Horatio Alger Jr.

Robert Coverdale's Struggle: or, on the Wave of Success

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A FISHERMAN'S CABIN

"Robert, have you seen anything of your uncle?"

"No, aunt."

"I suppose he's over at the tavern as usual," said the woman despondently. "He drinks up about all he earns, and there's little enough left for us. I hope you won't follow in his steps, Robert."

"You may be sure I won't, Aunt Jane," said the boy, nodding emphatically. "I wouldn't drink a glass of rum for a hundred dollars."

"God keep you in that resolution, my dear boy! I don't want my sister's son to go to destruction as my husband is doing."

My story opens in a small fishing village on the coast of one of the New England States. Robert Coverdale, whom I have briefly introduced, is the young hero whose fortunes I propose to record.

He is a strong, well-made boy, with a frank, honest face, embrowned by exposure to the sun and wind, with bright and

fearless eyes and a manly look. I am afraid his dress would not qualify him to appear to advantage in a drawing-room.

He wore a calico shirt and well-patched trousers of great antiquity and stockings and cowhide shoes sadly in need of repairs.

Some of my well-dressed boy readers, living in cities and large towns, may be disposed to turn up their noses at this ragged boy and wonder at my taste in choosing such a hero.

But Robert had manly traits, and, in spite of his poor clothes, possessed energy, talent, honesty and a resolute will, and a boy so endowed cannot be considered poor, though he does not own a dollar, which was precisely Robert's case.

Indeed, I may go further and say that never in the course of his life of fifteen years had he been able to boast the ownership of a hundred cents.

John Trafton, his uncle, was a fisherman. His small house, or cabin, was picturesquely situated on the summit of a cliff, at the foot of which rolled the ocean waves, and commanded a fine sea view.

That was perhaps its only recommendation, for it was not only small, but furnished in the plainest and scantiest style. The entire furniture of the house would not have brought twenty-five dollars at auction, yet for twenty-five years it had been the home of John and Jane Trafton and for twelve years of their nephew, Robert.

My readers will naturally ask if the fisherman had no children of his own. There was a son who, if living, would be twenty-three

years old, but years before he had left home, and whether Ben Trafton was living or dead, who could tell? Nothing had been heard of him for five years.

Mrs. Trafton's affections had only Robert for their object, and to her sister's son she was warmly attached – nearly as much so as if he had been her own son.

Her husband's love of drink had gradually alienated her from him, and she leaned upon Robert, who was always ready to serve her with boyish devotion and to protect her, if need be, from the threats of her husband, made surly by drink.

Many days she would have gone to bed supperless but for Robert. He would push out to sea in his uncle's boat, catch a supply of fish, selling a part if he could or trade a portion for groceries. Indeed he did more for the support of the family than John Trafton did himself.

"It's about time for supper, Robert," said his aunt; "but I've only got a little boiled fish to offer you."

"Fish is good for the brains. Aunt Jane," said Robert, smiling.

"Well, I suppose it's no use waiting for your uncle. If he's at the tavern, he will stay there until he is full of liquor and then he will reel home. Come in and sit down to the table."

Robert entered the cabin and sat down at a side table. His aunt brought him a plate of boiled fish and a potato.

"I found just one potato in the cupboard, Robert," she said.

"Then eat it yourself, aunt. Don't give it to me."

"No, Robert; I've got a little toast for myself. There was a slice

of bread too dry to eat as it was, so I toasted it and soaked it in hot water. That suits me better than the potato."

"Haven't you any tea, aunt – for yourself, I mean?" Robert added quickly.

"I don't care for it, but I know you do."

"I wish I had some. Tea always goes to the right spot," said Mrs.

Trafton; "but I couldn't find a single leaf."

"What a pity!" said Robert regretfully.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Trafton; "we have to do without almost everything. It might be so different if Mr. Trafton wouldn't drink."

"Did he always drink?"

"He's drank, more or less, for ten years, but the habit seems to have grown upon him. Till five years ago two-thirds of his earnings came to me to spend for the house, but now I don't average a dollar a week."

"It's too bad, Aunt Jane!" said Robert energetically.

"So it is, but it does no good to say so. It won't mend matters."

"I wish I was a man."

"I am glad you are not, Robert."

"Why are you glad that I am a boy?" asked Robert in surprise.

"Because when you are a man you won't stay here. You will go out into the world to better yourself, and I shan't blame you. Then I shall be left alone with your uncle, and Heaven only knows how I shall get along. I shall starve very likely."

Robert pushed back his chair from the table and looked straight at his aunt.

"Do you think. Aunt Jane," he demanded indignantly, "that I will desert you and leave you to shift for yourself?"

"I said, Robert, that I shouldn't blame you if you did. There isn't much to stay here for."

"I am sorry you have such a poor opinion of me, Aunt Jane," said the boy gravely. "I am not quite so selfish as all that. I certainly should like to go out into the world, but I won't go unless I can leave you comfortable."

"I should miss you, Robert, I can't tell how much, but I don't want to tie you down here when you can do better. There isn't much for me to live for – I'm an old woman already – but better times may be in store for you."

"You are not an old woman, Aunt Jane. You are not more than fifty."

"I am just fifty, Robert, but I feel sometimes as if I were seventy."

"Do you know, Aunt Jane, I sometimes think that brighter days are coming to both of us? Sometimes, when I sit out there on the cliff and look out to sea, I almost fancy I can see a ship coming in laden with good things for us."

Mrs. Trafton smiled faintly.

"I have waited a long time for my ship to come in, Robert," she said.

"I've waited year after year, but it hasn't come yet."

"It may come for all that."

"You are young and hopeful. Yours may come in some day, but I don't think mine ever will."

"Have you anything for me to do, aunt?"

"Not at present, Robert."

"Then I'll study a little."

There was an unpainted wooden shelf which Robert had made himself and on it were half a dozen books – his sole library.

From this shelf he took down a tattered arithmetic and a slate and pencil, and, going out of doors, flung himself down on the cliff and opened the arithmetic well toward the end.

"I'll try this sum in cube root," he said to himself. "I got it wrong the last time I tried."

He worked for fifteen minutes and a smile of triumph lit up his face.

"It comes right," he said. "I think I understand cube root pretty well now. It was a good idea working by myself. When I left school I had only got through fractions. That's seventy-five pages back and I understand all that I have tried since. I won't be satisfied till I have gone to the end of the very last page."

Here his aunt came to the door of the cabin and called "Robert."

"All right, aunt; I'm coming."

The boy rose to his feet and answered the summons.

CHAPTER II
ROBERT AND MRS. JONES

"Are you willing to go to the village for me, Robert?" asked his aunt.

"To be sure I am, aunt," answered the boy promptly. "I hope you don't doubt it?"

"I thought you might be tired, as you were out all the forenoon in the boat."

"That's sport, Aunt Jane. That doesn't tire me."

"It would if you were not very strong for a boy."

"Yes, I am pretty strong," said Robert complacently, extending his muscular arms. "I can row the boat when the tide is very strong. What errand have you got for me to the village, aunt?"

"I have been doing a little sewing for Mrs. Jones."

"You mean the landlord's wife?" questioned Robert.

"Yes; I don't feel very friendly toward her husband, for it's he that sells strong drink to my husband and keeps his earnings from me, but I couldn't refuse work from her when she offered it to me."

Mrs. Trafton spoke half apologetically, for it had cost her a pang to work for her enemy's family, but Robert took a practical view of the matter.

"Her money is as good as anybody's," he said. "I don't see why you shouldn't take it. She has enough of our money."

"That's true, Robert," said his aunt, her doubts removed by her young nephew's logic.

"Is the bundle ready. Aunt Jane?"

"Here it is, Robert," and the fisherman's wife handed him a small parcel, wrapped in a fragment of newspaper.

"How much is she to pay for the work?"

"I hardly know what to ask. I guess twenty-five cents will be about right."

