ALGER HORATIO JR.

THE ERRAND BOY; OR, HOW PHIL BRENT WON SUCCESS

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Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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CHAPTER I
PHIL HAS A LITTLE DIFFICULTY

Phil Brent was plodding through the snow in the direction of the house where he lived with his step-mother and her son, when a snow-ball, moist and hard, struck him just below his ear with stinging emphasis. The pain was considerable, and Phil's anger rose.

He turned suddenly, his eyes flashing fiercely, intent upon discovering who had committed this outrage, for he had no doubt that it was intentional.

He looked in all directions, but saw no one except a mild old gentleman in spectacles, who appeared to have some difficulty in making his way through the obstructed street.

Phil did not need to be told that it was not the old gentleman who had taken such an unwarrantable liberty with him. So he looked farther, but his ears gave him the first clew.

He heard a chuckling laugh, which seemed to proceed from

behind the stone wall that ran along the roadside.

"I will see who it is," he decided, and plunging through the snow he surmounted the wall, in time to see a boy of about his own age running away across the fields as fast as the deep snow would allow.

"So it's you, Jonas!" he shouted wrathfully. "I thought it was some sneaking fellow like you."

Jonas Webb, his step-brother, his freckled face showing a degree of dismay, for he had not calculated on discovery, ran the faster, but while fear winged his steps, anger proved the more effectual spur, and Phil overtook him after a brief run, from the effects of which both boys panted.

"What made you throw that snow-ball?" demanded Phil angrily, as he seized Jonas by the collar and shook him.

"You let me alone!" said Jonas, struggling ineffectually in his grasp.

"Answer me! What made you throw that snowball?" demanded Phil, in a tone that showed he did not intend to be trifled with.

"Because I chose to," answered Jonas, his spite getting the better of his prudence. "Did it hurt you?" he continued, his eyes gleaming with malice.

"I should think it might. It was about as hard as a cannon-ball," returned Phil grimly. "Is that all you've got to say about it?"

"I did it in fun," said Jonas, beginning to see that he had need to be prudent.

"Very well! I don't like your idea of fun. Perhaps you won't like mine," said Phil, as he forcibly drew Jonas back till he lay upon the snow, and then kneeling by his side, rubbed his face briskly with snow.

"What are you doin'? Goin' to murder me?" shrieked Jonas, in anger and dismay.

"I am going to wash your face," said Phil, continuing the operation vigorously.

"I say, you quit that! I'll tell my mother," ejaculated Jonas, struggling furiously.

"If you do, tell her why I did it," said Phil.

Jonas shrieked and struggled, but in vain. Phil gave his face an effectual scrubbing, and did not desist until he thought he had avenged the bad treatment he had suffered.

"There, get up!" said he at length.

Jonas scrambled to his feet, his mean features working convulsively with anger.

"You'll suffer for this!" he shouted.

"You won't make me!" said Phil contemptuously.

"You're the meanest boy in the village."

"I am willing to leave that to the opinion of all who know me."

"I'll tell my mother!"

"Go home and tell her!"

Jonas started for home, and Phil did not attempt to stop him.

As he saw Jonas reach the street and plod angrily homeward, he said to himself:

"I suppose I shall be in hot water for this; but I can't help it. Mrs. Brent always stands up for her precious son, who is as like her as can be. Well, it won't make matters much worse than they have been."

Phil concluded not to go home at once, but to allow a little time for the storm to spend its force after Jonas had told his story. So he delayed half an hour and then walked slowly up to the side door. He opened the door, brushed off the snow from his boots with the broom that stood behind the door, and opening the inner door, stepped into the kitchen.

No one was there, as Phil's first glance satisfied him, and he was disposed to hope that Mrs. Brent—he never called her mother—was out, but a thin, acid, measured voice from the sitting-room adjoining soon satisfied him that there was to be no reprieve.

"Philip Brent, come here!"

Phil entered the sitting-room.

In a rocking-chair by the fire sat a thin woman, with a sharp visage, cold eyes and firmly compressed lips, to whom no child would voluntarily draw near.

On a sofa lay outstretched the hulking form of Jonas, with whom he had had his little difficulty.

"I am here, Mrs. Brent," said Philip manfully.

"Philip Brent," said Mrs. Brent acidly, "are you not ashamed to look me in the face?"

"I don't know why I should be," said Philip, bracing himself

up for the attack.

"You see on the sofa the victim of your brutality," continued Mrs. Brent, pointing to the recumbent figure of her son Jonas.

Jonas, as if to emphasize these words, uttered a half groan.

Philip could not help smiling, for to him it seemed ridiculous.

"You laugh," said his step-mother sharply. "I am not surprised at it. You delight in your brutality."

"I suppose you mean that I have treated Jonas brutally."

"I see you confess it."

"No, Mrs. Brent, I do not confess it. The brutality you speak of was all on the side of Jonas."

"No doubt," retorted Mrs. Brent, with sarcasm.

"It's the case of the wolf and the lamb over again."

"I don't think Jonas has represented the matter to you as it happened," said Phil. "Did he tell you that he flung a snow-ball at my head as hard as a lump of ice?"

"He said he threw a little snow at you playfully and you sprang upon him like a tiger."

"There's a little mistake in that," said Phil. "The snow-ball was hard enough to stun me if it had hit me a little higher. I wouldn't be hit like that again for ten dollars."

"That ain't so! Don't believe him, mother!" said Jonas from the sofa.

"And what did you do?" demanded Mrs. Brent with a frown.

"I laid him down on the snow and washed his face with soft snow."

"You might have given him his death of cold," said Mrs. Brent, with evident hostility. "I am not sure but the poor boy will have pneumonia now, in consequence of your brutal treatment."

"And you have nothing to say as to his attack upon me?" said Phil indignantly.

"I have no doubt you have very much exaggerated it."

"Yes, he has," chimed in Jonas from the sofa.

Phil regarded his step-brother with scorn.

"Can't you tell the truth now and then, Jonas?" he asked contemptuously.

"You shall not insult my boy in my presence!" said Mrs. Brent, with a little spot of color mantling her high cheek-bones. "Philip Brent, I have too long endured your insolence. You think because I am a woman you can be insolent with impunity, but you will find yourself mistaken. It is time that you understood something that may lead you to lower your tone. Learn, then, that you have not a cent of your own. You are wholly dependent upon my bounty."

"What! Did my father leave you all his money?" asked Philip.

"He was NOT your father!" answered Mrs. Brent coldly.

CHAPTER II
A STRANGE REVELATION

Philip started in irrepressible astonishment as these words fell from the lips of his step-mother. It seemed to him as if the earth were crumbling beneath his feet, for he had felt no more certain of the existence of the universe than of his being the son of Gerald Brent.

He was not the only person amazed at this declaration. Jonas, forgetting for the moment the part he was playing, sat bolt upright on the sofa, with his large mouth wide open, staring by turns at Philip and his mother.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed in a tone indicating utter surprise and bewilderment.

"Will you repeat that, Mrs. Brent?" asked Philip, after a brief pause, not certain that he had heard aright.

"I spoke plain English, I believe," said Mrs. Brent coldly, enjoying the effect of her communication.

"I said that Mr. Brent, my late husband, was not your father."

"I don't believe you!" burst forth Philip impetuously.

"You don't wish to believe me, you mean," answered his step-mother, unmoved.

"No, I don't wish to believe you," said the boy, looking her in the eye.

"You are very polite to doubt a lady's word," said Mrs. Brent with sarcasm.

"In such a matter as that I believe no one's word," said Phil. "I ask for proof."

"Well, I am prepared to satisfy you. Sit down and I will tell you the story."

Philip sat down on the nearest chair and regarded his stepmother fixedly.

"Whose son am I," he demanded, "if not Mr. Brent's?"

