

ALGER HORATIO JR.

BRAVE AND BOLD; OR,
THE FORTUNES OF
ROBERT RUSHTON

Horatio Alger
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Fortunes of Robert Rushton

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CHAPTER I. THE YOUNG RIVALS

The main schoolroom in the Millville Academy was brilliantly lighted, and the various desks were occupied by boys and girls of different ages from ten to eighteen, all busily writing under the general direction of Professor George W. Granville, Instructor in Plain and Ornamental Penmanship.

Professor Granville, as he styled himself, was a traveling teacher, and generally had two or three evening schools in progress in different places at the same time. He was really a very good penman, and in a course of twelve lessons, for which he charged the very moderate price of a dollar, not, of course, including stationery, he contrived to impart considerable instruction, and such pupils as chose to learn were likely to profit by his instructions. His venture in Millville had been unusually successful. There were a hundred pupils on his list, and there had been no disturbance during the course of lessons.

At nine precisely, Professor Granville struck a small bell, and said, in rather a nasal voice:

"You will now stop writing."

There was a little confusion as the books were closed and the pens were wiped.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the professor, placing one arm under his coat tails and extending the other in an oratorical attitude, "this evening completes the course of lessons which I have had the honor and pleasure of giving you. I have endeavored to impart to you an easy and graceful penmanship, such as may be a recommendation to you in after life. It gives me pleasure to state that many of you have made great proficiency, and equaled my highest expectations. There are others, perhaps, who have not been fully sensible of the privileges which they enjoyed. I would say to you all that perfection is not yet attained. You will need practice to reap the full benefit of my instructions. Should my life be spared, I shall hope next winter to give another course of writing lessons in this place, and I hope I may then have the pleasure of meeting you again as pupils. Let me say, in conclusion, that I thank you for your patronage and for your good behavior during this course of lessons, and at the same time I bid you good-by."

With the closing words, Professor Granville made a low bow, and placed his hand on his heart, as he had done probably fifty times before, on delivering the same speech, which was the stereotyped form in which he closed his evening schools.

There was a thumping of feet, mingled with a clapping of hands, as the professor closed his speech, and a moment later a boy of sixteen, occupying one of the front seats, rose, and, advancing with easy self-possession, drew from his pocket a gold pencil case, containing a pencil and pen, and spoke as follows:

"Professor Granville, the members of your writing class, desirous of testifying their appreciation of your services as teacher, have contributed to buy this gold pencil case, which, in their name, I have great pleasure in presenting to you. Will you receive it with our best wishes for your continued success as a teacher of penmanship?"

With these words, he handed the pencil to the professor and returned to his seat.

The applause that ensued was terrific, causing the dust to rise from the floor where it had lain undisturbed till the violent attack of two hundred feet raised it in clouds, through which the figure of the professor was still visible, with his right arm again extended.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he commenced, "I cannot give fitting utterance to the emotions that fill my heart at this most unexpected tribute of regard and mark of appreciation of my humble services. Believe me, I shall always cherish it as a most valued possession, and the sight of it will recall the pleasant, and, I hope, profitable hours which we have passed together this winter. To you, in particular, Mr. Rushton, I express my thanks for the touching and eloquent manner in which you have made

the presentation, and, in parting with you all, I echo your own good wishes, and shall hope that you may be favored with an abundant measure of health and prosperity."

This speech was also vociferously applauded. It was generally considered impromptu, but was, in truth, as stereotyped as the other. Professor Granville had on previous occasions been the recipient of similar testimonials, and he had found it convenient to have a set form of acknowledgment. He was wise in this, for it is a hard thing on the spur of the moment suitably to offer thanks for an unexpected gift.

"The professor made a bully speech," said more than one after the exercises were over.

"So did Bob Rushton," said Edward Kent.

"I didn't see anything extraordinary in what he said," sneered Halbert Davis. "It seemed to me very commonplace."

"Perhaps you could do better yourself, Halbert," said Kent.

"Probably I could," said Halbert, haughtily.

"Why didn't you volunteer, then?"

"I didn't care to have anything to do with it," returned Halbert, scornfully.

"That's lucky," remarked Edward, "as there was no chance of your getting appointed."

"Do you mean to insult me?" demanded Halbert, angrily.

"No, I was only telling the truth."

Halbert turned away, too disgusted to make any reply. He was a boy of sixteen, of slender form and sallow complexion,

dressed with more pretension than taste. Probably there was no boy present whose suit was of such fine material as his. But something more than fine clothes is needed to give a fine appearance, and Halbert's mean and insignificant features were far from rendering him attractive, and despite the testimony of his glass, Halbert considered himself a young man of distinguished appearance, and was utterly blind to his personal defects.

What contributed to feed his vanity was his position as the son of the richest man in Millville. Indeed, his father was superintendent, and part owner, of the great brick factory on the banks of the river, in which hundreds found employment. Halbert found plenty to fawn upon him, and was in the habit of strutting about the village, swinging a light cane, neither a useful nor an ornamental member of the community.

After his brief altercation with Edward Kent, he drew on a pair of kid gloves, and looked about the room for Hester Paine, the lawyer's daughter, the reigning belle among the girls of her age in Millville. The fact was, that Halbert was rather smitten with Hester, and had made up his mind to escort her home on this particular evening, never doubting that his escort would be thankfully accepted.

But he was not quick enough, Robert Rushton had already approached Hester, and said, "Miss Hester, will you allow me to see you home?"

"I shall be very glad to have your company, Robert," said

Hester.

Robert was a general favorite. He had a bright, attractive face, strong and resolute, when there was occasion, frank and earnest at all times. His clothes were neat and clean, but of a coarse, mixed cloth, evidently of low price, suiting his circumstances, for he was poor, and his mother and himself depended mainly upon his earnings in the factory for the necessaries of life. Hester Paine, being the daughter of a well-to-do lawyer, belonged to the village aristocracy, and so far as worldly wealth was concerned, was far above Robert Rushton. But such considerations never entered her mind, as she frankly, and with real pleasure, accepted the escort of the poor factory boy.

Scarcely had she done so when Halbert Davis approached, smoothing his kid gloves, and pulling at his necktie.

"Miss Hester," he said, consequentially, "I shall have great pleasure in escorting you home."

"Thank you," said Hester, "but I am engaged."

"Engaged!" repeated Halbert, "and to whom?"

"Robert Rushton has kindly offered to take me home."

"Robert Rushton!" said Halbert, disdainfully. "Never mind. I will relieve him of his duty."

"Thank you, Halbert," said Robert, who was standing by, "I won't trouble you. I will see Miss Paine home."

"Your escort was accepted because you were the first to offer it," said Halbert.

"Miss Hester," said Robert, "I will resign in favor of Halbert,

if you desire it."

"I don't desire it," said the young girl, promptly. "Come, Robert, I am ready if you are."

With a careless nod to Halbert, she took Robert's arm, and left the schoolhouse. Mortified and angry, Halbert looked after them, muttering, "I'll teach the factory boy a lesson. He'll be sorry for his impudence yet."

CHAPTER II.

PUNISHING A COWARD

Mrs. Rushton and her son occupied a little cottage, not far from the factory. Behind it were a few square rods of garden, in which Robert raised a few vegetables, working generally before or after his labor in the factory. They lived in a very plain way, but Mrs. Rushton was an excellent manager, and they had never lacked the common comforts of life. The husband and father had followed the sea. Two years before, he left the port of Boston as captain of the ship *Norman*, bound for Calcutta. Not a word had reached his wife and son since then, and it was generally believed that it had gone to the bottom of the sea. Mrs. Rushton regarded herself as a widow, and Robert, entering the factory, took upon himself the support of the family. He was now able to earn six dollars a week, and this, with his mother's earnings in braiding straw for a hat manufacturer in a neighboring town, supported them, though they were unable to lay up anything. The price of a term at the writing school was so small that Robert thought he could indulge himself in it, feeling that a good handwriting was a valuable acquisition, and might hereafter procure him employment in some business house. For the present, he could not do better than to retain his place in the factory.

