

TOM THATCHER'S FORTUNE









AT A GLANCE, TOM SAW THE BEAR WATCHING THE MAN CROUCHING
AMONG THE BRANCHES. [Page 215.]

Tom Thatcher's Fortune.

By HORATIO ALGER, JR.,

Author of

"Joe's Luck," "Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy," "Ragged Dick," "Tom Temple's Career," "Luck and Pluck," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED.



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CHAPTER I.

AN OLD LETTER.

IS SUPPER ready, mother? I'm as hungry as a bear!"

The speaker was a sturdy boy of sixteen, with bright eyes, and a smiling sun-browned face. His shirt sleeves were rolled up displaying a pair of muscular arms. His hands were brown and soiled with labor. It was clear that he was no white-handed young aristocrat. His clothes alone would have shown that. They were of coarse cloth, made without any special regard to the prevailing fashion.

Tom Thatcher, for this was his name, had just come home from the shoe manufactory, where he was employed ten hours a day in pegging shoes, for the lucrative sum of fifty cents per day. I may as well state here that he is the hero of my story, and I hope none of my readers will think any the worse of him for working in a shop. I am aware that it is considered more "genteel" to stand behind a counter, and display goods to customers, even if the wages are smaller. But Tom, having a mother and little sister to help support, could not choose his employment. He lived in a large shoe

town, and was glad to find employment in the large manufactory of John Simpson, who, by virtue of his large capital, and as the employer of a hundred hands, was a man of mark in the town of Wilton.

"Supper will be ready in five minutes, Tom," said his mother, rather a delicate-looking woman, of refined appearance, notwithstanding she was dressed in a cheap calico.

"Are you tired, Tom?" asked his little sister Tillie, whose full name, never used at home, was Matilda.

"Not much, Tillie, but I've got a famous appetite."

"I am sorry I haven't got something better for you, Tom," said his mother. "I have only a hot potato, besides tea, and bread and butter."

"Why, that is good enough, mother," said Tom, cheerfully.

"You ought to have meat after working hard all day in the shop, my boy; but meat comes so high that I don't dare to have it on the table every day "

"Too much meat might make me savage, mother," said Tom laughing. "I wish we could have it oftener, for your sake. Anything will do for me. When I get older I shall earn higher wages, and then we'll live better."

"It's very uncomfortable to be poor," said Mrs. Thatcher, sighing. "Poor children, if your father were only living you would fare better. I little dreamed when he went to California, eight years ago, that he would never come back."

"Mr. Simpson and father went to California together, didn't they, mother?"

“Yes. They were both poor men at the time. Mr. Simpson was no better off than your father, but now—your poor father is in his grave, and John Simpson is one of the richest men in Wilton.”

“Mr. Simpson came home rich, didn’t he?”

“Yes. How rich I don’t know, but from being a journeyman he was able to build a manufactory of his own, and has been getting richer ever since.”

“Were he and father together in California?”

“Yes, Tom.”

“And didn’t father find any gold? How could one be prosperous, and the other unlucky?”

“I never could understand it. The very last letter I received from your father mentioned that he was prosperous, and had accumulated a large amount of gold dust, he and John Simpson also. Three months afterward John Simpson came home, but nothing was ever heard of your poor father or his money again.”

“What did Mr. Simpson say? Didn’t he know anything about him?”

“He called on me, and told me that your father and he had separated a little while before leaving California. He made his way to San Francisco while your father remained at the mines. He felt quite sure that your father had been robbed and murdered by some desperate person who had heard of his good fortune.”

“Was that all he could tell you?”

“That was all.”

“Couldn’t he tell how much gold father had at the time?”

"He said it amounted to some thousands of dollars, but how much he could not tell exactly. I cared little for that. If your poor father had only come back alive I would have been happy, even if he had come back in rags, and without a penny."

"Were he and Mr. Simpson good friends?" asked Tom, thoughtfully.

"They were very intimate before they went to California."

"And were you and Mrs. Simpson intimate, too, mother?"

"Yes; we lived in the same house. It was a double house, and each family occupied a part. You and Rupert Simpson were born the same day, and played together like brothers when you were both young boys."

"It isn't much like that now, mother. Rupert puts on all sorts of airs because his father is rich. He wouldn't think of associating with me on equal terms. He thinks himself altogether superior to a poor boy who works in a shoe shop."

"He has no right to look down upon you, Tom," said Mrs. Thatcher, with natural motherly indignation.

"You are superior to him in every way."

Tom laughed.

"He don't think so, mother," he answered, "and I am afraid it would be hard to convince him. But it seems strange to me to think that our families were once so intimate. Mrs. Simpson rides in her carriage, and always wears silks or satins to church, while you are compelled to wear a cheap gingham for best. She never comes to call on you."

"I don't wish her to," said Mrs. Thatcher, with honorable pride. "It would only be an act of condescension on her part, and Sarah Simpson isn't the woman to condescend to me, who was born and brought up her equal."

"You're right there, mother. You are just as much a lady as she is, even if you are poor."

"I hope I am, Tom."

"You spoke of father's last letter to you, mother. I haven't looked at it for a long time. Will you let me see it?"

"Certainly, my son."

Mrs. Thatcher went to the bureau, and from the top drawer took out an old letter, grown yellow with age, and unfolding it handed it to Tom. It was quite long, but a large part of it would be of no interest to my readers. I only transcribe the parts which are material to my story.

"I am glad to say, my dear Mary, that I have been very fortunate. John Simpson and I, some three months ago, chanced upon some very rich diggings, which, lying out of the ordinary course of travel and exploration, had thus far failed to attract attention. For a month or more we worked alone, managing in that time to 'feather our nests' pretty well. Then we sold out a portion of our claims to a third party for a large sum, and worked the balance ourselves. I don't dare to tell you how much we are worth, but enough to make us very comfortable. I can say as much as that. It won't be long before I come home. I could come now, but I think it a shame to leave so much treasure in the ground, when it can be had for the digging. A little patience, dear wife, and I shall come home, and

place you and our darling children in a position where you will never again know the limitations of poverty.

"Simpson's plans are the same as mine. We shall probably go home together, and build two nice houses near each other. It will be pleasant in years to come to refer to our days of struggle when we worked together at the shoe bench for a dollar and a half a day, and had to support our families on that paltry sum. Those days, thank God! are over, and I am still a young man with half my life before me, as I hope."

"Poor father!" said Tom. "How little he thought that his good luck was to prove the cause of his death, and that the money he had secured would never find its way to his family."

"It always makes me sad to read that letter," said Mrs. Thatcher. "It is so bright and hopeful, and death was even then so near."

As Tom gave back the letter to his mother, a knock was heard at the door.

Tom rose to open it, and admitted a boy of about his own age, Harry Julian, the minister's son, one of his most intimate friends.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG RIVALS.

GOOD-EVENING, Harry," said Mrs. Thatcher, cordially. "Won't you sit down and take a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Thatcher; I have just got through supper. You must excuse my coming so early, but I wanted to be sure to find Tom at home."

The speaker was a slender, pleasant-faced boy of about Tom's age. He was better dressed than Tom, for though his father received but a small annual salary from his parish, he was possessed of a considerable private fortune, which enabled him to live with more freedom from pecuniary anxiety than most ministers. The boys had always been intimate, and Tom had more than once been favored by the loan of books from his friend's library.

"You have found me at home, Julian," said Tom. "Is there anything going on this evening?"

"Yes, and that's what brings me here. There's going to be a large skating party on Round Pond, and we want you to join it."

"I should like it, but I can't go quite yet. I must saw and split some wood for to-morrow first."

"How long will it take you?"

"Less than an hour."

"Let me help you. Then it won't take so long."

"I'm afraid I can't afford to pay a hired man," said Tom, laughing.

"The pleasure of your company will pay me," said Harry.

"Thank you. I would take off my hat in return for the compliment if I happened to have it on. I will soon be through supper."

"Won't you change your mind, Harry, and let me give you a cup of tea?" asked Mrs. Thatcher.

"On second thoughts I will. It will keep me warm."

The boys were soon through supper, and, adjourning to the wood-shed, set to work energetically on the wood-pile.

"Will you saw or split, Harry?" asked Tom.

"I might break the saw if I attempted to use it. I will try the ax."

"What would Rupert Simpson say if he should see you helping me?" said Tom, in a moment's pause. "He would think you were lowering yourself."

"And he might be welcome to his opinion," said Harry, independently.

"You are a good deal together."

"Yes, but he seeks my company, not I his."

"Mother tells me that he and I were like two brothers when we were quite young. But he wasn't rich then."

"That has spoiled him."

"At any rate, it has cured him of his liking for my

company. Doesn't he ever speak to you about your being intimate with me?"

"Yes, often. He thinks I like you better than I do him, and he is right there."

"I can guess what he says to you, Harry?"

"Try it."

Tom changed his voice, adopting Rupert's rather affected tone.

"I shouldn't think," he began, "that you would associate with that Tom Thatcher. He pegs shoes in father's shop, and isn't fit for gentlemen like us to notice. My father doesn't like me to keep such low company."

Harry laughed heartily.

"You must have been listening some time when Rupert was speaking to me," he said.

"Then I hit right, did I?"

"Couldn't come nearer."

"I thought so. Yet father and Mr. Simpson worked side by side at the shoe bench. They went to California together. Both secured a great deal of money, but my poor father didn't live to come home."

"And his money? What became of that?" inquired Harry.

"No one knows. He was probably robbed of it."

"It is a sad story, Tom."

"Yes. My poor father's fate is often in my mind. I cannot bring him back to life, but I hope some day to learn something more of his last days, and, if possible, of the manner in which he died."

"Couldn't Mr. Simpson tell you something about it?"

"He called on mother after his return, but gave her no definite information. I am sometimes tempted to call on him and inquire on my own account."

"I would if I were you."

"I will, then. I won't speak to mother about it, because it always makes her sad to speak about father's death."

"There's the last stick, Harry," said Tom, a few moments later. "Now I sha'n't have to keep you waiting any longer. I have only to put on my coat, and get my skates."

"Better wear your overcoat, Tom. It is quite cold."

"Oh, I'm tough," said Tom, lightly. "Besides, I can skate better without it."

He didn't like to name the real reason, that he had no overcoat fit to wear. The one he had worn the previous winter was very ragged, and he could not spare money to buy a new one.

Harry suspected that this was the case, but was too delicate to refer to it, and said nothing further.

From a nail in the closet Tom took down a pair of old wooden-framed skates, on which, however, he could beat many who were provided with club-skates of the most approved styles.

His friend Harry had a new pair of club-skates, and so had Rupert Simpson.

A walk of a quarter of a mile brought the boys to Round Pond, which was situated near the center of the village. It was small, not more than three-quarters of

a mile in circumference; but it was frozen clear as glass, and looked tempting to the young skaters as they descended the bank, and sat down by the margin to put on their skates.

Many boys and a few girls were already on the ice. When Tom and Harry arrived some of them came to greet the new-comers. It was evident that both were general favorites.

Among the boys who came up was Rupert Simpson.

"What made you so late, Harry?" he asked, impatiently.

"I called for Tom, and he had some wood to saw and split before he could come."

"I suppose you helped him," suggested Rupert, with a sneer.

"I did."

Rupert looked astonished and disgusted.

"I didn't know you hired out to saw and split wood," he said, with another sneer.

"Now you do know it, I suppose you will cut my acquaintance," said Harry, pleasantly.

"I suppose you have a right to suit yourself. You wouldn't catch me sawing and splitting wood. We leave that to the servants."

"You couldn't give me a job, could you? However, it would be of no use. I only work for Tom."

Rupert shrugged his shoulders, and his attention was drawn to Tom's old skates.

"Those skates look as if they dated back to the ark," said he, rudely.

"I don't think they are quite so old as that," returned Tom, coolly.

"They are a curiosity, anyway."

"They can do good service, Rupert, that is, when Tom wears them," said Harry. "In spite of our fine club-skates, I believe we should find it hard work to keep up with him."

"Speak for yourself!" said Rupert, haughtily.

"No, I speak for you, too."

"Try it! A race! a race!" exclaimed the boys in chorus.

"I will race with Harry," said Rupert, hastily.

"No; you can beat me; I admit that in advance. Race with Tom."

Tom said nothing. By this time his skates were on, and he was quite ready to enter upon a trial of speed with Rupert, or any boy on the pond; but he did not care to betray any anxiety on the subject.

Rupert was rather conceited on the subject of his skating. With the exception of Tom Thatcher, he was probably the best skater in the village—that is, among the boys—and felt pretty confident that he could beat Tom himself. His reluctance was due only to his not liking to place himself on an equality with the boy who pegged shoes for his father at fifty cents per day. The clamor of the boys, however, and the anticipation of a triumph over his rival overruled his objections, and he said:

"I'll try a race across the pond, if you insist upon it."

"What do you say, Tom?" asked Harry.

“I am ready,” said Tom, promptly. “Just wait a minute till I tighten my skates.”

“Won’t you use mine?” asked Harry.

“I object to that,” said Rupert.

“That will place you on equal terms.”

“I doubt that,” said Rupert, with a sneer which made his meaning plain.

“I will use the skates I have on,” said Tom, quietly.

“Clear the track!” exclaimed Harry.

The two boys took their positions side by side, both eager for the race.

CHAPTER III.

THE RACE ON ROUND POND.

HARRY JULIAN gave the word.

No sooner was it out of his mouth than the two rivals dashed off in eager competition. In fact Rupert started before the word was fairly spoken and in consequence gained a slight lead upon his opponent. Slight, indeed, but still of importance, considering the shortness of the race-track.

The sight of Rupert just ahead put increased vigor into Tom's efforts, and, setting his teeth hard, he skated as he had never done before. He was eager to win—more so than if any other boy had been in competition with him, for he knew that if he were defeated Rupert would never cease boasting of his victory.

Tom did not intend giving him that gratification if he could help it.

But if Tom was eager to win, the same can be said of Rupert. In his view, it would be disgraceful to be beaten by a boy who pegged shoes in his father's shop.

So he, too, exerted himself to the utmost, and probably had never before skated as well.

Indeed, the boys were half way across the pond before Tom had succeeded in overtaking his rival. For a hundred yards the boys skated side by side, amid the

intense excitement of the young spectators. But Tom had one important advantage over his rival. He was excited, it is true, but he breathed freely and easily, while Rupert was becoming short-breathed. He had evidently exerted himself beyond his strength.

Slowly, but perceptibly, Tom began to lead him. Now the race was three-quarters over. Rupert tried to make up the increasing gap between them, but it proved to be impossible. To his disappointment and rage he saw that his despised opponent must inevitably beat him. He could not make up his mind to this, and, to provide himself with a convenient excuse for his failure, he contrived to stumble and fall a hundred yards from the goal.

Unconscious of this, Tom kept on and finished the race. Then looking back, to his surprise he saw Rupert picking himself up from the ice.

He instantly wheeled round and started back.

"Did you fall, Rupert?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rupert, sullenly.

"How did it happen?"

"I stumbled and fell."

"I am sorry. I hope you are not hurt."

"No, I am not hurt—that is, not much."

By this time the other skaters were standing round the two rivals.

"Tom, I congratulate you on your victory," said Harry Julian.

"What victory?" demanded Rupert, quickly.

"His victory in the race, to be sure, Rupert."

"There has been no victory," said Rupert, scowling.

"Why not?"

"Because I stumbled. Of course that prevented my winning."

The boys looked at each other. They guessed why Rupert had stumbled.

"Tom was considerably ahead of you when you fell," said Harry.

"He was a little ahead, but I could have made it up."

"I don't think you could."

"That's your opinion," said Rupert, rudely. "I say I could."

"Would you like to try it again?" asked Tom.

"It wouldn't be a fair race. Your skates are different from mine."

"They are not so good as yours."

"I know that, but they are good enough for going."

"You seem to have changed your opinion. You objected to my using Harry's skates, which are like yours."

"Because I wanted to give you the advantage of your own skates."

"Are you willing to have a second trial, in which I use Harry's skates?"

If Rupert had been prudent he would have made some excuse for declining, but I have already said that he was self-conceited about his skating, and he really believed that he could skate faster than Tom. In the event of a second trial, he would have a chance to show this. After slight hesitation, therefore, he said:

“Yes; I’ll try again, just to satisfy you.”

It was decided to start from the further end of the pond, and again Harry Julian was selected to give the word.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered both boys.

“Then—go!”

This time both started together.

At equal speed they dashed out for the opposite shore. Tom was fresher than his rival, and he was not now obliged to exert himself as in the former race. Indeed, he kept himself partly in check, not caring to pass Rupert till they neared the end of the race, for he feared that when the latter found himself hopelessly in the rear he would again manage to stumble, and so deprive him of the laurels he had justly won.

Of course the boys who were looking on did not know this, and when they saw Tom and Rupert skating side by side when the race was three-quarters over, they watched with great excitement, uncertain which would win.

Now the race was seven-eighths over, and still the boys were skating side by side. It was difficult to tell which was ahead.

Rupert’s breath came quick and short. Only a little ahead was the goal, and there seemed as good a chance of his reaching it as of Tom’s doing so.

“Anyway, we shall come in together,” he thought, “and then the pegger boy can’t triumph over me.”

This would not be quite as well as winning the race,

but it would certainly be a great deal better than being defeated.

But Rupert made no account of Tom's reserved strength. Even as this thought passed through his mind, Tom made a brilliant spurt, and before Rupert fairly realized the situation, his rival had touched the goal, leaving him fifty feet behind.

He reddened with anger and mortification, utterly unable to devise any excuse for his failure.

At a little distance behind were the other skaters.

"That was a pretty race," said Harry, as he came up. "I suppose you'll admit that you are beaten, now, Rupert. Come, own up," said Harry, seeing that Rupert remained silent. "You can't deny that that was a fair race."

"He wouldn't have beaten me if I had been well," said Rupert, thinking of an excuse at last.

"If you had been well?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

"What's the matter with you?"

"I've got a bad headache. I thought of stopping in the middle of the race, but I didn't want to spoil it."

There was not a boy within hearing who believed for a moment that Rupert was really troubled with a headache, so that his subterfuge was of no service to him.

"Your headache came on rather suddenly, didn't it?" asked Harry, significantly.

"No; I've had it for half an hour."

"When the race was first proposed did you have it?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so?"

“I thought it might not interfere with me.”

“Then I suppose you don’t consider this a fair race?”

“Of course not. How can a fellow skate well when he’s got a splitting headache?”

“Would you have said anything about the headache if you had won?”

“Look here, Harry Julian, I don’t like the way you talk. If you mean to insult me say so at once.”

“I don’t care to insult anyone,” said Harry, coldly.

“Since you don’t consider this a fair race I presume Tom will be willing to race you any time you may appoint. You can wait till you are in perfect health.”

“Yes,” said Tom, “I am ready to race any time. Rupert is an excellent skater, and I shouldn’t be at all surprised if he beat me some time,” he added, generously.

Such, however, was not the opinion of the boys. From what they had seen they entertained no doubt as to which was the better skater of the two, and Rupert would have risen in their opinion if he had manfully admitted his defeat,

At half-past nine the skating party broke up, and the young skaters went home.

Tom and Harry walked together.

“To-morrow evening,” said Tom, “I mean to call on Squire Simpson, and ask him about father’s life in California. I shall feel easier when I learn all that is to be known about it.”

CHAPTER IV.

A FALSE FRIEND.

MR. SIMPSON was not a justice of the peace, but his fellow-citizens had got into the habit of calling him "squire," and the title was not unpleasant to him.

He sat, in dressing-gown and slippers, in a comfortable sitting-room, reading a city paper, when a servant appeared at the door.

"There's a boy at the door who says he would like to see you, sir."

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Simpson.

"It's Thomas Thatcher, sir."

"What does he want with me?" inquired the rich man, arching his eyebrows in surprise.

"I don't know, sir; he didn't say."

"Well, let him come in."

A minute later Tom was ushered into the presence of his employer.

"Well, Tom, what's your business?" asked Squire Simpson, curtly.

"My mother tells me, Mr. Simpson, that you were with father in California just before his mysterious disappearance——"

"Suppose I were!" interrupted Squire Simpson, brusquely.

"I wanted to ask you a few questions about him," said Tom.

"Did your mother send you here?" demanded the rich man, with a frown of displeasure.

"No, sir; she does not know that I have come."

"It is very singular that you should come to me on such an errand," said Simpson, in a tone of displeasure.

"Is it surprising that I should wish to know something of my father, sir?" returned Tom, not at all abashed by his reception.

"I told your mother, years ago, all that I had to tell."

"I was too young then to take any part in the inquiry. Have you any objection to tell a son something of his father's last years?"

The rich man hesitated a moment, and then, with an ill grace, replied:

"What is it you wish to know?"

"How long did you leave my father before his death?"

"How should I know. I don't know when he died, or whether he died at all."

"How long, then, before you set out for home?"

"A few weeks—six weeks, perhaps."

"My father had considerable money at the time you left him, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me how much?"

"I don't see what good it would do you to know—you are not likely to get the money."

"I suppose not, sir; but it was his money that probably tempted the man who wickedly murdered him."

Squire Simpson seemed very ill at ease, as if, instead of being questioned by a boy, he were in the witness-box.

"Yes," said he, "I suppose your father was murdered for his money. How much did he have? Well, probably five thousand dollars, more or less. I had considerably more, having met with greater luck than he."

"At what place did you leave father, Squire Simpson?"

"It was at a place called Rocky Gulch. I don't know what they call it now."

"Didn't father say anything about coming home when you left him?"

"He hadn't fixed upon any time. He wanted to increase his pile. I suppose he felt dissatisfied because he hadn't as much as I. He would have done better to come home with me."

"I wish he had," said Tom, sadly.

"Of course, it would have been better for him and for his family, but it can't be helped now. I wonder you should bring up this old matter now. It can do no possible good. It was the Lord's will that your father should be taken away, and we must submit to His will. It's wicked to murmur against the plans of Providence."

The rich man said all this in a brisk, business-like manner, as if he were quite reconciled to what had happened.

"Still," said Tom, "we can't help thinking of how

changed our circumstances would have been if father had come home as you did."

"Yes, yes; but you haven't anything to complain of. You live comfortably, don't you? I give you employment in my shop," he added, pompously, "out of regard to your father's memory."

"Yes, sir, you give me employment," said Tom, slowly.

He could not be brought to think this a very great favor, since he was only paid what other boys were for the same labor.

"How long have you been at work in the shop?"

"Three years."

"Then for three years I have put you in a way of earning your living."

"It is rather hard to live on fifty cents a day," said Tom.

"Then, I take it, your errand here is to ask for higher wages?" said Simpson, quickly.

"No, sir; the thought never entered my mind when I came here."

"I suppose you wouldn't accept it if it were offered," said Simpson, with a slight sneer.

"Yes, sir, I should."

"I thought so."

"But not as a favor. I think I earn more money."

"What gives you that idea?" demanded his employer displeased.

"In Tompkins peggers are paid seventy cents a day."

"Then you are at liberty to go there and find work," said Simpson, roughly.

"I can't do that, sir, as you know I cannot leave my mother. Besides, if I had my board to pay, I should be worse off than I am now."

"That is a very sensible conclusion. You will find that you are well off in my employment, but if at any time you become dissatisfied, don't trouble yourself to stay on my account. I can easily fill your place."

"Yes, sir, I suppose you can," answered Tom, slowly.

"Have you any further business with me?" asked Mr. Simpson, impatiently.

"No, sir."

"Then I will bid you good-evening."

"I have just a few words to say, Mr. Simpson," said Tom, looking steadily at the man before him.

"Say them."

"You were my father's friend and companion for years," Tom began. "You worked together, and went to California together. You came home rich, while he was unfortunate enough to lose his money and his life. To-day you are a rich manufacturer, while his widow and children are compelled to live chiefly on a boy's small wages. You know all this, and it has never come into your mind to help them, or to pay the boy as good wages as he could get elsewhere. If you had died, and my father had come home prosperous, he would not have treated your family so."

It was surprising that Mr. Simpson should have al-

lowed Tom to finish this speech without interruption, but he did so. Then he burst forth in a fury.

"Boy, if you came here to insult me, you did the worst thing you could have done for your family. You complain, do you, that I don't support you and your family in luxury?"

"That is not true," interrupted Tom.

"Such is the plain inference from your words. You are not at all grateful for my supporting you all these years."

"You haven't done it, sir."

"I have given you the employment without which you and your family would have starved. You can't deny that."

"I don't think we should have starved, sir."

"I will give you a chance to try the experiment. You complain that you can't live on the wages I pay you. I will give you the chance to work for more somewhere else. To-morrow morning you may go to my foreman and ask for the wages that are due you. You needn't trouble yourself to return to work in my shop."

Tom turned pale, for he did not feel sure how he was to make up the small pittance which he had hitherto earned by pegging.

"You discharge me, then?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes," answered his employer, who marked with cruel enjoyment the dismay depicted upon Tom's face.

"Then, sir, I will bid you good-night."

Tom turned, and with a firm step walked out of the room. But his heart was heavy within him. How

should he break the tidings of this serious misfortune to his mother. How were they to live on the scanty sum which she earned by sewing and knitting.

In the midst of Tom's despondency his heart suddenly lightened.

"I won't despair," he said to himself. "I will trust in the Lord. He will provide for us somehow."

Mingled with this feeling was a firm and resolute determination.

He would make it the business of his life to ascertain how and under what circumstances his father died, and bring his murderer to justice!

CHAPTER V.

DARIUS DARKE.

AS TOM was on his way home, walking slowly and thoughtfully, while he considered the change which had taken place in his circumstances and prospects, his attention was attracted to a man shabbily dressed, whose suit looked as if it had been worn five years steadily, advancing along the pathway in an opposite direction.

Nowadays the man would be called a tramp, but at that time the name was not as common as now.

He was a stranger in the village, but Tom didn't give any thought to his appearance. He was too much interested in his own thoughts and his own troubles.

The man passed him, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, turned back and addressed him.

"Boy," said he, "are you acquainted about here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you tell me where John Simpson lives?"

"Yes," answered Tom, with momentary wonder that such a man should have anything to do with the rich shoe manufacturer. "He lives only a little distance back on this same side of the road. You can find the house well enough, for it is the finest in the village."

"Then I suppose John Simpson is a rich man?" said the tramp, after a slight pause.

"Yes, he is the richest man in town."

"Where did he get his money?"

"In California—that is, he got considerable of it there. Then he came back here and built a large shoe manufactory. I suppose he has made a good deal of money by this business."

"Humph! I suppose he is a good deal respected, isn't he?"

"He is looked up to, as most rich men are," answered Tom, with a tinge of bitterness.

He could not truly say that he, for one, respected John Simpson.

"That's all the same," said the stranger. "Give a man money, and he'll be respected fast enough. Does Mr. Simpson put on airs?"

"If you mean does he feel his importance, I think he does."

"A regular tip-top aristocrat, I take it."

"Very likely. Do you know him?" asked Tom, thinking it about time that he should change places with his questioner.

"Know him, boy? Yes, I knew him once—slightly. I haven't met him for years."

"Did you know him in California?" asked Tom, urged by an irresistible impulse to ask this question.

The man started.

"What makes you ask that question?" he demanded, quickly.

"Because you said you knew Mr. Simpson some years ago."

"Well, yes, I knew him in California," said the other, slowly.

"Then perhaps you knew my father there?" said Tom, eagerly.

"Your father!"

"Yes; my father was in California at the time. He went out with Mr. Simpson."

"What was your father's name?"

The question was put with what seemed to be strong interest and curiosity.

"Robert Thatcher."

The tramp whistled, as if to express his surprise and amazement.

"Did you know him?" Tom repeated.

The stranger answered guardedly:

"I heard that such a man was at work with John Simpson."

"And you saw him?"

"I believe I saw him once."

"Do you know what became of him?"

"Do I know what became of him? I suppose he came home."

"No; he did not. He never came home."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Simpson says he was probably murdered for his money."

"Oh, Simpson says that, does he? What more does he say?"

"He doesn't seem to know any more."

"Does he say how much money your father had?"

"He thinks about five thousand dollars."

The stranger laughed.

"The report was in the camp near by that Simpson and your father had cleared twenty-five thousand dollars apiece."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" repeated Tom, overwhelmed with astonishment.

"Yes; and it was generally believed. The claim was wonderfully rich, and besides what the two men took out they sold their claim for at least twenty thousand dollars. That was ten thousand dollars apiece."

"Can this be possible?"

"Oh, you may rely upon that. That I happened to know."

"This very evening I called upon Mr. Simpson and asked him about the matter. He told me that father had about five thousand dollars at the time he disappeared."

"Then Simpson lied," said the tramp, bluntly.

"I don't know why he should misrepresent things to me."

"I suppose he had his reasons."

"But what were they?"

"I give it up. Where do you live?"

"In that little cottage."

By this time Tom had reached his own house, the stranger walking slowly by his side.

"From the appearance of your house I shouldn't suppose you were very rich."

"Rich!" echoed Tom. "We have all we can do to live."

“Who do you mean by we?”

“My mother, and sister, and myself.”

“Doesn’t John Simpson help you?”

“He has given me a chance to peg in his manufactory, and paid me fifty cents a day, which is considerably below the regular wages in other establishments. If you call that helping us, then he has helped us.”

“That I call rather mean, since he has plenty of money.”

“So do I; but we never asked him for help. All I wanted was fair wages for my work.”

“Did you ever ask him to increase your small pay?”

“I asked him this very evening.”

“What did he say?”

“He got angry, and discharged me from his employment.”

“Money has evidently hardened his heart. What are you going to do?”

“I must try to find something else to do, or else go to the poor-house.”

“You won’t go to the poor-house. You don’t look like that kind of a boy. I wish I had John Simpson’s money and shop. I’d employ you at double his wages.”

“Thank you for your kind intentions, sir,” said Tom.

The tramp looked so far from being a capitalist, and, judging again from his appearance, his prospect of becoming a capitalist seemed so poor, that Tom did not gain much encouragement from his last words.

"At present I am quite unable to help you, but it may not be always so," continued the stranger.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, politely.

He reflected that a man's generous feelings were of little account if he had no money.

"I see you want to go in," said the tramp. "Don't let me keep you. I think I'll go and make a call on John Simpson."

"You'll find him at home, sir. That is, he was at home twenty minutes since."

"All right. I guess I'll find him."

Just as the stranger was leaving, Tom, impelled by the thought he might some time want to secure further information from this man, who appeared to have met his father in California, asked him:

"Would you be kind enough to tell me your name, sir?"

"My name! What do you want of my name?" demanded the tramp.

"Except John Simpson, who will tell me nothing, I have never before met any one who knew anything of my father's life in California. I might wish to meet you again and ask you more questions."

"I will take care that you have a chance to meet me some time," said the other, after a pause. "At present I prefer not to mention my name."

"Suppose I want to write to you?"

"Then you may address your letter to Darius Darke, New York Post-office."

"Darius Darke."

“Yes; I don’t think you will forget that name. It isn’t my real name, of course. Sorry I haven’t got a card to offer you,” he added, with grim humor.

“I shall remember the name.”

As Tom entered his humble home, he asked himself:

“Why did Mr. Simpson misrepresent the amount of father’s treasure? Of course he knew that he was deceiving me.”

But this question was easier to ask than to answer.

CHAPTER VI.

ENDS IN A FIRE.

DARIUS DARKE, to call him by the name by which he chose to be known, on parting company with Tom, turned his steps toward the house of Mr. Simpson, the wealthy shoe manufacturer.

As he walked along, he thought over the information which Tom had given him.

"What a scoundrel Simpson is!" he said to himself. "He might at least have taken care of poor Thatcher's family. Now he has actually turned the boy out of his shop, depriving him of his living. There would be small chance of his doing anything for me if I hadn't a hold upon him. I think I may be able to persuade him that it will be for his interest to provide for me."

He walked on, till he stood opposite the fine mansion of the man he sought.

"So John Simpson lives here, and I have no roof to cover me. The wicked do prosper sometimes, it appears. Well, I'll pull the bell, and see if he knows me."

John Simpson was sitting in the same room in which he had had his interview with Tom.

He was ill at ease, for Tom's questioning had stirred up unpleasant thoughts in the mind of the rich man. He was almost sorry that he had discharged Tom from

his employment. He knew very well that Tom was popular in the village, as his father had been before him, and that the townspeople would take sides with him. Again, everybody knew the relations which had existed between him and the boy's father, and he foresaw that he would be considered mean in thus treating the son of an old comrade. Yet he felt so irritated with Tom that he was not prepared as yet to recall his hasty words.

"I'll let him shift for himself for awhile," he decided. "It may teach him a lesson, and cure him of his impertinence to me."

At this moment the bell rang.

"Very likely the boy has come back to beg that I will take him on again," thought the rich man complacently, and he smiled in anticipation of the triumph this would afford him.

But he did not know Tom, or he would never have thought of this. Our hero was poor, but he had plenty of self-respect and proper pride. He would have humiliated himself if he saw no other way of saving his mother and sister from privation, but not until he had tried earnestly to find employment elsewhere.

The servant appeared at the door.

"Please, sir, there's a poor man wants to see you, Mr. Simpson."