"You are getting on too fast. Jonas," continued his mother, suddenly turning to her hulking son, on whose not very intelligent countenance there was an expression of greedy curiosity, "do you understand that what I am going to say is to be a secret, not to be spoken of to any one?"

"Yes'm," answered Jonas readily.

"Very well. Now to proceed. Philip, you have heard probably that when you were very small your father—I mean Mr. Brent—lived in a small town in Ohio, called Fultonville?"

"Yes, I have heard him say so."

"Do you remember in what business he was then engaged?"

"He kept a hotel."

"Yes; a small hotel, but as large as the place required. He was not troubled by many guests. The few who stopped at his house were business men from towns near by, or drummers from the great cities, who had occasion to stay over a night. One evening, however, a gentleman arrived with an unusual companion—in

other words, a boy of about three years of age. The boy had a bad cold, and seemed to need womanly care. Mr. Brent's wife–"

"My mother?"

"The woman you were taught to call mother," corrected the second Mrs. Brent, "felt compassion for the child, and volunteered to take care of it for the night. The offer was gladly accepted, and you—for, of course, you were the child—were taken into Mrs. Brent's own room, treated with simple remedies, and in the morning seemed much better. Your father—your real father—seemed quite gratified, and preferred a request. It was that your new friend would take care of you for a week while he traveled to Cincinnati on business. After dispatching this, he promised to return and resume the care of you, paying well for the favor done him. Mrs. Brent, my predecessor, being naturally fond of children, readily agreed to this proposal, and the child was left behind, while the father started for Cincinnati."

Here Mrs. Brent paused, and Philip regarded her with doubt and suspense

"Well?" he said.

"Oh, you want to know the rest?" said Mrs. Brent with an ironical smile. "You are interested in the story?"

"Yes, madam, whether it is true or not."

"There isn't much more to tell," said Mrs. Brent.

"A week passed. You recovered from your cold, and became as lively as ever. In fact, you seemed to feel quite at home among your new surroundings, which was rather unfortunate,

FOR YOUR FATHER NEVER CAME BACK!"

"Never came back!" repeated Philip.

"No; nor was anything heard from him. Mr. and Mrs. Brent came to the conclusion that the whole thing was prearranged to get rid of you. Luckily for you, they had become attached to you, and, having no children of their own, decided to retain you. Of course, some story had to be told to satisfy the villagers. You were represented to be the son of a friend, and this was readily believed. When, however, my late husband left Ohio, and traveled some hundreds of miles eastward to this place, he dropped this explanation and represented you as his own son. Romantic, wasn't it?"

Philip looked searchingly at the face of his step-mother, or the woman whom he had regarded as such, but he could read nothing to contradict the story in her calm, impassive countenance. A great fear fell upon him that she might be telling the truth. His features showed his contending emotions. But he had a profound distrust as well as dislike of his step-mother, and he could not bring himself to put confidence in what she told him.

"What proof is there of this?" he asked, after a while.

"Your father's word. I mean, of course, Mr. Brent's word. He told me this story before I married him, feeling that I had a right to know."

"Why didn't he tell me?" asked Philip incredulously.

"He thought it would make you unhappy."

"You didn't mind that," said Philip, his lips curling.

"No," answered Mrs. Brent, with a curious smile. "Why should I? I never pretended to like you, and now I have less cause than ever, after your brutal treatment of my boy."

Jonas endeavored to look injured, but could not at once change the expression of his countenance.

"Your explanation is quite satisfactory, Mrs. Brent," returned Philip. "I don't think I stood much higher in your estimation yesterday than today, so that I haven't lost much. But you haven't given me any proof yet."

"Wait a minute."

Mrs. Brent left the room, went up-stairs, and speedily returned, bringing with her a small daguerreotype, representing a boy of three years.

"Did you ever see this before?" she asked.

"No," answered Philip, taking it from her hand and eying it curiously.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Brent decided that you were to be left on their hands," she proceeded, "they had this picture of you taken in the same dress in which you came to them, with a view to establish your identity if at any time afterward inquiry should be made for you."

The daguerreotype represented a bright, handsome child, dressed tastefully, and more as would be expected of a city child than of one born in the country. There was enough resemblance to Philip as he looked now to convince him that it was really his picture.

"I have something more to show you," said Mrs. Brent.

She produced a piece of white paper in which the daguerreotype had been folded. Upon it was some writing, and Philip readily recognized the hand of the man whom he had regarded as his father.

He read these lines:

"This is the picture of the boy who was mysteriously left in the charge of Mr. Brent, April, 1863, and never reclaimed. I have reared him as my own son, but think it best to enter this record of the way in which he came into my hands, and to preserve by the help of art his appearance at the time he first came to us. GERALD BRENT."

"Do you recognize this handwriting?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"Yes," answered Philip in a dazed tone.

"Perhaps," she said triumphantly, "you will doubt my word now."

"May I have this picture?" asked Philip, without answering her.

"Yes; you have as good a claim to it as any one."

"And the paper?"

"The paper I prefer to keep myself," said Mrs. Brent, nodding her head suspiciously. "I don't care to have my only proof destroyed."

Philip did not seem to take her meaning, but with the daguerreotype in his hand, he left the room.

"I say, mother," chuckled Jonas, his freckled face showing his

enjoyment, “it’s a good joke on Phil, isn’t it? I guess he won’t be quite so uppish after this.”

CHAPTER III
PHIL'S SUDDEN RESOLUTION

When Phil left the presence of Mrs. Brent, he felt as if he had been suddenly transported to a new world. He was no longer Philip Brent, and the worst of it was that he did not know who he was. In his tumultuous state of feeling, however, one thing seemed clear—his prospects were wholly changed, and his plans for the future also. Mrs. Brent had told him that he was wholly dependent upon her. Well, he did not intend to remain so. His home had not been pleasant at the best. As a dependent upon the bounty of such a woman it would be worse. He resolved to leave home and strike out for himself, not from any such foolish idea of independence as sometimes leads boys to desert a good home for an uncertain skirmish with the world, but simply be cause he felt now that he had no real home.

To begin with he would need money, and on opening his pocket-book he ascertained that his available funds consisted of only a dollar and thirty-seven cents. That wasn't quite enough to begin the world with. But he had other resources. He owned a gun, which a friend of his would be ready to take off his hands. He had a boat, also, which he could probably sell.

On the village street he met Reuben Gordon, a young journeyman carpenter, who was earning good wages, and had

money to spare.

"How are you, Phil," said Reuben in a friendly way.

"You are just the one I want to meet," said Phil earnestly. "Didn't you tell me once you would like to buy my gun?"

"Yes. Want to sell it?"

"No, I don't; but I want the money it will bring. So I'll sell it if you'll buy."

"What d'ye want for it?" asked Reuben cautiously.

"Six dollars."

"Too much. I'll give five."

"You can have it," said Phil after a pause. "How soon can you let me have the money?"

"Bring the gun round to-night, and I'll pay you for it."

"All right. Do you know of any one who wants to buy a boat?"

"What? Going to sell that, too?"

"Yes."

"Seems to me you're closin' up business?" said Reuben shrewdly.

"So I am. I'm going to leave Planktown."

"You don't say? Well, I declare! Where are you goin'?"

"To New York, I guess."

"Got any prospect there?"

"Yes."

This was not, perhaps, strictly true—that is, Phil had no definite prospect, but he felt that there must be a chance in a large city like New York for any one who was willing to work,

and so felt measurably justified in saying what he did.

"I hadn't thought of buyin' a boat," said Reuben thoughtfully.

Phil pricked up his ears at the hint of a possible customer.

"You'd better buy mine," he said quickly; "I'll sell it cheap."

"How cheap?"

"Ten dollars."

"That's too much."

"It cost me fifteen."

"But it's second-hand now, you know," said Reuben.

"It's just as good as new. I'm taking off five dollars, though, you see."

"I don't think I want it enough to pay ten dollars."

"What will you give?"

