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WHOLE No. 455.

THE DEERSKIN TALISMAN.

A TALE OF MEXICAN TREASURE.*

BY GILBERT CAMPBELL.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FERRY OF THE ST. JACINTO.

IT was on a bright sunny morning that Bob and Arthur, accompanied by their trusty companions, Joe and Lopes, reached the banks of the St. Jacinto. They were all mounted, for they had supplied themselves with horses at the Hacienda del Pilar.

"Are you quite sure that we are going right, Arthur?" asked Bob. "I shouldn't like to miss this wonderful city, where we are to be recompensed so handsomely for all our toils."

"No, no; I'm right enough. This little piece of deerskin is as trusty a guide as Indian Joe," replied his brother with a smile.

Joe muttered something uncomplimentary to Indians as he glanced askance at the talisman.

"I puts no faith in them or their devices," he added. "But I say, Lopes, where is old Gomez? There is the hut safe enuf, but I don't see the crittur smoking outside as usual."

The ferry was of a kind very usual in Mexico. Two stout posts were firmly fixed on either bank, and a strong rope was carried across the river, passing through a notch in each of them. It was easy to warp a boat across the stream by laying hold of this and working along it. The St. Jacinto was a deep river, with a swift current, and some two miles down from the ferry was a rapid, thickly strewn with sunken rocks.

As they neared the ferry house Lopes raised his voice.

"Ola Gomez, are you awake? This is no time for a siesta. Here are some *caballeros* waiting to be ferried across."

But there was no reply to his calls. Dismounting from his horse, he pushed open the door with the barrel of his

rifle and entered the hut, but at once recoiled with a cry of alarm.

The rest of the party dismounted, too, when a sad sight was presented to them. The body of the ferry keeper was stretched upon the floor, pierced with half a dozen knife-wounds, any one of which would have been sufficient to let out his life. The cottage had been thoroughly ransacked and its poor furniture hacked in the most wanton manner.

"Who can have committed such a cruel outrage upon an old man?" cried Arthur.

Indian Joe stooped over the body. "Not much need to ask that, young master," said he. "Injins on the wartrail,



BOB SNATCHED THE LIEUTENANT'S SABER FROM ITS SCABBARD.

I guess; the sign's pretty cl'ar, anyhow. He has been dead about twelve hours," and he pointed to the dead man's head, from which the scalp had been torn away.

"S^z, s^z, it is true!" exclaimed Lopes. "The Apaches must have been here."

"I am not so sure that this is Indian work," replied Bob, who had been looking about him carefully. "What do you make of this, Joe?" he added, as he handed him a button that he had picked up.

* Begun in No. 451 of THE ARGOSY.

Joe eyed it contemptuously, and then jerked it away.

"Injuns offen sticks them kind of jimcracks about 'em, so that sign ain't of much account."

"But this is!" cried Bob. "Look here at that footprint in the ashes on the hearth; that was made by no Indian's moccasin. See, the heel is distinctly printed off."

"The boy is right!" exclaimed the old hunter; "old Joe must go to school again."

"And see!" cried Arthur, holding up a piece of silk which he had found clasped in the dead man's hand—"see the colors, orange and scarlet; this is a piece of—"

"The scarf that *picaro* Cifuentes wore; I noticed it as they led him away," said Lopes.

"One thing seems plain," remarked Bob. "Cifuentes has done the deed, with what object but plunder I do not know; and has scalped the poor old man to make believe that it is the work of Indians."

"I guess that's so," muttered Joe. "Young masters, we had better not stay here; suppose two of us cross to the other bank, and beat about for the villain, while the others do the same this side."

"Arthur and I will stay here, for somehow I don't believe he has crossed the river," cried Bob, his eyes glistening at the thought of being so near his father's murderer, and the brutal slayer of the poor old ferryman.

"As you like," returned the hunter; "Lopes and I will cross and prospect a little."

Joe and Lopes were soon in the flat bottomed boat, which lay close to the shore; and, catching hold of the rope, warped the boat into the center of the stream, the two boys remaining near the ferry house.

Before they were half way across, however, two figures, which had been crouching behind some large stones upon the opposite bank, rose up, rifle in hand.

"*Buenas dias*—good day, señors!" exclaimed Cifuentes, in mocking tones; "we regret that we cannot have the honor to receive your visit at present, but we promise that later on we will look for your bodies in the rapids below. Simon, cut the rope."

But as the fellow raised his hand to obey the order he had received, a bullet from Bob, who had been watching the scene from the other bank, passed through his wrist, causing him to drop his machete, and dance about, uttering loud cries of pain.

"Quick!" cried Cifuentes, snatching the weapon from the ground and dealing a blow which half severed the rope. "The young señor makes good shooting."

But as he raised the weapon to complete his work, a second bullet from Bob struck it near the handle, shivering the blade to atoms.

"This is too close to be pleasant!" exclaimed he, as a ball from Indian Joe's rifle pierced his hat. "To cover, *camarado mio*; the work is done, I think."

And, dragging Simon after him, he once more took refuge behind the stones where he had been first concealed, narrowly escaping as he did so two shots which Arthur fired at him.

He had spoken truly, however. The weight of the boat completed what the machete had begun; and in another moment the rope parted, and the craft began to descend the stream rapidly.

"Throw yourselves out and swim," cried Bob.

"This current, I guess, would sweep the strongest swimmer away," replied Joe calmly. "Ha!" he exclaimed, as from the safe cover behind which he was ensconced Cifuentes fired at him, and he fell senseless to the bottom of the boat.

"*Addios, señors*," cried poor Lopes. "Fate is against us." And, after taking one ineffectual shot at Cifuentes and Simon, he sat down in the boat and awaited his fate with stolid despair.

Both Bob and Arthur knew that they could do nothing to help their friends, and so took shelter in the cabin, from whence they kept a wary watch upon their enemies. Meantime the boat swept down with fearful speed towards the rapids.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SERIOUS CHARGE.

THE boys sorrowfully saw the boat containing their trusty friends drift down the river without its being in their power to aid them. They might have followed along the bank, but this they knew would expose them to the fire of their enemies who were lurking in ambush upon the opposite side.

"Arthur," said Bob, with emotion, "I fear that we have lost both Joe and Lopes."

"I fear so, too," returned his brother, "and what is worse, we can do nothing to help them."

"We must keep close here till nightfall," said Bob, "and then make our way down the river, to see if we can pick up some traces of them. Let us make up a good fire, so that the villains may think we are still here, and so relax their watch."

"Halfhung Simon won't give us much trouble, I expect," remarked Arthur. "Where did you hit him?"

"Somewhere in the arm, I fancy. I aimed higher, but he swung round just as I fired, and from the way he dropped the machete, I think I hit him in the arm."

"Well, we must wait as patiently as we can, and, meanwhile, let us see what we can do with the poor old man's body; it is a shocking sight as it is," said Arthur.

They removed the body of Gomez to a little room at the side, and covered it with a sheet. The only thing of value that was left was an antique silver watch which had somehow escaped the notice of the plunderers. This Bob put carefully in his pocket for protection, but as he did so he fancied that he saw a shadow flit by the window; yet though he and Arthur searched carefully they could find no one.

While engaged in searching, a powerful black hound, which was chained to a kennel outside, flew at them with such ferocity that the chain broke, and seizing Arthur by the collar of his hunting shirt, the dog bore him to the ground.

Well was it for the boy that he had a brother whose hunter's experience had taught him to be prompt in any emergency. Bob instantly drew his hunting knife and passed it through the brute's body, who expired in a moment, covering Arthur with blood and spattering the clothes of Bob with many a crimson stain.

Evening had now closed in, and after lighting a fire to deceive their enemies, Bob and Arthur mounted their horses, and leading the two belonging to Joe and Lopes, set out down the river bank, the pack mule following peacefully in the rear.

For the first mile or two they hardly exchanged a word, for the thoughts of both were full of those trusty friends, who they feared were now lost to them forever.

At last Bob spoke.

"Cheer up, Arthur; sad as it will be if poor Joe and Lopes have perished, yet we are not so helpless after all, and we have the stronger reason to see that justice overtakes the

murderers. Cifuentes and Simon shall find that, boys as we may be, we can strive to do our duty."

"Yes, I know it, I feel it," returned his brother; "but you must allow that the loss is painful from its extreme suddenness; but hark, what is that behind us? Horses' tramp, as I live"

"Can Cifuentes and Simon have discovered us?" cried Bob, unslinging his rifle from his back. "But no; listen to the jingle of the stirrup irons and steel scabbards; it is a troop of cavalry."

"I believe the Mexican soldiers are as great thieves as any of the veritable gentlemen of the road; but here they come. They are Lancers, too. I suppose they do not want us."

But Arthur was wrong in his conjecture, for in an instant the troop surrounded them, while the officer in command sternly ordered them to halt.

"What do you want with us, Señor Lieutenant?" asked Bob boldly, noticing the rank of the officer in command.

"It is not your duty to question, but ours," was the reply. "Whence do you come, señors?"

"From the ferry of the St. Jacinto," answered Bob at once.

The officer exchanged a look with his sergeant.

"This tallies with the information that we have received. Let the boy come forward."

A trooper with a Mexican boy behind him rode up and saluted his officer.

"Do you recognize these *caballeros*?" asked the lieutenant of the boy.

"Sí, señor," answered he. "I peeped through the window of the ferry house and saw the bigger one" (pointing to Bob) "take a watch off the body of old Gomez and put it in his pocket."

"You did not see a murder committed there?"

"No, Señor Lieutenant; only the robbery."

"What did you do then?"

"As soon as the coast was clear I stole away to alarm the village, but, meeting you on the road, I reported it all to you."

"*Caballeros*," said the lieutenant, turning to the boy; "you have heard this witness; have you anything to say?"

"Say to what?" asked Arthur. "Are we on our trial?"

"Say to the charge of having murdered and robbed Pedro Gomez, the ferryman of St. Jacinto," was the reply.

"Psha!" returned Bob. "We know well enough who murdered him, but—"

"I don't doubt you in the least," answered the officer with a sarcastic smile; "but meanwhile you must consider yourselves our prisoners and come with us to the Alcalde."

At a secret sign from the officer the Lancers had been closing round them, and before they could offer the slightest resistance they were seized and disarmed.

"You shall repent of this outrage," cried Bob fiercely.

"I am only doing my duty," answered the officer coldly. "Sergeant Juan, search the prisoners."

The sergeant performed his duty expeditiously, and then made his report to the officer as follows: "Younger prisoner, clothes saturated with blood, collar torn as if in a struggle. Elder prisoner, clothes spotted with blood, hunting knife stained with same, old silver watch in pocket."

"Boy," asked the lieutenant, "do you recognize this watch?"

"Certainly," answered the lad; "it belongs to old Gomez. He has had it for years."

"Form an escort for the prisoners, Sergeant Juan, and move forward at once," commanded the lieutenant.

"But," cried Bob impetuously, "we are in search of friends who are in the greatest peril! Make us prisoners, if you like, but come down to the rapids and help us to search for them."

The officer's lip curled contemptuously, but he made no reply.

