

The others gathered around to see the fun.

They saw it.

The fiery urchins, though both were as large as, and no doubt older than, Tom, were literally "nowhere" in the fight.

He conquered them in less than a minute without receiving a scratch, and then, turning to the crowd, remarked that if there was any one or two or a dozen there that wanted to tackle him, all they had to do was to come forward. No one came, and Tom sauntered off to sell his

newspapers.

It was exceedingly distasteful; but he was spurred on by necessity, and he went at it with the impetuosity of a veteran.

His success was below his expectations.

There seems to be a right way of doing everything, no matter how insignificant, which can only be learned by practice. Despite his natural quickness, Tom failed in more than one respect.

He hadn't the right change in several instances, and the men wouldn't wait while he darted into a store for it, but bought of some other boy who thrust himself forward. No matter where he turned, it seemed to the young hero that some more wide-awake newsboy was ahead of him, leaving only the aftermath for him to gather.

He boarded several of the crowded street-cars, and was kicked off one of them because he accidentally trod on a gouty old gentleman's toes, he being the president of the road.

However, all this, and much more indeed, is the sad accompaniment of the poor little gamins who fight each other in their strife as to who shall have the preference in leaving the morning sheet smoking hot at our doors while we are wrapped in slumber.

After carefully balancing accounts that evening, Tom found he was exactly seven cents ahead.

On the next day he fell nine cents behind, but on the third there was exciting war news, and he not only rushed off his usual supply, and the same number repeated, but he obtained in many instances fancy prices, and cleared several dollars.

This was encouraging, but the day was marked by the greatest mortification of his life.

He had rushed in his impetuous manner into a streetcar, when some one called his name, and he turned about and saw Sam Harper and his sister, both of whom had been his classmates at the Briggsville school, and Tom was accustomed to look upon Nellie as a little above ordinary mortals.

Sam shook hands with Tom, and made some jocose remark about his new business; but Nellie sneered, and looked out the car window.

A high-spirited lad who has experienced anything like this needs not to be told that it cuts like a two-edged sword.

CHAPTER XII.

For two weeks Tom Gordon prosecuted his vocation as a newsboy in the city of New York, by which time he had gained enough experience to earn his daily bread, but nothing beyond that. Such being the case, he felt that he was not making a success of his calling, as there was no reserve fund upon which to draw for clothing or other necessities.

The greater portion of a month wore by, during which he never gained the slightest knowledge of the fate of Jim Travers.

Tom went to the morgue, and applied to the police, and, in fact, used every means at his command to learn something. He occasionally encountered his friend Patsey, who rendered all the assistance he could, but it availed nothing.

When the fortnight was up, Tom received an unexpected offer, that the Irishman, through some acquaintance, secured for him. It was the opportunity to sell newspapers and periodicals on the Hudson River Railroad. He was to leave New York in the morning, "working the train" on the way up to Albany, and come down again in the afternoon.

This was such a big advance on what he had been doing, that he joyfully accepted the offer, even though he held not the slightest intention of following it as a continuous occupation. It would do very well until he could obtain something more suitable.

The lad found at the end of the first week that he was much better off than he anticipated. The privilege was conceded to him of charging double the price for the papers which was asked on the streets or at the news-stands, and his percentage of profits was very large.

Tom held his position for a couple of months to the satisfaction of his employer, and he had accumulated quite a sum, which was deposited in a savings-bank that wasn't likely to "suspend" for the benefit of the officers.

Spring had opened, the Hudson was clear of ice, and his business became quite agreeable.

It happened that he encountered, on several occasions, some of his former friends of Briggsville, who could not conceal their surprise at seeing him engaged in selling newspapers.

Tom could not always keep back the flush that stole over his handsome face at such times. But he began to believe there was a nobility in honest labor like his, of which he had no right to feel ashamed.

There were any number of young fellows who envied him his position, and who were ready to use all sorts of artifices to have him "bounced." Slandrous reports were carried to his employers, who took measures to investigate them, reaching the conclusion that Tom was without a superior in the way of integrity, politeness, and faithfulness.

The tiny gold chain and locket obtained from the drowning girl in so singular a manner, he preserved with a religious devotion. It was deposited in the savings-bank, beyond all danger of loss, and he would have starved to death before consenting to part with it.

The sweet face within the locket was as vividly fixed in his memory as if the original were a sister of his, and he never passed through the train without looking around, in the hope of seeing the little girl herself.

The only sister which Tom had ever had died in infancy, and there was something which linked the memory of the two in the tenderest and most sacred manner.

There were true modesty and manhood in the noble fellow, when he overheard a visitor in his employer's office relate the incident of the rescue, without suspecting that the hero stood before him, and never dropped the slightest intimation that he knew anything about it.

One bright spring morning Tom was passing through the smoking-car, when a young man, very flashily dressed, whistled to him, and asked for a copy of a sporting paper.

Tom had but a single copy left. This he tossed over into the lap of the applicant in that careless, off-hand style which characterizes the veteran newsboy.

The purchaser passed over a quarter in coin, and as Tom pulled out a handful of silver from his pocket, from which to select the change, the flashy young man said,--

"Never mind, sonny; I'll make you a present of that."

"But you have given me five times the price of the paper," said Tom, thinking there was an error.

"That's all right. When I see a fellow of your style I like to encourage him."

Tom thanked him and passed on.

The incident would not be worth recording but for the fact that it was repeated the next day, when the same young man bought a *Herald*, and compelled the lad to accept a bright silver quarter in payment, without allowing him to give any change.

Six times on successive days was this done, and then the liberal purchaser disappeared from the train.

Aside from the repetition of his favors, it was rather curious that on each occasion he should have placed a silver quarter in the palm of Tom.

Each coin was of the same date as that year, and was so bright and shiny that Tom believed they must have come directly from the mint. They looked so handsome, indeed, that he determined to keep them as pocket-pieces, instead of giving them out in change.

There is nothing like actual experience to sharpen a fellow's wits; and, on the first day the munificent stranger vanished, a dim suspicion entered the head of Tom that some mischief was brewing.

That night in New York he examined the coins more minutely than heretofore. Half an hour later he walked down to the wharf and threw them into the river.

The whole six were counterfeit. It wasn't safe for any one to carry such property about him.

Tom was strongly convinced, further, that a job was being "put up" on him, and he was mightily relieved when thoroughly rid of them.

That same evening one of his employers sent for him, and told him that he had received reliable information that he, Thomas Gordon, was working off counterfeit money on the road.

The boy denied it, of course, but he did not choose to tell all he knew, for he saw that his own situation was a dangerous one; but he demanded that the proof should be produced.

There was an officer present, who thereupon searched the lad for the "queer," but he acknowledged there wasn't a penny on him which was not sound.

Tom was kept at the office while another officer went to his lodging-house and ransacked his room. The result was *nil*. This rather stumped the detective, who was acting on the charge of some one else, and he started off, remarking that the business wasn't done yet, and the best thing the boy could do was to confess.

"I must first have something to confess," replied Tom, who was excusable for some honest indignation.

"Where is the man who said I was in *that* business?"

"You'll meet him in the court-room," was the significant reply of the detective.

"That's just where I'd like to meet him, and you too, but you're afraid to try it."

"Come, come, young man, you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll jug you as it is. I've enough against you."

"Why don't you do it, then?" was Tom's defiant question; "I've learned enough during the last few minutes to understand my rights, and if you think I don't, now's the time to test it."

The officer went out muttering all sorts of things; and Tom, turning to his employer, his breast heaving with indignation, said,--

"They have been plotting against me ever since I've been on the road. They went with all kinds of stories to you, and now they've been trying to make it appear that I am in the counterfeit business."

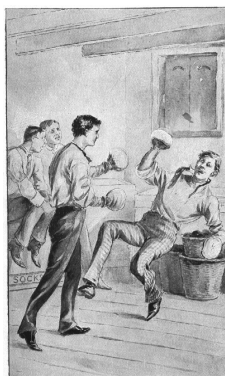
"But there must have been something tangible, or that detective would not have come here with the charge."

"There was something;" and thereupon Tom told the story of the six shining quarters.

His employer was angered, for he saw through it all; and from the description of the donor, he recognized a worthless scamp who had been discharged for stealing some time before Tom went on the route. The detective was sent for, and the case laid before him. That night Mr. Dick Horton, who made the charge, was arrested, and in his rooms were found such proofs against him as a counterfeiter that, a few months later, he went to Sing Sing for ten years.

For a time succeeding this incident Tom was left undisturbed in the pursuit of his business, the occurrence becoming pretty generally known and causing much sympathy for him.

It was about a month subsequent that Tom missed his afternoon train down the river, and took another, which left later, not reaching New York till late at night.



It was a fierce drive.

Page 100.

It was a fierce drive.

As there was nothing for him to do, the train being in the hands of another newsboy, he sat down in the smoking-car, which was only moderately filled. Directly in front was a man who, he judged from his dress, was a Texan drover, or some returning Californian. He was leaning back in the corner of his seat, with his mouth open and his eyes shut, in a way to suggest that he was asleep.

Seated next him was an individual who looked very much like the Italian who had shoved his head into the door of Tom's room some months before. This foreigner was watching the Californian--if such he was--as a cat watches a mouse.

"I believe he means to rob him," was Tom's conclusion, who, without being suspected by the scoundrel, was taking mental notes of the whole proceeding.

The supposition was confirmed within five minutes, when the Italian, leaning over toward the other, in an apparently careless manner, began cautiously inserting his hand into his watch-pocket.

The instant Tom saw this, he bent forward and shook the Californian's shoulder so vigorously that he started up, and demanded in a gruff voice what was the matter. The Italian, of course, had withdrawn his hand like a flash, and was leaning the other way, with his eyes half-closed, like one sinking into a doze.

"I saw that man there," said Tom, pointing to the Italian, "with his hand in your pocket, about to steal your watch, and I thought I'd best let you know."

"Is that so?" demanded the stranger, a giant in stature, as he laid his immense hand on the shoulder of the other, who started up as if just aroused from sleep, and protested in broken English that he was not aware of being seated with the gentleman at all.

His vehement declarations seemed to raise a doubt in the mind of the Californian, who began an examination of his pockets. He found everything right, and so declared.

"He was just beginning operations," said Tom in explanation, "when I woke you."

"Bein' as he ain't took nothin', I won't knock the head off him," said the Californian, as he announced himself to be; "but he ain't any business to look so much like a sneaking dog, so I'll punch him on general principles."

Whereupon he gave the fellow such a resounding cuff that he flopped out of the seat, and, scrambling to his feet, hurried out of the car.

The Californian thanked Tom, and then resumed his nap.

In half an hour Tom found the tobacco-smoke so oppressive that he rose to go into the next car. On the platform stood the discomfited Italian, who seemed to be waiting for revenge.

"You lie of me," he muttered, before Tom suspected his danger. "I show you."

With a quick push he gave the lad a violent shove, thrusting him entirely off the platform and out upon the ground, fortunately clear of the rushing wheels.

CHAPTER XIII.

The speed with which the train was running at the time Tom Gordon was pushed off was such that he was thrown forward with great violence upon the hard earth, where he lay senseless, with his leg broken and a number of severe bruises about his body.

The only one who saw his fall was the miscreant that caused it; and it is not necessary to say he made no alarm, and the train went whirling on to its destination.

Tom's employers knew nothing of the accident; and putting on a temporary substitute, they were constrained to believe, after several days' silence, that he had left their service, some two or three boys coming forward to declare that they had heard Tom say that such was his intention, as he had received a good offer on the Erie road. The substitute was given to understand that his situation was permanent, and the ill-used Tom was thus thrown out of his situation.

After lying an hour or so on the ground he came to, and finding he was in a sad plight, he set up a series of yells, which soon brought assistance in the shape of a passing farmer, who lifted him into his wagon, carted him home, and played the good Samaritan.

A physician was summoned, the broken limb set, and the patient was told that all he had to do was to do nothing but lie still and get strong. The farmer agreed that he should stay there, especially as the patient gave him to understand that he would pay him for the service.

Here we leave Thomas Gordon for the time in good hands, while we turn our attention to his friend, James Travers, who has been waiting too long for notice.

The reader will recall that the morning succeeding the rescue of the little girl from the river the two boys started out to hunt up something to do in New York. The experience of both was quite similar through the greater portion of the day, and we have dwelt fully upon what befell Tom.

Jim, with no better success, and fully as discouraged, set out on his return, as the cold, wintry night was closing in, and he reached the long, open street along the river without any incident worth notice; but while walking wearily along, and when not far from his lodging-place, he was accosted by a well-dressed man, who placed his hand on his shoulder and said, in a pleasant voice,--

"I think you are looking for something to do, my son?"

"Yes, sir," was Jim's reply, his heart bounding with renewed hope at the prospect of employment.

"Are you willing to do anything?"

"Anything that's honest and right."

"I wouldn't ask you to do what was not right," added the stranger, as if he was hurt at the idea.

"What is it you want me to do?"

"How would you like to work on a vessel?"

"I was never on a ship in my life," said Jim, frightened at the thought of the perils of the sea.

"That don't make any difference: you wouldn't have to serve as a sailor, but as a sort of a cabin-boy; and not exactly that, either. I am the owner of the boat, and want a clerk--a boy who can write letters, keep my accounts, and make himself generally useful. I like your looks, and you impress me as a boy of education."

"I think I could do all you ask; but where does your vessel sail?"

"Oh, she ain't a foreign ship, only a small schooner, engaged in the coasting-trade down along the Jersey shore, sometimes going as far as the capes, and occasionally making a trip up the Hudson. As navigation has closed on the river, we sha'n't go up there before Spring."

"I think I would like the job," said Jim, who felt as if the vision shown by Aladdin's lamp was opening before him. "What pay will you give if I suit you?"

"I am willing to pay well for the boy. It will be twenty dollars a week and found"---

"What!" exclaimed the astounded Jim, "did you say twenty dollars a *week*?"

"That's just what I said. I'm one of those who are willing to pay well for what they want."

"I'll take the situation; when do you want me to go?"

"As soon as possible--what do you say for to-morrow?"

"That will suit, as I have nothing in the world to do; I only want to run down to the hotel and tell Tom."

"Who's Tom?"

"He's the boy that came with me from home; he'll be mightily pleased when he hears the news."

"Suppose you walk down with me, and take a look at the boat; it isn't far off."

As Jim could see no reason for refusing, and as he hadn't the slightest thought of wrong, he replied that he would be glad to accept the invitation; and the two started off toward the wharves.

The well-dressed gentleman, who gave his name as Mr. Hornblower, kept up a running chat of the most interesting nature to Jim, who was sure he was one of the finest persons he ever met. The walk was considerably longer than Jim expected, and the man acted as if he had lost his way. He finally recovered himself, and, pausing where a number of all kinds of boats were gathered, he said that his schooner, the *Simoon*, lay on the outside, and was to be reached by passing over the decks of several other boats.

These lay so close, that there was no difficulty or danger in traveling over them, and they soon reached the deck of a trim-looking schooner, which was as silent and apparently as deserted as the tomb. Reaching the cabin, a light was seen shining through the crevices, and Mr. Hornblower drew the small door aside, and invited his young companion to descend.