"A poor man! Who is he?"

"Never saw him before, sir. He looks like a tramp."

"I don't care to see him."

"He told me to say that he used to know you in California."

John Simpson started uneasily.

"Bring him in," he said.

Directly afterward Darius Darke entered the room and coolly seated himself in an arm-chair.

"Good-evening, Mr. Simpson," he said.

"It appears to me that you are very ready to make yourself at home in a gentleman's house," said John Simpson, angrily.

"Why shouldn't I? I was once a gentleman myself."

"It must have been long ago," said the rich man with a sneer.

"Oh, you judge by my clothes," said the tramp, coolly. "That's wrong. Such as you see me I am a man of education, and a college graduate."

"I don't care what you have been. You are down in the world now."

"That's true enough."

"What did you mean by sending me word that you knew me in California?"

"I told the truth."

"Where was it?"

"At Rocky Gulch. You were associated with a man named Thatcher. By the way is he living now?"

"No, he is not," said Simpson, uneasily.

"How long has he been dead?"

"Eight years. He never came home from California."

"How was that?"

"I suppose he was robbed."

"And murdered?"

"Very probable. But you must excuse my speaking on this subject. It is painful to me."

"I don't wonder at it," said Darius Darke, in a tone which was pointed and significant.

John Simpson scanned his face sharply.

"Of course," he explained, "it is painful to think of the sad fate of a man with whom I was so intimate."

Darius Darke moved his chair nearer that on which the rich man was seated and asked, abruptly:

"John Simpson, what became of Thatcher's money?"

"How should I know?" answered the shoe manufacturer, nervously. "I suppose the men who stole it have spent it long ago. Why do you come to me with such a question?"

"I supposed you would be as likely to know as any one."

"Then, sir, you are very much mistaken. I don't understand what business it is of yours. I should judge that your own affairs required all your attention."

"So they do," said Darius Darke, imperturbably. "I am coming to them by and by. But it occurred to me that poor Thatcher's family needed the money he had when I knew him at Rocky Gulch."

"How do you know he left a family?"

"I was speaking to his boy this evening. A fine, manly fellow Tom Thatcher is. He'll make a smart man if he lives."

"You were speaking to Tom Thatcher this evening?" gasped John Simpson, unpleasantly surprised. "At what time this evening?"

"Just before I came in."

"And you hadn't met him before?"

"No; I asked him the way to your house, and he told me he had just left it."

John Simpson was relieved. He feared at first that Tom's call was induced by a previous interview with his present visitor.

"He seems a fine boy," repeated Darke.

"He is a very impertinent boy."

"He doesn't look like it. By the way, he tells me you have discharged him from your employment."

"He forced me to it. I may take him on again after a time. Did you speak to Tom about his father?" asked John Simpson, uneasily.

"Yes. He says that you told him his father had only five thousand dollars."

"Suppose I did."

"He got ten thousand dollars for his share of the money you jointly sold the claim for, John Simpson."

"How do you know that? Who are you?" demanded the rich man, with feverish interest.

"How do I know? I certainly ought to know, for I was one of the two men who bought you out."

"You!" exclaimed Simpson, with undisguised amazement.

"Yes. I don't look like it now, do I? But I had money then, and I paid ten thousand dollars down for a half interest in the claim. I may as well tell you that I never got the money back. The claim was nearly exhausted at the time you sold, though I am sure neither

you nor Thatcher knew it. Well, you both remained awhile. After you left my partner and myself came to the conclusion that we had made a bad bargain, and he deputed me to follow you and see if you wouldn't return a part of the money under the circumstances."

"Well?"

"Well, I finally came up with you. It was a bright moonlight night. I found where you were encamped."

Darius Darke paused. He rose from his chair, went to the door, and closed it; then he came back, and approaching Mr. Simpson's chair, said, in a low voice:

"Don't ask me to tell what I saw. You, of all men, would shrink from hearing it."

John Simpson looked at him with a dazed air.

"Why have you come here to tell me this?" he asked.

Darius Darke's manner changed.

"Because," said he, "I need money. The world has not used me well. Let me have five hundred dollars, and you will not see me again for a year."

"I cannot do it," answered Simpson, hastily.

"Reflect upon it for five minutes. I think you will let me have it."

There was a little haggling, but Darke remained firm. In the end he prevailed. Before he left the room, money and securities amounting to five hundred dollars were in his hands.

"Where are you going?" asked Simpson.

"I leave this town to-morrow, but I must pass the night somewhere. I suppose I will not be received in the hotel, looking as I am. Will you allow me to sleep in your stable?"

John Simpson hesitated. Finally he spoke.

“Follow me,” he said.

Out of the back door they went unobserved, to the back of the lot, six hundred feet away, where was an old ruined barn, now no longer used, as Mr. Simpson had built a stable near the house.

“You will find some hay in the loft,” he said, “and can rest undisturbed till morning. I expect you to keep your promise then, and leave this village.”

“I will do so.”

About one o'clock there was an alarm of fire in the village. John Simpson's old barn was discovered to be on fire, and was past saving when the village hook-and-ladder fire-engine arrived on the spot.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIDNIGHT FIRE.

FIRE! When Tom Thatcher heard the bells ringing, and the ominous cry of "Fire!" rang with startling distinctness through the streets of the village, he sprang from his bed and hurried on his clothes.

"Where are you going, Tom?" asked his mother, as she saw him pass her chamber door.

"To the fire, mother."

"But it is past midnight."

"I'll be home soon, mother."

"Don't go too near, Tom."

"No, I won't."

And Tom hurried out of the little cottage, and joined those who were hastening to the scene of the midnight fire.

For boys in their teens, and for some beyond that period, fires have an irresistible fascination. This is especially true in a village, where such occasions are uncommon, and where, as all are acquainted, the loss will come upon a friend or neighbor.

"Where is the fire?" asked Tom, of the first man he met.

"At Squire Simpson's."

"Not his house?" asked Tom, excited.

"No, it's the old barn at the back of his house."

"I wonder how it could have caught fire?" thought Tom, but as no answer suggested itself, he hurried on to the fire.

It was enveloped in a blaze when he came up, and surrounded by a group of men and boys, some in their shirt-sleeves, though it was a December night. The fire-engine was on the ground, but the firemen were inactive, for it was clear that nothing could be done to arrest the flames.

Prominent among those present was the rather portly form of John Simpson, bareheaded, and clad in a showy dressing-gown, the same he had worn in his interview with Tom and Darius Darke only a few hours earlier.

Mr. Simpson seemed excited and nervous, but that certainly was not surprising, considering that the fire was on his own premises, and might as well have involved his dwelling-house.

"Well, squire," said Newell Ingalls, a near neighbor, "the old barn will have to go."

"Yes, sir, there's no doubt about that."

"Is there any insurance?"

"No; but the building was worth very little. There might have been two or three tons of hay inside."

"Have you any suspicion as to how it caught fire? It seems rather queer it should have caught of itself."

"I am afraid I can explain the matter, Mr. Ingalls," said Squire Simpson, raising his voice a little, as if he desired the crowd to hear what he was about to say.

Naturally his neighbors gathered a little more closely about him, induced by curiosity.

"This evening," said the squire, "I had a call from a man whom I knew slightly some years since in California. I didn't remember him at first, but he managed to recall himself to my recollection. The poor fellow had been unlucky. He was miserably dressed, and appeared like a tramp. I gave him something in memory of old times, and at his request I allowed him to pass the night in the old barn. I didn't think to caution him against smoking. I have no doubt he lighted his pipe, and somehow the fire was communicated to the hay on which he was probably lying. That probably accounts for the fire."

"Then the man must have been burned in the fire!" exclaimed Ingalls, with an expression of horror.

"I am very much afraid of it," said Mr. Simpson, with a nervous shudder.

"Poor fellow! It's lucky you did not put him in the stable."

"Indeed it is, for in that case the fire would inevitably have spread to the house, which would probably now be in ashes."

"How happened it that you did not let him sleep in the stable?" asked Reuben Hunting.

"I was about to do so," answered the squire, "when, for some reason which I cannot explain, I changed my mind and led him out to this old barn."

"Did the thought of fire occur to you?" asked Hunting.

"I don't think it did. It was a providential thought, as it seems to me now."

"What was the man's name?" inquired George Ingalls.

"I can't at this moment recall it. My acquaintance with the man was very slight, and I never knew him very well."

It may be imagined with what feelings Tom listened to this conversation. He knew very well who this unhappy man was who had perished in the flames. That is he knew him by the name he had mentioned.

Our hero shuddered, and a feeling of awe crept into his mind, as he reflected that within a few hours he had talked with Darius Darke, to whom the gates of a terrible death had now opened.

He stood there, silent and grave, when, unexpectedly, public attention was turned to him.

"This man was seen by at least one who is now present," continued the squire. "He told me that he had inquired the way to my house of Thomas Thatcher."

"Did you see him, Tom?" asked a dozen voices at once.

"Yes," answered Tom. "I talked with him from ten to fifteen minutes."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"He gave me a name, but he as much as said that it wasn't his real name."

"What name was it?" asked several, eagerly.

"Darius Darke."

"That's a queer name. Is it his real name, squire?"

"I don't think it is. I know very little of him or his career. He may have had reasons for using a false name."

"Very likely."

“If he was burnt in the fire, squire, you’ll be likely to find his bones among the ashes,” suggested Newell Ingalls.

“I hope not. I hope he had time to escape,” said the squire. “However, it will be well to look in the morning.”

By this time the barn was completely consumed, and the embers alone remained.

“Friends and neighbors,” said Squire Simpson, “it is all over, and there seems to be no danger of the fire spreading. I won’t keep you any longer out of your beds. I thank you heartily for your kindly coming to my help, and I will on a future occasion express my acknowledgments in a suitable manner.”

The crowd dispersed, the engine was returned to the engine-house, and John Simpson sought his chamber.

He looked into the mirror, and hardly knew the image reflected there, so pale and bloodless were his cheeks.

“I look badly,” he said, to himself, “but it will pass off. As to that man, the world is well rid of him, and so am I. He should not have tried to blackmail me. I never should have got rid of him if——”

He did not finish the sentence, but with a nervous shudder sought his bed. He slept at last, but it was a troubled sleep, that gave him no refreshment.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARN LOFT.

WAS DARIUS DARKE really burned to death in the old barn assigned him as a resting-place?

So Squire Simpson thought, but he was mistaken.

When John Simpson went back to the house the tramp climbed up on the loft and lay down on the hay.

It was a comfortable place, far more comfortable than many in which he had been compelled to lodge, but it did not please him.

"Why," he asked himself, "should John Simpson pass by his comfortable stable and put me in this out-of-the-way barn? I have fallen pretty low, it is true, but I still think a stable is not too good a place for me. What! what is that?"

He started as he felt something cold on his face, and quickly rose to a sitting posture.

"It is a rat!" he exclaimed, in disgust. "I felt his cold paws on my face. I never can sleep here!"

Then the thought occurred to him that the stable was near by, and he could probably get in easily. He groped his way down from the loft, opened the door through which he had entered, and retraced his steps along the path leading to the house, deviating at last and seeking the stable.

He could not open the large door, but there was a small side door through which he entered. Leaving it open for a minute till he could get his bearings, he caught a glimpse of a ladder, by which he easily ascended to the loft, which was about half filled with hay.

He stretched himself out on his humble bed with a sigh of satisfaction.

"There won't be any rats here," he said to himself. "The building is new and they haven't found a lodgment here yet. I must wake up early in the morning and vacate the premises, and John Simpson will never know that I changed my sleeping-room."

Darius Darke ensconced himself in the hay, and congratulated himself on his change of quarters. He expected to sink to sleep, but the stable seemed close! He had always been accustomed to plenty of air, but especially of late, when his bed had often been by the side of a fence, or at the foot of a hay-stack, under the canopy of heaven.

"I wonder whether there isn't a window here?" thought he.

He rose from his couch and began to explore. He was successful.

In the side of the barn was, not a window, but a small door, which was fastened by a latch on the inside.

It was easy, of course, to open it, and admit the free air just behind where he lay.

"That is better," he soliloquized, in a satisfied tone, and, resuming his place on the hay, he was soon fast asleep.

Generally he was a good sleeper. His walking during the day was enough to insure that. To-night, however, was an exception.

Soon after midnight he awoke, and found the pale moon shining upon him through the small door.

He rose, and drawing near the window, looked out. Mechanically, for he had no object in so doing, he directed his glance toward the old barn, where he had been assigned a bed. He saw something that startled him.

Beside the barn was the stooping figure of a man. He seemed to have with him a basket, from which he drew out shavings, which he carefully placed just at the corner of the barn, at a place where the timbers were dry and broken.

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Darius Darke, “he is going to set the barn on fire!”

“Who was the incendiary? What could be his object?”

These were questions which naturally addressed themselves instantly to the mind of the eager watcher. Was it possible——

A terrible suspicion formed itself in his mind. To resolve it, it was necessary to identify the incendiary. Here the moonlight, which had probably awakened him, did him a further service.

As the figure rose from its crouching posture, after applying a match to the heap of shavings, it swiftly turned and fled, as if pursued, in the direction of the house. In so doing, it necessarily came nearer the watchful eye of the lodger in the stable.

"It is John Simpson!" exclaimed Darius Darke, a cold perspiration gathering on his face. "It is clear enough now what he meant to do. He intended to burn me up in the barn as I slept, and thus rid himself forever of the man who was acquainted with his secret. This is the reason why he passed by the stable and assigned me the old barn as a resting-place. His plans are defeated. If I were a better man, I should believe it to be by a special interposition of Providence. At any rate, I am grateful for my escape."

Even as he spoke the fire was making headway. The old dry timbers formed admirable food for the flames. Besides, there was a considerable amount of hay on the loft, and this, too, was of a highly combustible character.

"The barn will be a heap of ashes in half an hour," thought the tramp. "It will, of course, attract attention, and soon there will be a crowd here. I must close this door. No one must know that I am not actually in the barn, the victim of the flames."

He closed the door, but through a crevice watched the flames, and soon heard the murmur of many voices, and the noise created by the arrival of the fire-engine. He could not hear the explanation which was given by John Simpson of the origin of the fire, but he guessed correctly what he would say.

"I should like to hear the hypocrite speak," he thought. "How shocked these simple neighbors of his would be if they could know that the man who holds so prominent a place among them had this very night sought to commit a most atrocious murder!"

An hour later—less even—the barn was a smouldering mass of cinders, and the yard was deserted.

“I musn’t stay here any longer,” thought Darius Darke. “I am sorry to lose my night’s sleep, but I must be up and away while the village lies buried in sleep. For the present John Simpson must suppose me dead, but the time will come when the man he thinks murdered will rise from the grave to disturb his peace.”

He descended to the floor, slipped out of the door by which he had entered, and ere the morning dawned was ten miles away from Wilton.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED CHARGE.

MOTHER," said Tom, the next morning when they met at the breakfast-table, "I have some bad news for you."

"Bad news!" repeated Mrs. Thatcher, turning pale. "What is it?"

"Don't let it trouble you too much, mother, for it doesn't depress me."

"Don't keep me any longer in suspense, Tom," said his mother, anxiously. "Whatever it is, let me know it at once."

"Then," said Tom, "I am out of work. Mr. Simpson has discharged me."

"What for? Is business slack?" inquired Mrs. Thatcher.

"No, business is very good. The fact is, Mr. Simpson is angry with me."

"Have you given him any cause, my son?"

"I will tell you all about it and let you judge. Last evening I called upon him and asked him questions about my father, and how much money he had when they parted in California."

"But, Tom, what good can all this do now?" said his mother.

"Perhaps none, mother; but you must admit that I have reason to feel interested in the fate of my poor father."

"How did Mr. Simpson receive you?"

"Very coldly. Still he answered some of my questions. But when I spoke of the great change it would have made in our circumstances if father had lived, and brought home the money which even Squire Simpson admits that he had gained, he began to tell how much he had done for us."

"What has he ever done for us?" asked Mrs. Thatcher, wonderingly.

"I will tell you in his own words—he has employed me in his shop. When he said that, I said that he had given me no more than any one else—even less than is paid in other shoe towns—he became angry, and told me that he would discharge me, and I would then have the chance of seeking higher wages somewhere else."

"Did he really mean it?" asked Mrs. Thatcher, in alarm.

"Did he mean it, mother? If you had seen him and heard him, as I did, you wouldn't have needed to ask that question. He meant it fast enough. Why, mother, I actually believe that he hates me."

"But why should he hate you? Why should any one hate you, my boy?"

"I haven't given any one a good cause for doing it. But all the same he hates me, and that is why he has discharged me. I am to go to the shop this morning and collect what is due me, and that will be the end of it."

"Tom, I will go and see Mr. Simpson myself. I will ask him to take you back."

"No, mother," said Tom, decidedly; "I am too proud to beg to be taken back."

"It won't be you who ask it. It will be I."

"It would humble me all the same."

"But, Tom, we find it hard enough to live when you are at work. If you are out of work we shall starve."

"No, you won't, mother. In one way or another I will manage to earn fifty cents a day, and I hope more. Now I am going to the shop to collect my money."

Tom went out, leaving his mother in low spirits. She was not so hopeful as he of his ability to make up the sum which he had lost by his discharge from the shop.

In the shoe-shop Tom found plenty of sympathy. There was even a strong feeling of indignation excited against Mr. Simpson, for Tom Thatcher was a popular favorite. He collected his money—three day's wages—and left the shop.

On the way he met John Simpson. The boy would have avoided him, but the manufacturer called him by name.

"Look here, you Tom Thatcher," he said, "I have a word to say to you."

"Very well, sir," said Tom, proudly.

"I know very well what you were up to last night."

"I was at your fire, if you mean that, sir."

"I believe," said John Simpson, sternly, "that you were the incendiary."

Tom started, in uncontrollable surprise.

"I believe that you set the barn on fire in order to be revenged upon me for discharging you from my employment."

"Good Heavens, sir, what are you saying! You yourself attributed it to the man whom you let sleep in the barn."

"I only did it to screen you. I didn't want the son of my old comrade to be suspected of such a crime. I am willing that the matter should stand so."

"But I am not," said Tom, with spirit. "Your charge is a base falsehood. I can prove by my mother that I was fast asleep in my room for three hours before the fire. You know who set the fire better than I."

"What do you mean?" gasped the rich man, turning pale.

"That I know absolutely nothing about it."

"Oh, that was all, was it?" returned Simpson, relieved, and he walked away.

Tom looked after him, puzzled by his manner.

CHAPTER X.

IN SEARCH OF EMPLOYMENT.

ON HIS way back from the shop Tom met another member of John Simpson's family.

It was Rupert.

Rupert was carefully dressed, and looked, as the saying is, as if he had just come out of a bandbox. He was rather fond of dress. Besides it helped to distinguish him from the other boys in the village. Harry Julian was the only one who had the means to dress as well, and he was content with dressing neatly.

Generally Rupert would have passed Tom with a cool nod, if indeed he had deigned to notice him at all, but now his curiosity was excited by seeing him in the street at an hour when he was usually at work.

"Why are you not at work?" asked Rupert, pausing in his walk.

"Because I have no work to do," answered Tom, who did not care to seek Rupert's sympathy.

"Isn't the shop open to-day?" asked Rupert, puzzled, for he knew nothing of Tom's dismissal.

"Yes, it's open."

"Then why are you not at work?"

"Didn't your father tell you that he had discharged me?"

"No," said Rupert, eagerly. "What for?"

"He is angry with me. I will refer you to him."

"But what are you going to do?" inquired Rupert, who did not seem to take the news much to heart.

"I must find work somewhere else."

"That won't be very easy."

"Perhaps not."

"If you can't find anything to do, you and your mother will have to come on the town, won't you?" asked Rupert, briskly.

"I don't think so," said Tom, gravely.

"I wonder father didn't say anything at home about it," continued Rupert. "Wouldn't you just as lief tell me why he bounced you?"

"I must refer you to your father," said Tom, coldly. "Good-morning."

"That boy is very proud, considering he is a beggar, or the next thing to it," said Rupert to himself. "I suppose he was impudent to pa. I know pa wouldn't stand that, and he ought not to. I am glad Tom's pride has had a fall."

Tom didn't go immediately home. There was another shop in the village, considerably smaller than Mr. Simpson's, but still employing twenty hands. This was kept by a Mr. Casey, a man well-to-do, but not setting up for an aristocrat like his competitor in business. Tom thought it possible he might get employment here, and he dropped in on the way home.

"Good-morning, Tom," said Casey, who was cutting out shoes.

“Good-morning, sir.”

“Are you not at work to-day?”

“Mr. Simpson thinks he can get along without me.”

“How is that?” asked Casey, in surprise.

Tom briefly told under what circumstances he had been discharged.

“That’s a pity,” said Casey, in a sympathizing tone.

“I can’t justify John Simpson in that.”

“You don’t want a pegger, do you, Mr. Casey?”

“Not unless one of my boys leave me. I’d like to take you on; but I have no vacancy. As soon as there is one, you may depend on my sending for you.”

“Thank you, sir. That is all I can ask.”

“How much did Mr. Simpson pay you?” asked Casey.

“Fifty cents a day.”

“That is poor. Why, I pay sixty, and out of town more is paid.”

“I know that; but it wouldn’t pay me to go out of town as long as mother lives here.”

“That’s true. Well, Tom, I hope you will find something to do. You may depend on hearing from me when I have a vacancy.”

Tom thanked him and left the shop. He had been kindly received; but kind words wouldn’t pay the baker’s and grocer’s bills, and he felt rather sober.

A few rods from Casey’s shop he met his friend Harry Julian, who also expressed his surprise at seeing Tom on the street at that time in the day.

Tom gave an explanation.

Harry looked concerned, for he was strongly attached

to Tom, and he very well understood what a serious matter it was to him and his mother for him to be out of work.

He reflected a moment, and his face brightened as something occurred to him.

"Tom," he said, "will you do me a favor?"

"Of course I will, Julian."

"Then let me lend you this," and before Tom understood what he meant, he had thrust something into his vest-pocket.

Tom drew it out, unfolded it, and found it to be a five-dollar bill.

"Thank you, Harry," he said; "but I can't take this."

"Why not? Remember, I ask it as a favor to me."

"But it isn't that; it is a favor to me."

"Well, are you too proud to accept a favor from your friend Harry? Listen, Tom," he added, rapidly. "You know father is very well off, and he gives me a dollar a week as an allowance. I don't spend it all, and so I happen to have five dollars on hand. I really have no use for it. Now won't you take it?"

"You are very kind, Harry, but I have some money in my pocket."

"How much?"

"A dollar and a half,"

"That won't last you till you get something to do."

Tom knew this only too well, and he was strongly tempted to accept, for his mother's sake.

"Will your father like your giving away this money?" he asked.

"He will be glad to have me assist a friend, particularly you. He likes you, Tom, and is always willing I should come to visit you."

"Then I will tell you what I will do, Harry—I will take the money, and use it if I am absolutely obliged to. But I shall expect to pay it back some time."

"All right, Tom. You may pay it back when you are twenty-one. That will be soon enough. What a mean man that Simpson is. What an awful thing that was last night—I mean the tramp burning up in the old barn."

"Yes, it was. I suppose I was the only one who saw him besides Squire Simpson. Harry, he said he knew my father in California, and that he, father, was worth at one time twenty-five thousand dollars."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Harry, in surprise.

"Yes, and I believe the story."

"I wish you had it now, Tom."

"So do I; but it's no use wishing."

Tom went home considerably encouraged. True, he had no prospect of a place, but the sympathy and kindness of Harry Julian had made the world seem brighter to him. Boys, as well as men, when in trouble crave sympathy. They like to feel that they are not standing alone, but have some one's good wishes.

"What a splendid fellow Harry is," said Tom, warmly, to himself; "not much like Rupert. I really believe Rupert would be glad to see me in the poor-house. If I were rich and he were poor, I would try to help him, and not be mean enough to rejoice in his misfortune."

When Harry went home he lost no time in telling his father of Tom's misfortune, and what he had done to relieve it.

"I thought you would approve, father," he said.

"Approve, my son! I rejoice at your kindness of heart. You could not have pleased me more."

"I am afraid Tom will find it hard to get anything to do," said Harry, thoughtfully.

"Can he write a good hand?"

"Yes, he writes a very plain hand."

"Then, if he gets nothing better to do, I will offer to employ him as a copyist to copy some of my old sermons. I will pay him as much as Mr. Simpson has been paying."

"Shall I tell him?" asked Harry.

"No; I prefer that he should get employment elsewhere if he can, for this copying would only be a makeshift. It would not lead to anything permanent. Still, if he finds nothing else, I will offer him four weeks employment in my study."

While Harry and his father were devising some way of providing employment for Tom, John Simpson and his son Rupert were also discussing his affairs, but in a different spirit.

"I wouldn't have discharged him if he hadn't been impudent," said Squire Simpson.

"Just what I thought, pa. He's awfully independent. He is very rude to me."

"He will be his own enemy," said the squire, sententiously.

“ You won’t take him back, pa, will you?”

“ Not unless he makes me an humble apology.”

“ Then he’ll never come back,” thought Rupert.

“ He’s too proud to do that.”

John Simpson had one source of regret. His enemy, as he considered him, Darius Darke, had been cut off in a terrible manner, but at the same time the five hundred dollars which he had given him had also been consumed.

“ What a fool I was not to put him off till morning!” he reflected, with vexation. “ Then I would have saved five hundred dollars. But it never occurred to me. However, I am glad to be rid of him even at that price. I am sorry he fell in with Tom Thatcher, and told him that story about his father’s having twenty-five thousand dollars. Tom was already inclined to be suspicious. I wish he were out of the village—he and his whole family. If he can’t find work, he may have to go yet. The family can’t live on nothing, and the cottage isn’t worth much. I wish I had a mortgage on it.”

CHAPTER XI.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THE TOWN of Wilton, aside from the manufacture of shoes, had no other branch of industry employing a considerable number of men and boys. This accounts for the difficulty Tom experienced in finding employment.

However, he did have one offer. In passing Abel Babcock's blacksmith's shop, the smith, who had just finished shoeing a horse, called out to him:

"Come here a minute, Tom."

Tom entered the smithy.

"I hear you are out of a job, Tom."

"Yes, Mr. Babcock. I am looking for work."

"It was mean of John Simpson to turn you off, and I wouldn't mind telling him so."

"It was unlucky for me."

"How would you like to learn my business?" asked Abel Babcock,

"The business of a blacksmith?"

"Yes."

"I don't think it would suit me," said Tom, slowly.

"You've got to do something, Tom. You can't afford to be particular."

"I know that. Suppose I said yes, what would you be willing to pay me?"

"Well," said the smith, slowly, "I couldn't pay you much—that is the first year. You couldn't do much just at first."

"But how much?" persisted Tom.

"Well, maybe I could afford to pay a dollar a week the first year."

Tom shook his head.

"That wouldn't do," he said. "I have to help support my mother and sister. Mr. Simpson paid me three dollars a week, and it was all we could do to get along on that. Why doesn't your son, James, learn the business?"

"I wish he would," said the blacksmith, "but he prefers to work in a shoe shop. If he'd learn my business, he could earn more after awhile. Then you don't think you'd like to go in with me?"

"Even if I did like it, I couldn't afford to do it. But I'm much obliged to you for the offer."

"Oh, you're welcome, as far as that goes," and Abel Babcock returned to his work.

"That boy's goin' to make a smart man some of those days," said he to himself. "It'll take more'n John Simpson to keep him down. He's comin' out at the top of the heap some time."

It might have afforded Tom some satisfaction if he had been aware of Abel Babcock's high opinion of him, but it is doubtful whether he would have been complacent enough to agree with him. The fact was, Tom be-

gan to feel sober. He was willing enough to work, but there seemed to be no opening for him—that is, in Wilton. For the first time he began to think of other places.

He picked up in the village store a stray copy of the New York *Herald*, and he ran his eye eagerly over the advertising column headed “Help Wanted.” It was clear, so he thought, there were places open in New York. But New York was thirty miles away, and he could not leave his mother and sister. On the other hand, he could be of little service to them while he remained out of work.

We need not dwell upon this time of discouragement. After Tom had fully satisfied himself that there was no one in Wilton who required his services, his friend Harry, authorized by his father, proposed to him to spend three hours a day in copying his old sermons, as already mentioned.

“He will pay you fifty cents a day,” said Harry, “I believe that is the same you received in the shop.”

“Yes, but I am afraid I can’t write well enough.”

“You write a good, plain hand, and that is all that is required. Do you accept?”

“I shall be very glad to,” answered Tom, with a sigh of relief. “I’m tired of doing nothing.”

“Then report at father’s study to-morrow morning at nine o’clock.”

Tom promised to do so.

It must be admitted that our hero did not find his employment very interesting. The Rev. Mr. Julian’s

sermons were of a dogmatic character, and though he was a most excellent man, his pulpit discourses were undeniably dry. Yet Tom felt a degree of satisfaction in feeling that he was again earning something toward the support of his mother, and he felt especially glad when one morning, on the way to the parsonage, he encountered Rupert Simpson.

Rupert smiled superciliously.

"You don't find it very easy to get work, I see," said Rupert.

"How do you see it?"

"You have plenty of leisure to walk about now."

"That is true. I don't work as many hours as I did in your father's shop," returned Tom.

"Are you working at all?" demanded Rupert, quickly.

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Writing for Mr. Julian."

"Perhaps you are writing his sermons," said Rupert, with a sneer.

"That is exactly what I am doing," answered Tom, with a smile at Rupert's bewilderment.

"Come, that's nonsense. You are only trying to fool me."

"If you want to see me at work, you can come with me. I am going to the minister's study now."

"I suppose you are copying for him," said Rupert, with sudden enlightenment.

"You have guessed right."

"What does he pay you?" inquired Rupert, curiously.

"I am paid fifty cents for three hours' work. That is what your father paid me for the whole day."

"It won't last long," said Rupert, shortly, comforting himself with this thought, as he walked away.

That was exactly what Tom told himself. It would not last long. He felt that he must be looking out for something else, and, though at present employed, he felt uneasy.

He had the afternoon to himself, and occasionally he got a small job to do, which made a trifling addition to his income. But, of course, this was precarious.

The post-office was located in the village store, and the storekeeper, or one of his clerks, distributed the mail. Tom went there one afternoon to buy a half-pound of tea, and a couple of pounds of sugar for his mother, for their purchases were necessarily of an economical character, when the clerk who was waiting upon him, said:

"I believe there's a letter for you in the office."

"Is there?" asked Tom, rather surprised, for the family correspondence was very limited.

"Yes; here it is—a letter from New York; and it's for you."

Tom opened the letter and hurriedly glanced at the signature.

His heart gave a sudden bound.

It was signed by the man who, he supposed, had perished in the flames at the recent fire—Darius Darke!

Over the top was written:

"Strictly confidential."

It ran thus:

“This will seem to you like a voice from the grave. Doubtless you supposed that I was consumed in the burning barn. I wish all except yourself to believe this. When, therefore, you have read this letter, burn or otherwise destroy it, so that there may be no chance of my secret being discovered. I wish to see you as soon as possible, for reasons which I will explain when we meet. Come to New York on Monday, and meet me at twelve o’clock noon, or if you cannot reach the city so early, at three o’clock, in front of the Astor House. I inclose money to defray your expenses.

“DARIUS DARKE.”

This letter occupied one page of commercial note-paper. Between the two leaves was tucked a ten-dollar bill.

“Who was your letter from?” asked the clerk.

“An acquaintance of mine,” answered Tom, briefly, as he thrust the bank-note hurriedly into his vest-pocket.

CHAPTER XII.

TOM'S JOURNEY.

AS TOM went home his mind was in a whirl of mingled excitement and bewilderment. Neither he nor any one else in the village had harbored a moment's doubt on the subject of the wandering tramp. It was firmly believed that he had been consumed in the burning barn. Now it turned out that he was not a victim of the conflagration, but was alive and well in the city of New York.

"He must be better off than he was when I met him," thought Tom, "or he wouldn't be able to send me a ten-dollar bill."

His thoughts recurred to the fire and to Darius Darke.

If the tramp had not accidentally set the old barn on fire, who had? Was it possible that Darius had set it on fire out of spite against the owner? This was hardly likely, since John Simpson had allowed him to sleep there, and probably given him money, which would account for his ability to send the ten-dollar bill.

Tom finally settled upon this theory. The tramp, he decided, had accidentally set the barn on fire while smoking, but had managed to escape. The fear of being charged with incendiarism would naturally prompt

him to escape while he could. What Mr. Darke had to communicate to him he could not conjecture, but he was resolved to meet him at the time specified. It must be important, or he would not have offered to defray his expenses.

One difficulty presented itself. He was forbidden to mention the existence of Darius Darke. How, then, could he account to his mother for his wish to visit New York—a journey which he had never made alone? In fact, he had been in the great city but twice in his life.

It was now Thursday, and it was not necessary yet to mention the matter. He might think of some plausible pretext before Monday.

He did not wait in vain.

On Friday, when engaged in copying in the minister's study, he overheard Mr. Julian say to his wife:

"I ought to go to New York in a day or two, but I hardly know how to spare the time."