Robert was up at six the next morning. He spent half an hour

in sawing and splitting wood enough to last his mother through the day, and then entered the kitchen, where breakfast was ready.

"I am a little late this morning, mother," he said. "I must hurry down my breakfast, or I shall be late at the factory, and that will bring twenty-five cents fine."

"It would be a pity to get fined, but you mustn't eat too fast. It is not healthful."

"I've got a pretty good digestion, mother," said Robert, laughing. "Nothing troubles me."

"Still, you mustn't trifle with it. Do you remember, Robert," added his mother, soberly, "it is just two years to-day since your poor father left us for Boston to take command of his ship?"

"So it is, mother; I had forgotten it."

"I little thought then that I should never see him again!" and Mrs. Rushton sighed.

"It is strange we have never heard anything of the ship."

"Not so strange, Robert. It must have gone down when no other vessel was in sight."

"I wish we knew the particulars, mother. Sometimes I think father may have escaped from the ship in a boat, and may be still alive."

"I used to think it possible, Robert; but I have given up all hopes of it. Two years have passed, and if your father were alive, we should have seen him or heard from him ere this."

"I am afraid you are right. There's one thing I can't help thinking of, mother," said Robert, thoughtfully. "How is it that

father left no property? He received a good salary, did he not?"

"Yes; he had received a good salary for several years."

"He did not spend the whole of it, did he?"

"No, I am sure he did not. Your father was never extravagant."

"Didn't he ever speak to you on the subject?"

"He was not in the habit of speaking of his business; but just before he went away, I remember him telling me that he had some money invested, and hoped to add more to it during the voyage which proved so fatal to him."

"He didn't tell you how much it was, nor how it was invested?"

"No; that was all he said. Since his death, I have looked everywhere in the house for some papers which would throw light upon it; but I have been able to find nothing. I do not care so much for myself, but I should be glad if you did not have to work so hard."

"Never mind me, mother; I'm young and strong, I can stand work—but it's hard on you."

"I am rich in having a good son, Robert."

"And I in a good mother," said Robert, affectionately. "And, now, to change the subject. I suspect I have incurred the enmity of Halbert Davis."

"How is that?" asked Mrs. Rushton.

"I went home with Hester Paine, last evening, from writing school. Just as she had accepted my escort, Halbert came up, and in a condescending way, informed her that he would see her home."

"What did she say?"

"She told him she was engaged to me. He said, coolly, that he would relieve me of the duty, but I declined his obliging offer. He looked mad enough, I can tell you. He's full of self-conceit, and I suppose he wondered how any one could prefer me to him."

"I am sorry you have incurred his enmity."

"I didn't lose any sleep by it."

"You know his father is the superintendent of the factory."

"Halbert isn't."

"But he may prejudice his father against you, and get you discharged."

"I don't think he would be quite so mean as that. We won't borrow trouble, mother. But time's up, and I must go."

Robert seized his hat and hurried to the mill. He was in his place when the great factory bell stopped ringing on the stroke of seven, and so escaped the fine, which would have cut off one-quarter of a day's pay.

Meanwhile, Halbert Davis had passed an uncomfortable and restless night. He had taken a fancy to Hester Paine, and he had fully determined to escort her home on the previous evening. As she was much sought after among her young companions, it would have gratified his pride to have it known that she had accepted his company. But he had been cut out, and by Robert Rushton—one of his father's factory hands. This made his jealousy more intolerable, and humiliated his pride, and set him to work devising schemes for punishing Robert's presumption.

He felt that it was Robert's duty, even though he had been accepted, to retire from the field as soon as his, Halbert's, desire was known. This Robert had expressly declined to do, and Halbert felt very indignant. He made up his mind that he would give Robert a chance to apologize, and if he declined to do so he would do what he could to get him turned out of the factory.

At twelve o'clock the factory bell pealed forth a welcome sound to the hundreds who were busily at work within the great building. It was the dinner hour, and a throng of men, women and children poured out of the great portals and hastened to their homes or boarding houses to dine. Among them was Robert Rushton. As he was walking homeward with his usual quick, alert step, he came upon Halbert Davis, at the corner of the street.

Halbert was dressed carefully, and, as usual, was swinging his cane in his gloved hand. Robert would have passed him with a nod, but Halbert, who was waiting for him, called out:

"I say, you fellow, stop a minute. I want to speak to you."

"Are you addressing me?" asked Robert, with a pride as great as his own.

"Yes."

"Then you had better mend your manners."

"What do you mean?" demanded Halbert, his sallow face slightly flushing.

"My name is Robert Rushton. Call me by either of these names when you speak to me, and don't say 'you fellow.'"

"It seems to me," sneered Halbert, "that you are putting on

airs for a factory boy."

"I am a factory boy, I acknowledge, and am not ashamed to acknowledge it. Is this all you have to say to me? If so, I will pass on, as I am in haste."

"I have something else to say to you. You were impudent to me last evening."

"Was I? Tell me how."

"Did you not insist on going home with Hester Paine, when I had offered my escort?"

"What of that?"

"You forget your place."

"My place was at Hester Paine's side, since she had accepted my escort."

"It was very presumptuous in a factory boy like you offering your escort to a young lady like Miss Paine."

"I don't see it," said Robert, independently; "and I don't think it struck Hester in that light. We had a very agreeable walk."

Halbert was provoked and inflamed with jealousy, and the look with which he regarded our hero was by no means friendly.

"You mustn't regard yourself as Miss Paine's equal because she condescended to walk with you," he said. "You had better associate with those of your own class hereafter, and not push yourself in where your company is not agreeable."

"Keep your advice to yourself, Halbert Davis," said Robert, hotly, for he felt the insult conveyed in these words. "If I am a factory boy I don't intend to submit to your impertinence; and I

advise you to be careful what you say. As to Miss Hester Paine, I shall not ask your permission to walk with her, but shall do so whenever she chooses to accept my escort. Has she authorized you to speak for her?"

"No; but—"

"Then wait till she does."

Halbert was so incensed that, forgetting Robert's superior strength, evident enough to any one who saw the two, one with his well-knit, vigorous figure, the other slender and small of frame, he raised his cane and struck our hero smartly upon the arm.

In a moment the cane was wrested from his grasp and applied to his own person with a sharp, stinging blow which broke the fragile stick in two.

Casting the pieces upon the ground at his feet, Robert said, coolly:

"Two can play at that game, Halbert Davis. When you want another lesson come to me."

He passed his discomfited antagonist and hastened to the little cottage, where his mother was wondering what made him so much behind time.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPECIAL DEPOSIT

Stung with mortification and more incensed against Robert than ever, Halbert hastened home. The house in which he lived was the largest and most pretentious in Millville—a large, square house, built in modern style, and with modern improvements, accessible from the street by a semi-circular driveway terminating in two gates, one at each end of the spacious lawn that lay in front. The house had been built only three years, and was the show-place of the village.

Halbert entered the house, and throwing his hat down on a chair in the hall, entered the dining-room, his face still betraying his angry feelings.

"What's the matter, Halbert?" asked his mother, looking up as he entered.

"Do you see this?" said Halbert, displaying the pieces of his cane.

"How did you break it?"

"I didn't break it."

"How came it broken, then?"

"Robert Rushton broke it."