"Very well, Aunt Jane. Any other errands?"

"If you get the money, Robert, you may stop at the store and buy a quarter of a pound of their cheapest tea. I am afraid it's extravagant in me to buy tea when there's so little coming in, but it cheers me up when I get low-spirited and helps me to bear what I have to bear."

"Of course you must have some tea, Aunt Jane," said Robert quickly.

"Nobody can charge you with extravagance. Anything more?"

"You may stop at the baker's and buy a loaf of bread. Then to-morrow – please God – we'll have a good breakfast."

"All right, aunt!" and Robert began to walk rapidly toward the village, about a mile inland.

Poor woman! Her idea of a good breakfast was a cup of tea, without milk or sugar, and bread, without butter.

It had not always been so, but her husband's intemperance had

changed her ideas and made her accept thankfully what once she would have disdained.

It must be said of Robert that, though he had the hearty appetite of a growing boy, he never increased his aunt's sorrow by complaining of their meager fare, but always preserved a cheerful demeanor in the midst of their privations.

I have said that the settlement, which was known as Cook's Harbor, was a fishing village, but this is not wholly correct. A mile inland was a village of fair size, which included the houses of several summer residents from the city, and these were more or less pretentious.

Several comfortable houses belonged to sea captains who had retired from active duties and anchored in the village where they first saw the light.

The cabins of the fishermen were nearer the sea, and of these there were some twenty, but they were not grouped together.

I have said that the main village was a mile away. Here was the tavern, the grocery store and the shops of the tailor and shoemaker. Here was centered the social life of Cook's Harbor. Here, unfortunately, the steps of John Trafton too often tended, for he always brought up at the tavern and seldom came home with a cent in his pocket.

Robert was no laggard, and it did not take him long to reach the village.

Just in the center stood the tavern, a rambling building of two stories, with an L, which had been added within a few years.

During the summer there were generally boarders from the city, who considered that the invigorating sea air, with its healthful influences, counterbalanced the rather primitive accommodations and homely fare with which they must perforce be content.

By hook or crook Nahum Jones – or Nick Jones as he was called – had managed to accumulate a snug competence, but much of it was gained by his profit on liquor.

He was a thrifty man, whose thrift extended to meanness, and his wife was thoroughly selfish. They had but one child – a daughter – who bade fair to be an old maid.

Though Robert had made no objection to carry the work to the tavern, he didn't enjoy his visit in anticipation.

He disliked both Mr. and Mrs. Jones, but felt that this must not interfere with his aunt's business.

He went round to a side door and knocked. The door was opened by the daughter – Selina Jones.

"Well, Robert," she said abruptly, "what's wanted?"

"Is your mother at home?"

"I suppose she is."

"Can I see her?"

"I don't know – I guess she's busy. Won't I do as well?"

"I would rather see your mother."

Upon this Selina summoned her mother, not thinking it necessary to invite our hero into the house.

"Oh, I see!" said Mrs. Jones as she glanced at the bundle in

Robert's hand. "You've brought back the work I gave your aunt."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Let me look at it."

She took the bundle, opened it and ran her eye rapidly over it.

"It'll do," she said. "Might have been better done, but it'll answer."

She was about to close the door, as if her business with Robert was at an end, but this did not suit our hero.

"It will be twenty-five cents," he said in a business-like tone.

"Were you afraid I would forget to pay you?" asked Mrs. Jones rather sourly.

"No, ma'am, but I supposed you would like to know how much it would be."

"Very well; now I know."

If Robert had been easily abashed he would have dropped the matter there and suffered her to take her time about paying, but he knew that his aunt's intended purchasing must be made with ready money and he persisted.

"I would like the money now," he said, "for I am going to the store to buy something."

"It seems to me you are in a great hurry," said Mrs. Jones unpleasantly.

"So would you be, Mrs. Jones," said Robert bluntly, "if you were as poor as my aunt."

"Folks needn't be poor if they are smart," said the landlord's wife.

"I suppose you know where my uncle's money goes?" said Robert pointedly.

Mrs. Jones did know, and, though she had not much of a conscience, she felt the thrust and it made her uncomfortable and therefore angry. But it also gave her an idea.

"Wait a minute," she said and left Robert standing in the doorway.

When she returned, which was in a short time, her thin lips were wreathed with satisfaction.

"You can tell your aunt there won't be any money coming to her," she said.

"Why not?" demanded Robert in great surprise.

"Mr. Jones tells me that your uncle is indebted to him, and he will credit him with twenty-five cents on account."

"What does my uncle owe him for?" demanded the boy with flashing eyes.

"For drink, I suppose," said Mrs. Jones rather reluctantly.

"For drink!" repeated our hero. "Are you not satisfied with taking all my uncle's earnings, but you must get my aunt to work her fingers to the bone and then keep back her money in payment for your rum?"

"Upon my word, Robert Coverdale," said Mrs. Jones sharply, "you are very impudent! How dare you speak to me in that way?"

"How dare you treat my aunt so meanly?" retorted Robert with righteous indignation.

"I won't stand your impudence – so there! Your aunt needn't

expect any more sewing to do," said the angry landlady.

"She wouldn't take any more of your work if that is the way you mean to pay her."

"I won't stand here talking with you. I'll get Mr. Jones to give you a horsewhipping – see if I don't!"

"He'd better not try it," said Robert with flashing eyes.

The door was slammed in his face, and, angry and disappointed, he walked slowly out of the tavern yard.

CHAPTER III
THE WIND BROUGHT GOOD LUCK

John Trafton was sitting out on the porch of the tavern when his nephew came out of the side gate.

"There's your nephew, Trafton," said old Ben Brandon, who, like John Trafton, frequented the barroom too much for his good. "Hasn't come here for his dram, has he?" added the old man, chuckling.

John Trafton's curiosity was excited, for he had no idea of any errand that could bring Robert to the tavern. A suspicion crossed his mind, the very thought of which kindled his indignation. His wife might have sent to request Mr. Jones not to sell him any more liquor. He did not think she would dare to do it, but she might. At any rate he determined to find out.

He hastily left the porch and followed Robert. Presently the boy heard his uncle call him and he turned round.

"What's wanted, uncle?" he inquired.

"Where have you been, Robert?"

"I called to see Mrs. Jones."

"What did you want of Mrs. Jones?"

"It was an errand for Aunt Jane."

"Will you answer my question?" said Trafton angrily. "What

business has your aunt got with Mrs. Jones?"

He still thought that his wife had sent a message to Mr. Jones through the wife of the latter.

"She had been doing a little sewing for Mrs. Jones and asked me to carry the work back."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said John Trafton, relieved. "And how much did the work come to?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"You may give me the money, Robert," said the fisherman. "You might lose it, you know."

Could Robert be blamed for regarding his uncle with contempt? His intention evidently was to appropriate his wife's scanty earnings to his own use, spending them, of course, for drink. Certainly a man must be debased who will stoop to anything so mean, and Robert felt deeply ashamed of the man he was forced to call uncle.

"I can't give you the money, uncle," said Robert coldly.

"Can't, hey? What do you mean by that, I want to know?" demanded the fisherman suspiciously.

"My aunt wanted me to buy a little tea and a loaf of bread with the money."

"What if she did? Can't I buy them just as well as you? Hand over that money, Robert Coverdale, or it will be the worse for you."

"I have no money to hand you."

"Why haven't you? You haven't had a chance to spend it yet.

You needn't lie about it or I will give you a flogging!"

"I never lie," said Robert proudly. "I told you I haven't got the money and I haven't."

"Then what have you done with it – lost it, eh?"

"I have done nothing with it. Mrs. Jones wouldn't pay me."

"And why wouldn't she pay you?"

"Because she said that you were owing her husband money for drink and she would credit it on your account."

As Robert said this he looked his uncle full in the eye and his uncle flushed a little with transient shame.

"So aunt must go without her tea and bread," continued Robert.

