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THE CHINESE CONSPIRACY ;

OR,

A NAVAL CADET'S ADVENTURES IN THE CELESTIAL EMPIRE.

BY ENRIQUE H. LEWIS.

CHAPTER I.

FOO CHOW, CHINA.

"THERE is a boat approaching from shore, sir"

"Very well," replied the officer addressed, returning the old quartermaster's salute ; then as he walked forward toward the gangway, he mused : "Some of our guests arriving early. Wonder who it is?"

As he mounted the grating his smile of welcome changed to a look of indifference, however, for the only passenger in the rapidly nearing sampan was a placid faced Chinaman, and, to judge from his distinctive badge, one of the native messengers.

It was a bright, sunny day, some few weeks previous to the commencement of hostilities in the late Franco-Chinese war, and the famous old frigate Benton, flagship of the American fleet on the Asiatic station, was riding quietly at anchor off the pagoda anchorage near the city of Foo Chow, China. She had only arrived from Japan, called in haste owing to the grave complications existing between France and China, and the gallant admiral, Hornby Hewett, commander in chief of the fleet, had issued invitations to a reception and ball on board, remarking in his characteristic way :

"We'll have a little fun while we can, gentlemen, before the other ball commences."

The ship was in gala attire. From jib-boom to spanker end ; from pin-rail to truck, streamed the banners of all nations, and high above them, waving its broad folds in the breeze, was the American ensign, glorious in depth of color and significance of liberty.

The grim trappings of war had given way to flowery emblems of peace, and the long rows of open ports revealed, instead of frowning cannon, only a stretch of tranquil deck, flag wreathed and green with the decorations of many plants. The excellent naval band had already taken their places for a final practice, and, as the sweet music of stringed instruments floated over the water, the Mongolian messenger gazed in saucer eyed wonder at the strange scene.

At last his sampan touched the side, and, as he mounted the ladder, he extricated a sealed document from some mysterious pocket of his blouse, and handed it, with profound obeisance, to the lieutenant.

The latter received it with a languid air of unconcern which changed to one of awakened interest as he read the inscription :

ADMIRAL HORNBY HEWETT,
U. S. Flagship Benton.

"What in the deuce is up, I wonder?" he muttered, as he

saw that the official envelope bore in the left hand corner the words : "Important. To be delivered immediately," and was stamped with the Consulate seal.

Bidding the messenger wait, he walked hastily aft to where a group of officers in full dress were listening respectfully to the conversation of a gray haired old man in the dress of a rear-admiral. Touching his cap, the lieutenant extended the envelope and said :

"Admiral, here is a letter marked important, just brought from shore. Will there be an answer?"

The officer addressed turned at the interruption, and, taking the letter, moved away a few paces. Carefully adjusting a pair of gold rimmed eye glasses, he broke the seal. Those standing near saw a look of wonder come over his face as he read the communication.



"I WANT YOU TO SETTLE A DISPUTE FOR ME, MR. COLEMAN."

"Eh, what? Why, bless my soul, this is most extraordinary," he ejaculated, removing his glasses and hastily wiping them. Then rejoining the group he added in a voice agitated with half suppressed excitement: "Gentlemen, I beg you to excuse me. I am compelled to go on shore without delay. Mr. Decker, have my gig called away immediately. Um—at once, at once," and returning their salute in an abstracted manner, he bustled into the cabin. A few minutes later he was seated in his boat on his way to the beach.

"The old man has received some startling news, from his actions," remarked one of the young officers. "I hope it brings the glad tidings of our implication in this coming war. 'Just think of it, eh?'"

"No such good luck, I am afraid," answered a dapper young officer with the distinguishing blue band of a naval surgeon on his sleeve. "The American navy seems to be doomed to a career of peaceful inaction, only enlivened now and then by a ball, as today. Just fancy, I haven't had a bit of practice in the line of amputations, or—er—autopsies since receiving my appointment. Am getting positively rusty, by Jove!"

"Doctor, you are too bloodthirsty for this navy," remarked a manly, bright faced youth clad in the simple uniform of a midshipman. "Why don't you volunteer your services to the Chinese? They'll have a lot of patching up to do when the French artillerists commence potting them."

"Thanks, Coleman. An original idea, but I would prefer to practice on such clean limbed young fellows as you. Ah, here is the advance guard of our guests."

The officers moved in a body to the gangway and stood with raised caps as several civilians, accompanied by their families, stepped on board. The newcomers were speedily followed by boat load after boat load, and soon the extempore ball room on the quarter deck was thronged with gay crowds of pleasure seekers, highly delighted with the novelty of their surroundings.

The stanch old frigate resounded to the silvery tones of merry laughter, and the first strains of a favorite waltz echoed through the roomy breadth of decks—verily a decided change from the thunderous roar of fierce artillery. At least so thought the young middy already mentioned, as he stood aft near the wardroom skylight.

Lawrence Coleman, aged nineteen, a cadet in the American navy, and just entering on a career which his father had followed with credit to his country and honor to himself, was now completing his fourth year in the service, having won an appointment to the Annapolis Naval Academy by sheer superiority of education and worth at the competitive examination held by the Congressman at his native town in Indiana.

As he stands on the crowded quarter deck of his first cruising vessel, he presents a picture of manly strength and calm good nature, which, even in that throng of well built, athletic Americans, is plainly noticeable. A physiognomist, one of those crafty translators of the hieroglyphics written on a human face, would read him thus: brave, great strength of character, and a curious admixture of stern regard for duty and kindness. Yes, strong traits, but nearer the truth than such pages generally reveal.

He was well liked on board, and a personal favorite of the admiral, who had fought side by side with his father at Fort Fisher, on which occasion, as the honest old officer liked to tell, Commander Coleman had saved his life at the peril of his own.

While Lawrence watched the animated throng before him and pondered over the apparent incongruity of the scene, he

felt a light touch on the arm, which caused him to turn and bow with a smile of welcome to a fair young girl who had thus attracted his attention.

"Mr. Coleman, I have been looking for you everywhere," she said playfully. "I have had a dispute with that horrid Mr. Dalton, and I want you to settle it."

"I am entirely at your service, Miss Monroe," gallantly answered the middy, crossing the deck with her to where an officer stood leaning on a broadside gun. He was evidently an ensign by rank, and appeared rather old for that grade, although his dark, swarthy complexion and certain peculiar marks about the eyes, probably made him seem of greater age than was really the case.

Before reaching him, Lawrence turned to the young lady, and bending his head, whispered softly: "The decision will be in your favor, no matter what the subject."

The action was noticed by the ensign and a quick flush of annoyance passed over his face, but it was gone almost immediately, and he greeted them with a smile as they paused before him.

"Now, Mr. Dalton," she commenced, darting an aggressive look at the ensign, "I have brought a champion who will prove that you are wrong." Then turning to Lawrence she continued: "This is the subject of dispute between us: Mr. Dalton says a ship belongs to the feminine gender; in fact, should be spoken of as *she*, and I know they are called *men-of-war*. Am I not right?"

"Well—er—the fact is," stammered the embarrassed cadet, "er—you know, a vessel is called a man-of-war on account of its war-like duties; but when a sailor looks up aloft at the delicate tracery of rigging, and then watches the graceful hull as it dances over the water, he uses the feminine gender to express his appreciation."

"Thanks for your most lucid explanation," exclaimed the young lady, with a mock courtesy. "It has shown me my mistake. No—no apologies, I beg. We will now change the subject. Mr. Dalton, I don't know whether to congratulate you or not on your contemplated trip to Pekin during the unsettled state of the—why, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

The ensign had suddenly turned livid, and was staring at her in a most startling manner. When she stopped he muttered a few hasty words to the effect that it was only a temporary faintness, and, walking rapidly to the wardroom hatchway, disappeared below.

Miss Monroe looked wonderingly after the retreating figure for a moment, and then turned to Lawrence with a decided pout.

"There, did you ever see such a man?" she asked petulantly. "Just because I mentioned his proposed trip to Pekin, he flies off like that."

"His proposed trip?" echoed Coleman, looking very much surprised. "This is news to me. I haven't heard anything about it on board. May I ask what causes you to think he is going?"

"Why, certainly. I overheard papa and the admiral mention it this morning at our house, and I thought it was an ordinary piece of news. O, dear! I wonder if it is a state secret. Won't papa be angry if it is?"

Before Lawrence had time to reply, an orderly stepped up and handed him a note.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but this was just brought aboard, and the Chinese is waitin' for an answer."

"All right, Tell him I will be there in a moment. Please excuse me, Miss Monroe. Allow me to conduct you to a seat."

This duty attended to, he walked over to the gangway,

and stepping up on the grating, tore open the envelope. The contents were of a surprising nature, to say the least, and he read it through several times before understanding it. The note ran as follows:

Get leave in the ordinary way and come ashore at once, reporting to me at the Consulate. Do not delay, and, above all, keep your destination a secret.

HEWETT.

Within fifteen minutes Lawrence was seated in a native boat, bound for the beach. As he glanced back at the picturesque scene formed by the flagship, gay in bright colored bunting, the center of a vast flotilla of river craft, his thoughts reverted to the strange announcement made by Miss Monroe and the peculiar way in which Dalton had taken it.

"There is something in the wind," he mused thoughtfully, "and I have an idea I am going to be mixed up in it."

CHAPTER II.

THE CONSUL EXPLAINS.

THE American Consulate at Foo Chow is located in the foreign "bund," a settlement some three miles down the river from the city, so Lawrence directed the boatman to land him at a stone pier nearest that portion of the water front. After reaching the quay he lost no time in engaging a "rickshaw," selecting one in charge of two coolies, who at the sight of a glittering coin he was careful to show them, spurted through the narrow streets at a surprising speed. The unsteady lurches of the peculiar vehicle were not conducive to easy meditation, but he found time at intervals to ponder over the unexpected summons.

The tenor of the note had led him to believe that his presence was urgently required, and, it must be confessed, a not unnatural curiosity also possessed him. Being of rather a romantic disposition, withal hard headed when need be, he looked forward to the interview with lively interest.

His train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a violent shock, then the "rickshaw" dropped with a force that sent him headlong into the filthy street. His coolies in their haste to earn that coin had run into another outfit while rounding a sharp corner. As Lawrence scrambled to his feet, wild with rage and conscious of a very dirty face, he heard an outburst of imprecations, part English, and part Chinese, uttered in a familiar voice, and interspersed with cries of pain.

After wiping the mud out of his eyes he saw a stout built youth, with a ruddy complexion, and hair on the edge between auburn and red, belaboring two or three coolies with the broken handle of his "rickshaw." With every thwack he called down the vengeance of Buddha on their fathers, mother, and relations of every degree, only desisting at last from want of breath. Lawrence recognized him as a friend named Charlie Travis, the son of a very wealthy American tea merchant in Foo Chow.

"Hullo, Charlie!" he said. "Don't kill the poor beggars."

"Why, hullo, Coleman," gasped Travis, turning at the salutation, and walking up to the middy. "You must have been in a terrible hurry. Your men rounded that corner as if they were running amuck. Where are you bound?"

"Have an important appointment on the other side of town and, that reminds me, I must be off again. Haven't a minute to lose."

"Eh, well, you'll have to get another cooly. One of your men is *hors de combat*. Here, take my 'rickshaw' and men. I haven't far to go. Get in with you. No time for thanks. I'll settle up this affair."

"Much obliged, Charlie. I'll see you tonight at Wallace's, if you haven't anything else on."

"All right. I will be there at eight. Ta, ta."

Lawrence sprang into his friend's vehicle, and reached the Consulate several minutes later without further mishap.

He was admitted at once, and on entering the office, found Admiral Hewett waiting impatiently for him. The consul, Colonel Monroe, was reclining on a sofa, slightly indisposed, and had just bidden good by to a richly dressed native, who turned and gave Coleman a quick, searching glance as he passed through the door.

The peculiar action of the man caused Lawrence to look at his face, and he noticed it was marked by a jagged scar running across the right cheek. It was of an angry red, as if only recently healed, and formed a most unsightly blemish. The incident was trivial, and Lawrence forgot it a moment later, but he had occasion before long to thank his lucky stars for that casual glance.

As he took a seat at the consul's invitation, he noticed that the admiral was evidently laboring under some strong excitement. He was walking up and down the room with quick strides, uttering, every now and then, ejaculations expressive of emotion, whether of sorrow or amazement, Lawrence could not make out. At last he stopped, and bringing his hand down on the desk with a bang, burst out:

"By gad, Monroe, it is an infamous libel! I won't believe an officer of mine could be guilty of such a dishonorable action. No, sirrah, that yellow faced fellow is Ananias himself."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory gesture, as if hardly agreeing with the irate officer's opinion.

"As representative of the American Government I must take notice of the information, admiral," he replied. "Of course there is a possibility of it being untrue, but why should Hong Li invent such a story? He is high in official circles here, and I consider him entirely responsible. My advice is that we proceed with the plan already settled upon. Shall I inform Mr. Coleman or will you?"

The old admiral muttered to himself for a moment, then recommenced his stride.