"On business?" inquired his wife.

"Yes; I draw a certain amount of interest money every quarter from Mr. Mellish, of Mellish & Co., No. — Wall Street, who has charge of some securities of mine. It was due a week since, and I may have occasion for it."

"Why can't you spare time to go?"

"I am to make a tour of inspection among the schools next week, and I have, besides, some extra writing to do."

Mr. Julian chanced to be chairman of the school committee in Wilton, and the supervision of the schools brought him considerable labor.

"Mr. Julian," said Tom, looking up from his writing, "couldn't I do the business for you?"

The minister looked surprised.

"I don't know but you could," he said, after a pause of consideration. "Do you know your way about New York?"

"Not very well, but I'll find it," answered Tom, promptly.

"What put it in your head to propose going?" asked Mr. Julian.

"I saw a copy of the New York *Herald* the other day. It contained a good many advertisements for help. I should look around and see if I couldn't hear of some place."

"Not a bad idea," said the minister, approvingly. "Well, I believe I will trust you. When do you want to go?"

"On Monday," said Tom, promptly.

"Very well, Monday let it be—that is, of course, if your mother doesn't object. I shall pay your railway fares, and give you money enough to buy your dinner."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom would have declined taking money for his expenses, but he could not do so without betraying his own secret. He therefore made no objection.

Mrs. Thatcher felt a little nervous about Tom's going to the city alone. He was old enough to be trusted to make such a journey, but his mother had traveled so little that she felt timid.

"You must be very careful, Tom," she urged. "I

hear there are a great many wicked men in New York, who may lie in wait for you, and lead you astray."

"I think, mother," said Tom, good-humoredly, "they won't think me of sufficient importance. Besides, you know, I am only to be in the city a few hours."

"I shall feel anxious till you get back, Tom."

"I don't believe anybody will try to carry me off, mother. If they do they'll have a tough job. I'll make it lively for them."

Mrs. Thatcher, privately, was of the opinion that Mr. Julian had acted imprudently in trusting a boy with so important a commission, but she saw that Tom had no fears, and acquiesced in his going.

The morning train for New York left the Wilton station at half-past eight o'clock.

Rather to Tom's surprise, Rupert Simpson was a passenger by this train. As Tom entered the cars, he found Rupert already installed in a seat by the window. There was no other seat vacant except the one beside him.

"Is that seat taken, Rupert?" asked Tom.

Rupert surveyed our hero in undisguised surprise and awe.

"No," he answered. "Where are you going?"

"To New York," answered Tom, seating himself. "I suppose you are going there, too."

"Yes. I didn't expect to meet you here."

"No, I suppose not."

"What are you going for?"

"On business," returned Tom.

"What sort of business can you possibly have in New York?" demanded Rupert, impatiently.

Tom was in good spirits, and disposed to be on good terms with everybody. Otherwise he might, perhaps, have taken offense at Rupert's tone.

"It isn't business of my own," he answered, "that is not entirely. I am going up for Mr. Julian."

"That's strange."

"Is it? Why?"

"It is strange that he should trust any business to a boy like you."

"I don't know but it is. I think I can attend to it, though."

"What sort of business is it?" continued Rupert, giving way to curiosity.

"I don't think I ought to tell, as it is his business, not mine."

"No doubt it is of great consequence," sneered Rupert.

"It is of some importance, certainly. Are you going on business, too?"

"I am going to stay a week with some friends on Madison Avenue," answered Rupert. "I suppose you have heard of Madison Avenue?"

"I don't know that I have. I don't know much about the city."

"It is one of the finest streets in the city, and my friends live in an elegant house."

"You will have a fine time, no doubt," said Tom.

"Oh, yes, I am sure to. I shall go all about."

"I wish I were in your place, Rupert."

"Oh, it wouldn't suit you. You wouldn't know how to behave among fashionable people."

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Tom, spiritedly.

"Because you are only a shoe-pegger. You are not used to good society."

"I consider my mother and sister to be good society," said Tom, quickly.

"Oh, no doubt they are good sort of people," said Rupert, condescendingly, "but they are not fashionable."

"I don't see much difference between you and me on that score," said Tom. "Your father and mine used to work at the shoe bench together."

"Do you mean to insult me?" asked Rupert, flushing with vexation.

"No, I am only telling the truth."

Rupert looked offended, and became silent and sullen. By this time there was another vacant seat on the opposite side of the car. Tom rose and took it, finding that Rupert did not enjoy his society. On the whole he was not sorry, for he had feared that he might be unable to shake him off, and he did not wish any one from Wilton to be present at his interview with Darius Darke.

An hour and a half passed quickly. By ten o'clock Tom was in New York—two hours before the time appointed for the meeting.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHEAP OVERCOAT.

TOM thought it best to attend, first of all, to Mr. Julian's business. Accordingly he inquired his way to Wall Street, and was not long in finding the office of Mellish & Co.

It was a large office on the ground floor, with a counter and a cashier's desk. Considerable business appeared to be transacted there, to judge from the number of clerks and of visitors.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" inquired a young man.

It was a son of Mr. Mellish, the head of the firm.

Tom presented a few lines from Mr. Julian, authorizing the firm to pay him the quarterly interest due on Mr. Julian's securities.

The young man glanced his eye over it rapidly.

"Will you have a check or the money?" he asked.

"The money," answered Tom.

"Very well. I will make out a check, and our cashier will give you the money on it."

Five minutes later—perhaps in less time—Tom had placed in his hands two hundred and fifty dollars. He had not supposed the business would be transacted so easily. In his eyes two hundred and fifty dollars was an

immense sum, and he had some private doubts whether, in spite of Mr. Julian's letter, they would be willing to pay it to an unknown boy like him. It even occurred to him that it might be inconvenient for the firm to pay out so much money, and they might put him off till another day. But he didn't know how things were done in Wall Street.

Next to him was a boy of about his own age, who quietly gave an order for the purchase of five hundred shares of some kind of stock, at 89. Tom calculated that this purchase would amount to over forty thousand dollars. Yet the order was taken as a matter of course.

"There must be a good deal of money in New York," thought Tom, not unnaturally.

As he was going out of the office, a bootblack stepped up to him and said, jocosely:

"Say, young feller, couldn't you lend me a thousand dollars till to-morrer? I've got a big payment to make, and I'm short."

As the young applicant for a loan was dressed in a ragged costume of unknown antiquity, Tom, of course, understood the joke.

"I've got a big payment to make myself," he answered, "and I can't spare any money to-day."

"All right!" said the bootblack, nonchalantly, "I'll go and see Astor or Vanderbilt. I guess one of 'em will let me have the money."

"You didn't take me for either of them, did you?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no; I knew you was A. T. Stewart," said the boy, winking.

Tom laughed and walked up toward Broadway.

He was a little nervous about carrying so much money about with him. If he should lose it there would be no possibility of making it up. He put it into his inside coat pocket and buttoned up his coat tight.

As he was turning out of Wall Street he was addressed by a man of thirty or thereabouts, who had seen him come out of the office of Mellish & Co., though Tom did know that.

"My young friend," he said, "have you five minutes to spare?"

Tom looked up at the clock on Trinity Church and saw that it was not yet eleven o'clock.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"I see you have no watch," began the stranger.

"Is he going to give me one?" thought Tom.

"A young man of your age ought to have a watch. Now I'm going to make you an offer—a splendid offer—the chance of a life-time. Do you see that watch?"

He drew out what appeared to be a gold watch of rather a pretty pattern.

"I see it," said Tom, wondering what was to come next.

"I want to sell it. The fact is, I've got a note to meet at three o'clock, and must have some money. The watch is worth seventy-five dollars. I will sell it to you for twenty-five."

"You must be in great want of money," said Tom, not meaning to be sarcastic.

"I am; but that is not the only consideration. I really

don't need the watch, for I have another at home. Say the word, and the watch is yours at twenty-five dollars—dirt cheap, I can assure you.”

“It may be,” said Tom—he really thought it was—“but I can't afford to buy it.”

“Buy it then on speculation. Why, I venture to say you can double your money on it in a week, if you will look about a little for a purchaser who knows a good thing when he sees it.”

“Then why are you willing to sell for so small a sum?” asked our hero.

“Why? Because my commercial credit depends on my meeting my note, and credit is worth a great deal more to me than the small sum I should lose by the transaction. Then, besides, if any one is going to profit by it, I should like to have you.”

“Why?” asked Tom.

“Because you look like a gentleman. You look like a cousin of mine, now in Europe. He is a smart fellow, and very good looking,” added the stranger, meditatively.

“I wonder whether he means all that,” thought Tom, “or is he only giving me taffy.”

He looked at the watch, and it certainly did look tempting. If the money in Tom's pocket had been really his, I am inclined to think he would have bought it, but he was too honest to think for a moment of appropriating the money in his pocket.

“The watch may be a very good one,” he said, “but I can't buy it; I haven't got the money.”

"Couldn't you borrow twenty-five dollars? I don't know but I would say a little less."

"It would be of no use," said Tom, shaking his head.

The watch was galvanized, and possibly worth one-fifth as much as Tom was invited to pay for it, so that he had a narrow escape.

"I wonder if I look like a capitalist!" thought Tom. "Here, within ten minutes, I've been asked to buy a gold watch, and to lend a thousand dollars. I don't remember that anybody ever asked me anything of the kind in Wilton."

Tom walked up Broadway till he came to the Astor House.

It was but eleven o'clock, and it was not yet time to meet Darius Darke. He therefore passed on, and walked slowly up that wonderful street, watching with mingled interest and curiosity, the shops and the display of goods therein. He was especially interested in a large ready-made clothing store, and the overcoats about the door.

Tom was very much in want of an overcoat. In fact, though it was a cold day, he had none on at that very moment. He reflected that he had ten dollars of his own, the sum sent him by Darius Darke. As his traveling expenses were paid by Mr. Julian, he had not been obliged to trench on that fund.

"If I could get an overcoat for five dollars, I don't know but I'd buy one," he said to himself.

He entered, and inquired the prices of several articles in that line, but he found, to his disappointment, that ten dollars was the lowest price.

While he was standing in the store, a gentleman of moderate size made choice of one of the best overcoats sold by the firm.

"Shall we send your overcoat home?" asked the salesman.

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you may as well, though I don't expect ever to wear it again."

Then, glancing at Tom, who was on the point of leaving the store, he said:

"My boy, I see you have no overcoat. Will you consider it an insult if I offer you my old one?"

"No, sir; I would accept it, with thanks," answered Tom, quickly.

"Then it is quite at your service. You will find it not over half worn but it never fitted me, and that is why I lay it aside."

Tom lost no time in trying on the coat. It could not have fitted him better if it had been made for him. It was a gray mixed cloth, well made, and did not look to be even half-worn.

"I am *very* much obliged to you, sir," said Tom, gratefully.

"Oh, don't mention it! Glad it will be of service to you. Good-morning."

"It appears to me I am in luck," thought Tom, surveying his new overcoat complacently. "I wonder if such things often happen in New York. My visit to New York is likely to prove a success."

At five minutes to twelve Tom reached the ~~Star~~ House, and took a position on the steps.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAMP TRANSFORMED.

SEVERAL persons were standing near Tom, but no one who looked like his nocturnal acquaintance of Wilton.

"I suppose I am ahead of time," thought our hero.

Just then a well-dressed gentleman, swinging a light bamboo cane, approached and tapped Tom lightly on the arm.

"I see you are on hand my young friend," said the new-comer.

Tom glanced quickly at the man who had spoken to him.

He saw a gentleman, handsomely dressed, with a heavy gold chain depending from his waistcoat, and having every appearance of a man not only well-to-do, but rich.

"Haven't you made a mistake, sir?" he asked, in a puzzled manner.

"No, I think not. You are Thomas Thatcher, from Wilton, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you don't remember me?"

"Surely, you are not——"

"Darius Darke, at your service. So you didn't know me?"

"No, sir; you don't look much like the man I saw in Wilton the night of the fire."

"Speak low," said the other. "I don't care, for reasons of my own, to be identified as that man. We must continue our conversation in a place more retired. Come up to my room;" and he turned to enter the hotel.

"Do you live here?" asked Tom, amazed, for to live in the Astor House, as he understood, required a long purse.

"Yes; follow me."

He led the way up-stairs, and introduced Tom into a pleasant room on the third floor.

"Now, sit down, Thomas, and make yourself at home. Confess, you are surprised at my transformation?"

"I certainly am, sir."

"Did you expect to see the same disreputable-looking tramp who appeared to you on that eventful evening?"

"Well, not exactly, sir, for your sending me the ten-dollar bill—for which I thank you—showed that you must have improved in your circumstances."

"But you were not prepared for quite so great a change?" said Darius Darke, as he drew out a handsome gold watch and noted the time.

"No, sir; but then, of course, I knew very little about you."

"You thought I was burned with the old barn, eh?"

“ Yes.”

“ How did John Simpson account to his neighbors for the fire?”

“ He said he had let you sleep in the barn, and neglected to caution you about smoking. He thought you had set the building on fire in that way.”

Darius Darke laughed grimly.

“ John Simpson is a crafty man,” he said, “ but he overreached himself this time, or perhaps I should say that I overreached him. My young friend, I may say to you that I have not smoked for years—certainly, I did not smoke on that eventful night.”

“ Then how did the barn catch fire?” asked Tom, a good deal puzzled.

“ It was set on fire.”

“ Did you ——”

“ No, I did not set the barn on fire; I could have no object in doing it. *The fire was kindled by John Simpson himself.*”

“ Do you mean it?” asked Tom, his eyes wide open with surprise.

“ Yes, I mean it.”

“ But why should he want to burn down his own property?”

“ He wanted to burn me up in it,” answered Darius, coolly.

“ Why should he be so wicked?” asked Tom, more and more surprised.

“ Hark you, my young friend, John Simpson is a much more wicked and desperate man than you have an

idea of. He has reasons for wishing to get me out of the way. I know a secret of his which may give him trouble."

"How did you escape, Mr. Darke?"

Darius Darke explained to Tom how he had been induced to change his bed and remove to the stable. He explained furthermore how he had chanced to see Mr. Simpson setting fire to the building.

"I understood at once his motive," continued Mr. Darke, "and I resolved to watch the issue of this act. When the building was in flames, and the crowd around it, I saw all from the stable where I was safely hidden. It was not till all was over, and the crowd had dispersed, that I ventured to leave my retreat, and take up my line of march from the place which had come near proving my grave. I came at once to New York, and here I have been ever since. But there is one thing I have not explained to you. You wonder, no doubt, how the penniless tramp succeeded in assuming the dress and position of a gentleman in easy circumstances."

Tom admitted that this was a matter which he could not understand.

"Then I will explain. After leaving you I called upon Mr. Simpson. He did not at first recognize me, but I succeeded in recalling myself to his remembrance. He was not glad to see me. In fact, he heartily wished me at the remotest corner of the globe, I make no doubt, but he was, nevertheless, prevailed to hand over to me five hundred dollars. I see you look surprised," continued Darius Darke. "*He did not dare to do other-*

wise! I knew that about him which gave me a hold upon him. Well, it was so late that it seemed necessary to remain in Wilton till morning. In my wretched attire I could not secure a lodging at the tavern, and my kind host offered me the hospitality of his barn. I don't think at the moment he had any designs upon my life. Otherwise he would have suggested that I leave the money in his hands till the next day, and thus avoid the danger of burning it up."

"I was thinking of that, Mr. Darke," said Tom.

"It would naturally occur to any one. I suppose that after I had left him the idea of this easy way of ridding himself of me occurred to my old friend Simpson, and although he was likely to sacrifice the money, he doubtless thought it would save him from any more involuntary loans. So he went out after midnight, when I might be supposed to have fallen asleep, and kindled the fire."

"The next morning he accused me of setting the fire," said Tom.

"The scoundrel! I can see his object, however. He hates you almost as much as he does me."

"I don't see why he should hate me," said Tom.

"People are sure to hate those whom they have injured. That is a lesson I have learned in a rather varied career."

"I don't know that Mr. Simpson has tried to injure me, unless by discharging me from his employment."

"Hasn't he taken you back again?"

"No."

"I think he would like to drive you out of the village," said Mr. Darke, thoughtfully. "The sight of you is unpleasant to him."

"Why should it be?"

"Why? I will tell you presently. But I must first proceed with my own story. I arrived in New York with the five hundred dollars which my kind friend Simpson had given me. My first business, as you can well imagine, was to procure a more suitable dress; in other words, to restore myself to society by assuming a respectable appearance. That did not take long. I ran across a friend of more prosperous days, and learned that he was in business in Wall Street, as a broker. He gave me a valuable point, bought for me a line of stocks, which went up five per cent. the first day, and, in brief, has so manipulated my little fund that the five hundred dollars which I brought from Wilton have already increased to five thousand."

"I didn't think such things were possible," said Tom, dazzled by the recital of this remarkable success.

"They are possible but not probable. The probability was that I should lose all my money, or at any rate, the greater part of it, but fortune happened to be propitious, and I am a rich man, that is, I consider myself so. As three weeks since I hadn't a penny, you may consider that I am justified in my view."

"I should consider myself rich with *one* thousand dollars," said Tom.

"No doubt, but your ideas will grow. You will understand now why I venture to take a room at a fashionable hotel."

"Yes, sir."

"And now it is time to tell you my object in sending for you."

"I wish he would make me his private secretary," thought Tom.

"It was to reveal to you a secret which you ought to know—the secret of the hold I have upon John Simpson. Since he made that atrocious attempt upon my life I owe him no consideration. I do not require his help, and I declare myself his bitter foe. I forsake him, and I devote myself to you."

He spoke with energy, and Tom listened in surprise and bewilderment. He was not sure of Mr. Darke's sanity.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRAGEDY AT ROCKY GULCH.

IT IS now between eight and nine years ago," said Darius Darke, deliberately, "that I found myself at a mining district in California, then known as Rocky Gulch. With me was a man named James Gibbon. We had brought some money to California, and had greatly increased it by lucky investments in San Francisco. We were well fixed, but expected to increase our wealth in mining.

"At Rocky Gulch we found several men at work, but the richest claims belonged to John Simpson and Robert Thatcher."

"My father?"

"Yes, your father. We purchased the greater part of their claims, paying twenty thousand dollars."

"Then my father's share was ten thousand dollars?"

"Correct. It proved to be an unwise purchase. The claims were nearly exhausted, though this was unknown to your father and his partner."

"I am glad father did not know this. I should not like to think he had defrauded you."

"Your father thought he was giving us full value for our money. Presently Simpson and your father left Rocky Gulch, and a few days later my partner and I be-

came satisfied that our claims were practically exhausted. Gibbon requested me to follow your father and Simpson, and, representing the case to them, plead for a return of some part of the money. I set out.

“Fifty miles away I overtook the men of whom I was in search. It was on a bright moonlight night when I came in sight of the camp. Your father lay stretched out on the ground, and John Simpson was bending over him and rifling his pockets.”

“Is this true?” exclaimed Tom, deeply agitated.

“It is true as gospel. Beside the prostrate man was a large bag of gold dust, which Simpson had laid aside. Concealed from view behind a large tree, I watched, spell-bound, the nefarious work.”

“Why did you not dash forward, and help my father?”

“Because I was wholly unarmed, and I knew that Simpson was well armed. Again, I believed that, so far as your father was concerned, he was beyond help.”

“Was my father dead?” Tom asked, pale with emotion.

“I thought so at the time. I waited till the work of plunder was at an end, and then I uttered a shrill cry. John Simpson heard it and fled, in his fear forgetting the bag of gold dust. He never turned back, but, his fears increased by the thought of his crime, he fled as fast as his limbs could carry him.

“I approached your father, and bending over anxiously sought to discover whether he was alive or dead. I discovered that he had been stunned by a severe blow on the head, but he was still breathing. I remained beside him all night.”

“Did he die?” asked Tom, anxiously.

“No, not at once. But the heavy blow had affected his reason, and though he opened his eyes, he did not appear to recognize me, or to understand what had happened. In perplexity I left him to procure assistance and food, but I had to go farther than I anticipated. I ought to say that I took the precaution to excavate a place in the earth, and store therein the bag of gold dust.

“I was away a couple of hours. When I returned with two men whom I had found two miles away, what was my surprise to find that your father had disappeared. How I was unable to conjecture. He certainly was in no position to get away by himself. I next thought of the bag of gold. Was that gone, too? To my perplexity, I was unable to find the place where I had hidden it. If your father had remained where I left him, I should have had a clew. As it was, I was at a loss.”

“And you never found the gold dust?”

“Never. I ought to say, however, that I had but little time left for the search. I was in haste to get to San Francisco, for a good deal depended upon it. Gibson and myself paid for our claims partly in drafts upon a San Francisco bank. As soon as Simpson reached the city he would no doubt present them for payment. I wanted to stop them. I was unsuccessful. John Simpson was a few hours ahead of me. He had obtained the money, and I could find no trace of him in the city.”

“Didn’t you know where he lived?” asked Tom.

“No; if I had he would have heard from me much

sooner. It was only a few weeks ago, in fact, just before my visit to Wilton, that I learned his residence. I was down in the world, penniless, or nearly so, and, though the thought humiliated me, I determined to trade in my secret. The rest you know."

"Thank you for telling me all this, Mr. Darke," said Tom, "but I am sorry I have heard it."

"Why?"

"Because I shall hereafter think of Mr. Simpson as a murderer, without being able to do anything to repair the wrong which he inflicted upon our family. Besides, I shall always be in doubt as to what became of my father."

"Why don't you go out to California and see if you can't find out something about him, and the bag of gold dust which belonged to him?"

Tom looked at Mr. Darke in surprise.

"You don't seem to understand my position," he answered. "At present I am earning fifty cents a day. Where am I to get money enough to pay for such an expensive journey?"

"I will give you five hundred dollars toward it; that is, if you will agree to undertake the journey."

"But I have no claim upon you, Mr. Darke."

"You need not thank me. From John Simpson I obtained five hundred dollars, and it has enabled me to secure a small fortune in Wall Street. The original money I cannot keep. I should regard it as blood-money—the price of my complicity in his guilty secret. I give it to you as part of the large sum of which he

defrauded your father, for though he failed to secure the bag, he carried off a large sum that of right belongs to you and your mother to-day. Do you accept my proposal?"

Tom looked thoughtful.

"Are you willing that I should leave a part of this money for my mother to live upon while I am away?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then, if my mother does not object, I will go."

"If she objects, tell her of the bag of gold dust which is hidden somewhere at Rocky Gulch; but it will be better not to harrow up her feelings by speaking of your father's attempted murder by John Simpson."

"I will follow your advice. But how shall I explain my having the money to make this journey?"

"Tell her you have found a friend who once knew your father and who furnishes you with the necessary means. Caution her, however, not to mention this to others. It is especially necessary that it should not come to the ears of John Simpson, or he will do what he can to thwart you. And now for the money."

Darius Darke drew out a plethoric pocket-book and extracted therefrom five one hundred dollar bills.

"These are for you," he said. "Let me advise you before you leave the city, to deposit them in a savings bank. It is hardly prudent to carry so much money about."

"Can you recommend me a safe bank?"

"I will go with you, as you are unacquainted with the city."

The two left the Astor House together, and Mr. Darke led the way to a large savings bank in the Bowery, where Tom deposited all his money except a hundred dollars. This he exchanged for small bills, intending to carry them home and leave them with his mother.

As he left the bank with his pass-book in his hand, he felt almost bewildered with the sudden change in his circumstances.

Thrusting his hands into the inner pocket of his overcoat to place the pass-book therein, his hand came in contact with a package of papers. In surprise he opened it, and found it to contain valuable securities.

“What have you got there?” asked Darke.

“They must belong to the gentleman who gave me the overcoat!” answered Tom.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM'S VISIT TO PEARL STREET.

LET ME look at the papers," said Mr. Darke.
As he did so he whistled.

"Tom," he said, "this small bundle of papers is worth ten thousand dollars."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Tom, in amazement.

"Yes; I have made a rough estimate of their value. Now what are you going to do with them?"

"Return them, of course."

"I thought you would say so. Luckily you will have no difficulty about it. On the envelope is the owner's name and address—Samuel Perkins, No. 597 Pearl Street."

"I will go there at once," said Tom, promptly.

"Do so. The owner will be anxious if he has discovered his loss. When shall I see you again?"

"I will come to the city day after to-morrow."

"I shall want to see you. I shall still be at the Astor House."

While Tom is on the way to Pearl Street, we will precede him.

Mr. Perkins, on his return to his office, was for an hour or two engaged in business duties. Then a busi-

ness friend, with whom he was also socially intimate, came in, and they found time for a chat.

"By the way, Darrell," said Mr. Perkins, "I have been making a purchase. What do you say to my new overcoat?"

"It seems a very good one. Where did you buy it?" Mr. Perkins told him.

"I bought it ready made, contrary to my usual custom, but it fits as snugly as a kid glove."

"Where is the old one. If you have no use for it, I would like it for a poor man of my acquaintance."

"Too late, Darrell. I gave it away in the store."

"How was that?"

"I saw a bright-looking boy pricing a coat. He was apparently a country boy, and had no outer garment. You know I am not very gigantic; so, concluding that my old coat would fit him, I offered it, and it was gratefully accepted."

"Then I am too late. By the way, I hope there was nothing in the pockets?"

He was startled at the effect of his words. Mr. Perkins jumped to his feet, while a look of absolute dismay overspread his face. He plunged both hands hastily into the pockets of his new coat, and exclaimed:

"What a cursed fool I have been!"

"What's the matter, Perkins?" asked his friend.

"The matter? Matter enough! In the pocket of the coat I gave away was a package of securities amounting to about ten thousand dollars in value."

"Good heavens!"

"And they didn't belong to me. They belong to my ward. I got them out of the safe deposit vaults to-day."

"That *is* serious. Do you know where the boy lives?"

"I don't know his name."

Darrell whistled.

"Are the securities negotiable?" he asked.

"A part of them."

"I wish I could advise you what to do. Was your name on the envelope?"

"Yes," answered Perkins, brightening at the suggestion!

"It is too much to hope the boy will return them to you."

"I don't know about that. He looked honest. He is a boy in whom I should have considerable confidence," said the merchant, slowly.

Darrell shook his head.

"Your only hope is to offer a liberal reward. I advise you to insert an advertisement in the papers offering a reward of—say five hundred dollars."

"I'll do it."

Mr. Perkins seized a pen, and proceeded to draw up such an advertisement as his friend had suggested, when the door of the office opened, and Tom walked quietly into the room.

"Mr. Perkins," said he, "I have found something which belongs to you."

The merchant looked up. No sooner did he see and

recognize Tom than he sprang vivaciously from his chair.

“Did you find the papers?” he asked.

“Here they are, sir.”

“There, Darrell, what did I tell you?” he demanded, triumphantly. “Didn’t I say the boy would prove honest?”

“One case in a hundred.”

“I hope you didn’t think I would keep the papers after you had been so kind as to give me the overcoat!” said Tom, hastily. “I am not so mean as that. I would have come sooner, but it was only about fifteen minutes ago that I found the package.”

Mr. Perkins nodded his head in vigorous approval.

“Do you hear that, Darrell?” he asked. “Did you know the value of these papers?” he asked of Tom.

“Yes, sir; a gentleman of my acquaintance told me they were worth about ten thousand dollars.”

“Very correct. Do you know what I was about to do when you came in?”

“No, sir.”

“I had just discovered my loss. I was writing an advertisement offering a reward of five hundred dollars if you would bring them back.”

“I hope you don’t think I needed a reward for doing my duty.”

“Some boys would.”

“I am not one of that kind,” said Tom, proudly.

“I am now willing to pay you that reward. You have relieved my mind of a great load.”

"I will not accept a dollar, sir," said Tom, firmly.

"Yet I judge that you are a poor boy?"

"Poor, but honest."

"Where do you live?"

"In Wilton, about thirty miles from the city."

"Do you want a place?"

"This morning I should have said yes. Now, I think I have other plans."

"What are they?"

As briefly as he could, Tom explained what he intended to do.

Samuel Perkins listened with attentive interest.

"How soon do you propose to start for California?" he asked.

Tom answered that he should try to get away in a few days, if he found that his mother had no objection.

"Before you start, come to me; I may have a business commission for you."

"Very well, sir. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go. I want to catch the next train for Wilton."

"A moment. What is your name?"

"Thomas Thatcher."

"I will remember it. Good-by, and good luck to you."

"That's a boy of sterling merit," said Perkins. "If he does not go to California I will give him a good place."

"If you have no place for him, I will engage him. It is not every boy who would so resolutely refuse five hundred dollars."

"You are right there."

As for Tom, it did not strike him that he had done anything especially worthy of commendation in rejecting the reward which Mr. Perkins offered him. He had been so strictly trained in honesty that it had not occurred to him as possible that he could act in any other way than to return the papers. But for the unexpected good fortune which had come to him from another quarter, he would have accepted gratefully the offer of a place in Mr. Perkins' establishment. As it was, he felt it his duty to go to California, and clear up, if he could, the mystery of his father's fate.

When he entered the yard of his humble home, Tillie espied him from the window, and her sharp young eyes instantly took notice of the overcoat.

"Where could he have got it?" thought his mother.

Tillie was asking that question of Tom himself a minute afterward.

"Girls are always curious," he answered, good-humoredly. "I picked it off a bush."

"Now, Tom, don't tease me so."

"A gentleman made me a present of it."

"I wish he'd give me a cloak, then."

"You and mother shall both have cloaks, and dresses, too," answered Tom, cheerfully.

"You speak as if you had come into a fortune, Tom," said his mother.

"I have been very lucky to-day. I will tell you all about it presently."

Tom preferred to say what he had to his mother alone, as his sister was too young to be trusted with a secret.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOM GAINS A VICTORY.

GO TO California!" exclaimed Mrs. Thatcher, in dismay, when Tom had finished his story. "You surely can't be in earnest, Tom?"

"Why, not, mother? Remember, there is a bag of gold dust somewhere there which belongs to us. If my father knows what is going on here, don't you think it would be a relief to him to know that this money was in our hands? When he was gathering it he was thinking of us. It was for our sakes that he went so far from home, and thus far his labor has brought us no advantage."

Tom spoke earnestly, and his mother was somewhat impressed by his words. Still she had a mother's reluctance to have her only boy leave her on a distant trip for an uncertain period.

"Of course, I wouldn't go if you and Tillie were likely to suffer," continued Tom. "But I shall be able to leave with you as much money as I earned in the whole of last year, besides buying you some dresses, and so on, before I go."

"I can't understand where all this money comes from, Tom," said Mrs. Thatcher, in a puzzled tone.

"I am not at liberty to tell you, mother; I can only

say it is given me for the special purpose of making this journey."

"But who could possibly care so much about your going to California."

"It is some one who once knew father, and knew about the bag of gold dust being concealed."

"It seems very strange."

"So it does, mother. It seems very strange to me. But shall I reject a piece of good fortune because it seems strange?"

"I can't look on it as good fortune to be separated from my boy."

"Of course, mother, we shall miss each other, but a year or perhaps less, will soon pass, and we can be together once more. I will hire a boy to come and prepare the wood and do errands for you. Charlie Bates will be willing to do it, I know, and I will make it worth his while."

"It won't be necessary, Tom. If you go away I shall not live in this house."

"Not live in this house!" exclaimed Tom, surprised in turn.

"No, I have other views," said Mrs. Thatcher, in a tone which quite mystified Tom.

"While you have been away, Tom, I, too, have had a proposal made to me."

"A proposal, mother! Surely you will not marry again?"

"You are a foolish boy," said his mother, smiling. "The proposal is of quite a different character."

“What is it, mother?”

“You remember that Mr. Hiram Bacon lost his wife a year since,” said Mrs. Thatcher. “Since then his daughter has been keeping house for him. Now she is to be married, and will move out of town. He came here this afternoon to ask me to become his housekeeper.”

“But what is to become of Tillie?”

“She is to be with me. He says he would rather have her than not, as he likes to see children about the house. He also offered to take you, and let you pay your expenses by working on the farm. He agreed to pay you a dollar a week, besides board. Now, Tom, think how comfortable we might all be, if you would give up the idea of going to California, and settle down here.”

“I shouldn’t like it, mother. Farming wouldn’t suit me. If I give up the plan of going to California, I have a situation offered me in New York.”

“Accept it then, Tom. It will be much better for you than going so far from home.”

But Tom finally persuaded his mother that it would be expedient for him to go to California, promising when he returned to settle down near home.

That same evening he went to the minister’s house, and handed over the money which he had collected, and resigned his position as copyist.

“I am glad you have found some better employment, my boy,” said the minister. “As to this plan of yours I think it rather hazardous for a boy of your age to go so far away; but I pray God to bless you, to fulfill your desires, and bring you safe home!”

Tom had imparted his designation confidentially to the minister's family, knowing the kind interest which they each and all, felt in him, but he had no intention of making it generally known, as it would then reach the ears of John Simpson, and probably excite his suspicions.

It was not possible, however, wholly to suppress the news of his departure. In due course, therefore, it came to the knowledge of Rupert Simpson, who undertook to learn more from Tom himself.

"Is it true that you are going to leave Wilton?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Tom, briefly.