Jim did so, and found himself in an ordinary-looking cabin, quite well furnished, and supplied with a couple of hammocks.

A small stove was burning, and the temperature was exceedingly pleasant after the bleak air outside, where the raw wind blew strongly up the bay.

"I wouldn't want a better place than this to stay," said the delighted lad, taking a seat on a camp-stool.

"Then I'll let you stay a while."

These strange words were uttered by the man who stood outside the door, looking in at the lad with an odd smile on his countenance.

"What do you mean?" asked Jim, filled with a terrible fear.

"I mean just this: I want you to stay on the boat for the present. If you keep quiet and do what is told you, you won't be hurt; but if you go to howling and kicking up a rumpus, you'll be knocked in the head and pitched overboard."

"But tell me why you have brought me here?" asked Jim, swallowing the lump in his throat, and looking pleadingly up to the cruel stranger. "What do you want of me?"

"We want a big thing of you, as you'll learn before long; but you mustn't ask too many questions, nor try to get away, nor refuse to do what is told you. If you do, your clock will be wound up in short order; but remember what I've told you, and you'll be released after a while, without any harm to you. I will now bid you good-night."

With this the man shut and fastened the door of the cabin, using a padlock to do so.

The lad heard his footsteps as he walked rapidly over the deck, leaping upon those adjoining, and quickly passing up the wharf.

"Well, this beats everything," remarked Jim with a great sigh, sitting down again on the camp-stool.

As he sat thus in deep thought, it seemed to him, more than once, as if it was all a hideous dream, and he pinched himself to make sure it was not.

What it all meant was more than he could figure out, or even guess. The only possible solution he could hit upon was that this Hornblower, as he called himself, was in need of a cabin-boy, or perhaps a sailor, and he took this rather summary way of securing one, without the preliminary of obtaining the consent of the party most concerned.

Whoever Mr. Hornblower might be, it looked as if he had made elaborate preparations for the game played with such success.

"Poor Tom will be worried to death when he finds nothing of me," was the natural fear of Jim, while turning over in his mind the extraordinary situation in which he was placed. Despite the warning uttered by his captor before leaving, the boy stole up the steps and stealthily tried the door. It was fastened too securely for him to force it.

As he sat down again in the chair, he heard feet on the deck, and he concluded that his master had come back to see whether all was right.

But the fellow did not touch the cabin-door; and a minute later the lad noticed that two men were moving about, then the sounds showed that the sail was being hoisted. He could distinguish their words as they exchanged directions, and it was not long before the rippling water told that the schooner was under way.

"Like enough they have started for China or the Cape of Good Hope, and I won't see Tom again for years."

He sat still in the cabin, which was lit by a lamp suspended overhead, and which soon became so warm from the stove and confined air, that he did what he could to cool off the interior.

He had just finished this when he felt a draught of cold air, and looking up, saw an ugly face peering down on him from the cabin door.

"Hello, you're down there, are you?" called out the man; "how do you like it?"

"It's getting rather warm," answered Jim, hoping to make the best of a bad business.

"If you find it too hot, come on deck and air yourself."

The lad accepted the invitation, and hastily ascended the few steps, his chief object being to learn where he was.

Looking about in the gloom, he observed a ship under full sail on the right, and a little farther off one on the left. In the former direction he thought he discerned a faint dark line close to the water, which he supposed showed where the shore lay.

"Then we are putting out to sea," was his conclusion, while he shivered in the keen wind which swept over the deck.

The schooner had her mainsail and foresail up, both bellying far outward under the impulse of the wind, while the hull keeled far over to the right in response, and the foaming water at the bow told that she was making her way at high speed toward her destination, wherever that might be.

As well as Jim could make out in the gloom, neither of the two men who were managing the vessel was Hornblower.

"Where are we bound?" asked the prisoner, turning upon the one who invited him to come out of the cabin.

"To the moon," was the unsatisfactory response.

Jim said no more, for he was afraid he might offend the fellow by pressing his inquiries.

"I guess you'd better go below and sleep, for the likes of you ain't of any use here."

The boy did as advised.

He saw no preparations for eating, but he was so wearied and anxious that he felt little appetite; and, throwing himself in one of the hammocks, he committed himself to the care of Heaven, and was soon asleep.

He never opened his eyes till roused by the smell of burning meat, and looking up, saw one of the men cooking in the cabin, instead of on deck, as it seemed to the lad ought to have been the case.

He now took a good survey of the countenances of the men. They did not look particularly wicked, though both were hard and forbidding.

They paid scarcely any attention to the boy, but gave him to understand that he was at liberty to eat if he wished.

Jim did so, and as soon as the meal was finished strolled on deck.

From the direction of the morning sun he saw they were sailing southward, and the long stretch of land on the right he concluded must be the Jersey coast.

CHAPTER XIV.

Such a bleak and piercing wind swept across the deck of the Simoon that Jim Travers was glad to spend most of his time in the cabin, where a warm fire was always going.

The first day out the boy succeeded in picking up a few scraps of knowledge, which served rather to deepen than to clear up the mystery of his abduction.

The schooner was a good sailer, and was well furnished with coal, wood, water, and provisions, as if she were intended for a long voyage. There was no real cargo, as he could see; and the two men who managed the craft did not drop a word which could give any clew as to their destination.

It can scarcely be said that they treated the boy well or ill. Their conduct was more of the character of indifference, since they paid not the least attention to him, further than to notify him to keep out of their way.

This indifference might be considered kindness, inasmuch as it relieved the boy from attempting work which would have proven of a perilous nature. This also relieved him in a great measure of the fear which made existence a burden during the first twenty-four hours.

On the third morning out from New York, Jim made the discovery that the rising sun was on his right, from which it was certain he was sailing toward the north. Other evidence led him to conclude, from his knowledge of geography, that they had entered Delaware Bay, and were approaching Philadelphia.

"It's a queer way of getting back home again," was the reflection of the boy when convinced of the fact.

However, the Simoon did not propose to visit the Quaker City just then, and she came to anchor in a broad part of the bay, fully a half-mile from shore.

It was late in the afternoon that this stop was made; and just as night was closing in, a small boat containing two persons was discerned rowing out from land. When they were nigh enough to board the schooner, Jim saw that one was Mr. Hornblower, and the other was a herculean negro, who was swaying the oars with the ease of a professional.

As both came on deck, the white man signified to the lad that he was to follow him into the cabin, where the door was shut, and they sat down facing each other.

"I might as well own that I deceived you when I pretended I wanted to hire a clerk," began Hornblower, "but I had good reason for doing so; that reason I can't give for the present. Now," and here Mr. Hornblower took a pencil and note-book from his pocket, "I want to know your full name and exact age."

These were truthfully given and carefully written down.

"Now I want to know all about your parents, their age, your father's business, and various other matters which I shall ask you."

Jim had no reason to decline any information he was able to give, and he furnished all his captor desired to know.

When the examination was finished, the note-book was closed, and Mr. Hornblower asked, in the most friendly of tones,--

"Have they used you well?"

"They have," was the truthful reply.

"Do you know why?"

"I suppose because you instructed them to do so."

"It's not that, but because you behaved yourself; you haven't made any trouble."

"I don't intend to do that, for there's nothing to gain by it. I haven't any work to do, and may as well stay here as anywhere else."

"Remember what I told you; so long as you keep quiet you are safe, but only on those conditions."

As the man rose to go, Jim plucked up enough courage to ask,--

"Will you be kind enough to let me know where we are going, and why it is you make a prisoner of me?"

"Since you have behaved so well I suppose I might as well do so."

Hornblower opened his mouth to impart the information, when he changed his mind and shook his head.

"It is scarcely best at present; good-evening."

As there seemed to be no objection to following him on deck, Jim did so, much disappointed that he did not secure the information which was almost his.

Hornblower stepped down into a boat and rowed off toward shore, leaving the huge negro behind. It had become so dark that the boat, with its single occupant, speedily faded from view in the night, though the sound of the regularly swaying oars came back distinctly across the water until shore was reached.

Jim was glad that the African, whom he heard addressed as Sam, was left behind. He saw he was a good-natured fellow, and he believed he would be able to gain something from him.

After supper was eaten, the schooner hoisted anchor and moved several miles up the river, when it again lay to for the night.

Jim Travers went to bed again as much mystified as ever over the explanation of his imprisonment on board the boat. Aside from this inscrutable ignorance there was nothing very unpleasant, and he would have been willing to make quite a lengthy stay, whether he received any wages or not.

During the bitter cold weather, any one situated as he was might be thankful if he could secure lodging for the winter.

"They needn't be so afraid of my running away," he often said to himself, "for I would not be so foolish as to do that when I don't know where to go. All that I wish is that they would give me the chance to send a letter to Tom and let him know where I am. The poor fellow must be greatly worried over me."

He ventured to ask whether he would be permitted to send a letter ashore, but the refusal was given in such an angry manner that he regretted making it.

Several days now followed, during which the schooner beat up and down Delaware Bay without making a landing.

One night the vessel was caught in such a terrific blow that she came within a hair of being driven on the Jersey shore. The two men, however, were fine sailors, and assisted by the negro Sam, who was also an expert, they safely rode through the gale.

In the course of a week they approached the wharves at Philadelphia, where they were boarded by the proper officers. The latter seemed to find everything all right on board the schooner, and departed, apparently without noticing the boy standing near, who watched their

motions with great interest.

The Simoon lay at the wharf all night, which was unusually mild for that season of the year.

The cabin door was open and the negro was on duty, while one of the men was asleep in the hammock over Jim's head.

The second sailor had gone up-town somewhere, and there was no telling when he would return.

The lad was nearly asleep, when he heard footsteps on deck; and in the dim light from the lamp he observed the missing sailor coming down the steps, followed closely by Hornblower. When they were fairly within they shut the door, and the seaman turned up the wick of the lamp overhead.

A fancy struck Jim at this moment that he would pretend he was unconscious, though he had little hope of gaining anything by it.

As soon as the light filled the apartment, Hornblower looked over at the two forms stretched out in the hammocks, and asked in a whisper,--

"Are they asleep?"

The sailor leaned over each in turn, and carefully surveyed the features and listened to the breathing.

"Yes; they don't know any more than a couple of logs."

"I wouldn't have the boy overhear us for the world."

"There ain't any danger of that."

Thus believing, the two men talked business straight along.

"It won't do to stay here any longer," said Hornblower.

"Why not?"

"Because it's dangerous; you was such a fool yesterday as to allow the boy on deck when the officer was there, and he couldn't help noticing him."

"But they didn't speak to each other, and if the officer had suspected anything he would have showed it."

"Maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't; you must know that the boy's photograph has been scattered over the country, and he is likely to be recognized by any countryman."

"How are you making out with the negotiations?"

"It all looks well enough, if you don't spoil it by your tomfoolery. I should not have been surprised to find you had allowed him to go ashore to look around a little. You must leave here to-morrow morning. You ought to start to-night."

"I can do so if you wish it," said the sailor, rather sulkily.

"It might draw suspicion to you. No, you can wait till daylight, and then be off."

"It shall be done."

"We have managed to throw everybody off the scent pretty well. They seem to have all sorts of theories except the right one. It has got into the newspapers, of course. Some think the boy has been taken to England, others that he is in the South, and others have sworn that he has been seen in company with a man and woman in Canada; but no one imagines as yet that

he is on board the schooner Simoon, in the Delaware."

"How have you made out in your correspondence with the guardians?"

"They have agreed to give me ten thousand dollars if I restore the boy to them, and I have concluded to take it; but you understand, Bob, that it's a mighty delicate matter to handle."

"I rather think it is," growled Bob in reply; "for if they manage to handle us, we'll fetch up in State prison as sure as we live."

"We'd be glad to get there away from the mob," said Hornblower; "for, the way people feel over this business, they would act like a lot of famished lions toward us."

"If they agree to give what you ask, why don't you turn over the chap to them and have done with the whole business? I'm getting tired of dodging about in this fashion, never knowing when they're going to drop down on us, and feeling as if the prison-door was open just ahead. It's got to be wound up pretty soon, or I'll step out and let you finish it yourself."

"Have patience," said Hornblower in a conciliatory voice; "it will all come right, for we've the game in our own hands."

"Why the delay, then?"

"There's fear of the police; they mixed in, and they're bound to scoop us if they can, and cheat us out of the money."

"There's been a big reward offered by the guardians themselves?"

"Yes. The officers have that as well as the glory of victory to urge them on, and they won't let a chance slip."

"Have you put it to the guardians strong?"

"You'd better believe I have. I told them that at the first attempt they made to play us false, the boy would be sent home to them in a coffin. They understand that."

"Then, why don't they play square?"

"They would if it wasn't for the detectives. But with the help of the parents I think we can pull through all straight."

"In how long a time?"

"Two or three weeks. In the meantime go on south, and I'll keep track of you and let you know what to do."

With these parting directions the conversation ended. Mr. Hornblower produced a flask of whisky, the two drank each other's health, and the visitor departed.

Shortly after Bob, the sailor, turned in for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

Jim Travers, as he lay in his hammock, overheard every word which the two men had said, and considerable more to the same effect.

Unusually bright and mentally strong as he was, he comprehended it all, and read the scheme as if in a printed book.

Hornblower, seeing him making his way along the wharf in New York, had formed the plan of abducting him, and then securing a large reward from the parents or guardian for his return. Accordingly he stole and placed him in charge of his gang on the schooner, and then began negotiations with the guardians for his return.

Here a strange combination of circumstances came about.

One of the most pathetic facts that came to light regarding the abduction of Charley Ross, was the great number of other children that have been found who had been lost for months and years.

There can be no doubt that a regularly organized system of child-stealing prevails in this country, and there are at this hour hundreds of mothers and fathers separated from their beloved offspring through the deviltry of these kidnappers.

Hornblower must have supposed, from the appearance of Jim Travers, that he was the son of well-to-do parents, who would "come down" handsomely for his return. The extraordinary part of the business was, that, on the morning succeeding Jim's abduction, there appeared in the papers an account of the disappearance of a boy from Philadelphia, with the promise of a liberal reward for any information that would lead to his return. This account did not correspond entirely with the circumstances under which Jim was taken, but the main facts were such that Hornblower was satisfied he had the right lad in his keeping.

When Hornblower questioned Jim so closely in the cabin and took down his replies, he had not a particle of doubt that the boy was telling him a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end. Toward the close of the examination, however, it began to dawn on the abductor that possibly he had made an error. Be that as it might, he was none the less convinced that he had a bonanza in his hands, and one which could be made to serve him as well as the original himself.

His captive corresponded so closely to the one advertised that he could be made to pass muster as such, and the reward secured. This, it would seem, was almost an impossible task, but Hornblower was confident of success.

This explanation will serve to show why he took the precautions which had excited the impatience of his confederate, Bob.

Jim Travers did not know all this, but he easily understood from the conversation of the two conspirators that he had been stolen for the sake of making money out of his return.

"What a great mistake they have made," he thought; "there isn't any one in the wide world that would give three cents to have me returned."

He concluded to stay quietly on board the schooner and let matters take their course, as it did not occur to him that any personal danger might arise from future complications. Could he have dreamed of what was coming, he would have jumped overboard and risked drowning in his attempt to reach land.