Reuben finally agreed to pay seven dollars and seventy-five cents, after more or less bargaining, and to pay the money that evening upon delivery of the goods.

"I don't think I've got anything more to sell," said Phil thoughtfully. "There's my skates, but they are not very good. I'll give them to Tommy Kavanagh. He can't afford to buy a pair."

Tommy was the son of a poor widow, and was very much pleased with the gift, which Phil conveyed to him just before supper.

Just after supper he took his gun and the key of his boat over to Reuben Gordon, who thereupon gave him the money agreed upon.

"Shall I tell Mrs. Brent I am going away?" Phil said to himself,

"or shall I leave a note for her?"

He decided to announce his resolve in person. To do otherwise would seem too much like running away, and that he had too much self-respect to do.

So in the evening, after his return from Reuben Gordon's, he said to Mrs. Brent:

"I think I ought to tell you that I'm going away to-morrow."

Mrs. Brent looked up from her work, and her cold gray eyes surveyed Phil with curious scrutiny.

"You are going away!" she replied. "Where are you going?"

"I think I shall go to New York."

"What for?"

"Seek my fortune, as so many have done before me."

"They didn't always find it!" said Mrs. Brent with a cold sneer. "Is there any other reason?"

"Yes; it's chiefly on account of what you told me yesterday. You said that I was dependent upon you."

"So you are."

"And that I wasn't even entitled to the name of Brent."

"Yes, I said it, and it's true."

"Well," said Phil, "I don't want to be dependent upon you. I prefer to earn my own living."

"I am not prepared to say but that you are right. But do you know what the neighbors will say?"

"What will they say?"

"That I drove you from home."

"It won't be true. I don't pretend to enjoy my home, but I suppose I can stay on here if I like?"

"Yes, you can stay."

"You don't object to my going?"

"No, if it is understood that you go of your own accord."

"I am willing enough to take the blame of it, if there is any blame."

"Very well; get a sheet of note-paper, and write at my direction."

Phil took a sheet of note-paper from his father's desk, and sat down to comply with Mrs. Brent's request.

She dictated as follows:

"I leave home at my own wish, but with the consent of Mrs. Brent, to seek my fortune. It is wholly my own idea, and I hold no one else responsible.

"PHILIP BRENT."

"You may as well keep the name of Brent," said his step-mother, "as you have no other that you know of."

Phil winced at those cold words. It was not pleasant to reflect that this was so, and that he was wholly ignorant of his parentage.

"One thing more," said Mrs. Brent. "It is only eight o'clock. I should like to have you go out and call upon some of those with whom you are most intimate, and tell them that you are leaving home voluntarily."

"I will," answered Phil.

"Perhaps you would prefer to do so to-morrow."

"No; I am going away to-morrow morning."

"Very well."

"Going away to-morrow morning?" repeated Jonas, who entered the room at that moment.

Phil's plan was briefly disclosed.

"Then give me your skates," said Jonas.

"I can't. I've given them to Tommy Kavanagh."

"That's mean. You might have thought of me first," grumbled Jonas.

"I don't know why. Tommy Kavanagh is my friend and you are not."

"Anyway, you can let me have your boat and gun."

"I have sold them."

"That's too bad."

"I don't know why you should expect them. I needed the money they brought me to pay my expenses till I get work."

"I will pay your expenses to New York if you wish," said Mrs. Brent.

"Thank you; but I shall have money enough," answered Phil, who shrank from receiving any favor at the hands of Mrs. Brent.

"As you please, but you will do me the justice to remember that I offered it."

"Thank you. I shall not forget it."

That evening, just before going to bed, Mrs. Brent opened a trunk and drew from it a folded paper.

She read as follows—for it was her husband's will:

"To the boy generally known as Philip Brent, and supposed, though incorrectly, to be my son, I bequeath the sum of five thousand dollars, and direct the same to be paid over to any one whom he may select as guardian, to hold in trust for him till he attains the age of twenty-one."

"He need never know of this," said Mrs. Brent to herself in a low tone. "I will save it for Jonas."

She held the paper a moment, as if undecided whether to destroy it, but finally put it carefully back in the secret hiding-place from which she had taken it.

"He is leaving home of his own accord," she whispered. "Henceforth he will probably keep away. That suits me well, but no one can say I drove him to it."

CHAPTER IV
MR. LIONEL LAKE

Six months before it might have cost Philip a pang to leave home. Then his father was living, and from him the boy had never received aught but kindness. Even his step-mother, though she secretly disliked him, did not venture to show it, and secure in the affections of his supposed father, he did not trouble himself as to whether Mrs. Brent liked him or not. As for Jonas, he was cautioned by his mother not to get himself into trouble by treating Phil badly, and the boy, who knew on which side his interests lay, faithfully obeyed. It was only after the death of Mr. Brent that both Jonas and his mother changed their course, and thought it safe to snub Philip.

Planktown was seventy-five miles distant from New York, and the fare was two dollars and a quarter.

This was rather a large sum to pay, considering Phil's scanty fund, but he wished to get to the great city as soon as possible, and he decided that it would be actually cheaper to ride than to walk, considering that he would have to buy his meals on the way.

He took his seat in the cars, placing a valise full of underclothes on the seat next him. The train was not very full, and the seat beside him did not appear to be required.

Mile after mile they sped on the way, and Phil looked from

the window with interest at the towns through which they passed. There are very few boys of his age—sixteen—who do not like to travel in the cars. Limited as were his means, and uncertain as were his prospects, Phil felt not only cheerful, but actually buoyant, as every minute took him farther away from Planktown, and so nearer the city where he hoped to make a living at the outset, and perhaps his fortune in the end.

Presently—perhaps half way on—a young man, rather stylishly dressed, came into the car. It was not at a station, and therefore it seemed clear that he came from another car.

He halted when he reached the seat which Phil occupied.

Our hero, observing that his glance rested on his valise, politely removed it, saying:

"Would you like to sit down here, sir?"

"Yes, thank you," answered the young man, and sank into the seat beside Phil.

"Sorry to inconvenience you," he said, with a glance at the bag.

"Oh, not at all," returned Phil. "I only put the valise on the seat till it was wanted by some passenger."

"You are more considerate than some passengers," observed the young man. "In the next car is a woman, an elderly party, who is taking up three extra seats to accommodate her bags and boxes."

"That seems rather selfish," remarked Phil.

"Selfish! I should say so. I paused a minute at her seat as I passed along, and she was terribly afraid I wanted to sit down.

She didn't offer to move anything, though, as you have. I stopped long enough to make her feel uncomfortable, and then passed on. I don't think I have fared any the worse for doing so. I would rather sit beside you than her."

"Am I to consider that a compliment?" asked Phil, smiling.

"Well, yes, if you choose. Not that it is saying much to call you more agreeable company than the old party alluded to. Are you going to New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"Live there?"

"I expect to live there."

"Brought up in the country, perhaps?"

"Yes, in Planktown."

"Oh, Planktown! I've heard it's a nice place, but never visited it. Got any folks?"

Phil hesitated. In the light of the revelation that had been made to him by Mrs. Brent, he did not know how to answer. However, there was no call to answer definitely.

"Not many," he said.

"Goin' to school in New York?"

"No."

"To college, perhaps. I've got a cousin in Columbia College."

"I wish I knew enough to go to college," said Phil; "but I only know a little Latin, and no Greek at all."

"Well, I never cared much about Latin or Greek, myself. I presume you are thinking about a business position?"

"Yes, I shall try to get a place."

"You may find a little time necessary to find one. However, you are, no doubt, able to pay your board for awhile."

"For a short time," said Phil.

"Well, I may be able to help you to a place. I know a good many prominent business men."

"I should be grateful to you for any help of that kind," said Phil, deciding that he was in luck to meet with such a friend.

"Don't mention it. I have had to struggle myself—in earlier days—though at present I am well fixed. What is your name?"