"The widow Rushton's son?"

"Yes; he's a low scoundrel," said Halbert bitterly.

"What made him break it?"

"He struck me with it hard enough to break it, and then threw the pieces on the ground. I wouldn't mind it so much if he were not a low factory boy, unworthy of a gentleman's attention."

"How dared he touch you?" asked Mrs. Davis, angrily.

"Oh, he's impudent enough for anything. He walked home with Hester Paine last evening from the writing school. I suppose she didn't know how to refuse him. I met him just now and told him he ought to know his place better than to offer his escort to a young lady like Hester. He got mad and struck me."

"It was very proper advice," said Mrs. Davis, who resembled her son in character and disposition, and usually sided with him in his quarrels. "I should think Hester would have more sense than to encourage a boy in his position."

"I have no doubt she was bored by his company," said Halbert, who feared on the contrary that Hester was only too well pleased with his rival, and hated him accordingly; "only she was too good-natured to say so."

"The boy must be a young brute to turn upon you so violently."

"That's just what he is."

"He ought to be punished for it."

"I'll tell you how it can be done," said Halbert. "Just you speak to father about it, and get him dismissed from the factory."

"Then he is employed in the factory?"

"Yes. He and his mother are as poor as poverty, and that's about all they have to live upon; yet he goes round with his head

up as if he were a prince, and thinks himself good enough to walk home with Hester Paine."

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous."

"Then you'll speak to father about it, won't you?"

"Yes; I'll speak to him to-night. He's gone away for the day."

"That'll pay me for my broken cane," said Halbert, adding, in a tone of satisfaction: "I shall be glad to see him walking round the streets in rags. Perhaps he'll be a little more respectful then."

Meanwhile Robert decided not to mention to his mother his encounter with the young aristocrat. He knew that it would do no good, and would only make her feel troubled. He caught the malignant glance of Halbert on parting, and he knew him well enough to suspect that he would do what he could to have him turned out of the factory. This would certainly be a serious misfortune.

Probably the entire income upon which his mother and himself had to depend did not exceed eight dollars a week, and of this he himself earned six. They had not more than ten dollars laid by for contingencies, and if he were deprived of work, that would soon melt away. The factory furnished about the only avenue of employment open in Millville, and if he were discharged it would be hard to find any other remunerative labor.

At one o'clock Robert went back to the factory rather thoughtful. He thought it possible that he might hear something before evening of the dismissal which probably awaited him, but the afternoon passed and he heard nothing.

On leaving the factory, he chanced to see Halbert again on the sidewalk a little distance in front and advancing toward him. This time, however, the young aristocrat did not desire a meeting, for, with a dark scowl, he crossed the street in time to avoid it.

"Is he going to pass it over, I wonder?" thought Robert. "Well, I won't borrow trouble. If I am discharged I think I can manage to pick up a living somehow. I've got two strong arms, and if I don't find something to do, it won't be for the want of trying."

Two years before, Captain Rushton, on the eve of sailing upon what proved to be his last voyage, called in the evening at the house of Mr. Davis, the superintendent of the Millville factory. He found the superintendent alone, his wife and Halbert having gone out for the evening. He was seated at a table with a variety of papers spread out before him. These papers gave him considerable annoyance. He was preparing his semi-annual statement of account, and found himself indebted to the corporation in a sum three thousand dollars in excess of the funds at his command. He had been drawn into the whirlpool of speculation, and, through a New York broker, had invested considerable amounts in stocks, which had depreciated in value. In doing this he had made use, to some extent, of the funds of the corporation, which he was now at a loss how to replace. He was considering where he could apply for a temporary loan of three thousand dollars when the captain entered. Under the circumstances he was sorry for the intrusion.

"Good-evening, Captain Rushton," he said, with a forced

smile. "Sit down. I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, Mr. Davis. It will be the last call I shall make upon you for a considerable time."

"Indeed—how is that?"

"I sail to-morrow for Calcutta."

"Indeed—that is a long voyage."

"Yes, it takes considerable time. I don't like to leave my wife and boy for so long, but we sailors have to suffer a good many privations."

"True; I hardly think I should enjoy such a life."

"Still," said the captain, "it has its compensations. I like the free, wild life of the sea. The ocean, even in its stormiest aspects, has a charm for me."

"It hasn't much for me," said the superintendent, shrugging his shoulders. "Seasickness takes away all the romance that poets have invested it with."

Captain Rushton laughed.

"Seasickness!" he repeated. "Yes, that is truly a disagreeable malady. I remember once having a lady of rank as passenger on board my ship—a Lady Alice Graham. She was prostrated by seasickness, which is no respecter of persons, and a more forlorn, unhappy mortal I never expect to see. She would have been glad, I am convinced, to exchange places with her maid, who seemed to thrive upon the sea air."

"I wish you a prosperous voyage, captain."

"Thank you. If things go well, I expect to come home with

quite an addition to my little savings. And that brings me to the object of my visit this evening. You must know, Mr. Davis, I have saved up in the last ten years a matter of five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars!" repeated the superintendent, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, it has been saved by economy and self-denial. Wouldn't my wife be surprised if she knew her husband were so rich?"

"Your wife doesn't know of it?" asked the superintendent, surprised.

"Not at all. I have told her I have something, and she may suppose I have a few hundred dollars, but I have never told her how much. I want to surprise her some day."

"Just so."

"Now, Mr. Davis, for the object of my errand. I am no financier, and know nothing of investments. I suppose you do. I want you to take this money, and take care of it, while I am gone on my present voyage. I meant to make inquiries myself for a suitable investment, but I have been summoned by my owners to leave at a day's notice, and have no time for it. Can you oblige me by taking care of the money?"

"Certainly, captain," said the superintendent, briskly. "I shall have great pleasure in obliging an old friend."

"I am much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. I have large sums of my own to invest, and it is no extra trouble to look after your money. Am I to pay the interest to your wife?"

"No. I have left a separate fund in a savings bank for her to draw upon. As I told you, I want to surprise her by and by. So not a word, if you please, about this deposit."

"Your wishes shall be regarded," said the superintendent. "Have you brought the money with you?"

"Yes," said the captain, drawing from his pocket a large wallet. "I have got the whole amount here in large bills. Count it, if you please, and see that it is all right."

The superintendent took the roll of bills from the hands of his neighbor, and counted them over twice.

"It is quite right," he said. "Here are five thousand dollars. Now let me write you a receipt for them."

He drew before him a sheet of paper, and dipping his pen in the inkstand, wrote a receipt in the usual form, which he handed back to the captain, who received it and put it back in his wallet.

"Now," said the captain, in a tone of satisfaction, "my most important business is transacted. You will keep this money, investing it according to your best judgment. If anything should happen to me," he added, his voice faltering a little, "you will pay it over to my wife and child."

"Assuredly," said the superintendent; "but don't let us think of such a sad contingency. I fully expect to pay it back into your own hands with handsome interest."

"Let us hope so," said the captain, recovering his cheerfulness. "Our destinies are in the hands of a kind Providence. And now good-by! I leave early to-morrow morning, and I must pass the

rest of the evening with my own family."

"Good-night, captain," said the superintendent, accompanying him to the door. "I renew my wish that you have a prosperous and profitable voyage, and be restored in good time to your family and friends."

"Amen!" said the captain.

The superintendent went back to his study, his heart lightened of its anxiety.