"Sergeant Juan," he said, "if the prisoners attempt to escape cut them down. Forward, men! Walk--trot!" and, turning their back upon the St. Jacinto, the troop of Lancers started at a sharp trot, bearing away the brothers prisoners in the midst of them.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE THE ALCALDE.

AFTER an hour's quick riding the troop of Lancers halted in the center of a small village, and the lieutenant, pointing to a house of rather better appearance than the rest, said to one of the troopers:

"Ride up and tell the Alcalde that I have two American prisoners who are accused of robbery and murder at the ferry of St. Jacinto."

The trooper obeyed his orders, and in a few minutes returned with a message that the Alcalde would feel honored to receive the visit of the lieutenant, and would also feel obliged by his bringing up the prisoners under a safe escort.

In another moment they were in the presence of the Mexican magistrate. That official was a little plump man, excessively nervous, but at the same time imbued with a deep sense of his own importance.

"*Buenos días*, Señor Lieutenant," cried he, as soon as they entered the room. "We have to thank you for capturing these American cutthroats; but we will soon put a stop to their murderous doings."

"Yes, we are Americans and are proud of the fact but as to being cutthroats, that you must prove," cried Bob indignantly.

"Here is a young game cock," exclaimed the magistrate, permitting the huge cigarette which he was smoking to go out in his astonishment. "Do you not know that in all countries respect is due to a magistrate?"

"Yes," broke in Arthur, "but the magistrate must first prove himself worthy of respect."

"Señor Alcalde," remarked the lieutenant, "I fear that, young as they appear, they are hardened criminals. It would be as well for you to read them a severe lesson."

"How dare you say that," cried Bob vehemently.

"Silence in the court!" exclaimed the Alcalde, "and let the case proceed. Señor Lieutenant, will you oblige me by making your statement?"

The lieutenant did so in a few concise words; then the boy was called, who repeated his evidence; and next Sergeant Juan, who spoke to the finding of the watch upon the elder prisoner, and its identification by the Mexican lad.

The Alcalde frowned and bit his lips; the case not unaturally appeared to him a very strong one. Then turning to the prisoners, he asked them what they had to say in their defense.

At Bob's request, Arthur, who was much the cooler of the two, made a plain and lucid statement, beginning with the murder of James Sedgwick, and concluding with the attack upon them by Cifuentes and Halfhung Simon, and the des-

truction, as they feared, of their two friends, Indian Joe and Lopes the Tigero.

"A reasonable story to endeavor to impose upon a magistrate of his honor's well known sagacity," said the lieutenant, with a contemptuous curl of his lip. "Two innocent boys robbing a dead body; two murderous ruffians upon the other side of the St. Jacinto, and two witnesses to character who are suppose to be drowned."

"Shame," cried Bob boiling over with passion. "It is not for you to comment upon my brother's statement."

"Silence, silence!" shouted the Alcalde, raising himself

from his seat. "The evidence is sufficiently strong to warrant my committing the accused for trial, and I shall remit them to Puebla, to be dealt with by the Superior Court there. Bind the prisoners and conduct them forthwith to Puebla."

"Bind us!" cried Bob; "Not if I can prevent it!" and making one bound upon the lieutenant, who stood with an ill concealed smile on his face, he snatched his saber from its scabbard, and promptly stood upon the defensive, while Arthur, seizing a stool which stood near him, imitated his brother's example.

(To be continued.)

AN UNSUCCESSFUL STRATAGEM.



I.—BRIDGET (who is entertaining her friend Mike)—"Howly Moses! Here comes the mistress!"



IV.—"I think you had better—but mercy! What is that?"



II.—"I'll throw this over ye, Mike, an' ye'll look like an armchair,"



V.—"I declare it's a man's hat!"



III.—MISS PRIM—"Good morning, Bridget. I've come to order the dinner."



VI.—!!!?***!!

THE CHINESE CONSPIRACY;

OR,
A NAVAL CADET'S ADVENTURES IN THE CELESTIAL EMPIRE.*

BY ENRIQUE H. LEWIS.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRANSFER.



HE middy was bitterly disappointed. He had undergone many painful experiences during the last few days, but the greatest agony of all, the acme of sorrow was reached when, from his uncomfortable quarters on board the junk, he heard the puffing of the steam launch die away, and knew thereby that Charlie Travis had failed in rescuing him.

He easily recognized his voice. Those well known tones had risen above all others, and he felt with a great throb of joy, and a lifting of depressed spirits, that friends were near at

hand. Now, the creaking of blocks and banging of sails, the tramp of many feet overhead, the exultant cries of his captors, and the lurching from side to side of the old tub, betokened a prolongation of captivity, and—despair.

Lawrence's head drooped. The old feeling of nausea came on again, increased by foul air, impeded circulation of blood, and lack of food, for, be it remembered, the middy had not eaten a morsel since the night before.

He tried hard to keep up, called forth all the courage and pride of will: strong in one of his callings, but he was fast lapsing into a stupor, when the hatch was thrown open, and a draught of air, sweet in tonic ozone, revived him.

A man carrying a lantern climbed down the stanchion and cast the light on his face. What he saw made him shout excitedly to those above, and soon two or three of the crew were untying the middy. He was placed on the floor and the lashings removed, but no idea of escape entered his brain. No, it was pleasure enough just then to idly stretch his arms, and legs, to expand his chest with blissful impulse, and feel the retarded life blood flow through its accustomed channels, albeit carrying a memory of needles in the process.

Food was brought; rice in an earthen platter and corn made into rude cakes; then water was placed within handy reach, and Lawrence feasted.

It is an old saying that even turkey ceases to be turkey after a week's reveling in that toothsome article of diet. Be that as it may, the middy felt just then as if corn and rice and water tasted good enough to constitute the national dish of a country of kings. He ate heartily, cleaned off the platter, and swallowed the last crumb.

After the repast was finished, his captors rebound him, but with more care. He was tied to the stanchion by the feet, so that he could lie down when inclined, and then, when this unexpected act of mercy was an established fact,

the natives returned to the deck, leaving Lawrence more contented in body, but of despondent mind.

He felt the disappointment very keenly. The sound of Travis's voice had raised his hopes of rescue to such a high pitch that the fall was correspondingly great. So much depended on reaching Peking either with or without Dalton.

Lawrence considered his professional honor at stake in this matter. He appreciated the tacit confidence in his ability displayed by the old admiral in choosing him, a naval cadet, from among scores of officers possessing far more experience. He had set out on the expedition with a full determination to prove that the confidence was not misplaced. He had resolved to be wary, and, by his personal efforts and skill, either clear the ensign from the terrible accusation, or bring him to justice; and now he had slipped on the first step, stumbled from the first round of the ladder leading to this laudable consummation.

The middy's reflections lasted long into the night. He went over the whole ground again, and mystified his brain all to no purpose. The one fact remained that he was here, a close prisoner in the hands of some unknown foe, and was practically out of the race. At last nature asserted her rights, and he fell into a deep sleep.

When he awoke next morning, the sun was streaming down the open hatchway with a force indicative of approaching noon. Lawrence sat up and glanced at his novel surroundings with great interest. He could see almost the entire extent of the hold, and by casting his eyes upwards could catch a glimpse of the forward sails.

His present observations confirmed his previous opinion that the vessel was only a small trading junk, selected for the purpose, so as not to arouse suspicion. There was a fair wind blowing, as he could tell by the slant of the upper yard, and a certain movement of the hull, a forward and side lurch, well known to sailors, showed that she was making good time.

The long sleep had refreshed the middy, and his present thoughts were of a more roseate tinge than those of the night before. He even felt a complacent enjoyment in the novelty of his surroundings, and, with the buoyancy of youthful spirits, resolved to take things as they came, and trust to luck for a successful finale.

"Might as well look on the bright side of it. I am not dead yet, and, if they had wanted to take my life, they would have done so long ago. This is not a feather bed, but it is better than the bottom of the river, any way. Hello! here comes some more food."

The light was shut off for an instant as one of the crew dropped down alongside of the middy. Then a repetition of the previous repast was placed on the greasy deck. Another man came down, and the two removed enough of the lashing to enable Lawrence to use both hands in eating. He noticed that one of the coolies bore an old fashioned sword, ready for use in case he made an attempt to escape. It was evident they respected his prowess.

After finishing the food, Lawrence tried to engage them in conversation, but they only answered him in the native tongue, and apparently could speak no other. They did not tarry long in the hold, but, after securing him, returned to the deck. Left to himself, Lawrence whiled away the time in idle speculation on his probable fate, and in recalling painful memories, an occupation not wildly hilarious.

The day waned without further incident. Every once in a while a head would be poked down the hatch in vigilant inspection, but no one troubled him otherwise. Food was again brought just before sunset, and, after eating, Lawrence settled himself for the night. The preparation did

*Begun in No. 450 of THE ARGOSY.

not call for much labor; there were no shoes to be removed nor a long hunt for a fugitive nightshirt, but the middy simply "scrouched" a little more to one side, and, after shaking the dust out of his right ear, proceeded to slumber.

As may be imagined, his sleep was none of the sweetest. In fact, it was extremely fitful, and broken by ill-natured dreams, partly due to the surroundings, and partly to the uncompromising attitude of corn pone. However, he was thankful for the few brief hours thus secured, for, a little after midnight, his rest was rudely disturbed.

Lawrence had just emerged from a long struggle with sundry shadowy monsters, victorious, but covered with the perspiration of battle, when he suddenly became aware that the hold contained five or six coolies, who were trying to enshroud him in a huge piece of matting. He was awake in an instant, and fought with a strength born of desperation. He immediately concluded they were going to kill him, and the thought nerved him to superhuman efforts, but he was speedily overpowered, and in less than a minute he was enveloped in the stifling folds.

Then he felt himself lifted up and passed through the hatchway. It was not gently done, and he received divers scrapes and bumps in the operation. When the fresh air penetrated to his face, Lawrence suddenly gave a shout for help with all the power of his lungs, and repeated it, but only once. A violent hand was rudely clapped over his mouth, and he heard a deep voice threatening him in English.

"Shut up, you dog, or I'll kill you! Another word and —"

He felt a sharp prick in the side from a knife and realized instantly that it was a warning not to be disregarded. The same voice muttered something in Chinese, and was answered by two or three others. What seemed to be an argument was carried on for a moment, and then the middy found himself lowered back into the hold again.

The sweltering wrapper was immediately removed, and Lawrence gave one quick glance around in search of the man who had spoken. He started to utter a protest, but a gag was adroitly shoved in his mouth and the matting again replaced. This time he was bundled on deck with savage energy, and after being dumped over the coamings, several men grasped him, and half-dragging, half-carrying, managed to reach the side with their bundle.

Lawrence was nearly suffocated, and gasped painfully for breath. The cover was so tightly drawn over his face now that very little air penetrated and he suffered extremely. He tried to call out but the gag prevented him and he could only give utterance to inarticulate moans.

What followed was only conjecture. The middy could neither see nor hear, so thick was the matting, and he was only conscious of being lifted up and down several times. After what seemed hours to his overwrought nerves, he felt himself dropped not over gently on a hard surface, and both the wrap and gag were at last removed.

Lawrence drew one great breath of relief, and looked about him. Several men with lanterns were standing at one side, but the light was so faint that he could not distinguish their faces. One of them gave him a bowl of water, which he drank with avidity, and then they went away, leaving him to solitary reflections.