"You tell him, Monroe; I want to think it over. Explain everything, and hark ye, Coleman," he added, turning to the young midy; "pay close attention to the story, for the result deals with the honor of an officer and a gentleman."

"Now, my young friend," began the consul, swinging himself around so that he could look at Lawrence. "What I am going to relate is merely a suspicion, based, it is true on what I consider reliable information, but for the honor of your service, and the good name of a brother officer it is to be hoped that it will prove unfounded. As the matter now stands, that is the work we are going to ask you to do."

"To begin with, it will be necessary for you to know a state secret, and we rely on your discretion to keep it to yourself. Several days ago a cablegram was sent to me by the state department in Washington. Part of it was in cipher, and the rest explanatory. To be brief, it orders me to send Ensign Dalton to the minister at Peking with the cipher dispatch. As you have heard, there has been a masacre of foreigners at Tung Chow on account of this French trouble, and that part of the province between Tientsin and Peking is in a state of revolt. We are confident that it does not affect the two cities, and is, without doubt, confined to the lower rabble only."

"There is great difficulty in getting information from or to the capital, and as the cipher is most important, being on international questions between the two governments, the Department has ordered it conveyed by a trusty messenger. Ensign Dalton was selected on account of his thorough

knowledge of the language, having lived here for ten years prior to entering the navy. His father is almost a native of the country, and is now, I believe in the interior. The ensign was informed yesterday, and it has been arranged for him to leave by tomorrow's boat for Shanghai. The admiral will ostensibly send him to Nagasaki, as absolute secrecy is necessary in the matter."

Lawrence smiled to himself at the remark, and thought that walls have ears, even in a Consulate.

"Now we have come to the important part of my story," continued the consul. "Let me again impress on you the fact that what follows is only surmise, but unfortunately we are compelled to take it into account. This morning a certain native official in Foo Chow asked an audience of me on important business. I complied with his request, and he told me it had come to his knowledge that one of the American officers on board the Benton was selling information to the French concerning the Chinese preparations for war up the Min, and that the officer in question was Ensign Dalton. Whether—"

"It is preposterous, sir!" interrupted Lawrence jumping to his feet in amazement. "Why, Dalton is a gentleman, and—and—believe me, Colonel Monroe, I would stake my life on his honor."

"Good for you, my boy!" exploded the admiral, enthusiastically grasping Coleman's hand. "We have no traitors in our service, eh? Bless me I'd resign tomorrow if I thought this cock and bull story was true. Now, Monroe, you had better give up the idea."

The consul sat up on the lounge, and looked at the two excited officers with a calm and pitying smile. Sentiment was an ingredient entirely foreign to his nature, and he regarded the expression just vented as so much sea foam—pretty, but without substance.

"Well, Admiral Hewett," he asked coldly, "am I to understand that you decline to act with me in this matter?"

The request acted like a douche of cold water on the admiral. His face fell, and he plumped into a chair with a helpless look at his interrogator. For fully a minute he sat there with the signs of a painful struggle going on in his breast, then he arose, and, without a trace of his previous emotion answered:

"Colonel Monroe, my duty is clear. I will agree to your proposition, and will carry it out to the best of our ability."

"Very well, sir," replied the consul, the faintest trace of a triumphant smile hovering around his mouth. "Now, Mr. Coleman, this is where your part comes in. We are compelled to send Ensign Dalton, notwithstanding our suspicions, because he really is the only person capable of doing it, and also because the Department selected him as the messenger. It would cause a serious delay to hold an investigation now, and then the information is too meager to warrant it at present.

"The admiral and I held a consultation this afternoon, and concluded to send some trusty person with him. The duty will require one who is brave, subtle, and in whom can be placed the utmost reliance. He will be given a copy of the cipher, and also another message to the minister in regard to this unfortunate rumor. If anything happens he must try to reach Peking, and above all, keep a close watch upon Dalton's actions." The consul hesitated a moment, and then placing his hand upon Lawrence's shoulder, added abruptly: "You are the man we have selected for this work."

Coleman had listened quietly while the colonel explained, but now he rose to his feet, and turned to Admiral Hewett with a resolute expression on his manly countenance.

"Sir," he asked, "am I to understand that this is to be an *order* from you?"

"Yes, my boy. Why?"

"Then I wish to tender my resignation from the service, to take effect as soon as possible."

"Eh, what? Resignation, eh?" sputtered the astounded admiral. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that I will resign rather than be a sneak or a spy on a brother officer. You surely do not think me capable of such an act, sir?"

"Well, bless the boy!" exclaimed Hewett, casting an amazed glance at the consul, who returned it with interest.

This was a complication that had not entered into their plans, and they could only sit in helpless wonder, feeling very much as if the wind had been taken out of their sails.

"Mr. Coleman," spoke up Colonel Monroe at last, "I do not propose to argue with you in regard to your stand in this matter, but it seems to me that you would gladly grasp the opportunity to free Mr. Dalton from this suspicion. That is what it means. Remember you are only sent as a precautionary measure, to insure the safe delivery of a most important official dispatch, and by so doing you are furthering the interests of the American government, of which you are an officer."

"Yes, that is so," chimed in Admiral Hewett, with a glance of admiration at the astute consul. "Come, come, my boy; you don't think it possible for me to ask an officer to do any underhand work, do you?"

"No, sir," quickly replied Lawrence, wavering in his previous opinion. This view of the case had not struck him, and he thought it over for a few minutes before saying anything further. Then he acknowledged the plausibility of the consul's explanation, and agreed to go under the conditions that he would only act as a second messenger in case Dalton was disabled.

CHAPTER III.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW.

"NOW, as this is settled, we had better make up some plan to allay Dalton's natural suspicion at another person being sent with him," suggested the consul; then, with a quick glance at the others, he added, cautiously: "Natural, I say—if guilty."

"Why not have the admiral ask his opinion as to the advisability of sending two persons?" ventured Lawrence. "Then if he demurs it will be a sign that he really is a bit shady, and if he doesn't object, or favors the idea, we can reasonably suppose him innocent."

"That ought to answer the purpose," acquiesced Admiral Hewett. "Don't you think so, Monroe?"

"Yes; I cannot think of a better plan. Now, I presume you will get them off by tomorrow's steamer. If so, I will have everything prepared, and will send both ciphers on board to you for delivery to Mr. Coleman and Ensign Dalton, also the personal cipher to the minister."

After a few minutes' conversation on minor topics, Lawrence took his leave, and started for Wallace's, intending to take his dinner there, and meet Travis at the appointed hour.

His mind was in a state of bewilderment from the startling disclosures made by Colonel Monroe, and, as he walked along, looking for a chair, he almost felt that the whole thing was a dream.

"I don't believe a word of that story about Dalton," he mused; "and I am going to prove his innocence to even Colonel Monroe's satisfaction. Foxy old customer that; but his daughter Fanny—hi, there!"

This last exclamation was called forth by the sight of a sedan chair just ahead of him that had stopped and discharged an occupant. He ran forward to secure it, and reached the spot just in time to see the late passenger disappear through the door of a handsome private residence. He only caught one hasty glimpse of the man, but it seemed to Coleman that his form was familiar.

"By Jove, I believe that was Dalton!" he exclaimed aloud, taking a closer look at the building. "Queer, my meeting him just now. Well, talk of his Satanic Majesty, etc. I wonder whom he knows in there? I had better be moving on, or he will come out upon me, and I don't want to see him until I think this thing over."

He sprang into the chair, and was carried along through various narrow streets to a tea house kept by an Englishman named Wallace, where he expected to meet Travis. It was drawing towards dark, and the restaurant was filled with the usual number of Europeans that frequented the place. On entering, he was fortunate in finding Charlie, who had dropped in on his way home to dinner, intending to return later on.

"Stay and eat with me," invited Lawrence, "and we will have a stroll afterwards. I can't stay ashore late, as I have the mid watch tonight."

"Thanks, I think I will," replied Travis. "I want to have a talk with you, as I probably won't see you again for some time."

"How is that? Going away?"

"Yes. Going to Shanghai by tomorrow's steamer. The governor is sending me up there to look after some business, and it will probably keep me a couple of months; that is why I didn't attend the ball today."

Lawrence was on the point of exclaiming that he would be a fellow passenger, but checked himself just in time. The consul's orders were explicit about keeping it a secret as far as possible.

"It will be an agreeable surprise for him," he thought, and then added aloud: "By George! I am sorry I am not going with you, old boy, but I'll come ashore and see you off."

After dinner Lawrence decided to go on board, as he wished to make some preparations on the quiet for the long journey; so, promising to meet Charlie at the steamer next day, "with bag and baggage," he added to himself with a smile, he took a sampan for the ship.

* * * * *

On a low bamboo couch in one of the inner rooms of a house on the principal street of the foreign settlement, a Chinaman was seated, idly twirling the cord of a native fan. Every now and then he would glance at the form of a man, dressed in the European style, pacing up and down the carpeted floor.

Neither of the two occupants was speaking, and the silence of the little chamber, far removed from the street, was only broken by the slow ticking of an American clock on a laquered table in the center. At last the man in the foreign garb stopped in front of his companion, and stared fixedly at him for a moment.

"Then I am to understand, Kia," he asked in his native tongue, his voice slightly trembling, "that I can only purchase my father's life with my own dishonor?"

"If you look at it that way—yes," replied the other, giving the fan a flirt, and gently cooling his face. "As I told you before, your honored parent is in the hands of the Wong-si-ko band, leagues the other side of Chanteh, and will remain there alive until the word from me—if it comes within a certain time; if not—" he paused, and, drawing

the ivory back of the fan across his thumb nail, made a sound highly suggestive of the death rattle.

"You yellow fiend!" cried his companion, seizing him by the throat, "I'll choke the life out of your foul heart!"

There was a short struggle, the Mongolian swayed feebly in his muscular antagonist's grasp; then, with a muttered imprecation, he was thrown to the floor, lying there half stunned and gasping for breath. The infuriated man stood threateningly over him for a moment, then turned and recommenced pacing the floor, his hands working in a convulsive manner.

Presently Kia slowly regained his feet, and with unsteady motions rearranged the wrinkled folds of his silken blouse. His air of insolent boasting was gone, and in its stead a look of half suppressed fury revealed itself.

"Ah, friend, your hands are as hasty as your temper," he said, striving to conceal his rage under a guise of pleasantry; "but such conduct is unseemly, and should not enter into one's business relations. I will now ask for your final answer. If you refuse to do what I say, your father will die—that I promise you. What I want is a simple matter. You can easily get the information in Peking. Your position as a special messenger will enable you to obtain access to Ching Lu, and the rest—I leave that to you. In return for this, your parent will be set free and placed in safety. What is your answer?"

After waiting several minutes, during which time the man continued his ceaseless walk, apparently without heeding the question, the Chinaman continued: "You have seen the letter with your father's signature, and therefore believe what I say. You know the exact circumstances, and can now judge for yourself. Yes, or no?"

"Great heavens! man, give me time. If it was *my* life, I would not hesitate, but father—this is too much. I'll tell you what I will do; I will—"

He was interrupted by a low knock at the door, and it was cautiously opened a few inches. Kia demanded who was there in an authoritative voice, and was answered by a meek looking Celestial, who, stepping in, bowed almost to the floor. After a hurried conversation with the newcomer, Kia turned to his companion.

"I have just received word that you will have a comrade on your journey," he said. "It will be young Coleman."

"Coleman!" exclaimed the amazed hearer. "How do you know that?"

"I heard of it the same way that I learned of your trip," was the evasive answer. "This will complicate matters slightly, but will not prove a very serious obstacle, as—" bending over, he completed the sentence in a whisper.

It was received with a start of surprise, and a reply was given in the same low tone. A whispered conversation was carried on between them for a few minutes, and then the man in the European costume seized his hat and left the house. As he passed through the door of the inner room, the Chinaman looked after him with a strange expression on his face, in which both triumph and suspicion struggled for the mastery.

Several hours later, as the first rays of the morning sun drew the faint outlines of the flagship from its shadowy sleep, a native sampan, containing a solitary passenger, pulled up to the gangway. A man, muffled in a long, heavy coat, climbed from it to the main deck, and, after a few words with the officer on watch, disappeared below.

The rattle of drums and the discordant notes of several bugles proclaimed reveille, and soon the almost deserted decks were thronged with hurrying forms, hastily stowing away their canvas hammocks.

Aft in the cabin, the old admiral was aroused from his early morning slumber by the hubbub. After blinking for a brief space at an intrusive sunbeam that had found its way through the open deadlight at his side, he turned over and touched an electric button. There was the noise of a door opening in the outer cabin, and then a voice was heard, "Yes, sir."

"Ah, orderly," commanded the admiral. "Give the officer of the deck my compliments, and ask him to send Naval Cadet Coleman to me immediately."

"I must have this matter all arranged," he muttered to himself, stepping gingerly to the floor with many halts, significant of old age. "The steamer leaves at noon, and—well, orderly, is the young man coming?"

