

JED, THE POORHOUSE BOY



HORATIO
ALGER
JR.

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POORHOUSE BOY

BY

HORATIO ALGER, JR.

AUTHOR OF "RAGGED DICK," "LUCK AND PLUCK," "TATTERED TOWN,"
ETC., ETC.

THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.

PHILADELPHIA

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JED,

THE POORHOUSE BOY.

CHAPTER I.

JED.

"Here, you Jed!"

Jed paused in his work with his axe suspended above him, for he was splitting wood. He turned his face toward the side door at which stood a woman, thin and sharp-visaged, and asked: "Well, what's wanted?"

"None of your impudence, you young rascal! Come here, I say!"

Jed laid down the axe and walked slowly to the back door. He was a strongly-made and well-knit boy of nearly sixteen, but he was poorly dressed in an old tennis shirt and a pair of overalls. Yet his face was attractive, and an observer skilled in physiognomy would have read in it signs of a strong character, a warm and grateful disposition, and a resolute will.

"I have not been impudent, Mrs. Fogson," he said quietly.

"Don't you dare to contradict me!" snapped the woman, stamping her foot.

"What's wanted?" asked Jed again.

"Go down to the gate and hold it open. Squire Dixon will be here in five minutes, and we must treat him with respect, for he is Overseer of the Poor."

Jed smiled to himself (it was well he did not betray his amusement), for he knew that Mrs. Fogson and her husband, though tyrannical to the inmates of the poorhouse, of which they had been placed in charge by Squire Dixon three months before, were almost servile in the presence of the Overseer of the Poor, with whom it was their object to stand well.

"All right, ma'am!" he said bluntly, and started for the gate. He did not appear to move fast enough for the amiable Mrs. Fogson, for she called out

in a sharp voice: "Why do you walk like a snail? Hurry up, I tell you. I see Squire Dixon coming up the road."

"I shall get to the gate before he does," announced Jed, independently, not increasing his pace a particle.

"I hate that boy!" soliloquized Mrs. Fogson, looking after him with a frown. "He is the most independent young rascal I ever came across—he actually disobeys and defies me. I must get Fogson to give him a horse-whipping some of these fine days; and when he does, I'm going to be there and see it done!" she continued, her black eyes twinkling viciously. "Every blow he received would do me good. I'd gloat over it! I'd flog him myself if I was strong enough."

The amiable character of Mrs. Fogson may be inferred from this gentle soliloquy. When Fogson married her he caught a Tartar, as he found to his cost. But he was not so much to be pitied, for his own disposition was not unlike that of his wife, but he lacked her courage and intense malignity, and was a craven at heart.

As Jed walked to the gate his face became grave and almost melancholy.

"I can't stand this kind of life long!" he said to himself. "Mrs. Fogson is about the ugliest-tempered woman I ever knew, and her husband isn't much better. What a contrast to Mr. Avery and his good wife! When they kept the poorhouse we were all happy and contented. They had a kind word for all. But when Squire Dixon became overseer he put in the Fogsons, and since then we haven't heard a kind word or had a happy day."

Just then Squire Dixon's top buggy neared the gate. He was a pompous-looking man with a bald head and red face, the color, as was well known, being imparted by too frequent potations of brandy. With him was his only son and heir, Percy Dixon, a boy who "put on airs," and was, in consequence, heartily detested by his schoolmates and companions. He had small, mean features and a pair of gray eyes, while his nose had an upward tendency, as if he were turning it up at the world in general.

Jed held the gate open in silence and the top buggy passed through.

Then he slowly closed the gate and walked up to the house.

There stood Mrs. Fogson, her thin lips wreathed in smiles, as she ducked her head obsequiously to the town magnate.

"How do you do, Squire Dixon?" she said. "It does me good to see you. But I needn't ask for your health, you look so fine and noble this morning."

Squire Dixon was far from being inaccessible to flattery.

"I am very well, I thank you, my good friend, Mrs. Fogson," he said in a stately tone, with a gracious smile upon his florid countenance. "And how are you yourself?"

"As well as I can be, squire, thanking you for asking, but them paupers is trials, as I daily discover."

"Nothing new in the way of trouble, I hope, Mrs. Fogson?"

"Well, no; but walk in and I'll send for my husband. He would never forgive me if I didn't send for him when you were here. Master Percy, forgive me for not speaking to you before. I hear such good accounts of you from everybody. Your father is indeed fortunate to have such a son."

Percy raised his eyebrows a little. Even he was aware of his unpopularity, and he wondered who had been speaking so well of him.

"I'm all right!" he answered curtly.

Squire Dixon, too, though he overestimated Percy, who was popularly regarded as a chip of the old block, was at a loss to know why he should be proud of him. Still it was pleasing to have one so near to him complimented.

"You are kind to speak of Percy in that way," he said.

"He's so like you, the dear boy!" murmured Mrs. Fogson.

This might be a compliment, but as Percy stood low in his studies and frequently quarreled with his school companions, Squire Dixon hardly knew whether to feel flattered.

Percy looked rather disgusted to be called a "dear boy" by a woman whom he regarded as so much his social inferior as Mrs. Fogson, but it was

difficult to resent so complimentary a speech, and he remained silent. He looked scornfully about the plainly-furnished room, and reflected that it would be pleasanter out of doors.

"I guess I'll go out in the yard," he said abruptly.

"Would you be kind enough in that case, Master Percy, to tell the boy Jed to go and call my husband from the three-acre lot? He is at work there."

"Yes, Mrs. Fogson, I'll tell him."

Percy left the room and walked up to where Jed was splitting wood.

"Go and call Mr. Fogson from the three-acre lot!" he said peremptorily.

Jed paused in his work.

"Who says so?" he inquired.

"I say so!"

"Then I shan't go. You are not my boss."

"You are an impudent boy."

"Why am I?"

"You have no business to talk back to me. You'd better go after Mr. Fogson, if you know what's best for yourself."

"Did Mrs. Fogson send the message by you?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go. Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Because it was enough that I told you. My father's the Overseer of the Poor."

"I am aware of that."

"And he put the Fogsons where they are."

"Then I wish he hadn't. We had a good time when Mr. Avery was here. Now all is changed."

"So you don't like Mr. and Mrs. Fogson?" asked Percy curiously.

"No, I don't. But I must be going to the lot to call Mr. Fogson."

"I'll go with you. I don't want to be left alone."

Jed ought doubtless to have felt complimented at this offer of company from his high-toned visitor, but he did not appear to be overwhelmed by it.

"You can go along if you like," he said.

"Of course I can. I don't need to ask permission of you."

"Certainly not. No offense was meant."

"It is well for you that there isn't. So you liked Mr. and Mrs. Avery better than the Fogsons?"

"Yes," answered Jed guardedly, for he understood now that Percy wanted to "pump" him.

"Why?"

"Because they treated me better."

"My father thinks well of the Fogsons. He says that old Avery pampered the paupers and almost spoiled them."

"I won't argue the question. I only know that we all liked Mr. and Mrs. Avery. Now it's scold, scold, scold all day and every day, and we don't live nearly as well as we did."

"Paupers mustn't expect to live as well as at a first-class hotel!" said Percy sarcastically.

"They certainly don't live like that here."

"And they won't while my father is overseer. He says he's going to put a stop to their being pampered at the town's expense. You live well enough now."

"If you think we live so well, I wish you would come and board here for a week."

"*Me*—board at a poorhouse!" ejaculated Percy in intense disgust. "You are very kind, but I shouldn't like it."

"I don't think you would."

"All the same, you ought to be grateful for such a good home."

"It may be a good home, but I shan't stay here long."

"You shan't stay here long?" exclaimed Percy in amazement. "Do you mean to tell me you are going to run away?"

"I haven't formed any plans yet."

"I'll tell my father, and he'll put a spoke in your wheel. What do you expect to do if you leave? You haven't got any money?"

"No."

"Then don't make a fool of yourself."

Jed did not reply, for they had reached the fence that bounded the three-acre lot, and Mr. Fogson had discovered their approach.

CHAPTER II.

MR. AND MRS. FOGSON.

Mr. Fogson was about as unpleasant-looking as his wife, but was not so thin. He had stiff red hair with a tendency to stand up straight, a blotched complexion, and red eyes, corresponding very well with the color of his hair. He was quite as cross as his wife, but she was more venomous and malicious. Like her he was disposed to fawn upon Squire Dixon, the Overseer of the Poor, with whom he knew it was necessary to stand well.

Had Jed come alone he might have met with a disagreeable reception; but Mr. Fogson's quick eye recognized in his companion the son of the poorhouse autocrat, Squire Dixon, and he summoned up an ingratiating smile on his rugged features.

"How are you, Master Percy?" he said smoothly. "Did your pa come with you?"

"Yes, he's over to the house. Mrs. Fogson wants you to go right home, as he may want to see you."

"All right! It will give me pleasure. It always does me good to see your pa."

Percy looked at him critically, and thought that Mr. Fogson was about as homely a man as he had ever seen. It was fortunate that the keeper of the poorhouse could not read his thoughts, for, like most ugly men, Mr. Fogson thought himself on the whole rather prepossessing.

Fogson took his place beside Percy, and curtly desired Jed to walk behind.

Jed smiled to himself, for he understood that Mr. Fogson considered him not entitled to a place in such superior company.

Mr. Fogson addressed several questions to Percy, which the latter answered languidly, as if he considered it rather a bore to be entertained by a man in Fogson's position. Indeed he almost snubbed him, and Jed was pleased to find the man who made so many unpleasant speeches to others treated in

the same manner himself. As a general thing, a man who bullies others has to take his turn in being bullied himself.

Meanwhile Mrs. Fogson was chatting with Squire Dixon.

"Nobody can tell what I have to put up with from them paupers," she said. "You'd actilly think they paid their board by the way they talk. The fact is, the Averys pampered and indulged them altogether too much."

"That is so, Mrs. Fogson," said the squire pompously, "and that, I may remark, was the reason I dismissed them from their responsible position. Do they—ahem!—complain of anything in particular?"

"Why, they want butter every day!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson. "Think of it! Butter every day for paupers!"

"As you justly observe, this is very unreasonable. And how often do you give them butter?"

"Once a week—on Sundays."

"Very judicious. It impresses them with the difference between Sunday and other days. It shows your religious training, Mrs. Fogson."

"I always aim to be religious, Squire Dixon," said Mrs. Fogson meekly.

"Well, and what else?"

"Likewise the old people expect tea every day. They say Mrs. Avery gave it to them."

"I dare say she did. It's an imposition on the town to spend their—ahem!—hard-earned money on such luxuries."

"That's the way I look at it, Squire Dixon."

"How often do you give them meat?"

"Every other day. I get the cheapest cuts from the butcher—what he has left over. But they ain't satisfied. They want it every day."

"Shocking!" exclaimed the squire, arching his brows.

"So I say. Of course I get a good many sour looks, and more complaints, but I tell 'em that if they ain't suited with their boarding-house they can go somewhere else."

"Very good! Very good indeed; ha, ha! I presume none of them have left the poorhouse in consequence?"

"No, but one has threatened to do so."

"Who is that?" asked Squire Dixon quickly.

"The boy Jed."

"Oh, yes, he was the one who opened the gate for me. Now, what sort of a boy is he, Mrs. Fogson?"

"He's an impudent young jackanapes," answered Mrs. Fogson spitefully, "begging your pardon for using such an inelegant expression."

"It is forcible, however, Mrs. Fogson. It is forcible, and I think you are quite justified in using it. So he is impudent?"

"Yes; you'd think, by the airs he puts on, that he owned the poorhouse, instead of being a miserable pauper. Why, I venture to say he considers himself the equal of your son, Master Percy."

"No, no, Mrs. Fogson, that is a little too strong. He couldn't be so absurd as that."

"I am not so sure of that, Squire Dixon. There is no end to that boy's impudence and—and uppishness. Why, he said the other day that the meat wasn't fit for the hogs."

"And was it, Mrs. Fogson?" asked the squire in an absent-minded way.

"To be sure, squire, though I must admit that it was a trifle touched, being warm weather; but paupers can't expect first-class hotel fare—can they, now, squire?"

"To be sure not."

"Then, again, Jed is always praising up Mr. and Mrs. Avery, which, as you can imagine, isn't very pleasant for Mr. Fogson and me. I expect he was Mr. Avery's pet, from all I hear."

"Very likely he was. He was brought to the poorhouse when a mere baby, and they took care of him from his infancy. I've heard Mrs. Avery say she looked upon him as if he were her own child."

"And that is why she pampered him—at the town's expense."

"As you truly observe, at the town's expense. I am sure you and Mr. Fogson will feel it your duty to make the poorhouse as inexpensive as possible to the town, bearing in mind the great responsibility that has devolved upon you."

"Of course, squire, me and Fogson bear that in mind, but we ain't paid any too well for our hard labor."

"That reminds me, Mrs. Fogson, another month has rolled by, and——"

"I understand, squire," said Mrs. Fogson. "I have got it all ready," and she drew a sealed envelope out of her pocket and passed it to the squire, who pocketed it with a deprecatory cough. His face brightened up, for he knew what the envelope contained.

"You can depend on me to use my official influence in your favor, Mrs. Fogson," he said cheerfully. "As long as you show a proper appreciation of my service in giving you the place, I will stand by you."

Squire Dixon was a rich man. He was paid by the town for his services as overseer, yet he was not above accepting five dollars a month from the man he had installed in office. He had never distinctly asked for it, but he had hinted in a manner not to be mistaken that it would be politic for Mr. Fogson to allow him a percentage on their salary and profits. They got the money back, and more, for in auditing their accounts he did not scrutinize too closely the prices they claimed to have paid for supplies. It was an arrangement mutually advantageous, which had never occurred to Mr. and Mrs. Avery, who in their scrupulous honesty were altogether behind the times, according to the squire's thinking.

"And how many paupers have you in the house at present, Mrs. Fogson?" asked the overseer.

"Nineteen, squire. Would you like to look at them?"

"Well, perhaps in my official capacity it would be as well."

"Come in here, then," and Mrs. Fogson led the way into a large room where sat the paupers, a forlorn, unhappy-looking company. Two of the old ladies were knitting; one young woman, who had lost her child, and with it her mind, was fondling a rag baby; two were braiding a rag carpet, and others were sitting with vacant faces, looking as if life had no attraction for them.

"Will you address them, squire?" asked Mrs. Fogson.

"Ahem!" said the squire, straightening up and looking around him with the air of a benignant father. "I will say a few words."

"Attention all!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson in a sharp voice. "Squire Dixon has consented to make a few remarks. I hope you will appreciate your privilege in hearing him."

CHAPTER III.

THE SCRANTON POORHOUSE.

"Ahem!" began Squire Dixon, clearing his throat; "the announcement of my friend Mrs. Fogson furnishes me with a text. I hope you all appreciate your privileges in sharing this comfortable home at the expense of the town. Here all your material wants are cared for, and though you are without means, you need have no anxiety. A well-filled board is spread for you three times a day, and you enjoy the maternal care of Mrs. Fogson."

Here there was a shrill laugh from one of the old women.

Squire Dixon frowned, and Mrs. Fogson looked anything but maternal as she scowled at the offending "boarder."

"I am surprised at this unseemly interruption," said Squire Dixon severely. "I am constrained to believe that there is at least one person present who does not appreciate the privileges of this happy home. You are probably all aware that I am the Overseer of the Poor, and that it was through my agency that the services of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were obtained."

Here it would have been in order for some one to propose "Three cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Fogson," but instead all looked gloomy and depressed.

"I don't know that I have any more to say," concluded Squire Dixon after a pause. "I will only exhort you to do your duty in the position in which Providence has placed you, and to give as little trouble as possible to your good friends Mr. and Mrs. Fogson."

Here there was another cackling laugh, which caused Mrs. Fogson to look angry.

"I'm on to you, Sally Stokes," she said sharply. "You'll have to go without your supper to-night."

The poor, half-witted creature immediately burst into tears, and rocked to and fro in a dismal manner.

"You have done perfectly right in rebuking such unseemly behavior, Mrs. Fogson," said Squire Dixon.

"I didn't mind the insult to myself, squire," returned Mrs. Fogson meekly. "It made me angry to have you insulted while you were making your interesting remarks. The paupers are very ill-behaved; I give you my word that I slave for them from morning till night, and you see how I am repaid."

"Mrs. Fogson, virtue is its own reward," observed the squire solemnly.

"It has to be in my case," said Mrs. Fogson; "but it comforts me to think that you at least appreciate my efforts."

"I do; I do, indeed! You can always rely upon me to—to—in a word, to back you up."

Here a diversion was made by the appearance of Mr. Fogson and the two boys.

"Oh, Simeon!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson impulsively. "You don't know what you have lost."

Mr. Fogson mechanically glanced at his vest to see whether his watch-chain and the watch appended were gone.

"What have I lost?" he demanded.

"Squire Dixon's interesting speech to the paupers. It was truly eloquent."

"My dear Mrs. Fogson," said the squire, looking modest, "you quite overrate my simple words."

"They were simple, but they were to the point," said the lady of the poorhouse, "and I hope—I do hope that the paupers will lay them to heart."

There was an amused smile on the face of Jed, who was sharp enough to see through the shallow humbug which was being enacted before him. He understood very well the interested motives of Mrs. Fogson, and why she saw fit to flatter the town official from whom she and her husband had received their appointment.

"I wish you had heard the squire, too, Jed!" said Mrs. Fogson, detecting the smile on the boy's face.

"Perhaps, ma'am, you can tell me what he said," returned Jed demurely.

Mrs. Fogson was a little taken aback, but she accepted the invitation.

"He said you ought to consider yourself very lucky to have such a comfortable home."

"I do," said Jed with a comical look.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Fogson, suspiciously, "though it hasn't always looked that way, I am bound to say."

"Are you going to stay much longer, father?" asked Percy, who was getting tired.

"Perhaps we had better go," said Squire Dixon. "We have staid quite a while."

"When do you have dinner?" asked Percy, turning to Jed.

"In about an hour. I have no doubt Mrs. Fogson will invite you, if you would like to stay."

"*Me*—eat with paupers?" retorted Percy with fine scorn.

"I don't think you would like it," said Jed. "I don't."

"Why, you are a pauper yourself."

"I don't think so. I earn my living, such as it is. I work from morning till night."

"What do they give you for dinner?" asked Percy, moved by curiosity.

"Mrs. Fogson puts a bone in the boiler and makes bone soup," answered Jed gravely. "You can't tell how good it is till you try it."

"Is there anything else?"

"A few soggy potatoes, and some stale bread without butter."

"Don't you have tea?"

"Once on Sundays. It don't do to pamper us, you know."

"Do you have puddings or pies?"

"No; the town can't afford it," returned Jed without a smile. "What do you think of our bill of fare?"

"Pretty mean, I think. Do Mr. and Mrs. Fogson eat with you?"

"No; they eat later, in the small room adjoining."

"Do they have the same dinner as you?"

"Sometimes they have roast chicken, and the other day when I went into the room there was a plum pudding on the table."

Percy laughed.

"Just what I thought. The old man and old woman aren't going to get left."

"I don't know about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll explain another time," said Jed, nodding. "I wish I was Overseer of the Poor."

"What would you do?"

"I'd turn out the Fogsons and put back Mr. and Mrs. Avery."

"Father says they spoiled the paupers."

"At any rate they didn't starve them."

"Old Fogson is saving money to the town—so father says."

"Wait till the end of the year. You'll find the town will have just as much to pay. What they save off the food they will put into their own pockets."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Fogson suspiciously.

Jed did not have to reply, for Percy took offense at what he rightly judged to be a piece of impertinence.

"Mrs. Fogson," he said, "what we are talking about is no concern of yours."

A bright red spot showed itself in either cheek of Mrs. Fogson, and she would have annihilated the speaker if she could; but she was politic, and remembered that Percy was the son of the overseer.

"I didn't mean any offense, Master Percy," she said. "It was simply a playful remark on my part."

"I'm glad to hear it," responded Percy. "You didn't look very playful."

Squire Dixon was conversing with Mr. Fogson, and didn't hear this little conversation.

"I am just digging my potatoes," said Fogson deferentially. "I have some excellent Jackson whites. I will send you round a bushel to try."

"You are very kind, Mr. Fogson," said the squire, smiling urbanely. "I shall appreciate them, you may be sure. Mr. Avery never would have made me such an offer. It is clear to me that you are the right man in the right place."

"I am proud to hear you say so, Squire Dixon. With such an Overseer of the Poor as you are, I am sure the interests of the town will be safe."

"Thank you! Good-by."

"Come again soon, squire," said Mrs. Fogson with a frosty smile. She did not extend a similar invitation to Percy, who had wounded her pride by his unceremonious words.

"They are very worthy people, Percy," said the squire as they rode away.

"Do you think so, father? I don't admire your taste."

"My son, I am surprised at you," but in his secret heart the squire agreed with Percy.

Soon after Squire Dixon and Percy left the poorhouse dinner was served. It answered very well the description given by Jed. Though the boy was

hungry, he found it almost impossible to eat his portion, scanty though it was.

"Turning up your nose at your dinner as usual!" said Mrs. Fogson sharply. "If you don't like it you can get another boarding-house."

"I think I shall," answered Jed.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Mrs. Fogson quickly.

"If the board doesn't improve I shall dry up and blow away," returned Jed.

Mrs. Fogson sniffed and let the matter drop.

Towards the close of the afternoon, as Jed was splitting wood in the yard, his attention was drawn to a runaway horse which was speeding down the road at breakneck speed, while a lady's terrified face was visible looking vainly around in search of help.

Jed dropped his axe, ran to the bend of the road, and dashed out, waving a branch which he picked up by the roadside. The horse slowed down, and Jed, seizing the opportunity, ran to his head, seized him by the bridle, and brought him to a permanent stop.

"How brave you are!" said the lady. "Will you jump into the buggy and drive me to my home? I don't dare to trust myself alone with the horse again."

Jed did as desired, and at the end of the ride Mrs. Redmond (she was the wife of Dr. Redmond) gave him a dollar, accompanying it with hearty thanks.

"I suppose Fogson will try to get this dollar away from me," thought Jed, "but he won't succeed."

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXCITING CONTEST.

Jed was not mistaken.

When he returned to the poorhouse supper was ready, and Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were waiting for him with sour and angry faces.

"Where have you been?" demanded Fogson.

"Absent on business," announced Jed coolly.

"Don't you know that your business is to stay here and work?"

"I have been working all day."

"No, you haven't. You have been to the village."

"I had a good reason for going."

"Why didn't you ask permission of me or Mrs. Fogson?"

"Because there wasn't time."

"You are two minutes late for supper. I've a good mind to let you go without," said Mrs. Fogson.

"It wouldn't be much of a loss," answered Jed, not looking much alarmed.

"You are getting more and more impudent every day. Why do you say there wasn't time to ask permission to leave your work?"

"Because the runaway horse wouldn't stop while I was asking."

"What runaway horse?" demanded Fogson with sudden interest.

"While I was splitting wood I saw Dr. Redmond's wife being run away with. She looked awfully frightened. I ran out to the bend and stopped the

horse. Then she wanted me to drive her home, for she was afraid he would run off again."

"Is that so? Well, of course that makes a difference. Did she give you anything?"

"Now it's coming," thought Jed.

"Yes," he answered.

"How much?" asked Mr. Fogson with a greedy look.

"A dollar."

"Quite handsome, on my word. Well, hand it over."

"What?" ejaculated Jed.

"Give me the dollar!" said Fogson in a peremptory tone.

"The dollar is mine."

"You are a pauper. You can't hold any property. It's against the law."

"Is it? Who told you so?"

"No matter who told me so. I hope I understand the law."

"I hope I understand my rights."