John Trafton had the grace to be ashamed and said:

"I'll fix this with Jones. You can go to the store and get the tea and tell Sands to charge it to me."

"He won't do it," said Robert. "He's refused more than once."

"If he won't that isn't my fault. I've done all I could."

Trafton turned back and resumed his seat on the porch, where he remained till about ten o'clock. It was his usual evening resort, for he did not think it necessary to go home until it was time to go to bed.

Though Robert had no money to spend, he kept on his way slowly toward the village store. He felt mortified and angry.

"Poor Aunt Jane!" he said to himself. "It's a shame that she should have to go without her tea. She hasn't much to cheer her up. Mrs. Jones is about the meanest woman I ever saw, and I

hope Aunt Jane won't do any more work for her."

It occurred to Robert to follow his uncle's direction and ask for credit at the store. But he knew very well that there would be little prospect of paying the debt, and, though a boy, he had strict notions on the subject of debt and could not bring his mind, even for his aunt's sake, to buy what he could not pay for.

When we are sad and discouraged relief often comes in some unexpected form and from an unexpected quarter. So it happened now to our young hero.

Walking before him was an elderly gentleman who had on his head a Panama straw hat with a broad brim.

He was a Boston merchant who was spending a part of the season at Cook's Harbor. As his custom was, he was indulging in an evening walk after supper.

There was a brisk east wind blowing, which suddenly increased in force, and, being no respecter of persons, whisked off Mr. Lawrence Tudor's expensive Panama and whirled it away.

Mr. Tudor looked after his hat in dismay. He was an elderly gentleman, of ample proportions, who was accustomed to walk at a slow, dignified pace and who would have found it physically uncomfortable to run, even if he could be brought to think it comported with his personal dignity.

"Bless my soul, how annoying!" exclaimed the merchant.

He looked about him helplessly, as if to consider what course it would be best to pursue under the circumstances, and as he

looked he was relieved to see a boy in energetic pursuit of the lost hat.

This boy was Robert, who grasped the situation at once, and, being fleet of foot, thought it very good fun to have a race with the wind.

He had a good chase, for the wind in this case proved to be no mean competitor, but at last he succeeded and put his hand on the hat, which he carried in triumph to its owner.

"Really, my boy, I am exceedingly indebted to you," said Mr. Tudor, made happy by the recovery of his hat.

"You are quite welcome, sir," said Robert politely.

"You had a good run after it," said Mr. Tudor.

"Yes, sir; the wind is very strong."

"I don't know what I should have done without you. I am afraid I couldn't have overtaken it myself."

"I am afraid not," said Robert, smiling at the thought of a man of the merchant's figure engaging in a race for a hat.

"I could run when I was a boy like you," said Mr. Tudor pleasantly, "but there's rather too much of me now. Do you live in the village?"

"Out on the cliff, sir. My uncle is a fisherman."

"And do you ever fish?"

"Sometimes – a little, sir."

"But you don't expect to be a fisherman when you grow up?"

"Not if I can find anything better."

"A bright-looking lad like you ought to find something better.

Please accept this."

He drew from his vest pocket a two-dollar bill, which he placed in

Robert's hand.

"What!" exclaimed our young hero in astonishment. "All this for saving your hat? It is quite too much, sir."

Mr. Tudor smiled.

"You will no doubt be surprised," he said, "when I tell you that my hat cost me fifty dollars. It is a very fine Panama."

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Robert.

He had not supposed it worth two.

"So you see it is worth something to save it, and I should undoubtedly have lost it but for you."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said Robert. "I wouldn't accept the money if it were for myself, but it will be very acceptable to my aunt."

"I suppose your uncle does not find fishing very remunerative?"

"It isn't that, sir; but he spends nearly all of his money at the tavern, and – "

"I understand, my boy. It is a very great pity. I, too, had an uncle who was intemperate, and I can understand your position. What is your name?"

"Robert Coverdale."

"There is my business card. If you ever come to Boston, come and see me."

Robert took the card, from which he learned that his new acquaintance was Lawrence Tudor.

CHAPTER IV
ROBERT'S PURCHASES

When Robert parted from Mr. Tudor he felt as if he had unexpectedly fallen heir to a fortune. Two dollars is not a very large sum, but to Robert, nurtured amid privation, it assumed large proportions.

He began at once to consider what he could do with it, and it is to his credit that he thought rather of his aunt than himself.

He would buy a whole pound of tea, he decided, and a pound of sugar to make it more palatable. This would last a considerable time and take less than half his money. As to the disposal of the remainder, he would consider how to expend that.

In a long, low building, with brooms, brushes and a variety of nondescript articles displayed in the windows and outside, Abner Sands kept the village store.

It was a dark, gloomy place, crowded with articles for family use. The proprietor enjoyed a monopoly of the village trade, and, in spite of occasional bad debts, did a snug business and was able every year to make an addition to his store of savings in the county savings bank.

He was a cautious man, and, by being well acquainted with the circumstances and habits of every man in the village, knew whom to trust and to whom to refuse credit. John Trafton belonged to

the latter class.

Mr. Sands knew, as everybody else knew, that all his money was invested in liquor and that the chance of paying a bill for articles needful for the household was very small indeed.

When, therefore, Robert entered the store he took it for granted that he meant to ask credit, and he was all ready for a refusal.

"What do you charge for your tea, Mr. Sands?" the boy asked.

"Different prices, according to quality," answered the storekeeper, not thinking it necessary to go into details.

"How much is the cheapest?"

"Fifty cents a pound."

"Do you call it a pretty good article?" continued our hero.

"Very fair; I use it in my own family," answered Abner, looking over his spectacles at his young customer.

"I guess I'll take a pound," said Robert with the air of one who had plenty of money.

"A pound?" ejaculated Abner Sands in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

A pound of tea for one in John Trafton's circumstances seemed to Mr. Sands an extraordinary order. Considering that it was probably to be charged, it seemed to the cautious trader an impudent attempt to impose upon him, and he looked sternly at our young hero.

"We don't trust," he said coldly.

"I haven't asked you to trust me, Mr. Sands," said Robert

independently.

"You don't mean to say you're ready to pay for it cash down, do you?" asked Abner, his countenance expressing amazement.

"Yes, I do."

"Show me the money."

"I'll show you the money when I get my tea," said Robert, provoked at Mr. Sands' resolute incredulity. "I've told you I will pay you before I leave the store. If you don't want to sell your goods, say so!"

"Come, come! there ain't no use in gettin' angry," said the trader in a conciliatory tone. "Your trade's as good as anybody's if you've got money to pay for the goods."

"I've already told you I have, Mr. Sands."

"All right, Robert. You shall have the tea."

He weighed out the tea and then asked:

"Is there anything more?"

"Yes, sir. How do you sell your sugar?"

"Brown sugar – eight cents."

"I guess that will do. I will take a pound of brown sugar."

"Your folks don't generally buy sugar. I didn't know you used it."

"We are going to use a pound," said Robert, who did not fancy the trader's interference.

"Well, I'd jest as soon sell you a pound as anybody as long as you've got the money to pay for it."

Robert said nothing, although this remark was made in an

interrogative tone, as if Mr. Sands still doubted whether our hero would be able to pay for his purchases.

There was nothing to do, therefore, but to weigh out the sugar.

The two bundles lay on the counter, but Mr. Sands watched them as a cat watches a mouse, with a vague apprehension that our hero might seize them and carry them off without payment.

But Robert was better prepared than he supposed.

From his vest pocket he drew the two-dollar bill, and, passing it across the counter, he said:

"You may take your pay out of this."

Abner Sands took the bill and stared at it as if some mystery attached to it. He scrutinized it carefully through his spectacles, as if there was a possibility that it might be bad, but it had an unmistakably genuine look.

"It seems to be good," he remarked cautiously.

"Of course it's good!" said Robert. "You don't take me for a counterfeiter, do you, Mr. Sands?"