The marine gave a ceremonious salute with his right hand, and answered: "Sir, Lieutenant Seabury says as how Mr. Coleman cannot be found on board."

(To be continued.)

ON STEEDS OF STEEL:

OR,

THE TOUR OF THE CHALLENGE CLUB.*

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WILL HASBROCK, Hugh Dinsmore, Alexander McKie and Steve Osborn, comprising the Challenge Bicycle Club, start out on a tour from New York up along the banks of the Hudson. After various adventures they are overtaken one afternoon by a storm, which blows over a tree on Hugh. He is temporarily disabled and is carried into the nearest house, which proves to be the cottage owned by Mr. Brandon Darling. There is no one home but the daughter Marian, a girl of fifteen—not even the servants, and it does not take the Challengers long to discover that there is a mystery in the household. What this is is not explained until Jack Mills, the son of a neighbor, comes to call on Marian, and is requested by the latter to inform the young wheelmen that her father, the president of the People's Bank in the adjacent town of Bolton, has mysteriously disappeared, simultaneously with the vanishing of \$50,000 of the bank's money. Mills does not believe Mr. Darling guilty, although circumstances seem so strongly against him. Mrs. Darling is off with the carriage endeavoring to discover her husband's whereabouts, and while the party are at dinner, detectives, sent out by the bank, arrive to search the cottage.

CHAPTER XXII.

I HAVE A NOVEL TASK ASSIGNED ME.

WE had more trouble in bringing the young girl to from this fainting fit than was the case with the first one.

But as soon as she came around she made signs to have the telegram put back in her hands.

Then she read it, crumpled it up in her fingers, and began to cry softly.

How I wished for my sister at that moment! What could we three fellows do for a weeping girl, especially when we didn't know what she was weeping about?

We drew off to one corner of the room, out of sight, and I can't remember when I ever felt so thoroughly uncomfortable or out of place.

"Oughtn't one of us go up and ask if we can't be of any service?" whispered Mac in my ear.

"It seems so, and yet I don't know about it," was my puzzled answer. "Somehow I imagine we oughtn't to let her know we've seen her like this."

"Let's get out," suggested Steve, and, this being the easiest thing to do, we did it, and the next minute were back in Hugh's room.

"Well, what next?" began Mac, after we had sat looking at one another mutely for an instant.

"My stomach says dinner ought to be next," replied Steve in guarded tones, adding immediately: "But it seems awful to think of eating in the presence of this," and Steve in-

clined his head slightly towards the hall, across which came faintly the sound of the girl's sobbing.

"I know it does," I put in, "and it seems cruel for us to go off and leave her this way; but when you've only known a girl for about an hour, you can't very well act the part of comforter."

Hugh stirred now, and we thought he was going to waken, but he didn't. Then I noticed that it was beginning to grow dark, and, looking at my watch, found that it was after seven.

"We'll never have time to get to Bolton for a hot dinner now," observed Mac, when I announced the hour. "Besides, it doesn't seem right to leave that girl in her present state. There, I think she's calmed down now; I'm going in to ask her if we can't do anything," and he was off on the instant, as if fearful lest, should he linger to discuss the propriety of the thing with us, his courage would fail.

He was gone about fifteen minutes by the watch; half an hour it seemed to Steve and me, as we sat there listening to the murmur of voices across the hall, waiting for him to come back. When he did appear again, "Will," he began at once, coming straight over to where I sat in the window, "wasn't that the Beechams your mother told you to inquire about?"

"Great Scott, yes," I replied. "And I've never done it, have I? Forgot all about it. But why do you ask now?"

"Because Miss Darling's grandmother is a Beecham. I thought the name sounded familiar, and then I remembered what you told me about your mother's request the day we started. Were they relatives of yours?"

"No; only friends the family met in Europe years ago, when I was a little fellow," I replied. "Mother had lost their last address, and thought that possibly we might run across them, though I told her it was the old case of the needle and the haystack again."

"And is that what you've been talking to that girl about all this time?" Steve wanted to know.

"Of course not, but she happened to say that she expected her Grandma Beecham here tomorrow, so I asked her a few questions about the family, and from what Will tells me now I think it's the same one."

"Well, and did you ask the great question?" I inquired, for, under the present circumstances, even the discovery of the Beechams "took a back seat" with me.

"The great question?" repeated Mac. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, what's the matter here," Steve explained before I could do it. "Why everybody's gone off, why people look queer when you mention the Darlings' name, and—and what that telegram was about?"

"Of course I wasn't so rude as to do that," returned Mac. "I only said that she had been very kind to us, and that we wished to know if it wasn't possible for us to do something in return for her."

"And what did she say to that?" demanded Steve, almost breathlessly.

"Why, she simply declared that she *hadn't* done anything for us, and didn't see how she could, with nobody home but herself. Then she said that we must be hungry, and that if we weren't afraid to eat amateur cooking, she'd go down and see what she could dish up for us. And I came in here to get one of you fellows to come down with me and see if we can't help her. I can set the table, any way, I think."

"And I can wipe the dishes if some one else will wash them," I added.

"And you don't know yet what's at the bottom of all this?" finished Steve.

*Begun in No 443 of THE ARGOSY.

"No, but we probably will find out tomorrow, when the grandmother comes. Come on, Will."

"What do you suppose that grandmother will say, Mac," I remarked, as we descended the stairs together, "when she arrives and finds her granddaughter alone with a household of strange boys?"

"That's the very thing I was thinking of myself," rejoined Mac, "and the reason I am glad there's that tie about the Beechams to take the cold chill off, so to speak. As Miss Marian says herself, she couldn't turn us away, and the only thing to do now is to make the best of it."

We had by this time reached the lower floor, and, guided by the sound of clashing tinware, soon found our way to the kitchen and Miss Marian's presence.

She gave a sad kind of smile when she saw me, and then, when Mac explained that he thought her Beechams were the same as mine, she put out her hand and said: "I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Hasbrouck, and I'm sure grandma will be, too, when she comes tomorrow. You must be the little fellow she tells so many cute stories—"

Here, conscious that "little fellow" and "cute" were rather undignified terms to be applied in the present tense to a youth of my build, she stopped short, and then we all three laughed, which was the best thing that could have happened.

Mac and I now both offered our services to help about dinner, and while Mac secured the privilege of setting the table, I volunteered to do anything that was asked of me till it was time to wipe dishes.

"Well, the most pressing duty is milking the cow," replied Miss Marian, giving me a queer look as she turned her head in my direction, while she stood on tiptoe to get the pail from the pantry shelf. "Can you milk?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so," I replied recklessly. "That is I've never tried it, but anybody that isn't afraid of a cow can do it, can't he?"

"I am afraid not," was the reply. "I can't, and I'm not afraid of a cow. But the poor thing ought to be milked, and I don't know when Robert will be back."

"I've seen people milk lots, and I must say it looks awfully easy," I said, taking the pail.

"That's what I thought. Still, you can try, and if you can't do it I'll have to ask you to go over to the Garretson's and ask if they won't lend us Michael—though I'd hate to do that."

This last was added in very low tones, as if to herself, but I heard it, and gritting my teeth firmly, I walked out of the kitchen with the tin pail, resolved to milk that cow if I had to stay out all night to learn how to do it.

There was no need to inquire where the animal was, I had heard her mooring plaintively for the last half hour out behind the stable and hurrying out to the little paddock I looked about for a suitable place to begin operations.

"Seems to me though I ought to give her some bran first, and take her to the stable," I reflected.

After considerable hunting around I found what I wanted, got the cow in the stall I thought was set apart for her, procured a stool, and then sat down to my novel task.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACK MILLS.

IF you have never tried to milk a cow no doubt you imagine it is a very simple thing to do. I did, but I very soon found out my mistake.

Fully ten minutes I sat there, and not a drop of milk rewarded my frantic efforts. The poor cow tried to help

me in every way possible, I am sure, but it was no use. I hadn't caught the knack, and what to do I didn't know.

"I wonder if Steve could make a better fist of it?" I said to myself, and determined to hurry over to the house and find out.

Just as I ran up to the stoop two steps at a time, a young fellow came around the corner of the cottage from the direction of the road. He looked to be eighteen or nineteen, and was dressed in white flannel trousers and a blue and white striped blazer.

I lingered an instant at the door to find out what he wanted, and then, as he didn't seem inclined to announce his errand, but walked up on the piazza as if he belonged there, I asked: "Whom do you wish to see?"

He stopped then and looked at me in a queer sort of fashion, as if to say: "What under the sun are you doing here?"

"Perhaps I've put my foot in it, and this is Miss Marian's brother," I thought, but his first words reassured me on this point.

"I'd like to see Miss Darling—Miss Marian," he said "if I could."

He spoke in a hesitating manner as if conscious that he was asking for something that would very likely be refused him.

"If you will tell me your name I will take it to her," I answered, feeling pretty sure that the fellow must know the young lady a great deal better than I did.

"Just tell her please that Jack Mills is here," he said, and then taking a seat on the top step, began to draw his cap nervously back and forth between his fingers.

I hurried back to the kitchen, on the way nearly oversetting Mac with his arms full of dishes, and found Miss Marian frying frizzled beef.

"Well," she began before I could announce my errand, "where's the milk?"

I made a gesture of despair.

"But perhaps one of my friends can make a success of it," I added. "I've come over to get him, but first I promised to tell you that Jack Mills is here, and wants to know if he can see you."

"Why, do you know Jack?" she exclaimed, letting go the saucepan, which luckily was on the stove, and putting both hands together with a happier look on her face than I had yet seen there.

"No, never saw him till a minute ago," I answered. "That's what he told me to tell you. He's out sitting on the piazza steps now. Shall I tell him to come in?"

"Mercy no, not yet," she cried. "Oh, the very thing! Take him out to the stable and let him show you how to milk the cow. I'm sure he knows, and by that time I'll be ready to see him. I'm so glad he came."

This last was, I am sure, not intended for my ears, but I heard it, and drew my own conclusions. However, Mills certainly seemed to be a fine fellow, and I could not blame Miss Marian for being glad to see him.

"Must be one of the neighbors," I decided, and then wondered who he thought I was. "And what will he think," I proceeded to reflect, "when I deliver my message?"

But I am of the sort that prefers to take the cold plunge right off and have it all over with, instead of standing on the brink, experiencing twenty chills by anticipation instead of one in reality. So when I reached the front porch again I touched the young caller on the shoulder, and said rapidly: "Miss Marian will see you in a few minutes if you'll come out to the stable first, and teach me how to milk the cow."

Mills threw back his head, and I saw his lips puckered to a whistle of astonishment. Then he opened them, exclaimed in his hearty fashion: "All right; I'm your man," and started off with me to the stable.

Feeling that some explanation was due him, I began: "You see, the coachman is away and the servants have left, so—"

"The servants all left, you say?" broke in Mills. "Are you sure they weren't sent away?"

"I don't know," I answered, wondering how long it would take him to find out how very little I did know about the state of affairs in the Darling household.

He was just going to ask another question when we reached the barn, and for the next ten minutes that cow fully absorbed the attention of both of us. But he knew how to milk her, and when the pail was almost full I succeeded in mastering the art myself.

When he had got me well started Mills began to pace up and down the brick flooring with his hands in his pockets and his head bent down.

"How long have you been here?" he asked suddenly.

"Since about four," I answered. "Coo, boss."

"Of course you don't believe—don't believe all this stuff about Mr. Darling?" he went on, suddenly stopping just behind the cow and nervously crinkling a straw he had picked up.

This question put me in a predicament. I hadn't the ghost of an idea to what he was referring, I didn't like to commit myself ignorantly by saying "No," and yet what would he think if I told him frankly that I didn't know what he meant? I had certainly acted as though I was perfectly at home in the house, and, under the circumstances, I don't see how I could have done otherwise.

But now I must say something, and my mind was going through a series of wild acrobatics trying to decide what it should be when the cow came to my rescue by lifting her foot to kick at a fly on her stomach and hitting the milk pail instead. Mills flew to the rescue of the milk, only a little of which was spilled, and this diversion did away with all necessity of my answering the question.

"I'm about through, am I not?" I asked a minute or two later.

"I'll tell you in a sec; let me in there," and after a few tests he decided that bossy would let down no more milk that night.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you, I'm sure," I said as we started back to the house with the pail between us.

"Don't mention it. I——" he got so far and then stopped short at sight of Mac on the piazza.

At the same instant Steve opened the door and called out: "I say, Will, Hugh's awake and wants to see you."

Jack Mills's face was a study, as much as I could see of it in the twilight, which was now fast deepening. And I don't wonder he was astounded to find four strange fellows in a house, with the usual intimates of which he was no doubt on extremely intimate terms.

"If you'll wait on the piazza I'll send Miss Marian around," I said, and taking full charge of the milk pail, I hastened off with it to the kitchen.

"Where's Jack?" asked the young lady of the house as soon as I appeared.

"On the side piazza," I answered. "Do you want him here?"

"If you want any dinner I do," she answered with about the third smile she had given since I had had the honor of her acquaintance.