"Boy, this is trifling. You'd better not make me any trouble, or you will find yourself in a bad box."

"What do you want to do with the dollar?"

"None of your business! I shall keep it."

"I have no doubt you will if you get it, but it is mine," said Jed firmly.

"Mrs. Fogson," said her husband solemnly, "did you ever hear of such perverseness?"

"No. The boy is about the worst I ever see."

"Mr. Fogson," said Jed, "when Mr. Avery was here I had money given me several times, though never as much as this. He never thought of asking me for it, but always allowed me to spend it for myself."

"Mr. Avery and I are two different persons," remarked Mr. Fogson with asperity.

"You are right, there," said Jed, in hearty concurrence with the speaker.

"And he was very unwise to let you keep the money. If it was five cents, now, I wouldn't mind," continued Mr. Fogson with noteworthy liberality. "But a dollar! You couldn't be trusted to spend a sum like that properly at your age."

"I am almost sixteen," said Jed significantly.

"No matter if you are. You are still a mere boy. But I don't propose to waste any more words. Hand over that money!"

Jed felt that the critical moment had come. He must submit to a flagrant piece of injustice or resist.

He determined to resist.

He met Fogson's glance firmly and resolutely, and uttered but two words: "I won't!"

"Did you ever hear such impudence, Mrs. Fogson?" asked her husband, his face becoming red and mottled in his excitement.

"No, Simeon, I didn't!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson.

"What shall I do?"

"Thrash him. It's the only way to cure him of his cantankerous conduct."

Jed was of good height for his age, and unusually thickset and strong. Though poorhouse fare was hardly calculated to give him strength, he had an intimate friend and school companion on a farm near by whose mother often gave him a substantial meal, so that he alone of the inmates of the poorhouse could afford to be comparatively indifferent to the mean table kept by the managers.

Jed was five feet six, and Simeon Fogson but two inches taller. Fogson, however, was not a well man. He was a dyspeptic, and frequently indulged in alcoholic drinks, which, as my young readers doubtless know, have a direct tendency to impair physical vigor.

"Get me the whip, Gloriana," said Mr. Fogson fiercely, addressing his wife by her rather uncommon first name. "I will see whether this young upstart is to rule you and me and the whole establishment."

"I don't care about ruling anybody except myself," said Jed.

"You can't rule yourself. I am put in authority over you."

"Who put you in authority over me?" asked Jed defiantly.

"The town."

"And did the town give you leave to rob me? Answer me that!"

"Did you ever hear the like?" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson, raising her arms in almost incredulous surprise.

By this time Mr. Fogson had the whip in his hand, and with an air of enjoyment drew the lash through his fingers.

"Take off your coat!" he said.

"I would rather keep it on," replied Jed undauntedly.

"It won't do you any good. I shall strike hard enough for you to feel it even if you had two coats on."

"You'd better not!" said Jed, eyeing Mr. Fogson warily.

"Are you going to stand the boy's impudence, Simeon?" demanded his wife sharply.

"No, I'm not;" and Simeon Fogson, flourishing the whip, brought it down on Jed's shoulders and back.

Then something happened which took the poorhouse superintendent by surprise. Jed sprang toward him, and, grasping the whip with energy, tore it

from his grasp, and with angry and inflamed face confronted his persecutor. Mr. Fogson turned pale, and looked undecided what to do.

"Shall I hold him, Simeon?" asked his wife venomously.

"No; I'm a match for a half-grown boy like him," returned Fogson, ashamed to ask for help in so unequal a contest.

He sprang forward and grabbed Jed, who accepted the gage of battle and clinched with his adversary. A moment afterward they were rolling on the floor, first one being uppermost, then the other.

CHAPTER V.

JED SECURES AN ALLY.

It was trying to Mrs. Fogson to see her husband apparently getting the worst of it from "that young viper," as she mentally apostrophized Jed, and she longed to take a part, notwithstanding her husband's refusal to accept her assistance.

A bright but malicious idea struck her. She seized a tin dipper and filled it half full from the tea-kettle, the water in which was almost scalding. Then she seized an opportunity to empty it over Jed. But unfortunately for the success of her amiable plan, by the time she was ready to pour it out it was Mr. Fogson who was exposed, and he received the whole of the water on his neck and shoulder.

"Help! Help! Murder!" he shrieked in anguish. "You have scalded me, you—you she cat!"

As he spoke he released his hold on Jed, who sprang to his feet and stood watching for the next movement of the enemy.

"Did I scald you, Simeon?" asked Mrs. Fogson in dismay.

"Yes; I am almost dead. Get some flour and sweet oil—quick!"

"I didn't mean to," said his wife repentantly. "I meant it for that boy."

"You're an idiot!" roared Fogson, stamping his foot. "Go and get the oil—quick!"

Mrs. Fogson, much frightened, hurried to obey orders, and the next fifteen minutes were spent in allaying the anguish of her lord and master, who made it very unpleasant for her by his bitter complaints and upbraidings.

"I think I'd better get out of this," thought Jed. "The old woman will be trying to scald me next."

He disappeared through the side door, leaving the amiable couple busily but not pleasantly employed.

He had scarcely left the house when Dr. Redmond drove up, his errand being to see one of the inmates of the poorhouse.

"How are you, Jed?" he said pleasantly. "My wife tells me you did her a great service to-day?"

"I was glad to do it, doctor," said Jed.

"Here's a dollar. I am sure you can use it."

"But, doctor, Mrs. Redmond gave me a dollar."

"Never mind! You can use both."

"Thank you," said Jed. "You'd better go right in, doctor; Mrs. Fogson has just scalded her husband, and he is in great pain."

"How did it happen?" asked the doctor in amazement.

"Go in and they'll tell you," said Jed. "I'll see you afterwards and tell you whether their story is correct."

When Mr. and Mrs. Fogson saw the doctor enter they were overjoyed.

"Oh, Dr. Redmond," groaned Fogson, "do something to relieve me quick. I'm in terrible pain."

"What's the matter?" asked Dr. Redmond.

"I am scalded."

"How did it happen?"

"*She* did it!" said Fogson, pointing scornfully to Mrs. Fogson.

Dr. Redmond set himself at once to relieve the suffering one, making use of the remedies that Fogson himself had suggested to his wife. When the patient was more comfortable he turned gravely to Mrs. Fogson and asked: "Will you explain how your husband got scalded?"

"The woman poured hot water on me," interrupted Fogson with an ugly scowl. "It would serve her right if I treated her in the same manner."

"You don't mean that she did it on purpose, Mr. Fogson?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Of course I didn't," retorted Mrs. Fogson indignantly. "I meant it for Jed."

"You meant to scald Jed?" said the doctor sternly.

"Yes; he assaulted my husband, and I feared he would kill him. It was all the way I could help."

"Mrs. Fogson, I can hardly believe you would be guilty of such an atrocious act even on your own confession, nor can I believe that Jed would assault your husband without good cause."

"It is true, whether you believe it or not," said Mrs. Fogson sullenly.

Dr. Redmond's answer was to open the outer door and call "Jed!"

Jed entered at once, and stood in the presence of his persecutors, calm and undisturbed.

"Jed," said the doctor, "Mrs. Fogson admits that she scalded her husband in trying to scald you, and urges, in defense, that you assaulted Mr. Fogson. What do you say to this?"

"That Mr. Fogson struck me over the shoulder with a horsewhip, and that I pulled it away from him. Upon this he sprang at me, and in self-defense I grappled with him, and while we were rolling over the floor Mrs. Fogson poured a dipper of hot water over her husband, meaning it for me."

"Is this true, Mr. Fogson?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, it's about so. Mrs. Fogson acted like an idiot."

"If she had scalded Jed instead of you, would you say the same thing?"

"Well, of course that would have been different."

"I can see no difference," said Dr. Redmond sternly. "It was not an idiotic, but a brutal and inhuman act."

"Come, doctor, that's rather strong," protested Fogson uncomfortably.

"It is not too strong! I don't think there is a person in the village but would agree with me. Had the victim of the scalding been Jed, I would have reported the matter to the authorities. Now tell me why you attempted to horsewhip the boy?"

"Because he was impudent," replied Fogson evasively.

"And that was all?"

"He disobeyed me."

"Jed, let me hear your version of the story."

"Mr. Fogson knew that I had a dollar given me by Mrs. Redmond, and he called upon me to give it up to him. I wouldn't do it, and upon that he tried to horsewhip me."

"You see he owns up to his disobeying me, doctor," put in Fogson triumphantly.

"Why did you require him to give you the dollar, Mr. Fogson?"

"Because he is a pauper, and a pauper has no right to hold money."

"I won't discuss that point. What did you propose to do with the dollar in case you had obtained it from Jed?"

"As you are not Overseer of the Poor, Dr. Redmond, I don't know that I have any call to tell you. When Squire Dixon asks me I will make it all straight with him."

"Probably," answered the doctor in a significant tone, for he as well as others understood that there was some secret compact between Mr. Fogson and the town official, and he had earnestly opposed Squire Dixon at the polls.

"Not only you, but Squire Dixon will have to give an account of your stewardship," he said. "If any outrage should be committed against the boy Jed, or any one else in this establishment, you will find that making it straight with Squire Dixon won't be sufficient."

"I will report what you say to Squire Dixon," said Fogson defiantly.

"I wish you would. I shouldn't object to saying the same thing to his face. Now, Mrs. Fogson, if you will lead the way I will go and see Mrs. Connolly."

"Come along, then," said Mrs. Fogson, compressing her thin lips. "I don't believe there is anything the matter with that old woman."

"I am a better judge of that matter than you, Mrs. Fogson."

The poor old woman looked thin and wan, and hardly had strength to lift up her head to meet the doctor's glance.

After a brief examination he said: "Your trouble is nervous debility. You have no strength. What you need is nourishment. Do you have tea three times a day, Mrs. Connolly?"

"Only once a week, doctor," wailed the poor old woman, bursting into tears.

"Only once a week!" repeated the doctor shocked. "What does this mean, Mrs. Fogson?"

"It means, Dr. Redmond," answered the mistress of the poorhouse, "that this is not a first-class hotel."

"I should say not," commented the doctor. "How often did you have tea, Mrs. Connolly, when Mr. and Mrs. Avery were here?"

"At breakfast and supper, and on Sundays three times a day."

"Precisely. What do you say to that, Mrs. Fogson?"

"I say, as everybody says, that the Averys squandered the town's money."

"They certainly didn't put it into their own pockets. The town, I think I am safe in saying, doesn't mean to starve the poor people whom it provides for."

Do I understand that you are actuated by a desire to save the town's money?"

"Of course I am, and Squire Dixon approves all I do," answered Mrs. Fogson defiantly.

"If he approves your withholding the necessities of life from those under your charge he is unfit for his position. When the accounts of the poorhouse are audited at the end of the year I shall make a searching examination, and ascertain how much less they are under your administration than under that of your predecessors."

Judging from her looks, Mrs. Fogson was aching to scratch Dr. Redmond's eyes out; but as he was not a pauper she was compelled to restrain her anger.

"Now, Mrs. Connolly," said the doctor, "you are to have tea twice a day, and three times on Sunday. I shall see that it is given to you," he added, with a significant glance at Mrs. Fogson.

"Oh, how glad I am!" said the poor creature. "God bless you, Dr. Redmond!"

"Mrs. Fogson," went on the doctor, "do you limit yourself to tea once a week?"

"I ain't a pauper, Dr. Redmond!" replied Mrs. Fogson indignantly.

"No; you are much stronger than a pauper, and could bear the deprivation better. Let me tell you that you needn't be afraid to supply decent food to the poor people in your charge. It won't cost any more than it did under the Averys, for prices are, on the whole, cheaper."

"Perhaps if it does cost more you'll pay it out of your own pocket."

"I contribute already to the support of the poorhouse, being a large taxpayer, and I give my medical services without exacting payment. The town is not mean, and I will see that no fault is found with reasonable bills."

"I wish you'd fall and break your neck, you old meddler," thought Mrs. Fogson, but she did not dare to say this.

"One thing more, madam!" said the doctor, who had now entered the room where Jed and her husband were; "reserve your hot water for its legitimate uses. No more scalding, if you please."

"That's well put, doctor!" growled Fogson. "If she wants to scald anybody else, she had better try herself."

"That's all the gratitude I get for taking your part, Simeon Fogson," said the exasperated helpmeet. "The next time, Jed may beat you black and blue for all I care."

"It strikes me," remarked the doctor dryly, "that your husband is a match for a boy of sixteen, and need be under no apprehension. No more horsewhips, Mr. Fogson, if *you* please, and don't trouble yourself about any small sums that Jed may receive. Jed, jump into my buggy, and I will take you home with me. I think Mrs. Redmond will give you some supper."

"The boy hasn't done his chores," said Mrs. Fogson maliciously.

"Very well, I will make a bargain with you. Don't object to his going, and I won't charge Mr. Fogson anything for my attendance upon him just now."

This appeal to the selfish interests of Mr. Fogson had its effect, and Jed jumped into the doctor's buggy with eager alacrity.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FOGSON MAKES UP HIS MIND.

"I don't know, Jed, whether I can make up to you for the supper you will lose at the poorhouse," observed the doctor jocosely. "Mrs. Redmond may not be as good a cook as Mrs. Fogson."

"I will risk it," said Jed.

"Is the fare much worse than it was when Mrs. Avery was in charge?"

"Very much worse. I don't mind it much myself, for I often get a meal at Fred Morrison's, but the poor old people have a hard time."

"I will make it my business to see that there is an improvement."

"Dr. Redmond," said Jed after a pause, "do you think it would be wrong for me to run away from the poorhouse?"

"Have you any such intention?" asked the doctor quickly.

"Yes; I think I can earn my own living, and a better living than I have there. I am young and strong, and I am not afraid to try."

"As to that, Jed, I don't see why there should be any objection to your making the attempt. The town of Scranton ought not to object to lessening the number it is required to support."

"Mr. and Mrs. Fogson would object. They would miss my work."

"Have you ever spoken to them on the subject?"

"I did one day, and they said I would have to stay till I was twenty-one."

"That is not true."

"I don't think I could stay that long," said Jed soberly. "I should be dead before that time if I had to live with Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, and fared no

better. Besides, you see how I am dressed. I should think you would be ashamed to have me at your table."

Jed's clothes certainly were far from becoming. They were of unknown antiquity, and were two sizes too small for him, so that the sleeves and the legs of the trousers were so scant as to attract attention. In his working hours he wore a pair of overalls, but those he took off when he accepted Dr. Redmond's invitation.

"I didn't invite your clothes, Jed; I invited you," responded the doctor. "I confess, however, that your suit is pretty shabby. How long have you worn it?"

"It was given me nearly two years ago."

"And you have had no other since?"

"No. If I stayed there till I was twenty-one I expect I should have to wear the same old things."

Dr. Redmond laughed.

"I am bound to say, Jed, that in that case you would cut a comical figure. However, I don't think it will be as bad as that. My son Ross is in college. He is now twenty. I will ask my wife to look about the house and see if there isn't an old suit of his that will fit you. It will, at any rate, be a good deal better than this."

"Thank you, doctor; but will you save it till I am ready to leave Scranton?"

"Yes, Jed. I will have it put in a bundle, and it will be ready for you any time you call for it."

"There's another thing, doctor. I think Mr. Fogson will try to get my money away, notwithstanding all you said."

"He wouldn't dare to."

"He is very cunning. He will find some excuse."

Jed was right. To prove this, we will go back to the poorhouse and relate the conversation between the well-matched pair after Dr. Redmond's departure.

"Simeon," said his wife, "if you had any spunk you wouldn't let Dr. Redmond insult and bully you, as he did just now."

"What would you have me to do?" demanded her husband irritably. "I couldn't knock him down, could I?"

"No, but you could have talked up to him."

"I did; but you must remember that he is an important man in the town, and it wouldn't be wise to make him an enemy."

"Squire Dixon is still more important. If he backs you up you needn't be afraid of this trumpery doctor."

"Well, what would you advise?"

"Go this evening and see the squire. Tell him what has happened, and if he gives you authority to take Jed's money, take it."

"Really, that is a good suggestion, Mrs. F. I will go soon after supper."

"It would do no good to triumph over Dr. Redmond. He is an impertinent meddler."

"So he is. I agree with you there."

Soon after seven o'clock Squire Dixon was somewhat surprised when the servant ushered Mr. Fogson into his presence.

"Ah, Fogson," he exclaimed. "I was not expecting to see you. Has anything gone wrong?"

"I should think so. Jed has rebelled against my lawful authority, and Dr. Redmond is aiding and abetting him in it."

"You astonish me, Fogson. Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I'll tell you the whole story, squire, and you can judge for yourself."

Upon this Mr. Fogson gave an account of the scenes that had taken place in the poorhouse, including his contest with Jed, and Mrs. Fogson's ill-judged attempt to assist him.

"Certainly, you were in bad luck," said the squire. "Is the injury serious?"

"The burn is very painful, squire. Mrs. Fogson acted like an idiot. Why didn't she take better aim?"

"To be sure, to be sure. Wasn't the boy scalded at all?"

"Not a particle," answered Fogson in an aggrieved tone. "Now, what I want to know is, didn't I have a right to take the money from Jed?"

"Yes, I think so. The boy would probably have made bad use of it."

"The ground I take, squire, is that a pauper has no right to possess money."

"I quite agree with you. Since the town maintains him, the town should have a right to exact any money of which he becomes accidentally possessed."

"I don't quite see that the town should have it," said Fogson. "As the boy's official guardian, I think I ought to keep it, to use for the boy whenever I thought it judicious."

"Yes, I think that view is correct. I had only given the point a superficial consideration."

"Dr. Redmond denies this. He says I have no right to take the money from Jed."

"Dr. Redmond's view is not entitled to any weight. He has no official right to intermeddle."

"You'd think he had, by the manner in which he lectured Mrs. Fogson and myself. I never heard such impudence."

"Dr. Redmond assumes too much. He doesn't appear to understand that I, and not he, was appointed Overseer of the Poor."

"He says you are not fit for the position," said Fogson, transcending the limits of strict accuracy, as the reader will understand.

"What?" ejaculated Squire Dixon, his face flushing angrily.

"That's just what he said," repeated Fogson, delighted by the effect of his misrepresentations. "It's my belief that he wanted the office himself."

"Very likely, very likely!" said the squire angrily. "Do I understand you to say that he actually called me unfit for the position?"

"Yes he did. He appears to think that he can boss you and Mrs. F. and myself. Why, he stood by that boy, though he had actually assaulted me, and invited him home to supper."

"You don't mean this, Mr. Fogson?"

"Yes I do. Jed is at this very moment at the doctor's house. What mischief they are concocting I can't tell, but I am sure that I shall have more trouble with the boy."

Squire Dixon was very much disturbed. He was a vain man, and his pride sustained a severe shock when told that the doctor considered him unfit for his position.

"However," resumed the crafty Fogson, "I suppose we shall have to give in to the doctor."

"Give in!" exclaimed the squire, his face turning purple. "Never, Mr. Fogson, never!"

"I hate to give in, I confess, squire, but the doctor is a prominent man, and _____"

"Prominent man! I should like to know whether I am not a prominent man also, Mr. Fogson? Moreover, I represent the town, and Dr. Redmond doesn't."

"I am glad you will stand by me, squire. With you on my side, I will not fear."

"I will stand by you, Mr. Fogson."

"I should hate to be triumphed over by a mere boy."

"You shall not be, Mr. Fogson."

"Then will you authorize me to demand the money from him?"

"I will authorize you, Mr. Fogson, and if the boy persists in refusing, I authorize you to use coercive measures. Do you understand?"

"I believe I do, squire. You will let it be understood that you have given me authority, won't you? Suppose the boy complains to Dr. Redmond?"

"You may refer Dr. Redmond to me, Mr. Fogson," said the squire pompously. "I think I shall be tempted to give this meddling doctor a piece of my mind."

Mr. Fogson took leave of the squire and pursued his way homeward with a smile on his face. He had accomplished what he desired, and secured a powerful ally in his campaign against the boy Jed and Dr. Redmond.

He returned home a little after eight, and just before nine Jed made his appearance at the door of the poorhouse. He was in good spirits, for he had decided that he would soon turn his back upon the place which had been his home for fourteen years.

CHAPTER VII.

FOGSON'S MISTAKE.

"So you have got home?" said Mr. Fogson with an unpleasant smile as he opened the door to admit Jed later that evening.

"Yes, sir."

"You had a pleasant time, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jed, wondering to what all these questions tended.

"I suppose Dr. Redmond put himself out to entertain such a distinguished guest?"

"No, Mr. Fogson, I don't think he did."

"He didn't make arrangements to run the poorhouse, with your help, did he?"

"No," answered Jed with emphasis.

"We ought to be thankful, Mrs. Fogson and I, humbly thankful, that we ain't to be turned out by this high and mighty doctor."

"If you don't like the doctor you had better tell him so," said Jed; "he don't need me to defend him."

"Do you know where I've been to-night?" queried Fogson, changing his tone.

"How could I tell?"

"I've been to see Squire Dixon."

"Well, sir, I suppose you had a right to. I hope you had a pleasant call."

"I did, and what's more, I told him of Dr. Redmond's impertinent interference with me in my management of the poorhouse. He told me not

to pay any attention to Redmond, but to be guided by him. So long as he was satisfied with me, it was all right."

"You'd better tell Dr. Redmond that when he calls here next time."

"I shall; but there's something I've got to say to you. He said I had a perfect right to take the dollar from you, for as a pauper you had no right to hold property of any kind. That's what Squire Dixon says. Now hand over that money, or you'll get into trouble."

"I wouldn't give the money to Squire Dixon himself," answered Jed boldly.

"You wouldn't, hey? I'll tell him that. You'll give it to me to-night, though."

He put out his hand to seize Jed, but the boy quietly moved aside, and said, "You can't get the money from me to-night, Mr. Fogson."

"Why can't I? There's no Dr. Redmond to take your part now. Why can't I, I'd like to know?"

"Because I haven't got it."

"WHAT!" exclaimed Fogson. "Do you mean to say you've spent it already? If you have——"

"No, I haven't spent it, but I have given it to Dr. Redmond to keep for me."

Fogson showed in his face his intense disappointment. He expected to get the money without fail, and lo! the victory was snatched from him.

He glared at Jed, and seemed about to pounce upon him, but he thought better of it.

"You'll go and get the money in the morning," he said. "You and Dr. Redmond are engaged in a conspiracy against the town and the laws, and I am not sure but I could have you both arrested. Mind, if that money is not handed to me to-morrow you will get a thrashing. Now go to bed!"

Jed was not sorry to avail himself of this permission. He had not enjoyed the interview with Mr. Fogson, and he felt tired and in need of rest. Accordingly he went up stairs to the attic, where there was a cot bed under the bare rafters, which he usually occupied. There had been another boy,

three months before, who had shared the desolate room with him, but he had been bound out to a farmer, and now Jed was the sole occupant.

Tired as he was, he did not go to sleep immediately. He undressed himself slowly in the obscurity, for he was not allowed a lamp, and made a movement to get into bed.

But a surprise awaited him. His extended hand came in contact with a human face, and one on which there was a mustache. Somebody was in his bed!

Naturally, Jed was startled.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

"Who'm I? I'm a gentleman," was the drowsy reply.

"You're in my bed," said Jed, annoyed as well as surprised.

"Where is *my* bed?" hiccoughed the other.

"I don't know. How did you get in here?"

"I came in when no one was lookin'," answered the intruder. "Zis a hotel?"

"No; it's the Scranton poorhouse."

"You don't say? Dad always told me I'd end up in the poorhouse, but I didn't expect to get there so quick."

"You'd better get up and go down stairs. Fogson wouldn't like to have you stay here all night."