"Philip Brent."

"Good! My name is Lionel Lake. Sorry I haven't got any cards. Perhaps I may have one in my pocket-book. Let me see!"

Mr. Lake opened his porte-monnaie and uttered a exclamation of surprise.

"By Jove!" he said, "I am in a fix."

Phil looked at him inquiringly.

"I took out a roll of bills at the house of my aunt, where I stayed last night," explained Mr. Lake, "and must have neglected to replace them."

"I hope you have not lost them," said Phil politely.

"Oh, no; my aunt will find them and take care of them for me, so that I shall get them back. The trouble is that I am left temporarily without funds."

"But you can get money in the city," suggested Phil.

"No doubt; only it is necessary for me to stay over a train ten

miles short of the city."

Mr. Lionel Lake seemed very much perplexed.

"If I knew some one in the cars," he said reflectively.

It did occur to Phil to offer to loan him something, but the scantiness of his own resources warned him that it would not be prudent, so he remained silent.

Finally Mr. Lake appeared to have an idea.

"Have you got five dollars, Philip?" he said familiarly.

"Yes, sir," answered Philip slowly.

"Then I'll make a proposal. Lend it to me and I will give you this ring as security. It is worth twenty-five dollars easily."

He drew from his vest-pocket a neat gold ring, with some sort of a stone in the setting.

"There!" said Mr. Lake, "I'll give you this ring and my address, and you can bring it to my office to-morrow morning. I'll give you back the five dollars and one dollar for the accommodation. That's good interest, isn't it?"

"But I might keep the ring and sell it," suggested Phil.

"Oh, I am not afraid. You look honest. I will trust you," said the young man, in a careless, off-hand manner. "Say, is it a bargain?"

"Yes," answered Phil.

It occurred to him that he could not earn a dollar more easily. Besides, he would be doing a favor to this very polite young man.

"All right, then!"

Five dollars of Phil's scanty hoard was handed to Mr. Lake,

who, in return, gave Phil the ring, which he put on his finger.

He also handed Phil a scrap of paper, on which he penciled:

"LIONEL LAKE, No. 237 Broadway."

"I'm ever so much obliged," he said. "Good-by. I get out at the next station."

Phil was congratulating himself on his good stroke of business, when the conductor entered the car, followed by a young lady. When they came to where Phil was seated, the young lady said:

"That is my ring on that boy's finger?"

"Aha! we've found the thief, then!" said the conductor. "Boy, give up the ring you stole from this young lady!"

As he spoke he placed his hand on Phil's shoulder.

"Stole!" repeated Phil, gasping. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do!" said the conductor roughly.

CHAPTER V
AN OVERBEARING CONDUCTOR

No matter how honest a boy may be, a sudden charge of theft is likely to make him look confused and guilty.

Such was the case with Phil.

"I assure you," he said earnestly, "that I did not steal this ring."

"Where did you get it, then?" demanded the conductor roughly.

He was one of those men who, in any position, will make themselves disagreeable. Moreover, he was a man who always thought ill of others, when there was any chance of doing so. In fact, he preferred to credit his fellows with bad qualities rather than with good.

"It was handed me by a young man who just left the car," said Phil.

"That's a likely story," sneered the conductor.

"Young men are not in the habit of giving valuable rings to strangers."

"He did not give it to me, I advanced him five dollars on it."

"What was the young man's name?" asked the conductor incredulously.

"There's his name and address," answered Phil, drawing from his pocket the paper handed him by Mr. Lake.

"Lionel Lake, 237 Broadway," repeated the conductor. "If there is any such person, which I very much doubt, you are probably a confederate of his."

"You have no right to say this," returned Phil indignantly.

"I haven't, haven't I?" snapped the conductor.

"Do you know what I am going to do with you?"

"If you wish me to return the ring to this young lady, I will do so, if she is positive it is hers."

"Yes, you must do that, but it won't get you out of trouble. I shall hand you over to a policeman as soon as we reach New York."

Phil was certainly dismayed, for he felt that it might be difficult for him to prove that he came honestly in possession of the ring.

"The fact is," added the conductor, "your story is too thin."

"Conductor," said a new voice, "you are doing the boy an injustice."

The speaker was an old man with gray hair, but of form still robust, though he was at least sixty five. He sat in the seat just behind Phil.

"Thank you, sir," said Phil gratefully.

"I understand my business," said the conductor impertinently, "and don't need any instructions from you."

"Young man," said the old gentleman, in a very dignified tone, "I have usually found officials of your class polite and gentlemanly, but you are an exception."

"Who are you?" asked the conductor rudely. "What right have you to put in your oar?"

"As to who I am, I will answer you by and by. In reference to the boy, I have to say that his story is correct. I heard the whole conversation between him and the young man from whom he received the ring, and I can testify that he has told the truth."

"At any rate he has received stolen property."

"Not knowing it to be stolen. The young man was an entire stranger to him, and though I suspected that he was an unscrupulous adventurer, the boy has not had experience enough to judge men."

"Very well. If he's innocent he can prove it when he's brought to trial," said the conductor. "As for you, sir, it's none of your business."

"Young man, you asked me a short time since who I am. Do you want to know?"

"I am not very particular."

"Then, sir, I have to inform you that I am Richard Grant, the president of this road."

The conductor's face was a curious and interesting study when he heard this announcement. He knew that the old man whom he had insulted had a right to discharge him from his position, and bully as he had shown himself, he was now inclined to humble himself to save his place.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said in a composed tone. "If I had known who you were I wouldn't have spoken as I did."

"I had a claim to be treated like a gentleman, even if I had no connection with the road," he said.

"If you say the boy's all right, I won't interfere with him," continued the conductor.

"My testimony would clear him from any charge that might be brought against him," said the president. "I saw him enter the car, and know he has had no opportunity to take the ring."

"If he'll give me back the ring, that's all I want," said the young lady.

"That I am willing to do, though I lose five dollars by it," said Philip.

"Do so, my boy," said the president. "I take it for granted that the young lady's claim is a just one."

Upon this Philip drew the ring from his finger and handed it to the young lady, who went back to the car where her friends were sitting.

"I hope, sir," said the conductor anxiously, "that you won't be prejudiced against me on account of this affair."

"I am sorry to say that I can't help feeling prejudiced against you," returned the president dryly; "but I won't allow this feeling to injure you if, upon inquiring, I find that you are otherwise an efficient officer."

"Thank you, sir."

"I am glad that my presence has saved this boy from being the victim of an injustice. Let this be a lesson to you in future."

The conductor walked away, looking quite chop-fallen, and

Philip turned to his new friend.

"I am very much indebted to you, sir," he said. "But for you I should have found myself in serious trouble."

"I am glad to have prevented an injustice, my lad. I am sorry I could not save you from loss also. That enterprising rogue has gone off with five dollars belonging to you. I hope the loss will not be a serious one to you."

"It was more than a third part of my capital, sir," said Phil, rather ruefully.

"I am sorry for that. I suppose, however, you are not dependent upon your own resources?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Have you no parents, then?" asked Mr. Grant, with interest.

"No, sir; that is, I have a step-mother."

"And what are your plans, if you are willing to tell me?"

"I am going to New York to try to make a living."

"I cannot commend your plan, my young friend, unless there is a good reason for it."

"I think there is a good reason for it, sir."

"I hope you have not run away from home?"

"No, sir; I left home with my step-mother's knowledge and consent."

"That is well. I don't want wholly to discourage you, and so I will tell you that I, too, came to New York at your age with the same object in view, with less money in my pocket than you possess."

"And now you are the president of a railroad!" said Phil hopefully.

"Yes; but I had a hard struggle before I reached that position."

"I am not afraid of hard work, sir."

"That is in your favor. Perhaps you may be as lucky as I have been. You may call at my office in the city, if you feel inclined."