Jim had learned enough from the conversation in the cabin to keep him awake until midnight. It was near morning when he dropped off into slumber, which was not broken until the forenoon of the succeeding day was half gone.

When he went on deck, he saw that the schooner was far below the city, and standing straight toward the ocean. The weather was again cold, so he kept within the cabin most of

the time.

That night the negro Sam complained of feeling unwell, and threw his massive form into his hammock, in the hope of becoming better after a short rest. His sickness was not of a serious nature; but when such a big man falls ill there is a great deal of it, and the African instantly formed the belief that he was going to die, certain sure.

He groaned, and cried, until Jim himself became frightened, and went on deck to ask the others to look after him. They replied that there was nothing the matter with Sam, and that he would soon come around all right.

Jim did his best to relieve the negro, giving him the few simple remedies at hand, in the hope that he would drop off to sleep. Sure enough, in the course of half an hour Sam did fall asleep, and when he awoke, an hour later, was well; and, fully appreciating Jim's kind attentions, said to him, leaning on his enormous elbow in the hammock,--

"Tell you what, sonny, yous been mighty kind to me, and *I'll remember you*, dat's what I'll do."

"You would have done the same for me, Sam."

"S'pose I would; but dar ain't many dat would hab done it for me, and I *won't forget you*. But wasn't I 'bout de sickest coon dat you eber seen?"

"You seemed to feel very bad," replied Jim.

"Feel bad? you'd better beleib I did! Do you know what de matter wid me?"

"No."

"I had de Norf American cholera; dat's worse dan de African. I also had the pneumonia, and de bronchitis, and de measles, and de small-pox, and the cholly-wampus--all at the same time. Do you wonder dat I groaned?"

"I shouldn't think you could groan at all, if you had so many diseases as that."

"Dar's war my toughness and wrastling powers show themselves. I just wrastled and wrastled, and I frowed 'em all."

Sam swung his huge legs out of the hammock, took a seat near Jim, and, reaching out, he gently closed his immense fist around the little white hand of the boy. Then leaning forward until his black face, as broad as the moon, was almost against Jim's, he whispered,--

"Yous been mighty kind to me, sonny, and, as I obsarved befor', I ain't de one to forget it. Now, don't you disremember what I toles you. You tink it's all nice and pleasant here on de boat, and so it am jis' now, but dar's *breakers ahead!* Dat boss ob mine am one ob de biggest debbils dat am runnin' loose. Ef I should tell yous all dat I know 'bout him, your hair would rose up and stick frough de roof wid horror. Can you swim, sonny?"

"I am a good swimmer."

"Berry well; I'm mighty glad to hear dat; it's likely dat you'll hab to swim for your life one ob dese days. Don't roll your eyes so--I don't mean dat we's going to be wracked. But what I want to say am dat you must keep mum, and don't let on dat you don't know nuffin. Don't act as though you and me was much friends when de rest am 'bout, but you know dat I'm jis' de best one dat you'll eber find."

"I understand all that," said Jim, who saw that the plan was only a simple precaution against drawing suspicion to them; "but I had no thought that any one would want to hurt me."

"Yous young, and don't understand dem tings like us better eddycated gem'man. Old Hornblower am trying to sell you; and if he can't do it, and tinks dat de ossifers am coming down on him, why he'll jis' chuck you oberboard and dar'll be de end ob it. You see, yous a

purty big boy to steal, and if he lets you go, he'll be likely to hear from you again."

Jim thanked his new friend from the bottom of his heart, and asked him what was the best thing to do.

"*Run away!*" was the emphatic reply.

"But I don't get any chance when they're close to shore. I am watched all the while, and they are so far off at other times that I hardly dare try it."

"I'll tell yous what to do; jis' wait till I lets you know dat de time am come."

Jim agreed to this, and the African shortly after went on deck, while the boy turned in for the night.

From this time forth the captive lost his reckoning altogether, and could form no definite idea of the part of the world in which they were cruising. He supposed they were somewhere along the Virginia or North Carolina coast. At intervals of a day or two they ran in within sight of some town, and the sailor known as Bob went ashore in the boat.

On these occasions there could be no doubt that he met Hornblower, and that the schooner was playing her part in a drama which was likely to end in a tragedy.

Fortified by the presence of such a friend as the negro Sam, Jim determined to write a note to Tom, telling him what had happened, and promising to return to him as soon as possible.

He had no trouble securing paper and the occasion; and when finished, he intrusted the missive to Sam, with the strictest injunctions to drop it into the office at the first town where he landed.

The negro did his best, and a week later, when he went ashore, he inquired for the post-office, which he found after much trouble and delay. But he had lost the letter, and truth compelled him to report the sad fact to his young friend.

After that Jim did not run the risk of a second attempt.

"Providence will bring me out all right some day," was his conclusion; "and then Tom and I will talk it all over."

The schooner coasted up and down for weeks and months, until spring.

During this period she had spent days in ports where Jim could not gain the chance to find out the name of the town even.

Sam's ignorance was so dense that even if he heard the place called out, he could not remember it ten minutes.

Several times Hornblower had appeared on board the vessel; but he held no communication with Jim, nor could the latter gain any additional knowledge of how he was progressing with his negotiations.

In the presence of others there was always a coolness between Sam and the boy, and it was impossible that either of the sailors should have suspected the strong friendship that bound the two together.

The fact that the vessel was working her way northward again made Jim uneasy; for it convinced him that a crisis was at hand, and his fate was likely to be determined one way or the other very soon.

Sam was of the same belief, as he took occasion to say when the chance offered. Adding that he would keep his eyes and ears open.

On a beautiful day in spring the Simoon entered New York Bay, and Jim resolved to seize the

first opportunity to escape. The sight of the great city filled him with such longings to see his old friend Tom, that he could scarcely conceal his impatience from the others.

A grievous disappointment awaited him.

So strict a surveillance was kept over him, that no artifice was sufficient to secure the coveted chance.

That night Hornblower was on board, and a long and angry conference took place forward between him and Bob.

Jim would have given the world could he have learned what it was; but neither he nor Sam was allowed to catch a single expression.

The next morning the Simoon left the wharf and started up the Hudson. Mr. Hornblower had decided to effect a "change of venue."

CHAPTER XVI.

But for the dark fear which impended over him, James Travers would have looked upon his sail up the Hudson on that spring morning as one of the most delightful experiences of his life.

The sky was clear as Italy's; the air was balmy, and the steamers and shipping on the broad stream, as well as the roar of the train thundering along shore, formed an element in the romantic scenery which has well given the name of the Rhine of America to that noble river.

But the boy had little heart for all these. He was speculating upon the probabilities of the near future.

It was during the afternoon, while gliding up the river, that they passed so close to a downward-bound steamer that the features of the passengers on deck were plainly seen.

Jim was leaning idly on the gunwale, looking at them, when he observed a lady, with a child seated beside her, the mother pointing out to the child the varied beauties of the scene as they moved swiftly by. He straightened up on the instant, as if he had received an electric shock; for the conviction came like a flash that he had seen the face of that child before.

But where? He might as well have asked himself what there was in such a sweet, angelic countenance to affect him so strangely.

Ah! he had it. That was the girl that Tom had rescued from the icy water the winter before.

Going in opposite directions, and with such speed, the steamer and schooner were soon far apart, and the straining gaze of the lad was unable to tell where the mother and child were seated.

The two had not even looked at him, and he could only sigh that the glimpse was such a passing one.

"I wonder whether Tom has ever seen them since. He would be a great deal more delighted than I."

The Simoon sailed steadily upward till the day wore by, by which time she was a good many miles above the metropolis.

It was no more than fairly dark when Sam managed to whisper in the ear of the boy,--

"You mus' leab de boat to-night!"

These were alarming words, though the lad could not understand how harm to him was to benefit any one, unless it was that Hornblower and his confederates were afraid of the consequences of discovery, and preferred to act on the principle that dead boys can tell no tales.

The night was pleasant, with a faint moon, and the Simoon dropped anchor within a few hundred yards of shore.

The distance was one that Jim could swim with ease. All he asked was the opportunity.

The two sailors seemed to suspect some scheme of escape was in the boy's head, or else they must have noticed the chance was a very tempting one.

"Why should they think I want to run away," Jim asked himself, "when I've had a hundred chances before to-day?"

Why it was they were more than usually careful it was hard to understand; but that such was the fact could not be overlooked.

It might be they were watching for the arrival of some one else, or, knowing that something

important was on hand for that night, they were on the alert.

Poor Sam was in a state of great agitation, and made an awkward attempt to assist his young friend.

He offered to act as watch through the night, but the offer was declined.

They intended to keep the decks themselves.

"Dar's mischief a-brewin'," he whispered, "and yous had better git out ob dis unarthly place jist as quick as de good Lord will let you."

Which was precisely what Jim meant to do, as soon as Providence would open the way.

As the only chance was by a bold stroke, and as there was no telling the precise moment when the danger would burst upon him, Jim Travers did not wait long.

Creeping softly up the short stairs, Jim raised his head barely enough to see where the crew were.

The two sailors were standing aft, talking together in low tones. Probably they were discussing at that very moment the best plan of disposing of the boy, who had become a dangerous encumbrance to them and their employer.

It was more than likely that Hornblower had failed in his attempt to secure a ransom for the child, who was not the one for whom the other parties were negotiating.

The age of the captive was such that his liberty would prove fatal to his abductors.

Sam, the burly negro, was leaning against the mainmast, probably torturing his thick skull as to the best means of helping his young friend, whom he loved so well.

Jim saw enough, and, creeping out of the cabin, he crawled down over the rudder, upon which he rested a few seconds, while he made ready for his venture. He could see the dark bank, and he wished that the moon would hide itself behind a thick cloud, the better to give him a chance. But the sky was clear, and it might be fatal to wait any longer.

With a muttered prayer to Heaven not to desert him in his peril, he let himself down in the river, and struck out for the shore. He proceeded with all the care and stillness of which he was capable; but he had taken no more than half a dozen strokes, when he was seen by both the sailors.

"Hello! what's that?" asked Bob, running to the stern of the vessel, and peering over in the gloom.

"I guess it am a whale," suggested Sam, anxious to befriend the lad.

"A whale!" repeated the man with an oath, "it's that kid. Hello, there! Stop, or I'll shoot you!"

And he pointed his revolver at the head of Jim, who, instead of heeding the command, sank beneath the surface, swimming as far as he could before coming up. When he reappeared he was a dozen yards from the schooner.

The very moment he came up the villain discharged two shots from his pistol directly at his head.

"Look out, or dey'll hit yous!" called Sam, unable to repress his solicitude for the boy.

Could the miscreant finish the lad when swimming, it would be as good a way as any to dispose of him.

It looked as if he had succeeded, for Jim uttered a groan, and sank out of sight.

But it was only a trick intended to deceive the sailor.

The latter observed the head as it reappeared, still nearer shore, and he fired again, two shots, as before. The other sailor, fearful of a miss, was hastily lowering a boat.

He worked so expeditiously that the craft dropped into the water the next minute. Both sprang into the boat, and began rowing with might and main in pursuit of the fugitive.

Poor Sam could only stay on deck, in a torment of fear, while he prayed the good Lord to protect the boy.

When the little boat left the side of the larger one, Jim Travers had improved the precious moments to the utmost.

He had already passed over the greater part of the intervening distance, and never in all his life did he swim as now. And there was need of it, for the pursuers were determined he should not escape them.

Providentially, none of the bullets had struck him, though one or two had passed very near.

Jim cast a terrified glance over his shoulder, and saw the boat coming with great speed toward him.

There was no escape by diving, for there was too much light from the moon.

He must reach land far enough in advance to give him an opportunity to flee or hide himself.

A second after, Jim dropped his feet, and they touched bottom. Straightening up, he found the water reached only to his waist; and, with all the strength of which he was master, he fought his way to dry land, and hurried up the bank.

The pursuers were close behind him, and both fired, the boat being so near that the impetus already given by the oars carried it hard against the shore.

It was the best spot possible for the fugitive to land, being covered with wood and undergrowth, extending almost to the verge of the river itself.

Directly into this Jim plunged and ran with the speed of a frightened deer, until he had gone a few rods, when he darted to one side, ran a little farther, and dropped flat on his face. For a moment, while he lay listening, he heard nothing but the thumping of his own heart, which he feared would betray him.

In the silence he wondered what had become of his pursuers.

Had they given up the chase, believing the fugitive was gone beyond recovery?

Jim had no more than asked himself the question when he heard them moving through the undergrowth, a great deal closer than was agreeable. Worse still, they were approaching him, and discussing the question while doing so.

"He didn't run far," said one, whose voice the lad recognized as belonging to Bob.

"No; he must be hiding somewhere close by; we've each a charge left, and we'll keep it ready to fire when he shows himself."

"Yes, he must be somewhere around here, and we'll scare him up before long," was the assuring expression.

It looked very much as if they would keep their word, and Jim was sure he would have to move his quarters to escape discovery. This was a matter of exceeding difficulty, for the wretches were listening for some such noise, which would betray their victim.

They seemed to be pursuing the hunt in a scientific manner, by walking back and forth over a

certain area, gradually verging to the right, which was where Jim was crouching.

The boy succeeded in creeping a dozen feet, perhaps, without drawing attention to himself, when he was brought to a standstill by coming squarely against a fence, whose rails were too close together to allow his body to pass through.

Jim was in an agony of fear, for the two were steadily drawing near him.

When he was in despair there came the flutter of a bird in precisely the opposite direction, and the suspicion of the sailors immediately turned thitherward.

This was Jim's golden opportunity, and he was over the obstruction in a twinkling. But the fates seemed against him. Just as he left the top rail, it broke with a loud crash; and, feeling that everything now depended on his fleetness, he made his legs do their duty. Once over the fence, the fugitive found he was in the broad, open highway, along which he darted like a lad whose life was at stake.

As there was a light gleaming only a short way ahead, his enemies must have seen that it was hardly a safe thing to pursue their evil intent any farther.

Dreading they would not stop, Jim kept up his headlong flight, dashing through the open gate, without a pause for dogs, and giving so resounding a knock on the door that the old farmer instantly appeared, wondering what in the name of the seven wonders could be the matter.

"Can I stay here over night?" asked Jim, panting with terror; "a couple of bad men are after me."

"Yes, certainly, my boy; come in. I've one patient now, but you are welcome. My other boy is well enough to sit up."

Looking across the room, the astounded Jim saw his old friend, Tom Gordon, sitting in an easy-chair, with one leg bandaged, as though suffering from a hurt.

CHAPTER XVII.

The meeting between Tom Gordon and Jim Travers was one of the most joyous character.

As soon as the fugitive recognized his old friend, he uttered a cry of delight, and rushing forward, threw his arms around his neck, and the latter responded with a regular shout of happiness.

Then they laughed and asked and answered questions for some ten minutes, both in such a flutter of excitement, that their stock of knowledge was scarcely increased in the least.

By the time they got down to their sober senses, Jim awoke to the fact that a couple of bad men were after him, and were likely to pursue him across the threshold of the farmer's home.

There was no one present during the affecting interview between the lads excepting the kind host, and he was so touched by the joy of his guests that he more than once drew his hand across his face in a very expressive manner.