From the slight glimpse he had caught of his surroundings, Lawrence saw that he had been transferred to another junk. This was undoubtedly done to throw Travis off the track in case he pursued them any further. The many precautions taken made it apparent to the middy that his captors were determined to hold him at all hazards.

"First time I've been so valuable in all my life," he muttered to himself, with a feeble attempt at a laugh. "I must confess though that I am not overwhelmed with pride over the fact. Heigho! I wish we would reach our destination wherever it is. This sort of traveling has its drawbacks, for a certainty."

He had not given up hope of being rescued, or of escaping, and watched patiently for a chance. He felt certain that he was being carried into the interior, and believed that his destination would almost be in the heart of the Empire. Nevertheless he firmly resolved to seize the slightest opportunity and trust to making his way back to some city on the river, where he could find a representative of a foreign government.

Seven days passed away with no event worthy of mention. Several times false alarms occurred, and the middy was hastily gaged and hidden away behind some old bamboo crates, but he was ultimately restored to his place under the hatch after each scare.

At last certain indications proclaimed a change. One evening just after sunset the sounds of furling sails came from the upper deck; the junk's headway was stopped and a loud splash forward indicated that the anchor had been let go.

Lawrence hearkened to the signs with conflicting emotions. He did not know whether it would be for better or for worse, but with the illogical mind of youth hailed the promise of a change if only for variety.

However, at first it did not seem that he would get his desire. No attempt was made on the part of his captors to remove him from the hold. He remained in the same position, still tied to the stanchion, and after several hours had elapsed, was fain to believe that the next scene in the game would be played with the same stage setting. He was right, but not in the sense that he expected.

At last the middy settled himself as comfortably as the circumstances would permit, with the full intention of spending at least one night more in his present quarters. The usage of many days had enabled him to select the softest side of his wooden plank with the skill of an expert. He knew perfectly by this time just how long the middle of his back would stand the strain without complaining too loudly.

Lawrence was just passing into a preliminary doze when a faint sound as of whispering voices came to his ears. It was so closely allied to the thousand and one noises peculiar to a ship that he paid no heed other than to sleepily open his eyes; but the sound increased, and then something dropped to the deck near the hatch, with a metallic clang.

The middy instantly raised himself as far as the bonds would allow and tried to see what it was, but the gloom was too deep. He could make out, however, that the hatch was wide open. This was startling in itself, and the middy's drowsiness vanished. Something was on foot.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CIPHER RETURNS.

"AH! the mail has arrived, eh? Just put it on my desk, Mr. Decker; thanks. The packet must have come by way of the North coast, as I see letters there from Shanghai. By the way, lieutenant, Captain Douglas was telling me that you thought of resigning and entering the Chinese service to get some experience and—fun. Now, don't blush; your desire to gain experience in your profession is praiseworthy, but to class it as fun is—well—" the old admiral hesitated for a moment, then, in a voice partly grave and wholly kind, resumed: "War is necessary in a great many cases, but we should always deplore it. A naval

officer's higher aim is not to wish for a fight on account of the fun it would bring, but rather pray that it would never come, although, mind you, when there is no getting out of it, fight, fight to the last drop of your blood! kill—eh, you are laughing, you young dog! What was I saying? Ha! get out of this!"

The old officer removed his hand from an imaginary sword and waved the highly edified lieutenant through the door.

"Humph! You are a pretty fellow to give advice," muttered Admiral Hewett to himself, as he sat down before the letters heaped on the table. "Trying to preach, eh, when you know that your sinful old soul takes delight in anything savoring of a fight. Now, let us see what we have here."

He spent several minutes sorting them out into little piles, placing the official ones in a desk basket at his elbow, and the others in convenient array before him.

"Ah, here is a couple from the children, bless their dear hearts! I'll lay these aside and enjoy them at leisure. This one is from the Secretary of the Naval Benefit. Wonder if I have forgotten to pay my dues? Must have or else he wouldn't write. Now, this one, let me see, it looks like a begging letter; that goes into the 'future reference' pile. Ha! anything asking for money goes there until I am in a bad humor." The twinkle in his honest eyes belied his words, however, and he slipped a check into an envelope hastily, as if afraid that his left hand would know what his right hand had done.

"Now, who on earth is this from? Don't recognize the writing. There, my glasses have been lost again; must have lost them outside somewhere. Orderly! orderly-y! Where is that marine? Those confounded sea soldiers would make good policemen, they—Um! you are here at last. 'Did I call, sir?' No, oh, no! it was the gentle wind whispering in your ear. Egad! I want you to understand, sirrah, that when I ring the bell, I want—eh, what? What's that?"

The irate old admiral slipped helplessly down in his own chair. His face reddened to an apoplectic tinge and he glared at the trembling orderly in stupefaction. After thirty years of service he had lived to be contradicted by a private marine, and in his own cabin, too!

"The bell didn't ring, eh? The bell didn't ring? The bell—" He choked once more, and the orderly started on a run for the door, but before reaching it he was recalled by the officer who, in the midst of a wheezy cough, bade him not stir an inch or he would have him court-martialed.

"Now, what do you mean, you scoundrel? How dare you talk back to me. Oh! you wish to explain. Well?"

The orderly stammered and choked, but could not utter a word, then with Admiral Hewett staring at him in open mouthed wonder, he came to the right about, marched three steps, whirled on his heel in regulation style and returned to the desk. Then, after a long four movement salute, he blurted out: "Sir, you know as you ordered the bell repaired this morning, sir, and—and it's not been put back, sir."

"Ah-h!"

It was only a simple expression, but accompanied by several significant gestures, it meant much, and the orderly stepped outside the door in short order, albeit with a triumphant gleam on his otherwise stolid face. He did not remain at his accustomed stand, however, but made his way with hasty steps to where the sergeant of the guard stood killing time at the gangway.

"I say, sergeant; I am not a-going to stand this any longer. Browbeated and runned about as if I was a Chinese, I—"

"What's this?" interrupted the non-commissioned officer, drawing himself up with military promptitude. Then he grasped the private by the arm and added, "Refusing dooty, eh? Come to the mast, you blooming mutineer!"

But the orderly held back and explained the circumstances, at the same time promising to return to his post. His superior officer released him with many pungent words of advice, more salutary than agreeable, and as he reluctantly started to return, called after him:

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, you ungrateful sodger; kicking against a fatherly old admiral that gave all you fellows twenty dollars apiece, come next Christmas, and gets you liberty almost every day. If I see any more such goings-ons I'll haul you up as sure as pipeclay is chalk on this cheatin' bumboat!"

The crestfallen marine increased his pace to escape from the sound of the sergeant's rebuking voice, and, still growling under his breath, again halted before the cabin. He had barely settled back into the old military pose, however, when the starboard door was flung open with a bang and Admiral Hewett appeared.

He held several large sheets of writing in his hands, and the startled orderly noticed they were crumpled almost into a wad. His face was as pale as death, a noticeable change from its usual rubicund flush, and an ominous calm pervaded his every action.

"Orderly"—the word was uttered very quietly—"give my compliments to Captain Douglas and ask him to step this way for a moment. Make haste, orderly; I am waiting."

As the marine hurried away, he gave one rapid glance behind and saw the old admiral still standing in the open door, but the letter had fluttered to the deck unheeded. Several minutes later the captain knocked for admission, and, receiving no answer, made bold to turn the knob. It yielded to even his cautious touch, and stepping inside, he saw that the outer cabin was untenanted. A peculiar noise from one of the staterooms indicated the admiral's proximity, and Captain Douglas uttered a loud "Ahem!"

However, he had delayed long enough to understand what the queer noises were, and speaking of it several days later to his friend the chief surgeon, he said: "By Jove, Suture, it sounded just like a line-of-battle ship going to pieces on the rock of expletives."

The captain's announcement of his presence caused the admiral to join him at once, and, motioning his subordinate to a seat, the old sailor wiped his face several times with a handkerchief, and then said abruptly: "Now, Douglas, between friends, do I look like a pompous old fool?"

"Eh—eh—why, admiral, you—By Jove! that is a most extraordinary question! Why, certainly not, certainly not!"

"Well, I am, and what is more, I am a pompous, know-all old idiot! But it is between you and me, understand; don't let it go any farther. Now, that is not what I want to see you about, although it has its proper bearing. I have just received some melancholy news from Shanghai. The consul writes in haste to say that Naval Cadet Coleman was abducted from the 'bund' by persons unknown on the 12th inst., and that—"

"By Jove! is that possible? Why, Admiral Hewett, I—er—I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but this is astounding, simply astounding. Have you any particulars?"

"Well, I have some, but—What is it, orderly?"

"The officer of the deck begs to report, sir, that a launch is coming this way from the settlement, an' he thinks that the 'Merican council is in it, sir."

"Just the gentleman I want to see. Egad! I was going ashore in a few minutes to call on him. That will do, orderly; but, by the way, tell the officer to send him in here as soon as he arrives." Turning to the captain, Admiral Hewett added in an apologetic voice: "You will pardon me. Douglas, if I ask you to come later on. I have important diplomatic business with the consul. Please excuse me."

As Captain Douglas passed from the cabin in obedience to his chief's request, the quick puffing sound peculiar to a steam launch reversing its propeller came to his ears, and he hurried to the gangway in time to receive the consul.

Colonel Monroe was evidently in a hurry, and only paused long enough to shake hands, then with a hasty promise to deliver his usual budget of war news before he left again, he walked rapidly aft and was admitted immediately.

As he stepped through the door, the admiral pounced on him from behind the table, and, in a voice agitated with excitement, exclaimed: "Terrible news, Monroe, terrible news! Young Coleman has been abducted from Shanghai and he cannot be found. And that villain, Dalton, is concerned in it and is guilty, do you hear? Guilty. Now, I am going to send the Palos up there at once and have him rescued if I have to bombard Shanghai. I'll blow the town about their infernal ears!"

"No use, Hewett, it's too late," replied the consul in a saddened voice. Then drawing a package from his pocket he unfolded it and displayed to Admiral Hewett's horrified gaze a paper covered with Chinese characters, and the cipher they had given the middy, *now spotted with blood!*

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADMIRAL IS BLOODTHIRSTY.

COLONEL MONROE slowly spread the tissue cipher on the desk, and then both of them—the sturdy old admiral and the uncompromising diplomat—gazed silently at the eloquent messenger of disaster, their eyes dimmed with an unbidden moisture. For the space of a minute they sat thus, and only the merry tinkle of an ornamental clock in the after cabin, mingled with the soft swash of an occasional sea under the counter, broke the quiet.

At last the admiral rose to his feet, and, walking to the open port, looked out on the busy reach of waters. Within plain view, not half a mile away, the English man-of-war *Triumphant* was deep in the throes of a "sail drill," a spectacle wont to excite much interest in nautical observers; but the old officer saw it not. The wooden sides of the window only framed a face—that of a manly youth with curly brown hair and the features of his old time shipmate and friend. He turned away with a deep sigh and rejoined the consul.