As Mr. Grant spoke he put in Phil's hand a card bearing his name and address, in Wall Street.

"Thank you, sir," said Phil gratefully. "I shall be glad to call. I may need advice."

"If you seek advice and follow it you will be an exception to the general rule," said the president, smiling. "One thing more—you have met with a loss which, to you, is a serious one. Allow me to bear it, and accept this bill."

"But, sir, it is not right that you should bear it," commenced Phil. Then, looking at the bill, he said: "Haven't you made a mistake? This is a TEN-dollar bill."

"I know it. Accept the other five as an evidence of my interest in you. By the way, I go to Philadelphia and Washington before my return to New York, and shall not return for three or four days. After that time you will find me at my office.

"I am in luck after all," thought Phil cheerfully, "in spite of the mean trick of Mr. Lionel Lake."

CHAPTER VI
SIGNOR ORLANDO

So Phil reached New York in very fair spirits. He found himself, thanks to the liberality of Mr. Grant, in a better financial position than when he left home.

As he left the depot and found himself in the streets of New York, he felt like a stranger upon the threshold of a new life. He knew almost nothing about the great city he had entered, and was at a loss where to seek for lodgings.

"It's a cold day," said a sociable voice at his elbow.

Looking around, Phil saw that the speaker was a sallow-complexioned young man, with black hair and mustache, a loose black felt hat, crushed at the crown, giving him rather a rakish look.

"Yes, sir," answered Phil politely.

"Stranger in the city, I expect?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind the sir. I ain't used to ceremony. I am Signor Orlando."

"Signor Orlando!" repeated Phil, rather puzzled.

"Are you an Italian?"

"Well, yes," returned Signor Orlando, with a wink, "that's what I am, or what people think me; but I was born in Vermont,

and am half Irish and half Yankee."

"How did you come by your name, then?"

"I took it," answered his companion. "You see, dear boy, I'm a professional."

"A what?"

"A professional—singer and clog-dancer. I believe I am pretty well known to the public," continued Signor Orlando complacently. "Last summer I traveled with Jenks & Brown's circus. Of course you've heard of THEM. Through the winter I am employed at Bowerman's Varieties, in the Bowery. I appear every night, and at two matinees weekly."

It must be confessed that Phil was considerably impressed by the professional character of Signor Orlando. He had never met an actor, or public performer of any description, and was disposed to have a high respect for a man who filled such a conspicuous position. There was not, to be sure, anything very impressive about Signor Orlando's appearance. His face did not indicate talent, and his dress was shabby. But for all that he was a man familiar with the public—a man of gifts.

"I should like to see you on the stage," said Phil respectfully.

"So you shall, my dear boy—so you shall. I'll get you a pass from Mr. Bowerman. Which way are you going?"

"I don't know," answered Phil, puzzled. "I should like to find a cheap boarding-house, but I don't know the city."

"I do," answered Signor Orlando promptly. "Why not come to my house?"

"Have you a house?"

"I mean my boarding-house. It's some distance away. Suppose we take a horse-car?"

"All right!" answered Phil, relieved to find a guide in the labyrinth of the great city.

"I live on Fifth Street, near the Bowery—a very convenient location," said Orlando, if we may take the liberty to call him thus.

"Fifth Avenue?" asked Phil, who did not know the difference.

"Oh, no; that's a peg above my style. I am not a Vanderbilt, nor yet an Astor."

"Is the price moderate?" asked Phil anxiously. "I must make my money last as long as I can, for I don't know when I shall get a place."

"To be sure. You might room with me, only I've got a hall bedroom. Perhaps we might manage it, though."

"I think I should prefer a room by myself," said Phil, who reflected that Signor Orlando was a stranger as yet.

"Oh, well, I'll speak to the old lady, and I guess she can accommodate you with a hall bedroom like mine on the third floor."

"What should I have to pay?"

"A dollar and a quarter a week, and you can get your meals where you please."

"I think that will suit me," said Phil thoughtfully.

After leaving the car, a minute's walk brought them to a

shabby three-story house of brick. There was a stable opposite, and a group of dirty children were playing in front of it.

"This is where I hang out," said Signor Orlando cheerfully. "As the poet says, there is no place like home."

If this had been true it was not much to be regretted, since the home in question was far from attractive.

Signor Orlando rang the bell, and a stout woman of German aspect answered the call.

"So you haf come back, Herr Orlando," said this lady. "I hope you haf brought them two weeks' rent you owe me."

"All in good time, Mrs. Schlessinger," said Orlando. "But you see I have brought some one with me."

"Is he your bruder now?" asked the lady.

"No, he is not, unfortunately for me. His name is–"

Orlando coughed.

"Philip Brent," suggested our hero.

"Just so—Philip Brent."

"I am glad to see Mr. Prent," said the landlady.

"And is he an actor like you, Signor Orlando?"

"Not yet. We don't know what may happen. But he comes on business, Mrs. Schlessinger. He wants a room."

The landlady brightened up. She had two rooms vacant, and a new lodger was a godsend.

"I vill show Mr. Prent what rooms I haf," she said. "Come upstairs, Mr. Prent."

The good woman toiled up the staircase panting, for she was

asthmatic, and Phil followed. The interior of the house was as dingy as the exterior, and it was quite dark on the second landing.

She threw open the door of a back room, which, being lower than the hall, was reached by a step.

"There!" said she, pointing to the faded carpet, rumpled bed, and cheap pine bureau, with the little six-by-ten looking-glass surmounting it. "This is a peautiful room for a single gentleman, or even for a man and his wife."

"My friend, Mr. Brent, is not married," said Signor Orlando waggishly.

Phil laughed.

"You will have your shoke, Signor Orlando," said Mrs. Schlessinger.

"What is the price of this room?" asked Phil.

"Three dollars a week, Mr. Prent, I ought to have four, but since you are a steady young gentleman–"

"How does she know that?" Phil wondered.

"Since you are a steady young gentleman, and a friend of Signor Orlando, I will not ask you full price."

"That is more than I can afford to pay," said Phil, shaking his head.

"I think you had better show Mr. Brent the hall bedroom over mine," suggested the signor.

Mrs. Schlessinger toiled up another staircase, the two new acquaintances following her. She threw open the door of one of those depressing cells known in New York as a hall bedroom. It

was about five feet wide and eight feet long, and was nearly filled up by a cheap bedstead, covered by a bed about two inches thick, and surmounted at the head by a consumptive-looking pillow. The paper was torn from the walls in places. There was one rickety chair, and a wash-stand which bore marks of extreme antiquity.

"This is a very neat room for a single gentleman," remarked Mrs. Schlessinger.

Phil's spirits fell as he surveyed what was to be his future home. It was a sad contrast to his neat, comfortable room at home.

"Is this room like yours, Signor Orlando?" he asked faintly.

"As like as two peas," answered Orlando.

"Would you recommend me to take it?"

"You couldn't do better."

How could the signor answer otherwise in presence of a landlady to whom he owed two weeks' rent?

"Then," said Phil, with a secret shudder, "I'll take it if the rent is satisfactory."

"A dollar and a quarter a week," said Mrs. Schlessinger promptly.

"I'll take it for a week."

"You won't mind paying in advance?" suggested the landlady. "I pay my own rent in advance."

Phil's answer was to draw a dollar and a quarter from his purse and pass it to his landlady.

"I'll take possession now," said our hero. "Can I have some water to wash my face?"

Mrs. Schlessinger was evidently surprised that any one should want to wash in the middle of the day, but made no objections.

When Phil had washed his face and hands, he went out with Signor Orlando to dine at a restaurant on the Bowery.

CHAPTER VII
BOWERMAN'S VARIETIES

The restaurant to which he was taken by Signor Orlando was thronged with patrons, for it was one o'clock. On the whole, they did not appear to belong to the highest social rank, though they were doubtless respectable. The table-cloths were generally soiled, and the waiters had a greasy look. Phil said nothing, but he did not feel quite so hungry as before he entered.