When Jim explained his peril, telling how it was he escaped to this place, the farmer said,--

"You may bid farewell to all earthly fear while you're here with me. The old woman is over to one of the neighbors', and there ain't no one home but me; howsomever, I'm equal to any two."

Just then the gate was heard to shut, and the farmer stepped hurriedly to the window and looked out.

"Yes, there's two men coming up the path."

"They're after me," said the frightened Jim; "let me run out through the back way; I can get away from them."

"You won't do any such thing," was the resolute reply of the old man, while he compressed his lips, and his eyes flashed resolutely.

"This is *my* home, and the law says it is my castle; and if any man attempts to cross that threshold against my orders, on his head be the consequences."

By way of making matters consistent, he stepped briskly into the next room; and when he returned, which was in the course of three seconds, he held a loaded double-barreled gun in his grasp.

"It's well to have something like this to sorter emphasize what you say, you know--hello!"

The scoundrels were at the door, and a resounding knock was heard.

"Come in," called back the old man, who stood in the room, gun in hand.

Instead of opening the door, the criminals on the outside knocked again, their evident purpose being to gain an advantage by bringing some one to them.

"Come in!"

This was uttered in a tone that could be heard a hundred yards, and those who were applying for admission could not pretend to be ignorant of such a lusty welcome as that.

The latch was lifted, the door shoved inward, and there the two sailors stood, each with a revolver in hand, looking into the room, but neither venturing to step over the threshold.

We have stated where the farmer stood, and what his pose meant.

Tom Gordon was nearly recovered from his fractured leg, and he, too, had risen from his chair with his pistol in hand. He told Jim to get as near him--or rather behind him--as he could, and

if there was to be any shooting, why, he would take a hand.

The sailors could not fail to take in the fact that the three were on their mettle, and something more than a summons was necessary to bring them to terms.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the farmer, in a voice like a growl, while he lowered upon them in the most ominous style.

"We want that boy," replied Bob, the sailor, pointing his pistol at the fellow, whose heart beat a little faster when he found himself confronted by such danger.

"Do you want to go with them?" asked the farmer of the boy.

"No; they mean to kill me; they've tried it already, and you can see that my clothes are still wet from jumping into the river to swim away from them."

"He belongs to us. We don't wish to hurt him; but he must go with us. If he refuses, we shall take him, and it will be bad for you."

"It will, eh?" muttered the farmer, a peculiar click, click, where his hand grasped the gun, showing that he was cocking the weapon, so as to be ready for business. "It will, eh? Now I'll give you just two seconds and a half to take yourselves out of my sight, and if you don't, I'll empty both barrels of this gun into you."

"Let me know when you're going to shoot, Mr. Pitcairn," said Tom, also cocking his revolver, "because I want to join in."

The sailors, with some muttered imprecations, wheeled about and took themselves off, leaving the three masters of the field.

This danger removed, the boys sat down, and while the farmer went out to attend to some work about the premises, they talked coolly and sensibly over the past and future.

Tom was almost entirely recovered from the hurt to his leg, and expected to leave the house in the course of a few days.

He had written to and received a letter from his employers, notifying him that his situation was gone and there was none to give him.

So his future was as uncertain as that of Jim, who had not received a penny since leaving home the winter before, and who had not the remotest idea as to what he should do.

Jim had a small sum of money with him, and his other clothes were still preserved by his friend.

As Tom was the owner of some extra garments, these were donned by the fellow who had received such a ducking; and, as the room was pleasantly warm, he experienced no inconvenience from his bath.

Tom had also quite a sum in the savings-bank, and though he was reluctant to call upon it, yet there was enough to provide both against any want.

Tom said Farmer Pitcairn was a kind man, and thought he should be paid something for his entertainment of the wounded boy, as was manifestly his due; yet he would treat them as well without the slightest compensation.

When the farmer came in, and the case was laid before him, he said that he could make use of Jim at once, and of Tom as soon as he should be able to go around, and they might remain on the farm as long as they chose.

The life of a young farmer was not very attractive to either of the lads, but they concluded to fall back on it until they could find some more agreeable opening.

There was some fear that the two sailors would show themselves again and make trouble, but

nothing more of them was ever seen.

When Jim related the story of his abduction, Tom and Mr. Pitcairn boiled with indignation, and insisted on a prosecution of the scoundrels, including Mr. Hornblower, who could easily be reached by the strong arm of the law.

On mature reflection, however, the scheme was abandoned.

Jim made himself as useful as he could; and being unusually bright and quick to learn, he disappointed the farmer with his readiness in picking up the hundreds of mysterious little things which make up the farmer's life.

He learned to milk the cows, to drive the plow, to ride the most fractious horses, and to break the fiery young colts; he knew precisely how to look after the horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, fowls, and everything at night and in the morning.

As Tom regained the use of his limb, he joined him in this pursuit of knowledge, which had a great many pleasant features about it.

They became expert in the use of the gun, and as one of the neighbors owned a rifle which he was willing to lend, they practiced until they grew quite skillful in the use of that weapon.

The pistol afforded another branch of the science of projectiles, and, as the revolver was an unusually good one, they also became remarkably expert in the use of that little "bulldog."

Jim visited the city a short time after his arrival at the farmer's, and brought back all the property belonging to himself and Tom, as well as the money deposited in the savings-bank.

This latter move was one of the best they ever made. Two days after, the bank in which the deposit was made went to pieces, the depositors, consisting mainly of the poorer classes of people, losing all, while the officers retired with plethoric pockets to wait till the storm should blow over.

During these beautiful days the lads held long and earnest conferences as to what they should do, for they had reached an age wherein there was little time to spare.

They discussed the plan of learning some useful trade, and decided to do so; but, after several attempts to secure the opportunity, all resulting in failure, they gave it up, concluding that the fates had not intended them for such a life. They could not bring themselves down to the plan of remaining farmers all their days.

Tom would have liked to become a lawyer, and Jim inclined to the profession of medicine; but being without friends to secure the openings, they were compelled to give them the go-by, for the present at least. Another occupation seemed peculiarly attractive to them; that was one where each could make use of his skill in penmanship, something in the way of clerical work. In the pursuit of this phantom they learned the rather mournful fact that every such situation in the United States has from ten to a hundred applicants.

The boys became well satisfied that Farmer Pitcairn was allowing them to remain with him under the pretense of work, when the real truth was that they were more of a hindrance than a help. This knowledge made them uncomfortable, and caused them to resolve that it should not continue.

The spring wore along until the mild summer came, and still the boys remained with Farmer Pitcairn.

CHAPTER XVIII.

One night Jim Travers talked a great deal in his sleep. His tossing awoke Tom Gordon several times and caused him some anxiety, which was increased when he touched his friend's cheek and found him suffering with a burning fever. Toward morning Jim's restlessness partly subsided, and he fell into a fitful slumber. Tom dropped off, and did not awake until he heard his friend astir.

"What's the matter?" asked the elder, sitting up in bed and looking in a scared way at Jim, who having partly dressed himself, was sitting on the side of the couch.

"I don't know; I feel awful queer; my head is light; I saw father and sister Maggie last night: did you see anything of them?"

"No; you were dreaming."

"They were here; father came in the room and looked at me, but did not speak and went away, but Maggie took hold of my hand and asked me to go with her. Wasn't it strange, Tom, that she should come back after all these years? I saw her as plain as I do you."

Tom was frightened. Swallowing a lump in his throat, and hiding his agitation as best he could, he said gently,--

"Jim, you are ill. Lie down on the bed again and I'll call Mrs. Pitcairn."

"I'm afraid there is something the matter with me," muttered the younger lad, lying down, his face flushed and his eyes staring. He said something which showed his mind was wandering and he had become flighty.

Tom hastily donned his clothing and hurried downstairs to the farmer's good wife, who lost no time in coming to the room of the boys. By this time Jim had lost all knowledge of his surroundings. He was muttering and saying all sorts of strange things, speaking of his father, of his sister Maggie, and even of his mother, who died when he was a very small boy.

Mrs. Pitcairn had no children of her own, but she had had great experience in the sick-room. She saw, almost at a glance, that Jim Travers was suffering from a violent and dangerous fever. She prepared him a bitter but soothing draught of herbs, and told her husband a physician must be brought without delay.

Farmer Pitcairn felt a strong affection for the two lads, whose singular coming beneath his roof has been told. He was as much concerned as his wife, and, harnessing his horse, drove off at a swift pace for the family doctor, who appeared on the scene a couple of hours later.

"He is ill, very ill," said the physician; "his fever is of a typhus character, though not strictly that. There has been considerable of it this spring and summer in New York."

"Is it contagious?" asked the farmer.

"Somewhat; though it seems to be more of the nature of an epidemic; that is, it travels through the air, appearing without special reason at one place, and then at another. We have had three cases in the neighborhood the past fortnight."

"What was the result?" asked Mrs. Pitcairn.

"One was Mrs. Wilson, an elderly lady; the other her grandson, and a nephew of Mr. Chisholm," replied the doctor, not answering the question.

"What was the result?" repeated Mr. Pitcairn for his wife.

The doctor shook his head, and, with his eyes on the flaming face of Jim Travers, whispered,--

"All three died within twenty-four hours after being taken."

Tom Gordon's eyes filled with tears.

"O Doctor! is it as bad as that?"

"I am sorry to say it is. We shall hope for the best with this young man. Give him the medicine every hour, and I will call again this evening. You have all been exposed to whatever danger there is in the air, so you need not be alarmed."

"It wouldn't make any difference about that," said Tom; "I'm going to stay with him, and do all I can. I don't care whether or not I catch the fever."

"That is more creditable to your heart than your head. Don't forget," said the doctor, speaking to all, "to watch yourselves closely. At the first appearance of headache, ringing in the ears, and fever, take those powders that I have left on the stand. This is one of the cases where an ounce of prevention is worth a good many pounds of cure. Nothing more can be done for the boy than to follow the prescription I have given you. I will be here again in the evening, unless he should become much worse, when you can send for me."

Tom Gordon will never forget that day and night. He refused to leave the bedside of his friend except for a few minutes. The farmer and his wife were equally faithful, and did all they could for the sufferer, whose condition seemed to show a slight improvement toward the latter part of the afternoon. So much so indeed that all felt hope.

Jim slept at intervals, but continually muttered and flung himself about. There were flashes of consciousness, when he would look fixedly at those around his bed, and smile in his winning way. He thanked them for their kindness, and hoped he would get well; but he had never felt so strange. It seemed as if his head was continually lifting his body upward, and he was so light he could fly.

After lying this way for some minutes, his hand, which rested in that of Tom's, would suddenly tighten with incredible strength, and he would rise in bed and begin a wild, incoherent rambling, which filled the hearts of the others with anguish.

It was just growing dusk, when Jim, who had exchanged a few words of sense with his weeping friend, said, lying motionless on his pillow, and without apparent excitement,--

"Tom, I'm dying."

"O Jim! don't say that," sobbed the broken-hearted lad. "You must get well. You are young and strong; you must throw off this sickness: keep up a good heart."

The poor boy shook his head.

"It's no use. I wish I had been a better boy; but I've said my prayers night and morning, and tried to do as mother and father used to tell me to do. Tom, try to be better; I tell you, you won't be sorry when you come to die."

"No one could have been better than you, Jim," said the elder, feeling more calmness than he had yet shown. He realized he was bending in the awful shadow of death, and that but a few more words could pass between him and the one he loved so well.

"I haven't been half as good as I ought to--not half as good as you, Tom."

"O Jim! you should not say that."

"He is right," whispered Mrs. Pitcairn, standing at the foot of the bed, beside her husband; "he will be with us but a few minutes longer. How do you feel," she asked gently, "now that you must soon go, Jim?"

"I am sorry to leave you and Tom, but it's all right. I see mother and Maggie and father," he replied, looking toward the ceiling; "they are bending over me, they are waiting to take my hand; I am glad to be with them--Tom, kiss me good-by."

With the tears blinding his eyes, and holding the hot hand within his own warm pressure, Tom Gordon pressed his lips on those of Jim Travers, and, as he held them there, the spirit of the poor orphan wanderer took its flight.

The door gently opened a minute later and the physician stepped inside. One glance told him the truth.

"I knew it was coming when I looked at him this morning," he remarked, in a soft, sympathetic voice. "Nothing could save him. How do you all feel?"

It seemed cruel to ask the question of the three all standing in the presence of death; but it was professional and it was wise, for, by pressing it, he withdrew their thoughts from the overwhelming sorrow that was crushing them.

Tom Gordon had flung himself on the bed with uncontrollable sorrow. One arm lay over the breast and partly round the neck of the body, which breathed no longer, and whose face was lit up by a beatific smile; for Jim Travers was with mother and Maggie and father, and they should go out no more forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

It is not well to dwell upon the second great affliction of Tom Gordon. He was older now than when his mother died, and though bowed to the earth by the loss of his cherished playmate, he was too sensible to brood over his grief. Short as had been his stay at the home of Farmer Pitcairn, he had made friends, and they were abundant with the best of counsel.

There is no remedy for mental trouble like hard work. There's nothing the equal of it. When the dark shadow comes, apply yourself with might and main to some duty. Do your utmost to concentrate your thoughts, energies, and whole being upon it. Avoid sitting down in the gloom and bemoaning your affliction. By and by it will soften; and, relying upon the goodness of Him who doeth all things well, you will see the kindly providence which overrules all the affairs of this life. With the gentle poet you will be able to murmur:--

"Sweet the hour of tribulation,
When the heart can freely sigh,
And the tear of resignation
Twinkles in the mournful eye."

Jim Travers was laid away to rest in the beautiful country cemetery near the home of Farmer Pitcairn, and between it and the town of Bellemore. In due time a plain, tasteful shaft was erected to his memory, on which, below his name, date of birth and death, were carved the expressive words:--

"He was a tried and true friend."

It took a good deal of the earnings of Tom Gordon to erect this tribute to the departed youth. Mr. Pitcairn and his wife insisted upon sharing a part of the expense; and the youth could not refuse them, though he would not permit it to be more than a trifle as compared with his own. The placing of the shaft has led me to anticipate events somewhat.

Tom Gordon was approaching young manhood. He was a tall, sturdy boy, with a fair education, and it was high time that he set to work at the serious business of life. Providence had ordered that he should pass through more than one stirring experience. He had knocked about the world a good deal more than falls to the lot of most lads of his age, and had acquired valuable knowledge. He had learned much of the ways of men, and had undergone a schooling, rough of itself, but fitted to qualify him for the rebuffs of fortune to which we must all become accustomed.

What should he do? This was the question which he often debated with himself, as was befitting in a sensible youth, who feared the danger of a mistake when standing at the "crossing of the ways."

Somehow he felt a strong dislike to going back to New York. He and Jim had met with such rough treatment there that the memory was not pleasant. His yearning was to stay in the neighborhood of Bellemore. The soothing flow of the beautiful Hudson, the picturesque, restful scenery, and, above all, the sweet, sad halo that lingered around the last abiding place of his friend, held him to the spot, which would ever be a sacred one to him.

He could not fancy the life of a farmer, though nothing would have pleased Mr. Pitcairn more than to have the strong, thoughtful boy prepare himself to become his successor in the management of the thrifty and well-kept place. While Tom was in this state of incertitude, Providence opened the way, as it always does to the one who is waiting to accept the indication.