"Monroe, I won't be able to look that boy's mother in the face again. I know just how it will be and what she thinks of him. Egad! before we sailed from New York she came to the ship, clear from Indiana, and made me promise to look out for her son. Right here in this cabin she sat looking at me, and the motherly affection on her blessed face when she said Larry was her mainstay and pride made me think that my eyes were waterlogged and now I have sent him away to a—"

"Tut, tut, Hewett!" interrupted the consul, clearing his throat with a sudden effort. "I appreciate your feelings in the matter, but we are not to blame. The exigencies of the service have called away many a fine fellow before this, and then, we are not absolutely certain that Coleman has come

to grief. True, it looks very much like it. This cipher is undoubtedly the one we gave him, and then this note accompanying it says as much; but here, I had better read it. First, however, I will explain how it came in my possession."

The colonel removed his eyeglasses, leaned back in the chair, and, tapping his knuckles with them, continued:

"This morning, about eight o'clock, Chan, my valet, came into the bedroom with a small package which he said was given him by an ordinary looking cooly at the front gate. He explained that he asked the man to wait and see me, but the fellow ran off in great haste after handing him the parcel. As my curiosity was aroused I opened it at once and found what you see."

"Then it didn't come through the mails after all?"

"No; it was brought to the door, as I have described, and if it wasn't for the undeniable evidence of the cipher I would not place the slightest credence in the story. The accompanying note is not dated or signed, but it explains how the cipher was found. It is long and written in rather a surprising style, considering the source. It is as follows:

To the EXALTED CONSUL OF THE UNITED STATES AT FOO CHOW:

I, the writer, am a poor trader engaged in traveling through the inner districts. While on a journey near Nganjin, it was my misfortune to witness a terrible murder on the river above that city. I was walking along a path by the water when I saw a small junk floating down with the current. It was just after sunset, and by the uncertain light I could barely see that the junk was one belonging to the government, and used for collecting the grain tax. I paid no more attention to it, and was continuing my way when I heard a loud cry, apparently from the vessel. I dropped down on the ground and watched. Presently some men came to the side and threw a bundle wrapped up in a mat into the river and then the junk sailed on. I waited until it was out of sight, and after many trials succeeded in recovering the object from the water. As I thought, it was a dead body, but imagine my surprise when it turned out to be a foreigner, a youth like those on the "ping chwan" [man-of-war]. I am a lawful citizen of the Empire and do my duty to my country, but when the recognized officers of that country commit foul murder upon the citizens of a friendly nation, I think they should be punished. For that reason I send you the inclosed paper found on the body and my explanation. I did not sign this, as it would only cause trouble to me, but if you, in your wisdom, will have the river searched two leagues above Nganjin you will find the proofs of my story."

After the consul had finished reading the above, he re-folded the paper, gazed thoughtfully at the admiral and added: "Now, Hewett, we have to look at this from several standpoints. At the first blush it appears true, but after thinking it over I find two or three little things which causes me to think there might possibly be a doubt. For instance, this place Nganjin is over two hundred miles from here in the Province of Kiangsi, and the river he mentions is a tributary of the Yantzs Kiangsi, leading through a part of the country we will find it impossible to travel in until this French trouble is over and the natives have settled down again. This writer, whoever he is, knows that, yet he calmly tells me to go there and search for proof."

"That is a fact, Monroe!" exclaimed the admiral, eager to grasp at anything having a tendency to revive his hopes.

"Yes, and another little point is, why should the supposed assassins carry an intended victim hundreds of miles up the country for the purpose of killing him? What would prevent them from doing it in Shanghai? The river is deep enough there and just as dark. Then to crown it all, why should Chinese government officials kidnap an American naval officer? Bah! it looks more and more absurd every time I think of it!"

"But how about the cipher?" the admiral wanted to know.

"Well, that is the question. The only explanation that I can see is, that the whole affair is connected with Ensign Dalton's—"

"Yes," interrupted the old officer, springing to his feet and excitedly searching among the papers on the desk. "That letter; where is it? Ah! here it is. This is from Purcell at Shanghai, and briefly informs me that Coleman was abducted by a gang of thieving coolies, supposed to belong to the Wong-si-ko band. He says that a young American there, don't mention his name, had received a mysterious message from some one on the steamer, saying that Lawrence was to be carried into the interior to the mountain den of those bloodthirsty villains. This young man started the day after in Purcell's launch to look for Coleman in the very—"

"He is a daring fellow, whoever he is," broke in Monroe; "but it is a foolhardy attempt. What does Purcell say about Dalton?"

The admiral read to the astounded consul a concise description of the events that had occurred on the Tatar Khan as given to Purcell by Travis, also Dalton's peculiar actions when told that the midgy had been carried away. There were some very forcible opinions added, which received unqualified indorsement from both the reader and his listener.

"The scoundrel is guilty, no doubt about that now," avowed the colonel, casting a rather triumphant glance at Hewett's heated face.

"Guilty! Egad, if I had him here I would feel like hanging him to the yardarm! But to think that an officer of mine should fall so low. Monroe, it's a disgrace, a stigma on the profession. Has it come to this, that a man, an American, sir, taught at the Naval Academy by gentlemen, associated with gentlemen for years, should sell his honor for money!"

"Sh—sh! Calm yourself, admiral; sit down and let us talk this matter over quietly. There are even spots on the sun, you know, and I have actually heard of rascals in the

diplomatic service, but that is neither here nor there; we must come down to action."

"Action? Humph! That is just what I want. I would give five years of my pay this very minute to open on this confounded country. I'd glory in it, sir, I'd glory in it," and the wrothy old sailor rushed to the window and shook his fist with impotent rage at a passing junk.

Colonel Monroe settled back in his easy chair with silent resignation and waited till the admiral had worked off his excess of indignation, then he quietly resumed:

"Now, Hewett, attend to business. You can run out tomorrow and have target practice for a couple of hours; paint a moon faced Celestial on the canvas and blow him out of the water, but now we have other work to do. I will cable details to Washington immediately, and ask for instruction. It is hard to say what can be done at present, as this trouble with France is liable to culminate in war at any moment. By the way, you had better prepare for guests as the American residents in the Bund will take refuge on board in case of bombardment. Of course our government will make a formal demand for reparation in the Coleman case as soon as we can get word to Pekin."

"By Jove, Monroe, what about that cipher? Dalton will never take that one to the minister."

"That's so, I had forgotten that. We must send off another man. Confound that fellow! There is a day of retribution coming for him, admiral, and if I ever catch the rascal, I'll—"

The consul did not finish the sentence, but his face darkened with a stern determination highly suggestive.

After a few further words, he arose, and taking his hat passed out on deck accompanied by the admiral who appeared greatly preoccupied over some exceedingly weighty thought.

As the consul stepped on the gangway ladder leading down to the launch, Hewett grasped his hand and whispered earnestly:

"Monroe, if you love me, work this thing up so that I can open fire within twenty four hours."

(To be continued.)

A PECULIAR THING ABOUT BOYS.



THEY LIKE WATER,



BUT NOT IN SMALL QUANTITIES WITH SOAP.



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A NEW HEADING FOR THE ARGOSY.

Next Week THE ARGOSY will be enlarged, will have a new dress of type throughout and a new heading.

Here is the new heading in reduced form:



The pages of THE ARGOSY will be enlarged from 86 square inches, the present size, to 130 square inches. This will enable us to give more effective illustrations. The square inches of printing surface will be increased by ten per cent, and the reading matter will be over twenty per cent greater.

The new heading was designed by Charles Howard Johnson, and is pronounced by critics to be exceptionally good. It is modern, decorative and there is no foolishness about it.

Look out for THE ARGOSY next week and tell your friends of the change.

A DEBT OF HONOR

Is the title of an unusually clever story from the pen of a clever man—

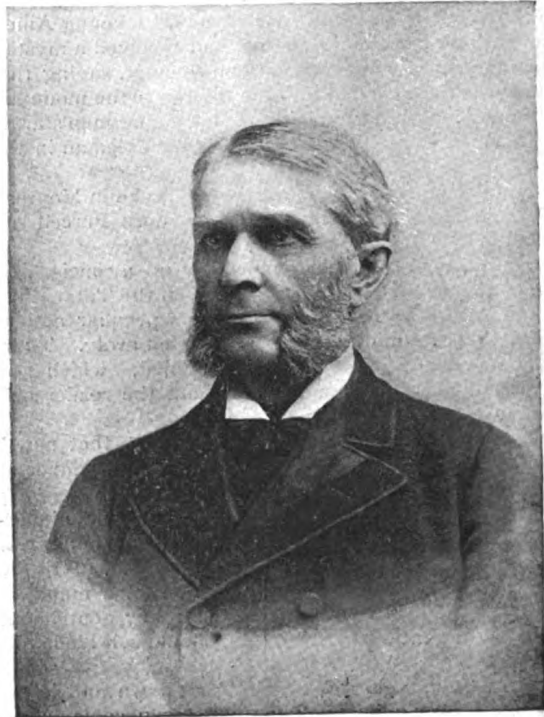
HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

The opening chapters of A DEBT OF HONOR will appear in next week's ARGOSY—the first number of our enlarged form. Gerald Lane, the hero, is the sort of a boy of whom boys like to read—manly, brave, dashing, a true product of the rugged mountains in which he has been reared. Readers of THE ARGOSY will do us a favor and their friends as well by telling them of Mr. Alger's latest story. Remember it commences next week.

WILLIAM DREW WASHBURN.

UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA.

SENATOR WASHBURN is a typical specimen of the great army of young Americans who, born and educated in the settled communities of the East, have gone out into the new West and become the pioneers of that great country's development. For generation after generation the Washburns had been New England farmers, and both of the Senator's grandfathers had fought in the Revolutionary



WILLIAM DREW WASHBURN.
From a photograph by Bell, Washington.

war. He himself is the youngest of seven sons, every one of whom gained a greater or less degree of prominence, the most famous of all being the late Elihu B. Washburn, who was Congressman, Senator, Minister to France, and Secretary of the Treasury.

The Senator was born at Livermore, Androscoggin County, Maine, on the 14th of January, 1831. The first twenty years of his life were spent at his father's home, where he worked on the farm in summer and attended school in winter. Then he went to Bowdoin College, graduated there after a three years' course, and was admitted to the bar in 1857.

Thus equipped for the warfare of life, young Washburn went to the West and hung out his shingle in Minneapolis, which was at that time a young and flourishing frontier community of not much more than a thousand souls. He speedily became interested in the flouring industry that has been the main cause of the wonderful growth of Minneapolis. With remarkable boldness and foresight he originated several other important enterprises, among which were the Minneapolis and St. Louis and the "Soo" railroads, the Minneapolis Harvester Works, and large lumber mills. In public affairs, too, he took a prominent part. In 1871 he was elected to the Minnesota Legislature, and in 1878 to Congress, where he served three terms and achieved much distinction. Two years ago he entered the Senate, having been elected for a six years' term. Mr. Washburn was married in 1879 to a Miss Muzzy, of Bangor, Maine. He has four sons to carry on the honorable traditions of his family name. Recently his financial interests have been suffering from embarrassments due to the almost unmanageable variety and extent of his undertakings. From these embarrassments he is now said to have successfully emerged.