"All right; I'll send him right around," I answered, and

hurrying back, found Mills walking up and down the driveway, every now and then casting a glance towards Mac and Steve, who were talking on the piazza.

"Miss Marian will see you in the kitchen," I said, and he was off like a shot.

"Who is that fellow?" Steve wanted to know when I joined them.

"One of the neighbors, I think," I replied. "And by the way, he gave me a clew to the mystery."

"What is it?" demanded Steve and Mac both at once.

"Come on up with me to Hugh and I'll tell you there," was my response. "Have you got the table set, Mac?"

"Yes, but dinner won't be ready for half an hour yet."

"Maybe we won't feel like eating when we hear the mystery," added Steve.

"Hush! don't worry Hugh about such things," I warned them as we entered the room where our injured comrade lay.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEANING OF THE MYSTERY.

"I SAY, Will," began Hugh as soon as I entered the room, "I hope you haven't sent word home about this. Have you?"

"No," I answered; "not yet."

"Then don't," he went on. "There is no use in it. It would only worry them. I've had a terribly narrow squeak of it, to be sure, but a miss is as good as a mile, you know."

"How do you feel now, old fellow?" I asked.

"A good sight better than I would have if that old tree had fallen half a second sooner," he replied. "It would have clipped me on the head, sure. But tell me what sort of a place this is you've brought me to. Steve says there's only a young girl about. Is she of the Milly Tucker sort?"

"Prettier," I answered promptly; "and now, fellows," turning to the others, "I'll tell you what I imagine is up here. I think Mr. Darling is in trouble of a criminal kind."

"Criminal?" exclaimed Mac. "You don't mean to say he's committed murder!"

"Of course not," I responded. "There are lots of other ways in which a man can break the criminal code," and then I went on to tell what Jack Mills asked me while I was milking the cow.

"Then you believe that the man who owns this house is a defaulter?" exclaimed Hugh, rolling over in bed as if he wanted to get out of it on the instant.

"No. I only say I believe that is what this Mills *asked* me if I believed," was my rejoinder. "He evidently doesn't believe it."

"And the servants?" said Mac. "Do you suppose they all left because this accusation was brought against their master?"

"It looks like it," said Steve.

"They may have been sent away to save money," I suggested.

"And what do you suppose that telegram was about?" Mac wanted to know.

"News to the daughter from her mother or somebody of how the case was going," I answered. "Open the door, Mac. Some one just knocked, I think."

Mac did as directed, and to our amazement Jack Mills walked in.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he began, "but Miss Marian sent me up with a message."

"Oh, I beg her pardon," I exclaimed impulsively. "I forgot to ask whether there was anything else we could do towards the dinner. Come, Mac, we must go down at once."

"No, it isn't that," said Mills checking us with raised hand. "She wanted me to tell you something—something that she thinks you ought to know, and which she couldn't, for obvious reasons, very well tell you herself."

Mills paused here, and I motioned for him to come over and take a vacant chair beside me. I imagined I knew what was coming, and so did the rest of the fellows, I guess, for I think no room with five fellows in it, not asleep, was ever so still before. Then Mills cleared his throat, and went on:

"Marian's father, Mr. Brandon Darling, is president of the People's Bank in Bolton. As you fellows have been traveling for the past two or three days, you probably haven't seen the newspapers, or you would have heard that yesterday fifty thousand dollars was found to be missing from the bank's funds—together with its president. Of course the directors and the public have drawn but one inference—that Mr. Darling and the money have gone together."

Mills paused again for an instant, and then I broke the silence by inquiring: "And his family do not know where Mr. Darling is?"

"No; he left home yesterday morning to go to the bank as usual, was there for a few minutes, then about ten o'clock put on his hat, told his colored man that he was going around to the barber's, and has not been seen since. Mrs. Darling and the coachman are both away, looking for him. Of course the detectives are doing the same thing—but with a different object. Marian wanted you should know this before you passed a night under the roof."

"Then there is only this circumstantial evidence against him?" I said, after drawing a long breath.

"That is all," returned Mills. "When I asked you that question out at the barn I thought you were a cousin or some relative, and must of course have heard of the affair. I can't believe the charge myself. I don't see how anybody can that knows Mr. Darling. But then so many good people go wrong these days that you can hardly blame the public for losing faith in the best of them."

"Was he traced to the barber shop?" asked Mac.

"He never went there," answered Mills. "The money was discovered to be missing at three o'clock in the afternoon, and, as Mr. Darling had not returned, an investigation was at once set on foot. Oh, it's a horrible affair, and the worst of it is, nearly everybody seems to think the worst of Mr. Darling. Even my people thought I'd better stay away from here, but I was determined to come. Poor Marian! I wonder she bears up as well as she does."

I then told about the fainting spells, and Mills explained that the telegram was from Mrs. Darling, saying that her husband was not at the house of a friend in the next county, where it was thought possible he might have gone.

"The servants all left in a body as soon as the news came out," Mills went on. "And of that Marian is rather glad. They were a bad set, and she couldn't have stood their prying about, trying to get items for the press."

"How terrible for her to have us come down upon the house at such a time!" I observed.

"Not unless you object to staying here yourselves," Mills interposed. "Of course if you leave now, you see the inference that will be drawn?"

"But will there be room for us all to stay?" I asked.

"Plenty. Now what answer shall I carry back to Miss Marian?"

"That we stand by the Darlings through everything, don't we, fellows?" I responded.

"We do, we do, we do," came the reply from the three other members of the Challenge Club, and then, adding that dinner would be ready in a few minutes, Jack Mills hurried off down stairs with his report.

"Well?"

Three of us uttered this word, and looked at one another when we were left to ourselves. Then

"I wonder if we'll all be in the papers?" remarked Steve, no doubt thinking of what his aunt would say if she read the item.

"Poor girl! how dreadful for her!" murmured Mac, adding: "But isn't the whole thing mysterious? If President Darling didn't take that money, where is he, and who did take it?"

"It will all come out right, see if it doesn't," said Hugh. "We've got to stand up for them, boys, the best we know how. Here's something more tangible than ghosts for you to fight. Will."

"Count on me, Hugh," I rejoined. "And now what about some dinner for you? Can you eat anything if I bring it up?"

"Try me," and Dinsmore clicked his teeth together suggestively.

"Great Scott!" I suddenly exclaimed, chancing to halt in front of the mirror, "have I been going around like this all this time? Where is the bath room?"

In the excitement attending the queer goings on at the Darling house, I had quite forgotten about my mud stained appearance, and now made haste to wash up and change my clothes. I had just completed my toilet when Jack Mills called up that dinner was ready, and you can believe me we didn't lose much time in getting down stairs and around the table.

And I started back in surprise at the tempting spread that one girl had managed to get together. There was frizzled beef and fried potatoes, salad, tomatoes, and strawberries and cream, and all served in first class shape. I'll never make fun of cooking schools again, for I found out that Miss Marian had been to one.

I rushed a plate of good things up to Hugh, and was hurrying back to go on with my dinner, when I saw Jack Mills standing in the doorway, talking to a tall man, with two or three others standing behind him.

"You must let us in, I tell you," the tall man was saying. "We come in the name of the law to search the premises for Brandon Darling, and any attempt at resistance only deepens the suspicion that there is really something to conceal."

(To be continued.)

AN AUDIENCE THAT WAS OF ONE MIND.

To make the best of a bad bargain is to go a long way on the road towards making it a good one, for what is done is done, and we all know that no amount of crying over spilled milk will serve to gather up a single drop. A correspondent of the Philadelphia *Times*, in alluding to the recent death of Joe Emmett, tells a story of the actor's career, which shows this celebrated comedian to have been possessed of this desirable trait in an eminent degree.

He was the first, I believe to inaugurate trying to make matinees go in Columbus, Ohio. The performance was duly advertised, but when the day arrived and it was time for the curtain to go up the audience consisted of one man. Calling his company together he told them the performance would go on just the same as if the house was full. Then stepping to the footlights he announced to the solitary auditor what he had decided to do, adding if anything pleased him to show his appreciation the same as he would were the house crowded. That night after the play he gave a supper to his company and invited his afternoon audience to participate. The man and he afterwards became great friends.



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BY GILBERT CAMPBELL.

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While we are not ready to go quite so far as a contemporary and say that "the worst bad company a boy or girl can be in is the company of a bad book," we certainly place the influence for evil of a hurtful volume at a high notch. The injury it does is of the most insidious sort, lingering in the mind like a poison slowly but surely sapping away the capacities for better things.

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THE LATE JOSEPH E. McDONALD,

EX SENATOR FROM INDIANA—A TYPICAL WESTERN STATESMAN.

IN Joseph Ewing McDonald, who died on Sunday, the 21st day of June, there passed away a man whose long and honorable career affords a splendid example of the possibilities that America offers to her sons. His way to the front in public life was won in spite of heavy disadvantages and severe discouragements. He was born to neither wealth nor influence. Fortune always appeared to be adverse to him, rather than favorable. He had not the fictitious prestige that sometimes results from a series of early successes, for his victories were interrupted by defeats that to one of less sturdy perseverance and less sterling energy might have proved fatal.

Mr. McDonald, who was born in Butler County, Ohio, seventy two years ago, came of the Scotch-Irish stock in which an especial genius for public life seems to be innate. He was still an infant when his father died, and the loss made the problem of existence a difficult one for the widow and orphan. Fortunately Mrs. McDonald was a woman of courage and sagacity, well fitted to train and mold the character of the future Senator.

As he grew to boyhood it was his desire to become a lawyer, but his mother, with practical wisdom, counseled him first to learn a trade as a step toward higher advancement. At thirteen he was apprenticed to a harness maker, and became an expert in the handling of leather and thread. But he never forgot his cherished ambition, and began to spend his leisure moments in studying the mysteries of legal lore. His apprenticeship lasted five years, and when it ended he took another step toward realizing his design by entering Wabash College, at Crawfordsville, paying his expenses by working at his trade during vacations. The next chapter in his education was a course at the Indiana Asbury University. Then for a time he taught school, and completed his pre-



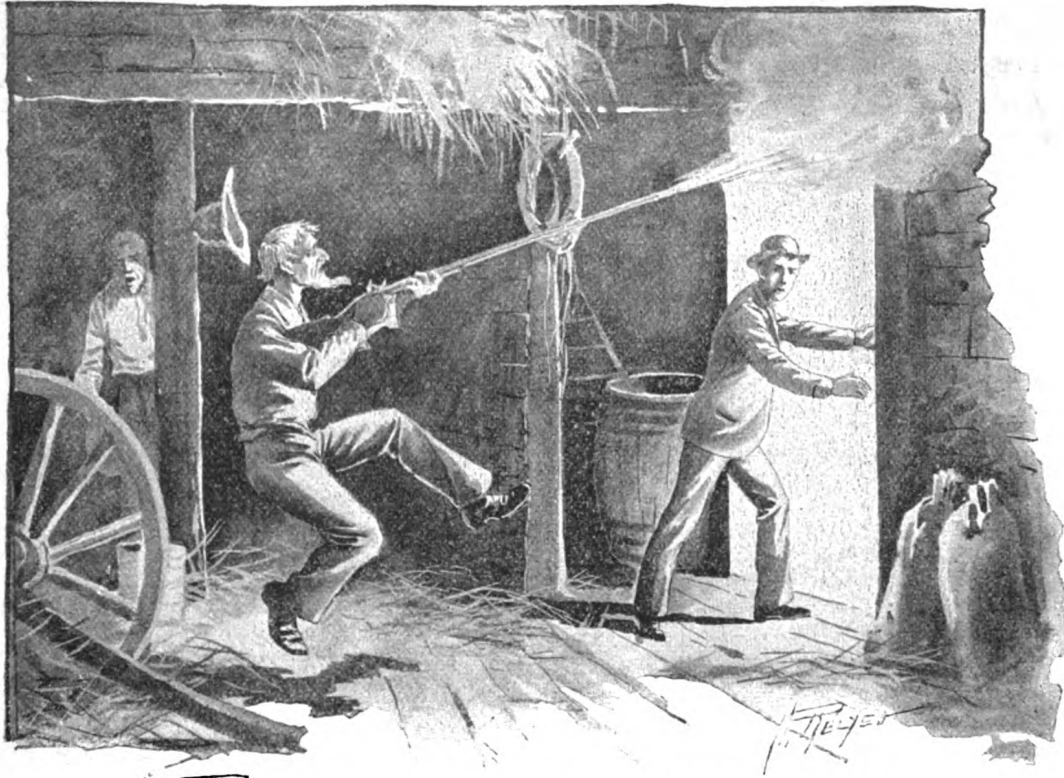
JOSEPH EWING McDONALD.
From a photograph by Bell, Washington.

paration for his profession in the office of Zebulon Baird, then esteemed the first lawyer in Indiana.