"I thought you'd have to. You couldn't get work here."

"I can do better elsewhere."

"Where are you going?"

"To New York, first."

"Oh, I see—you'll set up as a bootblack," sneered Rupert.

"If I did I would offer you a partnership."

"Don't be impudent," said Rupert, reddening.

"I generally repay compliments in kind, Rupert. As you are so anxious about my prospects, I may say that a Pearl Street merchant has offered me a place."

"Then you expect to live in New York—as long as you keep your situation?"

"No; I shall travel at first."

"Indeed! Where?"

"I shall probably go West."

This was all that Rupert was able to elicit from Tom.

He faithfully reported it to his father. John Simpson was relieved to hear that Tom was to leave Wilton. Had he known that our hero was going to California his feeling would have been very different. As it was, he concluded that Tom had undertaken the business of traveling-agent for some firm.

“He won’t make his fortune at it,” said he, shrugging his shoulders. “It’s a poor business.”

“I am glad of that,” said Rupert. “I hope he’ll come back in rags.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

DO THE DEAD LIVE?

I WISH you were going with me, Mr. Darke," said Tom, as he sat in that gentleman's room at the Astor House, making his farewell call.

He had made all arrangements, seen his mother and sister installed in the comfortable farm-house of Hiram Bacon, had procured a modest outfit, and was ready to start for the Pacific coast. He felt that it was a great undertaking for a boy of fifteen, and he longed for the championship of some one whom he knew, even but slightly.

Darius Darke shook his head.

"I have had enough of California!" he answered. "There I met with sorrow and losses. It will be long before I care to see it again."

"Shall you stay in New York, Mr. Darke?"

"In a week from to-day I start for Europe, to be absent for a year."

Tom looked surprised.

"Are you going on business?" he asked.

"No. I am going on a tour of pleasure. It seems strange to me, who have been a penniless tramp for two years, that I can really afford this journey."

"You must enjoy it all the better for that," said Tom.

"I do. By the way, my good fortune still follows me. I have been following up the stock market, and the tide has been with me. I am now worth [ten thousand dollars."

"It seems like magic," said Tom.

"I have played a hazardous game, and won. Now I have withdrawn for good. This very morning I invested my money in good dividend-paying stocks, and now I can leave America with a mind free from anxiety. By the way, if you need more money, draw on me."

"Thank you sir," said Tom, gratefully, "but there is no occasion. My mother and sister are well provided for, and I shall only need to leave a hundred dollars with them. I have spent sixty for clothes for them and myself, and that leaves me three hundred and forty."

"Shall you take it all with you?"

"No; I shall leave a hundred and fifty in the bank, and get along on the remainder. I don't want to spend it all on what may prove a wild-goose chase."

"You are prudent; but are you not afraid of running short of money?"

"No; I am going to work my passage partly. I am in no hurry. If I can get anything to do on the way I will accept it."

"I think you'll get along," said Darius Darke. "You have good common sense ideas. By the way, hasn't John Simpson got a son?"

"Yes, a boy of about my own age."

"What sort of a boy is he?"

"He is not a friend of mine, and I might speak too

harshly of him," said Tom. "He knows that his father is rich and he puts on airs accordingly."

"How does he treat you?"

"He looks down upon me—says I am a low shoe-pegger. He doesn't think me fit to associate with him."

"The time may come when he will have to look up to you. Patience, Tom! You may be as rich as his father some day."

"I don't want to be rich unless I can get money honestly."

"Stick to that, Tom. I haven't led a model life. I've made mistakes, and committed errors, but I don't look upon them now as I once did. I have turned over a new leaf, and I mean to do what I can to redeem myself."

Before the two new friends parted, Darius Darke gave Tom an address in New York, where he could direct any communication. It was at the office of Mellish & Co, already referred to.

"They will have orders to forward letters home," said Darke. "If you get into trouble, or if you make any important discoveries write to me. Bear in mind that I am deeply interested in your success."

"Thank you, Mr. Darke."

"Now, good-by, Tom, and God bless you."

Leaving Tom till the next chapter, we devote a few additional lines to Darius Darke and John Simpson.

The shoe manufacturer was thoroughly persuaded that his dreaded enemy was safely and finally disposed of. He entertained not a doubt that he had perished in

the flames that consumed the old barn. True, he had not been able to discover any bones among the ruins, and this puzzled him considerably.

"I suppose," he concluded, "that the fire must have been so intense that the bones as well as the flesh were entirely consumed. It must have been so. The man had no chance to escape, or, if he had, I should have heard from him before now. I have seen the last of him."

This thought gave John Simpson no little satisfaction. It might have been supposed that he would feel some compunction in reflecting upon the awful fate to which he had consigned a fellow-creature; but a cowardly man becomes easily cruel, and the feeling of relief outweighed the horror of the crime.

It was during the last week of Darius Darke's stay in New York that John Simpson came up to transact a little business. It was on Wednesday, and, having time to spare, he dropped into a matinee performance at one of the theaters.

In the interval between the second and third acts he chanced to look around him, and his heart gave a painful bound as his eyes rested on a man of about his own age seated not far from him.

"Do the dead live?" he asked himself, in dismay. "That looks like the man who I thought was burned in my barn."

John Simpson had a good memory for faces, and though Mr. Darke was handsomely dressed, and looked like a man of ample means, very different from the dilapidated tramp who had called upon him three weeks

before, an uneasy suspicion haunted him that this was the man.

"I must satisfy myself," he said. "I must find out if that is the man who called upon me in Wilton."

He left his seat, and advanced to where Darius Darke was sitting.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "but I think you called upon me not long since."

Luckily Darius Darke had noticed his approach (till then he had not seen him) and was on his guard.

"Sare," he said, in broken English, shrugging his shoulders, "I know you not. I am one Frenchman, who make one leetle visit to New York on business."

The voice which he assumed was entirely different from his own, and John Simpson was completely deceived.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I was mistaken."

"Oh, don't mention it, sare," said the assumed Frenchman, politely.

"I have had a good scare," said John Simpson, wiping the perspiration off his face. "Of course it couldn't be the man I thought, but there is certainly a strange resemblance."

CHAPTER XIX.

TOM STARTS ON HIS JOURNEY.

TOM CALLED at the office of Samuel Perkins, in Pearl Street, as requested by that gentleman.

"Well, my young friend, are you ready to go to California?" asked the merchant.

"Yes, sir."

"You would rather go than enter my employment?"

"Just at present, sir, I have a particular reason for wishing to go to California. Whenever I return I will call on you, and if you should then have a vacancy I should like to fill it."

"Good! Have you a watch?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not."

Mr. Perkins opened the drawer of his desk, and took out a neat gold watch, of Waltham manufacture, and handed it to Tom.

"You will find that useful, I fancy," he said.

"Is this for me?" asked Tom, amazed.

"It was purchased expressly for you," said the merchant.

Now there was no possession that Tom so much coveted as that of a watch, and he thanked Mr. Perkins heartily.

"No thanks are required, my young friend," said the

merchant. "I am still much in your debt for the return of my papers."

"If I hadn't returned them after you had given me the overcoat I should have been a rascal," said Tom, warmly.

"Still it was a temptation. At any rate, you are heartily welcome to the watch. I have prepared a letter to a friend of mine—a business man—in San Francisco, which I will get you to deliver whenever you reach there."

"Is it important?" asked Tom. "It may be months before I get there."

"It can wait till you reach the city. And now, my young friend, as I am writing letters to go to Europe by to-morrow's steamer, I must ask you to excuse me. Give me your hand. I wish you all sorts of good luck. Good-by! Don't forget to report to me whenever you come back to New York."

The very first thing Tom did when he reached the street was to look at his new watch. He regarded it with pride and satisfaction, and I will not venture to say how many times he took it out during the first twenty-four hours. Attached to it was a plain gold chain. Opening it Tom saw that his name was engraved inside. This made it all the more desirable.

"I wish mother and Tillie could see my new watch," he thought. "I've a great mind to go up to Wilton this afternoon and show it to them."

But on second thoughts he decided not to do this. It would only render necessary a second leave-taking, and

this would be painful. He decided that it was better to get started as soon as possible on his trip to the Pacific coast.

There were two ways to go to California—across the continent, or by steamer *via* Panama. Tom was somewhat in doubt upon which to decide. The shortest route would be by steamship, for at that period the Union Pacific Railroad had not been built, or even commenced. If Tom had been in haste he would have decided in favor of the steamer, but he was in no especial hurry; besides, he thought there would be a possibility of finding some employment or agency which would pay a part of his expenses, if he went by land. He was also influenced in part by a desire to see the broad plains and prairies of the far West, and he had no objection to a few adventures on the way. It was not quite so easy or safe to go to California in those days. On the way were hostile Indians, desperate adventurers, highwaymen, and a chance of being snowed up in the winter season.

After some inquiry, therefore, Tom decided to buy a ticket to St. Louis, and when he arrived there take a short time to study the route and arrange his subsequent plans. Possibly he might secure some business commission or agency there, which would enable him to pay a part or the whole of his traveling expenses.

CHAPTER XX.

A HOTEL ACQUAINTANCE.

ON ARRIVING at St. Louis Tom sought out a modest inn known as the St. Louis Hotel. The price per day was but a dollar, and this served as a recommendation in his eyes. The war had not yet enhanced the price of all articles, and even the best hotels charged but two dollars and a half, where now the tariff is four and five dollars.

Tom had two objects in view. He wanted to see St. Louis, and he thought it possible that he might find some employment—of what sort he had no very definite idea.

He devoted a day or two to visiting different parts of the city, regarding everything with the fresh interest of a boy who was making his first journey. He, too, though he did not know it, excited the attention and curiosity of some of the guests of the hotel.

One evening, as he sat in the public room, reading a New York paper which he had picked up from the table, he was accosted by a young man of thirty or thereabouts, tall, and rather loosely put together, who was smoking a cigar. He tendered another to Tom, with the remark:

“Will you try a cigar, young man?”

“No, thank you, sir, I don’t smoke,” answered Tom, politely.

“You’ll learn by and by. Been long in the city?”

“Not long.”

“Going further West?”

“I expect to go to California.”

“Indeed! Anybody with you?”

“No, I am traveling alone.”

The young man, for some reason, seemed to hear this with satisfaction.

“Got any friends out there—in California, I mean?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Going out to make your fortune, I reckon?”

“I will if I get the chance,” said Tom, smiling.

Of course he was not disposed to communicate his real errand to a stranger.

“Shall you start soon?”

“I don’t know exactly. I am trying to find something that will help to pay my expenses,” said our hero.

He had no objection to admitting this, for his new acquaintance might possibly put him in the way of procuring such employment as he desired.

“Do you think that would be possible?” he asked.

“I am not sure about that. Would you expect all your expenses to be paid, or have you money enough to pay a part of them?”

The stranger seemed interested to hear Tom’s answer.

“Oh, I have some money of my own,” answered Tom, quickly. “I have enough to carry me through, but I want to save some of it.”

"So, so," returned the young man, seeming gratified.
"I am glad to hear that."

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Because a friend of mine and myself propose to start for California in two or three days, and we would like to engage a boy to go with us, and do any little services that we might require. Now, I don't want to make any promises, but I will speak to my friend, and see if he is willing to join me in engaging you."

"Thank you," said Tom, joyfully, for he had not expected so soon to make an engagement.

"Oh, there will be no occasion to thank me; it will be a mutual arrangement," said the other, waving his hand. "What is your name?"

"Tom Thatcher."

"I suppose you can bring recommendations of honesty, and so on?"

"I don't know as I can give you any recommendations, for I know no one in St. Louis," said Tom, "but I hope you will not doubt my honesty."

"I don't speak for myself," said the stranger. "I am easily satisfied. My friend is more particular, but I think he will accept my guarantee. If now you had any certificate from your minister at home. By the way, where do you come from?"

"From Wilton, in the State of New York."

"By the way, what will be your views in regard to pay?"

"I haven't thought of that," answered Tom, truly.

"I suppose not. I will tell you my own idea, but, of course, shall have to consult my friend."

“Certainly, sir.”

“We would require you to pay your own traveling expenses, but we would allow you fifteen or twenty dollars a week salary. How does that strike you?”

“I didn’t expect so much,” answered Tom, honestly, much elated, indeed, by what he regarded a munificent offer.

“I am willing to agree to twenty, but I can’t speak for my friend.”

“I will agree to fifteen,” said Tom.

“Then, my young friend, we will confer together again. I may be able to see my friend this evening and arrange matters. Suppose you meet me in this place to-morrow, say at ten o’clock in the forenoon.”

“All right, sir.”

The young man arose, and left the hotel.

Tom was quite elated at the thought that he was likely to make so profitable an engagement.

“Fifteen to twenty dollars a week!” he said to himself. “That will be lucky and no mistake! It’s rather an improvement on three dollars a week. I hope I sha’n’t lose the place from having no recommendations. If they will only wait I am sure Mr. Julian would send me one.”

It never occurred to Tom that the stranger who proposed to employ him might stand in greater need of a recommendation, and might find it considerably more difficult to obtain one.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOM'S NEW EMPLOYER.

AS YET Tom did not know the name of the man from whom he hoped for an engagement. He afterward learned that he went by the name of Percy Burnett.

Of course Tom kept his appointment punctually the next morning. He was too anxious about the engagement to risk losing it by any negligence.

About a quarter after ten Mr. Burnett lounged into the hotel office.

"You are on hand, I see," he said, taking an arm-chair near the settee on which Tom was sitting.

"Yes, sir."

"I have seen my friend about the little matter I spoke of yesterday," said Mr. Burnett, "but I find he won't be ready to start for California for four weeks."

Tom's countenance fell. He had been buoyed up by the thought of the engagement, and now all seemed to be over.

Percy Burnett watched our hero's expressive face, and read his disappointment.

He proceeded :

"I thought at first that we should have to give up our

plan," he said, "but on second thoughts I may still be able to carry it out."

Tom's face brightened.

"I am not willing to wait here four weeks for my friend," continued Mr. Burnett. "It would only be a waste of valuable time. I should be glad to have you go with me as a—a sort of private secretary, but I can't afford to pay you as much as I mentioned yesterday. I think I said twenty dollars, did I not?"

"Fifteen to twenty dollars," corrected Tom.

"Just so. That would be too much for me to pay alone."

"I would go for less," said Tom, eagerly.

"I suppose you would hardly agree to say twelve?"

Twelve! It was just four times as much as Tom had ever hitherto received, and he quickly answered:

"I will be willing to go for that."

"Give me your hand, Tom," said Mr. Burnett, appearing to be much pleased. "You are a gentleman, and I engage you on the spot. How soon can you go?"

"I can go immediately," answered Tom, promptly.

"That is well. You won't complain then if I ask you to be ready to-morrow?"

"I will be on hand, sir."

"Very well, meet me here to-morrow at the same hour."

Mr. Burnett rose, and shaking hands with Tom, left the room.

Tom reflected with great satisfaction on the engagement he had made. To be sure he had his own travel-

ing expenses to pay, but these would be largely diminished by the weekly salary he was to receive. How long it would take to go across the plains he had no idea, but whether long or short, it appeared as if he had made an excellent arrangement.

The next day the two started together from St. Louis. Mr. Burnett had a small satchel with him, which he handed to Tom to carry.

"This will be the first of your duties," he said, with a smile.

Tom took the satchel cheerfully.

"I must ask you to be very careful of it," said Mr. Burnett. "It contains articles of considerable value."

"I will be very careful, sir."

"It is chiefly jewelry and watches," explained his employer. "I am carrying them to San Francisco, as I expect to realize large profits on them. I should think there might be five thousand dollar's worth in that satchel. You wouldn't suppose it, would you?"

"No, I should not," said Tom, sincerely.

"You understand now why I asked if you could bring any recommendations of honesty," said Mr. Percy Burnett.

"Yes, sir."

"I am trusting you with a very valuable package. Now what is to prevent your giving me the slip, and carrying it off?"

"I hope you don't think there is any danger, Mr. Burnett!"

"None at all. I have perfect confidence in your

honesty. If I had not, I certainly would not have dreamed of engaging you."

"Thank you, sir."

"My friend would probably have been more particular. He has a more suspicious temperament. For my part, I pride myself on my skill in reading faces, even when seen for the first time. Now, when I saw you, I said to myself: 'That is an honest, reliable boy. I never saw him before, but I can tell by his appearance that he has been well brought up and is honest as the day is long.'"

Tom was gratified by this compliment, and said:

"Thank you, sir; I am sure you won't regret your confidence in me."

This conversation took place in the cars. They were on their way to St. Joseph—popularly called St. Joe—a place from which most parties started on their overland trips to California.

Tom paid his own fare, as had been arranged between them, and though the disbursement was considerable, consoled himself with the thought that, at the end of a week, he would be in receipt of twelve dollars from his employer.

Indeed, Mr. Burnett had very considerately offered to pay the first week's salary in advance, but this Tom had declined.

"I would rather not receive the money until it is earned," he said.

"By the way, Tom, that is a very pretty watch and chain of yours," said Mr. Burnett.

"Yes, sir, so I think."

"How much did you pay for it, if I may venture to ask?"

"I did not buy it, sir. It was made a present to me just before I left New York."

"A very nice present, upon my word. I advise you to be very careful of it. It might excite the cupidity of some dishonest person who might be tempted to steal it."

"Yes, sir; I will be very careful of it. Thank you for the hint."

"I once had a watch and chain stolen myself," continued Mr. Burnett. "It was in the cars, too. A well-dressed person sat down beside me, and engaged me in conversation. I suspected nothing, but shortly after he had left me at a way-station I discovered that my watch and chain were gone."

"Did you never recover them?" asked Tom, with interest.

"Never. I suppose the fellow pawned or sold them."

They were nearing St. Joe when a rakish-looking fellow entered the cars, and seemed to recognize Burnett.

"How are you, old fellow?" he said.

Percy Burnett glanced instinctively at Tom, and answered, stiffly:

"Very well, thank you. This is my friend, Mr. Thatcher."

"How are you, Thatcher?" asked the new-comer, laughing. "I say, Jim, what's your game?"

"I really don't understand you," said Burnett.

"Come into the next car with me a moment."

The other laughed, and followed Burnett.

“I don’t much fancy that fellow,” thought Tom.
“Why did he call Mr. Burnett Jim? His name is Percy.”

He was still wondering that his employer should have such a friend, when Burnett came back.

CHAPTER XXII.

A ROUGH DIAMOND.

RATHER a rough fellow that," said Percy Burnett, as he resumed his seat beside Tom.

"Yes, sir."

"A rough diamond, I call him," said Burnett.

Perhaps he saw by Tom's face that his friend had not struck his young secretary as a diamond, rough or otherwise, for he proceeded:

"He has sterling qualities, Jack has, and an excellent heart. He is not refined, I grant. Indeed, he is rather coarse—never moved in good society, but he'll stand by a friend through thick and thin. Why, he once watched beside my sick bed, when I had a fever, day and night, and wouldn't leave me till I was out of danger."

"That was very kind," Tom was forced to admit.

"Yes, I shall never forget it. We became very intimate. You may have noticed that he called me Jim?"

"Yes, I did."

"The fact is, he took a dislike to the name of Percy. I believe he had been injured by some party of that name. So he asked if he might call me Jim, and I consented. Names don't matter much if the heart's in the right place."

"No, I suppose not," answered Tom, who was satisfied with the explanation.

"I haven't seen Jack for a good while," said Mr. Burnett, "and he was curious to know what I was doing. He expressed himself rather oddly."

"Yes, sir."

"The fact is, Tom—and I suppose you may have guessed—I am a dealer in watches and jewelry. I was in business in Cincinnati till recently, but decided to remove to San Francisco, upon learning that there is an excellent opening there for a man in my business. A small part of my stock I have in the satchel which you are carrying. Did you ever think of learning the jewelry business?"

"No, I never thought of it," Tom replied.

"When we get to San Francisco I may be able to offer you inducements."

"I shall want to travel about the State a little first," said Tom. "Thank you for the offer, though."

"Oh, well, I shall be in a hurry. Will you go to the mines?"

"I think so."

"Perhaps I may go, too. I have never been in any mining district, and I have a curiosity to see what it looks like. Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you."

"Oh, I forgot you don't smoke. I suppose I must go into the smoking-car—be back soon."

The reader may have a curiosity to know what passed between Percy Burnett and his friend, the rough diamond, when they left the car together.

"Who's that boy you've got with you, Jim?" asked Jack.

"A young man who is under my guardianship," said Mr. Burnett, hesitating.

Jack laughed.

"A pretty sort of guardian you'll make," he said, winking at his friend.

"Don't speak so loud, Jack. You'll attract attention."

"And that's just what you don't want, I reckon."

"Well, yes, if you will have it so."

"Come, now, tell me what's your game anyhow? Is the boy rich?"

"No."

"Then what good can he do you?"

"He has a little money," said Percy Burnett, cautiously.

"It won't be his long, then."

"You wrong me—indeed, you do. I am taking him out as far as Salt Lake City, and my expenses are to be paid by his friends."

This was the best story that Mr. Burnett could devise upon the spur of the moment.

"All I can say is that his friends can't know much about you. You didn't mention to them the term you had served in——"

"Hush!" said Burnett, looking about him in alarm. "Don't you know any better than to blurt out such things where people may hear?"

"Well, I'll keep mum for your sake."

"Do so, and I'll make it worth your while, Jack."

"When?"

"When I return to St. Joe."

"When will that be?"

"Before long."

"No, it won't, if you go all the way to Salt Lake City."

"Perhaps I may not go all the way there," said Percy, in a low voice.

"Oh, I see!" responded Jack, winking. "I begin to see your game."

"You were always a shrewd, long-headed fellow, Jack."

"So I am," said Jack, evidently gratified by the praise.

"Of course, when I am in funds——"

"As you expect to be before long."

"Well, as I expect to be before long, if you don't interfere with my plans. I shall remember my friends."

"Enough said! Now, honor bright! how soon do you expect to get back to St. Joe?"

"Perhaps in two or three days."

"You won't bring the boy back with you?"

"Not if he wants to go on."

"I say, Jim, I'm hard up. Let me have five dollars now."

"I assure you, Jack, I am not in a situation to part with any money just now."

"I must have it," said Jack, significantly.

"Oh, well, if you must," and Mr. Percy Burnett

drew it from his vest pocket, and reluctantly put it into the hand of the "rough diamond."

"It's rough luck meeting that fellow!" he muttered as he returned to his young secretary, "I was hoping I should not meet a soul that knew me till this job was fairly off my hands. Jack is always hard up, but it wasn't safe to refuse him. I must not allow him to have any conversation with the boy. I will take care to steer clear of him when I come back this way."

It was clear that Mr. Percy Burnett was not so much attached to the "rough diamond" as he led Tom to suppose.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PETER BRUSH, THE HUNTER.

ARRIVED at St. Joe, the town was found to be crowded, owing to some local celebration. At the first two hotels our two travelers were unable to gain admittance. At the third they were obliged to share a room with a third guest, already in possession.

Tom did not particularly care, as long as there was a comfortable bed to sleep in, but Mr. Burnett seemed very much annoyed.

"Can't you do any better for us?" he asked the clerk.

The clerk shook his head.

"I don't know about taking the room; I don't like to be with a stranger."

"Just as you like, major," said the clerk, indifferently. "We sha'n't have any trouble in letting the room."

It is a Western fashion to bestow titles on strangers, and this accounts for Burnett being dubbed major.

Purvey Burnett hesitated, but just then another party applied for a room, and he hastily agreed to take it.

The room was a fair one. It contained two beds, one large and one small one. Naturally Tom and his new acquaintance selected the large one. The other was to

be occupied by the stranger, who proved to be a stout man of middle age, who looked as if he had led an out-of-door life. A little conversation revealed the fact that he, too, was on his way to California.

"That's lucky," he said, in a free, cordial way, "why can't we hitch horses?"

"I don't understand you," said Burnett, coldly.

"I mean, why can't we go together? We shall find it more social."

"I will think of it," said Burnett, curtly.

Tom was pleased with the appearance and manner of their fellow room-mate, who gave his name as Peter Brush. He was not a man of education, but he seemed good-natured and gifted with a fund of common sense. He was a practical hunter, was familiar with the great middle region over which they must pass on their way to California, and told Tom a good many stories of his adventures upon the plains.

"Have you ever been to California?" asked Tom.

"There you've got me," answered Mr. Brush. "I've been as far as Utah, but I haven't been any farther. I 's'pose I should have gone, but my wife was kind of sickly, and I didn't want to be gone so long. Now she's dead, and I've got nothing to tie me down."

"Haven't you any children?" asked our hero.

"Yes, I've got a youngster about thirteen. I've left him at school in St. Louis. He's stayin' with an uncle—his mother's brother. I want him to have more learnin' than his father. As for me, I never attended school but two years, and the most I can do is to read and

write, and I'm no great shakes at either. But that's no reason why little Ben shouldn't be a scholar. Have you been to school much?"

"Considerably," answered Tom.

"And I suppose you're a good hand at writin' an' cipherin', and so on?"

"Pretty good," answered Tom, modestly.

"And you're goin' out to Californy to make your fortune?"

"I hope to do something that way."

"And that gentleman with you—is he an old friend?"

"I am working for him; I am his private secretary."

Peter Brush looked amazed.

"What does he want of a private secretary when he is crossing the plains?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly."

"What do you do, if you don't mind tellin'?" asked Mr. Brush.

"I carry a satchel," said Tom.

He was about to add that the satchel contained a stock of jewelry, when he reflected that this would be imprudent, and that his employer would not like him to be so communicative.

"Does he pay you much for that?" asked the hunter, after a pause.

"Twelve dollars a week."

"And your traveling expenses?"

"No; I pay those myself."

Peter Brush whistled softly and looked thoughtful. He evidently thought the arrangement a queer one.

“Then you have money enough for your expenses?” he said.

Tom answered in the affirmative. He knew that he was perhaps unwise in so far trusting a stranger, but he could not, for the life of him, distrust the honest-looking hunter.

This conversation took place while Mr. Burnett was down-stairs, smoking a cigar and looking about the town.

On his return he seemed to view with displeasure the intimacy between Mr. Brush and his young secretary, and took the occasion of Mr. Brush leaving the room, to say:

“Don’t get too intimate with that man. I don’t like his looks.”

“He seems like a good, honest fellow,” Tom could not help saying.

“Don’t trust to appearances. I’ve seen more of the world than you, and to me he looks like a rascal.”

“I don’t believe there’s anything out of the way with him,” thought Tom, but he remained silent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. BURNETT BEATS A RETREAT.

THE NIGHT passed, and the travelers breakfasted together in the plain dining-room of the inn. Tom and his employer sat together, and Peter Brush occupied a seat directly opposite Tom. He was disposed to be social, and Tom was entirely ready to respond, but Percy Burnett was reticent. He answered the hunter in monosyllables, whenever he could, and very evidently did not care to converse with him. Brush, however, was not a sensitive man, and mentally pronouncing Burnett "grouty," he kept up a conversation with Tom.

Our hero knew very well that his companion was displeased, but he felt that in such a matter as this Burnett had no business to dictate. He himself liked Brush, and saw no reason why he should not meet his friendly advances.

Just before they rose from the table, Brush said to Tom:

"When do you calculate to leave St. Joe?"

"That is as Mr. Burnett decides," answered Tom, turning to his employer.

"How soon do you calc'late to start, colonel?" asked Peter Brush.

"In two or three days," said Burnett, briefly.

Tom was rather surprised. He had not anticipated that Mr. Burnett meant to remain so long at St. Joe.

"I guess I'll wait for you," said Brush. "I did expect to go sooner, but I ain't in such a mighty hurry. I'd rather wait a little longer for the sake of having good company."

Tom smiled, and nodded in acknowledgment of the compliment. He felt glad that the hunter was to be with them, and Brush so understood it. If he had looked at Percy Burnett, he would have seen by the expression on that gentleman's face that *he* had an entirely different feeling on the subject.

No sooner had Peter Brush left the room than Percy Burnett turned toward our hero, and said, abruptly:

"You seem determined to annoy me."

"What's the matter?" asked Tom, astonished.

"I told you I didn't like that fellow."

"I know it."

"Yet you encourage him to intrude his unwelcome company upon us. You were talking with him all breakfast-time."

"Well," answered Tom, with spirit, "why shouldn't I? He was very pleasant and social, and it was only polite to answer him when he spoke to me."

"You could show by your manner that you don't relish his society," growled Burnett.

"But I do like his society," said Tom, with spirit. "You can't expect me to feel just as you do toward everybody. If you don't like him, you have a right to feel as you do. You have no right to order me to dislike him, too."

Percy Burnett was rather surprised and disconcerted by Tom's unexpected independence. He had taken him for a boy who would yield readily to his guidance, and he was not disposed even now to give up the attempt to control him.

"He is an uneducated, low fellow!" he growled. "I can't understand what pleasure you can find in such company. I don't believe he can read or write."

"Yes, he can," said Tom, "but that is about the extent of his education."

"Who told you that?"

"He told me so himself. As to being low, he doesn't look so low as the man who spoke to you in the cars."

Percy Burnett's face darkened, and he was about to speak violently, but a glance at Tom's face, which, boyish as it was, indicated no ordinary strength and firmness, led him to change his purpose.

"Jack is rough, I admit," he said, "but he's worth half a dozen of this fellow."

Tom did not agree to this, but he did not think it necessary to say so. He did not care to quarrel with Mr. Burnett, and thus lose the twelve dollars a week upon which he relied. He kept silent therefore.

For some reason or other Percy Burnett was unusually vexed and troubled at the thought of being accompanied by Brush, the hunter.

"It would spoil everything if that meddlesome fellow joins us," he said to himself. "I could beat that stubborn boy for so obstinately encouraging him to keep company with us. I must give him the slip somehow."

In the hotel yard was a stage with four horses attached. The driver was already on the box.

An idea came to Mr. Burnett.

"My friend," he said, "when are you going to start?"

"In ten minutes, general."

"Where are you bound?"

Percy Burnett learned that the destination was a point forty miles distant in Kansas. It was the first portion of the great transcontinental line, the terminus of which was San Francisco.

Mr. Burnett made up his mind at once.

He hurried into the hotel and summoned Tom.

"Be quick, boy," he said, "the stage is about ready to start."

"Are we going right off?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Yes; make haste."

"You told Mr. Brush you should not be ready for two or three days."

"I only wanted to put the fool off the scent. We are going by that stage; come on."

"All right, sir."

Tom, of course, made no opposition to Mr. Burnett's plans. It was not his place to do so. As long as he was in his employ, and accepted wages from him, he must conform to his arrangements.

In ten minutes the driver seized the reins, the stage bowled away, and Tom's face was set westward.

He felt sorry to have lost the opportunity of saying good-by to the good-natured hunter, but his mind was soon full of pleasurable excitement as the stage rumbled on its way toward the Pacific.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SOLITARY WALK.

IT WAS a long and tedious ride. The roads were not of the best—indeed they were not far from the worst—and more than once the stage had a narrow escape from tipping over.

Tom did not complain, however. He liked the excitement of the ride, and did not mind the violent jolting, though it made his limbs ache and his bones sore.

Percy Burnett grumbled enough for Tom and himself, too.

“I wouldn’t have taken this infernal stage,” he said, at a halting-place, “if I had known it would shake me to pieces.

“It is better than walking,” said one of the passengers, philosophically.

“I don’t know about that,” answered Burnett. “I would about as soon walk.”

Tom heard this, but did not think Mr. Burnett in earnest. For his own part, though an inexperienced traveler, he showed that he was already a good one, for he met, with cheerful good humor, the discomforts of the trip.

About five miles before the stage reached its destination Percy Burnett called out to the driver:

"How much further have we got to go, driver?"

"Five or six miles, sir."

"I can't stand it."

"You won't have to stand," said a good-natured fellow-passenger. "You can sit."

Percy Burnett turned upon him irritably.

"You may consider that very witty, sir," he said, "but I don't."

"No offense intended," said the other, pleasantly.

"I've a great mind to walk," said Burnett. "Driver, is it easy to find the road?"

"Yes, sir; straight ahead."

"And it's only about five miles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will walk; but I shall want company. Tom, are you tired?"

"No, sir."

"Are you willing to walk the rest of the way with me?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom, cheerfully.

He answered truly, for his limbs were cramped by sitting for many hours in one position, and he felt that it would be agreeable to limber them a little with exercise.

"I don't know but I'll join you," said a passenger.

Percy Burnett looked excessively annoyed.

"If you don't object to my company," continued the other.

"Please, yourself, sir," said Burnett in a repellent tone, which showed very clearly his aversion to the proposal.

“On the whole, I guess, I will stick by the stage,” said the other, seeing that his company would be unwelcome.

Mr. Burnett looked very much relieved.

“You can leave your baggage on the coach,” said the driver, noticing that Burnet had his bag in his hand.

“I’d rather keep it. Tom, bring yours with you.”

Of course Tom obeyed, though he did not see any advantage in burdening himself with what might just as well have gone in the coach.

“That’s an agreeable man,” said the passenger, whose overtures had been declined, after the coach drove off.

“As sweet as a crab-apple,” said the driver. “I’m glad to be rid of him.”