"It's a good deal of money for you to have, Robert. Where did you get it?"

"Why do you ask that question?" asked our hero, provoked.

"I was a leetle surprised at your having so much money – that's all. Did your uncle give it to you?"

"I don't see what that is to you, Mr. Sands. If you don't want to sell your tea and sugar, you can keep them."

If there had been another grocery store in the village Robert would have gone thither, but it has already been said that Abner

Sands had the monopoly of the village trade.

"You're kind of touchy this evenin', Robert," said Abner placidly, for he was so given to interesting himself in the affairs of his neighbors that he did not realize that his curiosity was displayed in an impertinent manner. "Of course I want to sell all I can. You've got considerable money comin' back to you. Don't you want to buy something else?"

"I guess not to-night."

"As long as you've got the cash to pay, I'm perfectly ready to sell you goods. Lemme see. Fifty-eight from two dollars leaves a dollar'n thirty-two cents."

"Forty-two," corrected Robert.

"I declare, so it does! You are a good hand at subtraction."

Robert felt that he could not truthfully return the compliment and prudently remained silent.

"There is your money," continued the trader, putting in Robert's hand a dollar bill and forty-two cents in change. "Your uncle must have been quite lucky."

He looked questioningly at our hero, but Robert did not choose to gratify his curiosity.

"Is it so very lucky to make two dollars?" he asked, and with these words he left the store.

"That's a cur'us boy!" soliloquized Mr. Sands, looking after him. "I can't get nothin' out of him. Looks as if John Trafton must have turned over a new leaf to give him so much money to buy groceries. I hope he has. It's better that I should get his

money than the tavern keeper."

Mr. Sands did not have to wait long before his curiosity was partially gratified, for the very man of whom he was thinking just then entered the store.

"Has my nephew been here?" he inquired.

"Just went out."

"I thought you might be willing to let him have what little he wanted on credit. I'll see that it's paid for."

"Why, he paid for the goods himself – fifty-eight cents."

"What!" exclaimed the fisherman, astonished.

"He bought a pound of tea, at fifty cents, and a pound of sugar, at eight cents, and paid for 'em."

"Where'd he get the money?" asked Trafton.

"I am sure I don't know. I supposed you gave it to him. He's got more left. He paid for the articles with a two-dollar bill and he's got a dollar and forty-two cents left!"

"The young hypocrite!" ejaculated John Trafton indignantly. "All the while he had this money he was worryin' me for a quarter to buy some tea and a loaf of bread."

"Looks rather mysterious – doesn't it?" said the grocer.

"Mr. Sands," said the fisherman, "I've took care of that boy ever since he was three year old, and that's the way he treats me. He's a young viper!"

"Jes so!" said Mr. Sands, who was a politic man and seldom contradicted his neighbors.

"The rest of that money belongs to me by rights," continued

the fisherman, "and he's got to give it to me. How much did you say it was?"

"A dollar and forty-two cents, John; but, seems to me, you'd better let him keep it to buy groceries with."

"I must have the money!" muttered Trafton, not heeding this advice, which was good, though selfish. "I guess I'll go home and make the boy give it to me!"

And he staggered out of the store, and, as well as he could, steered for home.

CHAPTER V
"GIVE ME THAT MONEY"

From the village store Robert went to the baker's and bought a loaf of bread for six cents, making his entire expenditures sixty-four cents.

He was now ready to go home. He walked rapidly and soon reached the humble cabin, where he found his aunt waiting for him.

She looked with surprise at the three bundles he brought in and asked:

"What have you got there, Robert?"

"First of all, here is a pound of tea," said the boy, laying it down on the kitchen table. "Here is a pound of sugar and here is a loaf of bread."

"But I didn't order all those, Robert," said his aunt.

"I know you didn't," answered her nephew, "but I thought you'd be able to make use of them."

"No doubt I shall, but surely you did not buy them all for twenty-five cents?"

"I should say not. Why, the tea alone cost fifty cents! Then the sugar came to eight cents and the loaf cost six cents."

"Mrs. Jones didn't pay you enough to buy all those, did she?"

"Mrs. Jones is about as mean a woman as you can find

anywhere," Robert said warmly. "She didn't pay me a cent."

"Why? Didn't she like the work?"

"She said uncle owed her husband money for drink and the work would part pay up the debt."

But for the presence of the groceries, this would have had a discouraging effect upon Mrs. Trafton, but her mind was diverted by her curiosity, and she said apprehensively:

"I hope you didn't buy on credit, Robert? I never can pay so much money!"

"Mr. Sands isn't the man to sell on credit. Aunt Jane. No, I paid cash.

And the best of it is," continued our hero, "I have some money left."

Here he produced and spread on the table before his aunt's astonished eyes the balance of the money.

Mrs. Trafton was startled. The possession of so much money seemed to her incomprehensible.

"I hope you came by the money honestly, Robert?"

"What have I ever done, Aunt Jane, that you should think me a thief?" asked Robert, half amused, half annoyed.

"Nothing, my dear boy; but I can't understand how you came to have so much money."

"I see I must explain, aunt. A strong wind blew it to me."

"Then somebody must have lost it. You shouldn't have spent it till you had tried to find the owner."

"I'll explain to you."

And he told her the story of the lost hat and the liberal reward he obtained for chasing and recovering it.

"Think of a straw hat costing fifty dollars, aunt!" he said wonderingly.

"It does seem strange, but I am glad it was worth so much or you wouldn't have been so well paid."

"This Mr. Tudor is a gentleman, aunt. Why, plenty of people would have given me only ten cents. I would have thought myself well paid if he had even given me that, but I couldn't have brought you home so much tea. Aunt Jane, do me a favor."

"What is it, Robert?"

"Make yourself a good strong cup of tea tonight. You'll feel ever so much better, and there's plenty of it. A pound will last a long time, won't it?"

"Oh, yes, a good while. I shall get a good deal of comfort out of that tea. But I don't know about making any to-night. If you would like some – "

"If you'll make some, I'll drink a little, Aunt Jane."

Robert said this because he feared otherwise his aunt would not make any till the next morning.

"Very well, Robert."

"Don't let uncle know I've brought so much money home," said Robert with a sudden thought.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want him to know I have any money. If he knew, he would want me to give it to him."

"I don't think he would claim it. It was given to you."

"I'll tell you why I am sure he would."

And Robert told how his uncle demanded the scanty pittance which he supposed Mrs. Jones had paid for the sewing.

Mrs. Trafton blushed with shame for her husband's meanness.

"Drink changes a man's nature completely," she said. "The time was when

John would have scorned such a thing."

"That time has gone by, aunt. For fear he will find out that I have the money, I believe I will go and hide it somewhere."

"Shall I take care of it for you, Robert?" asked Mrs. Trafton.

"No, Aunt Jane; he would find it out, and I don't want to get you into any trouble. I know of a good place to put it – a place where he will never find it. I will put it there till we need to use it."

"You must buy something for yourself with it. The money is yours."

Robert shook his head decidedly.

"I don't need anything – that is, I don't need anything but what I can do without. We will keep it to buy bread and tea and anything else that we need. Now, aunt, while you are steeping the tea, I will go out and dispose of the money."

Here it is necessary to explain that though John Trafton started for home when he heard from Mr. Sands about Robert's unexpected wealth, he changed his mind as he passed the tavern. He thought he must have one more drink.

He entered and preferred his request.

"Trafton," said the landlord, "don't you think you've had enough?"

"Not quite. I want one more glass and then I'll go home."

"But you are owing me several dollars. Clear off that score and then you may have as much as you will."

"I'll pay you a dollar on account to-morrow."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. Bob's got some money of mine – over a dollar. I'll get it to-night and bring it round tomorrow."

"Of course, Trafton, If you'll keep your credit good, I won't mind trusting you. Well, what shall it be?"