Admitted to the bar in 1844, he began to practice in Crawfordsville, where he soon found an opportunity to rise into prominence in a calling in which his abilities naturally fitted him to excel. In 1848 he was elected to Congress, but though he served with distinction, the next election went against his party, and he was defeated. In spite of this serious setback he became recognized throughout Indiana as a leader among the Democrats—a reputation that was only increased by the brilliant though unsuccessful campaign he made for the governorship in 1864, when he was worsted by the famous Oliver P. Morton. In 1875 he was sent to the United States Senate, where during six years' tenure of office he stood in the very foremost rank as a jurist and as an authority on finance. He took an active and prominent part in the electoral contest of 1876, and was distinguished as the most earnest and consistent advocate of "hard money" among Western Senators. As "Old Saddlebags"—a playful allusion to the trade of his youth—he was known all over the country as one of the most able and upright of our public men.

When his term expired, Mr. McDonald left his Senatorial seat, the Indiana Legislature being in the control of the Republicans, who chose the present President to succeed him. He never returned to public life, although in 1880 and 1884 his friends strongly urged his nomination for the Presidency, and had it not been for his unselfish loyalty to those to whom he had pledged his support, there is more than a chance that he might have been selected as a candidate for the highest office in the republic.

Mr. McDonald's old age, a calm and honored one, was spent in his home at Indianapolis, where he passed away last month, sincerely regretted by his city, his State, and his country.



A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION FAIRLY SHOOK THE BARN FROM CELLAR TO RIDGEPOLE.

ARTHUR BLAISDELL'S CHOICE.

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

THE two Blaisdell boys—Hal and Arthur—live with their widowed mother in Providence. It has become necessary for the sons to go to work at once, but positions are difficult to get. Arthur has literary tastes, and through the efforts of Mr. Olney, a friend of the family, a situation is obtained for one of the boys on the JOURNAL. In the natural order of things, this would have been taken by Arthur; but just at this time Mr. Olney secures the offer of another place—as that of driver of a milk wagon for Hiram Hart, who lives just outside of the city. Hal seems to do such work; but for the sake of the addition to the slender income, Arthur decides to give the post on the paper to his brother and accept that with Mr. Hart for himself.

He finds it rather dull in the country, but still has some rather lively adventures at a temperance meeting, to which he goes with Bill Olney, who works on the Pegrin place next door, and where he is introduced to Miss Annie Remington and her sister, whom he had met on the road in the morning when they were frightened by the bursting out of the bushes of a trampish looking individual. With the latter, who gives his name as Ben Norton, Arthur Blaisdell afterwards falls into conversation, finds him to be altogether inoffensive, and secures for him a place with old man Hart, Hiram Hart's father, where Arthur himself lives. One day, while on his way to the wood lot where Ben Norton is at work, Arthur is passed by a stranger, mounted on an exceedingly handsome horse. He is amazed a few minutes later by perceiving through the bushes this stranger and Norton face to face, the latter with his axe upraised, as though about to strike. From the conversation then overheard, Arthur gathers that the stranger, whose name he afterwards learns to be Chess Gardner, is trying to influence Ben for evil.

Soon afterwards Hiram falls ill and gets Arthur to promise him that he will take full charge of the place. This word having been passed, Arthur is prevented from accepting a position Mr. Davidson offers him on the JOURNAL. But still harder lines fall to the boy's lot. He is sent to California by the doctor's orders, and old man Hart tries in every way in his power to annoy Arthur, added to which the latter seems to make enemies in every direction, both Bill Olney and Mr. Davidson being down on him.

Meanwhile Hal has done some good work on the JOURNAL staff, has received an advance in salary, but has at the same time fallen into rather unfortunate company, having made an intimate of Mont Raymond, the society reporter, who introduces him to the Happy-Go-Lucky Club and Mr. Chess Gardner. He attends a supper given by Raymond, which ends up rather disgracefully, and is reported by the JOURNAL'S rival sheet, the TELEGRAPH, the next morning with Hal Blaisdell's name prominently mentioned. As a consequence he is dismissed from the staff of the paper.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MICKY BEARDS THE LION IN HIS DEN.

ON the morning Hal Blaisdell received his dismissal, all the *Journal* employees, from the managing editor down to the youngest boy in the press room, were more or less agitated over the objectionable article in the

Telegraph. And the managing editor was not a whit more agitated than was the aforesaid youngest press room assistant, who happened to be Micky Moriarty.

The employees on the *Journal* were all more or less clanish, and some of the older men considered the paragraph in the rival daily as much of an insult to themselves as to the management. At the very moment Hal was interviewing Mr. Jennings in the office below, a number of the reporters were gathered in the room overhead discussing the affair.

"It is a contemptible jibe," declared Braintree, one of the older reporters. "But I should think Blaisdell wouldn't have got into such a mess. No decent fellow would."

"That's what I say," declared Smith. "Of course the public won't pay much attention to what the *Telegraph* says; it's like a cur dog barking at a locomotive, and thinking to turn it from the track by so doing. But a fellow who would cut up that way is a scamp."

"I tinks you fellers vas just von leetle bit mistaken," said Horatio Guelph, who was another of the party.

"How so?" inquired Smith.

"Well, now, if I ain't mooch mistaken, dat feller Raymond had more to do mit it dan Hal. Now look here," he added earnestly, dropping his brogue for the moment; "I'm not very frequently sold when I size a fellow up, and I'll wager dollars to doughnuts that Hal Blaisdell isn't in it so deep as you think. He doesn't have the appearance of a beer guzzler, nor yet of a fast fellow. Did you ever see his mother? Well, I did, once, and a fellow with a mother like her *can't* go far wrong!" with which rather lengthy speech for him, Horatio turned away.

And that was the general opinion of those who knew the men—that Mont Raymond was at the bottom of the dis-

graceful affair, however much Hal might be entangled in it. Mr. Mack obtained a copy of the *Telegraph* when he came down to the office, and read the paragraph out loud to his assistants.

"It's what I call a dirty dab," he declared, throwing the objectionable paper on the floor, and tramping on it viciously. "I don't believe young Blaisdell had anything to do with that, an' you can't make me!" and he glared wrathfully about on his audience.

But nobody tried to shake his belief in Hal's innocence.

"They say ol' Jennings was madder'n blazes about it, and gave him the bounce before he had a chance to say boo," said one of the press men.

"Just like him," said Mack. "Now old Davidson is quick tempered, but he'll give a fellow a fair show. It had been better for Blaisdell if he'd had him to deal with."

Micky Moriarty heard this last remark of the foreman, and he treasured it in his heart.

"His poor mither! whatever will she do?" groaned Micky, as he went about his customary duties. "Her heart'll be broke intirely, so it will. I wonder now if the ould man would give him a hearin'. Mebbe he would, now, if somebody'd ax him. I wonder wud he if I'd ax him!" He stopped work, his heart almost standing still at the thought. "Oh, they do say he'll eat wan up whin he bes ugly. An' thin s'posen I was ter ax him, an' he give me the bounce, too. Sure, that'd be had f'r the mither an' Jamesy. But 'twill be wus f'r his mither, bless her swate face—an' she a-doin' so much f'r us. I'll do it!"

And throwing down the bunch of waste he was using, he washed his hands, and, fired with the new resolve, climbed the stairs to the main office.

He well knew the proprietor's private den. It was a little square apartment at the rear of the counting and editorial rooms, and one day he had looked in through the open door. He knew Mr. Davidson, too, an elderly, fleshy man, who generally was good natured, but whose tones sounded like thunder when he *was* angry.

Just a moment did Micky hesitate, and then, with trembling hands, knocked at the door of the ogre's castle. With fast beating heart he stepped inside at the gruff summons to "come in."

The sole occupant of the room sat before a large desk, writing, and Micky immediately recognized Mr. Davidson. The proprietor of the *Journal* looked even more formidable than the boy had anticipated, and it was with great trepidation that he approached the desk as the gentleman turned from his writing.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" inquired Mr. Davidson.

"Och, sur, it ain't me at all, at all," declared Micky, diving at once into the subject.

"It isn't you? Well, who in time is it?" inquired Mr. Davidson.

"Sure it's about Masther Blaisdell," commenced Micky.

"Hal Blaisdell?" inquired Mr. Davidson.

"Yis, sur; ye see, sur, he's got discharged, an' Mr. Mack sez, sez he——"

"Discharged!" exclaimed Mr. Davidson, in a voice that made poor Micky jump. "Discharged? Bless me! what for?"

"I dunno, sur—not jest right, sur. But 'twas f'r some racket wan of the ither reporters got him into."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the *Journal* proprietor, again almost scaring the boy's wits away. "But that can't be it. Jennings was trying to tell me this noon something about the *Telegraph*," and he caught up a copy of the paper from

the desk before him; "but I was too busy to pay much attention to what he was saying, although he seemed a good deal excited. He hasn't been selling news to the *Telegraph*, has he?"

"Not a bit, sur," returned Micky, gaining courage. "But there's a piece about him in the paper."

"About Hal Blaisdell?" again asked the mystified old gentleman. "Here, you find it," and he passed the paper to the boy.

Micky could read a little, and he quickly picked out the required paragraph. Mr. Davidson read it through without comment. Then he drew a long breath.

"Well, that's the most contemptible trick those *Telegraph* folks have stooped to yet. They shall suffer for that, defaming a boy's character that way!" and, jamming his hat over his ears, he was about to depart, when Micky said.

"But Misther Hal, sur?"

"Oh, Ha," repeated the old gentleman; "you say he's been discharged?"

"Yis, sur——"

"Discharged! Well, I wonder what for. Jennings must be crazy."

Going to a speaking tube, he summoned Jennings from his office.

"Here, what does this mean?" inquired the proprietor.

"What have you discharged Hal Blaisdell for?"

"Did you read that—*con*-temptible article in the *Telegraph* this morning?"

"Yes, I did, and I'm goin' over to see about it. Do you think I'm going to have my employees' characters ruined that way? But that's nothing to do with your discharging the boy."

"Well, I should think it had," returned Mr. Jennings with some spirit.

"How? You don't suppose that article was true, do you?"

"I know it was."

"And that Hal Blaisdell was mixed up in it?"

"Yes, sir; he admitted it," declared Jennings.

Mr. Davidson sank back in his chair as though completely astounded.

"Sure, sur," cried Micky, who saw his hope of helping Hal fast slipping away, "sure, sur, he wasn't the most ter blame, at all, at all. It was wan of the ither reparters."

"One of the other reporters?" repeated Mr. Davidson weakly.

"Yes, I really suppose that Raymond is at the bottom of this," admitted Mr. Jennings, "although he hasn't been down today, so I haven't questioned him. Coffin seems to think it was Raymond; but Blaisdell's name was attached to it."

"Well, what if it was?" snarled Mr. Davidson. "If the name of the angel Gabriel was attached to it would you have discharged *him*?"

"Yes, if he admitted he was engaged in such a disgraceful piece of business," replied Mr. Jennings stoutly.

"Who is this Raymond?" inquired Mr. Davidson.

"One of the reporters; been here a number of years, sir. Blaisdell has been pretty thick with him, but he ought to have seen his danger——"

"Danger? What sort of a fellow is this Raymond?"

"Well, he's pretty fast," said Jennings. "Driunks and gambles, and all that I suppose."

"He does?" roared the proprietor. "What do you mean by having such a fellow as that in this office?"

"Why, sir, he's the best society reporter we've got—in fact the only one."

"I don't care," declared the wrathful old gentleman, "I want you to get rid of him *at once!* Do you understand? I'm going to look into this and see how much Hal Blaisdell had to do with it. Mind you, sir, I don't question your authority in discharging him, Jennings, but I'm going to look into this matter a little more thoroughly than you seem to have done. A boy with such a mother as he's got," went on the old gentleman, who had lately seen Little Mum and been introduced to her, "can't go very far wrong, in my opinion," which goes to show that both the proprietor of the *Journal* and Horatio Guelph were of the same mind.

Micky returned to the press room hoping that it would all turn out right for Hal. He had been in the lion's den and heard the lion roar, and he congratulated himself that it had not roared at him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNDER SUSPICION.

While Hal Blaisdell was getting into trouble in the city, his brother Arthur was facing a trial even harder to bear than was Hal's disgrace.

The Monday morning following Hiram Hart's starting for California, Arthur's alarm clock, which always stood on the bureau near the head of his bed, rang the boy up at a few minutes before two. He arose and dressed noiselessly and leaving his room went down stairs as quietly as possible. Much to his surprise the side door stood wide open.

"I declare," thought Arthur, as he stepped out, closing the door behind him, "it's bad enough to leave this door unlocked day and night; but when it comes to having it stand wide open I think it's just a trifle risky."

With these thoughts he went out to the barn and made his preparations for departure. After feeding the horse he intended taking that day, he backed the wagon down to the door of the ice box, and began loading in the milk.

"Now, there's those cans," he muttered, his eyes falling on the two receptacles, which stood outside the box; "that milk's too old to be good—I'll give it to the old man's hogs."

Carrying the cans to the hog pen under the barn, he poured their contents into the porkers' feed trough, standing and watching the animals crowd each other as they eagerly devoured the milk.

"I don't suppose those creatures have anything to trouble them," he thought, "unless that it is that they don't get half enough to eat. I wish nothing more than that ever bothered me. I wonder how far Hi has got by this time?"