“The boy’s a different sort.”

“Yes, the boy’s a good fellow. Pity he’s tied to such a man.”

So the coach drove away, leaving Tom and his employer plodding along in a heavy, muddy road. It was hard work walking, but Tom did not care for that. He would like, however, to have had a more agreeable companion.

A little ahead of them was a fallen bough of a tree, separated from the parent trunk probably by some violent storm. It occurred to Tom that it would be a good idea to cut from it a stick, which might serve as a staff, and so lighten the labor of walking. He went up to the bough, therefore, and drew out a stout jack-knife, which he had in his pocket.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Burnett, quickly.

"Going to cut me a cane," replied Tom, innocently.

"I can't stop for any such nonsense," said Burnett, crossly.

"Go right on, Mr. Burnett, and I'll catch you," said Tom, good-humoredly.

"I positively forbid your cutting a cane, do you hear me?" said Burnett, angrily.

"I hear you, but I don't understand you," said Tom, considerably surprised.

"I believe I speak plain English. Leave that, and come along."

Tom began to think his employer very unreasonable, but as he accepted wages from him he did not think it wise to quarrel. So he resumed his march, but did not attempt to speak to his companion.

Presently the road entered a wood. It was already dusk, and the trees, though leafless, still contributed to deepen the darkness which surrounded them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PERCY BURNETT UNMASKS.

AS TOM plodded along beside his employer, who did not deign to utter a word, he could not help doubting whether he had done wisely in selling his independence for twelve dollars a week. Had he understood Burnett's real character and disposition, he would not have engaged with him. As matters stood he thought it best to remain for the present in his service.

"Mr. Burnett may be annoyed about something, and that may be the reason of his being so cross," Tom reflected. "To-morrow he may be different."

Tom was destined soon to be undeceived, and in a manner far from pleasant.

The wood through which they were passing was about a mile in width. When they had reached the middle point, Burnett halted.

"Stop here!" said he.

Tom looked at him in surprise. He could not conceive of any reason for stopping, unless, indeed, Mr. Burnett was tired, which was hardly probable, as they had scarcely walked a mile.

"Stop here?" he said, interrogatively.

"That is what I said."

"Very well, sir. Shall we sit down?"

There was a fallen tree lying beside the road, or rather lane, through which they were walking, and Tom made a motion to sit down.

"Never mind about sitting down," said Burnett, with an incomprehensible smile. "I want to transact a little business with you."

Tom was getting more and more at a loss to comprehend his companion's meaning, but he only said:

"Very well."

"How much money have you?" demanded Burnett.

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, with quick suspicion.

"You seem very stupid. Whatever money you have with you you may give to me. Do you hear?"

"I prefer to keep it myself," said Tom, firmly.

"And I consider it safer in my hands. Hand it over."

"I do not choose to, Mr. Burnett," said Tom, resolutely.

"Do you dare refuse?" demanded Burnett, angrily.

"Am I not your master?"

"No, sir; I have no master."

"I pay you wages. I am your employer. That is the same thing."

"It seems to me you want me to pay you wages," said Tom, shrewdly.

"Don't bandy words with me, boy; I won't allow it. Give me your money, and that quickly!"

Burnett's purpose was now plain to Tom. The man wanted to rob him. For that purpose he had inveigled

him into this lonely place, where there was little chance of his obtaining assistance. He must depend upon himself, but the chances of success were not flattering.

He was a strong boy, but Mr. Burnett was several inches taller, and had a man's strength, against which he had not much chance in a struggle. If only somebody would come along. Perhaps, if he could only prolong the conversation, some one might appear. It seemed to be the only thing he could do.

"Do you mean to rob me, Mr. Burnett?" he asked, retreating slightly.

"Well, there is no use in mincing words. That is precisely my intention."

"And was that the reason why you engaged me to go with you!"

"You've hit it, boy. Do you think I am such a fool as to pay you twelve dollars a week just to carry that little satchel?"

Tom began to suspect he was a fool.

It didn't seem reasonable that any man should be willing to pay such a salary for so small a service.

"You told me the contents were valuable," he said.

"You thought it was full of watches and jewelry," laughed Burnett.

"Yes. Didn't you tell me so?"

"To be sure I told you so. But you must not believe all you hear, youngster."

"I am not to believe you, then?"

"Not when I have a purpose to serve; but we have talked long enough. Give me your money."

Tom was pale with excitement, but his lips closed resolutely. He realized the unfortunate plight in which he would be placed if he should part with the money he had reserved for the expenses of his journey. He would be compelled to give up his project, and go home, if he were able to get home without money.

"I won't allow you to rob me," he said, firmly.

"Then," said Burnett, with an oath, "you must take the consequences.

He rushed upon Tom, and a contest ensued, in which Tom exerted himself to the best of his ability, but, as might be supposed, he was not a match for a strong man. Burnett threw him down, and by force possessed himself of our hero's money.

"Now," he said, "I will trouble you for that watch."

That was one pang the more. Tom was proud of his watch. Moreover, he valued it not a little because it was a gift from a man who had been pleased with his conduct. He regarded it, therefore, much as a school-boy regards a school-prize.

"Mr. Burnett," he said, "you have my money, and I don't know what I am going to do without it, more than a thousand miles from home. Leave me my watch at least."

"Sorry I can't oblige you," said Burnett, with an evil smile. "I want the watch myself."

"You must take it yourself, then, for I won't give it to you."

"That is what I propose to do," said Burnett, coolly, and he removed the watch in spite of Tom's resistance.

"Is that all?" asked Tom, desperately, "or would you like my coat also?"

"No, I will leave that. It wouldn't fit me."

"I suppose I ought to be thankful for that," said Tom, bitterly.

"No occasion to thank me. This is business."

"A very mean business," retorted Tom.

"Don't use your tongue too much, my young friend, or I might get mad, and give you something to remember."

"You have given me something to remember."

Burnett smiled.

"One more little operation, and I will bid you good-night."

He drew from his pocket a strong cord and proceeded to tie Tom's hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Tom, struggling.

"I don't mean that you shall follow me. To-morrow morning some one will come along and release you."

Percy Burnett had nearly accomplished his task, despite Tom's resistance, when both he and Tom were startled by the voice of one apparently close at hand:

"What are you about, you scoundrel?"

Percy Burnett turned his head suddenly, and his face paled, as he saw in the twilight a man ten paces distant, holding in his hand a revolver.

He jumped to his feet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT IS NOT to be supposed that Tom was indifferent to the sudden appearance of one who seemed sent by heaven to his help.

He looked eagerly in the direction of the new comer. The honest face and sturdy figure were not unknown to him.

“It is Mr. Brush!” he exclaimed joyfully.

“Yes,” said that individual, approaching, “it is Peter Brush. What has this rascal been up to?”

“Take care how you call me names, you clodhopper!” exclaimed Burnett, furiously, by no means pleased to see the man he had striven so hard to avoid.

“I may be a clodhopper, but I am not a scoundrel and a thief!” returned Brush.

Burnett felt that he was in a tight place. Would it be possible to deceive Mr. Brush? At any rate, he decided to try it.

“Sir,” he said forcibly, controlling his temper, “you are mistaken. I don’t blame you, for you are misled by what you have just seen.”

“If I am mistaken, perhaps you will explain why you have bound that boy, and taken his money and watch?”

“The boy is a thief, and has cheated me.”



PETER BRUSH RELEASES TOM FROM THE HANDS OF THE ROBBER.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Tom, his eyes flashing.

"Wait a minute," said Brush.

He stepped up to our hero, and drawing a knife, severed the cords that bound him, while Percy Burnett looked on in annoyance.

"Now, Tom," said Brush, "what have you got to say to this charge?"

"I say it's a lie!" asserted Tom boldly.

"Take care, you young rascal!" exclaimed Burnett, making a step toward our hero, now on his feet.

"Easy, now," said Peter Brush. "The boy's under *my* protection. Let him alone!"

"The boy's in *my* employment," said Burnett, "and I'll thank you not to interfere."

"I shall interfere all the same, if I think it necessary," said Brush, composedly.

"I am not in your employment," said Tom, facing Burnett. "I've had enough of your service."

"You say the boy is a thief," continued Brush. "Can you prove it?"

"Yes, he managed to pick my pocket of a considerable sum of money, which he has now in his possession."

"Don't believe him, Mr. Brush," said Tom.

"Easy now, Tom. How large a sum of money?" asked Brush.

That was just what Burnett could not tell, not knowing how much Tom had in his possession.

"I can't say exactly. It's over a hundred dollars," he said, after a pause.

"How about the watch? Did you have two?" for Burnett had one of his own besides the one he had taken from Tom.

"No; the watch belongs to the boy."

"Yet you took it?"

"Precisely. I took it in part compensation for the money of which he had robbed me."

"But you have the money, too."

"Who are you, anyway, and what business have you to interfere between me and my servant?" burst forth Burnett, angrily, finding himself cornered.

"Your servant!" said Tom, proudly. "I am not your servant, nor anybody's servant."

"That's a fact, Tom," said Mr. Brush. "This fellow ought to be your servant."

"If you are going to insult me, I'll leave you," said Burnett, suiting the action to the word.

"Come back, you thief!" cried Brush, covering him with his rifle.

"Do you mean to murder me?" asked Percy Burnett, alarmed.

"No, but there's a little formality you must go through before you bid us good-by."

"What is that?"

"Hand over the boy's watch and money."

"There's the watch," said Burnett, giving it back with an ill grace. "The money is mine and I will keep it."

"I don't think you will," said Brush, composedly.

"I will have you arrested for highway robbery," exclaimed Burnett, angrily.

"I don't think you will find any one to believe you, Jim Dobson."

Burnett started, and a look of dismay overspread his face.

"My name is Percy Burnett," he said, haughtily, recovering himself.

"Is it? It used to be Jim Dobson, well known to the police of Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis. You were recognized at St. Joe. Now will you hand over the money?"

With a muttered curse Burnett, *alias* Dobson, threw Tom's pocket-book on the ground.

"Now I suppose I may go," he said, sullenly.

"When the boy has examined his wallet to see if the money's all there."

"I know it is," said Tom, "he hasn't had time to open it."

"Then you can go, Mr. Dobson. Good-by! Take my advice and lead a better life in the future."

"Curse your advice!" said Burnett, as he strode rapidly away, leaving Tom and his new friend together in the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW PETER BRUSH CAME TO THE RESCUE.

WE SHA'N'T miss him much, Tom," said Brush, as Percy Burnett—as he called himself—disappeared from view.

Tom breathed a sigh of relief.

"I never want to see him again," he said.

"Nor I, unless I see him in the prisoner's dock. He's a regular rascal and no mistake. It's lucky I came up just as I did, Tom."

"If you hadn't I would have had to lie here all night, bound hand and foot."

"I am not sure but we ought to have served him as he wanted to serve you," said Mr. Brush. "It isn't too late yet—we can overtake him."

"Let him go, Mr. Brush. I don't care to be revenged upon him. He tried to rob me, but he has been defeated, thanks to you. And that reminds me—how did you happen to get here just in the nick of time? We left you this morning in St. Joe."

"Just so, my lad. It is lucky, as you say, or as you mean, anyway. Well, when I saw you last night, and found you so pleasant and social like, I took a great fancy to you. Thinks I to myself—'That boy's the right sort!'"

“Thank you for your favorable opinion, Mr. Brush.”

“You needn’t thank me, for I couldn’t help feeling the way I did. As I was goin’ the same journey, I thought I’d like to hitch to you and Dobson, though I didn’t much like him; but he seemed offish, and I saw he didn’t want me. I didn’t know why then, but I know now.”

“I was very much disappointed when Mr. Burnett hurried me away from St. Joe without seeing you.”

“So was I. I’d only gone out for half an hour to do a little shopping, thinkin’ I’d find you when I came back. Well, when I got back to the hotel, I looked round for you, and couldn’t find you. I thought maybe you’d gone out to take a walk. To make sure, I asked the stable-boy if he’d seen anything of a man and boy. He told me that you’d started off in the stage only twenty minutes ago. That took me quite aback, and I didn’t know what to do. I knew well enough what that rascal did it for. He wanted to get me off the track. Now, Tom, I’m a determined sort of man—kinder stubborn, I expect—and when I found how much he wanted to separate us, I was bound to defeat his plans, if it cost me a hundred dollars, partic’larly after a little discovery I made.”

“What was that, Mr. Brush?” asked Tom.

“I’ll tell you. A gentleman who was standin’ by, and heard what I asked the stable-boy, said:

“‘Do you know them parties you are askin’ about?’

“‘No, I only met ’em last evenin’.

“‘Well, the man’s a first-class rascal and swindler.’

“ ‘You don’t say!’ I answered. ‘Who is he, and what do you know about him?’

“ ‘It’s Jim Dobson, the famous confidence man and forger. He’s served more than one term in the State prison. He isn’t a very good companion for that boy that’s traveling with him.’

“ ‘I was struck all of a heap when I heard that, Tom. I knew what you told me, that this man had hired you for a secretary, or somethin’ of that kind. Of course I knew that was all a sham. What should a jail-bird like him want of a secretary. It didn’t take me long to make up my mind what his game was. I knew you had some money, for you had told me so last night, and I concluded that that was what Dobson was after. I saw that you would be robbed unless some friend interfered. I determined to be that friend.’”

Tom took the hard, toil-hardened hand of his new friend, and gratefully pressed it.

“ ‘You were a friend when I most needed a friend,’ he said.

“ ‘Oh, don’t mention it,’ said Brush, hurriedly, for it always made him feel awkward to be thanked. “ ‘I’m paid for all I’ve done by knowin’ that I’ve come up with that pesky rascal.’”

“ ‘But I don’t see how you managed to overtake us,’ said Tom. “ ‘That is what puzzles me.’”

“ ‘Easy now, Tom, I’m comin’ to that. I asked the stable-boy if there was another stage goin’ this way. He told me ‘not till to-morrow.’ I knew that would never do. In twenty-four hours you’d get that start of

me that I couldn't come up with you at all. There was only one thing to do."

"You don't mean to say you walked?" said Tom.

"No; if I had tried that I should be fifteen miles back. It isn't favorable walking in this mud."

Tom was more than ever puzzled. Mr. Brush was on foot, and there was no apparent way in which he could have come otherwise, unless he had flown and suddenly dropped down where he stood.

But our hero didn't have to wait long to have his question answered. Even as he wondered there fell upon his ear a clear, distinct, neigh.

Peter Brush laughed.

"That let's the cat out of the bag," he said.

"Have you a horse, then?"

"Yes; he is only a few rods off."

"I thought you were on foot."

"I got off his back just before I came up with you. I wanted to take you, or, leastwise, Jim Dobson, by surprise, and I reckon I did."

"It was not a very pleasant surprise to him, Mr. Brush."

"I didn't mean it should be when I saw that scoundrel bendin' over you, and tryin' to tie your hands and feet. I tell you I felt riled."

"So did I," said Tom, laughing.

"He thought you were completely in his power, but rascals sometimes do get mistaken, thank the Lord!"

"Then you bought a horse?"

"Yes, I found that was the only way I could overtake

you. I followed the stage, a good way behind, but it wasn't long before I began to gain upon it. I didn't expect you would get out of the stage, and when I saw you and Dobson alone in this wood, I was surprised."

"Mr. Burnett"—this name came more natural to Tom—"complained that his limbs ached from riding, and he asked me to get out and walk with him. I suspected nothing. I thought him a rich man, and didn't think he'd try to rob me of the little money I had with me."

"Of course you didn't. Has he paid you any wages?"

"No; the week wasn't up. He offered to pay me a week in advance."

"So he might, as he meant to take it from you again."

"I didn't think of that," said Tom, laughing.

"It didn't take me more'n fifteen minutes to find a horse and buy it," said Mr. Brush, proceeding with his story. "I didn't have time to examine it, and find whether it was sound, but I guess I got a good bargain. Anyhow it's worth sixty dollars, and that's what I paid for it. And now, Tom, that I've told my story, what do you say to hitchin' horses?"

"I haven't any horse to hitch, Mr. Brush."

Peter Brush laughed loudly.

"I mean," he explained, "that we might as well go along together, now that you've got rid of that swindler."

"With all my heart, Mr. Brush. I shall be glad of your company."

"I ain't goin' to engage you as my secretary, for I

wouldn't know what to do with one if I had him. I can't pay you twelve dollars a week, but if your money gives out I won't see you suffer."

"There's one thing in the way, Mr. Brush," said Tom, "I can't keep up with your horse."

"I'll buy you one, Tom, at the next haltin' place."

"No need of that, Mr. Brush; I'll buy one myself."

"Have you got money enough?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll pick one out for you. I'll see you don't get cheated. Now, my lad, it's gettin' dark, and we'd better push on. You get on the horse, and I'll trudge alongside.

Tom consented to ride a part of the time. But it was ten o'clock, so bad were the roads, before they reached the frontier village, and secured an humble lodging for the night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PACIFIC TRAIL.

TOM AND his new acquaintance spent a day at the little settlement where they passed the night. Tom was fortunate enough to buy a horse for forty-two dollars, and he also provided himself with a rifle and a few things which Mr. Brush told him were necessary for the long trip they had in view.

Whenever he thought of the change he had made in companions he congratulated himself. He had found no pleasure in Burnett's society, even before he had found out his treachery. The salary he was to receive was his only inducement. Now he had relinquished all salary, and must defray his entire expenses without help, but he felt assured that, should he become penniless, his honest friend Brush would not desert him. So, with a bold heart he set out upon his long journey.

I do not propose to give a daily record of the journeyings of the two companions, as they followed the Pacific Trail. The journey was monotonous enough. So many miles daily, the number varying according to the state of the road, if such a name can be given to the path they were following, camping for the night and resuming travel the next day.

It was so monotonous that they almost forgot the days of the week.

Let us look in upon the pair four weeks later. During that time they had made about five hundred miles.

"Tom," said Peter Brush, as they rode side by side over a broad, rolling prairie, "this is lonely, isn't it? For all we can see we are the only people living in the world. There isn't a house, nor a clearing, nor the smoke of a chimney, anywhere in sight."

"That is so, Mr. Brush."

"Seems to me, Tom, you are lookin' rather sober. Is there anything a weighin' on your mind?"

"Yes, Mr. Brush, I was thinking of my mother and sister."

"Then if you are thinkin' of them, you ought to look cheerful. If I had a mother and sister to think of I'd give a thousand dollars down, though I am a poor man."

"You don't quite understand me, Mr. Brush. How do I know that they are well? They may be sick, or dead," and our hero's lip quivered.

"Don't go to borrrering trouble, Tom. It ain't no use. I'll bet you a dollar they're well, and as lively as crickets."

"If I only knew that! But there isn't any chance of my writing to them, or hearing from them, in this great wilderness."

"That's so, Tom. There don't seem to be any post-offices near by, that's a fact."

"I am afraid mother will worry about me, when she has to go so long without getting a letter. She'll think I'm either sick or dead."

"I don't b'lieve she will. She will trust to Providence, that is, if she's a religious woman, and goes to church, as most mothers do."

"My mother is the best woman in the world!" said Tom, warmly.

"I don't doubt it—not a mite. She's got a pretty good son, and when you see a good son you'll generally find he has a good mother."

"I am glad you have so good an opinion of me, Mr. Brush, but I'm afraid I don't deserve it."

"Suppose we argy that point."

"Never mind," said Tom, smiling, "I'm perfectly willing you should think so. How soon do you think I can write a letter home?"

"There's a place about a hundred miles further on. We'll get there within a week. When you get there, you can write a long letter."

"I will; I will try to make up for lost time. I shall have a great deal to write."

"So you will, Tom."

"Sha'n't you write, too, Mr. Brush?"

"I haven't got anybody to write to," answered Peter Brush.

"There's your boy."

"I never writ a letter to him in my life. Fact is, Tom, I ain't much on writin'; I can handle a rifle a good deal better than a pen. My boy doesn't expect a letter from me."

"It seems to me if my father were away traveling, I should want to hear from him."

"I reckon you would, but there's a difference in families. Ours isn't a writin' family."

"When did you see your boy last?"

"Only a few weeks ago."

"And when do you expect to see him again?"

"In a year, likely, if things come round right. He's all right, and got good care taken of him, so there's no use worryin'. Your mother's well fixed, too, isn't she?"

"Yes, I suppose she's very comfortable. She is keeping house for a rich farmer, and wants for nothing."

"Then, don't you go to borrrering trouble."

Just then the two friends heard a steady tramp behind, as if another horseman were on their track.

"Peter Brush looked round, and his curiosity seemed to be excited.

"Tom," said he "look round. There's a queer-look-in' critter on our track."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAN WITHOUT A SCALP.

THIS WAS what Tom saw on looking behind him :
A very tall man, bestriding a raw-boned horse, who looked as if, like Dr. Tanner, he had just emerged from a forty days' fast.

The man was very nearly as thin as the horse, with a long face, set off, but scarcely adorned, by a rough, red beard. He was attired in a suit of rusty black, and looked not unlike a wandering missionary.

"He's tryin' to catch up with us, Tom," said Mr. Brush. "Suppose we halt and give him a better show."

Tom had no objections. In their lonely journey it was rather agreeable to meet a new acquaintance, however unprepossessing he might appear.

"Good morning, fellow pilgrims," said the new-comer, as he came up abreast of our two friends.

"Good mornin' yourself," said Brush. "What's the news?"

"Just what I would like to know," said the other. "I haven't heard a word from civilization for weeks. Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"My name is Peter Brush, at your service. This boy is my friend, Tom Thatcher. We are on our way to Californy, and we may get there if we don't run a-foul

of any murderous Indians. I ain't quite ready to part with my scalp yet, so I hope they'll keep away."

"It's very painful, being scalped," said the new arrival, meditatively.

"I reckon so."

"I know it. For I had that little operation performed on me."

Peter Brush drew in his horse, and stared at the stranger in profound surprise.

"What was that you were sayin'?" he ejaculated.

"I've been scalped myself, and I know how it seems."

"Stranger——"

"Lycurgus B. Spooner, M. D. That is my name and title."

"Then Mr. Spooner—or, Dr. Spooner—won't you oblige me by removin' your hat?"

"Dr. Spooner did so, and displayed a thick mass of red hair.

"I don't see any signs of scalpin'," said Mr. Brush, puzzled.

The doctor removed his wig, and displayed the marks of the unpleasant surgical operation to which he had been subjected by the Indians.

"How was it you didn't die?" asked Tom.

"The confounded redskins thought I was dead, and left me lying on the prairie. But I wasn't so far gone as they supposed. After awhile I came to, and a party of travelers coming up, took care of me. I recovered after a time, and tried to make up for my loss by a wig."

"How long ago was that?"

"Four years."

"And how do you get along without a scalp?" asked Peter Brush, curiously.

"Don't miss it," answered Spooner, laconically. "I used to have headaches, but now I never have 'em."

"And you think it's on account of the scalpin'?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"I sometimes have headaches myself, but I don't care about curin' 'em that way."

Tom laughed.

"I agree with you, Mr. Brush."

"If you have a fancy for being scalped," said Dr. Spooner, "it is very possible that an opportunity may be afforded you before long."

Tom was naturally startled, and none the less because the doctor's declaration was made in the coolest and most indifferent manner.

"What do you mean?" asked Peter Brush, hurriedly.

"Look at that, and you won't need to ask."

With his whip-handle he pointed to the left. There, at only a few rods distance, was a sight which made Tom's blood run cold in his veins.

Stiff and stark lay the bodies of two emigrants, with their scalps removed, evidently the victims of a ruthless band of savages.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO NEW COMRADES.

IT WAS the first time Tom had ever looked upon a man who had met a violent death, and the sight impressed him deeply.

The two men were fairly well dressed, apparently between thirty and forty years of age, not unlike the average emigrant of those days, who left a comfortable home in the East to seek his fortune in the far West.

"How long since this happened, doctor?" asked Peter Brush, soberly.

He naturally deferred in this matter to the superior judgment of a physician.

Dr. Lycurgus Spooner dismounted from his horse and examined the unfortunate victims of Indian barbarity with a professional eye.

"Not many hours," he answered, briefly.

"Then the plaguy redskins are not far away?"

"Probably not," answered the doctor. "In fact, only a few miles back I fell in with a party who had a narrow escape from the red rascals."

"I wonder we did not meet them."

"They took a more northerly course than you are doing."

"But you met them?"

"I struck to the south after meeting them, partly because I thought in that way I should get further away from the Indians. It seems, however, from this sad sight, that the red devils have been in this neighborhood."

"What shall we do?" queried Brush, doubtfully. "I don't care to meet them, nor Tom here I reckon."

"We may as well push on, but it will be best to keep a good lookout on all sides."

"Trust me for that. I've got a good pair of eyes, and I won't run afoul of them if I can help it."

"Have you any objection to my company?" asked Dr. Spooner.

"Not a mite. I shall be glad to have you hitch horses with our'n. Can you fight?"

"I have done it before now."

"Then, if we are attacked, you will stand by us?"

"You may rely upon me."

"Then you are welcome. By the way, doctor, I ain't curious, that is, not uncommon curious, but I do wonder why you, a doctor, are roamin' round in these diggin's?"

"You think I would be better off attending my patients at home, I suppose?"

"Just so."

"But suppose the choice lies between a grave in the East, and a wandering life of privation in the West, what do you say, then?"

"Who wanted to kill you at the East?" asked Peter Brush, bluntly.

"Consumption, my friend. I inherit a tendency to that fatal disease. My mother died of it. Her mother

died of it, and several other relations have in turn fallen victims to the scourge of the Atlantic Coast. Well, when I found the seeds ripening in my own system, and nature's warning becoming only too plain, I took the hint. I knew there was only one course to take. I must abandon the East, and my flourishing practice, must give up furnace-heated houses, and live out of doors far away from the fatal east winds. It was a great sacrifice, for I was a successful physician, and I liked the life of towns, and the culture and advantages of Eastern civilization, but life was precious, and I did not hesitate."

"How long ago was that, doctor?" asked Mr. Brush.

"Six years ago. I went across the plains to California. There I made some money and returned, but I could not stay long, for my old symptoms began to come back. I resumed my wanderings, and have spent more or less of the time since on the plains."

"And how's your health?"

"There's a good deal of life in me yet, though I don't look rugged."

Indeed the doctor, with his slim, hollow cheeks, looked far from robust, but he was embrowned by exposure to the elements, and was tough and wiry, and as Mr. Brush found out, he had a good deal of endurance.

"You don't look like a picture of health," said Mr. Brush.

"No; but that's partly because I am constitutionally thin. Our family doesn't gain flesh easily. I am well, and my appetite is always good, sometimes inconveniently good, for I am often so situated that I can't gratify it."

"I've got a healthy appetite myself," remarked Peter Brush.

"I'm not backward that way either," said Tom.

"Does your horse come of a consumptive family, too, doctor?" asked Brush, slyly, as his eye took in the bony skeleton on which Dr. Lycurgus B. Spooner was riding.

"In one sense, yes. He can consume as large an amount of hay and oats as any of his race. But, my friends, before we leave this place let us pay the last rites to the memory of these poor fellows who have been cut off in the midst of health and life by the savages."

"I say amen to that with all my heart, and Tom will help, I know."

"Yes," said Tom, soberly, while the thought could not help rising that before long some stranger might be called upon to do the same service for him.

A hole was dug close to where the bodies lay, and the two victims were deposited therein with reverent care. No clew could be found to their identity. There were no letters in their pockets, and they were buried by those who knew not their names.

"I'd like to kill a few of the wretches that did this foul deed!" said Mr. Brush. "If I were going to be killed, I'd rather meet my fate at the hands of a white man than to be cut down by an ignorant savage."

"I can't say it would make much difference to me," said Dr. Spooner, philosophically. "Death is death, whether a white man kills you, or a red man."

"I would rather be killed by my equal than by a savage, who is only a two-legged brute," persisted Peter Brush.

"I hope the choice won't be forced upon any of us," said the doctor. "At any rate, I prefer not to speculate upon such a fate as probable, though it may be possible."

"You've got the advantage of us, Doctor. You have no scalp to lose."

"No, but I set some value by my head, though it may be scalpless."

"They didn't take your horse's scalp, Dr. Spooner?"

"No. It is some advantage to be a horse. This poor beast, miserable as he looks, has twice saved me from capture by the redskins. Haven't you, bony?"

"A very appropriate name!" laughed Brush.

"It is short for Bonaparte. Still it is appropriate, as you say. He can get over the ground pretty fast, if there is need of it. And now, my men, what is your destination? Are you going to California?"

"Yes," answered Peter Brush, "such is our intention."

"In search of fortune, I presume?"

"Yes, but not wholly," and Peter Brush told the doctor of the leading object of our young hero, Tom.

"I have a mind to go with you," said Lycurgus. "I am wandering rather aimlessly just now. I might be able to help your young friend."

"Then keep along with us, the more the merrier," said Brush, cordially. "What do you say, Tom?"

"I hope the doctor will come with us."

"Then I will. Here is my hand on it."

Neither Tom nor Brush foresaw how fortunate for them was Dr. Spooner's determination.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STARTLING SIGHT.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later the party left the prairie, and came to a region more uneven and wooded.

“It seems pleasant,” said Tom, “to get away from the prairie.”

“It may be pleasanter,” said the doctor, “but it is not so safe.”

“Why not?” asked Tom.

“Your friend Brush will tell you as I do, that we are more liable to encounter Indians. They naturally seek the woods and hills.”

“Yet the two travelers whom we buried were on the prairie.”

“That is true; of course, the savages roam over the prairies at times, but even there they may be seen long beforehand. Here one may come upon them suddenly.”

“What the doctor says is gospel truth,” said Peter Brush, gravely. “I feel more anxious in my mind than I did yesterday. But it isn’t best to worry overmuch. I’ve been over the plains—at least as far as Utah—half a dozen times, and I’ve never been in the clutches of the redskins yet.”

“I hope I shall be as lucky, Mr. Brush,” said Tom.

"I hope so, too. To my mind they are a set of poisonous reptiles that ought to be exterminated. I don't know what they were made for, anyway."

"Your views are extreme, friend Brush," said Lyncr-gus Spooner. "I have no great liking for the redmen myself, but it is certain that the fault is not wholly on their side. They have been badly treated by our race."

"No more than they deserved," said Mr. Brush, stubbornly, for he was strongly prejudiced. I'd like to argy the point."

"No occasion for that. We will each hold to our own opinions, and I hope we may have no cause to think more ill of them."

Tom and his friend Brush found Mr. Spooner an entertaining companion. He was an educated man, had read a great deal, and seen a good deal of the world, having pursued his professional studies in part at Paris and Vienna. It must be confessed that he looked like a tramp, but one who judged him by his outward appearance would make a great mistake.

It was toward the close of the afternoon. They had just forded a narrow stream, and safely landed on the other side, were about to resume their journey, when, in a little inlet half-hidden by the trees, they saw an object which startled them.

It was an Indian canoe.

"Do you see that, Tom?" said Brush, quickly.

"Yes; it is a canoe, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it means that the Indians are not far away. Am I right, Dr. Spooner?"

“Probably you are, friend Brush.”

“What shall we do?” asked Tom.

“I suppose it will be best to push on. We shall never accomplish our journey unless we do, but we must keep our eyes open, and be prepared to come upon the Indians at any moment. What do you say, doctor?”

“You are right.”

No doubt Tom had reason to feel anxious. When he started away from home he knew that he must encounter difficulties and endure privations, but he had not thought of danger. He was only a boy of sixteen, and at that age one seldom weighs carefully the consequences of any given step. How then did he feel? Serious, to be sure, but the thought of danger gave him a feeling of excitement and exhilaration that was partly pleasurable. He felt older, more like a man, now that he found himself in a situation which men would consider serious.

The little party moved on with great caution, scarcely speaking above a whisper.

Though they were in the woods, there was a good trail, and they had no difficulty in making their way onward on horseback. There was very little underbrush. Straight and high-branched, the trees rose in lofty majesty. They were stripped of their foliage, for it was a winter month, but they looked like dark sentinels, posted by nature, to warn off intruders from her vast and lonely domain.

Suddenly Peter Brush, who was gifted with keen sight, clutched Tom by the arm.

“What’s the matter?” asked our hero.

“Hush! Look there!”

Tom followed the direction of the extended finger, and his heart beat quicker as he caught sight of a company of savages sitting in a circle beneath the over-spreading branch of an immense tree a dozen rods away. A fire had been kindled in the center of the group, and the savages were evidently enjoying it. Their day's tramp was over, and in their silent way they were enjoying their evening rest.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TAKEN CAPTIVE.

THE INDIANS numbered not far from twenty. The dusky warriors sat in silence, wearing their usual look of gravity. Among all races there is probably not one less social than the American Indian. A garrulous Indian would be a curiosity.

The three travelers gazed as if fascinated upon the group of savages. In spite of the dire péril in which they stood, their curiosity was excited by one member of the dusky company.

It was a boy, about as old as Tom, apparently, who was incased in a blanket, and lay close to the fire. I say incased to indicate how closely the blanket was folded around his boyish form.

Beside him sat a tall, stalwart warrior, who gazed on the boy with a look of evident anxiety.