"Who's Fogson?"

"He is the manager of the poorhouse."

"Who cares for Fogson? I don't b'lieve Fogson is a gen'leman."

"Nor I," inwardly assented Jed.

This was the last word that he could get from the intruder, who coolly turned over and began to snore.

Fortunately for Jed, there was another cot bed—the one formerly occupied by the other boy—and he got into it.

Fatigued by the events of the day, Jed soon slept a sound and refreshing sleep. In fact his sleep was so sound that it is doubtful whether a thunderstorm would have awakened him.

Towards morning the occupant of the other bed turned in such a way as to lie on his back. This position, as my readers are probably aware, is conducive to heavy snoring, and the intruder availed himself of this to the utmost.

Mr. and Mrs. Fogson slept directly underneath, and after awhile, the door leading to the attic being open, the sound of the snoring attracted the attention of Mrs. Fogson.

"Simeon!" she said, shaking her recumbent husband.

"What is it, Mrs. F.?" inquired her lord and master drowsily.

"Did you hear that?"

"Did I hear what?"

"That terrific snoring. It is loud enough to wake the dead."

By this time Fogson was fairly awake.

"So it is," he assented. "Who is it?"

"Jed, of course. What possesses the boy to snore so?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. I never heard a boy of his age make such a noise."

"It must be stopped, Simeon. It can't be more than three o'clock, and if it continues I shan't sleep another wink."

"Well, go up and stop it."

"It is more suitable for you to go, Mr. Fogson. I do believe the boy is snoring out of spite."

Even Fogson laughed at this idea.

"He couldn't do that unless he snored when he was awake," he replied. "It isn't easy to snore when you are not asleep. If you don't believe it, try it."

"I am ashamed of you, Simeon. Do you think I would demean myself by any such low action? If that snoring isn't stopped right off I shall go into a fit."

"I wouldn't like to have you do that," said Fogson, rather amused. "It would be rather worse than hearing Jed snore."

About this time there was an unusual outburst on the part of the sleeper.

"A little hot water would fix him," said Fogson. "It is a pity you had not saved your hot water till to-night."

"Cold water would do just as well."

"So it would. Mrs. F., that's a bright idea. I owe the boy a grudge for giving his money to Dr. Redmond. I'll go down stairs and get a clipper of cold water, and I'll see if I can't stop the boy's noise."

Mr. Fogson went down stairs, chuckling, as he went, at the large joke he was intending to perpetrate. It would not be so bad as being scalded, but it would probably be very disagreeable to Jed to be roused from a sound sleep by a dash of cold water.

"I hope he won't wake up before I get there," thought Mr. Fogson, as he descended to the kitchen in his stocking feet to procure the water.

He pumped for a minute or two in order that the water might be colder, and then with the dipper in hand ascended two flights of stairs to the attic.

Up there it was still profoundly dark. There was but one window, and that was screened by a curtain. Moreover, it was very dark outside. Mr. Fogson, however, was not embarrassed, for he knew just where Jed's bed was situated, and, even if he had not, the loud snoring, which still continued, would have been sufficient to guide him to the place.

"It beats me how a boy can snore like that," soliloquized Fogson. "He must have eaten something at Dr. Redmond's that didn't agree with him. If I didn't know it was Jed I should feel frightened at such an unearthly hubbub."

However, it won't continue long," and Fogson laughed to himself as he thought of the sensation which his dipper of water was likely to produce.

He approached a little nearer, and in spite of the darkness could see the outlines of a form on the bed, but he could not see clearly enough to make out the difference between it and Jed's.

He poised himself carefully, and then dashed the water vigorously into the face of the sleeping figure.

The results were not exactly what he had anticipated.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. FOGSON IS ASTONISHED.

The sleeper had already slept off pretty nearly all the effects of his potations, and the sudden cold bath restored him wholly to himself. But it also aroused in him a feeling of anger, justifiable under the circumstances, and, not belonging to the Peace Society, he was moved to punish the person to whom he was indebted for his unpleasant experience.

With a smothered imprecation he sprang from the bed and seized the astonished Fogson by the throat, while he shook him violently.

"You—you—scoundrel!" he ejaculated. "I'll teach you to play such a scurvy trick on a gentleman."

Mr. Fogson screamed in fright. He did not catch his late victim's words, and was still under the impression that it was Jed who had tackled him.

Meanwhile the intruder was flinging him about and bumping him against the floor so forcibly that Mrs. Fogson's attention was attracted. Indeed, she was at the foot of the stairs, desiring to enjoy Jed's dismay when drenched with the contents of the tin dipper.

"What's the matter, Simeon?" she cried.

"Jed's killing me!" called out Fogson in muffled tones.

"You don't mean to say you ain't a match for that boy!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson scornfully. "I'll come up and help you."

Disregarding her light attire she hurried up stairs, and was astonished beyond measure when she saw how unceremoniously her husband was being handled. She rushed to seize Jed, when she found her hands clutching a mustache.

"Why, it ain't Jed!" she screamed in dismay.

"No, it ain't Jed," said the intruder. "Did you mean that soaking for Jed, whoever he is?"

"Yes, yes, it was—quite a mistake!" gasped Fogson.

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I meant to fling you down stairs, and might have broken your neck."

"Oh, what a dreadful man!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson. "How came you here and where is Jed?"

"I am here!" answered Jed, who had waked up two or three minutes previous and was enjoying the defeat of his persecutor.

"Did you bring in this man?" demanded Mrs. Fogson sternly.

"No. I walked in myself," answered the intruder. "I was rather mellow—in other words I had drunk too much mixed ale, and I really didn't know where I was. I had an idea that this was a hotel."

"You made a mistake, sir. This is the Scranton poorhouse."

"So the boy told me when he came in. I wouldn't have taken a bed here if I had known your playful way of pouring cold water on your guests."

"Sir, apart from your assault on me, *me*, the master of the poorhouse," said Fogson, trying to recover some of his lost dignity, "you committed a trespass in entering the house without permission and appropriating a bed."

"All right, old man, but just remember that I was drunk."

"I don't think that is an excuse."

"Isn't it? Just get drunk yourself, and see what you'll do."

"I don't allow Mr. Fogson to get drunk," said his wife with asperity.

"Maybe my wife wouldn't let me, if there was any such a person, but I haven't been so fortunate as Mr. Fogson, if that is his name."

"Mrs. F.," said her husband with a sudden thought, "you are not dressed for company."

Mrs. Fogson, upon this hint, scuttled down stairs, and the intruder resumed: "If I've taken a liberty I'm willing to apologize. What's more, I'll pay you fifty cents for the use of your bed and stay the night out."

He was appealing to Mr. Fogson's weak point, which was a love of money.

"I see you're ready to do the square thing," he said in softened accents. "If you'll say seventy-five——"

"No, I won't pay over fifty. I don't care to take it another night on those terms, if I am to be waked up by a dipper of water. You've wet the sheet and pillow so that I may take my death of cold if I sleep here any longer."

"I'll bring you a comforter which you can lay over the wet clothes."

"All right! Bring it up and I'll hand you the fifty cents."

"And—and if you would like breakfast in the morning, for the small extra sum of twenty-five cents——"

"Isn't that rather steep for a poorhouse breakfast?"

"You will not eat with the paupers, of course, but at a private table, with Mrs. Fogson and myself."

"All right! Your offer is accepted."

Mr. Fogson brought up the comforter, and the visitor resumed the slumbers which had been so unceremoniously interrupted.

The sun rose early, and when its rays crept in through the side window both Jed and his companion were awake.

"I say, boy, come over here and share my bed. I want to talk to you."

Jed's curiosity was excited, and he accepted the invitation.

He found his roommate to be a good-looking young man of perhaps thirty, and with a pleasant expression.

"So you are Jed?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you live in the poorhouse?"

"Yes," answered Jed, half-ashamed to admit it, "but I don't mean to stay here."

"Good! A smart boy like you ought not to be a pauper. You are able to earn your own living outside. But perhaps you are attached to the queer people who made me a visit last night."

"Not much!" answered Jed emphatically.

"I don't admire them much myself. I didn't see the old lady. Is she beautiful?"

Jed laughed heartily.

"You'll see her at the breakfast table," he said. "Then you can judge for yourself."

"I don't think I shall do anything to excite Fogson's jealousy. Zounds, if this isn't the queerest hotel I ever struck. I am sorry to have taken your bed from you."

"I was glad not to be in it when Mr. Fogson came up."

"You're right there," said the other laughing. "Whew! how the cold water startled me. Sorry to have deprived you of it."

"Mr. Fogson got a dose himself yesterday, only it was hot water."

"You don't say so! Was that meant for you, too?"

"Yes;" and Jed told the story of his struggle with Mr. Fogson, and his wife's unfortunate interference.

"That's a capital joke," said the visitor laughing. "Now I suppose you wonder who I am."

"Yes; I should like to know."

"I'm Harry Bertram, the actor. I don't know if you ever heard of me."

"I never attended the theatre in my life."

"Is that so? Why, you're quite a heathen. Never went to a theatre? Well, I *am* surprised."

"Is it a good business?" asked Jed.

"Sometimes, if the play happens to catch on. When you are stranded five hundred miles from home, and your salary isn't paid, it isn't exactly hilarious."

"Are you going to play anywhere near here?" asked Jed, who was beginning to think he would like to see a performance.

"We are billed to play in Duncan to-morrow evening, or rather this evening, for it's morning now."

"Duncan is only five miles away."

"If you want to attend I'll give you a pass. It's the least I can do to pay for turning you out of your bed."

"I could walk the five miles," said Jed.

"Then come. I'll see you at the door and pass you in. Ask for Harry Bertram."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram."

"Old Fogson won't make a fuss about your going, will he?"

"Yes, he will; but I've made up my mind to leave the poorhouse, and I might as well leave it to-day as any time."

"Good! I admire your pluck."

"I wish I knew what I could do to make a living."

"Leave that to me. I'll arrange to have you travel with the show for two or three days and bunk with me. Have you got any—any better clothes than those?" and Bertram pointed to the dilapidated garments lying on a chair near by.

"Yes, I am promised a good suit by a friend of mine in the village. I'll go there and put them on before starting."

"Do; the actors sometimes look pretty tough, but I never saw one dressed like that."

"Jed!" screamed Mrs. Fogson from the bottom of the stairs. "You get right up and come down stairs!"

"They're calling me," said Jed, starting up.

"Will I have to get up too?"

"No; Mr. and Mrs. Fogson don't breakfast till seven. They'll send me up to call you."

"All right! We'll soon be travelling together where there are no Fogsons."

"I hope so," and Jed went down stairs with new life in his step.

CHAPTER IX.

JED LEAVES THE POORHOUSE.

At eight o'clock Harry Bertram was summoned to breakfast in the private sitting-room of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson. In spite of the poor fare of which the paupers complained the Fogsons took care themselves to have appetizing meals, and the well-spread table looked really attractive.

"Sit down here, Mr. Bertram," said Mrs. Fogson, pointing to a seat. The place opposite was vacant, as the heads of the table were occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Fogson.

"Mrs. Fogson," said the actor, "I am going to ask a favor."

"What is it?" returned the lady, wreathing her features into a frosty smile.

"I see the seat opposite me is unoccupied. Will you oblige me by letting the boy Jed take it?"

Mrs. Fogson's face changed.

"I should prefer not to have him here," she answered in a forbidding tone.

"Of course I propose to pay for his breakfast the same price that I pay for my own."

"The boy is insubordinate and disobedient," said the lady coldly.

"Still he gave me his bed last night. Some boys would have objected."

"My dear," said Fogson, whose weakness for money has already been mentioned, "I think, as the gentleman has agreed to pay for Jed's breakfast, we may give our consent, merely to gratify him."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Fogson, resolved to claim the twenty-five cents for herself.

She rose from her seat, went to the window, and opening it, called to Jed, who was at work in the yard.

He speedily made his appearance.

"Sit down to the table, Jedediah," said Mr. Fogson with dignity. "Mr. Bertram desires you to breakfast with him."

Jed was very much surprised, but as he noted the warm biscuit and beefsteak, which emitted an appetizing odor, he felt that it was an invitation not to be rejected.

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Bertram," he said, "and also to you and Mrs. Fogson."

This was a politic remark to make, and he was served as liberally as the guest.

"Do you find your position a pleasant one, Mr. Fogson?" asked Bertram politely.

"No, Mr. Bertram, far from it. The paupers are a thankless, ungrateful set, but I am sustained by a sense of duty."

"The paupers were spoiled by our predecessors, Mr. and Mrs. Avery," chimed in Mrs. Fogson. "Really, Mr. Bertram, you would be surprised to learn how unreasonable they are. They are always complaining of their meals."

"I am sure they must be unreasonable if they complain of meals like this, Mrs. Fogson," said the actor.

"Of course we can't afford to treat them like this. The town would object. But we give them as good fare as we can afford. Are you going to stay long in Scranton?"

"No; I am merely passing through. I shall sleep to-night at Duncan."

"At the poorhouse?" asked Jed with a comical smile.

"Yes, if I could be sure of as good fare as this," replied the actor with an answering smile. "But that would be very doubtful."

Mrs. Fogson, who, cross-grained as she was, was not above flattery, mentally pronounced Mr. Bertram a most agreeable young man—in fact, a perfect gentleman.

"I am really ashamed," continued Bertram, "to have entered your house in such a condition, but I was feeling a little internal disturbance, and fancied that whisky would relieve it. Unfortunately I took too much."

"It might have happened to anyone," said Fogson considerately. "I am myself a temperance man, but sometimes I find whisky beneficial to my health."

Bertram, noticing the ruddy hue of Mr. Fogson's nose, was quite ready to believe this statement.

"May I ask if you are a business man?" remarked Fogson.

"My business is acting. I belong to the Gold King Company, which is to play at Duncan to-night."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Fogson, with a glance of curiosity. "I never saw an actor before."

"I am sorry you should see such an unworthy representative of the Thespian art. If we were to play in Scranton, it would give me pleasure to offer you and Mr. Fogson complimentary tickets."

"I wish you were to play here," said Mrs. Fogson in a tone of regret. "I haven't seen a play for five years."

"I suppose you couldn't come to Duncan?"

"No; we could not be spared. Besides, we have no horse and carriage," said Fogson. "We must wait till you perform in Scranton."

Jed was very much relieved to hear this remark, for it would have interfered with his own plans if Mr. and Mrs. Fogson had accepted an invitation to witness the play at Duncan.

"Is it a good paying business?" asked Mr. Fogson.

"Well, so so. My salary is fifty dollars a week."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Fogson in envious surprise. "You ought to lay up money."

"It seems so, but in the summer we generally have a long vacation. Besides, we have to pay our hotel bills; so that, after all, we don't have as much left as you would suppose. Besides, we have to buy our costumes, and some of them are quite expensive."

In spite of these drawbacks the Fogsons evidently looked upon Bertram as a wealthy young man.

At length they rose from the table. Jed had never before eaten such a meal since he entered the poorhouse, and he felt in a degree envious of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, who probably fared thus every day. When he considered, however, how they nearly starved the poor people of whom they had charge he felt indignant, and could not help wishing that some time they might exchange places with the unfortunate paupers.

He went out to the yard again, and resumed his work at the woodpile. Harry Bertram strolled out and lazily watched him.

"I suppose you never did work of this kind, Mr. Bertram?" said Jed.

"Oh yes, I lived for nearly a year with an aunt who required me to prepare all the wood for the kitchen stove. I can tell you one thing, though, I did not enjoy it, and when I left her I retired forever from that line of business."

"Are you going to stay in Scranton to-day?"

"No; I must be getting over to Duncan. We have taken on a new actor and shall be obliged to have a rehearsal. Will you go along with me?"

"I should like to, but it would only get me into trouble. I will start about four o'clock, and go over to Dr. Redmond's to get the suit of clothes he promised me."

"I suppose you won't have to take a trunk of clothes from here?"

"About all the clothes I own are on my back. If I leave any behind me, anyone is welcome to them."

"Do you think there will be any difficulty in your getting away?"

"I think I can slip off without being noticed."

"Do you think they will go after you?"

"They might if they suspected where I was going."

"Then I shall have to help you. Join me at the theatre, and it will go hard if, between us, we cannot foil the enemy."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram. You are a real friend."

"Some people say I am everybody's friend but my own. You can judge for yourself about that when you know me better."

Harry Bertram walked off whistling, and Jed was left to his reflections. It is needless to say that he felt in an excited mood, for it seemed to him that he had come to a turning-point in his life. As far back as he could remember he had been an inmate of the Scranton poorhouse.

When Mr. and Mrs. Avery were in charge he had not minded this much, such was the kindness with which he was treated by those good people. But when, through the influence of Squire Dixon, they were removed and Mr. and Mrs. Fogson put in their place he began to feel the bitterness of his position. The three months which had passed since then seemed to him like so many years. But now he had resolved, once for all, to end his thralldom, and go out into the great world and see what he could do for himself.

Circumstances favored him.

About half-past three Mr. Fogson called him down.

"I want you to go to Squire Dixon's and carry this letter," he said.

Jed's heart leaped with joy. It at once occurred to him that Squire Dixon lived only about twenty rods from Dr. Redmond, and that he could call at the doctor's house after doing his errand.

"Is there any answer?" he asked.

"No; I have asked the squire to call here this evening, if he can. He is the overseer, and I wish to consult him."

"Very well, sir."

Jed took the letter, glad that no answer would be required. Even if there had been, he would have neglected to bring it, for he could not afford to throw away this chance of escape.

The distance from the poorhouse to Squire Dixon's residence was about three-quarters of a mile. Jed covered it in less than fifteen minutes.

In the front yard Percy Dixon was strutting about with the airy consequence habitual to him.

"What brings you here?" he asked rudely.

"I've come with a note for your father. After I've delivered it I will stop a little while and play with you if you want me to."

"You needn't trouble yourself. I don't care to play with paupers."

"Don't call me that again, Percy Dixon!" said Jed, his patience worn out.

"What will happen if I do?" demanded Percy tauntingly.

"I may be obliged to give you a thrashing."

CHAPTER X.

JED REACHES DUNCAN.

Percy Dixon's face flushed with resentment.

"Do you know who you are talking to?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Jed coolly. "I am talking to a boy who thinks a great deal more of himself than any one else does."

"I would punish you, but I don't want to dirty my hands with you. I'll tell my father, and he'll see that old Fogson flogs you."

Jed smiled. He never meant to see Fogson again if he could help it, but he was too wise to impart his plans to Percy.

At this moment his father came up to the gate, and as he opened it his attention was drawn to Jed.

"Have you come here with any message for me?" he asked.

"I have a note for you."

"Give it to me."

"Humph!" said the squire, casting his eye over the note. "Mr. Fogson asks me to call this evening. I will do so."

"Very well, sir."

"Father," interrupted Percy, "there is to be a play performed at Duncan this evening."

"Is there?"

"Yes; I saw a bill in the post-office. It's the 'Gold King,' I believe. May I go?"

"I don't know," said the squire, hesitating. "Mr. Fogson wants me to call at the poorhouse."

"If you don't care about going, I can drive mother and Alice over. You know you promised we should attend the next theatrical performance anywhere near."

"If your mother and Alice would like to go I have no objection. You must drive carefully, and you can leave the horses in the hotel stable."

"All right," said Percy joyfully. "Did you ever go to a theatre?" he asked Jed in a patronizing tone.

"No."

"I have been quite often," said Percy complacently. "But, of course, paupers can't attend amusements."

"You may change your mind this evening," thought Jed.

Jed went at once to the doctor's house. Dr. Redmond had just arrived from a round of visits.

"Good morning, Jed," he said pleasantly.

"Good morning, Dr. Redmond."

"Do you want to see me?"

"I have come to claim your promise," said Jed.

"What is that?"

"You promised me a suit of clothes when I got ready to leave the poorhouse."

Dr. Redmond's face instantly assumed a look of interest.

"And you have decided to take this important step?" he said.

"Yes, doctor. I am tired of being called a pauper. I am sure I can earn my own living, and I mean to try it."

"I don't know but you are right, Jed. At any rate, you have my best wishes. Come into the house, and I will ask Mrs. Redmond to look up the suit. If I am not mistaken you will need other things also—socks, handkerchiefs, and underclothing."

"I need them, no doubt, but I don't want to ask too much."

"I think Mrs. Redmond can fit you out. And, by the way, I think you can manage a little supper. In what direction are you going?"

"To Duncan."

"Why there, in particular?"

"I have a friend there."

"Who is it?"

"Harry Bertram, the actor."

Dr. Redmond looked surprised.

"How did you get acquainted with him?"

Jed told the story. The incident of Fogson's assault on the sleeping actor and his defeat amused the doctor not a little.

"He may be of service to you," he said. "At any rate, an actor sees a good deal of the world, and he may be able to give you some advice. Now put on your clothes and see what a transformation they will make."

Mrs. Redmond took Jed up to a small chamber belonging to her absent son, and laid the clothing on the bed, advising Jed to go into the bathroom close by and take a good bath.

When, half an hour or more later, he descended to the floor below, Dr. Redmond started in surprise. In place of the poorhouse drudge there stood before him a good-looking boy, attired in a brown suit, with clean linen and his hair neatly brushed. Dr. and Mrs. Redmond exchanged glances.

"I wouldn't believe clothes made such a difference," exclaimed the doctor.

"Nor I," chimed in his wife.

The same idea came into the mind of each. Jed's personal appearance would do credit to any family, however exclusive. Yet he had been brought up in the Scranton poorhouse, and associated with paupers all his life.

"I mustn't forget to give you your money," said the doctor, and he put a roll of bills into Jed's hand.

"But here is five dollars!" said Jed. "It was only two you had of mine."

"Take the five. You will need it. It is small enough capital for a boy to go forth into the world with to seek his fortune. Now how are you going to Duncan?"

"I am going to walk."

"I am afraid you will get very tired," said Mrs. Redmond in a tone of sympathy.

"No, ma'am, it is only five miles."

"And five miles is a trifle to a strong boy like Jed."

"Won't you wait till after supper?" asked Mrs. Redmond.

"No, thank you. It would get me there too late."

"Then I will make up some sandwiches for you. Your walk will make you hungry."

Jed started with a small valise in which were packed some extra underclothing, and he carried in his hand a substantial lunch wrapped in paper.

It was far better than the supper which he missed at the poorhouse.

He was rather afraid of meeting some one whom he knew, particularly Percy Dixon, who he was sure would be delighted to thwart his plan by reporting him; but fortunately he escaped observation. He passed two men whom he knew very well, but in his new dress they did not know him.

Jed had walked about half way when a man in a top buggy overtook him, and, stopping his horse, called out, "Is this the road to Duncan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it a straight road all the way?"

"Not quite, sir. There are one or two turns."

"I am sorry to hear it. I am not acquainted hereabouts, and I shouldn't like to lose my way. Are you going to Duncan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then jump in, unless you prefer walking. With a good guide I shall be all right."

"I would rather ride, and I will accept your invitation with pleasure."

"Then we are both suited."

Jed's new acquaintance was a stout man of middle age, with a prompt, alert manner, and looked like a business man. He had a quick, impulsive way with him.

"Are you travelling?" he asked, noticing Jed's valise.

"Yes, sir."

"Going to see the world, eh?"

"I'm going in search of a living, sir," answered Jed.

"Got parents?"

"No, sir. I'm alone in the world."

"Well, you've got a tough job before you."

"Yes, sir, I don't doubt it; but I am young and healthy, and I think I ought to be able to earn my living. Are you a business man?"

"No, not exactly. Why do you ask?"

"I thought you might have a place for me if you were."

"I am not in the right sort of business for you, my lad. I am the manager of the Gold King Dramatic Company."