He set down the empty cans, locked the ice box, and after getting a slight lunch in the farmhouse kitchen and harnessing his horse, drove away.

On his return about noon Arthur noticed that old man Hart was in the barn conversing earnestly with a short, thick set man, who was dressed in a blue suit and had an exceedingly important air. As he put up his horse the boy heard the stranger ask:

"Is that *him?*"

Old Hart nodded, and favoring Arthur with a long stare, the stranger climbed into a carriage which stood beside the roadside, and drove rapidly away.

"Do ye know who that was?" inquired Mr. Hart, approaching Arthur, who was unloading his wagon.

"No, sir."

"Wal, that was our town sergeant—Dan King," said the old man, watching the boy keenly,

"Is that so?" inquired Arthur, wondering what the other was driving at.

"Yes; and do ye know what he's gone arter?" demanded Mr. Hart, glowering at the boy.

"No."

"Wal, he's gone arter a warrant!" declared the old man.

"A warrant," repeated Arthur, gazing at the farmer in startled surprise.

"That's what I said," snarled the other, and seizing the boy's shoulder firmly with his long, claw-like fingers he continued: "He's gone fr a warrant fr you, that's what! I'll teach ye ter steal fr'm me, ye young varmint," and he shook the boy soundly.

"I'll teach ye," he went on, while Arthur struggled desperately, "I'll teach ye ter steal fr'm me, an' pizen my pigs! I'll—I'll——"

But just here Arthur freed himself from his grasp, and what the farmer really *did* do was slightly surprising to himself. Mr. Hart was undoubtedly the more muscular of the two: but Arthur was perfectly able to take care of himself now that his hands were loose.

As the old man clawed the air wildly in his endeavors to clutch his young antagonist again, Arthur stepped quickly to one side and delivered what is scientifically known as a "left hander," and a moment or two later the elder Hart picked himself up from under the milk team with a noise like a small volcanic explosion ringing through his ears, and a lump as big as a hen's egg on the back of his head.

"Now you tell me what you mean by your remarks and by trying to shake me out of my jacket," demanded Arthur fiercely.

But without replying, the old man commenced yelling for Ben Norton. In a moment the hired man appeared on the scene.

"Jest grab that young villain!" cried old Hart, fairly jumping up and down in his rage. "He's a-most killed me. He'll be killin' all on us ef we ain't keerful. Don't ye let him git away, fr King'll be back shortly with that 'ere warrant."

"For heaven's sake what does it mean?" demanded Arthur of Ben who stood eying him silently while the old man hurried off to the house.

"Don't you—haven't you heard?" replied Ben, still waiting Arthur with a peculiar expression.

"No, I haven't heard anything. For pity's sake e it."

Ben followed him into the barn.

"Last night," he said, in a slow, hard voice, "son stole Mr. Hart's watch and his wallet containing thirt lars, a gold thimble and a pair of spectacles of Mrs. H. and a gold ring."

"And they think I did it?" gasped Arthur, his face very white.

Ben nodded.

"What did he mean about his hogs being poisoned?" inquired Arthur, a dull feeling of helplessness creeping over him.

"*Somebody,*" repeated Ben, with the same emphasis on the word he had used before, "either last night or this morning gave the hogs some milk with something in it which made them both awful sick; but they're better now."

"Why, I gave them that milk this morning," said Arthur in a dazed tone.

"That's what the old man said."

"And they think I did it?" repeated Arthur.

"Everything points that way."

"Do *you* think it was I?" cried the boy desperately.

Ben turned away without replying, and Arthur sank down upon an upturned pail.

"They can't prove it," he exclaimed.

"Folks can prove most anything they've a mind to," said

Ben. "Look here," he continued, turning on the boy suddenly, "that constable won't be here for an hour or two, and in that time you can get a good many miles away. I won't see you and the old man is no good on a chase."

Arthur started up at the suggestion and turned towards the door. Then he halted, exclaiming:

"No, I am innocent, and I'll stay and see it out. If I run away it will look as though as I was guilty."

"No, I reckon you won't run away," exclaimed the harsh voice of Mr. Hart at the door, and the old man suddenly appeared, bearing an old fashioned musket about as tall as himself. "If ye try it I'll blow ye to flinders!" and he pointed the gun threateningly at the boy, waving the barrel about so recklessly that Ben Norton dodged into one of the horse stalls.

"For pity's sake, Mr. Hart, be careful where you point that gun," exclaimed the hired man.

"Don't you fret, Ben," returned the farmer with a satisfied smile. "I'm a-goin' ter keep it trained on that 'ere rascal. He won't git away, not if I know myself."

"Mr. Hart," began Arthur, "do you think I stole those things and poisoned your hogs?"

"Ye shet up!" interrupted the old man fiercely. "I know ye did, an' ye needn't think ye kin lie out'n it," and he made another frantic gesture with the musket which caused Ben Norton to again dodge out of range.

"But I didn't do it," insisted Arthnr.

"Didn't ye give my hogs that 'ere milk?" demanded Mr. Hart.

"Yes, but——"

"Don't ye 'but' me! I don't want ter hear no excuses, I'll prosecute ye ter the extent o' the law, and git my money back, too!"

"But——"

"Shet up!" roared the farmer. "You keep still. I'm a-goin' ter keep this 'ere weepson trained on ye till Dan King comes back."

"Well, if you do," said Arthur through his set teeth, "you'll have to follow me round some," and he started towards the door.

The old man, who had suddenly acquired considerable respect for Arthur's muscle, backed out of the way with surprising agility. But as the boy disappeared through the door he awoke to the fact that his prisoner was escaping, raising the old musket to his shoulder he shut both eyes and pulled the trigger.

The weapon had probably not been loaded before in twenty years, and the charge Mr. Hart had rammed home was a generous one—perhaps it was the only generous thing the old man had done in the last ten years of his life.

There was a puff of smoke and a flash of exploding powder, followed by a terrific explosion which fairly shook the barn from cellar to ridge pole. The charge of bullets and scrap lead splintered the casing above the door, and the old man was sent spinning backward about a dozen yards by the recoil.

He brought up against a stanchion with stunning force, tripped over the door of the trap which had been left open, and doubling up like a jack knife, shot down into the hog pen below!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEN NORTON RECEIVES A LETTER.

"GREAT Peter!" ejaculated Ben Norton, and running to the trap door he peered down into the half darkness of the barn cellar.

Arthur, who had been startled by the terrific explosion of

the old firearm, hurried back to see if anything was left of the interior of the barn. He found Ben gazing down into the cellar with bulging eyes.

"Great Peter!" again ejaculated the hired man, "he's gone clean out of sight in that muck!"

"Well, don't stand there staring like a great idiot!" exclaimed Arthur, dashing out of the barn. "Come and help him out. He'll smother in that stuff."

Followed by Ben, Arthur tore around to the opposite side of the barn to the door of the hog pen, and securing a loose plank to stand upon, he went to the rescue of the unfortunate farmer.

But Mr. Hart did not wait for assistance. Fortunately for him he had landed in an exceptionally soft spot, and rose to his feet completely covered with the muck, but uninjured, and ready to empty the phials of his wrath upon his young antagonist's head.

"You'll suffer f'r this, you young wretch!" declared the old man, who had been somewhat bewildered by the catastrophe and was inclined to believe that Arthur had attacked him. "You'll suffer f'r it soon's I kin git th' law on ye," he repeated, as he waded out toward the entrance through the muck which was considerably above his knees. "You git the gun, Ben, an' shoot him if he tries ter 'tack me agin."

"I wouldn't touch your old gun for a farm," declared Ben, in disgust.

"Hold on to him!" cried Hart, as Arthur stretched out his hand to help him out of the pen. "Hain't ye goin' ter defend me?" he demanded, looking wrathfully at the astonished hired man.

"He ain't going to hurt you," returned Ben.

"Haow d' ye know he ain't? What won't a fellar do 't would knock a man down through a trap that 'ere way?" whined the bewildered farmer, still backing away from Arthur.

"Why, he didn't touch you!" declared Ben. "'Twas that old gun. It kicked like a government mule."

"It was?" interrogated Mr. Hart, in a dazed tone, now coming outside the pen and standing staring at first one and then the other of the young men, while the muck ran down his face and clothing in little rivulets. "Why, that 'ere musket never useter kick. I've see my dad use it time 'n' time agin—an' it never kicked when I fired it afore."

"Well, it pretty nearly wrecked the barn that time," rejoined Ben. "You'd better change your clothes, Mr. Hart."

"I guess I will," said the farmer; "but don't you let that young raskil escape," he added, gradually recovering from his amazement.

"Oh, no, of course not," returned Ben sarcastically, speaking in a tone only loud enough for Arthur to hear, as the considerably crestfallen old man went toward the house. "Now, if you'll take a fool's advice," he added turning to Arthur, "you'll cut sticks and get just as far away from here as you can in the next hour."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," returned Arthur. "I'm not going to run away," and he turned and followed the farmer.

"Where are you going?" inquired Ben.

"Just at present I'm going into the house for something to eat," replied Arthur.

Mr. Hart had retired to change his clothes, but Mrs. Hart was in the kitchen.

"Oh, Arthur, what will Hi say?" she said reproachfully. "He has trusted you so much, and to have you do this. And then you attacked Mr. Hart so furiously—if it hadn't been for that I think he would have given you a chance to return the things and would have said nothing about it—"

"Why, Mrs. Hart, do you suppose that I am a thief?" cried Arthur indignantly.

"I shouldn't like to call you that," she replied sadly. "But Mr. Hart saw you in our room during the night and this morning the money and other things were gone."

"He saw me in the room last night!" cried Arthur, astounded beyond expression.

"Yes, Arthur," returned the lady gravely. "Don't ever think you can do wrong without your sin finding you out—"

"I'll thank you to keep your advice to yourself, Mrs. Hart," suddenly interrupted Arthur hotly. "I don't care to listen while you accuse me of something I am entirely innocent of. If Mr. Hart says he saw me in his room last night—I hope he'll be forgiven for lying, that's all! I begin to believe that this is simply a put up job on me, so that he can git Hi's business into his clutches. I shall telegraph for Hi at once, and sick or well, he must come home and straighten it out," and turning on his heel the angry young fellow dashed up stairs to his room.

"Oh, Little Mum! Little Mum!" he groaned. "What will you say when you hear of this? But you shan't hear of it! Somehow I'll keep it from your ears," and throwing himself face downward on his bed, he tried to map out some plan of defense.

Half an hour later he was aroused by a knock on his door.

"Come out o' that!" exclaimed the harsh voice of Mr. Hart. "Dan King hez come."

When Arthur opened his door, he found the farmer waiting in the hall with a formidable stick of cord wood for a defensive weapon.

"Now, see here," said the old man, "if ye go ter cuttin' up any capers, I'll give ye a taste o' this 't yo' won't fergit n' one while. Jest you march erlong in front o' me. Go 'long, now."

And so, greatly against his will, Arthur was marched outside. King, the town sergeant, was waiting for them.

"Ye better handcuff him, Dan," suggested the farmer. "He's purty ferocious. I 'spect he'd a-killed me if I hadn't been too quick f'r him. We had a reg'lar rough 'n' tumble fight f'r it; but fin'ly I conquered him."

"He don't look as though you'd punished him very badly," said the officer doubtfully, while Arthur remained speechless with amazement at the old man's account of the affair.

"No, I let him off easy," declared Mr. Hart. "But ye want'er look out f'r him."

"I reckon I kin manage a boy like him," said the officer. "Come, young feller, you just go 'long with me, an' mind ye, Dan King never lost a prisoner yet, so don't ye try ter run."

"I don't intend to," replied Arthur calmly; "but before you arrest me, will you please tell me what I am arrested for?"

"Why, yes," returned Mr. King. "The warrant says it's stealing," and he waved a folded document before Arthur's face.

"Oh, the warrant does?" questioned Arthur, still calmly. "And who makes this charge? Mr. Hart, or the Commonwealth?"

"The—the—why, Mr. Hart does, o' course," replied King.

"Just so. Now then," exclaimed Arthur, with considerable emphasis, "when did Mr. Hart go before the court and have that paper sworn out?"

"Why—why—" and the officer hesitated, rather at a loss how to reply.

"Please answer me," said Arthur, with all the severity of a police magistrate.

By this time they had reached the barn where the officer's horse was standing. To hide his confusion Mr. King began to fix some portion of the harness. He was not accustomed to making prisoners of anybody but inebriated and unfortunate tramps, and no one had ever before questioned the legality of his proceedings. This calm young fellow made him just a little nervous.

"What d'ye let that boy sass ye for?" demanded Mr. Hart in disgust. "Jest knock him on the head and bundle him into the kerridge. I'll go 'long with ye, 'an if that warrant ain't all right I'll tell my story to the judge, an' that'll fix it."

Arthur did not doubt that if the old man was allowed to tell his story to the judge it *would* fix it.