It was at the close of a mild day in early summer that he was sitting on the front porch of his new home, talking with Mr. Pitcairn and his wife, when a carriage stopped in front, and an elderly gentleman stepped down, tied his horse, and opened the gate.

"Why, that's Mr. Warmore," said Farmer Pitcairn to his wife, as he rose to greet his visitor, who walked briskly up the graveled path.

The appearance of the gentleman was prepossessing. He was tall and spare, but with a benign expression of countenance. He was well dressed, wore gold spectacles, and his scant hair and a tuft of whiskers on either side of his cheeks were snowy white, while his features were regular. He must have been an unusually handsome man in his younger days, and would still attract admiration wherever seen.

He shook hands warmly with the farmer and his wife, and was introduced to Tom, whom he treated with the same cordiality. The youth made haste to place a chair at his disposal, for which Mr. Warmore thanked him, and sitting down, crossed his legs, took off his hat, and wiped his perspiring brow with his white silken handkerchief. The chat went on in the usual way for a time, during which Tom discovered that the visitor showed considerable interest in him. His eyes continually turned in his direction, and he asked him a question now and then. The youth was too modest to intrude in the conversation, but knew how to express himself when asked to do so.

By and by the questions of Mr. Warmore became quite pointed. Once or twice Tom was disposed to resent them; but reflecting that the gentleman was much older than he, and could have no wrong purpose in thus probing into his personal affairs, he replied promptly to all he asked.

Finally, when this had continued until it began growing dark, Mr. Warmore said,--

"I wish to hire you to enter my store, how would you like it?"

The question was so unexpected that Tom was fairly taken off his feet. He replied with a pleasing laugh,--

"How can I answer, when I never saw you before, and have no idea of what your business is?"

"True, neither of us has seen the other until to-day; but I may say that I have heard of you from our pastor, Dr. Williams, who conducted the services of your young friend, that was buried a week ago."

"He cannot know much about me, though we have had several talks together."

"He talked, too, with Mr. Pitcairn here, as I did myself."

"Yes," said the farmer, "he asked me many questions about you, and so did Mr. Warmore the other day when I was in his place."

"I keep the largest store in Bellemore. I have kept it for forty years, as did my father before me. It is what may be called a combination establishment. My father started it toward the close of the last century, when a journey to New York meant a great deal more than it does to-day. So he tried to provide the neighbors with everything they could need, such as dry goods, groceries, hardware, farmers' implements, and, as I said, about all that a large and growing family are likely to require. I have followed in his footsteps, expanding the business, until now my clerks and assistants number nearly a dozen. I am in need of a large, strong, wide awake, active boy, who can write a good hand, and who is willing to begin at the lowest round of the ladder and work his way up."

It was the personality of the man, rather than the business, which attracted Tom Gordon. He liked Mr. Warmore so well that he secretly resolve to go with him. But the youth was not lacking in diplomacy.

"How do you know I will suit you, Mr. Warmore?" he asked.

"I don't; no one can know how another will serve him until the trial is made. You may not suit at all. Perhaps I won't keep you beyond a week. That's a risk we must all take. I'm willing to take it. Are *you* ready to see how you like me and the business?"

"What is to be my pay?" asked Tom, still veiling his growing inclination to accept the proposal of the merchant.

"Not much at first. Five dollars a week, which shall be made six at the end of a month if you suit. An increase will be given at the end of every half year; I don't say provided you earn it, for, if you don't, I won't keep you. What do you say, young man?"

"I'll try it; when do you wish me?"

"To-day is Friday. Come Monday morning. Don't be later than eight o'clock. Good-night, all."

Mr. Warmore had risen to his feet and raised his hat politely to all three. The farmer, who had hardly spoken a word during the interview, also arose and walked to the gate with his caller, where they talked for a few minutes.

"Yes, I like his looks," remarked the merchant in a low voice, as he untied his horse and flung the strap under the seat. "There is something good in his face. He looks honest; he is well put together; he is not afraid of work. Is he fully recovered from his injured leg?"

"I never saw one get well so quick. You wouldn't know that anything had ever happened to him. Of course one would say that coming to my house in the strange manner he did, I haven't had much chance to judge him. That would be the case with a man, but a boy can't play the hypocrite for long. My wife and I are very fond of him, and he will still be able to board with us."

"There is no reason why he should not. It is hardly a mile from here to the store, and it won't trouble him to walk it summer and winter. Now and then, when we are busy, I shall have to keep him in the evenings, but from what I hear, he has learned how to take care of himself. Well, Joseph, we are liable to make mistakes, and it may be we have done so in this case, but we'll chance it. Good-night again."

The merchant sprang lightly into his buggy, and drove down the road at a rapid pace, while the farmer, gazing for a moment or two in the direction of the cloud of dust, rejoined his wife and Tom on the porch.

CHAPTER XX.

And now let's take a big jump forward. Hold your breath while we gather our muscles for the effort, for when we land, it is at a point four years from the day when Tom Gordon entered the employ of Josiah Warmore, the leading merchant in the town of Bellemore, on the Hudson.

There have been many changes in those years, but in some respects slight differences could be noted. It would be hard to tell from looking at Mr. Warmore that he was one day older than when he stopped at the home of Farmer Pitcairn and hired Tom Gordon. His hair and whiskers were so white at that time that they could not grow any whiter. The face wears the same kindly expression, the shoulders are no more stooped than they were then, and his walk is as brisk and sprightly as ever. Few of his clerks are more alert of movement than he.

Much the same may be said of Farmer Pitcairn and his wife. Possibly there is an additional wrinkle or two on their homely faces, but their hearts are as genial and as kindly as ever. They love Tom Gordon as if he were their own son, and he fully returns the affection they feel for him.

And how has it been with Tom during those four years?

Well, he has had his shadow and sunshine, like the rest of us, but there has been far more of the latter than the former. How could it be otherwise, when I tell you that he has stood as firm as a rock upon the principles that were implanted in his heart and soul by his noble mother? He could never forget her teachings, which were added to by other wise and good persons with whom he was thrown in contact later.

Now, Tom Gordon became what I call a healthy, sensible Christian youth. He was not the good boy we used to read about in the Sunday-school books, who mopes around, forever preaching a sermon whenever he opens his lips, and finding a "lesson" in everything, even the leap of a grasshopper. When those boys become so good that they can be no better, they generally lie down, call all their playmates around them, deliver a farewell sermon, and then depart. The mistake of that sort of life is that it makes religion unattractive. It gives the idea that "the good die young," and that a jolly, genial, fun-loving boy, bubbling over sometimes with mischief, cannot be a Christian, when he is the very one that most pleases his heavenly Father.

Tom had his fun, his enjoyment, and now and then his crosses. Such things are inevitable and must be looked for. A thorn appeared in his side from the first. A young clerk that had entered the store a few weeks ahead of him was a sly, mean, gnarly fellow, who showed a dislike to the new-comer and annoyed him in every way possible. He was larger and apparently stronger than Tom, and seemed determined to provoke a quarrel with him.

Tom would have been glad to challenge him to a bout at fisticuffs, for he was confident he could vanquish him in short order. He often yearned to do so. More than once the hot defiance was tugging at his lips; but the memory of poor Jim Travers's parting words, "Tom, try to be better: I tell you, you won't be sorry when you come to die," restrained the angry utterance and the hasty blow.

Max Zeigler was one of those young men that are inherently mean. He was born that way, and his ugly disposition increased with his years. You occasionally meet such persons, whose nature it seems impossible to affect by any method of treatment. What was specially aggravating in Tom Gordon's place was that Zeigler seemed to feel no dislike of any one in the store besides himself. He slurred him the first day he met him, and kept it up unremittingly.

Tom's first course was to accept these slurs in silence. His face often flushed, when he saw the smiles on the countenances of the other clerks, excited by some cutting witticism of Zeigler at the expense of himself. His tormentor accepted the silence as proof of the timidity or rather cowardice of the new employee, and rattled off his insults faster than ever. While kindness as a rule will disarm a foe, there are some ingrates so constituted that it moves them the other way. When Tom replied gently to Zeigler, and asked him privately why he annoyed

him without cause, the fellow sneered the more at him. He took pains to indulge in profanity and obscenity before Tom, and received the full reward he sought when he saw how much his course grieved him.

Finally Tom struck the remedy. It was simple. He showed perfect indifference toward his persecutor. When Zeigler made a cutting remark, he acted as if he did not hear him. He continued his conversation with another; and though his enemy repeated his words, they did not seem to enter the ears of Tom. Even when Zeigler put a question direct to him, it was ignored.

It then became the turn of Zeigler to flush at the general smile that went round. At last he had been rebuffed.

One afternoon, when there was little custom in the store, Tom entered one of the rear rooms, where were Zeigler and two other clerks. The fellow's heart rankled at the snubbing he had received, and he was plotting some way of "getting even" with the sanctimonious fellow, who would never swear or indulge in a coarse word.

"This is just the place for a wrestling match," remarked Zeigler. "Gordon, I will go you."

There was no ignoring this challenge. Tom was a wonderfully fine wrestler, but none present knew it. He affected to be timid.

"You are bigger than I, and it would hardly be fair," replied Tom, surveying the bulky form of his challenger.

"O pshaw! you are as heavy as I; besides, I will let you down easy."

"Try him, Gordon," whispered one of the clerks.

"If you will promise not to throw me too hard," said Tom doubtfully, "I will take one turn with you."

"Of course I won't hurt you," grinned Zeigler, eager for the chance to humiliate the fellow whom he despised.

All saw his purpose, and none more plainly than Tom himself.

The two doffed their coats and vests, and took their station in the middle of the room, with their arms interlocked. Tom pretended an awkwardness which deceived the others, and convinced Zeigler, to use a common expression, he had a "cinch" in this little affair.

They struggled for a minute, and then, with the suddenness seemingly of a flash of lightning, Zeigler's heels shot toward the ceiling, and he came down on his back with a crash that shook the windows.

"I thought you knew something about wrestling," remarked Tom, standing erect, and looking down on him with a smile, "but you don't know anything at all."

The two spectators were convulsed with laughter. Zeigler's face was a fiery crimson, and he scrambled to his feet in a fury.

"That was a slip; you can't do it again!" he exclaimed, springing at Tom and hastily locking arms with him.

"All right; we'll see. Now do your best, for I mean to throw you just as I did a minute ago. Are you ready?"

"Of course I am; go ahead."

Zeigler was not lacking in a certain skill. The lesson he had just received was not lost on him. He was cautious, tricky, and alert--more so than Tom suspected, and he put forth the utmost

cunning of which he was capable.

They twisted, swayed back and forth, and once Tom came within a hair of falling, owing to a slight slip of one foot. But he was on his mettle, and, putting forth his whole might and ability, he flung his antagonist on his back with a violence that almost drove the breath from his body.

"Fudge!" remarked Tom, turning away in disgust; "I'll give you a few lessons if you wish to learn how to wrestle. Any way, you had better take lessons of some person before you bother *me* again."

The other two clerks had dropped upon the nearest stools, and were holding their sides with mirth.

"Zeigler," said one, when he recovered speech, "that's too big a contract for you; you can't deliver the goods."

"You'll have to pay for those window-panes you shook out," added the other.

"I've got a set of boxing-gloves here," growled Zeigler, who tried to assume an indifference, as he brushed off his clothes and looked up with flaming face. "I'd like to try you with them."

"I'm agreeable," replied Tom, who had seen Zeigler bang the other clerks around with the gloves as he pleased. "I learned something of the business when I was a newsboy. I hope you are better at it than you are at wrestling."

While Tom was speaking he was drawing on a pair of gloves and fixing the strings at the wrist. Zeigler was a little uneasy at the coolness of his opponent, and his readiness in accepting his challenge. Then, too, when he took his position, with his left foot advanced, his right glove in front of his chest, his left arm extended, the pose was so like a professional, that Zeigler's misgivings increased. Still he felt great confidence in his own skill, and there was no criticism to be made upon his position when he faced the youth, for whose vanquishment he would have given half his year's salary.

"Now," said Tom, with his exasperating coolness, "I propose that *each do his best*. I don't suppose you want any baby play. I don't. I invite you to hit me as often and as hard as you can. I'm going to do the same with you. *Time!*"

They began dancing about a common center, sawing their arms back and forth, each looking sharply in the other's eye and on the alert for an opening.

Tom meant to make the other lead; for, before assuming the aggressive, he wished to know more about Zeigler. It might be he possessed greater skill than Tom believed. He meant to learn something of his style.

They had circled round several times, when Zeigler thought he saw his chance, and feinting quickly, let fly with his left. Instead of parrying the blow, Tom dodged it by throwing his head back. The opportunity was a capital one to counter on Zeigler, but Tom made no effort to do so. It looked as if he lacked the quickness and skill, and failed to see his chance.

Zeigler now began edging nearer. He had come within an inch of reaching the face of Tom, when he failed to counter. A little closer, and he was sure he could "knock him out." At any rate, if he failed to do so, he had nothing to fear from a foe who did not know enough to use an elemental advantage.

A quick step forward at the instant of feinting with his right, and Zeigler again let fly with his left straight from the shoulder. It was a vicious blow, and, had it landed, would have done damage; but a flirt of the head allowed it to glide harmlessly over the shoulder. At the instant of doing so, Tom cross-counteracted with a quickness and force that could not have been excelled. That is to say, as Zeigler's left glove was darting past Tom's left ear, and the momentum of the young man's body was throwing him forward, Tom's right hand shot across the extended arm of the other, and landed with fearful force on the nose and mouth of his

opponent.

It was a fierce drive; for its effect was intensified by the fact that Tom's glove met the head of the other as it was coming toward him. It would have been bad enough had it landed on a stationary object, but the object was approaching from the opposite direction.

Tom and the two clerks were startled by the effect of the blow, for Zeigler went down like a log, rolling over on his back, his hands flapping full length above his head, while he lay perfectly unconscious.

But when water was dashed in his face he revived. It was some time before he freed his mouth and nose of the crimson result of colliding with the glove; but, aided by the clerks, he donned his coat and vest, and assumed something like a presentable condition.

While this was going on, Tom Gordon sat in a chair a few feet away, looking on as though he felt little interest in the matter. He did not help shape the other up, for two reasons. His aid was not necessary, and, again, he knew it would not be acceptable to his discomfited antagonist.

"A rather neat blow, Zeigler," remarked Tom; "when you wish to even up matters, I will be ready to accommodate you."

It sounded strange to the other clerks to hear the gentle Tom Gordon speak thus to the young man who had played the bully so long over him. They concluded that the crushed worm had at last turned. The vanquished one made no reply except to give the other a look of hatred, and leave the room.

Now, there is not one person in a thousand who would not have been conquered morally as well as physically by an experience like that of Max Zeigler. Such an utter overthrow would have made the bully the close friend and champion of the other; but it was altogether different with Zeigler. Before his swelled lip and bulging nose had resumed their normal appearance, he resumed his petty persecutions as before. Those who knew of the bout in the back room (and, indeed, every clerk quickly learned the particulars) urged Tom to lay out his enemy so effectually that he would stay laid out.