"Then you are acquainted with Harry Bertram?" said Jed eagerly.

"Yes, he is one of my actors. What do you know of Harry Bertram?"

"He slept in the same room with me last night. He told me to come to Duncan, and he would see what he could do for me."

"Ha, indeed! Well, Harry is a good fellow, and a good friend. He has one fault. He is a little too convivial."

"Yes, sir; I thought so. Is he a good actor?"

"Excellent in his line. He gets a very good salary, but I am afraid he doesn't save very much of it. Are you going to see the play this evening?"

"Yes; Mr. Bertram thought he could get me in."

"You won't need to ask him for a pass. Here is one;" and the manager scribbled on a leaf from his note-book

Admit Bearer.

MORDAUNT.

"Thank you, sir," said Jed, as he pocketed the pass. "I suppose you are Mr. Mordaunt?"

"John Mordaunt, manager of the Gold King Company. In my humbler days I was known to my friends as Jack Mordaunt."

By this time they had reached Duncan, and drove at once to the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

JED'S FIRST APPEARANCE ON THE STAGE.

Several gentlemen were sitting on the piazza in front of the hotel. Among them was Jed's acquaintance of the night before, Harry Bertram.

When he saw Mr. Mordaunt in the buggy he advanced to greet him.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Mordaunt," he said. "I wanted to consult you."

"Any hitch, Bertram?" asked the manager.

"Yes. Young Clinton is sick and can't play to-night."

"What's the matter with the boy?"

"He is threatened with fever."

"Couldn't he play to-night? His part is a small one, but it is important."

"The doctor absolutely forbids his appearing on the stage."

"That is awkward. If we were in the city we might get a substitute, but a common country boy would make a mess of the part."

"You have a boy with you. Do you think he would do?"

"You have known him longer than I. I refer the matter to you."

"Why, it's Jed!" exclaimed Bertram, examining our hero closely.

"Didn't you know me, Mr. Bertram?" asked Jed smilingly.

"Who could, with such a change of dress? You must have met some good fairy. And how did you fall in with Mr. Mordaunt?"

"He kindly offered me a ride."

"Then you have left Scranton for good?"

"For good, I hope. If I can help you in any way I will do my best."

"Try him, Bertram," said the manager. "He is very presentable. Take him in hand, and see if you can't get him ready to take Ralph Clinton's place."

"Then no time is to be lost. Come up to my room, Jed, and I will tell you what you are expected to do—that is, if you have had supper."

"I ate my supper on the road before I fell in with Mr. Mordaunt."

"Follow me, then, Jed."

Harry Bertram led the way to a comfortable chamber on the second floor.

"Now sit down, and I'll tell you what you will have to do. First, do you think you have the nerve to stand before an audience and play the part of a telegraph boy?"

"Yes, sir. I am not troubled with bashfulness."

"Have you ever spoken in public?"

"Yes, at school examinations."

"Then I think you'll do. Here is your part."

He handed Jed a small manuscript book containing the lines of his rôle, with the cues.

"You see it isn't long. I may be able to give you a little rehearsal, as you appear only in the first and last acts."

The next half hour was devoted to teaching Jed his part. Bertram was delighted with the aptitude shown by his pupil.

"Have you never attended a theatre?" he asked, almost incredulously.

"Never, Mr. Bertram."

"Then I can only say that you have the dramatic instinct, luckily for us. If you are sure you won't be afraid before the footlights, you'll do."

"Then I shall do," said Jed. "I never should think of being nervous."

"One thing more—nothing will be said of any substitution. To the audience you will be Ralph Clinton, as put down on the bill."

"That will suit me. I am afraid if I were announced as JED, THE POORHOUSE BOY, it wouldn't help you," continued Jed with a smile.

"You may have to continue in the part a week or more. As to the pay, I can't speak of that yet. Mr. Mordaunt will arrange with you."

"If I can earn my board I shall be satisfied."

"I can promise you that, and fully as good board as you have been accustomed to."

"I hope it won't be worse," said Jed laughing.

"When you go to the theatre I will see if Ralph Clinton's uniform will fit you. I haven't much doubt on that point, as you seem to be about the same size."

The performance was to commence at eight. Harry Bertram and his protégé went to the hall, which was to be used as a theatre, early, so that Jed might be introduced to his fellow-actors and receive a little instruction as to the business of his part.

He was very quick to comprehend, and forgot nothing, so that Bertram felt quite easy in regard to him, though it was his first appearance on any stage.

Jed was very well received by the other members of the company, all of whom expressed satisfaction at having the gap so quickly filled.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, my boy," said George Osprey, the leading man. "Where have you played?"

"Nowhere, sir. This is my first appearance."

"I hope you won't funk."

"If that means break down, I am sure I won't."

"Good! Your confidence will pull you through."

"Mr. Osprey, introduce me, please," lisped an elderly young lady, of affected manners.

"This is Miss Celesta Raffles, Mr. ——, I don't think I know your name."

"Jed Gilman, but I believe I am to be billed as Ralph Clinton."

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Gilman," said Miss Raffles. "I am sure you will be an honor to our noble profession."

"I hope so, Miss Raffles," said Jed smilingly, "but I shall be able to tell better to-morrow."

"I always sympathize with youth—with impulsive, enthusiastic youth," gushed Miss Raffles.

"If they are of the male sex," interpolated Mr. Osprey. "Mr. Gilman, I must warn you that Miss Raffles is a dangerous woman. She will do her best to make an impression on your heart."

"Oh, you wicked slanderer!" said the delighted Celesta. "Mr. Gilman, I am not dangerous at all. I will merely ask you to look upon me as your sister—your elder sister."

"Thank you, Miss Raffles," said Jed, showing a tact and self-possession hardly to be expected of one with his training. "Is Mr. Osprey one of your brothers?"

"Yes, she told me that she would be a sister to me. I have never—never recovered from the blow."

"I may change my mind," said Celesta, who admired the handsome leading man. "If you try again, you may meet with better success——"

"No," answered Osprey warily. "I never ask the same favor a second time. I leave you to Mr. Gilman. May you be happy, my children!"

As Celesta Raffles looked to be thirty-five, and Jed was but sixteen, he was a good deal amused, but Miss Raffles was disposed to take the matter in earnest.

"Don't let him prejudice you against me, Mr. Gilman!" she murmured. "We shall soon be better acquainted, I am sure. Do you know, I am to be your mother in the play? It is a little absurd, as I am only twenty-three, but we have to do strange things on the stage."

"She's thirty-six if she's a day," whispered Osprey, "but if you want to keep in her good graces you must believe her own reports of her age."

"Time to dress, Jed!" said Harry Bertram. "It will take you longer than usual, as it is the first time. Your nerve won't fail you, will it?"

Jed shook his head.

"I feel as cool as ever I did," he answered.

Fortunately the telegraph boy's uniform fitted him exactly. He hardly knew himself as he looked at his reflection in the little mirror in his dressing-room.

"I wonder if Mr. and Mrs. Fogson would recognize me if they should see me on the stage?" thought Jed.

Then it occurred to him that Percy Dixon and his mother would be present. He smiled to himself as he thought of Percy's bewilderment when he saw him under such a strange change of circumstances.

It is not necessary to give the plot of the Gold King. It is sufficient to say that Jed, the telegraph boy, had been stolen from his parents in early life, the Gold King being his father. He is obliged to earn his own living as a boy, but in the last act he is restored to his friends and his old station in life.

In the first act Jed appeared in his predecessor's uniform. In the last he wore his own suit, this being quite as well adapted to the character as Ralph Clinton's street costume.

Mrs. Dixon and Percy occupied seats in the third row from the front. They always paid the highest prices, and secured the most eligible seats.

At the end of ten minutes Jed's cue was called and he appeared on the stage. Percy, who was watching the play with the greatest attention, started in amazement when he saw the boy actor.

"Mother," he whispered, "that boy is the perfect image of Jed, the poorhouse boy."

"Is he, indeed? Very singular, on my word!"

"And he has the same voice," continued Percy, still more excited.

"But I suppose it can't be he," said Mrs. Dixon inquiringly.

"No, I think not," answered Percy. "Jed doesn't know anything about acting, and this boy is perfectly at home on the stage."

This was indeed true. Jed was quite self-possessed. Moreover, he never hesitated for a word or stumbled, but was letter-perfect. His scene was with George Osprey, as member of a fashionable club, who had inquired into his history. "Yes," said Jed, repeating his part, "yes, Mr. Glendower, I am a poor boy, but those who look down upon me will one day find their mistake—they may find that the poor telegraph boy whom they once despised is able to look down upon them."

As he uttered these words, Jed, perhaps intentionally, let his glance rest on Percy Dixon, while the latter gazed at him open-mouthed.

"I believe it is Jed, after all, mother!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER XII.

PERCY DIXON IS BEWILDERED.

At the end of the first act Jed and George Osprey were called before the curtain. Jed had been instructed to bow his thanks, and did so. Percy watched his face eagerly, for this brought Jed within a few feet of him.

"Mother," he said, "if that boy isn't Jed, it is his twin brother."

"But, Percy," said his mother, who was a practical woman, "I never heard that the boy had a twin brother."

"Oh, pshaw! I meant that he is exactly like him."

"But this boy is Ralph Clinton. The bill says so."

"I know it," said Percy, with a puzzled expression. "I don't understand it at all."

"The boy you mean is probably in bed at the Scranton poorhouse."

"Perhaps he is. I don't see, for my part, how he could be here, or know how to act."

The play proceeded. It was in five acts, and Jed was not called upon to appear again till the last one. He proved himself up to the requirements of the part, and evidently produced a favorable impression on the audience.

"Mother," said Percy, "I would like to wait at the stage door till the actors come out."

"But, Percy, it is already late. We ought to be starting for home."

"But, mother, you know father is Overseer of the Poor, and if this boy is Jed, he has run away from the Scranton poorhouse, and father will be held responsible."

"Why should he?"

"Because the paupers are under his charge. If one of them runs away he will be blamed."

"Well, if you think we ought to stop," said the lady undecidedly. "But I don't see what you expect to accomplish."

"I want to see that boy face to face. I want to speak to him, and find out for certain who he is."

"Well, don't be any longer than you can help."

"I won't."

Meanwhile Jed and Harry Bertram were conversing in the greenroom.

"You did yourself proud, my boy," said Bertram. "You acted as well as Clinton, and in some respects better."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Bertram," said Jed, gratified.

"I could hardly believe that this was your first appearance on the stage. Weren't you frightened at all?"

"Not a bit. I enjoyed it."

"Did you see any of your Scranton friends in the audience?"

"I saw none of my Scranton *friends*," answered Jed, "but I saw two Scranton acquaintances."

"Who were they?"

"Percy Dixon, son of the Overseer of the Poor, and his mother."

"Where were they sitting?"

"In the third row from the stage."

"Do you think they recognized you?"

"I saw Percy watching me very closely I am sure he noticed my resemblance to his old acquaintance Jed, but he couldn't understand how it was possible for me to be the same boy."

"Then you baffled him?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't wonder if he would be waiting outside to get a view of me."

"And if he does?"

"He will do all he can to get me back to the poorhouse."

"Then I'll tell you what to do. Go out of the stage door arm in arm with me, and I will address you as Ralph. If he speaks, appear not to know him."

"That will be a capital joke," said Jed taking in the humor of the situation.

"Between us, I think we can bluff him off."

Jed had appeared in the last act in his street costume, and had no preparations to make, but Bertram had to exchange his stage for his ordinary dress. When they were ready they emerged from the stage door arm in arm. A glance showed Jed that Percy was waiting to intercept him. He did not appear to notice Percy, but passed on.

Percy hastened forward, and touched him on the arm.

"Look here, I want to speak to you," he said.

"Speak on, my boy," said Jed, assuming the style of his new profession.

"How did you come here?" demanded Percy bluntly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are Jed Gilman."

"My dear Ralph, what does this person mean?" said Bertram.

"He evidently mistakes me for some one he knows," said Jed coolly. "May I ask your name, young man?"

"You know me well enough," said Percy angrily, for Jed had not tried to change his voice. "I am Percy Dixon."

"Percy Dixon?" repeated Jed. "Where have I met you?"

"Where have you met me?" retorted Percy. "At the Scranton poorhouse."

"Do you reside there?" asked Jed with admirable composure.

"Do I live at the poorhouse?" repeated Percy, exasperated. "Of course I don't."

Mrs. Dixon had heard this colloquy, as she was sitting in the carriage only six feet away.

"Percy," she said, "I told you you had made a mistake."

"I don't believe I have," said Percy in a sulky tone.

"For whom do you take me, Mr. Dixon?" asked Jed.

"For Jed Gilman, a poorhouse boy."

"I feel very much complimented," said Jed smoothly. "I hope Jed is a nice boy."

"No, he isn't. He is an impudent young rascal."

"Then how dare you compare my friend Ralph to a boy like that?" demanded Bertram savagely. "You must be crazy, or do you mean to deliberately insult him?"

Poor Percy was overwhelmed. He wasn't half so certain now that he was right. True, there was a wonderful resemblance between the young actor and Jed, but then it seemed impossible that Jed should have left the poorhouse suddenly (and Percy remembered seeing him that very afternoon at his own home) and developed into a member of a dramatic company.

"I may have made a mistake," he said doubtfully.

"I am glad you realize this possibility," said Bertram. "Did you witness the play this evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think your friend Jed——"

"He is not my friend."

"Well, do you think that Jed, whatever he is, could act like my friend Ralph?"

"No, I don't think he could," Percy admitted.

"Probably this Jed is a very ordinary boy?"

"I should say so. Ordinary is no name for it. He is stupid."

"Then you will see for yourself that it is not very likely that he should become an accomplished actor all at once. If it were you it might be different. You are evidently a young man of social position, while this Jed is a poor boy, and I presume without education."

"Yes, he is very ignorant," answered Percy, falling into the trap. "Is it—hard to learn to act?" he added.

"Not if you have talent and education. Do you think of trying the stage?"

"I might some time," said Percy, flattered by the question.

"If you do, I hope you will succeed. Now, Mr. Dixon, I must bid you good night, as my friend Ralph and myself are fatigued with our acting and must get to bed."

"Good evening!" said Jed, raising his hat gravely.

"Good evening!" returned Percy, more puzzled than ever.

He jumped into the carriage and started to drive home.

"Then it wasn't Jed?" said his mother.

"I suppose not," answered Percy, "but I never in all my life saw such a resemblance."

"Very likely," replied Mrs. Dixon placidly. "There was a woman in Trenton who looked just like me, so that no one could tell us apart."

"Yes," admitted Percy; "I must be mistaken. This boy had a very nice suit on, while Jed was dressed in rags."

When they reached home Squire Dixon was abed and asleep. Percy came down late to breakfast.

"By the way, Percy," said his father, as he helped him to breakfast, "Fogson has just been over to report that the boy Jed has mysteriously disappeared. He never went back after bringing me the message yesterday afternoon."

Percy dropped his knife and fork and stared at his father in open-eyed amazement.

"Then it was Jed, after all!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOGSON IN PURSUIT.

"What do you mean, Percy?" asked Squire Dixon, referring to his son's exclamation at the close of the preceding chapter. "Do you know anything of Jed?"

"Yes; I saw him last evening at Duncan."

"But what took him there? What was he doing?"

"He was on the stage. He was playing in 'The Gold King.'"

"What do you mean by this absurd statement?" demanded his father angrily.

"It is true. Ask mother if it isn't."

"I think Percy is right," said Mrs. Dixon. "The young actor bears a wonderful resemblance to the boy Jed."

"But Jed doesn't know anything about acting."

"That is why I thought I was mistaken. But if Jed has run away it must be he."

"Why didn't you manage to speak to him after the play?"

"I did, and he denied that he was Jed. He calls himself Ralph Clinton."

"Really, this is a most surprising circumstance," said the squire. "The boy is a hardened young villain. His running away from those who are lawfully set over him in authority is a most audacious and highhanded outrage."

"That's what I think," chimed in Percy. "What shall you do about it? Shan't you go after him?"

"I think it my duty to do so. As soon as breakfast is over, ask Mr. Fogson to come round here. Tell him I have news of the fugitive."

Three-quarters of an hour later Simeon Fogson was admitted into the august presence of the Overseer of the Poor.

"I hear you have news of Jed Gilman," he said. "That is what your son Percy tells me."

"It is true, Mr. Fogson. The young scapegrace has joined a company of actors. What is he coming to?"

"To the gallows, I think," answered Fogson. "But how did you learn this?"

"Percy saw him on the stage last evening."

"And he actually played a part?"

"Yes."

"In his ragged suit?"

"No," answered Percy. "He had a telegraph boy's suit first, and afterwards a nice brown suit—as nice as mine."

"Where did he get 'em?" asked Fogson.

"That's the question!" returned the squire solemnly. "There is a strange mystery about the boy's goings on. Have you observed anything queer in his conduct of late?"

"I have noticed that he has been unusually impudent. Ha, I have it!" said Fogson, suddenly, slapping his thigh.

"What have you?" asked Percy.

"There was an actor stayed at the poorhouse night before last—an actor named Bertram. It is he that has lured Jed astray."

"There was an actor by that name in the play last evening."

"Then that settles it. Squire Dixon, what shall I do?"

"I think, Mr. Fogson, you had better go at once to Duncan—I will lend you my buggy—and secure the boy, tying him hand and foot, if necessary, and take him back to the poorhouse."

Simeon Fogson smiled grimly. It was an errand that suited him.

"I will do so," he said, "and I will lose no time."

"Don't ask for Jed Gilman," suggested Percy. "Ask for Ralph Clinton. That's the name he goes by now."

Mr. Fogson drew out a stub of a lead-pencil and put down this name. In twenty minutes he was on his way, and an hour later he drew up in front of the hotel in Duncan.

He left the buggy and entered the public room of the inn.

"Is there such a boy as Ralph Clinton here?" he asked the clerk.

"Yes; do you want to see him?"

"I should like very much to see him," answered Fogson grimly.

"He is in No. 12. Jim, show the gentleman up. He is sick."

Fogson nodded.

"I dare say," he added significantly. "I guess his acting made him sick."

"Yes, that's what I heard. Is he your son?"

"No, but I am his guardian."

Fogson was quite elated at so easily getting on the track of the fugitive.

"Sick!" he repeated to himself, as he ascended the staircase. "I guess he'll be sick before he gets through with me."

The servant knocked at No. 12, and a boy's voice was heard to say "Come in!"

The door was opened, and Fogson, rushing in, grasped the arm of a boy sitting in a rocking-chair.

"I've got you, you young rascal!" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean, you lunatic?" demanded the boy in a clear voice, higher pitched than was Jed's.

Then for the first time Fogson, who was shortsighted, found out that the boy was not Jed, but a youth of lighter complexion and slighter physique.

He fell back in confusion.

"I was told you were Ralph Clinton," he explained, looking rather foolish.

"I am Ralph Clinton."

"But I want Jed Gilman."

"Then why don't you look for Jed Gilman? What have I got to do with him?"

"Do you act with the Gold King Company?"

"Yes, when I am well."

"Did you act last evening?"

"No; there was another boy that took my place."

"That's the one I want. He ran away from me."

"Are you his father?"

"No, I'm his guardian."

"I don't like your looks," said Ralph, who was a very free-spoken young man. "I don't blame him for running away from you."

Fogson scowled.

"I believe you're as bad as he," he growled. "There's one thing sure—I'm going to get the boy back. Where is he?"

"On the road, I expect. He will take my place till I get well."

"Not much, he won't. Have the rest of the actors left Duncan?"

"You'd better ask down stairs. I'm not going to help you get the boy back."

Fogson had nothing to do but to go down again to the public room. The clerk told him that the company were to play that evening at Bolton, twelve miles away, and were probably there now, having taken the morning train.

"Twelve miles away!" thought Fogson in dismay. "I can't drive so far as that. Squire Dixon wouldn't like to have me drive his horse so many miles. What shall I do?"

This was a question easier asked than answered. If he had not been burdened with the horse and buggy he would have taken the next train for Bolton. As it was, he didn't feel at liberty to do this.

He wished Squire Dixon were at hand, so that he might ask his advice, for he felt quite unable to decide for himself what was best to be done. As he stood beside his team in a state of indecision he heard the sound of approaching wheels, and looking up, recognized Dr. Redmond's carriage.

"What brings you to Duncan, Mr. Fogson?" asked the doctor with a peculiar smile.

"I've come after that rascal Jed."

"Is he here?" asked the doctor innocently.

"He has run away from the poorhouse and joined some strolling players. He played in the theatre last evening."

"Did he, indeed?" asked the doctor, really surprised. "He must be a smart boy to take up acting so suddenly."

"He is a very impudent boy."

"Is he? Then I should think you would be glad to get rid of him."

"I don't mean to let him off so easily. I'm going to bring him back to the poorhouse, and when I get hold of him I'll——"

Mr. Fogson nodded his head significantly. It was clear that he intended that the way of the transgressor should be hard.

"It strikes me, Mr. Fogson, that you are acting in a very foolish manner," said the doctor.

"Why am I?"

"I will tell you. Jed has got tired of being supported by the town, and he has taken the matter into his own hands. In other words, he proposes to relieve the town of the expense of his maintenance. The town will doubtless be glad to have one dependent less on its hands. You appear to want to get him back, and make the town once more responsible for his support. Is it not so?"

Fogson looked blank. The matter had never presented itself to him in that light before.

"You certainly won't make yourself very popular by this action," proceeded Dr. Redmond. "As a good citizen you ought to be glad that the town's expenses are lessened."

"Would you have me let the boy go?" Fogson ejaculated.

"Certainly, I would. Jed is able to support himself, and there is no earthly reason for keeping him in the poorhouse. I advise you to represent the matter to Squire Dixon, and see what he thinks about it."

Mr. Fogson drove home slowly. He found it hard to have Jed escape from his clutches, but Squire Dixon, upon consultation, reluctantly decided that perhaps it was best to drop the matter then and there. No one was more disappointed over this decision than Percy Dixon.

CHAPTER XIV.

JED'S LUCK.

Jed continued to act in the part assigned to him. He knew that he was liable to be superseded at any time by Ralph Clinton, but he did not care to borrow trouble.

As a matter of fact, however, he was allowed to play till the end of the season, but this was not very far off. Warm weather had set in, and audiences became small.

One day Harry Bertram called Jed aside.

"Well, Jed," he said, "I am afraid we must part."

"Why, Mr. Bertram?"

"The weather has become so warm that we are no longer paying expenses. Mr. Mordaunt has decided to close the season on Saturday night."

Jed looked blank. He didn't know what would come next.

"I thought we might hold out another week, and we might if the weather had remained comfortable, but people won't come to see 'The Gold King' or any other play when the thermometer stands at eighty degrees."

"What shall you do, Mr. Bertram?"

"Fall back on my trade, if possible."

"What is that?"

"I am a telegraph operator, and I may be able to fill in the summer in some Western Union office. I have to work at summer prices, but as long as I make my board and lodging I shall be content."

"I wish *I* had a trade," said Jed thoughtfully.

"You don't feel like going back to your old home?"

"In the Scranton poorhouse? Not much!" answered Jed energetically. "I'll starve first. Have you got any place engaged?"

"No, but I have worked two summers at Sea Spray, an Atlantic coast summer resort. I shall go there and see if there is an opening."

"Is it far away?"

"About fifty miles. I'll tell you what, Jed, you had better come with me. Something may turn up for you."

"What is the fare, Mr. Bertram?"

"About a dollar and a half. You will have some money coming to you. You haven't been paid anything yet, have you?"

"No; I didn't suppose I was entitled to any."

"You will get something. I will speak to the treasurer and arrange matters for you."