"I see it will do no good to question you any further," he said. "You admit that the paper is not legal. Mr. Hart did *not* appear before any judge, clerk of the court, or any other person in authority to swear out this warrant."

Whether he was right as far as the legal part of it went, for the life of him Arthur could not have told. But his remarks had their effect on the ignorant officer, and that was all he cared for.

"But I shall make no objection to accompanying you before the judge. In fact, I have business there myself," he went on with a peculiar look at Mr. Hart, who was standing uneasily by. "But we will be rather crowded in that small carriage, for Ben, here, must go with us."

"No, Ben ain't a-goin' with us," declared the farmer, breaking in on the boy's remarks. "I don't want no witness. The jedge knows me an' he'll put you where ye won't cut up no more such shines f'r one while."

"Well, he will go as *my* witness, if not as yours," said Arthur.

"Your witness!" exclaimed Mr. Hart.

"Yes, sir, my witness. What do you suppose I am going before this court for?" he demanded, wheeling suddenly upon the old man and putting all the emphasis possible into his words. Then before Hart could reply he continued: "I am going to court, Mr. Hart, to swear out a proper warrant against you for attempted manslaughter!"

For a moment the old man was fairly thunderstruck. Then he got his breath, and jumping up and down in his rage, he yelled:

"Ye young scoundrel! Yew give me any more sass like 'ere an' I'll break your head!"

"You can see for yourself," said Arthur, turning to the wondering sergeant, "that he is really dangerous. Ben here can tell you that he tried to shoot me not an hour ago. There is the gun there," he continued, pointing to the musket which stood leaning against the barn, "and here," leading the officer inside the building so that he could see the splintered door casing, "here is where the shot struck. Fortunately it was aimed too high, but there was enough buckshot in that musket to kill an elephant. I call on Ben here to witness that what I say is true."

King looked at Ben rather blankly, who nodded assent, and Arthur went on:

"If I had been in the range of that musket there wouldn't have been enough left of me for you to have taken to court. Now Mr. Hart can take me to court on this false charge if he wants to, but I'll make it the hottest place for him that he ever got into."

"Be you a-goin' ter stand there an' let that 'ere boy sass me without a-liftin' of your finger?" demanded the farmer of King wrathfully.

"Well—er—er—is what he says about the shootin' true?" inquired the officer hesitatingly.

His fear of the law was considerably greater than his

knowledge, and he began to believe that in this calm, collected young gentleman he had met a little more than his match.

"What if it is?" cried Hart. "Didn't I hev a right ter stop him when he was a-running away?"

"No, sir, you did not," declared Arthur before the officer could reply. "I was not arrested and you had no legal power over me. You will find out, Mr. Hart, that your act will cost you dear. A man cannot fire a loaded gun point blank at another in this community and go scot free. Mr. King can tell you that."

"That's so—that's a fact, Hart," said King, at last finding his voice. "Ye shouldn't have fired the gun at him. He's got you there."

By this time old man Hart was little less than beside himself with rage; but he was frightened too.

"Be yew sure, Dan?" he inquired in a slightly shaky voice.

"Sure as shootin'," responded the town sergeant, biting off a generous mouthful of tobacco to relieve his feelings.

"Now, Mr. Hart, I am ready to go with you at any time," said Arthur, who could not help enjoying the farmer's discomfiture now that the tables were turned.

"Well, Artie, I don't want to be too hard on ye," stammered the old man, feeling around for some knothole through which to crawl out of the affair. "I 'spect the temptation was great an' I know ye're young. It'd be too bad ter send a young feller like yew ter prison. Now if you'll just hand over the things ye took I'll call it square and won't say nothin' about yer pizenin' them pigs, seein's they got over it."

"No, you needn't do any such thing," said Arthur coolly. "You've accused me of stealing, and now I intend proving my innocence as well as making you understand that you can't attempt the life of any person with impunity," and he walked towards the town sergeant's carriage as though about to climb in.

"I—I say, I dunno ez I wan' ter press ye," exclaimed the old man, now really frightened at the prospect of being arrested on the charge of attempted murder.

Arthur halted, and turned towards him.

"I don't doubt that you have been robbed, Mr. Hart," he said, without a trace of anger in his voice, "but I am not the one who did it. It is true that I gave the hogs some milk this morning, but I gave them nothing in it. They may have been made sick by some other cause."

"'Twas suthin they eat," declared the old man in an aside.

"That may be, but I didn't give it to them. Now hadn't you better let this rest, and wait a few days? The thief will undoubtedly be discovered. In the meantime I will say nothing about your trying to shoot me."

"I guess ye better do it Hart," advised the officer, climbing into his carriage and preparing to drive away, as though he considered the matter fully settled.

"Wal," returned the old man slowly, acquiescing with evident reluctance, and without further discussion he turned towards the house, while King drove out of the yard.

"You ought to be a lawyer," declared Ben Norton, with some admiration, when he and Arthur were alone.

"Perhaps I ought," returned the boy, eying Ben sharply. "I'll see if I am lawyer enough to ferret this matter out and find the *real* thief."

Ben blushed and turned away without reply.

Mr. Hart avoided Arthur the rest of the day, and nothing further was said by the parties interested about the robbery. But the boy felt the disgrace that had fallen upon him keenly. He very well knew that Mr. Hart believed—or appeared to believe—him guilty and little as he respected

the farmer, it was galling to have the least breath of suspicion rest upon his hitherto unsullied character.

The following day things were much the same and a cloud seemed to hang over the farmhouse and its occupants. Late in the afternoon Ben Norton drove over to the Center on an errand, and when he returned almost paralyzed Mr. Hart with the announcement that he was going to leave.

"I just received a letter," said Ben, who seemed greatly excited, and showing the epistle. "My brother is dying up in Newton. I shall have to go home at once."

"But I can't get along without ye nohow," declared the farmer.

"Well, I reckon you'll have to," said Ben, "for I'm going," and he went up to his room, tied up his bundle, and departed.

As he passed out of the yard he accosted Arthur, who stood by the gate.

"Good by," he said. "You and I probably won't meet again. I hope you'll discover who robbed old man Hart," he added, giving the boy a peculiar glance, and then he hurried away down the road.

Arthur stepped forward as though to detain him, and then drew back and watched him depart in silence.

"I believe," he muttered, "that Ben Norton knows more about that robbery than he cares to tell. I'd give ten dollars to see the contents of that bundle of his."

(To be continued.)

BRAD MATTOON;*

OR,

LIFE AT HOSMER HALL.*

BY WILLIAM D. MOFFAT.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FATHER AND SON.

MR. Parker could not avoid a slight start of surprise at this sudden appearance of the master of Hosmer.

He was a man of great coolness of head and presence of mind, however, and needed but an instant to recover.

"I was saying, sir," he answered, "that this was the home of Edward Hosmer —"

"But it isn't any longer," interrupted Mr. Ivers with a sneer.

"That is quite evident, Gordon Ivers, and has been evident ever since you took possession. Edward Hosmer would have managed affairs here in a far different spirit from —"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt. He would probably have retained you for counsel for one thing—which would of course have been very much to your advantage pecuniarily."

Mr. Parker's eyes flashed fire.

"Better leave that subject alone, Ivers. I know more about this estate than you imagine, and my knowledge of the many ways you have mismanaged it might prove troublesome if a chance was offered me to use it."

Mr. Ivers scowled.

"Why, what on earth do you mean, Parker? What business is it of yours, or of any one else's, what I do with my own property?"

"No one disputes your right as master of Hosmer, Ivers; but, knowing how things have gone on, I could not help thinking what Edward Hosmer would say were he standing here today."

*Begun in No. 435 of THE ARGOSY.

Mr. Ivers uttered an exclamation of impatience. "That's all right, but, as Edward Hosmer has been dead for years, I can't see what that sort of talk amounts to. Come, now, Parker, lawyers ought not to waste time on sentiment. They ought to know better. What I want to find out is, have you made up your minds to give up that piece of property peacefully, or will I have to take it away?"

"If you feel so confident," answered Mr. Parker quietly, "I do not see what interest our actions can have."

"Well, it seems to me it takes a good while for you to get it through your heads that the land is mine, that is all. How long is this fussing and chinning to go on?"

"You will receive your rights in due time, Ivers. We shall not keep you waiting long. A few details still remain to be settled."

"Oh, yes. I suppose you lawyers wouldn't be satisfied without a lot of red tape. But you want to hurry up—do you understand? If you don't, I'll set fire to my end of the train, and blow you off the place—now there's a warning." And with this, Mr. Ivers turned on his heel with satisfaction, and walked away.

"All right, Ivers," remarked Mr. Parker after his retreating form, "though you speak truer than you think. There *is* likely to be an explosion, but when the smoke clears away, *you* will be the missing one, and not the academy, as you confidently expect."

Turning to Brad, he found him standing by the tree, motionless, looking far off across the fields. He had doubtless heard the conversation that had just taken place, but his thoughts were elsewhere. That one short sentence of Mr. Parker's, coupled with all that had recently been revealed to him, had wrought a complete revolution in his mind—a complete upsetting of all his ideas concerning himself—a complete change of view concerning his life.

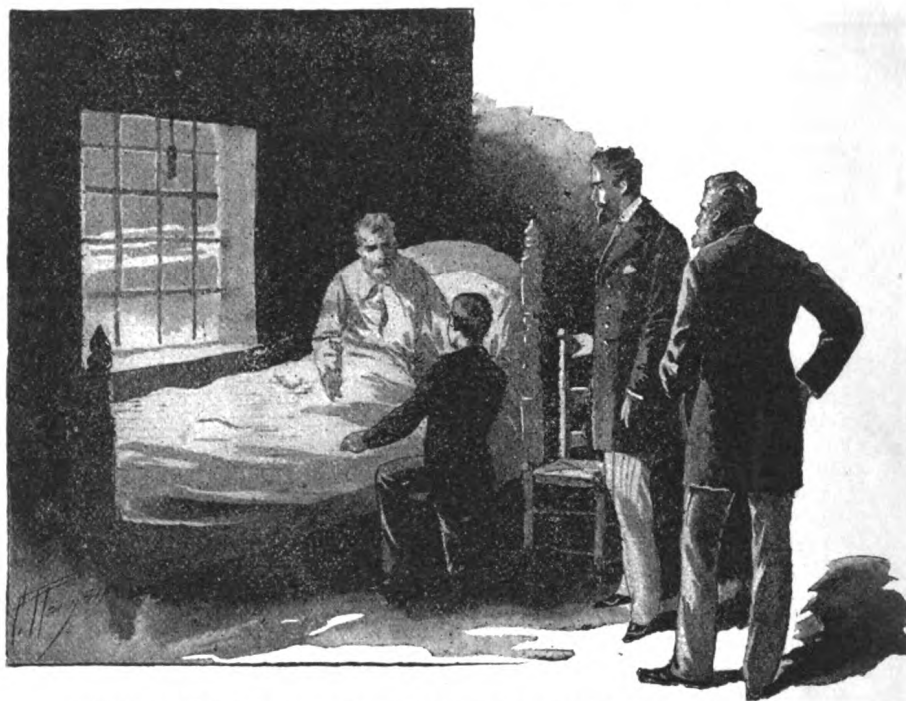
"Well, Brad," said Mr. Parker, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "we have given you a heavy load for a young head. I do not wonder that you are dazed and bewildered. I scarcely know what to think myself. Today's experience is a strange and startling one in all our lives—yours particularly. The moment the conviction of the truth of Mr. Prentice's statement about this man was forced upon me—the moment I saw his face and recognized him, my mind turned to the necessary consequences that must follow. Think, Brad, of the peculiar importance of your father's return just now. Think of its bearing not only upon your life, but upon the affairs of the academy."

"But, Mr. Parker," cried Brad, who was thinking still of the past, and the past alone, "I am still in the dark about this strange matter. You tell me this man is—is my father, then that he is Edward Hosmer. I feel I must believe you; but remember, I know little yet of my early life, of my parents, of how all these strange things, so hard to believe, came about. Why have I never been told?"

Mr. Parker's face grew graver.

"Brad," he said, "I believed your father was dead. Of

nearly all that took place after he left his home, I knew nothing until I heard Mr. Prentice's story an hour ago. The earlier events of your own life—your real name and origin—I did not tell you for the best of reasons. This property, the Hosmer estate, could benefit you only through your father. He being dead, you had no claim, no interest here. Tell me frankly, Brad, would it have done you any good, under those circumstances, to know who you were—to know



"MY SON!" HE WHISPERED FAINTLY. "THANK GOD—MY SON!"

that you were a Hosmer, and poor, while these Ivers held and abused the estate which might have been yours, but which you were unable to touch?"

Brad inclined his head.

"I understand you, Mr. Parker."

"Was it not far better for you to fight your way along contentedly as Brad Mattoon? Would you not have been unhappy and discontented had you known the truth?"

"Yes, Mr. Parker, I would. You acted for the best, I know."