The signor found two places at one of the tables, and they sat down. Phil examined a greasy bill of fare and found that he could obtain a plate of meat for ten cents. This included bread and butter, and a dish of mashed potato. A cup of tea would be five cents additional.

"I can afford fifteen cents for a meal," he thought, and called for a plate of roast beef.

"Corn beef and cabbage for me," said the signor.

"It's very filling," he remarked aside to Phil.

"They won't give you but a mouthful of beef."

So it proved, but the quality was such that Phil did not care for more. He ordered a piece of apple pie afterward feeling still hungry.

"I see you're bound to have a square meal," said the signor.

After Phil had had it, he was bound to confess that he did

not feel uncomfortably full. Yet he had spent twice as much as the signor, who dispensed with the tea and pie as superfluous luxuries.

In the evening Signor Orlando bent his steps toward Bowerman's Varieties.

"I hope in a day or two to get a complimentary ticket for you, Mr. Brent," he said.

"How much is the ticket?" asked Phil.

"Fifteen cents. Best reserved seats twenty-five cents.'

"I believe I will be extravagant for once," said Phil, "and go at my own expense."

"Good!" said the signor huskily. "You'll feel repaid I'll be bound. Bowerman always gives the public their money's worth. The performance begins at eight o'clock and won't be out until half-past eleven."

"Less than five cents an hour," commented Phil.

"What a splendid head you've got!" said Signor Orlando admiringly. "I couldn't have worked that up. Figures ain't my province."

It seemed to Phil rather a slender cause for compliment, but he said nothing, since it seemed clear that the computation was beyond his companion's ability.

As to the performance, it was not refined, nor was the talent employed first-class. Still Phil enjoyed himself after a fashion. He had never had it in his power to attend many amusements, and this was new to him. He naturally looked with interest for

the appearance of his new friend and fellow-lodger.

Signor Orlando appeared, dressed in gorgeous array, sang a song which did credit to the loudness of his voice rather than its quality, and ended by a noisy clog-dance which elicited much applause from the boys in the gallery, who shared the evening's entertainment for the moderate sum of ten cents.

The signor was called back to the stage. He bowed his thanks and gave another dance. Then he was permitted to retire. As this finished his part of the entertainment he afterward came around in citizen's dress, and took a seat in the auditorium beside Phil.

"How did you like me, Mr. Brent?" he asked complacently.

"I thought you did well, Signor Orlando. You were much applauded."

"Yes, the audience is very loyal," said the proud performer.

Two half-grown boys heard Phil pronounce the name of his companion, and they gazed awe-stricken at the famous man.

"That's Signor Orlando!" whispered one of the others.

"I know it," was the reply.

"Such is fame," said the Signor, in a pleased tone to Phil. "People point me out on the streets."

"Very gratifying, no doubt," said our hero, but it occurred to him that he would not care to be pointed out as a performer at Bowerman's. Signor Orlando, however, well-pleased with himself, didn't doubt that Phil was impressed by his popularity, and perhaps even envied it.

They didn't stay till the entertainment was over. It was, of

course, familiar to the signor, and Phil felt tired and sleepy, for he had passed a part of the afternoon in exploring the city, and had walked in all several miles.

He went back to his lodging-house, opened the door with a pass-key which Mrs. Schlessinger had given him, and climbing to his room in the third story, undressed and deposited himself in bed.

The bed was far from luxurious. A thin pallet rested on slats, so thin that he could feel the slats through it, and the covering was insufficient. The latter deficiency he made up by throwing his overcoat over the quilt, and despite the hardness of his bed, he was soon sleeping soundly.

"To-morrow I must look for a place," he said to Signor Orlando. "Can you give me any advise?"

"Yes, my dear boy. Buy a daily paper, the Sun or Herald, and look at the advertisements. There may be some prominent business man who is looking out for a boy of your size."

Phil knew of no better way, and he followed Signor Orlando's advice.

After a frugal breakfast at the Bowery restaurant, he invested a few pennies in the two papers mentioned, and began to go the rounds.

The first place was in Pearl Street.

He entered, and was directed to a desk in the front part of the store.

"You advertised for a boy," he said.

"We've got one," was the brusque reply.

Of course no more was to be said, and Phil walked out, a little dashed at his first rebuff.

At the next place he found some half a dozen boys waiting, and joined the line, but the vacancy was filled before his turn came.

At the next place his appearance seemed to make a good impression, and he was asked several questions.

"What is your name?"

"Philip Brent."

"How old are you?"

"Just sixteen."

"How is your education?"

"I have been to school since I was six."

"Then you ought to know something. Have you ever been in a place?"

"No, sir."

"Do you live with your parents?"

"No, sir; I have just come to the city, and am lodging in Fifth Street."

"Then you won't do. We wish our boys to live with their parents."

Poor Phil! He had allowed himself to hope that at length he was likely to get a place. The abrupt termination of the conversation dispirited him.

He made three more applications. In one of them he again came near succeeding, but once more the fact that he did not live

with his parents defeated his application.

"It seems to be very hard getting a place," thought Phil, and it must be confessed he felt a little homesick.

"I won't make any more applications to-day," he decided, and being on Broadway, walked up that busy thoroughfare, wondering what the morrow would bring forth.

It was winter, and there was ice on the sidewalk. Directly in front of Phil walked an elderly gentleman, whose suit of fine broadcloth and gold spectacles, seemed to indicate a person of some prominence and social importance.

Suddenly he set foot on a treacherous piece of ice. Vainly he strove to keep his equilibrium, his arms waving wildly, and his gold-headed cane falling to the sidewalk. He would have fallen backward, had not Phil, observing his danger in time, rushed to his assistance.

CHAPTER VIII
THE HOUSE IN TWELFTH STREET

With some difficulty the gentleman righted himself, and then Phil picked up his cane.

"I hope you are not hurt, sir?" he said.

"I should have been but for you, my good boy," said the gentleman. "I am a little shaken by the suddenness of my slipping."

"Would you wish me to go with you, sir?"

"Yes, if you please. I do not perhaps require you, but I shall be glad of your company."

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you live in the city?"

"Yes, sir; that is, I propose to do so. I have come here in search of employment."

Phil said this, thinking it possible that the old gentleman might exert his influence in his favor.

"Are you dependent on what you may earn?" asked the gentleman, regarding him attentively.

"I have a little money, sir, but when that is gone I shall need to earn something."

"That is no misfortune. It is a good thing for a boy to be

employed. Otherwise he is liable to get into mischief."

"At any rate, I shall be glad to find work, sir."

"Have you applied anywhere yet?"

Phil gave a little account of his unsuccessful applications, and the objections that had been made to him.

"Yes, yes," said the old gentleman thoughtfully, "more confidence is placed in a boy who lives with his parents."

The two walked on together until they reached Twelfth Street. It was a considerable walk, and Phil was surprised that his companion should walk, when he could easily have taken a Broadway stage, but the old gentleman explained this himself.

"I find it does me good," he said, "to spend some time in the open air, and even if walking tires me it does me good."

At Twelfth Street they turned off.

"I am living with a married niece," he said, "just on the other side of Fifth Avenue."

At the door of a handsome four-story house, with a brown-stone front, the old gentleman paused, and told Phil that this was his residence.

"Then, sir, I will bid you good-morning," said Phil.

"No, no; come in and lunch with me," said Mr. Carter hospitably.

He had, by the way, mentioned that his name was Oliver Carter, and that he was no longer actively engaged in business, but was a silent partner in the firm of which his nephew by marriage was the nominal head.

"Thank you, sir," answered Phil.

He was sure that the invitation was intended to be accepted, and he saw no reason why he should not accept it.

"Hannah," said the old gentleman to the servant who opened the door, "tell your mistress that I have brought a boy home to dinner with me."