Accordingly on Saturday evening, after the last performance, Jed was made happy by receiving twelve dollars, or at the rate of four dollars per week for the time he had been employed.

"Mr. Mordaunt directs me to say that he would pay you more if the business would permit," said the treasurer.

"Tell him this is more than I expected," said Jed elated.

"That isn't professional," remarked Bertram smiling. "Actors generally claim to be worth a good deal more than they are paid."

"I haven't been on the stage long enough to be professional," said Jed.

Early on Monday morning Jed and his friend Bertram took the cars for Sea Spray. As they neared the coast, the ocean breeze entered cool and refreshing through the open windows. Presently the cars stopped, only two hundred feet from the bluff, and Jed for the first time gazed with delight at the Atlantic billows rolling in on the beach.

"This is beautiful!" he exclaimed. "I hope I can stay here all summer."

"Have you never seen the sea before?"

"No; I have never travelled before. All my life has been spent at Scranton."

"Take a walk with me along Ocean Avenue, and I will see what chance there is of my obtaining employment."

Harry Bertram made his way to the principal hotel, where he knew there was a Western Union office. He told Jed to sit down in the reading-room while he sought for information.

In ten minutes he came back with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"I am in great luck," he said. "The operator here has just been summoned home by the serious illness of his father in Chicago. He was considering whom he could get to take his place when I presented myself. The result is that I am engaged to take charge of the telegraph office at twelve dollars a week and my board."

"Then you are provided for."

"Yes. I can get through the summer very well."

"I should think so. You will have the twelve dollars a week clear."

"No; I must get a room outside. However, my predecessor has recommended his—in a private house about a quarter of a mile from the shore—at only four dollars a week."

"Then I suppose we must part," said Jed with a tinge of sadness.

"No, Jed. You shall room with me, and your room will cost you nothing. As to meals, I can see you through till you secure some work."

"But I don't want to be a burden upon you, Mr. Bertram."

"I don't mean that you shall be, any longer than is necessary. It will go hard if a boy like you can't find something to do that will buy his meals at a crowded watering-place."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram. I have money enough left to buy my meals for two weeks at least."

"If we were at a regular office I could employ you as messenger, but most of the messages will come to guests in the hotel."

"I don't know exactly what I can do, but I am ready to do anything."

"Except black boots," said Bertram with a smile.

"I don't think I should like to do that if there is anything else to be found."

"I couldn't think of allowing a member of our honorable profession to undertake such menial employment."

Harry Bertram went to work that evening. Jed kept him company in the office a part of the time, and during the three succeeding days went from one hotel to another to see if he could obtain anything to do.

But every position had been filled for the season. Jed began to fear that there was no work for him at Sea Spray.

On the fourth morning, as he was sitting with Bertram, a gentleman whom he had several times seen—a guest of the house—approached them.

"Is this boy your brother?" he asked of Bertram.

"No, but he is my valued friend. In fact, I may call myself his guardian for the time being."

"Yes," assented Jed with a smile.

"He does not assist you?"

"No, he knows nothing of telegraphy."

"Would you like employment?" asked the gentleman, turning to Jed.

"I am very anxious to get work," said Jed quickly.

"Then I think I may be able to meet your wishes. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"You may have seen a boy of ten walking about with me?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is my son. He and I are here alone, but until yesterday I had a nurse in my employ whose sole business was to look after Chester. I felt entire confidence in her, but discovered last evening that she had purloined some jewelry belonging to me. Of course I discharged her instantly, and in consequence am obliged to find some one in her place.

"Chester objects to another nurse. It hurts his boyish pride to have a woman accompanying him everywhere. It appears to me that a boy old enough to look after him will suit him much better. But perhaps you would not like being encumbered with a small boy?"

"I should like it very much, sir," said Jed. "I like young boys, and I am sure I should like your son."

"Come up stairs, then. I will see how he likes you."

Jed followed his new acquaintance up to a suite of two rooms on the second floor. A young boy was at the window. He looked inquiringly at his father and Jed.

"Come here, Chester," said the former. "Are you quite sure you don't want another nurse?"

"Yes," answered the boy. "Some of the boys in the hotel call me 'sissy' because I have a girl always with me."

"Would you prefer this boy?"

Chester took a long, close look at Jed, who met his glance with a smile.

"Yes," said the little boy confidently. "I shall like him much better than a girl."

"That settles it," said Mr. Holbrook in a tone of satisfaction. "What is your name?"

"Jed Gilman."

"What was your last employment?"

"I took the boy's part in 'The Gold King.'"

"Are you an actor?" asked Chester, much interested.

"Not much of one."

"You must have some talent," remarked Mr. Holbrook, "or Mr. Mordaunt, who is a manager of reputation, would not have employed you. Is your season over?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think you will suit me. I am obliged to be in New York every day on business, and this leaves Chester alone. I wish you to act as his companion, to go with him on the beach and in bathing, and to look after him while I am away. Are you boarding here?"

"No, sir; I could not afford it."

"I shall arrange to have you take meals here with Chester, but after eight o'clock in the evenings you will be your own master. Now as to the matter of compensation. Will ten dollars a week satisfy you?"

"Ten dollars a week and my meals?"

"Yes."

"I didn't expect so much."

"I like to pay liberally, and expect to be well served."

"When shall I commence, sir?"

"At once. I want to take the next train for the city. As I go down stairs I will tell them that you are to take your meals here. Now, Chester, I will leave you with your new friend, as I have barely time to reach the next train for New York."

CHAPTER XV. TWO ODD ACQUAINTANCES.

"Ten dollars a week!" repeated Harry Bertram, to who Jed communicated his good luck. "Why, that is famous!"

"Ten dollars a week and my meals!"

"Better still. That is better than acting."

"I don't know how I shall suit Mr. Holbrook."

"You will suit him if you suit the boy."

By this time Chester made his appearance.

"I want to walk on the beach," he said. "Come, Jed."

And the boy put his hand confidingly in that of Jed.

They descended the steps that led from the bluff to the beach, and walked leisurely up and down on the sand. Presently Chester expressed a wish to sit down, and before long was engaged with a small wooden spade in making a sand fortification.

Relieved from duty, since his young charge could come to no harm, Jed had leisure to watch the crowds passing him in both directions.

Presently a thin, dark-complexioned man, of perhaps thirty-five, after walking up and down the beach, came to a stop, and, apparently without motive, seated himself on the sand beside Chester and his youthful guardian.

"A pleasant day," he remarked, looking at Jed.

"Yes," answered Jed politely.

He was not favorably impressed by the stranger's appearance, but recognized the claims of courtesy.

"Is this little boy your brother?"

"No," answered Jed.

"I thought perhaps you brought him down to the beach."

"I did."

"I have seen him about before—with a girl."

"That was Clara, my old nurse," said Chester, who caught the drift of the conversation. "I haven't got any nurse now," he added proudly. "I saw you talking to Clara one day," he added, after a closer examination of the stranger's features.

"Oh, no, my little boy!" said the man, seeming annoyed. "I don't know Clara, as you call her."

"Then you look just like the man that was talking with her."

The stranger opened his mouth and smiled unpleasantly.

"I dare say there are people that look like me," he said, "though I can't say I ever met one. What is your name, my little friend?"

"I am not your friend," said Chester, who did not appear favorably impressed by his new acquaintance.

"My little enemy, then."

"My name is Chester Holbrook."

"And how old are you?"

"Ten years old. How old are you?"

Again the man's lips opened in an unpleasant smile.

"You have an inquiring mind, Chester," he said. "I am—thirty years old."

"You look older than that."

"I am afraid that is not polite, Chester," said Jed gently.

"Why isn't it?" asked Chester innocently.

"People don't like to be thought older than they are."

"Oh, never mind," said the dark man. "A child is licensed to say what he pleases. So he is your charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't think I have seen you here before. Have you known Mr. Holbrook long?"

"No." Then upon the impulse of the moment Jed inquired, "Do you know him?"

The man's face changed, and he looked a shade embarrassed.

"Why do you think I know him?" he asked.

"I don't think it, but as you seemed interested in the boy, I asked you the question."

"Oh, that's it. I have seen Mr. Holbrook, and I may have spoken to him. I can't be sure on the subject, as I meet a good many people. Are you going in bathing?"

"Do you want to bathe, Chester?" asked Jed.

"No; papa told me not to go to-day, as I have a cold."

"I thought perhaps I would have had your company in the surf. Well, I must be going or I shall be late for the bath."

The stranger got up slowly and sauntered away.

"I don't like that man. Do you, Jed?" asked Chester.

"Not very much. I never saw him before."

"I have seen him. I saw him one day last week."

"Did you see him on the beach?"

"Yes; he came up and talked with Clara."

"But he said you were mistaken about that."

"I was not mistaken," said Chester positively. "I remember him very well."

"Do you remember what he was talking about?" asked Jed, struck by what the boy said.

"Yes; he was asking questions about me."

"He seems a good deal interested in you. Perhaps he is especially fond of small boys."

Chester shook his head.

"I don't think he is," he answered.

When the bathing hour was over they ascended the steps and took seats in a summer house on the bluff.

Ten minutes later a tall woman, with piercing black eyes and a swarthy complexion, entered the arbor and sat down beside them.

"Do you want your fortune told?" she asked of Jed.

He shook his head.

"I don't believe in fortune-tellers," he said.

"Don't you? Let me convince you of my power. Give me your hand."

There seemed a fascination about the woman, and almost involuntarily he suffered her to take his hand.

"You look prosperous," she began abruptly, "but your life has been full of poverty and privation. Is this true?"

"Yes," answered Jed, impressed in spite of himself by the woman's words.

"Shall I tell you where your early years were passed?"

"No," answered Jed, with a quick look at Chester. He did not care to have the boy hear that his life had been passed in the Scranton poorhouse.

"You are right. The knowledge could do no good and might embarrass you. You admit that I have told the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then shall I tell you of the future?"

Jed did not answer, but the woman took his assent for granted and went on. "You will be rich—some day."

"Shall I? I am glad to hear that. But I don't know where the wealth is to come from."

"It is not necessary for you to know. It will be enough if it comes."

"I agree with you there," said Jed, smiling. "Will it be soon?"

"That is a question which I might answer, but I will not."

"I don't care to know, as long as I am to be prosperous some day. Shall I ever go back to—to the place where my earlier years were passed?"

"You may, but not to live. That part of your life is over."

"I am glad of that at any rate. One question more. Shall I meet my—any one belonging to me—any one to whom I am related?"

Jed fixed his eyes anxiously upon the fortune-teller, for skeptical as he was at first, he was beginning to have some confidence in her claims to knowledge.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Don't seek to know more. Let me look at this boy's hand. Do you want me to tell your fortune, my pretty?"

Chester laughed.

"Yes," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me if I will ever be a soldier. I would like to be a General."

"No; you will never be a soldier, but you will have a fight before you."

"A fight? What kind of a fight?"

The fortune-teller turned to Jed and said rapidly, "This boy is threatened with a serious danger. He has an enemy."

"How can a young boy have an enemy?"

"There are few who do not have enemies," said the woman sententiously.

"Can you describe the enemy?"

"He is a dark man, not tall, but taller than you. He is thin."

"I met such a man on the beach," said Jed, surprised. "I met him only this morning. Is he the one you mean?"

"When you meet such a man beware of him!" said the woman, and without waiting for a reply she rose from her seat and walked away rapidly.

"What a funny old woman!" said Chester. "I am hungry. Let us go up to the hotel. It is time for lunch."

Jed's face became thoughtful. What he had heard left a deep impression upon his mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS HOLBROOK, SPINSTER.

It was at first on Jed's mind to tell Mr. Holbrook of his encounter with the young man upon the beach and his subsequent conversation with the fortune-teller and her predictions in regard to Chester. But he was afraid of being laughed at.

Moreover, as the days passed the impression made upon his mind became weaker, and was only recalled when from time to time he saw the young man on the sands or walking on the bluff.

He got on very well with Chester. The boy became strongly attached to him, much to the satisfaction of his father.

"So you like Jed, do you?" said Mr. Holbrook one evening, on his return from the city.

"Yes, papa, I like him ever so much."

"Do you like him as much as Clara?"

"Why, I don't like her at all."

Time wore on till the middle of August. Jed enjoyed his generous meals and the sea bathing which he shared in company with his young charge. He still lodged with Harry Bertram, but he shared the expense of the room.

But a change was coming, and an unwelcome one.

"Chester," said his father one evening, "I am going away for a week or ten days."

"Take me with you, papa!"

"No, I cannot. I am called to Chicago on business, and you will be much better off here at the beach."

"Jed will stay with me?"

"Yes, and I have sent for your Aunt Maria to come and look after you while I am gone."

"But I don't like Aunt Maria," objected the little boy. "She's always scolding me. She doesn't like boys."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Holbrook with a smile. "If Maria had married it might have been different, but I believe few maiden ladies are fond of children."

"Then why do you have her come here, papa? Jed can take care of me."

"I have great confidence in Jed, Chester, but you will need some one to look after your clothes and oversee you in other ways."

"Isn't there any one else you can send for, papa? I don't like old maids."

"Don't trouble me with your objections, Chester. It will only be for a little while, remember. I am sure you can get along with your aunt for ten days."

"I will try to," answered the boy with a look of resignation.

The next day Miss Maria Holbrook came to Sea Spray with her brother. She was a tall, slender lady of middle age, with a thin face, and looked as if she were dissatisfied with a large proportion of her fellow-creatures.

Chester looked at her, but did not show any disposition to welcome her to the beach.

"You may kiss me, Chester," said the lady with an acid smile.

"Thank you, Aunt Maria, but I am not particular about it."

"Well, upon my word!" ejaculated the spinster. "My own brother's child, too!"

"Kiss your aunt, Chester," said his father.

"No, it is not necessary," put in Miss Holbrook sharply. "I don't want any hypocritical caresses. Robert, I am afraid you are spoiling that boy."

"Oh, no, Maria, not quite so bad as that. Chester is a middling good boy."

Miss Maria Holbrook sniffed incredulously.

"I am afraid you judge him too leniently," she said.

"Well, you can tell better after you have had time to observe him. It is two years now since you have seen Chester."

"Let us hope that my first impressions may be modified," said the spinster in a tone that indicated great doubt whether such would be the case.

"Jed, you may go. Chester will not need you any more this evening," said Mr. Holbrook.

"Thank you, sir," said Jed, and walked away.

"Who is that boy?" asked the spinster abruptly, looking at him through her eyeglasses.

"He is in charge of Chester while I am in the city."

"Why, he is only a boy!"

"Is that against him?"

"I thought Chester had a nurse."

"So he did, but she proved dishonest."

"Then why didn't you engage another?"

"Because Chester felt sensitive about having a girl following him. The other boys in the hotel laughed at him."

"Let them laugh!" said Miss Holbrook severely. "Are you to have your plans changed by a set of graceless boys?"

"As to that, Maria, I find this boy more satisfactory, both to Chester and myself."

"Humph! What is his name?"

"Jed."

"A very plebeian name."

"It isn't exactly fashionable, but names are not important."

"I beg your pardon. I think names *are* important."

"Perhaps that is the reason you have never changed yours, Maria. You might have been Mrs. Boggs if you had been less particular."

"I would rather remain unmarried all my life. But where did you pick up this boy?"

"I met him in the hotel."

"Was he boarding here?"

"No; I think he was boarding somewhere in the village."

"Do you know anything of his family?"

"No."

"Do you know anything of his antecedents?" continued Miss Holbrook.

"Yes; he played a part last season in the 'Gold King.'"

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated the spinster, holding up her hands in horror. "Do you mean to tell me that you have placed your son in the charge of a young play actor?"

Mr. Holbrook laughed.

"Why not?"

"I am surprised that you should ask. You know as well as I do the character of actors."

"I know that some of them are very estimable gentlemen. As to Jed, he has not been long on the stage, I believe."

"Do you know anything of his family? Is he respectably connected?"

"I didn't think it important to inquire. It seems to me that the boy's own character is much more to the point. I have found Jed faithful and reliable, without bad habits, and I feel that Chester is safe in his hands."

"Oh you men, you men!" exclaimed Miss Holbrook. "You don't seem to have any judgment."

"I suppose," said Mr. Holbrook with good-natured sarcasm, "that all the good judgment is monopolized by the old maids. What a pity they have no children to bring up."

"Brother!" said Miss Holbrook in a freezing tone.

"I beg your pardon, Maria, but please credit me with a little good sense."

Miss Holbrook went up to the room assigned her with an offended expression, and had nothing further to say about Jed that evening.

The next morning Jed reported for duty just as Mr. Holbrook was leaving for his journey.

"Look after Chester while I am gone, Jed," said Mr. Holbrook pleasantly. "This is my sister, Miss Maria Holbrook, who will take my place here while I am gone."

Jed took off his hat politely, and Miss Holbrook honored him with a slight inclination of her head and a forbidding look.

"Good-by, Maria! I will telegraph you on my arrival in Chicago."

"Good-by, brother! You need have no apprehensions about Chester while I am here."

"I shall rest quite easy. Between you and Jed I am sure he will come to no harm."

Miss Holbrook pursed up her mouth at the conjunction of her name with Jed's, but said nothing.

"Shall I go and take a walk with Jed?" asked Chester.

"Yes, in a moment. I wish to speak to the young man first."

"What young man?"

"Jedediah."

"Jedediah!" echoed Chester with a merry laugh. "How funny that sounds!"

"I apprehend that Jedediah is your right name," said Miss Holbrook severely.

"I suppose so," answered Jed.

"You *suppose* so?"

"I mean that I have always been called Jed. I don't remember ever having been called by the full name."

"Don't your parents call you so?"

"My parents are not living."

"When did they die?"

Jed looked troubled.

"When I was a baby," he answered gravely.

"Indeed! Then who brought you up?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Avery."

"Were they any relations of yours?"

"No, but they were very kind to me."

"Come along, Jed! There's the steamboat just leaving the pier!" called Chester impatiently.

Without waiting to be further questioned Jed answered the call of his young charge. He was glad to get away, for he felt that the spinster might ask him some questions which he would find it difficult to answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

JED MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Jed was not long in finding that Chester's aunt looked upon him, if not with hostility, at least with distrust. This was an unpleasant discovery. Mr. Holbrook had always appeared to have confidence in him, and approved his management of his son.

While Chester and Jed were walking on the beach Miss Holbrook took a seat upon the bluff and watched them through her spectacles, as Jed could not help seeing.

"I say, Jed," asked the little boy, "how do you like Aunt Maria?"

"I don't feel very well acquainted with her yet," answered Jed cautiously.

"*I* don't like her!" said Chester emphatically.

"Why not?"

"Oh, she's always scolding and finding fault. Papa says it's because she's an old maid."

Jed smiled.

"I wish papa had not sent for her," went on Chester. "We could get along well enough without her."

"I think *we* should get along very well together, Chester."

"I am sure we should. Have you got any old maid aunts?"

"Not that I know of," replied Jed soberly, as he had forced upon him the thought of his solitary condition.

"Then you are lucky. I'll give you Aunt Maria if you want her."

"Perhaps she might not consent to be given away, Chester."

Half an hour later Jed met with a surprise, and one not altogether agreeable.

"Hello! you here!" exclaimed an amazed voice that sounded familiar to Jed.

He looked up and saw Percy Dixon approaching.

"Oh, it's you, Percy?" he said. "When did you arrive?"

"This morning. Father and I are staying at the Spray House." This was the largest hotel, and Percy mentioned the name with evident pride.

"It is a nice hotel," responded Jed.

"I should say so. Why, it's the most expensive one here. But you haven't told me how you came here."

"I have been here for some weeks."

"Where do you live?"

"I have a room in the village, but I take my meals at the Spray House."

"You take your meals at the Spray House?" ejaculated Percy.

"Yes."

"How can you afford it?"

"This boy's father pays my board. I look after Chester."

"What's your name?" asked Chester, who was by no means bashful.

"Percy Dixon," answered Percy politely, for he judged that Chester belonged to a rich family.

"So you know Jed?"

"Yes. I have that honor," returned Percy with a curl of the lip. "When did you leave off acting?" he asked, turning to Jed.

"At the end of the season. Few dramatic companies play during the summer."

"Are you going to play with them again?"

"I don't know yet. The boy whose place I took may be ready to take his own part in the fall."

"I saw your old friends Mr. and Mrs. Fogson just before I came away," said Percy significantly. "Wouldn't you like to know how they are?"

"No; I feel no particular interest in them."

"They are interested in you. Fogson says he's bound to get you back some time."

"I don't care to talk of them," said Jed coldly.

"Are you going in bathing?" asked Chester.

"Yes, I think so. Do you go in?"

"Shall we go in, Jed?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, if you like, Chester."

The three boys repaired to the bathing-houses and prepared for their bath.

As they walked up to the hotel together afterwards, Percy remarked: "It seems strange to see you in such a place as this."

"I suppose so."

"It's funny how you get on. How did you get the chance to take care of the little boy?"

Jed explained.

"Is Chester's father rich?"

"I presume so, from what I hear."

"Is he here now?"

"No; he is in Chicago for a week or ten days."

"And is there no one except you to take care of the boy?"

"There is an aunt of Chester's in the hotel—his father's sister. There she is now!" and Jed pointed out Miss Maria Holbrook.

Percy noticed her attentively, and was observed in turn by the spinster, who privately resolved to seek some information about Jed from one who appeared to know him.

After dinner, while on the piazza, Miss Holbrook noticed Percy sitting but a few feet distant.

"Ahem!" she began. "Young man, will you do me the favor to move your chair a little nearer?"

Percy did so gladly. He wished for a chance to become acquainted with Jed's employers.

"Thank you. May I ask your name?"

"Percy Dixon."

"I noticed that you seemed to be acquainted with the boy who is in charge of my young nephew Chester."

"Yes, ma'am, I know him."

"Have you known him long?"

"As far back as I can remember."

"Did you live in the same town?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where?"

"Scranton."

"You must pardon my curiosity, but my brother—Chester's father—engaged this boy without apparently knowing much about him, except that he had been on the stage."

"He wasn't on the stage long."

"Perhaps not, but probably he didn't get any good from it. What is your opinion of him. Though, as you are his friend——"

"I am *not* his friend!" said Percy bluntly.

"Then you haven't a high opinion of him?" said Miss Holbrook eagerly.

"No; I never liked him."

"I don't like him myself, though I can't tell exactly why not, and I am bound to say that Chester and his father seem infatuated with him."

"I think you are quite right, Miss Holbrook."

"I can't help thinking there is some mystery about him."

"You are right, Miss Holbrook. There *is* a mystery about him."

"I was sure of it," exclaimed the spinster. "What is the character of his relations?"

"He has none that I know of."

"I believe he told me his parents were dead, and that he was brought up by a Mr. and Mrs. Avery."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Percy.

"Why do you laugh?"

"At his being brought up by Mr. and Mrs. Avery."

"Isn't it true, then?"

"Yes; but he probably didn't tell you that Mr. and Mrs. Avery had charge of the Scranton poorhouse."

"What!" ejaculated the spinster.

"It is as I say. Until a few weeks since Jed was an inmate of the Scranton poorhouse."

"And this boy is actually in charge of my nephew!" exclaimed Miss Holbrook, overwhelmed with horror.

"Yes; I was very much surprised to see Jed in such company."

"My poor brother must be quite unaware of this astounding fact!"

"No doubt, Miss Holbrook. Jed is cunning. He wouldn't be very apt to tell your brother that he is a pauper."

"A pauper! What a horrid thought! And that boy has actually the effrontery to push himself in among people of position. I can hardly believe it."

"If you have any doubt about it, Miss Holbrook, just write a note to Mr. Simeon Fogson, and ask him what he thinks of Jed Gilman."