NORMAN BROOKE;

OR,

BREASTING THE BREAKERS.*

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

CHAPTER VII.

OFFICE LIFE AT TICK'S.

WHETHER my two companions had heard Mr. Tick's instructions to me or not—he certainly had not taken any particular pains to lower his voice when he gave them—I could not be sure; at any rate they seemed not to have taken any violent fancy to me. They kept on talking between themselves about things which were mostly Greek to me till we reached a flight of stairs that led down into what I called a cellar way.

A sign on one side set forth the fact that a *table d'hôte* lunch could be had below for fifteen cents. "Flies thrown in free," I mentally added, for the place was just swarming with them.

"Perhaps this cafe isn't tony enough for Brooke from Boston," I overheard Rich whisper to Larkin, to which the latter replied that they were only obeying the chief's orders, and needn't feel concerned about the results.

As may be imagined, all this time I was in anything but a comfortable frame of mind. I felt that Rich and Larkin rather resented having me along with them, and really I could not blame them. They had their own affairs to talk about, affairs which could not interest a third party in the least; although I am free to confess that they did not allow this fact to stand in the way of conversation.

"You go the whole bill, I suppose, Mr. Brooke," said Rich, as we took seats at a table, and he pushed a written menu in front of me, decorated in one corner with a splash of tomato soup.

I felt as if I couldn't "go" any of it, but as I saw that the two were just waiting for me to display some signs of "uppishness," I smiled and said "Oh, of course," as pleasantly as I could, and Rich gave the order for three to a waiter whom he addressed familiarly as "Bill." He then resumed the story he was telling Larkin about a big wave that came near carrying him out to sea on its undertow while he was bathing at Coney Island on Saturday.

I must say the lunch was a better one than I had expected to get for fifteen cents, but that isn't saying much for it, as I had expected the worst.

"But if I am going to pay seven a week for board," I reflected, "this is the sort of lunch I must put up with every day."

The thought of the boarding house caused my mind to revert to Dale Cameron, and I wondered whether he had recovered his missing property.

"I may find a policeman waiting for me when I get up to Forty Third Street tonight," I told myself, and I could not help but recall those words of Fred Jessup's: "What a lucky fellow you are, Norman!"

I was roused from this rather doleful reminiscence by Larkin's voice.

"We only have half an hour for lunch, Mr. Brooke," he said. "Aren't you going to eat your pie?"

I looked down at the whitish slice on my plate, and shook my head. I felt sure that it would not have been damaged in the least by being fired against the further wall of the restaurant.

"We'll divide it between us, then, Phil, eh?" suggested Larkin, and three minutes later it was out of sight.

Rich called for three checks, one of which he handed to me, we each paid at the desk, and then started back to the office, Rich and Larkin beguiling the way by smoking most vile, powdery smelling cigarettes.

It wanted five minutes to half after twelve when we re-entered Tick's Tickling Toy headquarters, and Mr. Tick smiled benignly as he inquired if I had been duly inducted into the mysteries of the far famed quick lunches of the New York business man.



WHAT A TABLEAU THERE WAS PRESENTED TO US THEN!

I laughed faintly—I really didn't know how else to reply—and, hanging up my hat, prepared to go through a pile of letters which had been placed on my desk to test my abilities in the way of replying to them.

"Shall I dictate my answers?" I asked of Mr. Tick, when I had examined a few of them.

"Dorset is going to lunch now," was his response, "but he'll be back in half an hour. Just give me an idea of what you are going to say before we let it go on the machine."

My views did not in every case coincide with those of my employer, and it was well on towards the middle of the afternoon before he decided that I was sufficiently imbued with his methods to be allowed to go ahead on my own account. Then he went out to lunch, leaving me with Dorset by my side, ready for dictation.

He—Dorset—seemed quite different sort from the other two in the office. The "kid," I soon discovered, Rich and Larkin called him, but I also speedily found out that he knew more than both of them put together.

My task of dictation was not a particularly easy one. In the first place, I was not accustomed to the thing, and then, as soon as Mr. Tick had disappeared, Rich left his high stool, and, stationing himself by the door, where he could see the approach of any one, clapped his hands together and then to his sides suggestively, which brought Larkin out from behind the table, and then the two went through a regular baseball pantomime, which might have been highly

amusing under other circumstances, but which, as matters stood, was very annoying to both Dorset and myself.

"I wonder if this is the sort of thing I am expected to report to Mr. Tick?" I reflected.

I felt provoked enough at the light headed youths, who were such time servers, to announce to them that I would certainly do so if they did not quit, when something occurred that rendered this unnecessary. In the excitement of the moment, Larkin could not content himself with mere pantomime, but suddenly seized a pasteboard box cover which lay on a shelf near him. Rich, not expecting anything so tangible, failed to catch it, and it flashed past him to the door, through which it passed, sending a crash of broken glass to the floor.

The baseball enthusiasts ceased their play at once, returning to their work with rather sober faces, each of them darting a look at me which seemed to say, "Are you going to tell?"

Presently the two began to whisper together, then Larkin went out, and pretty soon came back with a glazier. I could see that they were both on pins and needles while the man was at work, for fear Mr. Tick would come back before the job was finished, but he didn't.

"What time does the office close?" I inquired of Dorset, between two of the letters.

"At ten minutes to six," he answered. "Do you live up town or in Brooklyn?"

"I expect to live up town," I answered, wondering what he would say if I added that there was a slight possibility that I might take up my residence in one of the city jails.

Mr. Tick came back at half after four, and we all worked away silently for the next hour, except for the click of Dorset's machine. At twenty minutes to six Mr. Tick put on his hat, said good night to us all, and went off. Rich and Larkin followed him almost immediately, so that by quarter to, Dorset and I were the only ones left in the place.

"Who locks up?" I inquired.

"Larkin is supposed to, but he makes me do it," replied Dorset rather wearily.

I mentally resolved that I would see if I could not put a stop to this imposition, and five minutes later went off with the much enduring typewriter. He lived in Thirteenth Street his mother, sister and brother, he told me, so we rode far as Fourteenth together on the Elevated Road. Then I continued on up to Forty Second, where I disembarked and set out for Mrs. Max's, wondering with no small concern what developments I would find awaiting me there.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CAMERON MAKES HIMSELF AGREEABLE.

"I WONDER if I had better ask for Mr. Cameron or the landlady?" I debated with myself as I walked up the steps of No. 197.

The house was a pleasant appearing one, and the shade made by the awning over the front door was very grateful to me. By the time the servant appeared I had decided that I had better see Cameron first; then he could introduce me to Mrs. Max.

"Yes, Mr. Cameron was in," the girl said, so I sent up my card and waited in the parlor. Word was sent down in a few minutes that I was to step up to Mr. Cameron's room, third floor rear. This was a cheerful apartment with two windows, many pictures on the walls, and its occupant, in a blazer, reclined at full length on the sofa.

He sat up when I entered—for the door was open—and held out his hand.

"Glad to see you again, Brooke," he said. "What do you think of the place as far as you've got?"

"Oh, the house, you mean?" I returned. "It seems to be a very pleasant one. But about your watch and things: did you get them back?"

"No, of course I didn't," he replied. "Didn't expect to; but come on up stairs and I'll show you the den you can have if you want it."

He led the way up one flight and threw open the door of a room which was just about large enough for a short armed person to sling the traditional cat in.

"But you needn't stay here much, you know," explained Cameron. "There's my room just at the foot of the stairs. See, I took it for granted that you would stay, and had your trunk brought up here."

"Had I better see Mrs. Max about it?" I inquired.

"No, you can't; she's away, but it'll be all right. Better get ready for dinner now. We have it at quarter to seven. Stop for me and I'll go down with you;" and so saying, Cameron betook himself off, his hands in his pockets, and whistling a Strauss waltz under his breath.

"Great Scott!" I ejaculated to myself, "of all the queer fellows he's the oddest. One would think he was under deep obligations to me from the way he's treating me, and instead of that—. But never mind, there's no use in borrowing trouble. I'll take the goods the gods provide, and ask no questions."

I found water and all necessaries provided, so set to work at once to cool myself off. But before I was dressed a bell rang, and I wondered if Cameron would wait for me. But I need not have worried; when I got down to his room ten minutes later he was just putting on his shirt.

"Lie off there and make yourself comfortable, old man," he said. "I'll be with you in three shakes. That is, unless you're desperately hungry."

I disclaimed any such condition. Indeed it seemed to me I had not been hungry in weeks, and took a seat on the lounge.

"How do you like your new posish?" inquired Cameron when his head had emerged from the garment he was donning.

"So, so," I responded. "It's almost too soon to judge. But I say I'm terribly sorry about that watch. I can't help feeling that I'm responsible for its loss. You know it was I who suggested your removing your coat and vest."

"Please don't say anything more about it," he rejoined, giving me a peculiar look. "Detectives have taken the matter in charge, and it may be I will get the watch back in time. As to the clothes, I have more suits than I can conveniently wear now. Say, ever been to the theater much in New York?"

I had never been at all, and during the rest of the time occupied in finishing his toilet, Cameron descanted on the attractions in the line of comic opera that were then playing in the metropolis. It was fully half an hour after the bell rang when we presented ourselves in the dining room, which was situated back of the parlors. Cameron led the way to a seat at one end of the long table, which he took himself, motioning for me to occupy one to his right.

There were about ten people present, and I noticed that the greetings my companion received in response to his "Good evening" were none of them very cordial. Indeed on the face of a lady opposite me, who had a young girl on either side of her, I observed a distinct frown of disapproval, and once I caught her looking at me with an expression that seemed to be a strange compound of pity and contempt.

Under these conditions I was not surprised that Cameron

did not introduce me to any one, and I began to ask myself the question, into what sort of company have I fallen? But so far as I had seen, the fellow was all right. He was certainly very kind to me, and I could not help wondering where I would have been at that moment if I had not fallen in with him. After the hard first day I had had at the office, it was grateful indeed to have the companionship of a fellow who seemed honestly to care for my company. Still, I was conscious of a vague uneasiness in my mind all the time, but I finally set this down to worryment about the condition of affairs at Tick's.

"But I must keep business for business hours," I told myself.

Mrs. Max set a good table, and when Cameron and I were left over our coffee and fruit I felt in better spirits than at any time since leaving Lynnhurst.

"I'm afraid your reputation in the house is ruined, Brooke," remarked Cameron, when the servant had left the room.

"Why, how's that? What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"By letting it be seen that you are a friend of mine," he answered. "The people here think I am only fit to be held up as a 'horrible example.' Mrs. Max is the only one who stands up for me. She used to know my mother," and his voice softened noticeably as he mentioned the name.

Then after a brief pause he gave a little laugh and went on: "Did you notice that lady just across from you, the one with the two demure looking daughters? Well, I verily believe she regards me as the incarnation of everything that is evil, and I know life was made a perfect burden to her tonight because I sat in Mrs. Max's place, which brought me nearer to one of her lambs. I don't give a snap of my finger for any of them, but sometimes I like to meet new people and have them think well of me—at first. They never do so long, except Mrs. Max, and that's because I'm my mother's son."

He half sighed, and I wondered if he had me in mind when he mentioned those "new people." But in spite of all he had said, and the attitude the people in the house seemed to maintain towards him, I was conscious that I was growing to like the fellow.