"Could anything be more fortunate?" he ejaculated, "This help comes to me just when it is most needed. Thanks to my special deposit, I can make my semi-annual settlement, and have two thousand dollars over. It's lucky the captain knows nothing of my Wall Street speculations. He might not have been quite so ready to leave his money in my hands. It's not a bad thing to be a banker," and he rubbed his hands together with hilarity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

When the superintendent accepted Captain Rushton's money, he did not intend to act dishonestly. He hailed it as a present relief, though he supposed he should have to repay it some time. His accounts being found correct, he went on with his speculations. In these he met with varying success. But on the whole he found himself no richer, while he was kept in a constant fever of anxiety.

After some months, he met Mrs. Rushton in the street one day.

"Have you heard from your husband, Mrs. Rushton?" he inquired.

"No, Mr. Davis, not yet. I am beginning to feel anxious."

"How long has he been gone?"

"Between seven and eight months."

"The voyage is a long one. There are many ways of accounting for his silence."

"He would send by some passing ship. He has been to Calcutta before, but I have never had to wait so long for a letter."

The superintendent uttered some commonplace phrases of assurance, but in his own heart there sprang up a wicked hope that the *Norman* would never reach port, and that he might never set eyes on Captain Rushton again. For in that case, he

reflected, it would be perfectly safe for him to retain possession of the money with which he had been intrusted. The captain had assured him that neither his wife nor son knew aught of his savings. Who then could detect his crime? However, it was not yet certain that the *Norman* was lost. He might yet have to repay the money.

Six months more passed, and still no tidings of the ship or its commander. Even the most sanguine now gave her up for lost, including the owners. The superintendent called upon them, ostensibly in behalf of Mrs. Rushton, and learned that they had but slender hopes of her safety. It was a wicked thing to rejoice over such a calamity, but his affairs were now so entangled that a sudden demand for the five thousand dollars would have ruined him. He made up his mind to say nothing of the special deposit, though he knew the loss of it would leave the captain's family in the deepest poverty. To soothe his conscience—for he was wholly destitute of one—he received Robert into the factory, and the boy's wages, as we already know, constituted their main support.

Such was the state of things at the commencement of our story.

When the superintendent reached home in the evening, he was at once assailed by his wife and son, who gave a highly colored account of the insult which Halbert had received from Robert Rushton.

"Did he have any reason for striking you, Halbert?" asked the

superintendent.

"No," answered Halbert, unblushingly. "He's an impudent young scoundrel, and puts on as many airs as if he were a prince instead of a beggar."

"He is not a beggar."

"He is a low factory boy, and that is about the same."

"By no means. He earns his living by honest industry."

"It appears to me," put in Mrs. Davis, "that you are taking the part of this boy who has insulted your son in such an outrageous manner."

"How am I doing it? I am only saying he is not a beggar."

"He is far below Halbert in position, and that is the principal thing."

It occurred to the superintendent that should he make restitution Robert Rushton would be quite as well off as his own son, but of course he could not venture to breathe a hint of this to his wife. It was the secret knowledge of the deep wrong which he had done to the Rushtons that now made him unwilling to oppress him further.

"It seems to me," he said, "you are making too much of this matter. It is only a boyish quarrel."

"A boyish quarrel!" retorted Mrs. Davis, indignantly. "You have a singular way of standing by your son, Mr. Davis. A low fellow insults and abuses him, and you exert yourself to mate excuses for him."

"You misapprehend me, my dear."

"Don't 'my dear' me," said the exasperated lady. "I thought you would be as angry as I am, but you seem to take the whole thing very coolly, upon my word!"

Mrs. Davis had a sharp temper and a sharp tongue, and her husband stood considerably in awe of both. He had more than once been compelled to yield to them, and he saw that he must make some concession to order to keep the peace.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Want you to do! I should think that was plain enough."

"I will send for the boy and reprimand him."

"Reprimand him!" repeated the lady, contemptuously. "And what do you think he will care for that?"

"More than you think, perhaps."

"Stuff and nonsense! He'll be insulting Halbert again to-morrow."

"I am not so sure that Halbert is not in fault in some way."

"Of course, you are ready to side with a stranger against your own son."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the superintendent, submissively.

"Discharge the boy from your employment," said his wife, promptly.

"But how can he and his mother live?—they depend on his wages."

"That is their affair. He ought to have thought of that before he raised his hand against Halbert."

"I cannot do what you wish," said the superintendent, with some firmness, for he felt that it would indeed be a piece of meanness to eject from the factory the boy whom he had already so deeply wronged; "but I will send for young Rushton and require him to apologize to Halbert."

"And if he won't do it?" demanded Halbert.

"Then I will send him away."

"Will you promise that, father?" asked Halbert, eagerly.

"Yes," said Mr. Davis, rather reluctantly.

"All right!" thought Halbert; "I am satisfied; for I know he never will consent to apologize."

Halbert had good reason for this opinion, knowing, as he did, that he had struck the first blow, a circumstance he had carefully concealed from his father. Under the circumstances he knew very well that his father would be called upon to redeem his promise.

The next morning, at the regular hour, our hero went to the factory, and taking his usual place, set to work. An hour passed, and nothing was said to him. He began to think that Halbert, feeling that he was the aggressor, had resolved to let the matter drop.

But he was speedily undeceived.

At a quarter after eight the superintendent made his appearance, and after a brief inspection of the work, retired to his private office. Ten minutes later, the foreman of the room in which he was employed came up to Robert and touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Davis wishes to see you in his office," he said.

"Now for it!" thought Robert, as he left his work and made his way, through the deafening clamor of the machinery, to the superintendent's room.

CHAPTER V. DISCHARGED

The superintendent sat at an office table writing a letter. He did not at first look up, but kept on with his employment. He had some remnants of conscience left, and he shrank from the task his wife had thrust upon him.

"Mr. Baker tells me you wish to see me, Mr. Davis," said Robert, who had advanced into the office, by way of calling his attention.

"Yes," said the superintendent, laying down his pen, and turning half round; "I hear a bad account of you, Rushton."

"In what way, sir?" asked our hero, returning his look fearlessly.

"I hear that you have been behaving like a young ruffian," said Mr. Davis, who felt that he must make out a strong case to justify him in dismissing Robert from the factory.

"This is a serious charge, Mr. Davis," said Robert, gravely, "and I hope you will be kind enough to let me know what I have done, and the name of my accuser."

"I mean to do so. Probably it will be enough to say that your accuser is my son, Halbert."

"I supposed so. I had a difficulty with Halbert yesterday, but I consider he was in fault."

"He says you insulted and struck him."

"I did not insult him. The insult came from him."

"Did you strike him?"

"Yes, but not until he had struck me first."

"He didn't mention this, but even if he had you should not have struck him back."

"Why not?" asked Robert.

"You should have reported the affair to me."

"And allowed him to keep on striking me?"

"You must have said something to provoke him," continued the superintendent, finding it a little difficult to answer this question, "or he would not have done it."

"If you will allow me," said Robert, "I will give you an account of the whole affair."

"Go on," said the superintendent, rather unwillingly, for he strongly suspected that our hero would be able to justify himself, and so render dismissal more difficult.

"Halbert took offense because I accompanied Hester Paine home from the writing school, evening before last, though I did with the young lady's permission, as he knew. He met me yesterday at twelve o'clock, as I was going home to dinner, and undertook to lecture me on my presumption in offering my escort to one so much above me. He also taunted me with being a factory boy. I told him to keep his advice to himself, as I should not ask his permission when I wanted to walk, with Hester Paine. Then he became enraged, and struck me with his cane. I took it

from him and returned the blow, breaking the cane in doing it."

"Ahem!" said the superintendent, clearing his throat; "you must have been very violent."

"I don't think I was, sir. I struck him a smart blow, but the cane was very light and easily broken."

"You were certainly very violent," continued Mr. Davis, resolved to make a point of this. "Halbert did not break the cane when he struck you."