"But I thought it was Mr. Avery who kept the poorhouse."

"He did; but when my father became Overseer of the Poor," said Percy with conscious pride, "he removed the Averys and put in Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, whom he considered more fit for the office. The Averys were weak people and pampered the paupers."

"Mr. Simeon Fogson, Scranton," Miss Holbrook entered on her tablets.

"Really, Mr. Dixon, I am very much obliged to you for the important information you have given me, and so ought my brother to be. He has been very careless and indiscreet in engaging a boy of unknown antecedents, but it is fortunate that Chester has an aunt who is keenly alive to his interests."

As she rose to go to her room to write to Mr. Fogson, Percy smiled.

"Jed Gilman will find that his goose is cooked," he said to himself. "Won't he be astonished when the thunderbolt falls?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. FOGSON RECEIVES A LETTER.

Let us go back to the Scranton poorhouse. Mr. Fogson was sawing wood near the house. It was a task which Jed had been accustomed to do, but in his absence it devolved upon Mr. Fogson, who was very much disinclined to that form of labor, but still more to paying for having it done.

He had thought of requiring Isaac Needham, one of the paupers, to do the sawing; but the old man, who was over seventy-five, proved physically unable to do the work, and very much against his will Mr. Fogson found himself compelled to undertake it himself.

"Drat that Jed!" he muttered, as he stopped to mop his forehead with his red cotton handkerchief. "It's an outrage for him to throw his work on me. I wish I had him here this blessed minute and could give him a taste of the strap."

At this point a neighbor's boy, Joe Coakley, entered the yard.

"Here's a letter for you, Mr. Fogson," he said. "I guess it's from a lady."

With considerable surprise Mr. Fogson took the letter in his hand. The envelope was square, and of fine paper, while the address was in a lady's handwriting.

Mr. Fogson examined the postmark curiously.

"Sea Spray!" he repeated. "Why, that's a fashionable watering-place. Who can have written me from there?"

Just then Mrs. Fogson came out from the side door.

"What letter have you there?" she asked.

"It is from a lady, Mrs. F.," answered her husband with a grin.

"What business has a lady writing to you?" demanded Mrs. Fogson suspiciously.

"Really I don't know, as I have not read the letter."

"Give it to me!"

"No, thank you. I read my own letters."

"Mr. Fogson, if you are engaged in a private correspondence with any lady I intend to find out all about it."

"Don't be a fool, Mrs. F.; I don't know who the writer is, and I have never had a letter from her before."

By this time he had opened the envelope, and his face quickly assumed an expression of interest.

"It's about Jed," he exclaimed. "I'll read it to you."

This was the letter:

MY DEAR SIR:

I am informed that you can give me information as to the past history of Jedediah Gilman. Some weeks ago my brother, Robert Holbrook, a well-known merchant of New York, engaged the boy as a companion and personal attendant of his young son Chester, without knowing much about him or taking the trouble to inquire. Having seen the boy, I have doubts as to whether he is a suitable companion for a boy in my nephew's high social station. I learn from young Mr. Percy Dixon, of your town, that you can give me full information as to the boy's antecedents. I shall feel indebted to you if you will take the trouble to communicate with me by letter.

My brother is now in Chicago, and I am in temporary charge of my nephew. I feel that it is my duty to inquire into the character of a boy who by his intimate association with him may, if he is unworthy, do incalculable harm to his young and trustful nature.

Yours very truly,
MARIA HOLBROOK,
Spray Hotel,
Sea Spray, N. J.

"Well, upon my word!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson. "So that young villain has wormed his way into the confidence of a rich New York merchant!"

"Like a snake in the grass," suggested Simeon Fogson.

"Exactly. It makes me shudder to think what an impostor he is. It is providential that Percy Dixon should find him out and show him up."

"I'll show him up!" said Fogson, nodding. "I'll just write to Miss Holbrook, and tell her of his goin's on. I reckon he won't keep his place long after they get my letter."

"You'd better let me write the letter, Simeon."

"No, Mrs. F., the letter was addressed to me, and I'm goin' to answer it."

"Just as you like, Mr. Fogson, but you are well aware that you are weak in your spelling."

"Never mind, Mrs. F., I reckon I can make myself understood."

"Just as you like, Fogson. Only make it strong enough."

"You can trust me for that."

CHAPTER XIX. DISCHARGED.

In a front room on the second floor of the Spray Hotel sat Miss Maria Holbrook with a letter in her hand. It was written on the cheapest note-paper, and inclosed in a plebeian brown envelope.

Of course it will be understood that it was the epistolary effort of Mr. Simeon Fogson.

"Just as I thought!" soliloquized the lady. "This boy seems to be a disreputable character of the lowest antecedents, and utterly unworthy to associate even as a servant with a member of my family."

Here Chester entered in his usual impetuous manner.

"Oh, Aunt Maria," he cried, "I had a bully bath."

"I am shocked to hear you use such a low term as 'bully,' Chester," said his aunt. "No doubt you learned it of Jedediah."

"No, I didn't. Jed never uses the word. At least I never heard him."

"Will you tell Jedediah that I wish to see him at once on important business?"

"It seems funny to hear you call him Jedediah, Aunt Maria."

"I apprehend that it is his right name; 'Jed' sounds low."

"Well, I'll tell him to come up."

When Jed made his appearance Miss Holbrook said: "You may go below, Chester. I wish to speak to Jedediah in private."

"What's up now, I wonder?" thought Jed.

The lady turned upon him a severe look.

"Jedediah," she said, "is it true that your earlier years were spent at the Scranton poorhouse?"

"Yes, madam," answered Jed, coloring.

"Did you apprise my brother of this fact when he engaged you?"

"No, madam. I suppose you learned it from Percy Dixon."

"I learned it from young Mr. Dixon, but I could hardly believe it. He referred me to Mr. Simeon Fogson, of Scranton, and I have a letter from that gentleman in my hand. You probably will not care to read it."

"I should like very much to read it, Miss Holbrook. I should like to know whether Mr. Fogson tells the truth."

"Here is the letter, then."

Jed read it with conflicting emotions.

RESPECTED MADAM:

I am glad to give you the informashun you ask about that young villen Jed Gilman, who ran away from the Poor House some weeks since after a violent assault on me, his offishul gardeen. Words cannot tell you how much trouble I have had with that boy.

Likewise he has been very impident to Mrs. Fogson. The reeson is that he was too much indulged by my predicesors in offis Mr. and Mrs. Avery. I have tried to do my dooty by the boy, but as Squire Dixon, the Overseer will tell you my efforts has been in vane. I am not suprised that your brother was took in by Jed for he is the artfulest boy I ever seen. I hope for the sake of your young nefew's welfare you will discharge him at once and not allow him to corrup his youthful mind.

Yours respectfully,

SIMEON FOGSON.

"Well," said Miss Holbrook triumphantly, "that doesn't seem to commend you very highly."

"No," answered Jed, returning the letter to the envelope. "It is such a letter as I should expect Mr. Fogson to write."

"Why?"

"Because he is unfit for his place," answered Jed boldly. "He half starves the poor people under his charge, treats them roughly, and is detested by all."

"He says you are impudent and troublesome."

"I did not allow him to impose upon me."

"He says you ran away."

"I had a right to leave, as I felt able to support myself. I was recommended to do so by Dr. Redmond, the best physician in Scranton, who is a friend of mine."

"I have listened to your side of the story," said Miss Holbrook coldly, "and the terms in which you speak of Mr. Fogson convince me that his charges are correct. Of course you will not expect me to keep you in charge of my nephew."

"Will you wait till Mr. Holbrook returns?" pleaded Jed, who felt sad at the prospect of parting with Chester.

"No; I shall not feel justified in doing so. I will pay you up to date, and assume the charge of Chester myself."

She drew a bill from her pocket and handed it to Jed, who took it mechanically and left the room with a sober face. He was dismissed from his position in disgrace, a disgrace which he felt was not deserved.

What was he to do next?

CHAPTER XX.

JED'S POOR PROSPECTS.

Jed walked around to the office of his friend Harry Bertram.

The telegraph operator noticed at once that he looked disturbed.

"What has happened, Jed?" he asked.

"I am discharged! That is all."

"Discharged? Who discharged you?"

"Miss Holbrook."

"What is her reason? What have you done?" asked Bertram, much surprised.

"I have done nothing, but she has discovered that I was brought up in the Scranton poorhouse," announced Jed despondently.

"As if that made you any the worse!" ejaculated Bertram indignantly.

"It isn't to my credit, at any rate. I am ashamed of it myself."

"I don't know why you should be ashamed. You have left it, and are now earning your own living."

"I was, but I am out of work now, and I may find it hard to get another position."

"You can perhaps go back to the stage."

"If I can take my part in the 'Gold King' I shall be satisfied," said Jed hopefully. "When will the season commence?"

"September 7—three weeks from next Thursday."

At that moment one of the bell boys came to the telegraph office with a letter in his hand.

"I have a letter for you, Mr. Bertram," he said.

"Ha! This is from Mordaunt. Now we shall know."

He tore open the envelope hastily. His countenance fell, and he handed it in silence to Jed.

This is the letter.

DEAR BERTRAM:

Season of the Gold King opens at Jersey City on the seventh of September. As we shall have two new actors I shall call rehearsals for the Tuesday previous. Please report at Middleton Agency in New York on the first.

JOHN MORDAUNT, Manager.

P. S.—Ralph Clinton has recovered from his sickness, and will be ready to resume his part.

"That settles it!" said Jed soberly, as he handed back the letter. "That opening is closed to me."

"I am awfully sorry, Jed," returned Bertram in a tone of sympathy. "Perhaps if you enroll your name at the agency you can get a chance in some other play. I will speak a good word for you, and so I am sure will Mordaunt."

Jed shook his head.

"I don't think my chance would be very good," he said, "as I have had so little experience. Besides, it is three weeks from now. I must try to get work before then."

"Stay here, Jed. I will pay your expenses."

"Thank you, Mr. Bertram, but I have more than money enough for that, and you will need all yours. It will be better for me to leave Sea Spray, and go out in the world in search of work."

"I hate to have you go, Jed. I shall feel lonesome."

"So shall I, Mr. Bertram, but we are sure to meet again," said Jed with forced cheerfulness.

"You must promise if things don't go well with you to write to me. You can learn from the *Clipper* or any of the dramatic papers where we are playing."

"I'll promise that, Harry," said Jed, pressing the hand of his friend.

"That's right, Jed! Don't call me Mr. Bertram again."

"I will remember."

"Don't go till to-morrow."

"No, I won't. I shall need a little time to get ready."

At this point a message came for Bertram to transmit, and Jed walked over to the beach, feeling dull and despondent. As he sauntered on slowly with his eyes on the sand some one called out, "Hallo, there!"

Looking up, he met the gaze of Percy Dixon.

"Where's Chester?" asked Percy.

"In the hotel, I suppose."

"Why isn't he with you?"

"Because he is no longer under my charge," answered Jed eyeing Percy fixedly.

"Ho, ho! you don't mean to say that you're bounced!" queried Percy, with a look of malicious pleasure.

"That is about the size of it."

"Well, I *am* surprised," returned Percy cheerfully. "What have you been up to?"

"Nothing."

"Then why are you discharged?" asked Percy with a look of innocent wonder.

"I don't think *you* need ask, Percy Dixon," said Jed coldly. "If you had not made your appearance at Sea Spray I should have kept my place."

"Ho, ho! What have I been doing, I should like to know?" asked Percy smiling.

"I don't need to tell you. You told Miss Holbrook that I had been brought up in the Scranton poorhouse."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is true, but you understood very well what would be the result of your communication."

"As she asked me about you, I had to tell."

"You gave her the name of Mr. Fogson, and led to her writing to him."

"So he's written, has he."

"Yes; Miss Holbrook showed me the letter this morning."

"What did he say?" asked Percy, smiling.

"Probably Miss Holbrook will show you the letter if you ask her."

"I will. I should like to see what old Fogson says. He don't admire you very much."

"There is no love lost between us."

"Well, what are you going to do?" inquired Percy, whose weak point was curiosity.

"I shall try to get another position."

"Do you expect to go back to the stage?"

"No; my old part in the 'Gold King' has been taken by the actor whose place I filled during his sickness."

"Then you haven't anything in view."

"Nothing particular."

"Then I advise you to go back to the poorhouse. Fogson will be glad to see you. I will arrange it with father."

"You are very kind, but I have no more idea of returning to the poorhouse than you have of making your home there."

"I'll thank you not to mention my name in connection with the poorhouse," said Percy, coloring and speaking angrily.

"I will make the same request of you."

"You are getting on your high horse," remarked Percy sarcastically.

"Perhaps so. Good morning."

"That fellow's the proudest beggar I ever saw," mused Percy, as he stood still on the beach and watched Jed's receding figure. "It's so ridiculous, too! A boy brought up in a poorhouse! I wonder if he has any idea what a fool he is making of himself."

"Why is Percy so malicious?" thought Jed, as he pursued his way, feeling, if anything, a little more despondent than before. "If our situations were changed I should delight in helping him along. He seems determined to force me back to the poorhouse. But I won't go! I'll starve first."

To one who has been steadily employed enforced idleness is tedious and tiresome. As Jed paced the sands his life seemed perfectly aimless, and he wondered how he was going to get through the day.

Moreover he missed Chester. The boy's warm heart and affectionate ways had endeared him to his young guardian, and Jed felt sad to think that in all probability he should never again be on terms of intimacy with the little fellow.

Plunged in thought and despondent he sauntered along till suddenly he heard a young fresh voice, that brought a brighter look to his face.

"Jed, Jed!"

Jed turned, and saw only a couple of rods distant the boy of whom he had been thinking, walking beside his tall and stately aunt, who, after discharging Jed, had felt obliged to undertake the charge of her young nephew herself.

"Why, Chester!" said Jed with a bright smile.

Chester broke away from his aunt, and running up to Jed took his hand confidingly.

"Aunt Maria says you are going away!" he broke out. "What makes you go away?"

"Your aunt has sent me away," announced Jed.

"But I won't let you go," said the little boy, taking a firmer grip of Jed's hand.

"Come back directly, Chester!" said Miss Holbrook frowning.

"I want to stay with Jed," said Chester rebelliously.

"But I don't want you to stay with him. Come back directly, you naughty boy!" exclaimed Miss Holbrook angrily.

"I'd rather stay with Jed!"

"Jedediah!" said Miss Holbrook, turning a look of displeasure upon Jed. "I am sorry that you incite Chester to acts of disobedience."

"Miss Holbrook," returned Jed independently, "I don't think I have done what you charge me with. I like Chester, and I cannot drive him away."

"That is all very well, but I understand your motives. You want to force me to take you back."

"Excuse me, I have no such thought. If your brother will take me back I shall be glad to return to him."

"I will see that he does not recall you. Chester, if you don't come back at once I will punish you."

Looking at his aunt's angry face, Chester very reluctantly felt compelled to obey.

"Kiss me, Jed!" he said.

Jed bent over and kissed the little boy. Tears nearly came to his eyes when he felt that it might be for the last time.

"I trust, Jedediah," said Miss Holbrook stiffly, "that your sense of propriety will prevent your speaking to Chester again."

"Miss Holbrook," said Jed with a tremor in his voice, "as I am to leave Sea Spray to-morrow morning I shall hardly meet Chester again."

Then, as Chester walked away unwillingly with his aunt, Jed's heart sank within him. In all the world he seemed to be alone, and he cared little at that moment what was to become of him in the future.

CHAPTER XXI.

JED ARRIVES IN NEW YORK.

Jed counted over his money and found he had thirty-nine dollars and thirty-seven cents. He would have had more, but he had supplied himself with clothes, so that he was on the whole very well provided in that way.

He resolutely refused to borrow from Harry Bertram, though the actor pressed a loan upon him.

"No, Harry," he said, "I have almost forty dollars, and I am sure that will last me till I can earn some more."

"Well, perhaps so," replied the actor, "but you have no idea how fast money melts away. What are your plans?"

"I am afraid I haven't any," answered Jed, looking perplexed. "I want to make a living, but I don't know what I am fit for."

"Where do you mean to go?"

"I think I should like to go to New York," answered Jed. "I have never been there."

"You will find the city very dull at this time of year. Business is very quiet in August."

"But there must be a good many chances in a city of over a million inhabitants."

"Well, perhaps you may as well find out for yourself. I am afraid you will be disappointed."

Jed attached considerable importance to the opinion of his friend Bertram, but in his own mind there was a conviction that the other exaggerated the chances of failure. He was of a sanguine temperament himself, and this made him hopeful.

There were two ways of reaching New York from Sea Spray. One was a combination of cars and boat, the other took one all the way by steamer. This, on the whole, Jed preferred.

With his modest gripsack in his hand he passed over the gang-plank and took a seat forward. Next to him was a tall, thin man, dressed in shabby attire, who did not appear to have shaved for several days. Though the weather was warm, he had his coat buttoned tight across his chest, possibly to conceal the lack of a vest.

When the boat had been perhaps fifteen minutes under way, he turned and eyed Jed with some attention.

"Are you staying at Sea Spray this summer, young man?" he asked.

"I have spent some weeks there," answered Jed.

"I suppose you are going to New York for the day?"

"No; I am going for good. That is I hope I am going for good."

"You are going to fill a business position, perhaps?"

"I hope so, but I have none engaged."

"Are you acquainted in New York?"

"No; I have never been there. This will be my first visit."

"Indeed! This is very interesting. I should be glad to help you to a position."

Jed thought privately that his new acquaintance must stand quite as much in need of a place as he, but courtesy led him to say, "Thank you."

"Have you any particular choice as to the business you take up?"

"No; anything that will enable me to pay my expenses will satisfy me."

"Just so. You have heard of H. B. Claflin, probably?"

"Yes; he is a dry goods merchant."

"On a very large scale. I have a mind to give you a letter to him."

"Do you know him?" asked Jed doubtfully.

"Yes; Horace and I used to go to school together. He was older than I, but we were pretty intimate."

"Why don't you apply for a position for yourself?"

"Dry goods are not in my line. I am an editor—that is, an editorial writer."

"Indeed!"

Jed had read from time to time squibs and witty paragraphs touching the poverty of editors, and this seemed to explain the shabby appearance of his new friend.

"What paper do you write for?" he ventured to ask.

"I contribute editorially to most of the city dailies. Sometimes I get as high as fifteen and twenty dollars a column."

Jed was rather surprised at this. He concluded that Mr. Hamilton Barry—for this was the name the stranger had given—was not a very good financial manager.

"That seems a high price," said Jed.

"Yes, but brain-work ought to be paid handsomely. Do you ever write for publication yourself?"

"Oh, no," said Jed, flattered nevertheless by the question. "I haven't education enough."

"I thought if you did I might get you something to do. But perhaps business is more in your line?"

"I think it will be."

"Then I had better write you a note to Mr. Claflin. When we get to the city I will run into some hotel and write you a letter of recommendation."

"But, Mr. Barry, you don't know me. How can you recommend me?"

"My dear boy, I judge you by your appearance. Besides, I know something of phrenology, and you have a good head—a very good head. I read in it honesty, integrity, enterprise and fidelity. Those qualities certainly ought to qualify you to succeed in business."

"I don't know anything about phrenology, but I hope it's true."

"My young friend you may rely implicitly on the verdict of the wonderful science."

"I shall be glad to," said Jed smiling, "since, as you say, it is so favorable to me."

When they reached the pier Hamilton Barry passed his arm familiarly through Jed's, and led the way to a small public house, the office of which seemed also to be a bar.

"Won't you take a glass of something?" asked the editor.

"I don't drink," answered Jed, rather embarrassed.

"Take a glass of sarsaparilla. It won't harm an infant."

"Thank you. I don't mind."

Upon this Mr. Barry stepped up to the bar and ordered one sarsaparilla and one whisky straight. While Jed was solemnly drinking the first, the editor poured down the whisky at one gulp.

Then he felt in his pockets for the fifteen cents which were due. But somehow no silver was forthcoming.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "I must have left my money at home. Mr. Gilman, can you oblige me with a quarter?"

Jed produced the required coin. Taking it, Barry paid the score, and quietly pocketed the change.

"Now for the letter!" he said. "Where is your writing-room?"

"Haven't got any," answered the barkeeper.

"Can't you scare up a sheet of paper and an envelope?"

After some time these were produced, also a pen and a bottle of ink. Barry sat down at one of the tables generally used for bar customers, and in a short time produced a letter which he handed to Jed.

It ran thus:

DEAR HORACE:

This letter will be handed to you by a talented young friend, who is in search of a business position. Mr. J. Gilman is in my judgment possessed of superior business qualifications, and will prove a valuable man in your store. I advise you to engage him at once.

Your old friend,
HAMILTON BARRY.

This note was placed in an envelope directed to Horace B. Claflin. In the corner Barry wrote: "To introduce Mr. J. Gilman."

"There," he said. "Take this letter round to Claflin and he will undoubtedly give you a good place."

He spoke with so much confidence that Jed was led to think himself in luck to be the recipient of such a testimonial.

"Thank you," he said. "I feel very much obliged."

"Oh don't mention it!" said Barry in an airy way. "It gives me pleasure to assist you, Mr. Gilman, I assure you. When you have ascended round by round until you are at the top of the ladder, I trust you will not forget your chance acquaintance, Hamilton Barry."

"I certainly will not, Mr. Barry," said Jed warmly, grasping the hand of the editor. "I hope some day to thank you as I wish."

"My dear boy, the sentiment does you credit. I know you are sincere."

"Certainly," said Jed.

"It is because I know this that I venture to suggest that you may do me a favor at once."

"What is it?"

"Let me have a fiver till next Monday. I shall then call at the office of the *Tribune* for twenty dollars due me for two editorials published early this week."

This request rather staggered Jed. Now that he had paid his fare to New York he had only about thirty-seven dollars, and five dollars would cut rather seriously into his small balance.

"I am afraid," he said awkwardly, "that I can hardly spare five dollars. If two dollars would help you——"

"It would materially," interposed Barry. "Of course it is only a loan. Meet me here next Monday, at six o'clock, say, after your duties are over at Claflin's, and I will gladly repay you."

This off-hand allusion to Claflin, taking for granted his engagement there, made Jed ashamed of his temporary distrust, and he drew from his pocketbook a two-dollar note, which he handed to Mr. Barry.

"Thanks," said the editor, as he carelessly slipped it into his pocket. "Be here on Monday at six o'clock sharp."

Then with a jaunty air he touched his hat and walked rapidly around the corner.

"I think I will go around to Claflin's at once," decided Jed. "I may as well strike while the iron is hot."

CHAPTER XXII.

JED MAKES TWO CALLS.

On Church Street Jed found an imposing-looking building which a passing policeman informed him was Claflin's place of business. The size rather impressed Jed, accustomed as he had been hitherto to the small stores in Scranton, but he felt that it was no time for diffidence. So he opened the outer door and entered.

He found himself in a scene of activity. The shelves were filled with goods, and behind the counters were numerous salesmen. No one took any notice of Jed at first till a tall, stout man, in walking across the room, espied him.

"Any one waiting on you, young man?" he asked.

"No," answered Jed.

"Here, Wilkins," said the floor-walker, "attend to this young man. What house do you represent?"

"None, sir," answered Jed uncomfortably, feeling out of place.

"Ah, you want to buy at retail. Go into the next room."

"No, sir, I didn't come to buy anything," stammered Jed. "I have a letter for Mr. Claflin."

The great merchant is now dead, but at the time of Jed's call he was living.

"Wilkins, you may take the letter and carry it to Mr. Claflin."

Wilkins took the letter from Jed's hands, walked across the room, and ascended to Mr. Claflin's office on the second floor. He reappeared within five minutes and signaled to Jed to approach.