"The breeze is from the front tonight," he said, as we left the table. "Let's go up in your room awhile and get some of it before we go out. Then I suppose you want to do some unpacking."

I wondered where he intended to go. I wonder now how I would have felt if I could have looked forward a few hours and seen what was to happen. But there was no sign given me, and Cameron sat in the window chatting while I put away my things.

Then, as it began to grow dark, he said: "Come, it's getting stuffy up here. Let's go out for a walk."

I wanted to write to my aunt before going to bed, and as I had ink to purchase, I gladly fell in with the suggestion.

CHAPTER IX.

A MEMORABLE EVENING.

WHEN Cameron and I reached the front door, on our way out, we found the stoop crowded with the rest of the boarders, who had taken seats there to catch what little breeze there was stirring. As they made room for us to pass them, their talk ceased in that sudden way which is very apt to cause one to think he has been the subject of it.

When we had got half way to the corner Cameron glanced back over his shoulder for an instant.

"Yes, just as I supposed," he said with a little laugh;

"they are every one of them looking after us and pitying your fate, Brooke. I'll warrant."

I smiled, but said nothing. The fellow dwelt so persistently on this matter that I began to think there might be something in it after all; and the vague uneasiness that had already half taken possession of me now became more clearly defined.

"Come, we'll take a stroll down Broadway," he said, "and then we'll have the wind in our faces. Look out it doesn't blow your hat off," he added facetiously.

I was about to inquire if there was a stationery store near when a newsboy, who had been vociferously bellowing "Extra, extra! Baseball!" suddenly lowered his tones and began chatting with Cameron, who had bought his last paper.

"Just step in for a minute, Mr. Cameron," I heard him say. "It's only down this street a ways. Nobody need know who it was sent it. You can look in at the door a minute, and if they see you you can ask if Mrs. Smith or Jones lives there."

"But you see I've got company, Benny," Cameron responded. "What will I do with him?"

"Bring him along," rejoined the boy, "Hurry," he added, looking up at a clock on a hotel at the corner. "I want you to see what Jimmy does when he first sees it. He'll be home in five minutes now."

"Brooke," said Cameron, turning to me, "here's the boy I get my papers of wanting us to go down to his house to behold the general hilarity that has been raised there by some one giving his mother a sewing machine as a surprise. You don't mind stopping with me a minute, do you? Ben seems to have set his heart on my going."

"Certainly; I'll go with pleasure," I responded, already feeling sure I knew the giver of the machine.

We turned down a side street, the boy leading the way with eager strides, and after walking a square and a half, entered a house, about the door of which it seemed to me twenty five or thirty children were playing. Then up two flights of stairs, where we were told to halt for a minute in the hall, while Ben went forward to investigate.

So we stood in the shadow while he ran across the passage with a little whoop and threw open the door at the further end with a cry of "All sold out!"

What a tableau there was presented to us then! A woman whose face showed the marks of much suffering, sat on a chair in front of a sewing machine, which she was examining with a look of such joy, as promised soon to chase away the lines of sorrow. By her side, on his knees was a small boy, pointing at it and saying something to it which we could not hear, but which caused Ben, standing just behind the two, to stretch his mouth in a broad smile.

"Come," said Cameron, gently pulling me by the sleeve, "let us go," and we hurried off before the picture in real life was disturbed.

Again had my opinion of the young fellow at my side undergone a change, Alas, how many of these it was destined to pass through! I wondered what those people at the house would think if they knew he had given a sewing machine to a poor woman.

"Can he be very rich?" I asked myself.

If he was, why did he not live at Newport, or some other resort in the summer, instead of staying in town? This was a perplexing question, but I speedily decided that it was none of my business.

The scene we had just witnessed made us both silent for awhile after we reached the street again. I felt instinctively that Cameron would not care to have me tell him what

I thought about the donor of the machine, so I said nothing until when we were crossing the next avenue, I spoke about the ink I wanted to buy.

"Oh, it's too late for that tonight," he replied "You can get all you want in my room, and use my desk to write your letter on."

"All right, much obliged, but what's that?"

I put this query as a large building on the corner burst on my view, its roof ablaze with lights, beneath which I could catch glimpses of plants and the forms of people moving about.

"Oh, that's the Casino Roof Garden. Come, we'll go up; it's one of the summer sights of New York,"

At this moment strains of music fell on my ear. It was the Hungarian band playing the "Blue Danube" waltz. The sound carried me back at once to that garden party in Lynhurst, and I did not know whether the recollection brought me more sorrow or joy. But I am passionately fond of music, and as we walked nearer and the tones grew more distinct, I forgot the protest that had at first risen to my lips.

The next moment I found myself in a Moorish entrance way, then we were whisked up stairs in an elevator, next I was following Cameron, half bewildered at the swiftness with which it had all come about, across an open space with a railing around one edge, through which I could catch glimpses of the stage of a theater, where an opera was being sung, then we went up a flight of stairs and emerged into fairyland, as I thought it then.

"Or perhaps you would have preferred staying down stairs and seeing the performance," said Cameron, as we halted beside a table.

"Oh, no, I don't want to go to the theater now," I hastily rejoined. "Besides it's deliciously cool up here."

It certainly was, but when I began to look about me and noticed the drinking that was going on on every side, I

could not help wondering if my aunt and Edna would have felt it right for me to be there.

"I say, Brooke, what are you going to drink?"

Cameron had evidently repeated the question.

"Me? Oh, I don't care for anything to drink."

"Have an ice cream then. What flavor?"

"Chocolate," I replied, wishing with all my heart I was back on the sidewalk.

What Cameron had I did not know, but he repeated the order several times. He became very talkative and told me long stories about members of the different theatrical companies, many of whom he pointed out to me among the crowd on the roof.

He renewed his invitation for me to drink something and then tried to press a cigarette on me. But I steadily held out against him.

At last it grew to be eleven o'clock. I was growing fearfully tired, but every time I proposed going home "Just stay for one piece more," Cameron would say.

I wondered when the concert would end. I was destined to find out, for Cameron would not move till midnight when the last piece was played. Then to my unlimited horror I found he could not move without my assistance. He had drunk too much.

Fortunately he kept silent, so I managed to get him away without attracting attention. As the place was on Broadway and not far from the house, I knew where I was, and by steadying Cameron's steps with my hand under his elbow, I got him up to 197 without making a spectacle of ourselves.

But now a new difficulty arose. How were we to get in? The outer door was closed, all the lights were out, and I had no latch key. But Cameron probably had, so I stood him up against the stoop and began to feel in his pockets, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and a voice exclaimed:

"Ah, I nabbed you that time."

(To be continued.)



ROUGH BEFORE A VISITOR.

Mistress (angrily)—"IF YOU BREAK ANOTHER DISH YOU MUST PAY FOR IT OUT OF YOUR WAGES."
Bridget—"I'D BE HAPPY TO, MUM, IF I OWNLY HAD ME WAGES."

ARTHUR BLAISDELL'S CHOICE.*

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN ASTOUNDING DECLARATION.



W

HAT? Ben Norton!" gasped Arthur, recognizing the strange seaman. "How came you here?"

"Why, Arthur!" exclaimed the other, and he peered into his face with surprise. "Is this Arthur Blaisdell?"

"Yes—how came you here?"

"I might answer that with a similar question," responded Ben grimly. "I'd as soon have expected to have seen old Hart himself

here. But come," he added, looking at Hal for the first time, "we'd all three best get up among the rigging. We'll be safer there."

The two boys worked their way along the slippery and wreck strewn deck behind him, and after several narrow escapes gained a more secure position among the cordage.

"If that boat gets to land safely it'll be impossible for it to reach us again," shouted Ben in Arthur's ear.

The boy nodded and seized his brother's hand in his strong grasp.

"Poor Little Mum," he murmured brokenly, and although it was impossible for Hal to hear his voice he understood the motion of the lips.

He, too, was thinking of the dear mother waiting for him in the little cottage so many miles away. Perhaps she would wait in vain.

"The wind's haulin' round to a point a little north of east, I'm thinking," declared Ben, in tones faintly heard above the howling of the gale. "It's been all 'round the compass since we left Nantucket, and if it gets a little further north 'twill keep the waves from pounding the old hulk so."

"What vessel is this?" demanded Arthur.

"Kaspar—three days out from Boston, bound for the South Sea Islands," returned Ben. "The mate *would* leave port and persuaded the captain, who was a weak minded sort of fellow, to his way of thinking. Poor fellow, he was washed overboard early this morning."

"How came you in this vicinity?" inquired Arthur.

"Mate was drunk. Tried to put into Newport after the captain was lost. You see the Kaspar had to make the port of New York, too, before she could get all her cargo and clearance papers, and the captain had intended to run into Long Island, I think. Mate lost his reckonin' and run her straight for the shore, and when we discovered our danger we were helpless."

The storm seemed not to abate an atom, but rather to increase. However, the shifting of the wind had made the

brig lie easier, although the same change now made it utterly impossible for the lifeboat to again reach them.

"Oh, if I had only proved my innocence to the Harts!" thought Arthur, and then with fierce anger he remembered that the man whom he believed could clear him from the charge was beside him, and, like himself, liable to be torn from the wreck and drowned at any moment.

"It is retribution for him," thought the boy. "but what is it for me? Why should I die?"

Hal halloed something in his ear, but it was only when he had repeated it that Arthur understood the words.

"The *Journal* won't get much of a report of this!"

It seemed a strange remark for Hal to make at such a time, so Arthur thought. He wondered if his brother was becoming insane. He felt as though he should lose his own mind if the agony of this uncertainty remained much longer.

Suddenly he noticed that Ben Norton was at work on something. He was carefully untangling a long piece of cable, and when he had recovered about twenty feet of it he cut it off with his clasp knife. One end of the rope he tied about his own waist, and passing the rest to Arthur he motioned him to fasten himself to the middle and Hal to the other end.

"If any of us drops off from cold or gets carried away by the waves we can save him," shouted Ben, and Arthur nodded. He had awakened from the stupor into which he had been fast falling, and deftly followed Ben's directions.

"Come with me," said Ben. "I'm going to try to get to the cook's pantry. We may be able to stay here until the storm passes over, and must keep as strong as possible. I haven't had anything to eat since daybreak."

Arthur remembered now that he hadn't eaten anything himself since breakfast. The night had now begun to close in about them and added its darkness to the terrors of the storm. Lights flashed now and then on the shore, but the three unfortunates paid little attention to them. No boat could reach them through the boiling surf.

Slowly and carefully Ben led the way forward to the cook's galley. The door had been wedged fast from either a blow or the lurching of the vessel; but Ben at once forced back one of the oblong windows on the lea side of the galley.

"Poor cooky went soon after the captain," he said, and having forced the window, he carefully wormed his body through the opening.

Hal and Arthur followed him as rapidly as possible. The floor was wet, but there was no water standing there, as all which had washed in had run down into the hold. The door was soon repaired so that it could be easily opened should it be necessary to leave their retreat, and then all three turned their attention to such eatables as they could find.

A box of ship biscuit was opened, and Ben discovered a can of pressed beef which had probably been among the private stores the captain had laid in for his wife.