"Yes, sir," answered Hannah, surveying Phil in some surprise.

"Come up to my room, my young friend," said Mr. Carter. "You may want to prepare for lunch."

Mr. Carter had two connecting rooms on the second floor, one of which he used as a bed-chamber. The furniture was handsome and costly, and Phil, who was not used to city houses, thought it luxurious.

Phil washed his face and hands, and brushed his hair. Then a bell rang, and following his new friend, he went down to lunch.

Lunch was set out in the front basement. When Phil and Mr. Carter entered the room a lady was standing by the fire, and beside her was a boy of about Phil's age. The lady was tall and slender, with light-brown hair and cold gray eyes.

"Lavinia," said Mr. Carter, "I have brought a young friend with me to lunch."

"So I see," answered the lady. "Has he been here before?"

"No; he is a new acquaintance."

"I would speak to him if I knew his name."

"His name is–"

Here the old gentleman hesitated, for in truth he had forgotten.

"Philip Brent."

"You may sit down here, Mr. Brent," said Mrs. Pitkin, for this was the lady's name.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"And so you made my uncle's acquaintance this morning?" she continued, herself taking a seat at the head of the table.

"Yes; he was of service to me," answered Mr. Carter for him. "I had lost my balance, and should have had a heavy fall if Philip had not come to my assistance."

"He was very kind, I am sure," said Mrs. Pitkin, but her tone was very cold.

"Philip," said Mr. Carter, "this is my grand-nephew, Alonzo Pitkin."

He indicated the boy already referred to.

"How do you do?" said Alonzo, staring at Philip not very cordially.

"Very well, thank you," answered Philip politely.

"Where do you live?" asked Alonzo, after a moment's hesitation.

"In Fifth Street."

"That's near the Bowery, isn't it?"

"Yes."

The boy shrugged his shoulders and exchanged a significant look with his mother.

Fifth Street was not a fashionable street—indeed quite the reverse, and Phil's answer showed that he was a nobody. Phil

himself had begun to suspect that he was unfashionably located, but he felt that until his circumstances improved he might as well remain where he was.

But, though he lived in an unfashionable street, it could not be said that Phil, in his table manners, showed any lack of good breeding. He seemed quite at home at Mrs. Pitkin's table, and in fact acted with greater propriety than Alonzo, who was addicted to fast eating and greediness.

"Couldn't you walk home alone, Uncle Oliver?" asked Mrs. Pitkin presently.

"Yes."

"Then it was a pity to trouble Mr. Brent to come with you."

"It was no trouble," responded Philip promptly, though he suspected that it was not consideration for him that prompted the remark.

"Yes, I admit that I was a little selfish in taking up my young friend's time," said the old gentleman cheerfully; "but I infer, from what he tells me, that it is not particularly valuable just now."

"Are you in a business position, Mr. Brent?" asked Mrs. Pitkin.

"No, madam. I was looking for a place this morning."

"Have you lived for some time in the city?"

"No; I came here only yesterday from the country."

"I think country boys are very foolish to leave good homes in the country to seek places in the city," said Mrs. Pitkin sharply.

"There may be circumstances, Lavinia, that make it advisable," suggested Mr. Carter, who, however, did not know Phil's reason for coming.

"No doubt; I understand that," answered Mrs. Pitkin, in a tone so significant that Phil wondered whether she thought he had got into any trouble at home.

"And besides, we can't judge for every one. So I hope Master Philip may find some good and satisfactory opening, now that he has reached the city."

After a short time, lunch, which in New York is generally a plain meal, was over, and Mr. Carter invited Philip to come upstairs again.

"I want to talk over your prospects, Philip," he said.

There was silence till after the two had left the room. Then Mrs. Pitkin said:

"Alonzo, I don't like this."

"What don't you like, ma?"

"Uncle bringing this boy home. It is very extraordinary, this sudden interest in a perfect stranger."

"Do you think he'll leave him any money?" asked Alonzo, betraying interest.

"I don't know what it may lead to, Lonny, but it don't look right. Such things have been known."

"I'd like to punch the boy's head," remarked Alonzo, with sudden hostility. "All uncle's money ought to come to us."

"So it ought, by rights," observed his mother.

“We must see that this boy doesn’t get any ascendency over him.”

Phil would have been very much amazed if he had overheard this conversation.

CHAPTER IX
THE OLD GENTLEMAN PROVES A FRIEND

The old gentleman sat down in an arm-chair and waved his hand toward a small rocking-chair, in which Phil seated himself.

"I conclude that you had a good reason for leaving home, Philip," said Mr. Carter, eying our hero with a keen, but friendly look.

"Yes, sir; since my father's death it has not been a home to me."

"Is there a step-mother in the case?" asked the old gentleman shrewdly.

"Yes, sir."

"Any one else?"

"She has a son."

"And you two don't agree?"

"You seem to know all about it, sir," said Phil, surprised.

"I know something of the world—that is all."

Phil began to think that Mr. Carter's knowledge of the world was very remarkable. He began to wonder whether he could know anything more—could suspect the secret which Mrs. Brent had communicated to him. Should he speak of it? He decided at any rate to wait, for Mr. Carter, though kind, was a comparative

stranger.

"Well," continued the old gentleman, "I won't inquire too minutely into the circumstances. You don't look like a boy that would take such an important step as leaving home without a satisfactory reason. The next thing is to help you."

Phil's courage rose as he heard these words. Mr. Carter was evidently a rich man, and he could help him if he was willing. So he kept silence, and let his new friend do the talking.

"You want a place," continued Mr. Carter. "Now, what are you fit for?"

"That is a hard question for me to answer, sir. I don't know."

"Have you a good education?"

"Yes, sir; and I know something of Latin and French besides."

"You can write a good hand?"

"Shall I show you, sir?"

"Yes; write a few lines at my private desk."

Phil did so, and handed the paper to Mr. Carter.

"Very good," said the old gentleman approvingly.

"That is in your favor. Are you good at accounts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Better still."

"Sit down there again," he continued. "I will give you a sum in interest."

Phil resumed his seat.

"What is the interest of eight hundred and forty-five dollars and sixty cents for four years, three months and twelve days, at

eight and one-half per cent?"

Phil's pen moved fast in perfect silence for five minutes. Then he announced the result.

"Let me look at the paper. I will soon tell you whether it is correct."

After a brief examination, for the old gentleman was himself an adept at figures, he said, with a beaming smile:

"It is entirely correct. You are a smart boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Phil, gratified.

"And you deserve a good place—better than you will probably get."

Phil listened attentively. The last clause was not quite so satisfactory.

"Yes," said Mr. Carter, evidently talking to himself, "I must get Pitkin to take him."

Phil knew that the lady whom he had already met was named Pitkin, and he rightly concluded that it was her husband who was meant.

"I hope he is more agreeable than his wife," thought Philip.

"Yes, Philip," said Mr. Carter, who had evidently made up his mind, "I will try to find you a place this afternoon.

"I shall be very much obliged, sir," said Philip gladly.

"I have already told you that my nephew and I are in business together, he being the active and I the silent partner. We do a general shipping business. Our store is on Franklin Street. I will give you a letter to my nephew and he will give you a place."

"Thank you, sir."

"Wait a minute and I will write the note."

Five minutes later Phil was on his way down town with his credentials in his pocket.

CHAPTER X
Phil CALLS ON MR. PITKIN

PHIL paused before an imposing business structure, and looked up to see if he could see the sign that would show him he had reached his destination.

He had not far to look. On the front of the building he saw in large letters the sign:

ENOCH PITKIN & CO.

In the door-way there was another sign, from which he learned that the firm occupied the second floor.

He went up-stairs, and opening a door, entered a spacious apartment which looked like a hive of industry. There were numerous clerks, counters piled with goods, and every indication that a prosperous business was being carried on.