John Trafton gave his order and sat down again in the barroom. He felt so comfortable that he easily persuaded himself that there was no hurry about collecting the money in his nephew's hands. Robert was at home by this time and would have no way of spending the balance of his cash.

"It's all right," said the fisherman; "I'll wait till ten o'clock and then I'll go home."

Meanwhile Robert went out on the cliff and looked about him. He looked down upon the waves as they rolled in on the beach and he enjoyed the sight, familiar as it was, for he had a love of the grand and beautiful in nature.

"I think if I were a rich man," thought the poor fisherman's boy, "I would like to build a fine house on the cliff, with an observatory right here, where I could always see the ocean. It's something to live here, if I do have to live in a poor cabin. But I

must consider where I will hide my money."

At his feet was a small tin box, which had been thrown away by somebody, and it struck Robert that this would make a good depository for his money. Fortunately the cover of the box was attached to it.

He took the money from his vest pocket and dropped it into the box. Then he covered it, and, finding a good place, he scooped out the dirt and carefully deposited the box in the hole.

He carefully covered it up, replacing the dirt, and took particular notice of the spot, so that there would be no difficulty in finding it again whenever he had occasion.

Having attended to this duty, he retraced his steps to the cabin and found that the tea had been steeped and the table was covered with a neat cloth and two cups and saucers were set upon it.

"Tea's all ready, Robert," said his aunt cheerfully. "The smell of it does me good. It's better than all the liquor in the world!"

Robert did not like tea as well as his aunt, but still he relished the warm drink, for the night was cool, and more than ever he rejoiced to see how much his aunt enjoyed what had latterly been rather a rare luxury.

About nine o'clock Robert went to bed and very soon fell asleep.

He had not been asleep long before he was conscious of being rudely shaken.

Opening his eyes, he saw his uncle with inflamed face and thickened utterance.

"What's wanted, uncle?" he asked.

"Where's that money, you young rascal? Give me the dollar and forty-two cents you're hiding from me!"

CHAPTER VI
MAN AGAINST BOY

As Robert, scarcely awake, looked into the threatening face of his uncle he felt that the crisis had come and that all his firmness and manliness were demanded.

Our hero was not disposed to rebel against just authority. He recognized that his uncle, poor as his guardianship was, had some claim to his obedience.

In any ordinary matter he would have unhesitatingly obeyed him. But, in the present instance, he felt that his aunt's comfort depended, in a measure, upon his retention of the small amount of money which he was fortunate enough to possess.

Of course he had thought of all this before he went to sleep, and he had decided, in case his uncle heard of his good luck, to keep the money at all hazards.

For a minute he remained silent, meeting calmly the angry and impatient glance of his uncle.

"Give me that money, I tell you!" demanded the fisherman with thickened utterance.

"I haven't got any money of yours, Uncle John," said Robert, now forced to say something.

"You lie, boy! You've got a dollar and forty-two cents."

"I haven't got as much as that, but I have nearly as much."

"Have you been spending any more money?"

"I bought a loaf of bread for six cents."

"Then you've got a dollar and thirty-six cents left."

"Yes, I have."

"Give it to me!"

"You want to spend it for rum, I suppose, uncle."

"Curse your impudence! What difference does it make to you what I do with it?"

Robert rose to a sitting posture, and, carried away by just indignation, he said:

"I mean to keep that money and spend it for my aunt. There ought to be no need of it. You ought to support her yourself and supply her with all she needs; but, instead of that, you selfishly spend all your money on drink and leave her to get along the best way she can!"

"You young rascal!" exclaimed his uncle, half ashamed and wholly angry.

"Is that the way you repay me for keeping you out of the poorhouse?"

"I can support myself, Uncle John, and for the last two years I've done it and helped Aunt Jane besides. There isn't any danger of my going to the poorhouse. I would leave Cook's Harbor tomorrow if I thought Aunt Jane were sure of a comfortable support, but I am afraid you would let her starve."

Robert had never spoken so plainly before and his uncle was almost struck dumb by the boy's bold words. He knew they were

deserved, but he was angry nevertheless and he was as firm as ever in his determination to have the money.

"Boy," he said, "you are too young to lecture a grown man like me. I know what's best to do. Where did you get the money?" he demanded with sudden curiosity. "Did you find it in any of my pockets?"

"There wouldn't be much use in searching your pockets for money. You never leave any behind."

"Where did you get it then?"

"Mr. Tudor, who boards at the hotel, gave it to me."

"That's a likely story."

"He gave it to me because I ran after his hat, which was blown off by the wind, and brought it back to him. It was a very expensive hat, so he said."

"I know; it is a Panama hat."

"That's what he called it."

"Did you have that money when I saw you coming out of the tavern yard?"

"No."

"When you got it, why didn't you come and bring it to me?"

"Because it was my own money. You had no right to claim it," said Robert firmly.

"He is right, John," said Mrs. Trafton, who had listened uneasily to the conversation, but had not yet seen an opportunity to put in a word in Robert's favor.

"Shut up, old woman!" said the fisherman roughly. "Well,"

said he, turning to Robert, "I've heard what you've got to say and it don't make a bit of difference. I must have the money."

"I refuse to give it to you," Robert said, pale but firm.

"Then," said John Trafton with a curse, "I'll take it."

He snatched Robert's pants from the chair on which they were lying and thrust his hand into one pocket after the other, but he found nothing.

He next searched the vest in the same manner, but the search was equally unavailing.

"You needn't search, for I haven't got the money," said Robert.

"Then where is it?"

"It is safe."

"Did he give it to you, Jane?" demanded the fisherman, turning to his wife.

"No."

"Do you know where it is?"

"No."

"Boy, where is that money?" demanded Trafton, his face flushed. "Go and get it directly!"

"I can't. It isn't in the house."

"Where is it then?"

"I hid it."

"Where did you hide it?"

"I dug a hole and put it in."

"What made you do that?"

"Because I was afraid you would get hold of it."

"You were right enough there," said John Trafton grimly, "for I will get hold of it. Get right up and find it and bring it to me."

Here Mrs. Trafton again interposed.

"How can you ask such a thing, John?" she said. "The night is as dark as a pocket. How do you expect Robert is going to find the money in the dark?"

Though John Trafton was a good deal under the influence of liquor, he was not wholly deaf to reason and he saw the force of his wife's remark.

In fact, he had himself found sorry trouble in getting home from the tavern, familiar as the path was to him, on account of the intense darkness.

"Well, I guess it'll do to-morrow morning," he said. "I must have it then, for I've promised to pay Jones a dollar on account. I said I would, and I've got to keep my promise. Do you hear that, you young rascal?"

"Yes, I hear it."

"Then mind you don't forget it. That's all I've got to say."

And the fisherman staggered into the adjoining room, and, without taking the trouble of removing his garments, threw himself on the bed and in five minutes was breathing loud in a drunken stupor.

Mrs. Trafton did not immediately go to bed. She was troubled in mind, for she foresaw that there was only a truce and not a cessation of hostilities.

In the morning her husband would renew his demand upon

Robert, and, should the latter continue to refuse to comply, she was afraid there would be violence.

When her husband's heavy breathing showed that he was insensible to anything that was said, she began.

"I don't know but you'd better give up that money to your uncle," she said.

"How can you advise me to do that, aunt?" asked Robert in surprise.

"Because I'm afraid you'll make him angry if you refuse."

"I can't help it if he is angry," answered Robert. "He has no right to be. Don't you know what he said – that he wanted to pay a dollar to the tavern keeper?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Jones shall never get a cent of that money," said Robert firmly.

"But, Robert," said his aunt nervously, "your uncle may beat you."

"Then I'll keep my distance from him."

"I would rather he would have the money than that you should get hurt,

Robert."

"Aunt Jane, I am going to take the risk of that. Though he is my uncle and your husband, there's one thing I can't help saying: It is a contemptibly mean thing not only to use all his own earnings for drink, but to try to get hold of what little I get for the same purpose."