"He struck the first blow."

"That does not alter the question of the amount of violence, which was evidently without justification. You must have been in a great passion."

"I don't think I was in any greater passion than Halbert."

"In view of the violence you made use of, I consider that you owe my son an apology."

"An apology!" repeated Robert, whose astonishment was apparent in his tone.

"I believe I spoke plainly," said the superintendent, irritably.

"If any apology is to be made," said our hero, firmly, "it ought to come from Halbert to me."

"How do you make that out?"

"He gave me some impertinent advice, and, because I did not care to take it, he struck me."

"And you seized his cane in a fury, and broke it in returning the blow."

"I acknowledge that I broke the cane," said Robert; "and I

suppose it is only right that I should pay for it. I am willing to do that, but not to apologize."

"That will not be sufficient," said the superintendent, who knew that payment for the cane would fall far short of satisfying his wife or Halbert. "The cost of the cane was a trifle, and I am willing to buy him another, but I cannot consent that my son should be subjected to such rude violence, without an apology from the offender. If I passed this over, you might attack him again to-morrow."

"I am not in the habit of attacking others without cause," said Robert, proudly. "If Halbert will let me alone, or treat me with civility, he may be sure that I shall not trouble him."

"You are evading the main point, Rushton," said the superintendent. "I have required you to apologize to my son, and I ask you for the last time whether you propose to comply with my wishes."

"No, sir," said Robert, boldly.

"Do you know to whom you are speaking, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am not only the father of the boy you have assaulted, but I am also the superintendent of this factory, and your employer."

"I am aware of that, sir."

"I can discharge you from the factory."

"I know you can," said Robert.

"Of course, I should be sorry to resort to such an extreme measure, but, if you defy my authority, I may be compelled to

do so."

So the crisis had come. Robert saw that he must choose between losing his place and a humiliating apology. Between the two he did not for a moment hesitate.

"Mr. Davis," he said, boldly and firmly, "it will be a serious thing for me if I lose my place here, for my mother and I are poor, and my wages make the greatest part of our income. But I cannot make this apology you require. I will sooner lose my place."

The bold and manly bearing of our hero, and his resolute tone, impressed the superintendent with an involuntary admiration. He felt that Robert was a boy to be proud of, but none the less he meant to carry out his purpose.

"Is this your final decision?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are discharged from the factory. You will report your discharge to Mr. Baker, and he will pay you what you have earned this week."

"Very well, sir."

Robert left the office, with a bold bearing, but a heart full of trouble. If only himself had been involved in the calamity, he could have borne it better, but he knew that his loss of place meant privation and want for his mother, unless he could find something to do that would bring in an equal income, and this he did not expect.

"Mr. Baker," he said, addressing the foreman of his room, on his return from the superintendent's office, "I am discharged."

"Discharged?" repeated the foreman, in surprise. "There must be some mistake about this. You are one of our best hands—for your age, I mean."

"There is no dissatisfaction with my work that I know of, but I got into a quarrel with Halbert Davis yesterday, and his father wants me to apologize to him."

"Which you won't do?"

"I would if I felt that I were in fault. I am not too proud for that. But the fact is, Halbert ought to apologize to me."

"Halbert is a mean boy. I don't blame you in the least."

"So I am to report my discharge to you, and ask you for my wages."

This account was soon settled, and Robert left the factory his own master. But it is poor consolation to be one's own master under such circumstances. He dreaded to break the news to his mother, for he knew that it would distress her. He was slowly walking along, when he once more encountered Halbert Davis. Halbert was out for the express purpose of meeting and exulting over him, for he rightly concluded that Robert would decline to apologize to him. Robert saw his enemy, and guessed his object, but resolved to say nothing to him, unless actually obliged to do so.

"Where are you going?" demanded Halbert.

"Home."

"I thought you worked in the factory?"

"Did you?" asked Robert, looking full in his face, and reading

the exultation he did not attempt to conceal.

"Perhaps you have got turned out?" suggested Halbert, with a malicious smile.

"You would be glad of that, I suppose," said our hero.

"I don't think I should cry much," said Halbert. "It's true then, is it?"

"Yes; it's true."

"You won't put on so many airs when you go round begging for cold victuals. It'll be some time before you walk with Hester Paine again."

"I shall probably walk with her sooner than you will."

"She won't notice a beggar."

"There is not much chance of my becoming a beggar, Halbert Davis; but I would rather be one than be as mean as you. I will drop you a slight hint, which you had better bear in mind. It won't be any safer to insult me now than it was yesterday. I can't lose my place a second time."

Halbert instinctively moved aside, while our hero passed on, without taking farther notice of him.

"I hate him!" he muttered to himself. "I hope he won't find anything to do. If he wasn't so strong, I'd give him a thrashing."

CHAPTER VI.

HALBERT'S DISCOMFITURE

Great was the dismay of Mrs. Rushton when she heard from Robert that he was discharged from the factory. She was a timid woman, and rather apt to take desponding views of the future.

"Oh, Robert, what is going to become of us?" she exclaimed, nervously. "We have only ten dollars in the house, and you know how little I can earn by braiding straw. I really think you were too hasty and impetuous."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear mother," said Robert, soothingly. "I am sorry I have lost my place, but there are other things I can do besides working in the factory. We are not going to starve yet."

"But, suppose you can't find any work?" said his mother.

"Then I'll help you braid straw," said Robert, laughing. "Don't you think I might learn after a while?"

"I don't know but you might," said Mrs. Rushton, dubiously; "but the pay is very poor."

"That's so, mother. I shan't, take to braiding straw except as a last resort."

"Wouldn't Mr. Davis take you back into the factory if I went to him and told him how much we needed the money?"

"Don't think of such a thing, mother," said Robert, hastily, his brown cheek flushing. "I am too proud to beg to be taken back."

"But it wouldn't be you."

"I would sooner ask myself than have you do it, mother. No; the superintendent sent me away for no good reason, and he must come and ask me to return before I'll do it."

"I am afraid you are proud, Robert."

"So I am, mother; but it is an honest pride. Have faith in me for a week, mother, and see if I don't earn something in that time. I don't expect to make as much as I earned at the factory; but I'll earn something, you may depend upon that. Now, how would you like to have some fish for supper?"

"I think I should like it. It is a good while since we had any."

"Then, I'll tell you what—I'll borrow Will Paine's boat, if he'll let me have it, and see if I can't catch something."

"When will you be home, Robert?"

"It will depend on my success in fishing. It'll be half-past nine, very likely, before I get fairly started, so I think I'd better take my dinner with me. I'll be home some time in the afternoon."

"I hope you'll be careful, Robert. You might get upset."

"I'll take care of that, mother. Besides, I can swim like a duck."

Robert went out into the garden, and dug some worms for bait. Meanwhile, his mother made a couple of sandwiches, and wrapped them in a paper for his lunch. Provided thus, he walked quickly to the house of Squire Paine, and rang the bell.

"Is Will home?" he asked.

"Here I am, old fellow!" was heard from the head of the stairs; and William Paine, a boy of our hero's size and age, appeared.

"Come right up."

"How did you happen to be at leisure?" he asked. "I supposed you were at the factory."

"I'm turned off."

"Turned off! How's that?"

"Through the influence of Halbert Davis."

"Halbert is a disgusting sneak. I always despised him, and, if he's done such a mean thing, I'll never speak to him again. Tell me all about it."

This Robert did, necessarily bringing in Hester's name.

"He needn't think my sister will walk with him," said Will. "If she does, I'll cut her off with a shilling. She'd rather walk with you, any day."