The nearest person was a young man of eighteen, or perhaps more, with an incipient, straw-colored mustache, and a shock of hair of tow-color. This young man wore a variegated neck-tie, a stiff standing-collar, and a suit of clothes in the extreme of fashion.

Phil looked at him hesitatingly.

The young man observed the look, and asked condescendingly:

“What can I do for you, my son?”

Such an address from a person less than three years older than himself came near upsetting the gravity of Phil.

"Is Mr. Pitkin in?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Can I see him."

"I have no objection," remarked the young man facetiously.

"Where shall I find him?"

The youth indicated a small room partitioned off as a private office in the extreme end of the store.

"Thank you," said Phil, and proceeded to find his way to the office in question.

Arrived at the door, which was partly open, he looked in.

In an arm-chair sat a small man, with an erect figure and an air of consequence. He was not over forty-five, but looked older, for his cheeks were already seamed and his look was querulous. Cheerful natures do not so soon show signs of age as their opposites.

"Mr. Pitkin?" said Phil interrogatively.

"Well?" said the small man, frowning instinctively.

"I have a note for you, sir."

Phil stepped forward and handed the missive to Mr. Pitkin.

The latter opened it quickly and read as follows:

The boy who will present this to you did me a service this morning. He is in want of employment. He seems well educated, but if you can't offer him anything better than the post of errand boy, do so. I will guarantee that he will give satisfaction. You can

send him to the post-office, and to other offices on such errands as you may have. Pay him five dollars a week and charge that sum to me. Yours truly, OLIVER CARTER.

Mr. Pitkin's frown deepened as he read this note.

"Pish!" he ejaculated, in a tone which, though low, was audible to Phil. "Uncle Oliver must be crazy. What is your name?" he demanded fiercely, turning suddenly to Phil.

"Philip Brent."

"When did you meet—the gentleman who gave you this letter?"

Phil told him.

"Do you know what is in this letter?"

"I suppose, sir, it is a request that you give me a place."

"Did you read it?"

"No," answered Phil indignantly.

"Humph! He wants me to give you the place of errand boy."

"I will try to suit you, sir."

"When do you want to begin?"

"As soon as possible, sir."

"Come to-morrow morning, and report to me first."

"Another freak of Uncle Oliver's!" he muttered, as he turned his back upon Phil, and so signified that the interview was at an end.

CHAPTER XI
PHIL ENTERS UPON HIS DUTIES

Phil presented himself in good season the next morning at the store in Franklin Street. As he came up in one direction the youth whom he had seen in the store the previous day came up in the opposite direction. The latter was evidently surprised.

"Halloo, Johnny!" said he. "What's brought you here again?"

"Business," answered Phil.

"Going to buy out the firm?" inquired the youth jocosely.

"Not to-day."

"Some other day, then," said the young man, laughing as if he had said a very witty thing.

As Phil didn't know that this form of expression, slightly varied, had become a popular phrase of the day, he did not laugh.

"Do you belong to the church?" asked the youth, stopping short in his own mirth.

"What makes you ask?"

"Because you don't laugh."

"I would if I saw anything to laugh at."

"Come, that's hard on me. Honor bright, have you come to do any business with us?"

It is rather amusing to see how soon the cheapest clerk talks of "us," quietly identifying himself with the firm that employs

him. Not that I object to it. Often it implies a personal interest in the success and prosperity of the firm, which makes a clerk more valuable. This was not, however, the case with G. Washington Wilbur, the young man who was now conversing with Phil, as will presently appear.

"I am going to work here," answered Phil simply.

"Going to work here!" repeated Mr. Wilbur in surprise. "Has old Pitkin engaged you?"

"Mr. Pitkin engaged me yesterday," Phil replied.

"I didn't know he wanted a boy. What are you to do?"

"Go to the post-office, bank, and so on."

"You're to be errand boy, then?"

"Yes."

"That's the way I started," said Mr. Wilbur patronizingly.

"What are you now?"

"A salesman. I wouldn't like to be back in my old position. What wages are you going to get?"

"Five dollars."

"Five dollars a week!" ejaculated Mr. G. Washington Wilbur, in amazement. "Come, you're chaffing."

"Why should I do that? Is that anything remarkable?"

"I should say it was," answered Mr. Wilbur slowly.

"Didn't you get as much when you were errand boy?"

"I only got two dollars and a half. Did Pitkin tell you he would pay you five dollars a week."

"No; Mr Carter told me so."

"The old gentleman—Mr. Pitkin's uncle?"

"Yes. It was at his request that Mr. Pitkin took me on."

Mr. Wilbur looked grave.

"It's a shame!" he commenced.

"What is a shame; that I should get five dollars a week?"

"No, but that I should only get a dollar a week more than an errand boy. I'm worth every cent of ten dollars a week, but the old man only gives me six. It hardly keeps me in gloves and cigars."

"Won't he give you any more?"

"No; only last month I asked him for a raise, and he told me if I wasn't satisfied I might go elsewhere."

"You didn't?"

"No, but I mean to soon. I will show old Pitkin that he can't keep a man of my experience for such a paltry salary. I dare say that Denning or Claflin would be glad to have me, and pay me what I am worth."

Phil did not want to laugh, but when Mr. Wilbur, who looked scarcely older than himself, and was in appearance but a callow youth, referred to himself as a man of experience he found it hard to resist.

"Hadn't we better be going up stairs?" asked Phil.

"All right. Follow me," said Mr. Wilbur, "and I'll take you to the superintendent of the room."

"I am to report to Mr. Pitkin himself, I believe."

"He won't be here yet awhile," said Wilbur.

But just then up came Mr. Wilbur himself, fully half an hour

earlier than usual.

Phil touched his hat politely, and said:

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning!" returned his employer, regarding him sharply. "Are you the boy I hired yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come up-stairs, then."

Phil followed Mr. Pitkin up-stairs, and they walked together through the sales-room.

"I hope you understand," said Mr. Pitkin brusquely, "that I have engaged you at the request of Mr. Carter and to oblige him."

"I feel grateful to Mr. Carter," said Phil, not quite knowing what was coming next.

"I shouldn't myself have engaged a boy of whom I knew nothing, and who could give me no city references."

"I hope you won't be disappointed in me," said Phil.

"I hope not," answered Mr. Pitkin, in a tone which seemed to imply that he rather expected to be.

Phil began to feel uncomfortable. It seemed evident that whatever he did would be closely scrutinized, and that in an unfavorable spirit.

Mr. Pitkin paused before a desk at which was standing a stout man with grayish hair.

"Mr. Sanderson," he said, "this is the new errand boy. His name is—what is it, boy?"

"Philip Brent."

"You will give him something to do. Has the mail come in?"

"No; we haven't sent to the post-office yet."

"You may send this boy at once."

Mr. Sanderson took from the desk a key and handed it to Philip.

"That is the key to our box," he said. "Notice the number—534. Open it and bring the mail. Don't loiter on the way."

"Yes, sir."

Philip took the key and left the warehouse. When he reached the street he said to himself:

"I wonder where the post-office is?"

He did not like to confess to Mr. Sanderson that he did not know, for it would probably have been considered a disqualification for the post which he was filling.

"I had better walk to Broadway," he said to himself. "I suppose the post-office must be on the principal street."

In this Phil was mistaken. At that time the post-office was on Nassau Street, in an old church which had been utilized for a purpose very different from the one to which it had originally been devoted.

Reaching Broadway, Phil was saluted by a bootblack, with a grimy but honest-looking face.

"Shine your boots, mister?" said the boy, with a grin.

"Not this morning."

"Some other morning, then?"

"Yes," answered Phil.

"Sorry you won't give me a job," said the bootblack. "My taxes comes due to-day, and I ain't got enough to pay 'em."

Phil was amused, for his new acquaintance scarcely looked like a heavy taxpayer.

"Do you pay a big tax?" he asked.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.