The boy's thin features, and a certain contraction of his brow, indicated that he was sick and in pain. Lycurgus Spooner and Peter Brush judged that he was the chief's son, or, at least, the son of a man of distinction.

While taking their observations, our three pilgrims had halted their horses. Thus far they had not attracted the attention of the Indian braves.

What was to be done?

They did not dare to consult audibly, lest the sound of their voices should reach the quick ears of the Indians.

Peter Brush, with an inquiring glance, extended his hand in the direction of the river which they had just forded. Lycurgus Spooner, understanding the unspoken question, bowed his head affirmatively.

The three turned their horses, and were about to retrace their steps, when Tom's horse gave a slight whinny.

Instantly the Indians raised their heads, and our travelers were discovered. Without a word the redmen sprang to their feet, and, with a wild whoop, that was well calculated to send terror to the hearts of the fugitives, started in pursuit.

When the three reached the river-bank the Indians were close behind.

"Stop!" shouted the foremost Indian, the tall warrior who had been seated beside the boy.

It was one of the four English words which he knew.

The command might not have been obeyed, but that it was reinforced by a gun drawn to the shoulder and leveled at Lycurgus Spooner, whom he took to be the leader of the party, in virtue of his age and dignified bearing.

"The game's up," said Brush. "We may as well give ourselves up, and not wait till we are shot."

"There is no hope of escape," said Lycurgus, reigning in his horse by the river-bank.

"We might get across," said Tom.

"And be shot in doing it? No; it's a bad business, but it can't be helped."

All this conversation passed in an instant, for there was no time to waste, or, rather, there was risk in prolonging the discussion.

All halted their horses, and almost simultaneously they were surrounded by the Indians.

The chief made a signal for them to dismount. Lycurgus Spooner was the first to obey. It was not his first experience of Indian captivity, and he knew that prompt obedience would be wise.

His example was followed by Peter Brush and Tom, who with much apprehension and anxious hearts leaped to the ground, to find themselves hemmed in by savage forms, and faces grave but void of expression, but even in their self-repression inspiring fear.

At a signal three warriors led off the horses. Tom fancied that the Indian who led Dr. Spooner's horse regarded the thin, bony beast with contempt, but he might have been mistaken.

Dr. Spooner, Peter Brush and Tom were ranged in line, and conducted toward the camp-fire, preceded and followed by an Indian guard.

It must not be supposed that they were allowed to retain their fire-arms. Their rifles were taken from them, and the acquisition of these arms appeared to yield their captors considerable satisfaction. They had learned to value these articles, which were to them of practical value.

Who shall say what thoughts surged up in the heart of our young hero, as he found himself in the power of a people of whom he had read so much? He remem-

bered a thin, paper-covered novel, which he had read only the previous summer in the security of home, in which had been described the captivity of a boy of his own age. Little did he dream at that time that he himself would ever be the hero of a similar adventure. It was romantic, certainly, but Tom would readily have surrendered all the romance of the situation for a quiet seat in his humble home far away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO POWWOWS.

AT A SIGNAL from the chief all three prisoners were bound and placed on the ground close by.

Then the Indians, resuming their sitting positions, had a powwow, or, as we should say, deliberated. Though the three captives could not understand their speech, they readily inferred that they were the subjects of discussion, and that their fate was being decided. This, indeed, might be inferred from the occasional glances cast toward them by the different speakers.

There was one circumstance, however, that puzzled them, and naturally. Reference was also made to the sick boy. This they also inferred from the looks which he attracted.

"They are talking about us, doctor," said Peter Brush, in a low voice.

"Yes, but they are also talking of the boy."

"You don't understand them, do you?"

"Only an occasional word. I know the Indian word for boy, and they have used that several times."

"They may mean Tom."

"That is what I thought at first, but I observed that whenever they use the word, they either point or glance at the sick boy in the center."

"That's curious. I can't see what he has to do with us."

"Nor I."

"What do you suppose they will do with us?"

"Don't let us think of unpleasant subjects, friend Brush. There's one comfort—my scalp is pretty safe."

"But mine isn't," said Brush, sadly running his hand through his bristling hair. It was not ornamental, but Peter Brush was attached to it, and the thought that he might lose it strengthened the value he set upon it.

"Tom, what are you thinking about, my lad?" asked Brush.

"I am thinking that we are in a tight place," answered Tom, soberly.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, lad. We ain't past hope."

"God may help us," said Tom, reverently.

Peter Brush scratched his head reflectively.

"I am sorry to say, lad, that I never gave much thought to Him. My mother used to tell me about God when I was a little chap, but I've spent most of my life away from churches, and I don't know much about anything but this earth."

"Surely you believe there is a God, Mr. Brush?"

"Yes, Tom, but I don't feel as if I had much to do with Him. If you think He will help us, just ask Him."

"I have been asking him in my own thoughts," said Tom, "and I have a feeling that somehow help will come to us."

"We stand in precious need of help from some quarter. I wish I could make out the Indian palaver."

“We shall know in due time, friend Brush,” said Lycurgus Spooner; “perhaps sooner than we care to.”

“Do you think they will do anything to us to-night, Dr. Spooner?” asked Tom.

“No; such is not their custom. They have had their council. They will do nothing till the night is over. We shall be allowed a good night’s sleep.”

“I don’t expect to sleep a wink all night,” said Peter Brush, in a lugubrious tone. “I shall be thinking all the while how it feels to be scalped.”

“That won’t tend to make your dreams pleasant, friend Brush. My advice is, that whatever is to come, you try to sleep well. It will strengthen you, either to devise means of escape, or, if need be, to meet your fate.”

“It’s all very well to give that advice, doctor, but not being a cold-blooded animal, I sha’n’t find it easy to follow. Suppose you were going to be hung to-morrow morning—how do you think you could sleep?”

“No such fate as that is in store for us, at any rate. People are hung only in civilized communities. Did you ever hear of a man shipwrecked on a territory entirely unknown to him, who in the course of his first walk came to a man hanging upon a gallows? ‘Thank heaven!’ he said, ‘I am in a civilized country!’”

Tom and Mr. Brush laughed in spite of the peril that menaced them, and this unexpected sound drew the wondering attention of the Indians. Indeed, it increased their respect for their captives. It was clear that they were not cowards or they would not laugh under such circumstances.

But the merriment of our three friends was short-lived. They became silent and thoughtful, and as they gazed at the flickering flames, and the shadows grew darker, all were impressed by the gravity of the situation, and the uncertain tenure by which they held their lives.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW TOM PASSED THE NIGHT.

THE INDIANS had held their powwow, and so had their white captives, and both were silent. One by one dropped into a slumber. Tom was the first of the three to fall asleep. He was fatigued, and he had a greater trust in Providence. His fears were allayed by a confidence that somehow, and from some quarter, help would come.

In the middle of the night, or, rather, about half-past one o'clock, he suddenly awoke. As well as his constrained position would let him he looked about him; first, at his two companions. They were both asleep, but on the face of Brush there was a troubled expression, indicating, perhaps, unpleasant dreams. Lycurgus Spooner looked as tranquil as if he were sleeping in his own bed. He was following his own advice, and securing for himself a sound, refreshing slumber.

Next Tom looked at the Indians. They, too, were asleep, their dusky faces no more expressionless than in their waking moments. They slept soundly, like animals as they were, untroubled by cares or anxieties. It is only in a state of civilization that the nerves become active and irritable. Refinement and civilization bring with them higher enjoyments, and more intense sufferings.

"All around me are asleep," thought Tom; "if only my hands and feet were not tied, I might escape."

Hope kindled in his heart. He began to work upon the cords that confined his wrists, and succeeded in loosening them a little. He had a knife in his pocket. If only he could have got hold of that! But it would be necessary to unfasten his wrists first, and that was impossible.

Next he tried with his hands, fastened as they were, to release his feet, but he was forced to work at a disadvantage, and the knots were too secure.

"I must give it up as a bad job," thought Tom. "Even if I got free, of which there isn't much chance, I should not like to leave Mr. Brush and the doctor in captivity. It would seem mean."

Tom's chivalry was, perhaps, overstrained. I do not myself consider that he was under any obligation to remain and risk a terrible fate because he could not also rescue his two companions. Yet I like Tom better for his unselfishness.

The boy captive had just desisted from his futile attempt to extricate himself from his fetters, when, chancing to direct his gaze toward the Indian boy, he saw the bright eyes of the young chief fastened upon him.

Tom's nature was intensely sympathetic, and forgetting that the young Indian was his natural foe, he smiled pleasantly.

The Indian boy seemed surprised, but even his unresponsive nature was affected by Tom's bright look. His naturally grave face lighted up, and a faint smile showed Tom that his friendly overture was not thrown away.

It cheered him, and he thought, "I believe that boy would be my friend if they would let him. I wish my fate depended upon him."

The Indian boy's smile faded, and an expression of pain succeeded, while he pressed his hand upon his chest.

"I am sorry for the poor fellow," thought Tom. "I wonder what's the matter with him."

Probably his face expressed his sympathy, and the Indian boy read it as he once more looked toward the young captive, so near his own age. The pain seemed to pass and he became more tranquil, but still his dark eyes were open, and it did not seem likely that he would soon fall asleep.

"I must give up all thoughts of escaping," thought Tom, "while the boy is awake."

He fell asleep again after awhile, and did not awake till he was shaken roughly by one of the Indians.

Morning had come, though on that wintry day the tardy sun had not yet risen.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOM'S DEADLY PERIL.

THE THREE captives, on awakening, regarded their captors with looks of anxiety. They tried to read their fate in those dusky faces, but in vain.

There was a little conversation between the chief and an elderly Indian, who proved to be an interpreter, having a fair knowledge of the English language for an Indian, and then the latter approached our three friends.

He singled out Dr. Spooner as the supposed head of the party, and to him addressed himself.

“White man,” he said, “the chief bids me tell you your fate.”

It need hardly be said that he had attentive listeners.

“You and you,” pointing out Brush, “may go, but your horses and guns remain with us.”

“I am very much obliged to you, colonel,” said Peter Brush, greatly relieved. “You’re welcome to the horse and rifle, and my friend, the doctor, will no doubt say the same. How soon can we go?”

“At once. You shall be unbound, and free to keep on your way to the great waters.”

“And the boy may go, too?” said the doctor, who was more cool and self-possessed than Mr. Brush, and had

at once noted the omission to include Tom in the proposed release.

"Of course! Didn't he say Tom, too?" said Peter Brush, hastily.

"The boy must stay!" said the Indian interpreter, gravely.

"But why must he stay?" He is under my care. I can't go without him?" said Brush, eagerly.

"White boy must stay!" repeated the Indian.

"What do you propose to do with him?" asked Dr. Spooner, uneasily.

The Indian continued:

"For more than a moon the young chief has been sick and weak. A bad spirit has entered into him and torments him."

"But what has all this to do with Tom?" asked Brush, impatiently.

"Let him tell his story in his own way, friend Brush," said the doctor. "We shall know soon enough."

The interpreter continued:

"The Great Spirit is vexed. He has sent one of the bad spirits to trouble Miantomimo. He must be appealed."

"But what has that to do with Tom?" asked Peter Brush, again.

"Hush!" said Lycurgus Spooner.

"He has revealed it to his children that Miantomimo will not get well till a white boy has been sacrificed in his stead."

A look of anxiety and horror swept over the face of Dr. Spooner. Peter Brush did not seem to catch the meaning of the last words.

"Surely," said Lycurgus, "you would not kill an innocent boy?"

"The Great Spirit has said it," said the Indian, gravely.

"Kill Tom!" ejaculated Peter Brush, horror-stricken.

"He don't mean that, does he, doctor?"

"The boy must die!" said the interpreter.

"Then you may kill me, too, you bloody butcher!" exclaimed Peter Brush, tugging fiercely at his fettered hands.

"Calm yourself, friend Brush," said Lycurgus Spooner. "Let me speak with the Indians. Perhaps I can convince them of their folly."

"I'd like to argy the point myself," said Peter.

Of course, Tom had heard all this, and the thought of the fate which seemed inevitable blanched his cheek and sent a cold chill to his heart.

What! at the age of sixteen must he die a violent death, because a young Indian boy was sick, a victim to the cruel superstition of a band of savages?

"God help me!" he murmured, with pale lips. "For the sake of my dear mother and sister, save me from this fearful fate!"

"This is terrible!" ejaculated Peter Brush, while in his excitement the big drops of perspiration gathered on his brow. "Kill me, Mr. Indian, and let the boy live. He is young, and his life is worth more than mine."

"No good!" said the Indian. "A boy is sick. A boy must die."

"Mr. Brush," said Tom gratefully, "I will never forget this unselfish offer. You have offered your life for mine. You are a true friend."

"But the brutes won't accept my offer," said Peter Brush, bitterly. "They are bound to shed your innocent blood, my poor boy. If I only had my revolver here, and loaded, I would kill some of them, or my name isn't Peter Brush."

"Be careful what you say, or they will kill you, too," said Tom, in a warning voice.

The interpreter stood aside. At a signal from the chief, two men advanced toward Tom. They took him up in their arms, and carried him to a young tree, of slender trunk, and deftly bound him with his back to the tree, facing toward the group.

"Are they going to kill Tom before our very eyes?" said Peter Brush, in a tone of horror.

"It is indeed terrible!" said Lycurgus Spooner, in a state of agitation almost as great.

"Oh, Tom, Tom, I wish I'd left you with that swindling Jim Dobson. He would only have robbed you, while I have led you to your death."

"You couldn't help it, Mr. Brush," said Tom, his lips quivering. "It is hard, but I'll try to meet it."

"You thought God was going to help you!" exclaimed Brush, bitterly.

"It is not too late yet. He may save me yet. But Mr. Brush, I have a favor to ask of you."

"What is it? I will do anything in my power, Tom."

"And I too, my poor lad," said Dr. Spooner.

"Write to my mother, and let her know that I am dead, but don't let her know how I died. Let her think that I caught cold and died of a fever. She won't feel so bad. There's some money that I have in the — bank, in New York. Let her know about that. They will give it to her, if she calls for it."

"Yes, Tom, I will do it," said Peter Brush, stifling a sob—"that is, if I live. I don't think I can stand it to see those red devils kill you."

While this conversation was going on the Indians remained quiet. Probably they understood that Tom was giving to his two friends the last messages he was ever to deliver, and a sense of propriety, possibly a feeling of sympathy, would not permit them to interfere.

For it must be remembered that they were about to kill Tom from no feeling of hostility, but merely because in their superstition they thought God required a sacrifice, and would in return restore the young chief to health.

Poor Tom! his fate seemed sealed. The Indian chief, who on account of his relationship was considered the fitting instrument for accomplishing the sacrifice, took his stand at the distance of a hundred feet from the tree to which Tom was bound, and raised his rifle.

Tom closed his eyes, and with an unspoken prayer, commended his soul to God, when a most surprising incident startled all who were looking on.

The Indian boy rose suddenly to his feet, flung off the blanket in which he was wrapped, and rushing to the tree, flung his arms around Tom, with a loud cry.

His father dropped the rifle with which he was about to act the part of executioner, and gazed as if spell-bound upon the two boys

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE INDIANS ADOPT TOM.

NOT LESS powerful was the effect produced upon the Indian warriors by this unexpected action of the sick boy.

They gazed upon him almost in stupefaction. Then they began to murmur expressions of wonder, not unmingled with awe. To their superstitious minds it seemed like a direct interposition of God in Tom's favor. And who shall say that it was not so? Who shall say that the kindly and compassionate impulse which led Miantonimo to Tom's rescue was not God's work?

New hope sprang up in Tom's heart as he felt the arms of the Indian boy closely encircling him. He knew that Miantonimo was the chief's son, and likely to prove a powerful intercessor. He would have returned the embrace if he could, but his arms were pinioned, or failing that, have thanked him warmly, but he knew the Indian boy could not understand him.

"Miantonimo!" he said, softly, and his eyes were full of gratitude, which the boy chief could understand.

Miantonimo, still encircling Tom with his arms, turned his head, and in the Indian language, said:

"Save him, my father, let him be my brother."

"The Great Spirit has spoken through my son," said Wanuka, the chief, gravely.

"Then shall he live?"

"He shall live. No harm shall come to him," said the chief. "Unbind him. He shall stay with us, and be brother of Miantonimo."

This decision seemed to please the Indian braves, who murmured in approval.

Two of them, at a signal from Wanuka advanced, and loosened the ropes that confined the boy prisoner.

Peter Brush and Lycurgus B. Spooner looked on with joy, not unmingled with amazement.

"It is wonderful!" ejaculated Brush.

"Wonderful, indeed, friend Brush. It seems to me like a direct interposition of the Almighty."

"That Indian boy is a trump. I'd like to shake hands with him."

"So would I, but it might be misunderstood. It will be best to keep quiet and let things take their course."

No sooner was Tom unbound, than with boyish warmth of heart he threw his arms around the neck of Miantonimo and gave him a brotherly embrace.

Wanuka and the Indian warriors looked on with approval, for was not Tom to remain with them and become the brother of their future chief. Their satisfaction was increased by the improved looks of Miantonimo. He no longer looked sick, but his manner was sprightly and his eyes sparkled. It was difficult to believe that he was the same boy who for days reclined, weak and spiritless, by the log-fire, wrapped in blankets.

"The Great Spirit has cured him!" went from mouth to mouth.

"Give me my bow," said the Indian boy.

It was brought to him in wonder, and in place of resuming his position on the ground, he signed to Tom to come with him to a vacant spot near by, and putting up a mark, made him shoot at it.

Tom was no archer, and his shot was wide of the mark.

Miantonimo, laughing, took the bow, and carefully adjusting it, struck the object at which he aimed.

"Well," said Peter Brush, "that beats all I ever heard of. I don't believe I'm awake. Pinch me, to make sure."

"No need of that, friend Brush. Tom has had a signal deliverance. Just now he was in danger of being sacrificed; now he is a prime favorite."

Just then the interpreter, after a brief conference with the chief, advanced toward our two friends.

"Wanuka bids me say that you are free. You can go where you will."

"And may Tom go, too?"

"Who is Tom?"

"The boy."

"No, he will stay with us. He will be the brother of Miantonimo."

Peter Brush and Dr. Spooner looked at each other in perplexity. Tom's life was saved, but the Indians were resolved to keep him a captive, and that, they knew, would make him miserable.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish, doctor," said Peter. "Must we leave Tom here?"

"I am afraid we must," said the doctor, slowly.

"I have a great mind to say that he is my son, and I can't do without him."

"Better not. If the Indians should find out that it is a deception, the consequences might be serious. Besides, they wouldn't let him go even then."

"Do you think not?" asked Brush, doubtfully.

"I feel sure of it. Tom owes his life to the sudden fancy which Miantonimo has taken for him. When the boy is just recovering, you may be sure his father will not allow any fancy of his to be thwarted. Tom must stay."

"And spend his life with the Indians?"

"No. Tom is a smart boy. Sooner or later he will escape. He is lucky to save his life, even by a long term of captivity. We will bid him farewell, and urge him to keep up a good heart, and persuade them to let him go as soon as possible."

Brush and Dr. Spooner signified their desire to speak to Tom, and our hero was allowed to approach them.

"Tom," said Brush, "we hate to leave you here, but the doctor thinks it wouldn't do to oppose the plans of the Indians. As soon as Miantonimo is well, use your influence with him to procure a release from captivity. I can't tell whether we shall meet again, but I hope so."

"Good-by," said Tom, sadly. "I ought to feel thankful that my life has been saved, but it seems hard to stay here."

"Be patient, and your deliverance will come. There are plenty of things that may turn up. Keep a stiff

upper lip, and keep friends with the redmen, at any rate, and especially with Miantonimo. He's a regular trump, that boy is. He's the first Indian I ever liked."

"Yes, he's a good fellow. I wish I understood his language, and could talk with him."

"Try to learn; it will help you."

A few words more, and the two white men left the Indian camp, and pursued their way westward.

Poor Tom followed them with longing eyes, and his heart was heavy within him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THREE MONTHS IN CAPTIVITY.

EAGER as he was to leave his new associates, Tom was wise enough to understand that it must not be thought of at present. He must bide his time.

Meanwhile he must make himself as agreeable as possible to the young Indian whose friendly feeling had saved his life. Had Miantonimo still remained sick, he would have watched by his sick couch, but of this there was no need. A wonderful change had come over the boy. His sickness, whatever it was, seemed to have left him all at once. His strength rapidly returned, and he was able to resume his usual sports.

In these he always wanted Tom to participate, and the white boy was entirely willing. While he remained in captivity he must pass the time in some way, and none seemed more agreeable than to share the life and employments of Miantonimo.

There were some things which the Indian boy could teach him. In the course of a few weeks Tom became expert with the bow; he even rivaled his adopted brother, who was remarkably skillful. He learned to ride a horse bareback, to shoot, to hunt. He also picked up some of the Indian dialect, so that he and Miantonimo could converse after a fashion.

All this was regarded by Wanuka and his followers with quiet approval. Tom seemed to become more and more like their people, and they looked forward to his becoming a great warrior, for his courage and skill were understood and appreciated by them.

Oftentimes Wanuka, as he sat in silence and watched the two boys at their sports, congratulated himself that his son had found a friend so congenial, and one in whose society he seemed to take so much delight.

But how was it with Tom? Was he contented?

At first when under the tutelage of his young Indian friend he was learning to ride and to shoot, he found these exercises so interesting that he, for the time being, forgot to regret civilization and all its advantages and opportunities. But when he had learned all that Mian-tonimo could teach, when he could rival his teacher, and there was nothing to do but repeat from day to day the same routine, life became monotonous.

For three months he had not read a word of print. Not even a scrap of newspaper had fallen beneath his eye. Tom was troubled with a sense of dreariness and mental vacancy. If he could have bought the dullest and most trivial book he would have regarded it as a literary treasure.

"Must it be always so?" he asked himself, one evening. "Must I live cut off from all that I have been accustomed to enjoy, eating, sleeping, and hunting, and with nothing else to look forward to? If this is the case, I shall not value life much."

Besides, there were his mother and sister, from whom

he seemed forever separated. Such ties cannot be rent, when the heart is as affectionate as Tom's, without great sorrow and pain.

The next day the two boys were riding together.

No one was with them, as no watch was needed when Tom had Miantonimo with him.

The Indian boy looked wistfully at Tom, whose gravity he had noticed, and asked:

"Why is my brother sad? Why does he not smile as he did yesterday? Is he in pain or sorrow?"

"Miantonimo," said Tom, "far away, near the shores of the ocean, my mother and sister dwell. They know not where I am. They mourn for me. Perhaps they think I am dead. Do you wonder that I am sad?"

Miantonimo looked grave.

"Can you not be happy with me?" he asked. "You are like a brother to me."

"Dear Miantonimo, I like you. You saved my life. But you cannot take the place of my mother and sister."

"Why, then, did you leave them?"

"They are poor. I left home to seek gold, far away by the great western sea. I wished to bring it home that they might not want."

Miantonimo looked up, and his face was sad.

"Do you wish to leave me?" he asked.

"I wish you could go with me."

"I must stay with my people," said the Indian boy.

"But you—if you wish to go, you can go."

"Your father will be angry," said Tom, but his face was lighted up with new hope.

"I will tell my father that I was willing you should go. Look yonder! Do you see a line of men and horses winding through the valley?"

"Yes."

"They are your people. Go and join them, and forget Miantonimo," said the Indian boy in sad, reproachful accents.

"I will never forget Miantonimo, but I shall be glad to join the party."

He brought his horse alongside his companion's, grasped his hand long and cordially, and then turning, galloped away.

The Indian boy watched him, sitting motionless upon his horse, with a sad and wistful look, and then rode slowly back to rejoin his tribe.

"Poor Miantonimo! he is a true friend!" thought Tom. "He will grieve for me, but I cannot stay with him."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CABIN AT ROCKY GULCH.

THE CURTAIN falls, shutting out our view of Tom, as, day by day, he wends his slow way from the great barren plains west of the Mississippi valley toward the modern Golconda.

He had been fortunate in joining a company of emigrants, who treated him kindly, accepting his company as welcome, for he was the only boy in the party, and to more than one he brought to mind boys of their own left behind in homes far east.

He feared that Wanuka, angry at his desertion, would pursue him, and perchance attack the party to which he had joined himself. But Miantonimo prevented that. Indian boy as he was, he was a true and unselfish friend, and repressed the sadness and loneliness which he felt for the sake of the white boy whom he had learned to love as David loved Jonathan.

The curtain rises disclosing a different scene.

We see a valley hemmed in on nearly every side by high mountains. Tall pines, straight as a flag-staff, rise here and there. Boulders, projected above the earth's surface by some former upheaval, dating back thousands of centuries it may be, dot the slope of the hills and the shelving valley, and this is probably the

reason why the place received years since, and still bears, the name of Rocky Gulch.

It is not uninhabited now, for there is a small village. Most of the houses are occupied by miners, for the treasures of the place are not exhausted.

In one of these cabins, rude enough in its construction, live two men whom we have met before.

That tall figure, in a rather close-fitting suit, with an old sombrero crowning a head and covering a face which evidently belonged to a man of thought and culture, must surely be Dr. Lycurgus B. Spooner, physician and wanderer by profession. And that other figure, shorter, stouter, broader-shouldered, surmounted by a bronzed, honest face, can belong to none other than Peter Brush.

Together they sit in the twilight, which comes earlier in the shadow of the hills, at the door of their humble residence, smoking clay pipes at the close of their day's labor.

For a time they are silent. Then Mr. Brush lays aside his pipe, and turning to his companion, says, slowly:

"Doctor, I don't know why it is, but to-day I've been thinkin' more than usual of poor Tom."

"So have I, friend Brush. I don't know why it is, but when I was at my work, his image kept rising before me."

"How long have we been here, doctor?"

"Three months to-day, friend Brush."

"And we haven't heard anything of Tom in all that time."

“It was hardly to be expected. There isn’t any post-office where he is, and if there was, he would not know where to direct to us.”

“I hope the poor boy has come to no harm.”

“That wasn’t likely unless he made an attempt to escape. The Indian boy—what was his name?”

“Miantonimo.”

“Yes. Well, he had such a fancy for Tom that he would be sure to have him treated well. It was very strange,” continued the doctor, meditatively, “almost like a romance.”

“It beats any romance I ever read,” said Peter Brush. “Doctor, I mistrust that Tom would try to escape sooner or later, and would most likely be caught and——”

Peter Brush gasped a little, and did not try to finish the sentence.

“He wouldn’t try to escape if he didn’t have a fair show, friend Brush. Tom is a smart boy; I didn’t know him long, but I found that out.”

“Yes, he’s a mighty smart boy. Now, supposin’ he did escape, what then?”

“What then? He would come here. When you told me his story, I made up my mind to that, directly. Tom set out on a mission, to clear up the mystery of his father’s disappearance. It was here that his father was robbed, and perhaps murdered. You may rely upon it, friend Brush, that he would come here just as fast as his legs could bring him.”

“I know you said that. That was why we came here.”

"To be on the ground when he came—precisely. Well, friend Brush, we haven't made any mistake in that. We've made it pay."

"That is true. We stumbled upon a rich vein, which wasn't to be expected after the place had been ransacked for years. I reckon that between us we have taken out six thousand dollars."

"About that."

"If Tom comes here, I will divide with him. He sha'n't suffer any loss for stayin' behind."

"I have a different proposition to make, friend Brush. You say we have six thousand dollars?"

"As near as I can calc'late," answered Peter.

"Then suppose we divide that into three portions—one for you, one for me, and the other for Tom."

"Agreed, pard. But it's hardly fair that you should give up part of your findings."

"Why not?" asked the doctor sharply. "Do you mean to insinuate that Tom isn't my friend, as well as yours?"

"No, of course not."

"Then, friend Brush, it appears to me that you are talking nonsense. I claim the right to help Tom if he joins us."

"I'm afraid it's no use talkin', doctor," said Peter Brush, in a dispirited tone. "Poor Tom may be scalped and murdered for all we know."

"I don't believe it, friend Brush," said Lycurgus B. Spooner, energetically, "and I wish you wouldn't call up such disagreeable ideas. It's no joke being scalped, I tell you."

"I s'pose it isn't."

"I *know* it isn't, and I claim to be good authority on that point, for I'm one of the four men who were submitted to that little surgical operation and still live. I don't care to think of any of my friends being operated upon in like manner."

"Of course not. I wouldn't have mentioned it, but, doctor, how long is this thing goin' on?"

"Is what thing going on? Be a little more explicit, friend Brush."

"I mean, how long are we goin' to wait here for Tom?"

"Do you mean that you are tired of waiting for him?"

"No, I mean nothing of the kind. I mean that if you will stay here I will go back and try to find him."

"Among the Indians?"

"Yes."

"But why am I to stay here?"

"So that if the boy comes there will be somebody left to receive him."

"How long have you been thinking of this, friend Brush?"

"For a week or more. I will leave all the gold-dust with you except, maybe, a few hundred dollars' worth to pay expenses. If I don't come back, you can keep it for yourself and Tom."

"Wouldn't it be better, friend Brush, for me to go and leave you here?"

"No; I don't believe I could stand it. I want to be lookin' for Tom myself."

"Let it be so, then. When do you wish to go?"

"To-morrow."

"Very well. I shall feel lonely without you, but you are probably better adapted to the business."

While they were talking some one had come near. It was a boy—the picture of a penniless tramp, with the clothes almost literally falling off from him—a veritable ragamuffin, yet clean, bright-eyed, and with cheeks of a healthy brown. His face was fairly glowing with the joy of an unexpected discovery, as he rushed to the pair with the speed of a young whirlwind, and with hands outstretched, he exclaimed:

"Mr. Brush—doctor—don't you know me?"

"WHY, IT'S TOM!" exclaimed honest Peter Brush, almost beside himself with joy. And he seized our hero, and gave him a bear-like hug. "Are you really alive?"

"I sha'n't be long if you squeeze me like that!"

"Tom," said Dr. Spooner, "I am just as glad to see you as our friend Brush, but I won't show it in the same way."

"Not to-night, at any rate."

"Is your scalp all right, Tom?" asked Brush, anxiously.

Tom laughed, and pulling off a ragged and dirty hat, displayed an ample crop of chestnut hair.

"And now, Tom, tell us all about it," said the doctor. "How did you get away, and what adventures have you had?"

"One question first, doctor. Have you got anything to eat? I haven't tasted food for twelve hours."

“To be sure we have,” answered Brush, “and plenty of it. Sit here with the doctor, and in ten minutes you shall have supper.”

“Brush is chief cook this week, Tom,” explained Dr. Spooner. “It is well for you that he is, for my genius doesn’t lie in that direction.”

CHAPTER XL.

TOM FINDS HIMSELF RICH.

IN TEN minutes Tom found himself sitting at the hospitable board of his two friends. It was literally a board. A broad plank, or rather two side by side, were stretched across the tops of two barrels, and upon this humble table Peter Brush spread a plain but substantial supper.

Cold meat, bread and butter and tea—that was all it consisted of, but of these there was plenty, and Tom made a fierce onslaught upon them.

“I’m sorry we haven’t any pudding or pie, Tom,” said Mr. Brush. “I know somethin’ about cookin’, but I ain’t up to that.”

“Brush made a pie once,” said the doctor, shuddering. “It looked pretty well, but I tasted it, and the taste is still in my mouth. He tried to eat it himself, but couldn’t. A pig came along, and we gave it to him. I never saw that pig again. I suspect he died of the colic.”

Peter Brush laughed good-naturedly at this story, and only retorted:

“How much better would you have succeeded, doctor?”

“Worse, if possible. Don’t suppose I’m running down your culinary skill, friend Brush. I freely admit that it exceeds mine.”

"I never tasted anything so good in my life," said Tom, with a large sense of enjoyment.

"Hunger is a good sauce, my lad. To-morrow you may be more critical."

Supper was over at length, and the three friends sat down before the cabin door.

"Tom, now I come to look at you," said Brush, "you are the most complete ragamuffin I ever saw. Isn't he, doctor?"

Tom laughed and looked rather ruefully at his dilapidated garb.

"I've worn this suit seven or eight months," he said, "through woods and underbrush, sleeping in it at night when I lived with the Indians, and roughing it as I never expected to. Do you see those shoes?"

They scarcely hung about his feet, while his suit was torn, soiled and tattered.

"If mother should see me now, she would be in despair," he said, "and that isn't the worst of it."

"What is the worst of it, Tom?"

"I am not only ragged, but penniless."

Peter Brush and the doctor exchanged a look of satisfaction. They were glad that Tom was penniless, because their help would be so much the more welcome.

"How is that, my lad?" asked Lycurgus. "The Indians didn't take away your money, did they?"

"No; but after I left them and joined the party I finished my journey with, I had a use for all my funds. I had to buy a horse, and just as I came to the last stage of my journey he either ran away or was stolen. The

last fifty miles I made on foot. As to the rest of the money it went for incidental expenses. Do you want to know how much I have left?"

He took from his pocket two cents.

"Those won't pass here, Tom. Nobody will take so small a coin as that."

"Not even for a suit of clothes?" asked Tom.

"No."

"Then I must go to work and earn enough. What are the chances around here, Mr. Brush?"