Robert blushed a little; for, though he was too young to be in love, he thought his friend's sister the most attractive girl he had even seen, and, knowing how she was regarded in the village, he naturally felt proud of her preference for himself over a boy who was much richer.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Will, with interest.

"The first thing I am going to do is to catch some fish, if you'll lend me your boat."

"Lend you my boat? Of course I will! I'll lend it to you for the next three months."

"But you want it yourself?"

"No. Haven't you heard the news? I'm going to boarding school."

"You are?"

"It's a fact. I'm packing my trunk now. Come upstairs, and superintend the operation."

"I can't stay long. But, Will, are you in earnest about the boat?"

"To be sure I am. I was meaning to ask you if you'd take care of it for me. You see, I can't carry it with me, and you are the only fellow I am willing to lend it to."

"I shall be very glad of the chance, Will. I've been wanting a boat for a long time, but there wasn't much chance of my getting one. Now I shall feel rich. But isn't this a sudden idea, your going to school?"

"Rather. There was a college classmate of father's here last week, who's at the head of such a school, and he made father promise to send me. So I'm to start to-morrow morning. If it wasn't for that, and being up to my ears in getting ready, I'd go out fishing with you."

"I wish you could."

"I must wait till vacation. Here is the boat key."

Robert took the key with satisfaction. The boat owned by his friend was a stanch, round-bottomed boat, of considerable size, bought only two months before, quite the best boat on the river. It was to be at his free disposal, and this was nearly the same thing as owning it. He might find it very useful, for it occurred to him that, if he could find nothing better to do, he could catch fish every day, and sell at the village store such as his mother could not use. In this way he would be earning something, and it

would be better than being idle.

He knew where the boat was usually kept, just at the foot of a large tree, whose branches drooped over the river. He made his way thither, and, fitting the key in the padlock which confined the boat, soon set it free. The oars he had brought with him from his friend's house.

Throwing in the oars, he jumped in, and began to push off, when he heard himself called, and, looking up, saw Halbert Davis standing on the bank.

"Get out of that boat!" said Halbert.

"What do you mean?" demanded Robert.

"You have no business in that boat! It doesn't belong to you!"

"You'd better mind your own business, Halbert Davis. You have nothing to do with the boat."

"It's William Paine's boat."

"Thank you for the information. I supposed it was yours, from the interest you seem to take in it."

"It will be. He's going to let me have it while he's away at school."

"Indeed! Did he tell you so?"

"I haven't asked Ma yet; but I know he will let me have it."

"I don't think he will."

"Why not?"

"If you ever want to borrow this boat, you'll have to apply to me."

"You haven't bought it?" asked Halbert, in surprise. "You're

too poor."

"I'm to have charge of the boat while Will Paine is away."

"Did he say you might?" asked Halbert, in a tone of disappointment and mortification.

"Of course he did."

"I don't believe it," said Halbert, suspiciously.

"I don't care what you believe. Go and ask him yourself, if you are not satisfied; and don't meddle with what is none of your business;"

"You're an impudent rascal."

"Have you got another cane you'd like to have broken?" asked Robert, significantly.

Halbert looked after him, enviously, as he rowed the boat out into the stream. He had asked his father to buy him a boat, but the superintendent's speculations had not turned out very well of late, and he had been deaf to his son's persuasions, backed, though they were, by his mother's influence. When Halbert heard that William Paine was going to boarding school, he decided to ask him for the loan of his boat during his absence, as the next best thing. Now, it seemed that he had been forestalled, and by the boy he hated. He resolved to see young Paine himself, and offer him two dollars for the use of his boat during the coming term. Then he would have the double satisfaction of using the boat and disappointing Robert.

He made his way to the house of Squire Paine, and, after a brief pause, was admitted. He was shown into the parlor, and

Will Paine came down to see him.

"How are you, Davis?" he said, nodding, coolly, but not offering his hand.

"I hear you are going to boarding school?"

"Yes; I go to-morrow."

"I suppose you won't take your boat with you?"

"No."

"I'll give you two dollars for the use of it; the next three months?"

"I can't accept your offer. Robert Rushton is to have it."

"But he doesn't pay you anything for it. I'll give you three dollars, if you say so?"

"You can't have it for three dollars, or ten. I have promised it to my friend, Robert Rushton, and I shall not take it back."

"You may not know," said Halbert, maliciously, "that your friend was discharged from the factory this morning for misconduct."

"I know very well that he was discharged, and through whose influence, Halbert Davis," said Will, pointedly. "I like him all the better for his misfortune, and so I am sure will my sister."

Halbert's face betrayed the anger and jealousy he felt, but he didn't dare to speak to the lawyer's son as he had to the factory boy.

"Good-morning!" he said, rising to go.

"Good-morning!" said young Paine, formally.

Halbert felt, as he walked homeward, that his triumph over

Robert was by no means complete.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGE PASSENGER

Robert, though not a professional fisherman, was not wholly inexperienced. This morning he was quite lucky, catching quite a fine lot of fish—as much, indeed, as his mother and himself would require a week to dispose of. However, he did not intend to carry them all home. It occurred to him that he could sell them at a market store in the village. Otherwise, he would not have cared to go on destroying life for no useful end.

Accordingly, on reaching the shore, he strung the fish and walked homeward, by way of the market. It was rather a heavy tug, for the fish he had caught weighed at least fifty pounds.

Stepping into the store, he attracted the attention of the proprietor.

"That's a fine lot of fish you have there, Robert. What are you going to do with them?"

"I'm going to sell most of them to you, if I can."

"Are they just out of the water?"

"Yes; I have just brought them in."

"What do you want for them?"

"I don't know what is a fair price?"

"I'll give you two cents a pound for as many as you want to sell."

"All right," said our hero, with satisfaction. "I'll carry this one home, and you can weigh the rest."

The rest proved to weigh forty-five pounds. The marketman handed Robert ninety cents, which he pocketed with satisfaction.

"Shall you want some more to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes, if you can let me have them earlier. But how is it you are not at the factory?"

"I've lost my place."

"That's a pity."

"So I have plenty of time to work for you."

"I may be able to take considerable from you. I'm thinking of running a cart to Brampton every morning, but I must have the fish by eight o'clock, or it'll be too late."

"I'll go out early in the morning, then."

"Very well; bring me what you have at that hour, and we'll strike a trade."

"I've got something to do pretty quick," thought Robert, with satisfaction. "It was a lucky thought asking Will Paine for his boat. I'm sorry he's going away, but it happens just right for me."

Mrs. Rushton was sitting at her work, in rather a disconsolate frame of mind. The more she thought of Robert's losing his place, the more unfortunate it seemed. She could not be expected to be as sanguine and hopeful as our hero, who was blessed with strong hands and a fund of energy and self-reliance which he inherited from his father. His mother, on the other hand, was delicate and nervous, and apt to look on the dark side of things.

But, notwithstanding this, she was a good mother, and Robert loved her.

Nothing had been heard for some time but the drowsy ticking of the clock, when a noise was heard at the door, and Robert entered the room, bringing the fish he had reserved.

"You see, mother, we are not likely to starve," he said.

"That's a fine, large fish," said his mother.

"Yes; it'll be enough for two meals. Didn't I tell you, mother, I would find something to do?"

"True, Robert," said his mother, dubiously; "but we shall get tired of fish if we have it every day."

Robert laughed.

"Six days in the week will do for fish, mother," he said. "I think we shall be able to afford something else Sunday."

"Of course, fish is better than nothing," said his mother, who understood him literally; "and I suppose we ought to be thankful to get that."

"You don't look very much pleased at the prospect of fish six times a week," said Robert, laughing again. "On the whole, I think it will be better to say twice."

"But what will we do other days, Robert?"