Young Gordon, however, chose the better course. He affected the same indifference as before, and frequently did not seem to hear the words of his enemy. The hardest duty Tom had to do was to keep back the scathing retorts of which he thought so often, and which would have silenced Zeigler. Nothing, indeed, is more difficult for a high-spirited person than to bridle his tongue under the lashings of another. *How* few of us are equal to the task!

CHAPTER XXI.

Only two or three incidents worthy of note fell to the lot of Tom Gordon during his second year in the employ of Josiah Warmore.

At the beginning of the year he was promoted, and received a considerable increase of salary. The situation given to him belonged by right of seniority of service to Max Zeigler, and was looked upon as a certainty by him. He was so indignant at the snub, that he made no effort to conceal his feelings. While the hurt rankled, he went to Mr. Warmore and demanded an explanation. He got it, and resigned forthwith. No one regretted to see him go, and least of all Tom Gordon, who gave a sigh of thankfulness at the removal of the thorn from his side.

It was strange how Mr. Warmore found out everything about his employees. Often they felt astonishment, and could not understand by what means he picked up knowledge they were often certain was only known to themselves. Thus he learned at an early date the petty persecutions suffered by Tom at the hands of Zeigler; and there can be little doubt that that information was one cause of the fellow receiving such a marked set-back. Then he knew as much of that wrestling and boxing bout as if he had been a witness. There is reason to suspect he was secretly pleased at the issue, though he would never admit it. It is not wise at all times for the teacher or employer to let those under his charge know the extent of his knowledge of their doings. In other words, it is not always best to see what you do see.

Mr. Warmore was a reserved man. He was kind, but just, toward his clerks. He established a free reading-room in Bellemore, saw that every employee had his regular vacation each summer or whenever he preferred it, encouraged them to be frugal and moral, gave them good advice, forbade coarseness of language or profanity, and hired a pew in each of the two leading churches, which were always at the disposal of his young men without any expense to them.

Occasionally he gave entertainments at his own handsome residence for their benefit. Now and then he would invite some of them to dinner. His wife was in delicate health, but a most excellent woman, who did much to make such evenings highly enjoyable. Their only son had died in his infancy, and their daughter Jennie was attending a boarding-school. Little was seen of her, though when at home she often drove to the store with her mother, to take her father out with them. She was remarkably attractive in looks, but, like her father, reserved in manner. She recognized the clerks, when she chanced to meet them, with the air and manner of a lady; but all felt there was a gulf between her and them which was impassable. They concluded (and did not criticise her therefor) that she held herself socially above each and all of them.

The second incident that took place came to Tom Gordon in the summer-time while away on his fortnight's vacation. He had grown to be tall, and more attractive than when younger. He was fond of good clothes; and when he took the steamer at the landing, and went down the Hudson to New York, it would have been hard to find a better looking or more correctly costumed young man than Tom. He did not show it in his manner, but how could he help knowing it?

Strange that almost the first persons he noticed on the boat were Sam Harper and his sister Nellie, returning from an excursion up the river. They, too, had done considerable growing, and made a handsome couple. Tom looked so well that Nellie was very pleased to meet him. She would have been glad to receive attention from him, and showed by her manner that she expected it. But Tom could not forget that snub a couple of years before, when he was selling papers on a Broadway car. He liked Sam and his father and mother, but couldn't forgive Nellie for hurting his feelings. So, when the brother turned her over to him, Tom with exquisite courtesy raised his hat, bade her good-day, and strolled to another part of the boat. She understood the meaning of the repulse, as he meant she should, and she felt it.

And who should he run against on the wharf in the city but his old friend Patsey McConough, who had done him such a good turn when he first arrived in the metropolis. The genial Irishman had driven down with a carriage to meet his employer, who was on the steamer, so he had but

little opportunity to talk with Tom, whom he did not recognize until the youth made himself known. But they shook hands warmly, and each was pleased to find the other doing so well. They parted with the best wishes, hoping soon to see each other again.

Tom, like a sensible youth, made the most of his vacation. He spent several days among his friends at Briggsville, who heartily welcomed him among them, even though saddened by the fact that the orphan who went away with him could never return to them again. Then he gave a few days to the seashore, where none enjoyed the bathing, the boating, and frolicking more than he. All too soon the two weeks drew to an end, and he again boarded the steamer which stopped at the landing opposite Bellemore, on its way to more important towns and cities up the Hudson.

Strolling over the boat to see whether there were any acquaintances among his fellow-travelers, he found none, and, having nothing better to do, sat down on a camp-stool on the forward deck to view the picturesque scenery, which, however, had become so familiar that he fell to studying human nature as it appeared immediately around him.

That which interested him the most was a dudish young man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, carrying a heavy cane, and wearing eyeglasses. He had high cheek bones, fishy gray eyes, fine teeth, and a simpering smile. Tom judged he was a couple of years older than himself, and became interested in him because of his amusing efforts to charm the ladies around him. The vulgar expression would be that he was trying to "mash" them. The word is not a good one, but it will help my reader to understand the meaning.

Evidently he believed himself irresistible, and his smirking, posing, and ogling were ludicrous to the last degree. Among the numerous young ladies on board were a dozen Vassar girls, as bright, merry, and full of mischief as they could possibly be. They met the ogling of the dude with sly glances and smiles which made him more killing than ever. Encouraged by this, and not doubting that he had made a conquest, he ventured to approach and address them. The reception he met was enough to congeal water. It fairly took away his breath. Then he blushed clear out to the end of his ears, and withdrew to some other part of the boat, where he could hope to be better appreciated.

Some of the girls managed to stroll thither a few minutes later, as if unconscious of where he had gone. Tom saw some fun was coming, and he drifted thither too.

The dude had succeeded in making an impression on a simpering girl, and was seated on one of the camp-stools beside her, talking in his drawling way, and pointing out the beautiful scenery as they swept past. He frequently raised his heavy cane and indicated the different objects, the better to enlighten his companion.

"Aw, that is Haverstraw," he volunteered, bringing the stick to a level. "It is--aw--quite a famous place; reminds me of Holland across the water, you know."

"What is there about Haverstraw to suggest Holland?" inquired his lady friend.

"They make bricks there--aw--a good many bricks--aw--may I inquire, doncherknow, did you ever see a brick?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, with an impertinent glance from her mischievous eyes; "I think I am looking at one now."

"You mean to say that I am a brick--aw--good, dooced good; I must tell that at the club--dooced clevah; couldn't do much bettah meself, doncherknow? Now, if you will kindly rise from your seat--aw--I will point out a vewy interesting mountain peak."

"Thank you, I can see well enough without rising."

Nevertheless, the dude came to a stooping posture, and, with one gloved hand on the railing to steady him self, wobbled the bulky cane again in the direction of the shore.

"Aw--I'm a little off soundings, doncherknow, and am not suah whether that is Dunderberg Mountain or Saint Anthony's Olfactory Organ--aw--that's clevah, don't you think,--Saint Anthony's Olfactory Organ, doncherknow"--At the moment of partly rising to his feet, a couple of Vassar girls walked past. When directly opposite the camp-stool of the dude, one of them touched it with the toe of her shoe and shoved it to one side. The lady seated near and listening to the young man's chatter saw it, but pretended she did not, and, therefore, made no effort to save her new friend from his impending catastrophe. It was the same with a dozen other persons.

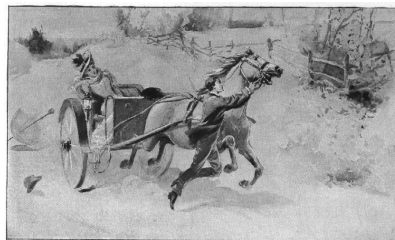
There is no form of practical joking more to be condemned than that of taking a chair from under a person when he is about to sit down. Lasting injury has resulted in more than one instance, and no person should ever do it himself or permit it to be done by another. Possibly, however, the case now in hand was an exception; for it was evident that the principal performer was so soft that no harm could come to him from the fall. No spectator felt any misgiving on that score.

Finding his companion did not rise as he had requested, the young man began slowly to sit down. He continued doing so, until he struck the deck with a bump which caused his hat to fly off, the cane to drop from his hand, and his eyeglasses to fall from his nose. He gradually picked himself up, and, amid the laughter of every one near, made his way to the *salon* below, and busied himself reading a copy of an English paper.

This incident would not be worth the telling but for that which followed. The dudish young man who caused so much entertainment on board the steamer that afternoon was destined to cross the path of Tom Gordon in a way of which neither dreamed.

Tom gave no more thought to him until, when waiting to walk ashore at the landing, he saw, to his surprise, the young man was about to do the same. It looked as if he intended to make a call at Bellemore. Greater astonishment came when Tom saw the handsome carriage of Mr. Warmore at the landing. The driver was perched on the high seat in front, while Mrs. Warmore and her daughter Jennie occupied the rear seat, facing the vacant one.

"Can it be possible? Well, that beats me!"



Tom held on like grim death. Page 311

The carriage was waiting for this young man, who simpered forward with uplifted hat and greeted them effusively. Mrs. Warmore noticed Tom, and bowed to him, inviting him to enter the carriage and ride with them,--an invitation which, as he expressed to himself, he would not have accepted for seventeen thousand million dollars. The dude stepped into the carriage, dropped into the seat facing the ladies, and devoted himself to gnawing the head of his cane and making bright remarks to them.

"Well, who in the name of the seven wonders can he be?" mused Tom, walking briskly homeward. "He must be some relative of the Warmores; but they ought to be ashamed of such a specimen as that. He was the laughing-stock of the boat. I was forming quite an exalted opinion of Miss Jennie; but if she fancies that sort of thing, my respect for her has gone down to zero."

When Tom stepped upon the porch of Farmer Pitcairn's home, and shook hands with him, and received a motherly kiss from his good wife, he went inside, and, sitting down to their evening meal, asked Mr. Pitcairn whether he had noticed the young man riding in the Warmore carriage

with the mother and daughter.

"Yes; I've seen him before. He is a son of an old friend of the family. I've an idee that he and Miss Warmore are intended for each other."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes--let me see. Ah, it is Catherwood--G. Field Catherwood. He parts his name, like his hair, in the middle. He is quite a dude in his dress, but when you come to know him pretty well he isn't such a bad sort of fellow."

"How is it *you* know so much about him?" asked Tom in surprise.

"He has stopped here a good many times when out riding with the ladies. He's fond of mother's buttermilk."

"I thought his kind preferred sweet milk," Tom could not help remarking, with a laugh; "but I must not judge him too harshly. We all have our peculiarities, and he is not likely to fancy me any more than I do him."

Tom returned to his work refreshed and renewed in strength and spirits. The year passed pleasantly. That which followed saw him promoted another step, so that when the fourth year opened it saw him in a situation where the salary of but a single employee exceeded his; that was the bookkeeper.

He had every reason to expect that place when the vacancy should occur. Mr. Warmore had given so many evidences of his regard that it was conceded by all that he was his favorite clerk. He had never violated his principles of honesty, truthfulness, and consideration for every one with whom he came in contact. A young man who lives up to that rule of conduct is as sure to succeed, if his life is spared, as the sun is to rise.

The bookkeeper was an elderly gentleman, so well-to-do that, at the beginning of the fifth year, he resigned and gave up all active work. His son was engaged in successful business in New York, and urged his father to join him, where he would be a partner. So he left. His successor in the establishment of Mr. Warmore, instead of being Tom Gordon, was G. Field Catherwood.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was a surprise to every employee of Mr. Warmore. To Tom Gordon it was also a keen disappointment. He had never doubted that the plum would fall to him. He did not dream that the dudish young man would ever demean himself by manual labor; but Mr. Warmore departed from his usual reticence, to the extent of taking Tom aside and explaining matters.

"Mr. Catherwood is the son of an old college friend of mine. His father was wealthy, and, at his death some years ago, left everything to him. Mr. Catherwood has traveled a good deal, but is disposed now to settle down in life and become a business man. He has made an offer to put a large sum of money in our business, and I have accepted it--that is, conditionally," added the merchant with a slight hesitation.

Tom bowed.

"I presume he has some thought of marriage, and has awakened to the fact that the life of an idler is a worthless one. So he contemplates becoming a merchant. With his help we shall be able to expand our business and thus benefit both. I said I accepted his offer conditionally."

Noticing the hesitation of his employer, Tom interposed:--

"Mr. Warmore, there is no call for you to make this explanation. No man could have been kinder to me than you have been. I will not deny that I was disappointed, when I found myself checked on the next to the highest round of the ladder, but not a word of complaint can ever be heard from me. I should be an ingrate to utter it. I shall give you the best service of which I am capable, as I have done in the past. My gratitude you shall have always."

"Those manly word have decided me to say two things: From the beginning of the year your salary shall be the same as that of Mr. Martin who has left. The condition upon which I have agreed to accept Mr. Catherwood as a partner is that he shall devote one year's hard work to the business. He thinks he can acquire the necessary knowledge best by becoming a bookkeeper, since he could hardly be expected to begin where you and the rest did."

Repeating his thanks to his employer for the goodness he had always shown toward him, Tom Gordon bowed himself out.

Sure enough, the next day Mr. Catherwood took his place at the bookkeeper's desk. Mr. Martin agreed to stay a week in order to explain everything necessary to him; and none could have applied himself more assiduously than the young man, whose whole thoughts seemed to have been centered on that of dress and the other sex.

Tom Gordon soon discovered the cause of Mr. Pitcairn's remark to the effect that Catherwood was not such a bad fellow when you came to know him. He wrote an excellent hand, understood the theory of bookkeeping, and mastered that branch of the business so quickly that Mr. Martin was dismissed with thanks at the end of three days.

True, he wore eyeglasses, parted his hair in the middle, and was an exquisite in his dress. When he chose he could be courteous to those around him. Most of the clerks were pleasantly disappointed by his manner.

Tom Gordon, as in duty bound, yielded full respect to the one who was not only his superior in position, but who was likely, in the course of time, to become his sole employer. But the young man was sensitive, and soon became convinced that Mr. Catherwood did not feel especially friendly toward him. It was not in anything he said or did, but rather in his manner. It made Tom uncomfortable; but he resolved to make the best of it, and, if he could not force Mr. Catherwood to like him, he could at least compel his respect.

"He must have seen me laughing at him on the steamboat, when he missed his chair; possibly he suspects I had something to do with his mishap. It is natural that he should feel resentful toward me, but I hope it will wear off."

In the dusk of early evening, some months later, Tom was sauntering homeward, musing over the past, with an uncomfortable feeling that despite the long service he had given Mr. Warmore, and the many times he had expressed his satisfaction with him, the association was not likely to continue much longer.

There could be no mistaking the hearty dislike which Catherwood felt for the young man. Tom would have cared little for that had not the discouraging conviction forced itself upon him that Mr. Warmore was beginning to share his future partner's distrust. It seemed to be an unconscious absorption on his part of the views of another.

This was hard to bear; but it rasped the young man's sense of manhood, for it was an injustice which he did not expect.

"If Mr. Warmore is weak enough to let that fellow turn him against me, he is a different man from what I suspected. His store is not the only one in the world, and at the first unfair act on his part, I shall leave--hello!"