"I'll show you what we've done, Tom."

Peter Brush led the way to his treasury, as he called the place where he had stored his gold dust.

"What do you say to that?"

"Is it gold dust?" asked Tom, taking up a handful in curiosity.

"Yes."

"How much is all that worth?"

"Six thousand dollars."

"You don't mean to say you found it all here?" asked Tom, amazed.

"Yes, I do. We struck a rich vein."

"Is there more?" asked Tom, eagerly. "I will go to work to-morrow."

"You don't ask who this belongs to," said Peter Brush, rather ungrammatically.

"To you and the doctor, of course."

"And to you."

"But I didn't gather any of it," said Tom.

"It makes no difference," said Brush. "The firm

was Spooner, Brush & Thatcher, and a third of it belongs to you as junior partner. Tom, you are worth two thousand dollars."

"But I can't take it, Mr. Brush," cried Tom. "I can't accept your great kindness. I had no hand in collecting this gold."

"Because you were with the Indians when we left you."

"You couldn't help it."

"But we saved our own lives by leaving you there. You had the worst of it. Do you want to make us ashamed of deserting you?"

"No, but——"

"Then you must take your share of the money. If you don't, we'll throw it away, won't we doctor?"

"Yes, Tom must take it."

"Then, my dear, kind friends, I will take it, for your sake and my mother's. I wish I could change a part of it for a suit of clothes."

"You can. There's a trader in the village who keeps a general stock of goods. We'll fit you out in the morning."

"And is there a chance to mail a letter. Mother hasn't heard from me for months; she may think I am dead."

"There's no regular post-office, but you can leave the letter at the trader's, and it will go to 'Frisco by the first chance. Letters don't often have to wait over a week."

"It seems like a dream," said Tom. "An hour ago

I came here a penniless tramp. Now, thanks to you, I am a rich boy. I can't realize that I am worth two thousand dollars."

"Now, Tom, you must tell us how you escaped from the Indians. You haven't told us a word yet."

"True, Mr. Brush; I will begin at once."

So Tom told his story, and you may be sure he had attentive listeners. It will not, of course, be necessary to repeat it here, since we already know what is of most interest. In response to questions, Tom mentioned many details which were of greater interest to his friends than they would be to us.

"That Indian boy is a regular trump, and no mistake!" said Mr. Brush. "I wish you had brought him with you."

"I shall never forget his kindness," said Tom. "I shall think the better of all Indians for his sake all my life."

So the evening wore on, and bed-time came. Tom wrapped himself in a blanket, and, weary with his long journey, was soon in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XLI.

TOM AND THE GRIZZLY.

WHEN TOM got up the next morning he found breakfast ready.

It was nearly eight o'clock.

"You must think me lazy," he said.

"Oh, no; you were fatigued by your journey. Besides, we don't go to work very early."

After breakfast Tom wandered out and surveyed the gulch with sad interest.

"This is the place," he said, "where my father was robbed and perhaps murdered. I wish I could solve the mystery of his fate."

"Don't let it affect your spirits too much, my young friend," said Dr. Spooner. "Your father may have died before his time, but he is in the hands of his Creator. We must submit to the inevitable, trusting and believing that in the end all will turn out for the best."

"You are right," said Tom, "but here where my poor father disappeared, I can't help recalling him to mind."

"And very natural it is, too."

After a walk, Tom joined his friends in their labors.

The claim was not exhausted, and they decided to remain at Rocky Gulch as long as it was worth working.

Tom did not work all day. He devoted a part of every afternoon to exploring the gulch, with the view of finding the bag of gold dust, which Mr. Darke had concealed, and then been unable to find. In more than one place he dug down, only to be disappointed. It was provoking to think that somewhere, perhaps where he had himself walked, there was hidden beneath the surface a sum of money belonging to him and his mother by right of inheritance, which would have made the family rich.

But Tom did not employ all his leisure time in this way. Sometimes he took his gun, for he had bought one since he came to Rocky Gulch, and wandered for miles over the hills, or through the valleys, shooting a bird or a squirrel, according to the opportunities he had.

One day he took for an entire holiday; he was alone, Mr. Brush being rather indisposed, and the doctor being in attendance upon him.

Having so much time at command, he wandered further than ever before. He had not had much sport. In fact his thoughts were upon his home, and he walked on without much thought of the scene about him, when there came to his ears, borne by the wind, a shout, which sounded very much like "Help! help!"

This roused Tom instantly, and brought back his thoughts to the present.

Whence came the voice?

He could not immediately determine. He looked

about him, but could see no person. But he saw something else which sufficiently startled him.

Squatting beneath a large tree was a huge bear, which, from his appearance, Tom instantly recognized as a grizzly. He knew, though he had never seen one before, that the grizzly bear of California is stronger and more formidable even than the lion, being just the sort of stranger which a prudent man would be most anxious to avoid.

Tom started back in alarm, but the bear had not yet seen him. In fact, the attention of the huge animal seemed otherwise directed. He was looking up into the tree.

Following his gaze, Tom solved the mystery of the voice. Crouching among the branches was a well-dressed man, who looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

The bear below was "holding the fort," and as long as he remained there the man did not dare to come down.

"But why didn't the bear climb the tree?" some of my readers may be tempted to ask.

For the reason that the grizzly bear, at any rate, when fully grown, seldom or never climbs. He leaves that to the more common species.

As long, therefore, as the besieged party remained in the tree, he was safe. But it was hardly a position in which he could feel comfortable in his mind. Peering anxiously around, he at length espied our hero, whom he had not before seen, and called out:

"Boy, have you got a gun with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then shoot that confounded grizzly, who is waiting for me at the foot of the tree."

"Suppose I miss him," suggested Tom.

"Then you must look out for yourself. He will transfer his attention from me to you."

"That would be rather serious."

"You needn't miss him. Aim just behind the ear."

"I will try."

"If he chases you climb up the nearest tree."

Close to Tom was a tree which he judged that he could climb easily. This gave him a chance of escape in case he should fail to disable the huge beast.

By this time the bear had discovered Tom, but, apparently thinking him unworthy of notice, he just growled a little and resumed his post beneath the tree.

"It's me he wants," cried the man besieged. "Ugh, you brute! I wish I could wound you mortally, and see your dying agonies."

The bear listened very complacently, evidently feeling that the advantage was on his side.

"Come, boy, are you going to shoot?" asked the man in the tree.

Tom did not answer.

He was carefully taking aim. He was fully conscious that his own personal safety depended upon the effectiveness of his shot. In fact, his safest course would have been to leave the spot and the beleaguered man to his fate. But Tom was not that kind of a boy. He was bold and courageous, and he would have been ashamed



"At a glance Tom saw the Bear watching the man crouching among the branches."—Page 215.

Tom Thatcher's Fortune.

if he had coolly deserted a man whom it was in his power to help, at however great danger to himself.

So he quietly and carefully took aim, and then pulled the trigger.

The grizzly uttered an angry growl, and correctly guessing the quarter from which the attack had come, was fired with revenge. He started toward Tom, and our hero would have stood a slender chance had the great beast succeeded in reaching him. But the shot had done its work.

The grizzly had scarcely gone a rod when he staggered and fell in a great floundering mass upon the ground.

Tom was already up in the tree he had selected for a refuge before he ventured to look at his enemy.

His heart was elate with joy and triumph when he saw how effective had been his shot. It was no light thing for a boy not yet seventeen to bring down the monarch of the California forests.

The bear made a few convulsive movements, and then settled into the rigidity of death.

"He's done for!" exclaimed the stranger joyfully, preparing to descend the tree. "He will never trouble us any more."

"Then I'll come down," said Tom.

Together they met beside the huge beast.

Then the stranger, turning to Tom, said:

"My young friend, you have saved my life. That is a debt I never can pay, but I don't mean to let it go unacknowledged. What is your name, and where do you live?"

“My name is Tom Thatcher, and I live at Rocky Gulch.”

“Ha! I am going there. We will go together.”

“I shall be glad of your company,” said Tom, politely.

On the way the stranger introduced himself as Robert Percival, a banker, from San Francisco.

“I have some interests at Rocky Gulch,” he said. “I feel an affection for the spot, for here I laid the foundation of my fortune. Feeling the need of a little rest from business cares, I have come out here from the city. By Jove! I came near getting a permanent vacation. If you hadn’t come to my help, I can’t undertake to say that I should ever have been able to return to any business in the city.”

Toward the close of the afternoon Tom and his new friend reached Rocky Gulch.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

AS THERE was no hotel, nor even tavern, at Rocky Gulch, the banker, Percival, gladly accepted Tom's invitation to pass the night at the cabin occupied jointly by himself and his two friends.

"But what will your friends say?" asked Percival.

"They will be glad of your company," said Tom, promptly.

The banker looked pleased.

"My visit will prove pleasanter than I anticipated," he said.

When they reached the cabin Tom found that Mr. Brush was much better. In fact, he and the doctor were at the door smoking.

"Dr. Spooner, Mr. Brush," said our hero, "allow me to introduce a new acquaintance, Mr. Percival, of San Francisco."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Percival," was the cordial greeting of both, as they extended their hands.

"I have promised Mr. Percival accommodations for the night," continued Tom.

"He shall be welcome if he doesn't object to rough it," answered Brush. "We don't live in a palace."

"My friend," said the banker, "it seems to me a

palace compared with what would have been my lodging but for the lucky chance of meeting your young friend here."

The doctor and Mr. Brush looked inquiringly first at one, then at the other.

Tom smiled, but left Mr. Percival to tell the story.

"I was emphatically up a tree," said the banker, "with a grizzly standing guard underneath, when this brave boy (Tom blushed at the compliment) came up, and taking effectual aim, disposed of Mr. Bruin."

"You don't mean to say you killed a grizzly, Tom?" exclaimed Mr. Brush, in excitement.

"It is a literal fact," said Robert Percival, "and one of the largest specimens I have ever seen."

"Where is he?"

"We were not able to bring him along," said Tom, smiling. "If you and the doctor can manage him I will give him to you."

"I've always wanted to kill a grizzly," said Peter Brush, meditatively. "It would be a feather in my cap. Yet here am I, a man of fifty-two, and I have not had a chance yet, while you, a mere stripling, have succeeded."

"I didn't go to do it," said Tom, with a queer smile.

"No, but you've done it, while neither I nor my friend the doctor, I presume, have ever succeeded."

"I think I could dispose of a first-class grizzly if he would only consent to take my medicines," said the doctor, dryly.

At this there was a general laugh.

"Mr. Percival," said the doctor, "I venture to say that you and Tom are hungry."

"I am famished," said the banker.

"I am glad you are hungry, for I am cook this week, and hungry men are not fastidious."

"I will help you, doctor," said Peter Brush.

"Out of regard for our guest I will accept your offer," said Dr. Spooner. "I am sorry I haven't a few pounds of Tom's grizzly to cook."

"I am content that he didn't make a meal of me," said the banker, shrugging his shoulders.

Supper was enjoyed, and the four who partook of it were unusually jovial.

After the meal was finished Robert Percival's business instinct led him to inquire of his hosts how well they had succeeded in their mining. He was surprised to learn how much gold dust they had accumulated.

"Gentlemen," he said, "business is business, and that as well as the need of recreation has brought me out here. If you feel inclined to part with your dust I will make you as favorable an offer as any one in San Francisco, and give you drafts in payment."

The three partners consulted, and Peter Brush acted as spokesman, and promptly accepted their guest's offer.

"Nothing will suit us better," he said. "We are sure you will deal honorably with us."

"Even if such were not my custom," said Percival, "I would do so for the sake of your young associate, who has rendered me so important a service. I confess my surprise at seeing so young a boy engaged in this business. Is he related to either of you?"

This drew out Tom's story. It was told partly by Mr. Brush, partly by our young hero himself.

Robert Percival listened from the first with interest. But as the story proceeded, and reached the point where our hero's father was robbed and left for dead near the very spot where they were conversing, his interest increased, and was apparently mingled with surprise. When the tale was told he ejaculated:

"This is a most extraordinary occurrence."

"Not so extraordinary," said Brush. "In the early days of California emigration, robbery and murder could not have been so very uncommon."

"But you don't understand me, my friend. It is extraordinary that this story should be told to me."

"Why?" asked Brush and Tom, and the doctor looked equally inquisitive.

"Why? Because I myself found the bag of gold dust of which the boy is in search, and I was one of the party who found his father and carried him from the gulch!"

This statement was listened to with unbounded amazement by his three listeners.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TOM COMES INTO A FORTUNE.

THERE was deep silence for more than a minute. All eyes were turned upon him who had made so extraordinary a statement.

Then Tom asked in a subdued tone:

“Was my father dead?”

“No, but he was insensible from concussion of the brain.”

“How long did he live, Mr. Percival?”

“HE IS LIVING NOW!” answered the banker.

Tom stared at the speaker in incredulous amazement. Dr. Lycurgus B. Spooner and Mr. Brush seemed equally amazed. All looked to their guest for an explanation.

“You wonder,” continued the banker, without waiting to be questioned, “you wonder, no doubt, why, if this is the case, that your father did not return to his home and family. I can tell you in four sad words. Though your father did not lose his life, he did lose his reason. The blow which he received upon his head affected his brain, and he has never recovered the use of his mental faculties since.”

“Where is he?” asked Tom, soberly, for this was heavy news.

“He is boarding in a private family in San Fran-

cisco. Let me explain, that, though he is not sane, he is not violent, and does not therefore require to be confined in an asylum. He is quiet and sane in many respects. He boards in a small family where there are children, and so far as one in his condition may, he appears to enjoy life. He is in good physical condition, works about the garden, goes on errands for the family, and is able to be useful in many ways."

"But what supports him?" asked Tom, anxiously. "His board amounts to something. How is it paid?"

"I pay it," answered Mr. Percival.

Tom rose impulsively and seized his hand.

"Thank you, sir, for your generous kindness to my poor father," he said.

"My boy, I would be glad to accept your thanks, if I deserved them, but you must remember that for eight years I have had possession of a considerable sum of money belonging to your father."

"But you did not know it was his."

"True, I did not know it, but I guessed it. I may as well explain that though I was only one of a party who discovered and rescued your father, I alone found the gold dust. Being found so near your father, I at once came to the conclusion that it was his, and resolved to devote so much of the income of it as might be needed to his support and welfare. I found a poor but worthy family, to whom the sum paid for his maintenance would be an important help, and I placed him in their charge. He is with them now."

"Is there no hope of his recovering his mind?" asked Tom, anxiously.

"The doctor says that anything which will recall his old life may restore his lost faculties. I think your presence, and what you could tell him of your mother, and his old home, may have a very important influence upon him."

"Then I must go to him as soon as I can," said Tom.

"Your eagerness is natural. A week hence I shall myself return. If you will wait till then I shall be able to introduce you to his presence. He knows me, and considers me his friend."

"Dr. Spooner," said Tom, "I shall be sorry to leave you and Mr. Brush, but I feel that I ought to go to my father as soon as possible."

"Of course, of course, Tom," said Peter; "but we sha'n't be separated. We will all go together."

"So say I," said Dr. Lycurgus Spooner.

"Good!" said Tom, joyfully.

"Then," said the banker, "I shall be able to complete my business with you all. I have bought your gold dust, you remember, and must settle for it. I can do so better in San Francisco than here. Besides, I shall have a large account to settle with my young friend here."

"With me?" asked Tom.

"Yes, the gold dust which I found I shall return to you with interest."

"But you have spent the interest on my father."

"Only a small part. Let me tell you, my boy, that that gold was the foundation of my fortune. It amounted to a little over twelve thousand dollars. I invested in building-lots in the city, and sold out at an immense

profit. I am now worth half a million, and that was the nucleus of my fortune."

"Half a million!" exclaimed Peter Brush, regarding his guest with awe.

"Yes. Now, let me tell you what I propose to do. To my young friend, Tom, I will turn over twenty-five thousand dollars, if he will give me a receipt in full for the money belonging to his father, which I have been using for eight years."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars! Mr. Percival, that is too much."

"It is not enough, but if you are satisfied, I will accept the rest as a voluntary concession of your rights."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars will make us all rich," said Tom, his eyes glowing with joy. "Mother can live like a lady."

"As I am sure she is."

"In that case," said Tom, "I won't claim any of the gold which we have found here. Doctor, I give you and Mr. Brush my share."

At first his two friends opposed this, but Tom was firm, and, knowing that he was now rich, they ceased their opposition.

A week later, the three friends, in company with Mr. Percival, set out for San Francisco, which they reached without any adventure which we feel called upon to record.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

IN THE upper part of San Francisco, where now stand fine mansions, there were at the time of my story, only a few small and modest houses, with land enough attached for a kitchen garden.

One of these was occupied by David Temple, employed as a clerk in the city. In his family for years Robert Thatcher had made his home.

He was at work in the garden—a man of about fifty, but looking considerably older on account of his hair, which had become prematurely whitened. His figure was slightly bent, and his face was embrowned by exposure. Physically he looked well, but in his face there was something wanting. His intellect was clouded, but many had conversed with him for an hour at a time without ascertaining the fact.

On many subjects Mr. Thatcher was sane, but on others his memory was at fault. This was especially the case when his own history was referred to. A veil seemed to shut out all that part of his existence which preceded his coming to California.

“Where did you live before coming to this State, Mr. Thatcher?” asked a visitor one day.

“Eh?” asked Thatcher, looking puzzled.

The question was repeated.

A troubled look overspread the face of the stricken man, as he answered slowly:

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t know?” was the amazed rejoinder.

“No, I can’t seem to remember.”

The visitor was called away, and privately informed of Mr. Thatcher’s peculiarity.

The Temple family took special care to avoid all disquieting allusions. They never in conversation referred to their guest’s past history, at least to that part of his life which preceded his arrival on the Pacific coast.

All these particulars were communicated to Tom by Mr. Percival when they were on their way to the city.

“Don’t you think there is any chance of father’s recovery?” asked our hero, considerably troubled.

“Yes I believe the sight of you will have a powerful effect.”

“But I was only a little boy when father left us. He will hardly be able to see any resemblance between me and the little boy he left behind him.”

“Tell him your name. Speak to him of your mother and sister; it may awaken old memories and associations.”

This advice seemed good to Tom and he determined to follow it.

When on the day of his arrival in San Francisco he went out with the banker to the little cottage where his father was domesticated, Tom felt agitated, and with reason. He was about to see the father whom he had

long supposed to be dead, and to test the possibility of his recovery.

“Is that he?” asked Tom, clutching the arm of Mr. Percival.

“Yes, Tom. Would you recognize him?”

“He looks much older, but his face looks natural. May I speak to him?”

“No; let me speak first. He knows me.”

“Good-day, Mr. Thatcher,” said the banker.

“Good-day, sir,” answered Thatcher, politely.

“I hope you are well.”

“Quite well, sir.”

His eyes rested upon Tom, and a puzzled expression swept over his face.

“Who is that?” he asked, abruptly.

“It is a young friend of mine. His name is Tom.”

“Where was it?” he continued, dreamily. “Tom! Tom! I once knew a boy of that name.”

“It is a common name. This boy is Tom Thatcher.”

The old man clutched his hoe convulsively.

“What did you say?” he asked, eagerly.

“Tom Thatcher—the same as yours.”

“Let me look at him,” said Thatcher, abruptly, hurrying to Tom and looking into his face with a bewildered look.

“Boy,” he said, hoarsely, “where do you come from? Who is your father?”

“I come from the town of Wilton,” answered Tom, trembling with excitement. “My father’s name was Robert Thatcher.”

“Wilton! Robert Thatcher! Why, that’s my name! Good heaven! what does this mean?”

“Did you ever have a son named Tom?” asked the banker.

“Why—yes,” answered Thatcher, his face lighting up with returning memory.

“And a daughter named Tillie?” asked Tom.

“Yes, yes! I remember it all now. Where, where are they?”

And he clutched Tom’s arm as he searched his face for an answer.

“Father,” said Tom, with emotion, “I am your son Tom.”

“And—and your mother?”

“She still lives. She is waiting for you to return to her.”

Robert Thatcher passed his hand over his brow.

“Can this be true?” he asked, “or is it a dream?”

“It is no dream, father. I have come to California to take you home. Will you come?”

“Yes, yes, now. But,” he added, with momentary doubt, “you cannot be Tom. Tom was a little boy, and you are a large one. He was only half your size.”

“That was long ago, father. I have grown up, but I am the same Tom.”

It must not be supposed that Robert Thatcher recovered his memory and reason all at once. It was not till Tom talked with him day after day, and patiently recalled one circumstance after another, and one person after another living in their native village, that the veil

which had hung between him and the past was rent at length, and the bright light of fully recovered reason illumined his mind. Tom did not act wholly according to his own judgment, but he was aided and advised by a skillful physician, conversant with mental maladies similar to that by which Mr. Thatcher was afflicted.

At length he was repaid for his patient labor. His father's mind returned to its normal condition, and four weeks after his arrival in San Francisco Tom and his father sailed for New York by the regular steamer.

Mr. Percival had settled up his indebtedness, and Tom carried with him drafts on New York for twenty-four thousand dollars. A part of the remaining thousand paid their passage, and the balance Tom carried with him in hard cash. Of course, the money properly belonged to his father, but it was Mr. Thatcher's desire that Tom should relieve him entirely of business cares.

We must precede him, and let the reader know what had happened in Wilton while Tom was away.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW THINGS WENT ON AT HOME.

WE GO back to the time of Tom's leaving home. His departure from Wilton excited considerable surprise, more especially as people could not find out where he had gone. Many were the inquiries made of Mrs. Thatcher, but she answered as Tom had requested her, "Tom has gone West."

"Indeed, has he gone far West?"

"I can't tell you precisely how far West he has gone," answered Mrs. Thatcher, smiling.

"Will he be gone long?"

"That depends on how successful he is in his business."

"I suppose he has taken some agency?" remarked Miss Woodward (an inquiring old maid).

Mrs. Thatcher said neither yes nor no, but somehow Miss Woodward got the idea that she said yes, and so reported throughout the village.

Mrs. Thatcher and Tillie moved to the comfortable farm-house of Mr. Hiram Bacon, as had been arranged before Tom went away, and this made Tom's departure a little less mysterious, since he was leaving his mother and sister in a good home.

Still there was considerable curiosity felt, and there

seemed a chance of finding out something when Tom wrote home.

"Have you heard from Tom yet?" asked the indefatigable Miss Woodward, a little later.

"Where did he write from?" asked the old maid, eagerly.

"From St. Louis," answered our hero's mother, with a little hesitation.

"Ah! St. Louis is a good way off. Is he going any further?"

"Perhaps so."

Another letter came to Mrs. Thatcher from St. Joseph, announcing that Tom was going across the plains, and that it might be a good while before he would be able to write again.

Mrs. Thatcher did not mention this second letter, but the postmaster noticed the postmark, and through him it became known.

Among those who heard of it was John Simpson. Rupert had picked up the news somewhere in the village.

"St. Joseph!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson, startled. "Why, it looks as if the boy was on his way to California."

"How could he go to California?" said Rupert, rather enviously. "Doesn't it cost a good deal of money?"

"Yes."

"He's as poor as poverty."

"True; but he has found money enough to go to St. Joseph, and that is no trifle."

Mr. Simpson felt uneasy. Was it because he feared that the ghastly mystery connected with Rocky Gulch would be unearthed, and his reputation blasted. At any rate, he decided to see Mrs. Thatcher himself, and find out what he could.

He did not call at the new home of the widow of his old partner, but chanced one day to meet her in the street.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Thatcher," said the squire, affably.

"Good-morning, sir," responded Mrs. Thatcher, coldly.

"I hear your son is away. You must miss him."

"I do miss him, Mr. Simpson."

"Has he gone far?"

"He has gone to the West."

"Far West?"

"I have not heard from him lately."

"Ha! There is something she wishes to conceal," thought John Simpson.

"I am afraid he won't get back the money his traveling expenses must cost him."

"He was obliged to do something, Mr. Simpson. There was no chance left for him in Wilton?"

"When you write to him, tell him that I will give him back his old place if he sees fit to come back."

"I will tell him," said Mrs. Thatcher, but she expressed no gratitude, for she felt none.

Why did John Simpson make this offer? Because he wanted to keep Tom away from California. After so

many years, there seemed little enough chance of the boy's learning anything of the circumstances attending his father's fate, but a guilty conscience makes men cowards, and John Simpson was troubled with an uneasy idea that some time, in some way to him unknown his crime might be made known.

There was another circumstance that puzzled him. How did Tom Thatcher obtain the necessary funds for so expensive a journey? Probably, he said to himself, Mrs. Thatcher had mortgaged her house, and given Tom the money. He determined to find out if he could.

"You must excuse what I am about to say, Mrs. Thatcher," he began, clearing his throat to begin with, "but I am afraid you did a foolish thing in raising money on your place to pay the expenses of such a wild-goose chase."

"Who told you I had mortgaged my place, Mr. Simpson?" demanded the widow, looking the rich man full in the face.

"Why, no one," stammered the squire, taken aback by her directness, "but I of course inferred it, knowing that Tom had no money of his own."

"Then you inferred a mistake," said Mrs. Thatcher. "The place is not mortgaged."

"You don't say so!" said Simpson, more than ever bewildered.

"I do not propose to mortgage my place at present."

"When you do," said Simpson, recovering himself, "come to me. I will do as well by you as any one."

It would indeed have suited him to obtain a lien upon

Mrs. Thatcher's humble homestead, that he might have her in his power.

She neither said yes nor no, but "I will bear in mind your offer, Mr. Simpson."

He walked slowly away, puzzling over the problem of where Tom obtained his money. Was there some one behind who backed him? Was there some one who had sent him to California, and, if so, why? He must know whether Tom had gone there.

Now, the postmaster had obtained his office through Mr. Simpson's influence, and was therefore likely to do him a favor.

"Mr. Jackson," he said, when alone with that functionary, "does Mrs. Thatcher write to her son Tom?"

"I haven't noticed any letter, sir."

"When she brings one, please notice the address, and let me know it. I am afraid the boy will spend all his mother's property if no one interferes. I want to write to him to come back. I will give him employment."

"Very kind of you, sir," said the postmaster, obsequiously.

"He is the son of my old associate," said John Simpson, with an assumption of generosity, "and I naturally feel an interest in him and his mother."

But for weeks Mrs. Thatcher brought no letters to the office. Tom was on the plains, and she knew not where to address him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MRS. THATCHER LOSES HER NEW HOME.

ONE DAY, about four months after Tom's departure, John Simpson sat at his writing-desk, busy about some accounts, when Rupert entered the room in visible excitement.

"Father," he said, "what do you think? Hiram Bacon died last night."

In a village like Wilton the death of a well-known citizen, especially if it is sudden, creates excitement.

"You must be mistaken, Rupert," said his father. "I saw Mr. Bacon no later than yesterday afternoon in the post-office."

"He's dead now," persisted Rupert. "He was found dead in bed this morning. The doctor says he died of heart disease."

"That's very sudden," said John Simpson, no longer incredulous. "I can hardly believe it."

"I wonder where Tom Thatcher's mother will live now," continued Rupert.

"I didn't think of that," said his father, his face lighting up with satisfaction. "To be sure, it will be a great loss to her. She will lose a comfortable living."

"I'm glad of it," said Rupert.

"Rupert, Rupert, don't rejoice over the misfortunes of your neighbors," but he spoke very mildly.

"I can't help it father. I hate Tom Thatcher and all his relations.

"You shouldn't hate anybody, my son," said Mr. Simpson; but his rebuke was very light.

"Don't you hate anybody, father?"

"Ahem! not that I am aware of, my son."

But when Rupert had left the room Mr. Simpson's face betrayed his satisfaction.

"You won't be quite so independent now, Mrs. Thatcher, I am thinking," he soliloquized. "You'll have a hard time getting along now. You'll have to mortgage your place after all, and I will be on hand to advance the money. You won't get any help from that vagabond son of yours. I shall live to see you all in the poor-house."

There did not seem to be much difference between Rupert and the father who had just been preaching charity to him, but Mr. Simpson never quite removed the mask which concealed his real character, even in the presence of his own son, who, nevertheless, understood him better than the father suspected.

Yet weeks and even months passed, and Mrs. Thatcher did not appear to stand in need of money, nor, so far as John Simpson could find out, did she make any effort to mortgage her place. He did not know what the reader is already aware of—that she was living on the hundred dollars which Tom had left with her, added to the scanty amount which she was able to earn with her needle.

But though she still was able to live day by day, her

face became more sad and anxious. She was famishing for news from Tom, yet no letter came from him. She knew, of course, that there would be a difficulty about writing when he was on the plains, but making all allowances for that, the time had come when she might expect to hear something. She could not know that at that very moment he was in captivity with the Indians, and if it had been made known to her it would only have increased her anxieties.

In her trouble the minister, Rev. Mr. Julian, was a friend and comforter. With him she shared her anxieties, and he said what he could to relieve her anxiety, though he, too, began to feel that something might have happened to his friend's son.

"Don't get discouraged, my dear friend," said the minister. "It is a long and wearisome journey across the plains. I believe Tom is quite safe, and that you will soon receive tidings from him."

"I wish I could feel so," said Mrs. Thatcher, sadly. "Mr. Julian, he is my only boy. I have Tillie, but my hopes rested with him. I looked to Tom to be the prop of my old age. Without him my life will be worth nothing."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Thatcher. You will still have your daughter to live for. But don't give up Tom. He is a manly boy, and will come back to you well and prosperous, if God wills."

"But if he is well why doesn't he write? He is not a boy to give me unnecessary anxiety by neglect."

"I can't explain that, but I can easily believe that the western mails are irregular."

This thought gave Mrs. Thatcher courage for a time, but soon another cause of anxiety presented itself. When at Mr. Bacon's, she had drawn upon her reserve fund of money more freely because she thought her position a permanent one. When she unexpectedly lost it this fund had considerably diminished.

She found herself at length with but five dollars left, and the thought forced itself upon her that she must mortgage her little place. Just at this juncture she received a call from John Simpson.

"Have you heard anything from Tom?" asked the manufacturer blandly, as he took a seat in Mrs. Thatcher's little sitting-room.

"No, Mr. Simpson," answered the widow, with a spasm of pain.

"Isn't that rather strange?"

"Oh, Mr. Simpson, you don't know how anxious I am about him," said the poor mother, sadly.

"Very natural, but I always thought it was unwise to let him go so far away. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Perhaps you are right, but I acted for the best. Then there was nothing for Tom to do here. You had dismissed him from the shop."

"Yes, I know, but I would have taken him back again after awhile."

"Why didn't you tell him so. Then he would have been here now."

"Things may turn out for the best after all, Mrs. Thatcher," said Mr. Simpson, evading a direct reply.

"Meanwhile, I came in to see if there was any way in which I could help you."

Mrs. Thatcher looked surprised. John Simpson was about the last person from whom she would have expected an offer of assistance.

"In what way?" she asked.

"I was thinking you might want to raise money on the place," suggested Simpson, blandly.

"I do need money," said the widow, hesitatingly.

"Of course you do; you couldn't well help it," said the manufacturer briskly. "Now I have come here prepared to make you an offer."

"Well, sir?" said Mrs. Thatcher, inquiringly.

"I will lend you four hundred dollars at six per cent. interest, and take a mortgage on the house and lot."

"That is less than half the value of the place," said the widow.

"What can you be thinking of, Mrs. Thatcher? Pray at what sum do you value this property?"

"It ought to be worth a thousand dollars."

John Simpson shook his head.

"It wouldn't bring over six hundred," he said.

"That can't be possible," said Mrs. Thatcher, anxiously.

"It is not only possible, but true," said the rich man, positively. "Property has depreciated dreadfully, dreadfully."

"Then I don't know what is going to become of us if Tom doesn't come back," said Mrs. Thatcher, in a tone of discouragement.

“ Oh, something will turn up,” said Simpson, carelessly. “ Well, widow, about the mortgage, what do you say?”

“ I will consult Mr. Julian.”

John Simpson frowned.

“ He is a minister. What does he know about business?”

“ He has business of his own to attend to. Besides, he is my friend.”

“ Better say the word now, widow. I may draw back from the agreement.”

“ Then I must apply to some one else. Even according to your own statement the place is worth six hundred dollars, and ought to command as large a mortgage anywhere.”

“ I said it wouldn't fetch six hundred dollars.”

“ I will not take such an important step, Mr. Simpson, without consulting some one.”

“ Very well,” said Simpson, displeased, “ take your own way, but it will be at your own risk.”

“ Let it be so, then,” said Mrs. Thatcher, calmly, and John Simpson left her, foiled for the present, but confident that he would eventually carry his point.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

IT WAS TEN o'clock in the evening. Tillie was fast asleep, but her mother, by the light of a small lamp, was engaged in sewing in her little sitting-room.

Her face was grave and sad. Her hope of seeing Tom again in life was fast growing fainter and fainter. He was her only boy, and she had lost him. She would never again see his bright face, or hear his cheerful voice through the long and weary years that probably awaited her.