"What we have always done, mother—eat something else. But I won't keep you longer in suspense. Did you think this was the only fish I caught?"

"Yes, I thought so."

"I sold forty-five pounds on the way to Minturn, at his market

store—forty-five pounds, at two cents a pound. What do you think of that?"

"Do you mean that you have earned ninety cents to-day, Robert?"

"Yes; and here's the money."

"That's much better than I expected," said Mrs. Rushton, looking several degrees more cheerful.

"I don't expect to do as well as that every day, mother, but I don't believe we'll starve. Minturn has engaged me to supply him with fish every day, only some days the fishes won't feel like coming out of the water. Then, I forgot to tell you, I'm to have Will Paine's boat for nothing. He's going to boarding school, and has asked me to take care of it for him."

"You are fortunate, Robert."

"I am hungry, too, mother. Those two sandwiches didn't go a great ways. So, if you can just as well as not have supper earlier, it would suit me."

"I'll put on the teakettle at once, Robert," said his mother, rising. "Would you like some of the fish for supper?"

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble."

"Surely not, Robert."

The usual supper hour was at five in this country household, but a little after four the table was set, and mother and son sat down to a meal which both enjoyed. The fish proved to be excellent, and Robert enjoyed it the more, first, because he had caught it himself, and next because he felt that his independent

stand at the factory, though it had lost him his place, was not likely to subject his mother to the privations he had feared.

"I'll take another piece of fish, mother," said Robert, passing his plate. "I think, on the whole, I shan't be obliged to learn to braid straw."

"No; you can do better at fishing."

"Only," added Robert, with mock seriousness, "we might change work sometimes, mother; I will stay at home and braid straw, and you can go out fishing."

"I am afraid I should make a poor hand at it," said Mrs. Rushton, smiling.

"If Halbert Davis could look in upon us just now, he would be disappointed to find us so cheerful after my losing my place at factory. However, I've disappointed him in another way."

"How is that?"

"He expected Will Paine would lend him his boat while he was gone, but, instead of that, he finds it promised to me."

"I am afraid he is not a very kind-hearted boy."

"That's drawing it altogether too mild, mother. He's the meanest fellow I ever met. However, I won't talk about him any more, or it'll spoil my appetite."

On the next two mornings Robert went out at five o'clock, in order to get home in time for the market-wagon. He met with fair luck, but not as good as on the first day. Taking the two mornings together, he captured and sold seventy pounds of fish, which, as the price remained the same, brought him in a dollar and forty

cents. This was not equal to his wages at the factory; still, he had the greater part of the day to himself, only, unfortunately, he had no way of turning his time profitably to account, or, at least, none had thus far occurred to him.

On the morning succeeding he was out of luck. He caught but two fish, and they were so small that he decided not to offer them for sale.

"If I don't do better than this," he reflected, "I shan't make very good wages. The fish seem to be getting afraid of me."

He paddled about, idly, a few rods from the shore, having drawn up his line and hook.

All at once, he heard a voice hailing him from the river bank:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Hallo!" answered Robert, lifting his eyes, and seeing who called him.

"Can you set me across the river?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bring in your boat, then, and I'll jump aboard. I'll pay you for your trouble."

Robert did as requested, with alacrity. He was very glad to earn money in this way, since it seemed he was to have no fish to dispose of. He quickly turned the boat to the shore, and the stranger jumped on board. He was a man of rather more than the average height, with a slight limp in his gait, in a rough suit of clothes, his head being surmounted by a felt hat considerably the worse for wear. There was a scar on one cheek, and, altogether,

he was not very prepossessing in his appearance. Robert noted all this in a rapid glance, but it made no particular impression upon him at the moment. He cared very little how the stranger looked, as long as he had money enough to pay his fare.

"It's about a mile across the river, isn't it?" asked the stranger.

"About that here. Where do you want to go?"

"Straight across. There's an old man named Nichols lives on the other side, isn't there?"

"Yes; he lives by himself."

"Somebody told me so. He's rich, isn't he?" asked the stranger, carelessly.

"So people say; but he doesn't show it in his dress or way of living."

"A miser, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What does he do with his money?"

"I only know what people say."

"And what do they say?"

"That he is afraid to trust banks, and hides his money in the earth."

"That kind of bank don't pay very good interest," said the stranger, laughing.

"No; but it isn't likely to break."

"Here? boy, give me one of the oars. I'm used to rowing, and I'll help you a little."

Robert yielded one of the oars to his companion, who

evidently understood rowing quite as well as he professed to. Our hero, though strong-armed, had hard work to keep up with him.

"Look out, boy, or I'll turn you round," he said.

"You are stronger than I am."

"And more used to rowing; but I'll suit myself to you."

A few minutes brought them to the other shore. The passenger jumped ashore, first handing a silver half-dollar to our hero, who was well satisfied with his fee.

Robert sat idly in his boat, and watched his late fare as with rapid steps he left the river bank behind him.

"He's going to the old man's house," decided Robert. "I wonder whether he has any business with him?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD FARMHOUSE

The stranger walked, with hasty strides, in the direction of an old farmhouse, which could be seen a quarter of a mile away. Whether it had ever been painted, was a question not easily solved. At present it was dark and weather-beaten, and in a general state of neglect.

The owner, Paul Nichols, was a man advanced in years, living quite alone, and himself providing for his simple wants. Robert was right in calling him a miser, but he had not always deserved the name. The time was when he had been happily married to a good wife, and was blessed with two young children. But they were all taken from him in one week by an epidemic, and his life was made solitary and cheerless. This bereavement completely revolutionized his life. Up to this time he had been a good and respected citizen, with an interest in public affairs. Now he became morose and misanthropic, and his heart, bereaved of its legitimate objects of affection, henceforth was fixed upon gold, which he began to love with a passionate energy. He repulsed the advances of neighbors, and became what Robert called him—a miser.

How much he was worth, no one knew. The town assessors sought in vain for stocks and bonds. He did not appear to possess

any. Probably popular opinion was correct in asserting that he secreted his money in one or many out-of-the-way places, which, from time to time, he was wont to visit and gloat over his treasures. There was reason also to believe that it was mostly in gold, for he had a habit of asking specie payments from those indebted to him, or, if he could not obtain specie, he used to go to a neighboring town with his bank notes and get the change effected.

Such was the man about whom Robert's unknown passenger exhibited so much curiosity, and whom it seemed that he was intending to visit.

"I wonder whether the old man is at home!" he said to himself, as he entered the front yard through a gateway, from which the gate had long since disappeared. "He don't keep things looking very neat and trim, that's a fact," he continued, noticing the rank weeds and indiscriminate litter which filled the yard. "Just give me this place, and his money to keep it, and I'd make a change in the looks of things pretty quick."

He stepped up to the front door, and, lifting the old-fashioned knocker, sounded a loud summons.

"He'll hear that, if he isn't very deaf," he thought.

But the summons appeared to be without effect. At all events, he was left standing on the doorstone, and no one came to bid him enter.

"He can't be at home, or else he won't come," thought the visitor. "I'll try him again," and another knock, still louder than

before, sounded through the farmhouse.

But still no one came to the door. The fact was, that the old farmer had gone away early, with a load of hay, which he had sold; to a stable-keeper living some five miles distant.

"I'll reconnoiter a little," said the stranger.

He stepped to the front window, and looked in. All that met his gaze was a bare, dismantled room.

"Not very cheerful, that's a fact," commented the outsider. "Well, he don't appear to be here; I'll go round to the back part of the house."

He went round to the back door, where he thought it best, in the first place, to knock. No answer coming, he peered through the window, but saw no one.

"The coast is clear," he concluded. "So much the better, if I can get in."