"Mr. Claflin will see you," he said. "Follow me."

Presently Jed found himself in the presence of the great merchant, who surveyed him curiously.

"Are you Mr. J. Gilman?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Jed, blushing.

"You bring a letter from—" here Mr. Claflin referred to a note—"from a man who calls himself Hamilton Barry?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't know any such man. How did he happen to offer you a letter?"

"I told him I wanted a position."

"Exactly. Did he say he knew me?"

"Yes, sir. He said he used to go to school with you."

Mr. Claflin laughed.

"Did he borrow any money from you?"

"Yes," answered Jed, surprised that the merchant should have guessed this.

"Not much, I hope."

"Two dollars."

"That was all?"

"No, sir; he treated me to some sarsaparilla and did not have the money to pay for it."

"He is evidently a fraud and an impostor. Did he say he ever worked for me?"

"No, sir; he said he was an editor—that he wrote articles for the daily papers."

"When did he offer to repay you?"

"Next Monday, when he had received pay from the *Tribune* for some articles he had written."

"What was the man's appearance?"

"He was tall, and not very well dressed."

"It is hardly likely that he ever wrote an article for the *Tribune* or any other of the city dailies. I hope he did not get all your money?"

"No, sir. I have considerable besides."

"I advise you to take good care of it, and to steer clear of questionable acquaintances."

Mr. Claflin turned to a letter which he was writing, and Jed felt that he was dismissed. Mr. Claflin had said nothing about taking him into his employment, and he went down stairs feeling mortified and depressed.

Mingled with these feelings was one of anger at having been so cruelly deceived by his steamboat acquaintance.

"I'd just like to meet him again!" soliloquized Jed, involuntarily doubling up his fist.

"I wonder whether he really writes for the *Tribune*?" he asked himself.

He decided to solve this question at once, though he had not much doubt on the subject. He wanted to know exactly what he had to depend on.

He walked up to Broadway, then down to the City Hall Park, and asked a boy whom he met, "Where is the *Tribune* office?"

"There it is across the park," said the boy, pointing to a tall building with a lofty tower. "What do you want to do—sell papers?"

"No," answered Jed. "I want to ask about one of the editors."

"You're from the country, ain't you?"

"Yes. What makes you think so?"

"Because all the boys in the city know the *Tribune* building. Say, what do you do for a livin'?" inquired the boy confidentially.

This was rather a puzzling question, but Jed, remembering that he had been on the stage for a time, felt justified in answering, "I am an actor."

"Cracky! you don't say. You ain't little Lord Fauntleroy, are you?"

"No; I played the telegraph boy in the play of 'The Gold King.'"

"How did you like it?" asked the newsboy, becoming interested.

"Very much."

"Are you goin' to play it again?"

"No; I took the place of the regular actor for a few weeks while he was sick. Now he is well, and I am not needed."

"Say, does actin' pay well?" asked the boy curiously.

"I was paid pretty well."

"Do you think you could get me a chance?"

"I am afraid I can't get another chance myself."

The newsboy had no more questions to ask, and Jed, following directions, crossed the park and the street beyond to the *Tribune* building.

He entered the office, and walked up to a window, beyond which stood a young man who was handing out papers to a purchaser who wanted some back numbers.

Jed presented himself next, and the clerk looked at him inquiringly.

"Do you wish to subscribe?" asked the clerk, as Jed remained silent.

"No; I want to ask whether you have an editor named Hamilton Barry?"

"I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"He borrowed some money of me, and said he would pay me when he collected some money due him from the *Tribune*."

The clerk smiled.

"I am sure none of our editors borrow money from boys," he said. "You have been imposed upon, young man."

"I guess you are right," responded Jed, coloring.

"If you like, I will send up to the city editor to inquire if there is a man named Barry in his department."

"I guess I won't trouble you."

Jed turned away quite satisfied in his own mind that he had been cleverly swindled and would never see his two dollars again. He reflected that it might have been more, and stoutly resolved not to let any designing persons wheedle him out of any more money.

He had never visited New York before, and the streets were all new to him. So he strolled about for a couple of hours, gazing curiously at shops, buildings, streets, and street scenes.

This naturally led to a feeling of hunger, and at twelve o'clock he began to look around for a restaurant. He found one on Fulton Street, and went in.

He took a seat on the right-hand side, about midway up the room, and consulted the bill of fare. He found that roast meats were fifteen and twenty-five cents, the latter being for large plates. Tea and coffee were five cents each, and pie or pudding was ten cents.

He ordered a large plate of roast beef, feeling quite hungry, and a cup of coffee.

Jed had about half finished his dinner when his attention was drawn by a familiar voice at the next table. Looking up, he saw that two men had entered the restaurant since he had been served and were sitting with their backs to him. One of them he recognized, with a thrill of excitement, as his acquaintance of the morning, Hamilton Barry.

"I say, Barry," said his companion, "you've had a streak of luck. How do you happen to be in funds?"

"I negotiated a loan, my boy."

"That is interesting. Would the party accommodate me, do you think?"

"Depends upon your invention, my boy. I told him a plausible story, and did him a favor."

"Explain."

"He was looking for a position, and I gave him a letter of introduction to H. B. Claflin."

The friend burst into a fit of laughter.

"I admire your cheek," he said. "What do you know of Claflin?"

"I told him that Claflin and I went to school together."

"A lie, of course?"

"Yes; I never set eyes on the man in my life."

"And on the strength of that you negotiated a loan."

"Precisely."

"How much?"

"I struck him for a five, but he only let me have two."

"Which, of course, you promised to repay."

"I told him I would repay him next Monday when the *Tribune* paid me for two editorial articles I wrote for them."

This tickled the fancy of both, and they burst into uproarious laughter.

It may be imagined with what feelings of indignation poor Jed listened to these rascals, and understood how adroitly he had been swindled. He felt

tempted to get up and address the man who had swindled him in fitting terms, but concluded to wait until he had finished his dinner.

He felt particularly angry when Barry ordered a high-priced dish—a plate of roast turkey—to be paid for with his money.

At last his dinner was over, and taking the check in his hand, Jed made his way to the table in front.

"Mr. Barry," he said as calmly as he could, "I believe you owe me two dollars. I shall be glad if you will pay me now."

Barry looked up quickly, and actually seemed embarrassed when he recognized Jed.

"Confusion!" he ejaculated. "The kid!"

CHAPTER XXIII. JED'S BAD LUCK.

"Yes," answered Jed coolly, "it is the kid. I have called upon Mr. Claflin, and also at the office of the *Tribune*. Probably you can guess what I was told at both places."

Mr. Barry felt that he was in a tight place, but reflecting that Jed was only a boy, he determined to bluff him off.

"I don't know what you are talking about, boy," he said. "I know nothing of Mr. Claflin, and have nothing to do with the *Tribune* office."

"I am aware of that, but you gave me a letter of introduction to H. B. Claflin, and borrowed two dollars of me, promising to pay me when you settled with the *Tribune* for editorial contributions."

"There is not a word of truth in this," said Barry, fidgeting in his chair.

"I have been listening to your conversation for fifteen minutes," continued Jed, "and I heard you give an account of the matter to your friend here."

Barry hesitated a moment. Even his brazen hardihood was scarcely adequate to the emergency. He was the more uneasy because a policeman was sitting at the next table but one.

"It was only a practical joke, boy," he said hurriedly. "I'll pay you back the two dollars."

"That will be satisfactory," returned Jed.

"But I can't do it to-day. I'll meet you on Monday afternoon, as I said. I am in rather a hurry now and must be going."

He rose from the table precipitately, and went up to the desk followed by his friend.

"Shall I stop him?" thought Jed.

He decided not to do so, as he felt sure Barry could not pay him. The loss was not a serious one, but it would not do to make a second mistake. He paid his check and left the restaurant.

Jed knew very little of New York, even for a country boy. Some Scranton people doubtless had visited the great city, but, as an inmate of a poorhouse, he had not been thrown in their way. Accordingly he was like a mariner without a compass. He could only follow where impulse led.

He turned into Broadway, and with his gripsack in his hand walked up the great thoroughfare, looking in at shop windows as he strolled along. Travelling in this leisurely manner, it was perhaps four o'clock when he reached Union Square.

He was by this time fatigued and ready to rest on one of the benches which he found in the park. One person was sitting there already. It was a slender young man with a diamond ring on one of the fingers of his right hand. At least it looked to be a diamond.

He was dressed in rather a showy manner. He was perhaps twenty-two, but so slender that he must have weighed a dozen or fifteen pounds less than Jed, who was only sixteen. He looked casually at the country boy as the latter sat down, and presently turned and addressed him.

"It is a warm day," he said.

"Yes," answered Jed, who felt lonely and was glad to be social with some one.

"I judge from your bag," he glanced at the gripsack, "that you are a visitor to New York."

"Yes," answered Jed frankly. "I have never been in New York before."

"That was my case two years ago. Now I feel quite like an old resident. Are you staying at a hotel?"

"No; that is what I should like to ask about. I must spend the night somewhere. Can you recommend a *cheap* hotel?"

"Why do you go to a hotel? No hotel is cheap in the long run. It is much better to hire a room in a lodging-house and take your meals at restaurants."

"Yes, I suppose it would be. But I don't know where to find such a lodging-house."

"Come, I'll make you an offer. I have a room on Twenty-Seventh Street. You shall pay for my supper, and I will let you stay in my room without charge till to-morrow. Then if you like it well enough to room with me, I shall be glad to have you."

"Thank you; how much do you pay for your room?"

"Four dollars a week. That will be two dollars a piece. That is cheap for the city. You can't get a room at a hotel for less than a dollar a night."

"Is that so?" asked Jed. "That would be seven dollars a week."

"Precisely."

"I couldn't afford to pay that."

"There is no reason why you should. I couldn't afford it myself. Well, do you accept my offer? Do just as you please. Of course I have no motive except to give a helping hand to a stranger in the city."

"You are very kind," said Jed gratefully. "I know so little of New York that I feel quite helpless."

"Quite natural. I've been through it all."

"Are you—in business?" rather wondering how his companion should be free at that hour.

"Yes, I am in a broker's office down town. We have easy hours. I am off for the day at three o'clock."

"Are you well paid? But perhaps you don't care to tell."

"Oh, yes, I don't mind. I get twenty dollars a week."

"I wish I could get twelve," said Jed wistfully. "I shall have to get work soon."

"You have some money to keep you while you are waiting for work?" said the other quickly.

"Yes. I have about thirty-five dollars."

The young man's face brightened up.

"I am glad for you," he said. "You can make that last a good while, if you are guided by me, and keep down your expenses."

"That is exactly what I want to do," responded Jed earnestly.

"Oh well, I will put my experience at your service. I hope you will conclude to room with me. I feel rather lonesome at times. Of course I could easily get a roommate, but I am rather particular."

"You might not like me," said Jed.

"I am sure I shall. I can tell in five minutes whether I am going to like a person or not. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Indeed! You look older. That's going to help you, you know, about a situation. You can pass for a young man, and they won't think of offering you boy's pay."

"Perhaps you will be able to advise me about the kind of place I had better apply for."

"Of course I will. I already begin to take a great interest in you. What kind of work have you done?"

"Well, I have acted a little."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated his new friend in genuine surprise, for he had looked upon Jed as an unsophisticated country boy who probably had never seen the inside of a theatre. "I suppose you mean," he suggested as an afterthought, "in some village entertainment."

"No; I played in 'The Gold King' for some time."

"You don't say so! What part did you take?"

"The boy's part."

The young man regarded Jed with more respect.

"I shouldn't have thought it," he said. "How did you happen to get such a fine chance as that?"

"I knew one of the actors—Harry Bertram—and the one who played the boy's part regularly was taken sick. I only played about four or five weeks all together."

"Still that makes you a regular actor. Do you think of trying to get a place at Daly's or Palmer's?"

"Oh, no. I don't suppose I should stand any show. I could only take a boy's part."

"Well, we can talk over our plans later. I don't mind confessing that I am hungry. How about yourself?"

"I think I could eat some supper."

"Come along, then. I'll take you to a good restaurant. It's some way off, but it is near my room."

"All right."

The two rose, and leaving the park, walked up Broadway, past the Fifth Avenue Hotel, the Hoffman House, and the St. James, till they reached a well-known eating-house known as Smith & Green's, situated on the east side of Broadway, between Twenty-Seventh and Twenty-Eighth Streets.

"Come in here. I won't take you to Delmonico's, a little further down, as you haven't a private bank to draw from. This is a nice restaurant and moderate in its charges."

They entered, sat down at a round table and studied the bill of fare. The prices seemed to be moderate. Jed's dinner cost thirty-five cents, but his

companion was more lavish in his orders, and ran up a bill of sixty-five cents.

"That makes just a dollar," he remarked.

It seemed considerable to Jed, who decided that he would rather order and pay for his own meals separately hereafter.

During the repast Jed learned that his new friend's name was Maurice Graham.

"Now we'll go around to my room, and you can dispose of your gripsack."

"I shall be glad to do so. I am tired of carrying it about."

Graham led the way to a three-story brick house near Seventh Avenue, and mounted to a small square room on the upper story. It was plainly furnished with a three-quarters bed, a bureau, and the usual chamber furniture.

"You can leave your bag anywhere, and then we will go out for a walk."

"I think I would rather stay here and lie down."

"All right! Make yourself at home. I will go out. Shall probably be back by ten."

When Graham returned at a little past ten he found Jed in bed and fast asleep. His eyes sparkled with pleasure.

He raised Jed's clothes from the chair on which he had thrown them and went through the pockets expeditiously. Poor Jed's small stock of money was quickly transferred to his own pockets.

"He hasn't any watch," soliloquized Graham. "That's a pity."

When his search was completed he put on his hat again.

"I shall sleep in Jersey City to-night," he said to himself. "That will be safer."

He went out softly, leaving Jed alone, the victim of a cruel trick.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Jed slept on, unconscious of his loss, till the sun flooded the room with golden light. Then he opened his eyes and wondered for a moment where he was. But recollection came to his aid, and he recalled the incidents of his meeting with Graham and sharing the latter's room.

He looked over to the other side of the bed, but his roommate was not to be seen.

"I suppose it is late and he has gone to his business," thought Jed tranquilly. "Probably he didn't want to wake me up."

This explanation seemed natural enough till he noticed that the pillow on the right-hand side of the bed did not seem to have been used. Lifting the quilt, he discovered that the sheet was smooth. Clearly Graham had not slept there at all.

"What does it mean?" thought Jed, perplexed. "Why didn't he come back last evening?"

This was a question which he could not answer. No suspicion, however, had yet dawned upon him that anything was wrong.

"Well," he said, jumping out of bed, "I must get up and try for a place. I guess I can find that eating-house where we took supper. Let me see, what was the name? Oh, Smith & Green. Well, I feel as if I could dispose of a good breakfast."

He washed his face and hands and proceeded to dress. Mechanically, but not from any feeling of uneasiness, he thrust his hand into his pocket in search of his wallet. The pocket was empty!

His heart gave a jump, and he hurriedly examined his other pockets, but it was of no avail. Then he looked about the room and on the floor, but there was no trace of the lost wallet.

Jed felt faint, and his legs trembled under him, as he thought of the terrible situation in which he was placed. He began to connect Graham's absence with his loss, and understood that his new acquaintance had played him false.

It was a shock to him, for his nature was trustful, and he hated to believe that a young man who had seemed so friendly should prove so treacherous.

"What shall I do?" thought poor Jed. "I haven't enough money for my breakfast, and I am *very* hungry."

At this point, just as he was ready to go out, there came a knock at the door.

Jed rose and opened it. He confronted a stout woman of middle age with a very serious expression of countenance that seemed to indicate that she meant business. She regarded Jed with surprise.

"I expected to see Mr. Graham," she said. "Are you a friend of his?"

"I only met him yesterday. He invited me to come and spend the night in his room."

"Is he here, or has he gone out?"

"I don't think he slept here at all last night. He left early in the evening, and said he would come back, but the bed doesn't seem to have been slept in except by myself."

"He is very liberal in offering the use of a room that he has not paid for," said the lady sarcastically.

"I don't know anything about that," faltered Jed.

"No, I suppose not. But it's true. He only came here two weeks and a half ago, and paid one week's rent in advance—four dollars. When the next week's rent became due he said that his employer was on a visit to Chicago, and he could not get his pay till he came back. Do you know whether that is true?"

"No, I don't. I never saw him before yesterday afternoon about four o'clock in a park about half a mile from here."

"So he wasn't at work at that time?"

"No; he said he worked for a broker and got through at three o'clock."

"A broker? Why he told me he was working in a wholesale house down town. At any rate, I wish he'd pay me the eight dollars he owes me."

"I wish he'd pay me the thirty-five dollars he owes me," said Jed despondently.

"You don't mean to say that you were goose enough to lend him thirty-five dollars?" exclaimed Mrs. Gately in a crescendo voice.

"No; I didn't lend it to him," returned Jed bitterly. "He must have taken it out of my pocket when I was asleep."

"Well, I declare! So he's a thief, too."

She looked around the room, and opening a bureau examined the drawers.

"He's gone off and taken all of his things," she reported. "That settles it. We shall not see our money again."

"I—I don't know what to do," said Jed sorrowfully.

"Did he take *all* your money?" asked Mrs. Gately, drawn from a consideration of her own misfortune to that of her fellow-sufferer.

"Yes, he took every cent," answered Jed mournfully. "And the worst of it is that I am a stranger in New York."

"Well, that is too bad!" said the landlady, an expression of sympathy relieving the severity of her face. "Your case is worse than mine. You actually haven't anything left?"

"Except my gripsack."

"And of course you haven't had any breakfast?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, I do pity you. I suppose you are hungry?"

"I don't know when I have ever felt so hungry," answered Jed.

"I will see that you don't leave the house in that condition at any rate. I'm a poor woman, as any one must be who has to depend on lodgers for an income, but I'm not penniless. Come down stairs, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Gilman," suggested Jed.

"And I will skirmish round and scare you up something to eat."

"You are very kind," said Jed gratefully.

"Wait and see what you get," returned Mrs. Gately with a laugh and a softer expression, for Jed's case appealed to her heart.

She led the way to the front basement. A table was set in the centre of the room. Evidently it had not yet been cleared off.

"I'm a little behindhand this morning," remarked Mrs. Gately, beginning to bustle round. "I don't take boarders in a general way, but I have a young girl in the house that works at Macy's. I suppose you've heard of Macy's?"

"No, ma'am."

"Never heard of Macy's? I thought everybody had heard of Macy's, Fo'teenth Street and Sixth Avenue. Luella Dickinson works there, and I give her breakfast in the house as a favor. Let me see, there's a little coffee left—I'll warm it over—and there's bread and butter, and—I can cook you a sausage, and boil a couple of eggs."

"I hope you won't take too much trouble," said Jed.

"I guess I can afford to take a little trouble, especially as there's no knowing when you will have any dinner."

Jed owned to himself with a sigh that there was a good deal of doubt on that point. However, it isn't wise to borrow trouble too far in advance, and the odor of the sausage as it was frying was very grateful to his nostrils. He was sure of one meal at any rate, and that was something, though the day before he thought he had enough money to last a month.

"I don't think the coffee will do," said Mrs. Gately, as she bustled round the stove in the next room. "I'll make some fresh. I don't think coffee amounts to much when it is warmed over."

Jed was of the same opinion, and did not utter a protest. He was very fond of coffee, and felt that with a fresh pot of it the breakfast would be fit for a king.

"Haven't you got any folks, Mr. Gilman?" asked the landlady, as she brought the pot of coffee and sat it on the table.

"No, ma'am," answered Jed. "I am alone in the world."

"Dear me, that's sad! And so young as you are, too!"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm only sixteen."

"What did you calc'late to do, if you could get a chance?"

"Anything. I'm not particular."

"You haven't any trade, have you?"

"No. I've been living in the country most of the time, and did chores on a farm."

"Well, we haven't many farms in New York," said the landlady with a laugh.

"No. I suppose not. Even if there were, I don't like that kind of work."

"Have you never done anything else?"

"I acted for a few weeks."

"Gracious! You don't mean to say you've been a play actor?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How Luella Dickinson would like to see you! She dotes on play actors, but I don't think she ever met one."

"I am afraid she would be disappointed in me."

"Oh, I guess not. If you've played on the stage that's enough. Why can't you call round some evening? Luella would *so* like to see you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gately. If I can get anything to do, I will call."

Jed finished his breakfast. He ate heartily, for he had no idea where he should get another meal.

"I guess I'll be going," he said, as he rose from the table. "You have been very kind."

"Oh, that's nothing. I hope you'll meet that rascally Graham and make him give up your money."

"I am afraid there is little hope of that. Good morning, and thank you!"

And so Jed passed out of the hospitable house into the inhospitable street, without a cent of money or a prospect of earning any.

CHAPTER XXV. WITHOUT A PENNY.

There is nothing that makes one feel so helpless as to be without a penny in a strange city. If Jed had had even a dollar he would have felt better.

The fact of his poverty was emphasized when a boy came up to him and asked him to buy a morning paper. Jed instinctively felt in his pocket for a penny, but not even a cent was forthcoming.

"I have no change," he said, by way of excuse.

"I can change a dollar," responded the newsboy, who was more than usually enterprising.

"I wish *I* could," thought Jed, but he only said, "No, it is no matter."

So he walked along Broadway, fairly well dressed, but, so far as money went, a pauper. Yes, though no longer an inmate of the Scranton poorhouse, he was even poorer than when he was there, for then he had a home, and now he had none.

"I wonder when it is all going to end?" reflected poor Jed despondently. Then his anger was excited when he thought of the unprincipled rascal who had brought him to this pass.

"If I could only get hold of him," muttered Jed vengefully, "I would give him something to remember me by."

All the while Jed walked on, though his walk was aimless. He was as well off in one part of the city as another, and only walked to fill up time.

He found himself passing a drug store. Just outside the door he saw the sign "Boy wanted," and with a little kindling of hope he entered the store.

Just behind the counter stood a man with a sandy beard, who appeared to be the proprietor. To him Jed addressed himself.

"I see you want a boy," he said.

"Yes; do you want a place?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hardly think you would be satisfied with the wages we pay, unless you particularly wish to learn our business."

"What do you pay, sir?"

"Three dollars a week."

Three dollars a week! It was certainly better than no income at all, but Jed knew well that it would be impossible to live on this sum, and he had no reserve fund to draw upon.

"No," he said, "I am afraid I couldn't get along on that salary."

"Are you entirely dependent on your earnings?" asked the druggist.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you parents residing in the city?"

"No, sir; I am all alone."

"That would be an objection. We prefer to employ those who live at home."

"Do most employers require that, sir?"

"Many do."

Here a customer came in and asked for a bottle of cough medicine, and the druggist turned away to fill the order. Jed walked slowly out of the store.

"I wonder whether there is any work for me anywhere?" he asked himself despondently.

Jed continued his walk down Broadway. It was a bright, clear, exhilarating day, and Jed would have enjoyed it thoroughly if he had been better fixed, but it is hard to keep up the spirits when your pocket is empty.

When Jed reached City Hall Park he went in and sat down on one of the benches.

One of the boy bootblacks who carry on business in the park came up to him with his box on his shoulder and asked, "Shine your boots?"

Jed shook his head.

"Not this morning," he replied.

"They need it," said the boy.

Jed looked at his boots, and was fain to admit that the boy was right. But he was not possessed of the necessary nickel.

"Yes, they do need it," he said, "but I haven't money enough to pay you for doing it."

"Only five cents."

"I haven't five cents. I'm poorer than you are, my boy," said Jed in a burst of confidence.

The boy looked puzzled.