Beside this loss pecuniary cares were of secondary importance, but they troubled her at this hour. If, as John Simpson said, the house and lot, her only property, would scarcely bring six hundred dollars, that would not last long, and how was she to get along? If only she had Tom's strong arm to rest upon, he would find something to do, and would not let his mother want.

The five dollars had now dwindled away. But fifty cents were left, and she could not get sewing enough to do to defray even their small expenses.

That very afternoon she had sent Tillie to the house of John Simpson, asking him to call the coming day. She had made up her mind to accept his offer, and either mortgage the place for four hundred dollars or sell it outright for six hundred, if he would give it.

She reckoned that two hundred dollars a year, in addition to what she could earn, would support them; and thus three years would be provided for. During that time Tom might come back. She would not give him up yet.

The outlook was sad enough, and it was no wonder that Mrs. Thatcher looked pale and sad, yet she was on the threshold of a great joy, though she knew it not.

At length, about half-past ten, she rose from her sewing and prepared to go to bed.

At that very minute she heard a knock at her door.

"Who can be coming here at this hour?" she thought, with alarm.

Not long before a tramp had entered a house in the village during the night, and it occurred to her that this might be the same man or one of his confederates. She was alone and defenseless, and naturally she felt nervous.

"Who is there?" she asked, in a tremulous voice.

"It's I, mother."

There was something in that voice which sent a thrill through her veins, and wakened a glad hope in her heart.

No hesitating now! Hurriedly she opened the door, and uttered a glad cry of surprise as Tom entered.

"Oh, my boy, my boy! I thought I should never see you again!" she cried, as she clasped him to her bosom.

"A bad penny always turns up again," said Tom, merrily.

Then Mrs. Thatcher had a chance to look at the boy from whom she had been separated for a year.

"You have grown taller, Tom," she said.

"Yes, mother, I am at least two inches taller."

Then she examined his clothes. They were well worn; in fact, they were shabby. It was clear that Tom had not been successful. But what of that? She had him back, and that was better than all.

"Well, Tom," she said, "you didn't find it pay going to California?"

Tom smiled.

"I am glad I went, though I did have a hard time getting there."

"Why didn't you write?"

"On the plains there were no post-office, or scarcely any. Then, again, I was captured by the Indians, and kept a prisoner for three months."

Mrs. Thatcher uttered a little cry.

"Oh, Tom! if I had known that I should have died of anxiety."

"Then it's well you didn't know, mother."

"How did you happen to come here instead of to Mr. Bacon's?"

"I heard that he was dead. How have you got along, mother? Have you been pressed for money?"

"I have fifty cents left, Tom, but now that you are back I won't feel anxious any more. You will stay at home, now, won't you?"

"But can I get any work, mother?"

"Yes; John Simpson says he will take you back into the shop."

"And give me three dollars a week?"



MRS. THATCHER UTTERED A GLAD CRY OF SURPRISE AS TOM ENTERED
[Page 245.]

"Yes; that will be better than nothing. Take it for awhile, Tom. I can't have you go away again just yet."

"I'll see about it, mother."

Then Mrs. Thatcher told Tom that Mr. Simpson was coming the next day to arrange about a mortgage on the place.

"That is, if you think it best, Tom."

"Let him come, mother. We will talk it over. I shall want to see him myself about business."

"You won't say anything to irritate him, Tom? You know he might refuse to give you a place again in the shop."

"And that would be a misfortune," said Tom, smiling.

"Of course. That will enable you to stay at home with me, and we can be so happy together, Tom. We may live poorly, but if we are together, we won't mind that."

"It seems good to be at home again, mother, but I have something important to say to you."

"You, Tom?"

"Something that will surprise you very much."

"What is it, Tom?" asked his mother, anxiously.

"Not bad news?"

"No, good news. Do you think you can bear it?"

"Bear good news! Why shouldn't I?"

"I met an old friend in California—one whom we all thought to be dead. He has come home with me."

"An old friend? I can't think whom you mean, Tom," said his mother, with a puzzled expression.

“We thought,” continued Tom, slowly, “that he died in California eight—nine years ago.”

“What can you mean, Tom?” asked his mother, in deep agitation, for she began to suspect the truth.

Tom’s answer was to open the outer door again, and call:

“Father!”

Then Mr. Thatcher, who had been patiently waiting for Tom to break the news to his wife, entered. Instantly he was clasped in the arms of his wife.

The shock and surprise were so great that Mrs. Thatcher came near fainting away, but joy is seldom dangerous, and she soon recovered.

“Mother,” said Tom, after a brief space, “there are reasons why we do not want father’s return made known in the village just at present. Do you think Tillie will recognize him?”

“No; she was very young when her father went away.”

“Then call him by a different name in her presence, so she may not suspect the truth.”

“You may call me Johnson,” said Mr. Thatcher. “I had a friend of that name in California. It will do as well as any other.”

“I will try to hide the secret, but I fear my face will betray it.”

“People will think you are excited by Tom’s return,” said her husband.

“How thankful I ought to be!” said Mrs. Thatcher. “I thought myself almost alone in the world, and

to-night has brought me back two dear ones. I am twice blessed!"

"Now," thought Tom, "we shall be ready to see Mr. Simpson in the morning. If father's appearance does not confound him, Mr. Darke will arrive early, and his testimony will confront him with another crime attempted."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

RETRIBUTION OVERTAKES JOHN SIMPSON.

IT MUST be explained that Tom and his father, on reaching New York late in the evening, went to the Astor House to spend the night.

At the breakfast-table the next morning, Tom, in looking about him, to his great surprise recognized Darius Darke. Mr. Darke was equally surprised to meet Tom. It appeared that Mr. Darke had arrived from Europe on a Cunard steamer only two days previous.

He reported that he had a pleasant trip. During his absence his man of business, with whom he had left his funds, had managed by skillful manipulation to more than double his money, so that he found himself, even after deducting the expenses of his European trip, the possessor of twenty thousand dollars.

Tom, too, had his story to tell, and he received the hearty congratulations of Darius Darke for the energy, perseverance and pluck which had enabled him to succeed in the face of so many difficulties.

“And now, Tom,” said Mr. Darke, “we will form an alliance, go up to Wilton, and bring consternation and dismay to our common enemy, John Simpson.”

So it was agreed, but Mr. Darke was to stop over night at a town five miles distant from Wilton, and ride over in the morning.

John Simpson, with a pleasant sense of triumph in his heart, left his handsome dwelling to call upon Mrs. Thatcher, whom he considered now to be in his power.

He could not explain why it was that he hated the Thatchers so much, but it is generally the case that the victim is hated by the one who has injured him. Moreover, as long as Mrs. Thatcher remained in Wilton she recalled a scene in his life which he was anxious to forget.

Therefore, he desired by depriving her of her humble home to force her to leave Wilton for good.

When Mr. Simpson entered the cottage he found Mrs. Thatcher alone. Tom and his father and sister were together in an upper room.

"Well, widow, I've called to see you about the mortgage," said the rich man, sinking into a rocking-chair.

At the words Mrs. Thatcher's heart felt a thrill of happiness, for she was a widow no longer. She did not know, for it had not been revealed to her, that the man before her had tried to make her a widow, or she would not have been able to treat him with common politeness.

"Can't you let me have more than four hundred dollars on the place, Mr. Simpson?" she asked, having been so instructed by Tom.

"No," said the shoe manufacturer, decidedly.

"The place is worth a thousand dollars."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Thatcher. It wouldn't bring over six hundred."

"I can hardly believe that."

"I will strain a point and give you that sum," said Mr. Simpson, who knew very well that he would be making an excellent bargain.

"I can't decide upon so important a matter without consulting my son."

To Mr. Simpson's amazement she went to the foot of the stairs and called "Tom."

"Has Tom got home?" asked the rich man, looking disturbed.

"He got home last night."

Before Mr. Simpson had a chance to ask any further questions, Tom entered the room. He was looking healthy and manly, but he was shabbily dressed.

"He has returned as poor as he went," thought John Simpson.

"So you've got home," said he coldly.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are probably convinced by this time that you were a fool to leave home."

"No, sir; I have seen something of the world. Besides, there was nothing for me to do here."

"Where did you go?"

"To California."

Mr. Simpson started, and carefully scrutinized Tom's face, but it told him nothing.

"There was nothing for me to do here," continued Tom.

"Mr. Simpson said the other day that he would take you back into his shop," said Mrs. Thatcher.

Tom looked inquiringly at the rich man, who said, coldly: "At present there is no vacancy. There may not be any for some months."

"But how am I to live in the meantime?" asked Tom.

"On the money I will advance to your mother on the place."

Mrs. Thatcher repeated the offer which Mr. Simpson had made, and asked: "Shall I accept, Tom?"

"No," answered Tom, promptly.

"Do you propose to be guided by the advice of this young jackanapes, Mrs. Thatcher?" asked John Simpson, angrily.

"Tom knows more about business than I do."

"He looks like it—a ragged tramp like him!" said the rich man, with a sneer. "After that display of impudence I refuse altogether to employ him. Now you can do as you please—accept my offer or starve with him."

"Mother," said Tom, quietly, "will you be kind enough to leave me alone with Mr. Simpson? I wish to speak to him in private."

"Certainly, Tom."

Very much to his surprise, Mr. Simpson found himself left alone with Tom, whose manner was self-possessed and grave.

"What does all this mean?" he asked, imperiously.

"Be patient, Mr. Simpson, I have something to say which you ought to hear. When I was in California I visited a place called Rocky Gulch."

John Simpson's ruddy face paled, and he made a visible start, but he recovered himself by an effort.

"That was foolish," he said. "All the gold dust has been gathered long ago, and there could be no advantage in going there."

"I wanted to find out something, if I could, about my poor father's disappearance," said Tom, gravely.

"Then you wasted your time," said Simpson, nervously.

"No; I learned something."

"What was it?" asked the rich man, in a voice slightly tremulous.

"I learned that while my father was asleep, one whom he supposed to be a friend stole upon him, attacked him, and left him for dead, carrying away a large sum belonging to my poor father."

"That is a lie!" said Simpson, his face livid with dismay, rising from his chair.

The door opened and Tom's father entered the room.

"It is true, John Simpson," he said, sternly, "and you are the guilty man who stole in upon my unprotected slumbers, and sought to kill me."

"Great heavens! Whence do you come?" demanded Simpson, hoarsely.

"I come from California, where for eight years and more I lived bereft of reason in consequence of your cruel assault."

"You need not tell me that," said Simpson, with a bold inspiration. "Your story is evidently the tale of a crazy man, and will not be believed. I am glad you are alive, but your attempt to levy blackmail will not succeed," and he sat down with a smile of gratified malice.

"If such is the case and my father's story is untrue, why did you give five hundred dollars to Darius Darke to keep your secret, about a year ago?"

This was another surprise. How could Tom know this? Certainly not from the man who had received the money, for he had been burned in the old barn.

"Who told you this cock-and-bull story?" demanded Mr. Simpson, defiantly. "It is clearly a bold invention of yours."

Another door opened, and John Simpson stared aghast at the man whom he had supposed to have been burned alive in the conflagration.

"It is no invention, John Simpson," said the newcomer.

"Where do you come from?" asked Simpson, with staring eyes and parched lips.

"From Europe. You were very cunning, John Simpson, in your attempt, by destroying my life, to silence forever the tongue of one who might have appeared against you, but Providence did not suffer you to succeed. I did not sleep in the old barn; I passed the night in your stable, which I found more comfortable."

"And set my barn on fire! That explains it," said Simpson, desperately.

"No, it does not explain it. With my own eyes I saw you set the fire. I understood your motive. I meant you to believe that you had succeeded, and I left the village during the night. I went to New York, made a fortune in stocks, and went to Europe, but I gave the five hundred dollars I had wrung from your fears to this boy, and sent him to California, where he succeeded better than I expected. Your old crime and your new one are discovered, John Simpson. Your race is run."

“You can’t do anything,” said Simpson, defiantly.

“We can procure your arrest on a double charge of attempted murder, if you wish to stand trial.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Simpson, with blanched face.
“It isn’t true, but it would blast my reputation.”

“It is true, and you know it.”

“Can’t we compromise this thing?” asked Simpson, nervously.

“It is for this boy to determine. Tom, what will you accept?”

“How much money of my father’s did Mr. Simpson obtain?”

“Ten thousand dollars, at least.”

“Let him pay to my father ten thousand dollars, with interest for nine years, and I shall be willing to let him off.”

“And you, Mr. Thatcher?”

“I leave the matter in Tom’s hands.”

Before John Simpson left the cottage, which he had entered for a very different purpose, he had entered into a covenant to pay the sum demanded.

In a subsequent interview he offered Mr. Thatcher his house, furniture, and large manufactory, in lieu of the money, and, as they were amply worth that, the offer was accepted, Mr. Thatcher having a desire to return to his old business.

With the remnant of his fortune, Mr. Simpson left town, and established himself in a Western State. He couldn’t bear to see daily the man whom he had attempted to murder.

Here he was induced to engage in speculations, lost

all his money in the course of a few years, and died of grief. Rupert, now reduced to penury, found his way back to Wilton, and obtained a position as workman in the shop which his father had once owned. His pride had had a severe fall.

Tom became his father's junior partner, and at twenty-one is really acting-manager and responsible head of the great shop where he once worked for three dollars a week. Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher now live in the handsome house once owned by John Simpson, while Rupert, rather curiously, is a boarder in the humble cottage once occupied by the Thatchers.

No one in Wilton understands how this wonderful change was brought about, for Tom and his father kept Mr. Simpson's guilt and restitution a secret. It is popularly supposed that Mr. Thatcher was very fortunate in California, and made his fortune there.

It is not certain that Tom will remain long in Wilton, or in his present business. He has a handsome offer from Samuel Perkins, of Pearl Street, New York, whose papers he restored, and as he would like a larger field of action he may remove to New York and become a commission merchant. Indeed, as his father is willing to retire from business it is likely that he will accept the first fair offer for his manufactory and establish himself in the city.

Mrs. Thatcher is well and happy, and it is needless to say proud of Tom, whose energy and pluck enabled him successfully to find the clew which restored to him in the end a father and a fortune.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

BY WILLIAM BENNETT.



THE boy home for the holidays is always suspected of all manner of mischief.

I know that I, Charley Mitford, found it so when I was home for my last Christmas holidays. Everything that went wrong was sure to be my fault; sometimes I was blamed justly, but generally, I thought, unjustly. I will tell you about one scrape of mine.

My father had invited a middle-aged gentleman, who was a learned professor, and a terrible book-worm, to spend a week or two at our house.

I didn't like Dr. Millbank, and he hated me and all other boys. I generally kept out of his way; but one day, the doctor being in a more friendly and talkative mood than ordinary, I ventured to accompany him into the library, taking care only to speak to him when he condescended to speak to me.

The doctor, however, soon became lost in a book, and altogether forgot my presence. I accordingly retired into the recess of a window, and also engaged myself

with a book on old sports and pastimes. Dr. Millbank's back was turned upon me, and he was thoroughly lost in his studies.

Now, learned as was the doctor in his special subjects—mostly of the dry-as-dust order—he knew but little of the natural history of magpies; and at the present moment my interest and the interest of my story is with one of those birds, Jack by name.

He was a tame magpie, a clever talker, and a great pet in our household, though he was as mischievous, almost, as they said I was.

He came hopping into the library, unseen by the doctor, but watched by my observant eyes. He stealthily posted himself on a chair; it seemed that there was something on his mind.

While he was ensconced in his citadel of the chair, he kept his cunning, twinkling eyes fixed on the doctor's silver spectacles on his nose. Magpies are fond of pilfering bright or glittering articles, and with secret joy I saw that Jack was meditating a theft.

Perched, however, in his elevated position, and seeing no hope for the present of purloining the spectacles, he stealthily took the leather case which the doctor had laid upon the table after taking the glasses therefrom. Then he stealthily hopped out of the room.

A few minutes later, the doctor, weary of his book, took his spectacles from his nose, and naturally enough, sought the case to place them in. The case was not to be found.

“This is most mysterious. I know I placed it on the

table. Dear me! dear me! always something to annoy me!"

It was very wrong, no doubt, to laugh at the misfortunes or annoyances of other people, but I was home for the holidays, you know, and I really couldn't help it. He laid down his spectacles on the table, while he took a walk round the room, frowning in his displeasure and mystification. Then he espied me lounging with outstretched legs in the recess with my book of sports.

"Ah, ah, Master Charles, and so you are the culprit, are you?"

"Sir!" I exclaimed, affecting to be ignorant of his meaning.

"My spectacle-case—where is it?"

"Spectacle-case? I have not got it."

"What! Why, I laid it beside me on the table, and now it is gone! You should not take such liberties with your elders."

"Why, sir, I have not moved from the spot where I am sitting, and it is a very hard case for me to be accused of removing it."

"Your joke is impertinent at a time like this. You are the only person, as I said before, who has been in the library since I have been reading here——"

"Excuse me, doctor——"

"Do not interrupt me, Master Charles. I must ring the bell for your father. Boys home for the holidays take so much license nowadays that really they have become an intolerable nuisance. There should be no school holidays if I could have my way."

As he spoke, the doctor advanced to the bell-rope. He walked with his back toward the door, and as he did so my old friend Jack, the magpie, came hop-hop-hopping in, and his thievish eye at once fell upon the silver specs, which the enraged man had laid down on the very spot on the table where before he had laid the case which had so disgraced me in his eyes.

Jack quietly hopped upon his old quarters in the arm-chair and as quickly possessed himself of the envied trophy, and I became the innocent witness of another theft much greater than the last.

Deeper disgrace to me, I thought; but as the doctor was evidently sure I was the culprit, and was not likely to accept any explanation from me, I thought it best to keep quiet, though by this I no doubt made myself Jack's accessory.

A servant answered the bell, and he was requested to send my father hither, and, of course, my father came.

"Well, doctor, what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" he inquired. "You appear agitated—what is the matter?"

"Look here, sir, if you please," said the doctor to my father. "I laid my spectacle-case on the table where you see my glasses," and here he pointed to the table, and my father looked on the spot indicated, and said:

"Where, doctor, where? I see no glasses."

We were all standing some distance from the table, and the doctor could not see what was on it; he only spoke from the knowledge that he had placed his spectacles on the table, to which he now drew near,

when, to his great surprise, and to my greater amusement, he made the same discovery that my father had done, that there were no glasses there.

“Why, sir, not five minutes ago I laid my glasses on this spot!” he exclaimed, giving the table rather a loud rap with his knuckles, which did not harm the table, though it did the knuckles, as the doctor’s screwed-up face indicated. “There, sir, exactly there—and now you see with your own eyes that both case and spectacles are gone!”

“It is a very mysterious occurrence, Dr. Millbank,” remarked my father.

“I cannot say that I see any mystery about it, sir; I am no believer in spiritualism, but I am in logic, I laid the spectacles and case there on that table. They are now gone—no one has been in the room but Master Charles.”

“*Ergo*, Master Charles must have them,” interrupted my father. “That is the true inference of your logic.”

Just then, another visitor came hopping into the room—no less than my father’s favorite, Jack, the magpie. My father was now seated by the side of the doctor, and the bird, as was his custom, hopped and flew to his shoulder, which was his favorite perch when he had the opportunity.

“Well pa,” said the cunning bird, bending his head and beak to my parent’s face.

“And what do you want, Master Jack?”

“Sho!” said the magpie, which was another daily

phrase of his which he had picked up. Then he pretended to be sleepy, winking and blinking, and even yawning and crying, "Poor Jack! poor Jack!"

"A fine, rare bird, Mr. Mitford, is your magpie," said the doctor, who would not have said so much had he known, as I did, that Jack was the author of his misery.

"By the by," cried my father, "I wonder if the magpie has taken the things from the table!"

"Tell the truth!" I said, catching the bird up by his tail, much to his displeasure. "What have you done with the spectacles?"

"Sho!" screamed the bird, making divers pecks at my hands.

"Depend upon it, my friend," said my father, "it is the magpie who is the thief."

"Easier said than proved, dear sir," replied the doctor. "I know this, however, that I would not keep a bird capable of such thefts. But I am surprised, Mr. Mitford, that you should suggest such a solution of the mystery. It is quite a vulgar error to suppose that magpies are thieves of anything but that which contributes to their sustenance. If a magpie will take one bright thing he will take another. There is a silver pencil-case," said the incredulous doctor, placing it on the table, when, to his great surprise, the bird, that had hitherto been immovable, hopped from my father's shoulder to the armchair. "Now, sir, if the bird took my glasses, and if it is his nature to steal, he will soon possess himself of the pencil-case."

“Not when he is observed, perhaps. Jack, like human thieves, doesn’t like his evil propensities to be seen.”

“Then let us all three retire and leave the magpie with the pencil-case. What then?”

“Why, that when we return you will find the bird and the case both flown.”

“A bargain, sir!” said the doctor, quite pleased that he should soon have the satisfaction of proving my father in the wrong.

We all retired to the dining-room, and had a little agreeable talk about magpies, and the plot that had been laid to discover whether Jack was a thief or not.

An hour later I asked whether I should go and look after the bird and the case.

“No, thanks, Master Charles,” said the doctor, “I object to that; you are home for the holidays. We will all go together when your father is prepared.”

“I am quite ready, sir.”

So we all three went to the library and to the table. Bird and pencil-case had vanished! The doctor was astonished; I and my father were not, but laughed to each other at the doctor’s expression of surprise.

“What do you say now, doctor?” quizzed my delighted parent.

“That they are gone!” he replied.

“It could not be by ‘the boy home for the holidays,’ now, could it?”

“But the bird, sir—where is the bird?” exclaimed the doctor, who fairly felt himself in a dilemma.

"Gone to his storehouse," replied my father.

"And where is that?"

"I have not been able to discover."

"Have you taken any means to do so?"

"I have not. Can you suggest any?" inquired my father.

"Watch him," was the laconic but sensible reply.

"But the cunning fellow has committed his depredations when he has not been seen."

"Plant some temptation for him, as now, and then place three or four persons to watch where he takes it."

"A very good idea, and I will follow it out now, if you please.

"I should like very much, for my curiosity is now deeply excited. Ah! Master Charles, you are a boy of an excellent temper to bear so well as you have done with my petulance and hasty conclusions."

"Now," said my father, "I will place my gold pencil-case on the spot where you placed your silver one, and then wait the return of the sly old bird.

This was done, and it was not many minutes before the bird entered, no doubt to see if there were any more bright things to be taken away. What! another pencil-case for Jack! No one was in the room but the doctor, who, this time pretended to be deeply engaged in a book, as I had before done, while I and my father planted ourselves in unseen places outside the room. The bird was not slow in accomplishing his theft, and as quickly hopped out of the library with the pencil-case.

"Seeing is believing!" exclaimed the doctor, closing

the book with a loud bang. "I wouldn't keep a magpie for the world."

Then he made his way to the courtyard, where I and my father had stationed ourselves. We had not been long here before the bird came hopping along with the pencil-case in his beak, and he flew to the top of a loft.

The doctor's countenance expressed indescribable surprise, while I and my father laughed heartily as Jack flew up to his hiding place.

We all ascended the ladder, and when we had got to the roof, there, in a leaden valley between two angles, we discovered a hoard of bright things, among others the cases and spectacles belonging to Dr. Millbank!

"What do you say now, doctor?" triumphantly asked my father, extending his hands over the magpie's storehouse and handing him back his property.

"That I will never keep a magpie," he returned, shaking his head, placing his hands behind the tail of his long clerical-cut coat, and blushing and laughing.

During a little conversation between us on the top of the loft the saucy bird returned, looking unutterable things and screaming when he saw us there and his hoard disturbed.

When the doctor held up his glasses, and was about to admonish him, the bird turned tail upon us and flew off, croaking "Sho! Sho!" and we did not see him for two days afterward. He was evidently deeply offended; indeed, Jack was not the same bird afterward, and was even cold and indifferent to the caress of my father; as for "Master Charles," he dare not touch Jack's tail.

On taking his departure, the doctor, smiling good-naturedly, remarked:

“I assure you, Mr. Mitford, until now I set down all these wonderful stories of animals that we meet with as fabulous. But your bird, sir, has taught me a wholesome lesson, that things may nevertheless be true, whether we believe them or not; and, further, I have had a warning not to be too hasty in coming to conclusions with boys home for the holidays upon circumstantial evidence; and still further, that as long as I wear spectacles I will never keep a magpie.”

We each and all had a hearty laugh, a shake of the hand, and the doctor took his departure. When he next loses his spectacles he will inquire if there is a magpie around.

THAT BELL!

BY PAUL BLAKE.



ERRY was a boy of many characteristics.

The most notable were an amazing love of sleep and a desperate activity when awake.

He seemed to lay in a fresh stock of energy every time he had a nap, and although the most difficult boy in the world to waken, when he was awake he was irrepressible.

It was winter. Berry found that season of the year did not agree with his constitution.

“This getting up in the middle of the night is killing me,” he remarked one day to a group of sympathizers. He had the whole school on his side in this particular matter, for work before breakfast in winter was decidedly unpopular. At half-past seven every boy had to be at his desk “putting in” an hour at mathematics before prayers and breakfast.

It was pitch dark at seven, when the big bell rang as a signal to rise. It is curious how difficult it was to hear that bell in winter. Berry never heard it, or rather never heeded it. He scorned to rise till twenty minutes

past seven. He could "do it," as he termed dressing, in ten minutes, and had been known to do it in five. On such occasions his personal ablutions were apt to be rather neglected.

"That old bell is at the bottom of it," remarked Culverwell, another boy, who found that the heavy clang disturbed his slumbers.

"It's John who's at the bottom of the bell," put in Millward.

"I wish he'd resign," said Berry. "It's time they pensioned him off and sent him to a hospital for incurables."

"He's a hopeless job," said Millward. "I spent half an hour one day trying to make him understand that I was willing to stand him a shilling if he'd give us a few minutes' grace in the morning. But he's as deaf as a post and though he took my shilling he rang us up more punctually than ever next morning."

"I wish he'd hang himself with his bell-rope," said Culverwell.

They eyed the offending bell, which hung idly in its turret, built over what was once a stable, but was now part of the school building.

"I wish we could muffle the old thing," said Millward, looking wistfully up. "It's freezing hard, and 'twill be deadly work getting up to-morrow."

"I believe I could shy a stone up and crack it," suggested another.

Berry had been silently inspecting the building.

"Tell you what, you fellows," he said at last, "I

believe I could get up there if I had a ladder. Out of the small class-room window, jump on the ledge, then creep up the roof by the chimney, then a ladder over the space to the turret. If you fellows will hand me up the ladder I'll go!"

They were all dumb for a moment at his audacity. Then Millward said:

"How are you going to get into the small class-room? It's always locked in play-time."

"So 'tis," assented Culverwell.

"Then I must get up to the ledge with a ladder, and then pull it up after me."

"You're a plucky beggar!" exclaimed Millward, in admiration. "Shouldn't we have a jolly snooze in the morning if you could stop that old bell's jaw!"

"I will, too," said Berry. "There must be a ladder somewhere about."

"There's the one John uses to clean the outside of the windows," suggested Millward, "but it isn't long enough."

"It may do," said Berry. "Come along, let's get hold of it. This is just the time; it's dark, and 't isn't tea-time for half an hour."

It was just five o'clock and nearly every boy was indoors; few cared for sliding on a worn slide in the dark, and a game was out of the question. So the three boys had small fear of being discovered as they prowled about in search of John's ladder.

That worthy was having his tea, and was not likely to be disturbed by any noise, for he was stone deaf. The

boys hauled out his ladder almost from under his nose without his hearing a sound. Culverwell kept "cave" while Millward held the ladder for Berry to ascend.

It was a plucky if not perilous feat to attempt in the dark. But Berry was abounding in pluck, and the spirit of the adventure made him keep his nerve. He soon found himself on the ledge, and managed to haul up the ladder after him. It was an assistance instead of an incumbrance in crossing the roof, and he soon was within a dozen feet of the turret.

The boys below anxiously waited for his reappearance. But he had a job before him. His idea was to unship the tongue of the bell. He had a glorious reward if he could succeed, *for John would never know if the bell rang or not!*

It would be superb to have the old factotum pulling away at his rope and fancying he was fulfilling his duty when the tongueless bell was swinging silently on its pivot.

Berry worked the tongue this way and that, but it was a difficult job. The inside of the bell was as dark as the inside of a wolf, to use a hunter's simile; he had to feel everything, and the metal was terribly cold.

However, at last he managed to unhitch it. He deliberated what to do with it, now he had it. He put it in his pocket, and descended as quickly as was consistent with security.

"Off with the ladder," was his first order.

They soon had that in its place again. Then they felt safe from detection.

“What are you going to do with it?” asked Millward, alluding to the rusty tongue which Berry exhibited.

“I think I shall leave it at the bottom of the turret. If I take it away they’ll know some one’s been up, but if we leave it here they’ll think it’s dropped down.”

“Let’s hope they will,” said Culverwell, dubiously.

“At any rate, I’ll chance it,” continued Berry. “So you fellows will be able to have a tall time to-morrow morning; we sha’n’t get called till half-past eight, at the earliest.”

The sequel proved the correctness of Berry’s prophecy. Old John sought his bell-rope punctually at seven, as usual, rang away steadily for three minutes, and then retired to his den to commence his never-ending job of shoe-cleaning. One or two boys awoke from sheer habit, but, hearing no bell, went to sleep again. The rest slumbered peacefully on, little thinking to whom they owed their unwonted repose.

The whole household were asleep. The big bell was the signal for rising to every one, servants included, with the exception of John and his wife. Her duty was to light the schoolroom fires, after which she retired to her own part of the house to prepare her husband’s breakfast. These two almost useless pensioners on the doctor’s bounty inhabited two rooms apart from the rest of the house.

How long every one would have slept can not be known, perhaps till nine, for when one depends on a bell for waking, one waits for the accustomed sound. But dogs are not like human beings, and Fido, who always

had his breakfast at eight, began making a great disturbance at a quarter past.

Fido woke his mistress, the doctor's wife. She looked at her watch—8:15. She was surprised beyond measure, as there was a strange silence everywhere. But the clock on the mantelpiece confirmed her watch, and two minutes later bells were ringing in a manner which brought the servants out of their beds with a jump.

By half-past eight, every one, boys and all, had been awakened, informally, for the bell refused to make a sound. John was summoned, and was at last made to understand what was the matter. He asseverated warmly that he had rung the bell, and went on a tour of inspection. He found the tongue on the ground, and obtaining a ladder from the gardener, next door, fastened it in its place again before it was time to ring for school.

“Never had such a gorgeous sleep in my life,” said Millward, warmly, to Berry. “We’ll vote you a silver tankard as a reward of merit.”

“Pity the trick can’t be played twice,” remarked Culverwell. “They don’t seem to suspect anything this time, but if it were to happen again, there’d be an inquisition.”

Berry heaved a regretful sigh. It was hard to think that at seven next morning the inexorable bell would toll out as usual the knell of departing night.

Something that day put him in a peculiarly reckless mood. More than that, he did not get his usual afternoon nap; he was disturbed by an inconsiderate master,

who wanted to know when his exercises were going to be handed in to him. So five o'clock found Berry ready for any deed requiring more cheek than usual.

The bell! It struck him directly after he had written his last line. Whatever might happen, he would have one more good sleep.

He did not confide his intentions this time to his two friends. He knew his way now. In five minutes he had captured the ladder and placed it against the wall.

He was just stepping off it on to the ledge, when he heard footsteps beneath him, perilously near. If he attempted to draw up the ladder, the noise must attract attention. His only chance was to keep quite still, in the hope that the ladder wouldn't be noticed in the dark.

But it was. Old John happened to have finished his tea earlier than usual, and was on his way to fetch an armful of wood.

"Now, who's been taking my ladder!" he said to himself. "Suppose it's one of them boys wanting to get their balls off the ledge."

He put the ladder on his shoulder and marched off with it.

Berry listened in horror. He did not know it was John who had captured his only means of retreat; whoever it was, he must throw himself on his mercy.

"Hi!" he called out, in a voice meant to combine a shout and a whisper.

"Hi! you there!"

It was a shout this time and no mistake. But it had no effect.

Berry knew now it must be John. It was no use to shout. He tore off a piece of plaster, and shied it in the direction of the retreating figure.

It struck the ground close to John, but he did not hear it. Poor Berry was left alone on the ledge, fourteen feet from the ground.

He couldn't drop, for there was a nasty grating just beneath him; besides, he could not lower himself from the narrow ledge. He might have done it in daylight, but not in darkness. Even his pluck must draw the line somewhere.

It was an uninviting night, and not a boy was out of doors. There was nothing for it but to accept the inevitable, and remain where he was until something happened.

He knew well enough what would happen. After tea there would be calling over; he would be unable to say "Adsum," and inquiry would be made, resulting in his capture and punishment.

Once more he proved himself a true prophet. Everything fell out exactly as he had anticipated. And by the time he was assisted down he was so cramped and frozen he would have welcomed a caning on the spot to warm him.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the authorities did not connect his being on the ledge with the outrage on the bell of the day before. He received the usual punish-

ment for missing calling over, but beyond that nothing was done.

Probably the master who captured him considered he had already received punishment enough. At any rate, Berry was of opinion that he had bought his extra hour's sleep rather dearly.

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