Coming down the road, on a swift gallop, with the reins flying, was a spirited horse, dragging a fashionable dog-cart, which, as it swayed from side to side, showed that it contained a single person,--a lady, who had lost control of the animal.

"That looks bad," muttered Tom, his heart leaping with natural excitement. "She is likely to be killed."

It looked as if the young man was to be given one of the stereotyped opportunities to prove his heroism,--that of rescuing a beautiful young lady whose horse was running away. He did not think of that, however, for it would have been the same had a bitter enemy been in peril.

The steed was coming like the whirlwind. The clomp of his hoofs, his snorting nostrils, his flying mane, and dangling reins, the frail vehicle bounding from side to side and often on the point of overturning, the glimpses of the lady bravely holding on and uttering no scream,--all these made up the most startling picture on which Tom Gordon had looked for many a day.

Stationing himself in the middle of the road, he swung his hat and arms, and shouted to the mad animal in the hope of making him slacken his speed sufficiently to allow the occupant to leap out. The horse saw him, shied a little, moderated his pace a trifle, and then plunged forward on a run.

Clearly he was not to be checked by that means. Tom Gordon braced himself for the shock of the supreme effort he had formed.

In a twinkling his strong grip had closed about the strap of the bit, and he threw his whole weight against the brute, who reared, plunged, struggled, struck with his fore feet, and strove to shake the incubus loose, but in vain. Tom held on like grim death, though in imminent danger of being struck down and trampled upon. No animal is quicker to recognize the hand of a master than a horse, and in less time than would be supposed possible the mad runaway was under control.

Then a gentle patting, a few soothing words, and he became more quiet, though still trembling in every nerve.

"I hope, Miss Warmore, you have not been injured."

"Not in the least, thanks to your bravery," replied the young lady, displaying wonderful coolness. "I have had a pretty rapid ride and a bad shock, but that is all."

Tom had caught up the reins and held them in hand, while he stood at the side of the vehicle near the daughter of his employer.

"Perhaps, Miss Warmore, it will be safer for me to drive home with you. The horse is nervous and liable to take fright again."

"I can never thank you sufficiently for what you have already done," she said with emotion, moving to one side to make room for him.

"It was not difficult," he remarked lightly, stepping in beside her, and speaking gently to the animal, as he carefully turned him around to drive back. "I had time to prepare myself, and he was easily controlled. May I ask how it happened?"

He was sure he never saw one so beautiful as she. The excitement had brought a glow to her lustrous eyes, and there was deepening of the pink tinge on the cheeks which made her complexion perfection itself. She was still agitated, though striving hard to bring her feelings under control.

"We were driving at a brisk pace," she replied, "when a piece of paper blew across the road in front of Jack, and he was off like a shot."

Tom noticed her use of the word "we," and knew whom she meant.

"Could not Mr. Catherwood control him?"

He glanced sideways at her when he asked the question, and noticed the scornful expression that came upon her face.

"He might have done so had he a spark of *your* courage; but the instant Jack made his leap, Mr. Catherwood flung the lines over his back, and with a call to me to jump, he sprang out of the cart and left me alone. If he had given me the lines, I could have managed Jack myself; but he wouldn't allow me even that poor privilege."

"He must have lost his head."

"Small loss to lose *such* a head," exclaimed Miss Jennie, who evidently held a small opinion of her escort; "it's the last time I shall ever go riding with *him*."

A queer thrill passed through Tom Gordon. He was a fervent admirer of the young lady at his side; but he had worshiped her, as may be said, as we worship a fair and brilliant star. It is something so far beyond our reach that we keep our admiration to ourself, and strive to drive the foolish feeling from our heart.

"I have no wish to injure Catherwood," was his thought; "but if he is such a coward as to desert a lady in peril, it is well she should know it before it is too late."

When Mr. Warmore referred to the young man as not only contemplating a partnership in his business, but as intending marriage, Tom Gordon held not the slightest doubt of his full meaning. He was paying court to the merchant's only daughter; and, if they were not already engaged, they expected soon to become so.

The situation of our young friend, therefore, became a most peculiar one. He had been given an important preliminary advantage, if he chose to aspire to the love of the sweet one at his side; but he thought hard, and did not lose his self-poise or sense of honor.

"It is natural that she should despise his poltroonery and feel grateful to me," was his thought; "but, after all, it isn't likely she holds any emotion other than simple gratitude. It would be base in me to presume upon it. I will not do so."

The drive was comparatively a short one to the handsome residence of the Warmores. As Tom guided the mettlesome pony through the open gate and up the winding roadway to the front of the porch, Mrs. Warmore came out pale with fright. She had just learned of the accident from G. Field Catherwood, who had limped up the steps with a rambling tale of how he had been flung headlong from the vehicle at the moment he was about to seize Jennie and lift her free.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the mother, when she saw her daughter unharmed; "I was sure you were killed."

Catherwood hobbled forward from behind the lady, leaning on his cane.

"I say 'amen' to those sentiments," he added, too much flustered just then to use his affected style of speech. "O Jennie, my heart was broken when I was hurled out before I could save you. Allow me."

"You had better look after your own safety," she said, refusing his help, as she stepped lightly from the cart. "Jack might start again. Mother, Mr. Gordon here saved my life."

At this moment the groom appeared, and the blushing Tom turned the horse over to him, and, pretending he had not heard the words of Jennie, lifted his hat.

"It has come out all right; I bid you good-evening."

Catherwood quickly rallied from the snub of the lady. He slipped his fingers in his vest-pocket and drew out a bill, which he handed to Tom.

"What's that for?" asked the wondering youth, taking the crumpled paper.

"Aw--that's all right, my deah fellow--you earned it--dooced clevah in you"--

Tom Gordon compressed the paper into a small wad, and placing it between his thumb and forefinger, as though it were a marble, shot it against the eyeglasses of the amazed dude.

"That's my opinion of *you*," he said, turning about and walking off, before the agitated Mrs. Warmore could thank him.

"I suppose I've done it," he mused, when in the highway and walking toward Farmer Pitcairn's. "Catherwood never did like me and now he hates me. If Miss Jennie keeps up her course toward him, he will hate me more than ever. He will not rest till he gets me out of the store. Well, let him go ahead. I am not an old man yet, and the world is broad and big."

He was about to sit down to the evening meal, when a servant of Mr. Warmore arrived with a note, requesting the pleasure of Mr. Gordon's company to dinner that evening. It was not a simple formal invitation, but was so urgent that the young man could not refuse. He returned word through the servant that he accepted with pleasure the invitation and would be soon there.

Can the youth be censured, if, with a fluttering heart, he took extra pains with his personal appearance before leaving the good farmer's home that evening? When at last he stepped forth, in full dress, swinging his light cane, you would have had to hunt a long way to find a handsomer fellow than he.

And yet, with all his delightful anticipation, was mingled a feeling of dread. He disliked meeting Catherwood, for between them a great gulf yawned and something unpleasant was certain to occur. Jennie had witnessed his insulting offer of a reward to him for what he had done, and must have appreciated the style in which it was repulsed. She would show her feelings most decisively before the evening was over.

Besides that, he dreaded hearing the family renew their expressions of thankfulness. Tom had unquestionably performed a brave act, but no more so than hundreds of others that were continually being done every day--some of them entitled to far more credit than was his.

But the fact that he was about to spend an evening in the company of Miss Jennie herself, outweighed all these slight objections. Conscious, too, of her feeling toward him, he could not help viewing the hours just before him with a delightful flutter of anticipation.

The first pleasant disappointment which came to Tom, after reaching the fine residence and receiving the cordial welcome of the family, was the discovery that G. Field Catherwood was not present, and would not form one of the little party. That lifted a load of apprehension from his shoulders.

Inasmuch as it had to come, Tom took the thanks of the parents like a hero. He listened with a respectful smile, blushed under the compliments, and blushed still more when Jennie with a straightforward, earnest look said,--

"Mr. Gordon may say it was not much, but it saved my life, and I shall *never*, NEVER forget it. If Mr. Catherwood had shown a hundredth part of his courage"--

"There, there, daughter," protested her father, as they seated themselves at the table, "a truce to all that; let us leave him out of the conversation."

"And, if you please, drop the whole thing," added Tom, who began to feel uncomfortable under it all.

"Since it will be more agreeable to you, we will do so," was the hearty remark of the head of the family, as all began "discussing," as the expression goes, the feast before them. "I will say, however, that Jennie did meet with one experience, in which her rescuer showed possibly more pluck than Mr. Gordon to-day."

The guest looked inquiringly at his host.

"She seems to be destined to be concerned in unpleasant adventures."

"Yes; I hope this is the last of them. What I refer to happened some five or six years ago,-- possibly more than that. At any rate, she was a small girl, crossing the ferry at New York with her mother, when in the crowd and crush, by some means which I never could understand, she fell overboard. The river was full of floating ice, and she would have been drowned but for the heroism of a boy, who sprang in after her, and, at the risk of his own life, kept her afloat until both could be drawn on board."

Tom Gordon felt his face turning scarlet. He was so disturbed for the moment that he could not frame any words. He could only look at his employer and listen. In that moment there flashed upon him the explanation of a little mystery which had troubled him for months.

The first time he looked into the face of Jennie Warmore, the suspicion came to him that somewhere and at some time, under far different circumstances, he had met her. When sitting at her side in the dog-cart that afternoon, this suspicion became a certainty. He strove to account for it on the theory that it was one of those accidental resemblances which all of us have met in our experience; but he could not make himself believe it to be the fact.

Strange that he never thought of associating her with that memorable incident in his own life! He had sacredly preserved the chain and likeness; and it was the similarity between the latter and the budding young lady that caused the perplexity in his mind. He wondered that he had not hit upon the explanation before it was flung in his face, as may be said.

By the time Mrs. Warmore had added her account to that of her husband, Tom had regained mastery of himself.

"And who was the lad that did all this?" he asked in the most innocent manner conceivable.

"That is the one feature about the affair that has always troubled me," said the merchant. "I have tried to find out, but have never been able to gain the first clew to his identity. Mrs. Warmore was so frantic in mind that she did not think of the noble rescuer until he was gone. Then she made inquiries, but no one seemed to know anything about him."

"It distressed me," added the lady; "for I felt he must think we were ungrateful. We advertised in the papers, but it was useless. I do not suppose we shall ever know who he was."

"He may have been some poor boy in need of help," added Mr. Warmore; "but so brave a lad as that is sure to get along."

"I presume *you* remember the incident?" remarked Tom, turning toward the daughter.

"How can I ever forget it?" she asked in reply, with a shiver. "I can feel that icy water even now, as it closed round me that wintry night. It was too dark to see my rescuer's face plainly, but I would know him if I met him fifty years from now. He was remarkably handsome."

"A boy of that age changes very much in a few years."

"He could never change so as to grow out of my recollection," said Jennie with a positiveness that made Tom Gordon smile.

"And of all the strange things that were ever done by a child," said Mrs. Warmore, "none ever equalled what Jennie did while floating in the water."

"Indeed, what could that be?"

"Tell him yourself, daughter."

The young lady blushed and laughed.

"I don't know what possessed me to do it. I hardly think I was conscious of matters or responsible for all I did. When the lad was fighting his way through the icy waters, I remember snatching a chain and locket containing my likeness from my neck, and twisting the chain about a button on his coat. I had a feeling of wishing to do something that should help him to remember me. After that I became wholly unconscious."

"It seems to me the little fellow was rewarded by securing the chain and locket," remarked Tom with a significant smile.

"That was but a trifle compared to what he ought to have received," replied Jennie.

"You forget that it contained *your* picture."

The compliment was so neatly put that all laughed, and the face of the young lady became rosier than ever.

"Pardon me," Tom hastened to say; "of course the little fellow has preserved those mementoes, and I should not be surprised if he turns up some day when least expected."

"I hope so," was the fervent response of Jennie, in which sentiment her parents joined.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the evening, which was a red letter one in Tom Gordon's life. No more delightful hours were ever spent by him; and when, without tarrying too late, he left, he could make no mistake as to the sentiments of the three, and especially the youngest, toward him. He had made an impression there, and it would be his own fault if it failed to ripen into something serious.

But, as he walked homeward in the silvery moonlight, he felt a respect for himself which, it is safe to say, would have come to few placed as he was. He had not given the first hint that he was the boy who, at the risk of his own life, had leaped into the wintry waters and rescued little Jennie Warmore from death.

Who would have held back the secret in his situation? Would you or I? Doubtful, if when smitten with love for a fair, sweet girl, we had felt that its telling would have riveted the bonds which, at the most, were only partly formed, and might dissolve into nothingness if not thus strengthened.

It was the youth's fine-grained sense of honor that restrained him.

"She holds a good opinion of me now. If it should ever happen that that feeling grows into love (and Heaven grant it may!), it must be for me alone, and not for any accident in the past. Suppose I had not done her a good turn to-day,--she might have discarded Catherwood for his baseness, but what would have caused her to transfer her regard to me? No, she shall never know the whole truth until--until"--

He dared not finish the thrilling sentence, the blissful hope, the wild dream, that set his nerves dancing. Unto us all can come that radiant, soulful, all-absorbing emotion but once in our life, and it is too sacred to be trifled with; for once destroyed, once crushed, once dead, and the holy thing vanishes forever.

Two noticeable truths became manifest to Tom Gordon on the morrow. G. Field Catherwood's dislike of him was intensified. The young man had felt from the first that the head clerk was not only more attractive than he in looks, but was far brighter intellectually. Added now to this was the feeling of jealousy. He had received from Jennie Warmore a too pointed expression of her contempt for him to have any possible room for misunderstanding it. When he ventured to hint at their engagement, which had been discussed, but never formally made, she shook her head decisively, and his heart collapsed.

He had strolled by the house early in the evening, having fully recovered from the injuries resulting from the runaway, and was on the point of passing through the gate, when he observed a figure ahead of him. One quick glance disclosed that it was young Gordon, on his way to pass the evening there. That knowledge caused the dude to wheel about and go to the hotel, where he made his home. And as he strode along the highway, his heart overflowed with the bitterness of gall and wormwood.

He made no attempt to conceal his feelings on the following day, when he and Gordon came in contact at the store. Tom avoided him as much as possible; but, of necessity, they occasionally came together, and the repulsion was mutual. This unpleasantness was fully offset not only by the consciousness of the regard of Miss Warmore, but by the cordial manner of her father. Those signs of distrust which he had shown during the past week were gone, and his kindness and consideration for the young man were so marked as to attract the attention of all. It was clear that the mists between them had vanished.

CHAPTER XXIII.

That night, after the establishment of Mr. Warmore was closed and the employees had gone home, two persons remained behind to engage in earnest consultation. They were the proprietor and G. Field Catherwood, the young man who expected, at the end of the year, to become an equal partner with him. The doors were fastened, and the two sat alone in the private office, the expression on the faces of both showing that some grave matter weighed upon them.

"How long has this been going on?" asked Mr. Warmore.

"For two weeks or more; that is to say, I discovered it about a fortnight ago. No doubt it has been kept up in a small way for a long time previous to that."

"How much do you suppose has been taken altogether?"

"Several hundred dollars; perhaps a thousand."

"And your suspicions point to Mr. Gordon?"