"I don't deny it, Robert. I don't pretend to defend my husband. Once he was different, but drink has changed his whole nature. I never had any reason to complain before he took to drink."

"No doubt of it, aunt, but that don't alter present circumstances. I have no respect for my uncle when he acts as he has to-night. Come what may, there's one thing I am determined upon – he shan't have the money."

"You'll be prudent, Robert, for my sake?" entreated Mrs. Trafton.

"Yes, I'll be prudent. To-morrow morning I will get up early and be out of the way till after uncle is gone. There is no chance of his getting up early and going a-fishing."

The deep and noisy breathing made it probable that the fisherman would awaken at a late hour, as both Robert and his aunt knew.

She was reassured by his promise and prepared to go to bed. Soon all three inmates of the little cabin were sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER VII
THE NEXT MORNING

Robert rose at six the next morning and half an hour later took his breakfast. It consisted of fish, bread and a cup of tea, and though most of my young readers might not be satisfied with it – especially as there was no butter – Robert thought himself lucky to be so well provided for.

When his breakfast was finished he rose from the table.

"Now I'm off, Aunt Jane," he said.

"Where are you going, Robert?"

"I'll earn some money if I can. We've got a little, but it won't last long."

"It won't be very easy to find work, I am afraid."

"I shall be ready for anything that turns up, aunt. Something turned up yesterday when I didn't expect it."

"That's true."

Just then the fisherman was heard to stir in the adjoining room, and Robert, not wishing to be near when he awakened, hastily left the cabin to avoid a repetition of the scene of the previous night.

Mrs. Trafton breathed a sigh of relief when her nephew was fairly out of the way.

About an hour later her husband rose and without needing to dress – for he had thrown himself on the bed in his ordinary

clothes – walked into the room where his wife was at work.

"Where's Robert?" he asked.

"He had his breakfast and went out."

"How long ago?"

"About an hour ago."

John Trafton scowled with disappointment.

"Is he round about home?"

"I don't think he is."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He said he would try to find a job."

"Why didn't you keep him? Didn't you know I wanted to see him?"

"You didn't ask me to keep him," said Mrs. Trafton nervously.

"I see how it is," said the fisherman; "you're in league with him."

"What do you mean by that, John?"

"You know well enough what I mean. You don't want him to give me that money."

Mrs. Trafton plucked up courage enough to say: "You ought not to ask for it, John."

"Why shouldn't I ask for it?" he demanded, pounding forcibly on the table.

"Because he means to spend it for things we need and you want it to spend at the tavern."

"There you are again – always twitting me because, after exposing myself to storm and the dangers of the sea, I take a little

something to warm me up and make me comfortable."

To hear John Trafton's tone one might think him a grievously injured man.

"For two years, John Trafton, you have spent three-fourths of your earnings at the tavern," said his wife quietly. "You have left me to suffer want and privation that you might indulge your appetite for drink."

"You seem to be alive still," he said with an ugly sneer. "You don't seem to have starved."

"I might have done so but for Robert. He has brought me fish and bought groceries with what little money he could earn in various ways."

"Oh, it's Robert always!" sneered Trafton. "He is an angel, is he? He's only done his duty. Haven't I given him the shelter of my roof?"

"You haven't given him much else," retorted his wife.

"I've heard enough of that; now shut up," said the fisherman roughly.

"What have you got for breakfast?"

Mrs. Trafton pointed to the table, on which, while her husband had been speaking, she had placed his breakfast.

"Humph!" said he discontentedly, "that's a pretty poor breakfast!"

"It is the best I can give you," said his wife coldly.

"I don't care for tea. I'd as soon drink slops."

"What do you prefer?"

"I prefer coffee."

"I have none in the house. If you will bring me home some from the store, I will make you a cup every morning, but I don't think you would like it without milk."

"Do you think I am made of money? How do you expect me to buy coffee?"

"With the money you would otherwise spend for drink."

"Stop that, will you?" said Trafton angrily. "I'm tired of it."

A moment later he said in a milder tone:

"When I get that money of Robert's I will buy a pound of coffee."

Mrs. Trafton said nothing.

"Do you know where he has hidden it?" asked her husband after drinking a cup of the tea which he had so decried.

"No."

"Didn't he tell you where he was going to put it?"

"No."

"You are sure he didn't give it to you to keep?"

"I am very glad he didn't."

"Why are you glad?"

"Because you would have teased me till you got it."

"And I'll have it yet, Mrs. Trafton – do you hear that?" said the fisherman fiercely.

"Yes, I hear you."

"You may as well make up your mind that I am in earnest. What! am I to be defied by a weak woman and a half-grown boy?

You don't know me, Mrs. T."

"I do know you only too well, Mr. Trafton. It was an unlucky day when I married you."

"Humph! There may be two sides to that story. Well, I'm going."

"Where are you going? Shall you go out in the boat this morning?"

"Oh, you expect me to spend all my time working for my support, do you?

No, I am not going out in the boat. I am going to the village."

"To the tavern, I suppose?"

"And suppose I am going to the tavern," repeated the fisherman in a defiant tone, "have you got anything to say against it?"

"I have a great deal to say, but it won't do any good."

"That's where you are right."

John Trafton left the cabin, but he did not immediately take the road to the village.

First of all he thought he would look round a little and see if he could not discover the hiding place of the little sum which his nephew had concealed.

He walked about the cabin in various directions, examining carefully to see if anywhere the ground had been disturbed.

In one or two places he thought he detected signs of disturbance, and, bending over, scooped up the loose dirt, but, fortunately for our hero, he was on a false scent and discovered

nothing.

He was not a very patient man, and the fresh disappointment – for his hopes had been raised in each case – made him still more angry.

"The young rascal!" he muttered. "He deserves to be flogged for giving me so much trouble."

From the window of the cabin Mrs. Trafton saw what her husband was about and she was very much afraid he would succeed. She could not help – painful as it was – regarding with contempt a man who would stoop to such pitiful means to obtain money to gratify his diseased appetite.

"If I thought my wife knew where this money is I'd have it out of her," muttered the fisherman with a dark look at the cabin, "but likely the boy didn't tell her. I'll have to have some dealings with him shortly. He shall learn that he cannot defy me."

John Trafton, giving up the search, took his way to the village, and, as a matter of course, started directly for the tavern.

He entered the barroom and called for a drink.

Mr. Jones did not show his usual alacrity in waiting upon him.

"Trafton," said he, "where is that dollar you promised to pay me this morning?"

"Haven't got it," answered the fisherman, rather embarrassed. "I'll bring it to-morrow morning."

"Then to-morrow morning you may call for a drink."

"You ain't going back on me, Mr. Jones?" asked John Trafton in alarm.

"You are going back on me, as I look at it. You promised to bring me a dollar and you haven't done it."

"I'll tell you how it is, Mr. Jones. My nephew, Robert, has the money, but he was gone when I woke up this morning. I shall see him to-night and give you the money."

"You needn't wait till then. I saw Robert pass here only half an hour ago. He's somewhere in the village. Find him and get the money and then I'll talk with you."

There was no appeal from this decision and Trafton, angry and sullen, left the tavern to look for Robert.

CHAPTER VIII
ROBERT BECOMES A PRISONER

One of the most tasteful houses in Cook's Harbor was occupied in summer by the family of Theodore Irving, a Boston lawyer, who liked to have his wife and children in the country, though his business required him to spend a part of the hot season in the city.

The oldest son, Herbert, was about a year younger than Robert, a lively boy, fond of manly sports and thoroughly democratic in his tastes. He had scraped acquaintance with our hero, making the first advances, for Robert was not disposed to intrude his company where he was not sure it would be acceptable.

When Robert came to the village to avoid meeting his uncle. In passing by the house of Mr. Irving he attracted the attention of Herbert, who was sitting on the edge of the piazza.