"Poor thing," said Ben, as he deftly opened the tin can with his clasp knife. "She was taking the voyage for her health—much good it did her. If I hadn't thought of her being in the cabin at the last moment those scoundrels would have left her to her fate."

"But you might have saved yourself had you let her stay," suggested Arthur.

Ben favored him with an astonished stare before replying:

"What do you think I am, any way? You must think I'm a miserable wretch if I'd leave a woman to drown that way."

"That wouldn't be much meaner than robbing an old

*Begun in No 439 of THE ARGOSY

man and then allowing some one else to be accused of it," said Arthur bitterly.

Ben stopped eating and scrutinized Arthur curiously as he replied :

"You think so? Does old man Hart think I stole that money and other truck?"

"I don't know whether he does or not, but I know you did it," said Arthur.

"Oh, *you* did?" exclaimed Ben. "Well, you're a dreadfully smart youngster—smarter than most folks."

"What do you mean?" inquired Arthur, while Hal looked as though he intended making a violent attack on Ben Norton,

"Because," said Ben, speaking calmly, "*I did not commit that robbery, neither do I know who did!* That is my answer under oath."

The declaration was made with such earnestness and emphasis that both Hal and Arthur could not fail to be impressed.

"It is very probable," resumed Ben in a grave tone, "that none of us will ever reach land alive. The storm, instead of decreasing, seems to be worse than ever. And," he said, suddenly rising to his feet and speaking with an earnestness that thrilled his listeners, "as surely as I expect my body will tomorrow morning lie somewhere along these sands," with a sweeping gesture of his arm, "and my soul will be before my Maker, I declare that I am entirely innocent of that crime—however many the others I shall have to answer for."

"I believe you, I believe you, Ben!" exclaimed Arthur, and even Hal looked convinced. "But who was the thief? Old Hart declares he believes I'm guilty, and if I ever *do* get out of this I want to prove my innocence. How can I do it? I thought if I found you I would get a confession from you somehow——"

"A confession that I was the thief any way, whether I was or not?" interrupted Ben, with a smile.

"Oh, well, you know I was sure you were the guilty party," returned Arthur. "But who could it have been—or was it just a put up job of the old man's and no robbery at all? I'd hate to believe that of him."

"There was a thief," said Ben, "for I saw him, and it wasn't the old man either!"

"There was? Who was it?" exclaimed the boys simultaneously.

"I don't know who it was now; but I *did* think that it was Arthur Blaisdell!"

"Not me?" exclaimed Arthur, aghast.

"Yes, sir, *you*. I thought you took the things just as you supposed I had."

His companions were speechless with amazement.

"It's a fact and I'll tell you why. Some time during that night I was awake and somebody was in my room. You know it was separated from the hall by a curtain, and as I opened my eyes somebody was just stealing out, and I thought from the height and general appearance of the person that it was Arthur. I saw the sleeve of the fellow's jacket and it seemed familiar, yet as I think of it now, the goods were a coarse check instead of a stripe like Arthur's, although of the same color. What little light there was in the room shone through the window directly on the fellow's coat sleeve."

"Why didn't you tell of this before?" asked Arthur.

"Well, if I had it wouldn't have done you any good, young man," replied Ben. "Instead, all that I could have told would have strengthened the old man's case. The old wretch! how I did detest his meanness. I wonder what time it is now."

Hal took out his watch. The water had stopped it, but it pointed to five o'clock.

"H'm; we've been here three hours at least, so it must be eight o'clock," said Ben.

Thus brought suddenly back to a remembrance of their terrible predicament the three young fellows looked at each other rather soberly. With their disheveled and water soaked clothing and the rope still fastening them together, they were an odd looking group indeed.

"Well, let's not get solemn," said Ben trying to speak lightly. "With full stomachs and good spirits we may pull through all right yet."

"Well, that affair is about as mysterious as anything I ever heard of," said Arthur, his thoughts recurring to the robbery at the Hart place. "Whoever the fellow was, put poison in that sour milk I gave to the hogs, I suppose."

"Poison!" exclaimed Ben. "Twasn't any such thing. 'Twas tartar emetic or something of the sort. But it did almost finish the poor porkers."

"It's about as mysterious as the burglary at Major Van Slyck's," said Hal.

Ben started and changed color perceptibly.

"Burglary at Major Van Slyck's?" he repeated, staring at Hal.

At that very instant there was a sudden jar which shook the brig in every part, and as the trio jumped up in affright, the vessel began to move.

"Quick!" shouted Ben, flinging open the galley door. "On deck, unless you want to be drowned like rats in a hole!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT.

WITH the opening of the galley door a fierce blast of wind and spray dashed into their faces. Ben Norton was first on deck and almost dragged his two companions after him.

The first discovery that all three made was the fact that the wind had veered round until it was now blowing almost directly off the beach and the brig was moving!

Lying broadside as she did to the land, the strength of the fierce gale was sufficient with the help of the waves, to drive her off shore. The three terrified young fellows found themselves swept irresistibly out to sea.

"Try the pumps! quick!" shouted Ben, and he hurried along amidship and seized the brakes.

The two boys followed him and lent their assistance, but instead of the great volume of water they expected would pour out of the hold, hardly any at all followed their efforts.

"Great Peter!" ejaculated Ben, "she don't leak enough to keep her sweet."

They gazed at each other in blank amazement, although their spirits rose something like two hundred degrees.

"Sound as a dollar," cried Hal, and Arthur would have shouted a hurrah, had not a sudden gust of wind almost carried him off his feet.

"Nothing but a sandy bottom where she struck," declared Ben, "so she didn't stave her timbers. See, she's almost righted herself. Let's do what we can to clear away the wreck. There are axes in the fo'castle"

"Why can't we steer her into port?" suggested Arthur, following Ben towards the sailors' quarters.

"Better wait till this storm passes," said Hal grimly. "There isn't much surety yet that we shall steer ourselves safely into port, let alone this old hulk."

"She won't answer her helm," said Ben. "The rudder

was carried away before we struck. But we can construct a drag that will keep her balanced better and she'll ride more easily."

"By gracious, I never want to be a sailor!" declared Arthur, as they attacked the mass of spars and cordage after securing their axes.

The bulk of the wreck hung over the port bow, dragging the brig down, till every wave swept her deck. This was quickly remedied, and the craft righted herself, shook the water from her bows, and mounted the waves like a duck.

Under Ben's instructions, the boys prepared a drag with the aid of a loose spar, and, flinging this over the stern, they found that the Kaspar kept her head before the wind in good shape.

"This is better than I had hoped," declared Ben, when it was completed.

The pumps were again tried. This time they raised considerable water, but after a few moments' work at the brakes it subsided. Evidently, if the brig leaked at all, she had simply started a plank somewhere, and was making water but slowly.

"Well, for the present we're safe," said Arthur, as they stood aft.

"But as far as we know we are likely to bump up against the other continent, 'across the pond,'" finished Hal, gazing ruefully at the dark clouds under which the dismantled brig was scudding.

"We ought to thank God for our preservation thus far," said Ben Norton, "and not trouble ourselves over what *may* happen to us."

"Do you know," said Arthur, looking at Ben curiously, "you're a perfect wonder to me. I'd give considerable if I knew just what sort of a fellow you really were."

Ben made no direct reply to this, and together the three young men went forward to the cook's galley again. For the first time they removed the rope which held them together, and Ben, finding some kindling stuff and matches, lighted a fire in the little cook stove.

"Now I'm going to take a trip to the cabin," he said, "and I'll bring back such dry clothing as I can find."

"No you don't," said Arthur good humoredly. "I'm not going to have you pick out a suit for me. I'll go with you and see what I can find."

"I'll go, too," added Hal, "for I'm as wet now as the rest of you," and he looked ruefully at the now torn oilskins he had borrowed from Captain Henry.

After overhauling the chests of the captain and officers, they appareled themselves very comfortably, although somewhat oddly, in whatever came to hand. Ben dressed himself throughout in clothing of the Kaspar's late commander, pea jacket and all; and, although the captain had been a trifle taller than Ben, and the young fellow was rather broader across the shoulders and fuller in the chest than the owner of the clothing, he was by far the most presentable of the three.

Arthur had overhauled the first mate's belongings, and arrayed himself for the most part in them. The mate had been rather fleshy and very short, so the clothes hung on Arthur like meal bags on a bean pole.

Hal was the most unfortunate of the trio, and was dressed in a combination of male and female apparel that would have driven Dr. Mary Walker wild with envy. The second and third mates must have been absolute museum freaks, for one was a positive giant, while the other had been so small that a pair of his trousers only reached half way between Hal's knees and the tops of his shoes. He made up

for their deficiency, however, by wearing a pair of sea boots which came above his knees, and were a mile too wide in the foot. The trousers aforesaid were buttoned at the waist over a woolen sack once belonging to the captain's wife, and, thus arrayed, Hal stood forth, to the unbounded amusement of his companions, but to his own great satisfaction.

"There, I'm comfortable once more," declared Arthur, complacently gazing down at his voluminous apparel. "I haven't been dry before since this morning."

"And I haven't been dry since yesterday," declared Hal.

"And I for all of three days," said Ben. "Boys, don't ever go for a sailor."

"Don't intend to," returned Hal.

"But what made *you*, I'd like to know?" inquired Arthur. "I thought your brother was sick, and you had to go home?"

Ben flushed a little, but said quickly:

"Come back to the galley. I'll talk to you there."

The fire in the cook's stove was burning merrily, and the little apartment was pervaded with the warmth.

"Ah, this is bliss," sighed Hal, sitting down on an up-turned beer keg, and stretching his legs out toward the warmth.

"Bliss!" exclaimed Arthur; "well, you're easily satisfied. Call this bliss, with the old hulk plunging through the waves so that you can hardly keep your feet, and with no certain knowledge that we shall ever see the sun rise again!"

"Hal takes the right view of it," said Ben Norton, busying himself in preparing some coffee in a battered pot. "But about that robbery you spoke of at Van Slyck's," he added, turning suddenly to Hal. "You spoke of it a little while ago. What was it?"

"That isn't what we are going to talk about," interrupted Arthur quickly, without noticing his brother's warning gesture. "You were going to tell us *why* you left the old man Hart's. Was the business about your brother's being sick all a hoax?"

"It was all a lie," said Ben gravely. "Boys," he added, turning his earnest gaze on his companions, "I'm going to tell you something that I thought I never should tell any one again—the true story of my life."

It is needless to say that both Hal and Arthur were all attention.

(To be continued.)

THE SEATS WERE NOT FOR ANGELS.

MODESTY is a charming attribute, and self forgetfulness is a quality that we all admire in either man or woman. But the sort of self forgetfulness displayed by the heroine of the below described incident which we clip from the New York *Evening Sun*, is apt to cause more embarrassment than gratification.

There is a nervous, fussy but delightful little woman out in her summer home who a few days ago invited a party of friends out to dine in the country. When the table was laid in the dining room she went in to look at it. There were nine covers. "But there are only seven guests," she said to herself. Just then the sound of carriage wheels on the drive told her the guests had come. "Empty places at table are perfect death's heads," she said to herself, and whipping everything at two places away she spaced things properly in an instant. Then she went smiling and cordial, out to her guests.