"I am sorry to say they do. Of course he was the last one to suspect; but, when I began quietly investigating, the trail led unmistakably to him."

"What caused you first to suspect him, Mr. Catherwood?"

"Well, when a merchant finds some, one of his employees is robbing him, the most natural thing to do is to look into the habits of them all. If he discovers that one is living beyond his means, he naturally probes a little farther; and, if his habits prove to be extravagant, the suspicion increases."

"What did you find out about Mr. Gordon?"

"I accidentally learned that he has a considerable sum in the savings-bank."

"He deserves credit for that."

"True, if that which was deposited was his own. Besides, he spends a good deal of money."

"In what way?"

"In the first place, on his clothes."

"He certainly is well dressed, but no more so than his salary will permit."

"Last week he paid off a mortgage on the farm of Mr. Pitcairn, and then made a present of it to the old gentleman."

"What was the amount?"

"Several thousand dollars."

"You are mistaken. Mr. Pitcairn told me of it three days ago. He had promised Mr. Gordon not to tell any one; but the farmer was so happy that he said he could not keep it back. It was only three hundred dollars, however."

"Then I was misinformed," Catherwood hastened to say with a flush; "but I happen to know he is speculating in Wall Street, and betting on the races."

"That is bad; is your information reliable?"

"There can be no doubt of its truth."

"Have you any objection to telling me the channel through which this knowledge reached you?"

"I would be glad to do so, but the source at present is confidential."

"Very well; I am sorry to hear this about Mr. Gordon, for, as you know, I held him in high regard. For the present, let us keep the matter a close secret. Do not let him see he is under suspicion, and we will not move until certain there can be no mistake in the matter."

A few minutes later the two walked out of the front door, which was carefully locked behind them, and sauntered homeward. The younger man went to the chief hotel of the town, while the elder continued up the highway, thinking deeply over the subject he had just discussed with Catherwood.

Now, it so happened that Josiah Warmore, the merchant, was a far shrewder man than G. Field Catherwood suspected. If the latter had been playing a part, so had the former.

As has been intimated, it came to the knowledge of the merchant, about a fortnight before, that some one in his employ was systematically robbing him. Gatherwood first dropped a hint, and then both investigated so far as the opportunity allowed. The result turned suspicion toward Tom Gordon. The merchant had learned, in the course of his long and varied experience, the sad truth that no man in the world can be picked out and declared, beyond all possibility of doubt, to be absolutely honest. Thousands of people live and die and go to their graves wrapped in the mantle of unassailable integrity. It may be they have not defrauded a person out of a penny, for the simple reason that the temptation has never been strong enough to make them do so. Had it been a little stronger, they would have succumbed. Others, after years of straightforward life, have fallen. So it might be that, though he had given full trust to Tom Gordon, he was not worthy to receive that trust. This half-belief caused the chill in his treatment of the young man, so different from that to which he had been accustomed. Before making up his final judgment, however, Mr. Warmore resolved that every vestige of doubt should be removed. He sent for Mr. Fyfe Lathewood, one of the shrewdest detectives in New York City, told him all the circumstances, and ordered him to find out the whole truth, no matter what it cost, or where it might strike.

The detective had been at work the better part of a week, without any one in Bellemore suspecting his identity or business. On the afternoon of the day in which Tom Gordon checked the runaway pony of Miss Warmore, the detective dropped into the store, as any stranger might have done, made a few trifling purchases, and then turned and walked out. As he did so, he managed to pass close to the proprietor, who was standing at the front, and whispered:--

"It isn't Gordon; I'll see you to-night."

Mr. Warmore was strolling homeward, swinging the heavy cane which he always carried, when, in passing a small stretch of woods just beyond the outskirts of the town, a man stepped from among the trees with the stealth of a shadow and waited for him to approach. The merchant hesitated a moment in doubt of his identity, but the other spoke in a low voice,--

"It's all right; come on."

"I wasn't quite sure," remarked Mr. Warmore, turning aside among the trees, where he could talk with the detective without the possibility of being seen or overheard.

"Well," said the merchant in a guarded voice, "what is it?"

"It was a dirty piece of business to throw suspicion on that young Gordon. He is as innocent as you or I."

"What did you learn about him?"

"You told me of that mortgage which he paid off for the farmer where he has lived so long."

"Yes; there is no doubt of the truth of that."

"He has been in your employ for four or five years. You tell me he is saving, and has no bad habits. So the paying of such a small mortgage ought not to be impossible."

"By no means."

"Nor would it be strange if he had a nest-egg in the savings-bank?"

"Knowing him as well as I do, I would be surprised if such was not the fact. There is no one in the world dependent on him, and his wages are liberal. But what about Wall Street and the races?"

"He has never risked a dollar there, I am sure of it."

"I had my doubts, but Catherwood told me he had positive information."

"He simply lied to you--that's all. Have you found how this money is taken from you? Does it disappear through the day,--that is, is it missing at night in making up the accounts, or is the money short in the morning?"

"It has happened in both ways."

"You do not keep a private watchman?"

"We have one who passes along the front every half hour or so, and looks in to see if the light is burning, and everything is right. Two of the clerks sleep overhead, so it would seem that such a thing as burglary is out of the question."

"Can you get me inside the store to-night without being seen?"

"I guess I can manage it," replied the merchant in surprise.

"How would you like to go with me? There will be no personal danger. I will see to that."

"What time of the night do you wish to enter?"

"It isn't likely there will be a visitor before midnight; but, to make sure, we will say about eleven."

"I can warn the watchman"--

"You mustn't think of such a thing! We must slip inside without a soul knowing it. The watchman is the last one to trust."

"Do you suspect *him*?" asked the astonished Mr. Warmore.

"Not in the least; but you must never trust any person when it can possibly be avoided. Doubtless, he means well, but he may leak. The gentleman for whom we are looking might take it into his head to quiz him: do you see?"

"It shall be as you say. Will you call for me?"

"Yes; it will be safe enough, I think, to do that."

After his family had retired, Mr. Warmore lit a cigar a few minutes before the time mentioned, and sauntered down the path in front of his house. Detective Lathewood was prompt, and met him at his gate. They walked briskly along the highway, until they entered the town and approached the large establishment which had been in the possession of the Warmore family for the better part of a century. The merchant's familiarity with his own premises enabled him to enter by a back way, without attracting the attention of the watchman or any one. They waited till the streets, which were quite clear at that late hour, showed no one near, when they slipped inside, and closed the door behind them.

It was important that the two clerks sleeping upstairs should not be awakened; for they were not only likely to begin shooting, if they heard intruders below, but, of necessity, would learn of the project which the detective and the merchant had in mind.

Every foot was familiar to Mr. Warmore, who reached the large main room of his establishment without mishap. Lathewood did the same, by keeping close to him, and feeling each inch of the way.

Here there was a light burning; and they had to be extremely careful, since their movements could be seen by any one passing the front. The opportunities, however, for concealment were so good that they readily secured a place where they could sit down behind the far end of the counter, and remain unobserved in comfort. This was done, and the trying wait began.

The detective was so accustomed to that sort of thing, that he remained cool and collected. He would have liked to smoke a cigar to help while away the time, but was too wise to attempt anything of the kind. The odor of tobacco would be certain to warn any one who entered by means of the front door.

Mr. Warmore was nervous, for the experience was new to him. He succeeded by a great effort in keeping himself well in hand, venturing only to whisper a word now and then.

"You don't think he is likely to come in the back way?" he asked in a guarded undertone.

"There is not the slightest danger of his doing so. That would look suspicious. He will use the front door, so, if seen and challenged, he will be ready with the excuse that he has called on legitimate business of his own. At the same time, he will try to manage it so as not to be observed by any one. That watchman of yours is not the keenest-eyed fellow in the world."

Some time later, just as the town clock finished booming the hour of midnight, the officer touched the arm of his companion, who said,--

"I haven't noticed anything; what is it?"

"Did you hear some one walk past?"

"Yes; the footfall sounded plainly enough: what of it?"

"That is the third time that man has gone by. He is on the alert."

"It may have been different persons."

"It was the same man--sh! there he comes on the porch."

In the stillness of the night the sound was plainly heard. The next moment a key turned in the lock of the door, which was silently shoved inward.

The visitor, whoever he was, acted with the coolness of a professional. He entered by the main door, so, if it chanced that any one saw him, he could explain the cause of his visit. At the same time, he made as sure as was possible that no one did see him. Knowing the movements of the watchman, he waited until he was out of the way, with the certainty that he would not be back again under a half-hour at the least. That interval was more than sufficient to do all that he had in mind, and to take his departure.

He opened the door so quietly that, but for the warning rattle of the key, it would have been hard for the watchers to hear him. Almost before they knew it he stood inside with the door closed. Here the light fell upon him, and revealed his identity to the men at the rear.

Neither was surprised. Although they had not mentioned their suspicions to each other, both were morally certain the thief would prove to be the man whom they now identified. G. Field Catherwood.

Walking quickly and softly across the floor to the private office, which opened off from the other end of the counter, the prospective partner of the business stooped down, turned the shining knob of the safe round until the right combination had been struck, and swung back the immense, massive door. Then from an inner drawer he drew the merchant's bank-book, in which were clasped several hundred dollars in bills. Two of the largest denomination--fifty

each--were withdrawn, and the book returned to its place.

No veteran could have been cooler than Catherwood. He looked and acted no more like the exquisite on the steamboat than did Tom Gordon himself. He was the sleek, cunning, hypocritical villain he had always been, stealing, not because he was in need of money, but because it was his nature to do so.

"Well, Mr. Catherwood, it looks as if the account will be a little short to-morrow!"

The miscreant started as if he had heard the warning of a rattlesnake at his feet. Turning like a flash, he saw Mr. Warmore standing at his elbow. Had he received but a few seconds' notice, he might have tried to bluff it out, by pretending he had come to look after some matters about which he was not fully satisfied. Holding the situation he did in the establishment, he could feel certain no one would suspect him of any sinister purpose.

But the exposure dropped like a thunderbolt. He had not an instant to prepare himself. He was caught in the act, and could explain nothing.

Mr. Warmore, upon seeing who the thief was, whispered to the detective,--

"Leave him to me; don't show yourself, unless he resists."

Before the shivering rogue could make protest, the merchant, suppressing his anger, said with a coolness which surprised himself as much as it did the officer crouching a few paces away, with his hand on his revolver,--

"We will call the amount stolen an even thousand dollars, Mr. Catherwood. How soon will you be prepared to restore it?"

"Why--why--why"--

"As a beginning, suppose you return that which you have just taken."

Catherwood did as ordered without a word.

"Now re-lock the safe. Be sure you have the right combination. No one knows it besides you and me. I will give you a week in which to send back the rest."

G. Field Catherwood was recovering his nerve. He was furious with himself that he had been so completely knocked out.

"Suppose I don't choose to return it, what then?"

"It will be ten years or more in State prison."

"Bah! you will have a sweet time proving anything against me."

"I have a witness at hand."

"W-w-what!"

"Give me the word and I'll have the nippers on him before you can say Jack Robinson."

The detective, without rising to his feet or allowing himself to be seen, uttered these words in such a sepulchral tone that they almost lifted the hair on the head of the criminal. He started, and stared affrightedly back in the gloom.

"What do you say?" asked the merchant.

"It's all right; it's all right. I'll send it to you as soon as I can get back to the city. Don't be too hard on a fellow, Warmore. I declare"--

"Enough has been said. Now go!"

He went.

"You are too tender-hearted," remarked Detective Lathewood, when he and Mr. Warmore were walking homeward.

"Perhaps I am; but mean as is the man, I shuddered at the thought of disgracing and ruining him for life."

"But it was *he*, not *you*, who does that."

"True; I know that's the way you officers of the law look at it. But this is not the first time I have had dealings with young men who have yielded to temptation. I think it is safer to err on the side of charity than that of sternness. It is better to reform than to punish a man."

"Do you think you have reformed that specimen?"

"Far from it; he is the most contemptible scoundrel I ever knew. He is rich, and therefore has no excuse for stealing. Worse than all, he tried to ruin a young man whose shoe-latchet he is not worthy to unloose."

"So you unloose *him*. But let him go. He is certain not to trouble you or any of your family again."

Two days later Mr. Warmore received a certified check for nine hundred dollars; and thus the account between him and G. Field Catherwood was closed. He was never seen in Bellemore again. Ten years later he died, while travelling abroad with a woman whom he had made his wife. Then, for the first time, Tom Gordon learned the particulars of the night when Mr. Warmore assisted the detective.

Let us take one more, and the final, leap forward. Three years have passed since Tom Gordon checked runaway Jack, and saved the life of pretty Jennie Warmore. They have been three years of undimmed happiness to both; for during the last one of those years they two became man and wife.

Oh, it all came about so naturally, that you would not care to know the particulars. Tom was given a share in the business which he had done so much to develop; and on the day previous to his wedding his prospective father-in-law presented him with a half interest, thus insuring him a handsome income for life.

Tom made one condition, which was carried out in spirit and letter. Mr. Pitcairn, from whose hospitable roof he took his final departure, was to have all the groceries, dry-goods, and every sort of supplies from the store as long as he lived, without paying one penny therefor. And it is a pleasure to record that this arrangement continued without break until the old couple were finally laid to rest in the churchyard beside poor Jim Travers who had passed on long before.

Among the wedding presents to the bride was the locket and chain which she herself had taken from her neck years previous, when drowning in the North River, and linked about the button on the coat of her rescuer. She and her parents were amazed beyond measure as they stood with only her smiling husband present, examining the treasure.

"It is the same," said the wondering mother, opening the locket, and looking at the childish features, "the very one you wore about your neck on that awful night."

"But where did it come from?" asked the father, taking it from his wife's hand, and examining it with an interest that can hardly be described.

"There is no name with it," added Jennie, "and--do you know anything about it, Tom?" she asked abruptly, turning short upon him.

"Didn't I tell you years ago, when you related the story, that the boy would turn up sooner or later. Well, he has done so, and what of it?"

"But where is he?"

He opened his arms, and the proud, happy bride rushed into his embrace, while the parents stared, not able quite to understand what it all meant.

"Yes," said he, looking around, "I was the fortunate boy who jumped into the water after you, and found that chain wound round the button of my coat. I have kept it and the locket ever since, but I never knew you were the original until I heard the story from your lips."

"You scamp!" exclaimed Mr. Warmore. "And you never said a word about it."

"Yes, you mean fellow, why didn't you tell us?" demanded Jennie, disposed to pout.

"You were sure you would know the young gentleman; and I meant that if I ever gained your love you should love me for myself, and not for any accident of the past."

"But--but how jolly it would have been if we had known it was you! For you see I have had two heroes all along. One was you, and the other was that unknown boy who took a plunge in the icy river for my sake."

"You may have those two heroes still," said Tom.

"So I have; but now the two are one."

"And so are we," he added, touching his lips to the sweet mouth that did not refuse to meet them.

"And any way, I could not love you a bit more than I have all along."

And the grateful, happy fellow, in looking back over his stormy boyhood and young manhood, and feeling how strongly he had striven at all times to live by the Golden Rule, knew in his heart that it was to that fact that he had Fought the Battle that Won.

The second volume in the "Brave and Honest" Series is entitled "Honest Ned."