With him was another boy of about his own age, a cousin named George Randolph. He had come to Cook's Harbor to spend a fortnight with his cousin, but the latter soon found that George was very hard to entertain.

He was seldom willing to engage in any amusement selected by his cousin, but always had some plan of his own to propose. Moreover, he was proud of his social position and always looked

down upon boys whose dress indicated a humbler rank than his own.

The two cousins were sitting on the piazza doing nothing. Herbert had proposed croquet, but George pronounced it too warm. He also declined ball for a similar reason.

"It seems to me you are very much afraid of the sun," said Herbert.

"I don't care to get tanned up. It looks vulgar," said George.

"I like to have a good time, even if I do get browned up," said his cousin.

"Then I don't agree with you," said George in a superior tone.

Just then Robert was seen approaching.

"There's a boy that will play with me," said Herbert, brightening up.

"What boy?"

"There – the one that is just coming along."

"That boy? Why, he isn't dressed as well as our coachman's son!"

"I can't help that; he's a nice fellow. Bob, come here; I want you."

"You surely are not going to invite that common boy into the yard?" protested George hastily.

"Why not? He has been here more than once."

By this time Robert had reached the gate.

Herbert jumped up and ran to open it.

"I am glad to see you, Robert," said Herbert cordially. "Are

you in a hurry?"

"No, Herbert."

"Then come in and have a game of croquet."

"All right, but you'll easily beat me."

"Never mind; you'll learn fast. Bob, this is my cousin, George Randolph.

George, this is my friend, Robert Coverdale."

George made the slightest possible inclination of the head and did not stir from where he was sitting.

"He doesn't look very social," thought Robert, greeting his friend's visitor politely.

"Here, Bob, select a mallet and ball. Shall I start first?"

"If you please. Won't your cousin play?"

"I'm very much obliged, I'm sure, for the invitation," said George, "but

I'd rather not."

"George is afraid of being tanned by exposure to the sun," explained

Herbert. "I hope you are not."

"I don't think the sun will make me any browner than I am already," said

Robert, laughing.

"I agree with you," said George in a sneering tone.

Robert looked at him quickly, struck by his tone, and decided that he had no particular desire to become any better acquainted.

The game of croquet proceeded and Herbert was an easy

victor.

"I told you I should be beaten, Herbert," said Robert.

"Of course; I am much more used to the game than you. I will give you odds of half the game. You shall start from the other stake on the return course and I will try to overtake you."

He came near succeeding, but Robert beat him by two wickets.

After three games Herbert proposed ball, and Robert, who felt more at home in this game, agreed to it.

"You'd better join us, George," said his cousin.

"No, I thank you. I have no inclination, I assure you."

"I don't see what fun there can be in sitting on the piazza."

"You forget that I have an opportunity of witnessing your friend's superior playing."

His tone made it clear to Robert that this was a sneer, but he had too much self-respect and too much regard for Herbert to take offense at it.

"You mean my awkwardness," he said. "You are quite welcome to the amusement it must afford you."

George arched his brows in surprise.

"Really this ragged boy is talking to me as if he considered me his equal," he thought. "It is Herbert's fault. He should not treat him so familiarly. I really don't care to be in such company."

"You must excuse me, Herbert," said George, rising with suitable dignity. "As you are provided with company, you can spare me. I will go into the house and read for a while."

"Very well, George."

"I hope I haven't driven your cousin away, Herbert," said Robert.

"I don't care whether you have or not, Bob," said Herbert, "I'm awfully disappointed in him. Papa invited him to visit us, thinking he would be company for me, but, instead of that, he objects to everything I propose. I find it very hard to entertain him."

"He doesn't appear to fancy me," said Robert.

"Don't mind him, Bob. He's a mean, stuck-up fellow, if he is my cousin."

"Perhaps he is not to blame. I am only a poor boy, belonging to a fisherman's family. I am afraid I am not a suitable associate for you or him," said Robert with proud humility.

"No more of that talk, Bob," said Herbert. "You're suitable for me, anyhow, and I like you twice as much as my cousin. I don't care how you are dressed, as long as you are a good fellow."

"At any rate, you are a good fellow, Herbert," said Robert warmly. "I liked you the very first day I saw you."

"And I can say the same for you. Bob. Well, never mind about George.

Leave him to his book. We'll amuse ourselves better."

As Robert was playing he caught sight of his uncle on his way to the tavern. He knew, therefore, that he could return home without danger of annoyance, and he excused himself to Herbert. As it was doubtful whether he could get anything to do in the

village and as the boat would not be in use, he concluded to go out and see if he could not catch a few fish for his aunt's dinner.

"Well, come and play with me again very soon, Bob," said his friend.

"I will, Herbert. Thank you for inviting me."

"Oh, I do that on my own account! I like your company."

"Thank you!"

Robert went home and spent a short time with his aunt before setting out on his fishing trip. He only meant to go out a short distance and there was plenty of time before noon.

He was just getting out the boat when, to his dismay, he heard a familiar but unwelcome voice hailing him.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going a-fishing. I thought you were not going to use the boat."

"Well, I am," said the fisherman shortly. "Are you ready to give me that money?"

"No, uncle," said Robert firmly.

"I have a right to it."

"You don't need it and aunt does," answered our hero.

"Well, never mind about that now. You can go out with me."

Considerably surprised at getting off so easily, Robert jumped into the boat with his uncle and they pushed off.

"Pull for Egg Island," said John Trafton.

Egg Island, so called from its oval shape, was situated about three miles from the cliff on which the fisherman's cabin stood

and probably did not comprise more than an acre of surface. It was rocky, partly covered with bushes and quite unoccupied.

Robert was puzzled, but did not venture to ask his uncle why they were going to this island.

In due time they reached the rocky isle and the boat was rounded to shore.

"You may jump out and get me a good-sized stick," said the fisherman.

Robert obeyed, though he feared the stick was to be used on his back.

He had scarcely scrambled up the bank than he heard the sound of oars, and, looking back hastily, he saw his uncle pushing off from the island.

"I'm going to leave you here, you young rascal, till you agree to give me that money," said John Trafton triumphantly. "I'll let you know that I won't be defied by a boy."

Already the boat was several rods distant.

Robert sat down on a rocky ledge and tried to realize his position. He was a prisoner on Egg Island and there he must stay till his uncle chose to release him.

CHAPTER IX
ALONE ON AN ISLAND

Of course our hero's position was not to be compared with that of one left on a lonely island in the Pacific, but it was not agreeable. He was only three miles from the mainland, but there was no chance to cross this brief distance. He had no boat, and though he could swim a little, he would inevitably have been drowned had he undertaken to swim to shore.

Robert had read "Robinson Crusoe," and he naturally thought of that famous mariner on finding himself in a similar position.

He had never been on Egg Island before and he knew it only as he had seen it from the mainland or from a boat.

"That's a mean trick of Uncle John," said Robert to himself. "If I had suspected what he was after I wouldn't have got out of the boat."

Just then he saw the boat turn, the fisherman pulling for the island.

Robert felt relieved. He was not to be left on the island after all. He sat still and waited for the boat to approach.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked Trafton when he was within a few rods.

"Not very well," answered our hero.

"You wouldn't care to stay here, I suppose?"

"No."

"I will take you back into the boat if you will promise to give me that money."

It was a tempting proposal, and Robert was half inclined to yield. But, he reflected, his uncle had no claim to the money, and, if he secured it, would spend it for drink, while his aunt would lose the benefit of it. He summoned all his courage and answered:

"You have no right to the money, uncle. I can't give it to you."

"If you don't, I will row away and leave you."

"Then you will be doing a very mean thing," said Robert with spirit.

"That's my lookout. Just understand that I am in earnest. Now, what do you say?"

"I say no," answered our hero firmly.

"Then you may take the consequences," said his uncle, with a muttered curse, as he turned the head of the boat and rowed rapidly away.

Robert watched the receding boat, and for an instant he regretted his determination. But it was only for an instant.