In a few minutes dinner was served. "But where am I to sit, my dear?" asked her husband, as they took their places. "And you?" he added as he looked at the table a second time.

"There, now!" she exclaimed, as a relieved look came into her eyes. "I've been trying to think all this time whom those two blessed places were set for, and I couldn't for my life remember. I knew they must be for somebody."

ON STEEDS OF STEEL:

OR,

THE TOUR OF THE CHALLENGE CLUB.*

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON A DOWN GRADE.



EARNING more for supper than fame, neither Mac nor I had the slightest inclination to immortalize ourselves by getting a railroad train out of an awkward predicament. Besides we were keenly disappointed at finding what we expected to prove a settlement, where we could procure aid for Dinsmore, was only a locomotive off the track.

"Is this place you want me to go the nearest

village?" I inquired, thinking that perhaps after all it would only be a case of keeping right on as we were doing when came to the railroad.

"Yes, it's Wixenberg," replied the conductor. "It lies off yonder, and it's down hill all the way," and he pointed back along the track.

"Then you've just come from there?" I said, a great scheme beginning to bud in my brain.

"Cert," rejoined the brakeman.

"How's the road?" put in Mac.

"Pretty fair," answered the conductor. "Come now, will you fellows ride it?"

"'Pretty fair' means horribly bad for wheeling," I began, adding: "You say it is down hill all the way?"

"Yes."

"On the railroad, too?"

"Well, you just ought to hear 76 puff when she brought us up and you'd believe the grade was a steep one."

"Is Wixenberg much of a place?" I went on. "Can I hire a horse and wagon there?"

"Half a dozen of them if you want to," answered the conductor. "But come, we're losing time. You'd better be off."

"Will you take myself and my friend here along if I tell you how to get word to Wixenberg before we could possibly carry it there with our machines?"

The whole group turned and stared at me wonderingly, and the expression on Mac's face was as good as a circus. I hastened to fully explain what I meant before they took me for a lunatic.

"Here's my plan," I said. "It is down grade all the way from here to Wixenberg, you say. Will you please tell me what is to prevent your cutting off the end car of the train, giving it a start and covering the six miles by gravity in a much shorter time than we could do it on our machines?"

That is, of course, provided you are certain the track will be clear.

"Great Jehosaphat!" exclaimed the fireman. "What a head that boy's got! I believe the thing could be done, Tim," leaning down towards the engineer.

"How about it, Jake?" said the latter, turning to the conductor. "There are no freights booked till after midnight, are there? Besides, you could bring her to a standstill in the meadows."

The dudish individual became greatly excited over the scheme, clapped me on the shoulder and assured me that I ought to have been a James Watt. I thought he meant George Stephenson, but I didn't tell him so, as just then I was more interested in learning whether my wildcat scheme was to be carried into effect. I call it wildcat because I knew it would have been quite impracticable on any railroad of importance.

But from what I had seen of it I felt convinced that this was only a small spur, and that therefore the track was but little used. The only thing that bothered me was starting that car.

This difficulty was overcome, however, by the engineer calling to the brakeman to bring a crowbar, and then we all trooped back to the rear end of the train, and I knew that my suggestion was to be acted upon.

Mac and I hastened to put our wheels aboard the last coach, which was a smoker and baggage car combined, and the conductor went through the train announcing what was to be done, and stating that any of the passengers who preferred going back to Wixenberg, to waiting there in the woods for an indefinite period, could avail themselves of the "smoker" and the present opportunity.

The train was a very short one, and there were not more than twenty passengers all together, and all of these bundled themselves into the baggage compartment, eager to take the novel ride. But a good many of us were presently called upon to get out and help start the car, after which there was quite a scramble to get aboard again.

We were off at last, however, and as many as could crowded about the rear platform to watch our progress. I had been down the Switchback at Mauch Chunk, and fondly hoped that I was to have such another glorious experience with gravity locomotion, but the conductor was extremely cautious, and whenever the car got to whizzing along at a rate that began to make one's blood tingle, he ordered the brakes on.

But all the same it did not take us many minutes to cover that six miles, and when we came to a standstill on the outskirts of Wixenberg we were at once surrounded by an awe-stricken crowd of natives, who evidently thought at first a spook car had descended upon them.

Mac and I didn't wait to hear explanations. Getting our machines, we stumbled over a lot of tracks till we found the road, and then mounting, put energy into the pedals till we reached the first big hotel.

Here we engaged rooms for the night, also a two horse team and driver. While this was being got ready we rushed into a restaurant across the street, gulped down a cup of coffee apiece, and invested a dollar in doughnuts and tongue sandwiches, which we took back to the carriage with us. This we found ready to depart, and then arose the vexed question of where to tell the driver to take us.

The nearest we could come to it was to explain that we had left our friends in the woods on the road that crossed the railroad track, about six miles from town. Fortunately, the man had been born and brought up in the locality, and when we further explained that we had come from Bassets,

*Begun in No. 443 of THE ARGOSY.

he said he thought he knew just the way we ought to go.

But he didn't, and it seemed to me we poked about in those woods half the night before we found the other half of the Challenge Club. And we wouldn't have come upon them then if Steve hadn't bethought himself of imitating the example of steamers in a fog, and uttering a wailing signal cry every three minutes.

Fortunately Hugh had gone to sleep, and although I was in mortal terror that he had caught that cold of which I stood in such dread, I tried hard not to borrow trouble.

He dozed in the carriage all the way back to the hotel, which we didn't reach till two o'clock in the morning.

We didn't leave it till two the next afternoon, by which time we were all rested out and quite ready for the next adventure. But it seemed our stock of those had been exhausted, for we had plain sailing—or rather wheeling—from that time till the end of the tour.

"I think you must have broken the charm, Will," said Hugh, "when you deserted the steel wheels of our bicycles for the steel wheels of the prosaic railway car. Positively I'm shocked whenever I recall how basely the captain of the Challengers gave their chosen vehicle the back seat on that memorable occasion."

"You'd have been in the woods all night if I hadn't," was my reply, which always ended the discussion.

We disbanded at Lake Hopatcong, where my people had gone for the summer, and where Steve, Mac and Hugh stayed over Sunday with me. You can imagine we had a big story to tell, but when I got through, my sister's comment was: "That is all very exciting to be sure, but it seems to me that all this could have happened to you just as well on horseback or in canoes as on a bicycle tour."

"Certainly, that's just what made it so exciting," I retorted. "It was the unexpectedness of the circumstances."

"Well," Edith went on, "I should call it the unpleasantness of a good many of them."

"What!" I exclaimed. "When you remember that sail up the Hudson in the Belle, with the lemonade and—"

"But we don't want to remember that," put in the other Challengers in a breath, and this was the only episode of the famous tour on which we had varying opinions.

THE END.



II.

The acrobat turns a back somersault and catches the revolver with his feet.



III.

ACROBAT—"Up with your hands for a change."

THE HIGHWAYMAN AND THE ACROBAT.



I.

HIGHWAYMAN—"Yer money or yer life!"

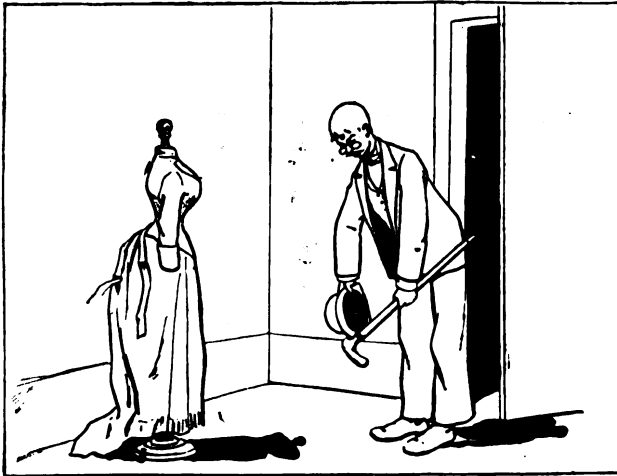


IV.

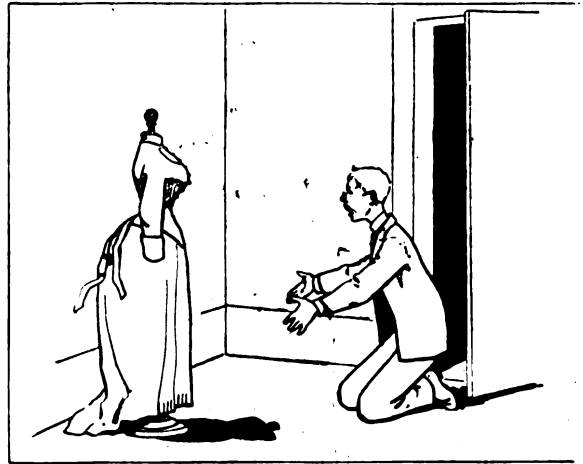
ACROBAT—"Keep marching along now."

THE ARGOSY

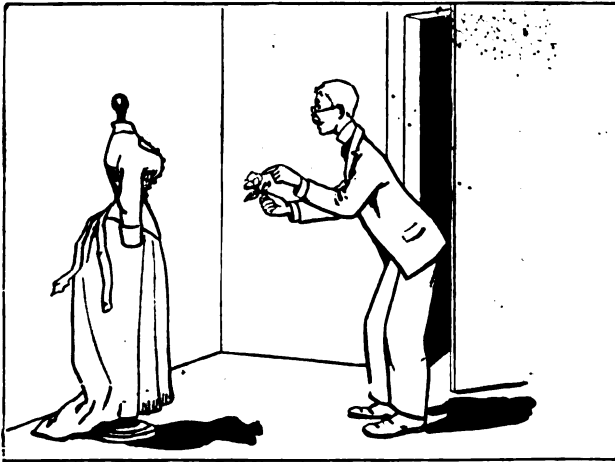
A BASHFUL MAN'S EXPERIMENTAL PROPOSAL.



I.
He enters her sainted presence.



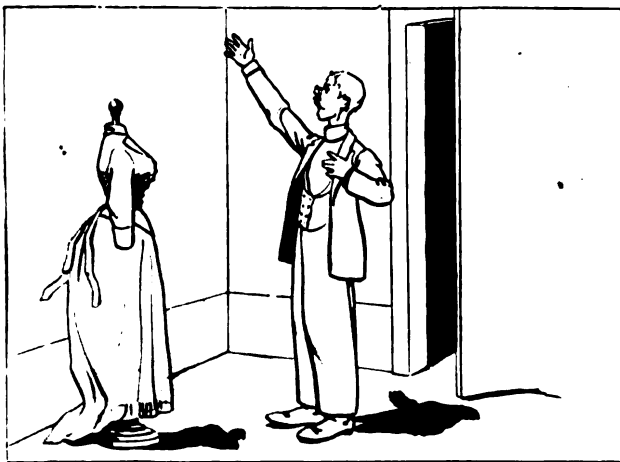
IV.
He asks her to wed him, unworthy as he is.



II.
He compares her to the spotless rose.



V.
At the moment of success he is interrupted unexpectedly.



III.
He swears that he adores her.



VI.
And the result is disastrous to his cherished hopes.