The door proved to be locked, but the windows were easily raised. Through one of these he clambered into the kitchen, which was the only room occupied by the old farmer, with the exception of a room above, which he used as a bedchamber. Here he cooked and ate his meals, and here he spent his solitary evenings.

Jumping over the window sill, the visitor found himself in this room. He looked around him, with some curiosity.

"It is eighteen years since I was last in this room," he said. "Time hasn't improved it, nor me, either, very likely," he added, with a short laugh. "I've roamed pretty much all over the world in

that time, and I've come back as poor as I went away. What's that copy I used to write?—'A rolling stone gathers no moss.' Well, I'm the rolling stone. In all that time my Uncle Paul has been moored fast to his hearthstone, and been piling up gold, which he don't seem to have much use for. As far as I know, I'm his nearest relation, there's no reason why he shouldn't launch out a little for the benefit of the family."

It will be gathered from the foregoing soliloquy that the newcomer was a nephew of Paul Nichols. After a not very creditable youth, he had gone to sea, and for eighteen years this was his first reappearance in his native town.

He sat down in a chair, and stretched out his legs, with an air of being at home.

"I wonder what the old man will say when he sees me," he soliloquized. "Ten to one he won't know me. When we saw each other last I was a smooth-faced youth. Now I've got hair enough on my face, and the years have made, their mark upon me, I suspect. Where is he, I wonder, and how long have I got to wait for him? While I'm waiting, I'll take the liberty of looking in the closet, and seeing if he hasn't something to refresh the inner man. I didn't make much of a breakfast, and something hearty wouldn't come amiss."

He rose from his chair, and opened the closet door. A small collection of crockery was visible, most of it cracked, but there was nothing eatable to be seen, except half a loaf of bread. This was from the baker, for the old man, after ineffectual efforts to

make his own bread, had been compelled to abandon the attempt, and patronize the baker.

"Nothing but a half loaf, and that's dry enough," muttered the stranger. "That isn't very tempting. I can't say much for my uncle's fare, unless he has got something more attractive somewhere."

But, search as carefully as he might, nothing better could be found, and his appetite was not sufficiently great to encourage an attack upon the stale loaf. He sat down, rather discontented, and resumed the current of his reflections.

"My uncle must be more of a miser than I thought, if he stints himself to such fare as this. It's rather a bad lookout for me. He won't be very apt to look with favor on my application for a small loan from his treasure. What's that the boy said? He don't trust any banks, but keeps his money concealed in the earth. By Jove! It would be a stroke of luck if I could stumble on one of his hiding places! If I could do that while he was away, I would forego the pleasure of seeing him, and make off with what I could find. I'll look about me, and see if I can't find some of his hidden hoards."

No sooner did the thought occur to him than he acted upon it.

"Let me see," he reflected, "where is he most likely to hide his treasure? Old stockings are the favorites with old maids and widows, but I don't believe Uncle Paul has got any without holes in them. He's more likely to hide his gold under the hearth. That's a good idea, I'll try the hearth first."

He kneeled down, and began to examine the bricks, critically,

with a view of ascertaining whether any bore the marks of having been removed recently, for he judged correctly that a miser would wish, from time to time, to unearth his treasure for the pleasure of looking at it. But there was no indication of disturbance. The hearth bore a uniform appearance, and did not seem to have been tampered with.

"That isn't the right spot," reflected the visitor. "Perhaps there's a plank in the floor that raises, or, still more likely, the gold is buried in the cellar. I've a great mind to go down there."

He lit a candle, and went cautiously down the rickety staircase. But he had hardly reached the bottom of the stairs, when he caught the sound of a wagon entering the yard.

"That must be my uncle," he said. "I'd better go up, and not let him catch me down here."

He ascended the stairs, and re-entered the room just as the farmer opened the door and entered.

On seeing a tall, bearded stranger, whom he did not recognize, standing before him in his own kitchen, with a lighted candle in his hand, Paul Nichols uttered a shrill cry of alarm, and ejaculated:

"Thieves! Murder! Robbers!" in a quavering voice.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNWELCOME GUEST

The stranger was in rather an awkward predicament. However, he betrayed neither embarrassment nor alarm. Blowing out the candle, he advanced to the table and set it down. This movement brought him nearer Paul Nichols, who, with the timidity natural to an old man, anticipated an immediate attack.

"Don't kill me! Spare my life!" he exclaimed, hastily stepping back.

"I see you don't know me, Uncle Paul?" said the intruder, familiarly.

"Who are you that call me Uncle Paul?" asked the old man, somewhat reassured.

"Benjamin Haley, your sister's son. Do you know me now?"

"You Ben Haley!" exclaimed the old man, betraying surprise.

"Why, you are old enough to be his father."

"Remember, Uncle Paul, I am eighteen years older than when you saw me last. Time brings changes, you know. When I saw you last, you were a man in the prime of life, now you are a feeble old man."

"Are you really Ben Haley?" asked the old man, doubtfully.

"To be sure I am. I suppose I look to you more like a bearded savage. Well, I'm not responsible for my looks. Not finding

you at home, I took the liberty of coming in on the score of relationship."

"What, were you doing with that candle?" asked Paul, suspiciously.

"I went down cellar with it."

"Down cellar!" repeated his uncle, with a look of alarm which didn't escape his nephew. "What for?"

"In search of something to eat. All I could find in the closet was a dry loaf, which doesn't look very appetizing."

"There's nothing down cellar. Don't go there again," said the old man, still uneasy.

His nephew looked at him shrewdly.

"Ha, Uncle Paul! I've guessed your secret so quick," he said to himself. "Some of your money is hidden away in the cellar, I'm thinking."

"Where do you keep your provisions, then?" he said aloud.

"The loaf is all I have."

"Come, Uncle Paul, you don't mean that. That's a scurvy welcome to give a nephew you haven't seen for eighteen years. I'm going to stay to dinner with you, and you must give me something better than that. Haven't you got any meat in the house?"

"No."

Just then Ben Haley, looking from the window, saw some chickens in the yard. His eye lighted up at the discovery.

"Ah, there is a nice fat chicken," he said. "We'll have a chicken

dinner. Shall it be roast or boiled?"

"No, no," said the old farmer, hastily. "I can't spare them. They'll bring a good price in the market by and by."

"Can't help it, Uncle Paul. Charity begins at home. Excuse me a minute, I'll be back directly."

He strode to the door and out into the yard. Then, after a little maneuvering, he caught a chicken, and going to the block, seized the ax, and soon decapitated it.

"What have you done?" said Paul, ruefully, for the old man had followed his nephew, and was looking on in a very uncomfortable frame of mind.

"Taken the first step toward a good dinner," said the other, coolly. "I am not sure but we shall want two."

"No, no!" said Paul, hastily. "I haven't got much appetite."

"Then perhaps we can make it do. I'll just get it ready, and cook it myself. I've knocked about in all sorts of places, and it won't be the first time I've served as cook. I've traveled some since I saw you last."

"Have you?" said the old man, who seemed more interested in the untimely death of the pullet than in his nephew's adventures.

"Yes, I've been everywhere. I spent a year in Australia at the gold diggings."

"Did you find any?" asked his uncle, for the first time betraying interest.

"Some, but I didn't bring away any."

Ben Haley meanwhile was rapidly stripping the chicken of its

feathers. When he finished, he said, "Now tell me where you keep your vegetables, Uncle Paul?"

"They're in the corn barn. You can't get in. It's locked."

"Where's the key?"

"Lost."

"I'll get in, never fear," said the intruder, and he led the way to the corn barn, his uncle unwillingly following and protesting that it would be quite impossible to enter.

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