"I have done what I thought to be right," he said, "and I don't believe

I shall have cause to repent it. I must see what is best to be done."

He got up and set about exploring his small island kingdom.

It was very rocky, the only vegetation being some scant grass and some whortleberry bushes. Luckily it was the height of the

berry season and there was a good supply on the bushes.

"I shan't starve just yet," he said cheerfully. "These berries will keep me alive for a day or two, if I am compelled to remain as long."

There was this advantage about the berries, that, in a measure, they satisfied his thirst as well as his hunger.

Robert did not immediately begin to gather berries, for it was yet early, and too short a time had elapsed since breakfast for him to have gained an appetite. He wandered at random over his small kingdom and from the highest portion looked out to sea.

Far away he saw several sails, but there was little chance of being rescued by any. If he were seen, it would not be supposed that he was confined a prisoner on an island so near the mainland. Still Robert did not feel that he was likely to be a prisoner for a long time.

There were other fishermen, besides his uncle, at Cook's Harbor, and by next morning, at the farthest, he would be able to attract the attention of some one of them as he cruised near the island.

But it would not be very pleasant to pass a night alone in such an exposed spot.

Not long before a sloop had been wrecked upon the southwest corner of the island, and though no lives were lost, the vessel itself had been so injured that there had been no attempt to repair or remove it.

In coasting near the island Robert had often thought he would

like to examine the wreck, but he never had done so. It struck him now that he had a capital opportunity to view it at his leisure. Of leisure, unfortunately, he had too much on his hands.

There was a patch of sand at the corner where the sloop had run ashore and the frame of the vessel had imbedded in it. A portion had been swept away, but a considerable part still remained.

Robert clambered down and began to make an examination of the stranded vessel.

"I suppose it belongs to me if I choose to claim it," he said to himself. "At any rate, no one else is likely to dispute my claim. Wouldn't it be jolly if I could find a keg of gold pieces hidden somewhere about the old wreck? That would keep aunt and me for years and we wouldn't feel any anxiety about support."

This was very pleasant to think about certainly, but kegs of gold pieces are not often carried on sloops nowadays, as Robert very well knew.

The chief use the old wreck was likely to be to him was in affording materials for a raft by which he might find his way to the mainland.

Our hero made a critical survey of the wreck and tried to pull it apart.

This was not easy, but finally he was enabled to detach a few planks.

"If I only had a saw, a hammer and some nails," he thought, "I could build a raft without much difficulty. But I don't see how

I am going to get along without these."

For the hammer he soon found a substitute in a hard rock of moderate size. There were nails, but they were not easy to extricate from the planks. As to a saw, there was no hope of getting one or anything that would answer the purpose of one.

Robert worked hard for a couple of hours and in that time he had accomplished something. He had extricated half a dozen planks of unequal length, secured a supply of nails, more or less rusty, and thus had already provided the materials of a raft.

The grand difficulty remained – to fashion them into a raft which would convey him in safety to the shore of the mainland.

I have said that he had no saw. He had a jackknife, however, and this was of some use to him, particularly in extricating the nails. It was slow work, but he had all day before him.

When the two hours were over he began to feel hungry. It was not far from the time when he was accustomed to take dinner, and he set about satisfying his hunger.

He went from bush to bush, plucking the ripe berries and eating them. They were very good, but not quite so hearty as a plate of meat and potatoes. However, he would have had no meat if he had been able to sit down at home.

After dinner – if his repast of berries can be dignified by such a name – Robert sat down to rest a while before resuming his labors on the raft.

He finally lay down with his head in the shadow of an unusually large bush, and, before he was fully aware of the

danger, he had fallen asleep. When he awoke he saw by the position of the sun that it must be about the middle of the afternoon.

He jumped up hastily, and, first of all, took a hasty glance around to see if he could anywhere descry a boat. But none was to be seen.

"I must set about making my raft," he decided. "It is getting late and I don't know how long it may take me."

It proved to be slow and rather difficult work. Robert was pounding away with his stone hammer when, to his great joy, he descried a boat rounding the corner of the island.

It was rowed by a single boy. When he came near Robert recognized him as

George Randolph – the cousin of his friend Herbert.

It happened that George was very fond of rowing and had a boat of his own, which he rowed a good deal in Boston Harbor.

He had long had an ambition to row to Egg Island and had selected this day for the trip. He had not asked Herbert to accompany him, being desirous of saying that he had accomplished the entire trip alone.

Though George had not seemed very friendly, Robert did not for a moment doubt that he would be willing to help him in his strait, and he was almost as delighted to see him as he would have been to see Herbert himself. There would be no need now of the raft, and he gladly suspended work upon it.

Rising to his feet, he called out:

"Hello, there!"

George paused in his rowing and asked – for he had not yet caught sight of Robert:

"Who calls?"

"I – Robert Coverdale!"

Then George, turning his glance in the right direction, caught sight of the boy he had tried to snub in the morning.

CHAPTER X
ROBERT COMPLETES THE RAFT

"What do you want of me?" asked George superciliously.

"Will you come to shore and take me into your boat?" asked Robert eagerly.

"Why should I? You have no claims on me," said George. "Indeed, I don't know you."

"I was at Mr. Irving's this morning, playing croquet with Herbert."

"I am aware of that, but that is no reason why I should take you into my boat. I prefer to be alone."

If Robert had not been in such a strait he would not have pressed the request, but he was not sure when there would be another chance to leave the island, and he persisted.

"You don't understand how I am situated," he said. "I wouldn't ask such a favor if I were not obliged to, but I have no other way of getting back. If you don't take me in, I shall probably be obliged to stay here all night."

"How did you come here?" asked George, his curiosity aroused.

"I came in a boat with my uncle."

"Then you can go back with him."

"He has gone back already. He is offended with me because

I won't do something which he has no right to ask, and he has left me here purposely."

"Isn't your uncle a fisherman?"

"Yes."

"I don't care to associate with a fisherman's boy," said George.

Robert had never before met a boy so disagreeable as George, and his face flushed with anger and mortified pride.

"I don't think you are any better than Herbert," he said, "and he is willing to associate with me, though I am a fisherman's boy."

"I don't think much of his taste, and so I told him," said George. "My father is richer than Mr. Irving," he added proudly.

"Do you refuse to take me in your boat then?" asked Robert.

"I certainly do."

"Although I may be compelled to stay here all night?"

"That's nothing to me."

Robert was silent a moment. He didn't like to have any quarrel with

Herbert's cousin, but he was a boy of spirit, and he could not let

George leave without giving vent to his feeling.

"George Randolph," he broke out, "I don't care whether your father is worth a million; it doesn't make you a gentleman. You are a mean, contemptible fellow!"

"How dare you talk to me in that way, you young fisherman?" gasped

George in astonishment and wrath.

"Because I think it will do you good to hear the truth," said Robert hotly. "You are the meanest fellow I ever met, and if I were Herbert Irving I'd pack you back to the city by the first train."

"You impudent rascal!" exclaimed George. "I've a good mind to come on shore and give you a flogging!"

"I wish you'd try it," said Robert significantly. "You might find yourself no match for a fisherman's boy."

"I suppose you'd like to get me on shore so that you might run off with my boat?" sneered George.

"I wouldn't leave you on the island, at any rate, if I did secure the boat," said Robert.

"Well, I won't gratify you," returned George, "I don't care to have my boat soiled by such a passenger."

"You'll get paid for your meanness some time, George Randolph."

"I've taken too much notice of you already, you low fisherman," said

George. "I hope you'll have a good time staying here all night."

He began to row away, and as his boat receded Robert saw departing with it the best chance he had yet had of escape from his irksome captivity.

"I didn't suppose any boy could be so contemptibly mean," he reflected as his glance followed the boat, which gradually grew smaller and smaller as it drew near the mainland. "I don't think

I'm fond of quarreling, but I wish I could get hold of that boy for five minutes."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.