"Very little remains to be cleared up concerning your father's life, and that little I learned but just now from Mr. Prentice. The story is now complete. On the occasion of your father's second visit to Paris, he was the guest of a wealthy gentleman of high rank. In his family your father met Estelle Leclair, a beautiful, refined and cultured woman, whose circumstances were very limited, and who supported herself by teaching. She was, in fact, acting as governess in this gentleman's family. Your father fell in love with her and married her. For this his host, who was very proud and aristocratic, never forgave him. Your father suffered many social slights. In anger he left Paris and returned home, only to find that the news of what his French friends had chosen to term his *mesalliance*, had reached your grandfather's ears. It touched Reginald Hosmer's pride also, and the natural result was the unfortunate quarrel, of which I have already told you, and on account

of which your father left his home, vowing never to return, and even discarding the name of Hosmer.

"Your parents went back to Paris, found new friends, and for awhile got along very well. Your father was succeeding in business, and his life was quite happy. It was at this time that Mr. Prentice, who was a student in Paris, and afterwards a tutor, met your parents and became a close friend of theirs. Mr. Prentice was in very moderate circumstances and frequently pressed hard by necessity. Your father was a good friend to him; always stood by him in time of need, and helped him with the utmost liberality. Then came your mother's death, and after that your father lost heart. Quite reckless in his desolate condition, he fell into his old, bad habits, neglected his business and sank down rapidly—but enough of that. Mr. Prentice has already spoken of that dark period of their life.

"It was during that period that your father, feeling his inability to bring you up properly, and fearing you would grow up to find in him the very worst company, put you in the hands of an old friend, Captain Bunn. He appealed to him as a friend to look carefully after your welfare, and placed in his hands a sum of money to cover your expenses—an outlay that must have left your father almost destitute. Captain Bunn knew of me through your father, and had it in mind to bring you to me as soon as convenient. He grew so fond of you, however, that he kept postponing the time year after year until you had arrived at an age when he felt the necessity of giving you a chance to gain an education. This was five years ago, when he first brought you to me; and from that time on I have shared Captain Bunn's interest in you, and we have both tried to fill the place of parents—"

At this moment they were interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Prentice at the cottage door. Without a word more they hastened to meet him.

"He is awake," said Mr. Prentice. "He knows me. We have talked together, and I have told him where he is."

Mr. Parker turned to Brad.

"Will you go in now, Brad?" he asked gently.

Brad did not answer, but the arm which Mr. Parker held shook with emotion. A moment more and he stepped forward.

"Yes; I will go in," he said softly.

With the least possible noise, the three entered the sick room. That moment remained forever indelibly impressed upon Brad's mind—the moment that marked the beginning of a new epoch in his life.

The sun was setting, and the golden glory of a closing day illuminated the room with a mellow and tender light. On the bed by the window, propped up by pillows, his wasted features softened by the subdued light, lay Edward Hosmer. His face was towards the window when they entered, but, at the sound of their steps, he quickly turned his head.

"Raymond—you here?" he gasped, as Mr. Parker placed his hand gently on the sick man's wrist. Then the latter's eyes wandered to Brad, who had dropped on one knee by the bedside.

"And who—who is this?" asked the invalid with difficulty.

Mr. Parker whispered softly to him. A new, glad light filled the sick man's eyes. His whole expression changed; struggling up, with a quick cry, he seized Brad's face in his thin, tense, nervous fingers, and turned it towards the light.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried hoarsely. "See, Ernest! These are her eyes—her lips—"

Then, as if exhausted by his effort, Edward Hosmer fell limply back against the pillows. Mr. Parker, unable longer

to master his feelings, covered his face with his hands and leaned heavily against the wall.

"Father!" was all Brad could say as his head sank down upon the bed. The sick man's fingers played softly through the boy's thick, curly hair.

"My son!" he whispered faintly. "Thank God—my son!"

CHAPTER XL.

HOSMER CHANGES OWNERSHIP.

WITHIN the next three days the explosion which Gordon Ivers had predicted, occurred. As Mr. Parker had said, however, it proved to be far different from what Mr. Ivers expected, and its effects upon him may be imagined. A thunderbolt dropped from the clearest sky would have been passed over unheeded, as an insignificant trifle in comparison to the brief announcement he received from the trustees concerning Edward Hosmer's reappearance. At first he was completely staggered. Then, on partially regaining his senses, he believed himself to be the victim of a trick, devised for the purpose of delaying and complicating matters.

This he soon found to be a mistake. Far from wishing to delay matters, the trustees were pushing ahead with all possible speed to secure the necessary evidence to prove the identity of Edward Hosmer. This was not hard to obtain, especially with such witnesses as Mr. Parker, Mr. Prentice, and Captain Bunn, the last named fortunately being in New York during the next month. In the face of the evidence adduced, Gordon Ivers found the ground crumbling suddenly beneath his feet. He recognized the utter uselessness of attempting to hold his place, and was compelled to face the prospect of being ignominiously driven out of the estate over which he had held absolute sway for many years—without a word of regret or sympathy from the residents either at Hosmer or in Bramford, all of whom disliked him thoroughly. Moreover, with this prospect came a realization of the stern fact hinted at by Mr. Parker, that he might be held to strict account for certain funds misapplied, and trusts abused.

No one expressed any very great surprise, therefore, when news was brought to the academy one morning that the Ivers, father and son, had suddenly disappeared. An examination of affairs at Hosmer revealed also the fact that Mr. Ivers had taken a large sum of money with him. For this reason Mr. Parker strongly urged a pursuit, but Edward Hosmer—who in three weeks time had grown well enough to be up and about—objected.

"No, Raymond," he said, "I haven't so very long to live now, and for that time let us have peace and quiet. I have had enough of family quarrels."

"But think a moment. This rascal has—"

"He is my cousin, Raymond. I don't care to follow him up. He may not have been behaving himself all these years, but neither was I. Give him time and he will punish himself as I did." And Edward Hosmer let the matter rest so.

Those were momentous days while he was struggling back to health—in which he was casting off the terrible burden of that dark past, and rallying the shattered forces of his nature to one stern resolution—the resolution to make the most, and the best, of the years still left him.

How dark that past had been only Brad, Mr. Parker and Mr. Prentice knew. To them he told how he had, on the night he parted from Mr. Prentice, gone out with the determination to put an end to himself; had fallen in with companions about to leave Paris; had altered his mind, and

gone with them; and, finding Dr. Bourget's grim prophecy remained unfulfilled, had gone on tramping it from place to place, supporting himself as best he could, until, wearied of that sort of life, he suddenly resolved to return to Hosmer, his early home. By care and labor he managed to save enough to enable him to come back, only to find himself penniless, and a stranger and outcast on the site of his birthplace. All that he had suffered during these years he would not tell, though it was easy to detect it in his narrative. But all that was past, and what his heart now ached for was the peace and quiet of home. This he suddenly found just when he had renounced all hope.

It needed a few weeks for the town and county to get used to the strange story of his return, and during that time Edward Hosmer had rapidly gained in physical and mental vigor. In the slender, pale gentleman who walked over to the academy one day, resting upon Brad's shoulder, no one would have recognized the man whom Brad had met on the road that night a month before. Edward Hosmer was never strong again, but that only afforded Brad the opportunity to be the more attentive, while it remained a bond of sympathy that kept father and son close together.

As might be supposed, the affairs of the academy were quickly straightened out, and things at once began to run smoothly again. As for the boys, the varied reception they accorded Brad remained for a long time a subject of amusement to him.

Perry Landon expressed a hearty congratulation that left no doubt as to its sincerity. Others were equally frank and honest in wishing him joy. Little Rob Wilton approached him with a timid sort of awe that aroused Brad's laughter.

"I don't know exactly what to say," he began hesitatingly. "It seems as if you must be a different fellow, Brad, living up there at Hosmer in such grand style."

"Well, just run up and see me, little dominie. Then you'll find out there's no difference—except I can make it pleasanter for you. You won't find any big dogs on the place, or anybody to bully you and shake you up. The academy and Hosmer are all one now—that's the only difference."

This put Wilton at ease again immediately, and it was not long before he found himself thoroughly at home in the Hosmer residence.

It required that whole summer for Brad and his father, together with frequent visits from Mr. Parker, to get the affairs of the Hosmer estate once more into good working order. It had sustained severe losses during Gordon Ivers's ownership, and had been greatly neglected, but it was one of the most valuable pieces of property in the county, and judicious management would soon restore it to its former prosperous condition.

"Well, Brad," said Mr. Parker one day late in the summer, as they walked together towards Bramford after one of the latter's visits, "we can take a breath now, and you can begin to enjoy your new home. The first thing a young man of property usually thinks of at your age is to travel, but I suppose that presents no attractions to you."

"None at all. I've had enough travel for many years, and now that I've found a home and a father I shall stay right here and make the most of them."

"My advice was even better than I thought when I urged you to come to Hosmer last January."

"It was a lucky day for me," answered Brad fervently.

"And how about your resolution, Brad?" said Mr. Parker more soberly. "Will you find it as easy to keep it now your circumstances are so much improved? Be careful, my boy. Your new life may offer frequent temptations."

"Mr. Parker," answered Brad firmly, "no temptation could shake that resolution. Even if I were not already so set on keeping it, the terrible lesson of my father's life, constantly before me, would prevent all possibility of my breaking it. That resolution, however, was a solemn one, and it was made for once and all. You may trust me to stand by it."

"I do trust you perfectly, Brad," said Mr. Parker. And that his trust was not misplaced the testimony of future years gave ample proof.

Brad frequently owned to himself with a slight blush that he concealed another good reason for not wanting to leave Hosmer—and that reason lay in the pleasing proximity of the Hosmer estate to that of Judge Carter. Brad's chance meeting with Miss Lena on that bright afternoon was by no means the last opportunity of this kind afforded him, and he soon learned to look upon that as another lucky day in his life. On the least excuse Brad was glad to carry a message over to Judge Carter or to ramble down by the lake where Miss Lena was occasionally to be found gathering flowers. Eugene Clifford had watched this growing friendship with a disinterestedness that convinced Brad that Eugene's feelings had been misrepresented by Perry Landon when he dropped that hint.

The visits at the Carters' continued to grow more frequent as time passed on, until the neighbors began to smile significantly and say—but then, my readers know how neighbors will talk, so I will not repeat the gossip.

The breaking up of the academy in June brought with it a general parting of all Brad's friends. Of these, Perry Landon and Dan Ellis needed still another year to finish their course, so Brad saw more of them, Little Rob Wilton hastened to his home in India, never again to return, though, at long intervals, Brad received letters from him, written in his sober, quaint style, and telling of his life and the mission work in which he was already beginning to engage.

Eugene Clifford graduated, and went to Harvard University, where he found new fields to cultivate, and soon made a brilliant record for himself. He saw little of Hosmer after that, except on occasional visits to Brad, which the latter gladly returned, and which served both boys as welcome opportunities of renewing a friendship that had formed one of the pleasantest features of their lives.

The Ivers dropped out of sight for a long time. They might, in fact, have become as utterly forgotten, as their whereabouts were unknown, had not, two years later, an item appeared in the New York papers reporting the detection of a bold young forger, Sidney Ivers by name. Then it was that Mr. Parker, at Edward Hosmer's request, sought Sidney out, used all his influence in the boy's behalf, and obtained as lenient treatment of him as possible under the circumstances, and in every way rendered him an assistance which he by no means deserved.

Of the father nothing was seen after his departure from Hosmer, though it was supposed that he had followed the bent of his nature, and drifted into some sort of adventurous, gambling pursuits.

Meantime the change of ownership soon brought the Hosmer estate to a condition of prosperity; while the academy continued to flourish under Dr. Hope, with Mr. Prentice as his right hand man, and promised successor; and they still count as one of the academy's most valued friends, the genial Bob Turner, who rendered such signal service on that memorable night when he drove Mr. Prentice over from Bramford, and they met Brad on the road.

THE END.

THE ARGOSY

TOM SMITH'S SHOES.

A PLEASING FEATURE OF LIFE IN A SIX BY NINE FLAT.



I.

"Don't put your dusty shoes on the new rug, Tom,"



II.

So Tom thoughtfully puts them on the mantel.



III.

But the mantel is no place, his wife tells him, so he arranges them on the new pincushion.



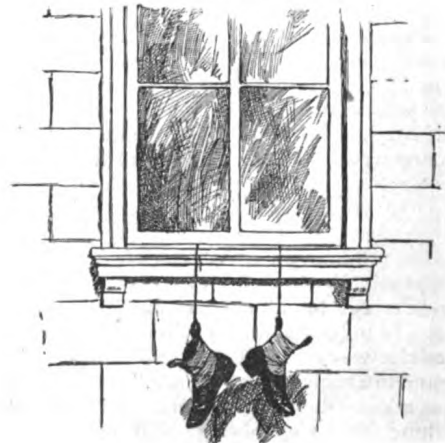
IV.

Having been scolded roundly for using the pincushion, he appends them to the mirror.



V.

As he cannot find a place to put them without being blamed, he goes to bed with them on.



VI.

Finally, as even this is not satisfactory, he hangs them from the window, and peace reigns in the Smith household.