"You don't look like it," he said after scrutinizing Jed's appearance. "How did you come to be so poor?"

"Had all my money stolen last night."

"How much was there?"

"Thirty-five dollars."

"Whew!" whistled the bootblack. "That was a haul. Who did it?"

"A young man I fell in with. He invited me to share his room. I woke this morning to find that he had stolen all my money."

"He was a snide, he was! I'd like to step on his necktie."

"I'd like to do something of that sort myself," said Jed with a smile.

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Yes; I shan't forget him very soon."

"When you do see him hand him over to a cop. Just hold out your foot," and the boy got down in a position to black Jed's shoe.

"But I haven't any money. I can't pay you."

"I'll do it for nothin', seein' as you're down on your luck. You can pay me some time when times is better."

"I am afraid you will have to wait a good while for your money."

"Never mind! It won't kill me if I lose it."

"You're very kind to a stranger," said Jed, grateful for the boy's friendly proffer.

"Oh, it ain't nothin'. You look like a good fellow. You'll get a place quicker if your shoes look nice."

There was something practical in this suggestion, and Jed accepted the offer without further hesitation.

The boy exerted himself specially, and Jed's dirty shoes soon showed a dazzling polish.

"There, you can see your face in 'em!" exclaimed the boy, as he rose from his knees.

"Thank you," said Jed. "I see you understand your business. Will you tell me your name?"

"Jim Parker."

"Well, Jim, I am much obliged to you. I hope some time I can do you a favor."

"Oh, that's all right. So long! I hope you'll get a job." And the independent young bootblack, with his box over his shoulder, walked across the park in search of another job.

Somehow Jed was cheered by this act of kindness. He felt a little better satisfied with himself, moreover, when he saw the transformation of his dirty shoes to the polish that marks the gentleman.

A man rather shabbily dressed was drawn by this outward sign of affluence to sit down beside him. He took a brief inventory of Jed, and then doffing his hat, said deferentially, "Young gentleman, I hope you will excuse the liberty I am taking, but I have walked all the way from Buffalo, and am reduced almost to my last penny. In fact this nickel," producing one from his pocket, "is all the money I have left. If you will kindly loan me a quarter I shall esteem it a great favor."

Jed felt like laughing. He had not a penny, yet here was a man richer than himself asking for a loan.

"I wish I were able to oblige you," he said, "but you are asking me for more than I possess."

The man glanced incredulously at Jed's polished shoes.

"You don't look poor," he said, in a tone of sarcasm.

"No, I don't look poor, but you are five cents richer than I."

The man shrugged his shoulders. He evidently did not believe Jed.

"It is quite true," continued Jed, answering the doubt on the man's face. "Last night I was robbed of all the money I had. Had you applied to me yesterday I would have granted your request."

This frank statement disarmed the man's suspicion.

"I think you are speaking the truth," he said. "Though there are plenty who pretend to be poor to get rid of giving. Perhaps I shall surprise you when I say that a year ago I should have been able to lend you five thousand dollars, and have as much more left."

"Yes, you do surprise me! How did you lose your money?"

"I was a fool—that explains it. I bought mining stocks. I was in San Francisco at the time, and my money melted like snow in the sun. A year

since I was worth ten thousand dollars. To-day I am worth a nickel. Do you know what I will do with it?"

Jed looked at him inquiringly.

"I will buy a glass of beer, and drink to our good luck—yours and mine."

"I hope it will bring the good luck," said Jed smiling.

"I would offer you a glass too, if I had another nickel."

"Thank you, but I never drink beer. I thank you all the same."

His companion rose and left the park, probably in search of a beer saloon. Jed got up, too, and took another walk. By half-past twelve he felt decidedly hungry. His breakfast had lasted him till then, but he was young and healthy, and craved three meals a day.

"How shall I manage to get dinner?" thought Jed seriously.

He paused in front of the Astor House, which he knew to be a hotel, and saw business men entering in quest of their midday lunch.

It was tantalizing. There was plenty of food inside, but he lacked the wherewithal to purchase a portion.

"Why, Jed, how are you?" came unexpectedly to his ears.

He looked up and saw a brown-bearded, pleasant-faced man, whom he recognized as a fellow-guest at the Spray Hotel at Sea Spray.

"When did you leave Sea Spray?" asked his friend.

"Only yesterday."

"Going to stay in the city?"

"Yes, if I can get anything to do."

"Have you been to lunch?"

"Not yet."

"Come in and lunch with me, then. I think we can find something inviting at the Astor."

"Saved!" thought Jed, as he gladly passed into the famous hostelry with his friend. "I wonder if he has any idea how glad I am to accept his invitation?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN SEARCH OF EMPLOYMENT.

Jed followed his hotel friend up stairs into an upper dining-room, and they took seats at a corner table.

"I never like to dine alone," said Howell Foster. "I am glad I fell in with you, Jed."

"So am I," answered Jed. "I am more glad than you have any idea of," he said to himself.

"What will you order?" asked Mr. Foster, pushing over the bill of fare to his companion.

"I have a healthy appetite and shall enjoy anything," said Jed with a smile. "Please order the same for me as for yourself."

Howell Foster was rather proud of his gastronomic knowledge, and took this as a compliment.

"You can trust me to do that," he replied. "I am used to the place and know what they succeed best in."

Thereupon he ordered a dinner which Jed found delicious. No expense was spared, and Jed, glancing at the bill when it was brought, found that the charge was three dollars and a half.

During the repast the host kept up a bright and chatty conversation.

"I hope you enjoyed your dinner," he said, when it was over.

"Actions speak louder than words," answered Jed with a smile.

"This is a good, reliable place. I advise you to come here often."

"What would he say if he could see the inside of my pocket-book?" thought Jed. "I am afraid," he said aloud, "it is too expensive for my means."

"Yes, probably; I didn't think of that. By the way, what have you in view?"

"I hardly know yet."

"Come round and see me some day," and Foster handed Jed his card.

"Thank you, sir."

"Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you, sir. I don't smoke."

"It would be money in my pocket if I didn't. My cigars cost me last year five hundred dollars."

"I wish I was sure of that for my entire income," thought Jed.

They parted at the entrance to the hotel. It was clear from his manner and speech that Howell Foster thought Jed in easy circumstances.

It made the boy feel almost like an impostor, but he reflected that he had done nothing to give Mr. Foster a false impression.

It was about half-past one when he left the hotel. The dinner had occupied an hour. The world was still before him, but he had eaten a hearty meal and felt that he could get along, if necessary, till the next morning, so far as eating was concerned.

Where to sleep presented a perplexing problem, but it would be some time before it required to be solved. How to spend the afternoon puzzled Jed. He went back to City Hall Park, and on the seat he had formerly occupied he found a copy of the New York *Herald* which somebody had left there. He took it up and looked over the advertisements for Help Wanted.

He found the following:

WANTED.—Smart, enterprising agents to sell packages of stationery. Fifteen dollars a week can easily be made. Call at No. 182 Nassau Street, Room 22.

This struck Jed as just the thing. It could not be very hard to sell stationery, and fifteen dollars a week would support him comfortably.

"Where is Nassau Street?" he inquired of a bootblack who took a temporary seat beside him.

"There 'tis," said the street boy, pointing in the direction of the *Tribune* building. "You just go down in front of the Tribune."

"Is No. 182 far off?"

"No, it's close by. You can get there in less than no time."

"Thank you!" and with hope in his heart Jed rose and walked in the direction indicated.

He found the building. At the entrance was a list of occupants of rooms. He went up two flights of stairs, and halted in front of No. 22. He knocked at the door and was bidden in a deep, hoarse voice to "Come in!"

Opening the door, he found himself in the presence of a short, humpbacked man, whose voice was quite out of proportion to his size.

"I suppose you come to see me about the advertisement in the *Herald*," said the dwarf.

"Yes, sir," answered Jed, gazing as if fascinated at the stunted figure, huge head and long arms of the person before him.

"I have engaged several agents already this morning," went on the dwarf, turning over a large book on the desk before him.

"Then perhaps you don't need any more?" said Jed despondently.

"Oh, yes, I do if I can get the right ones," was the answer.

"It is to sell packages of stationery, I believe. Can you show me some?"

The dwarf handed Jed a flat package, on the outside of which was printed a list of the contents. They included a pen holder, pens, a quire of paper, a supply of envelopes, and several other articles.

"This is the best package in the market for the money," said the dwarf. "Observe how varied are the contents, and only a paltry twenty-five cents for the whole."

"Yes, it seems a good bargain," said Jed.

"You are right there," said the dwarf confidently. "Why, you can make money hand over hand. Our agents are actually coining it. We allow them to retain ten cents on each package. Two or three, and sometimes five, are sold to the same person. Would you like to have me read one or two agents' letters?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Here is one from Theodore Jenkins, who is operating in Pennsylvania:

"HUGO HIGGINS, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR:

"Please send me at once two hundred packages of stationery. They sell like hot cakes. I got rid of forty yesterday, and it rained half the day, too. I have held several agencies for different articles, but none that paid as well as this. I shall be disappointed if I don't make forty dollars per week. It looks as if it might exceed that sum.

"Yours respectfully,

"THEODORE JENKINS.'

"That letter speaks for itself," remarked the dwarf as he folded it up and replaced it in an envelope.

"Yes," said Jed, "it is certainly very encouraging."

"I will read you another from a party who has been in our employ for fourteen months. He is operating in Ohio.

"DEAR SIR:

"You may send me three hundred packages by Adams Express, and please don't delay, for I need them at once. I have been working for you for fourteen months. During that time I have supported my family and bought a house, on which I have paid cash down a thousand dollars. In the course of the next year and a half I expect to complete the payment and own the house clean. It was certainly a lucky thing

for me when I saw your advertisement for agents and engaged in your service.

"Yours gratefully,
"ARTHUR WATERS.

"That is another letter that speaks for itself," observed Mr. Higgins. "I have plenty more, but I don't think I need to read any others to convince you that the business will pay any one that takes hold of it."

"Perhaps," added Jed, "these gentlemen had experience as agents."

"One of them had, but the other was quite green in the business."

"You think then that I could succeed?"

"Undoubtedly. You look smart and have a taking way with you. You can't fail to succeed."

This was pleasant to hear, and Jed felt strongly impelled to engage in the service of the plausible Higgins.

"If you will trust me with twenty packages," he said, "I will see what I can do."

"Certainly. That will be three dollars. You see we charge you fifteen cents each, and you sell them for twenty-five. That gives you two dollars. You had better take fifty packages, and then you won't have to come back tomorrow."

"Very well, I will take fifty."

"All right. You may pay me seven dollars and a half, and I will get the packages ready."

"Do you require payment in advance?" asked Jed quickly.

"Certainly. You are a stranger to me, and even if you were not, I should not feel like risking so much money or money's worth. What is there to hinder your making off with it and never coming back?"

"I wouldn't be dishonest for a great deal more money than that."

"I dare say you are right, but we must adhere to our business methods. You will get your money back in two days probably."

"But I haven't the money to pay in advance."

"Oh, that alters the matter," said Higgins, become less gracious. "How much have you?"

"I am unable to pay anything," said Jed desperately.

Mr. Hugo Higgins turned away, no longer interested in Jed. Poor Jed felt sadly disappointed at losing so good a chance, but something happened to mitigate his regret.

A stout man with red hair opened the door of the office and dashed in, carrying in his hands a large package.

"I want my money back!" he said. "You are a big swindler!"

CHAPTER XXVII. AN INTRACTABLE AGENT.

The new visitor was a large man, evidently a German, weighing not less than two hundred pounds. He approached Hugo Higgins, towering above the dwarf by at least fourteen inches, and shook his fist in his face. Mr. Higgins shrank back as if fearful of a personal assault, and inquired in uneasy tones:

"Who are you, my friend?"

"Who am I?" retorted the other, laughing gutturally. "You know me well enough, you villain!"

"I think I have seen you somewhere," said Hugo, not daring to show the anger he felt at the hard name by which the other addressed him.

"You have seen me somewhere? Come, that's good. My name is Otto Schmidt, and I am one of your victims. You understand that, hey?"

"No. I can't say I do."

"Then I'll tell you. I came in here last week and bought some of your confounded packages. I was to make big wages by selling them, hey?"

"Certainly, I hope you did."

"You hope I did?" repeated Mr. Otto Schmidt fiercely. "Well, I tell you. I went round two days in Montclair, and how many packages you think I sell, hey?"

"About fifty," answered Hugo with a sickly smile.

"About fifty? Ha, ha!" returned the German, laughing wildly. "I sell just one to a young boy named Chester Noyes. That's all I sell."

"My dear Mr. Schmidt, I am afraid you got discouraged too soon," said Hugo suavely.

"So I am your dear Mr. Schmidt, hey? You cost me dear enough with your lies about the business, you scoundrel!"

"I cannot allow you to talk to me in this way," said Hugo in a dignified tone.

"Oh, you won't, hey?" retorted the German, beginning to dance about the floor.

"Well, I won't. Maybe you prefer to have me step on your necktie, hey?"

Hugo Higgins looked alarmed, and Jed could hardly help laughing.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Hugo, afraid some applicant for an agency might enter and be frightened away.

"What do I want? I want my money back."

"That is against our rules," said Hugo. "My good Mr. Schmidt, take the packages and go to some other place. Other agents have told me that Montclair is not a good town for business. Go to—to Rahway! I am sure you will sell all your packages there."

"No; I don't go to Rahway. I sell all my packages here."

"But, my good friend——"

"I am not your good friend. I am no friend to a rascal."

"Really, this language——"

"Never mind about the language! I ain't going to be schwindled by no fakir. I've got forty-nine packages here, and I want you to pay me back my money, seven dollars and thirty-five cents."

"I can't think of such a thing."

"Then I give you in charge for schwindling," said Otto Schmidt, thrusting a fat fist directly under Hugo's nose. "I may be one Dutchman, but I ain't so dumb as you think I am."

"I don't think you dumb at all," said Hugo soothingly. "I think you are a smart man of business."

"You find me too schmart to be schwindled, I tell you that."

"Still, if you don't want to go on with the business, I'll take back the packages and give you five dollars for them."

"And I to lose two dollars and thirty-five cents, besides all my time. Not much, Mr. Hugo Higgins."

"You can't expect me to give you back all the money."

"Well, I do," said Mr. Schmidt stoutly. "I give you just two minutes to make up your mind."

Just then the door opened, and a young man who was evidently from the country entered.

"I seed your advertisement," he said. "I want to be an agent, if you can give me a chance."

Otto Schmidt smiled sardonically, and was about to speak, when Hugo said hurriedly, "Come out into the hall, Mr. Schmidt, and I think we can arrange your business satisfactorily."

"All right! I come," and he followed Hugo out into the entry.

"I will pay you your money," said the agent. "It is quite against my rules, but I will make an exception in your case."

"I want a dollar more to pay me for my time," said the German, appreciating his advantage.

"But, my dear sir, this is very unreasonable," said Mr. Higgins uneasily.

"Then I go back into the room and show you up."

"Very well, here is your money!" and Hugo with great reluctance drew out eight dollars and thirty-five cents and handed it to Mr. Schmidt.

Otto Schmidt chuckled and nodded significantly at the discomfited Hugo.

"I may be a Dutchman," he said, "but I ain't no chump."

Hugo re-entered the office and smiled affably at the young man from the country.

"One of our successful agents," he said, nodding towards the door. "I won't tell you how much that German gentleman has made by selling our famous packages, for you might not believe me."

"Can you give me a chance?" asked the young hayseed anxiously.

"Well, I think I can," said Hugo with assumed hesitation, and then he explained on what terms he sold, as he had done to Jed.

"How many packages will you take?" he asked pleasantly.

"I guess I'll take a dozen to begin with," said the young man from the country.

"A dozen!" replied Hugo, much disappointed. "My, that's no order at all. You would have to come back for more before the day was out."

"Well, I'll take fifteen," said the young man after reflection.

"You'd better take fifty. Very few of our agents take less than fifty."

"No, I ain't got much money. I'll only take fifteen to begin with."

And to this determination he adhered, in spite of the persuasions of Mr. Higgins.

As Hugo wrapped up the packages and received back two dollars and twenty-five cents, he regretted that he had so hastily agreed to buy back Mr. Schmidt's boxes at an advance on the original cost.

"Where would you advise me to sell?" asked the young man.

"Country towns are best," said Hugo. "Some distance from the city, I advise, as those who live near New York can come here and buy, and are less ready to patronize agents."

Jed smiled to himself. He understood that Mr. Higgins wished to guard against a visit from the young man in case his business failed to meet his anticipations. He lingered behind after the rural visitor had gone.

"I hope," said Hugo, "you took no stock in what that stupid Dutchman said."

"Well," replied Jed, "it shows that some of your agents are not successful."

"A man like that could not succeed in selling anything," said Hugo scornfully. "Now it is different with you. You look smart."

Jed smiled. He began to understand Mr. Higgins and his methods.

"Then you remember the letters from the agents which I read you."

"Yes," answered Jed, but he felt convinced now that the letters were bogus, and manufactured by Mr. Higgins himself.

"When you can command the necessary funds I shall be glad to have you call and buy a bundle of samples."

"I don't think I shall care to enter into the business, Mr. Higgins," said Jed. "It would be an experiment, and I am not in a position to try experiments."

Higgins looked at Jed, and saw that he was understood.

"Very well!" he said coldly. "You must do as you like, but you are making a mistake."

Jed left the office and went down stairs. What had happened did not encourage him. It seemed a good deal harder to make a living in a large city than he supposed.

He saw now that there were sharpers ready to fleece the young and inexperienced. If he had not been robbed of his money, in all probability he would have fallen a victim to the persuasive but deceptive representations of Mr. Higgins, and have come back disappointed like Mr. Otto Schmidt.

He continued his walk down Nassau Street, and presently turned into Broadway. His attention was attracted to a church with a very high spire facing Wall Street. He inquired the name and found it was Trinity Church. The Scranton meeting-house could easily have been tucked away in one corner of the large edifice, and as far as height was concerned, it was but an infant compared with a six-footer.

He walked still further down Broadway, till he reached a green park, which he found was called the Battery. Feeling somewhat fatigued, he sat down on a bench near the sea-wall and looked over toward Governor's Island. Craft of different sizes were passing, and Jed was interested and exhilarated by the spectacle.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE COMMISSION.

Jed's companion on the seat was a sallow-faced, black-bearded man. Jed merely glanced at him, but presently became aware that he had become the object of the sallow man's scrutiny.

Finally the latter moved rather nearer Jed, and showed a disposition to be sociable.

"A fine day, young man," he began.

"Yes, sir."

"And a fine view we have before us," went on the stranger, pointing to the harbor and the numerous craft that were passing in both directions. "However, I suppose it is quite familiar to you?"

"No, sir; I am a stranger in the city."

"Indeed!" and here the stranger allowed his gaze to rest on the small gripsack that Jed had placed on the seat beside him. "Perhaps you have come in quest of work?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jed.

"Have you found anything yet?"

"No, sir, but I have only been here since yesterday morning. Do you know of any situation that I could fill?"

"Well, no, no permanent position," answered the other deliberately. "I might give you a chance to earn," here he hesitated, "two dollars this evening. But perhaps that would not be worth your while."

"Yes, sir, I should be glad to earn even that," said Jed eagerly.

"Then perhaps I may employ you. Can you row a boat?"

"Yes, sir. I think so. I have rowed on a pond up in Scranton."

"Then you can probably row here. I would row part of the way myself."

"When do you want me?" asked Jed.

"Not till late this evening. I will explain when the time comes."

Jed was disappointed. He had hoped to do the work at once, and receive the money. Then he could buy himself some supper, for he was already hungry. He found that his appetite was just as regular as if he were earning a living income, instead of being impecunious and without work.

"At what time shall I meet you, sir?"

"At eleven o'clock, here."

"Yes, sir," answered Jed, wondering what he was to do during the intervening time.

As he had no money, he must defer eating till then, and it occurred to him that he would hardly feel able to row any considerable distance unless refreshed by food. Could he venture to ask a part of the sum he was to earn in advance? He decided to do so.

"I am going to ask a favor," he said hurriedly. "I have been robbed of all my money, and I have not enough to buy my supper. If you let me have half a dollar on account——"

He feared that this proposal would be distasteful to his companion, but the sallow-faced man did not seem offended.

"Perhaps," he said thoughtfully, "I had better keep you with me, and let you eat supper with me."

"Very well, sir," said Jed, feeling relieved.

The other looked relieved.

"It is half-past five," he said. "We may as well start now."

He rose leisurely from his seat, and Jed followed him. He walked to the head of the Battery, and keeping near the piers, led the way to a humble tavern called "The Sailor's Rest."

"This will do," he said. "It is not very fashionable, but they can give us a comfortable meal."

Certainly the interior presented a great contrast to the Astor House, where Jed had lunched, or rather dined. The floor was sanded, the tables were unprovided with tablecloths. There was a bar on one side of the room, over which presided a stout bartender with mottled cheeks and a dirty white apron.

"Where is the restaurant?" asked Jed's companion.

"In there," answered the bartender with a jerk of his finger in the direction of a back room.

With a nod the sallow-faced man beckoned Jed to follow him. Opening a door, he led the way into a room provided with four tables only. On each table was a small bell.

Jed and his guide sat down, and the latter rang the bell.

A dirty-faced man, with a beard of several days' growth, made his appearance.

"We want some supper."

"What'll you have?"

"What can we have?"

"Beefsteak, ham and eggs."

"What else?"

"Eggs without."

"Without what?"

"Ham."

The sallow man shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems we must choose between beefsteak and ham and eggs," he said. "What will you have?"

"Ham and eggs," answered Jed.

"All right. Ham and eggs for two."

"Anything else?"

"Two bottles of lager. You drink beer, don't you?"

"No," answered Jed.

"Then bring the boy some tea or coffee—whichever he prefers."

"Tea," suggested Jed.

"Bread and butter, of course, and fried potatoes, if you can get them ready."

While they were waiting the man leaned back in his chair and stared out of the window at a dirty back yard, but his thoughts seemed to be otherwise occupied. Jed's eyes wandered about the room, but found little to attract him in the two or three prints—one of a yacht, another of a merchant vessel—that adorned the walls.

On the mantel was a soiled piece of coral and a large seashell. All seemed to harmonize with the name of the inn. Jed, however, felt but a fleeting interest in the furnishings of the place. His mind dwelt rather on the promised supper.

He could not understand how in this crisis of his fortunes, when there was so much to discourage him, he should have such an appetite. Savory odors from the neighboring kitchen found their way into the room when the waiter opened the door and entered to set the table.

Jed was glad to overlook the cheap and dark-hued crockery, the rusty knives and forks and the chipped glasses, as the odor of the ham and eggs was wafted to his nostrils. Finally the beer and tea were brought in, and his companion signaled to him to fall to.

"Where did you dine?" he asked abruptly.

"At the Astor House."

The sallow-faced man paused with his glass, which he had just filled, half-way to his lips.

"Was that before you were robbed of your money?" he asked.

"No, sir, but I met a gentleman whom I knew at the seaside, and he invited me to dine with him."

"Oh, that explains it. This is a very different place from the Astor House."

"I should think so," said Jed smiling.

"Still we can probably satisfy our hunger."

"Oh, yes," responded Jed, and he made a vigorous onslaught on the contents of his plate.

In a few minutes supper was over, and Jed felt better. It is wonderful how much more cheerful views we take of life and the world on a full than on an empty stomach.

Jed experienced this. He couldn't, to be sure, look very far ahead, but he had had three meals that day in spite of an empty purse, and the money he was to earn would insure him a bed and three meals for the coming day, in all probability.

"It is half-past six" said his companion, referring to his watch—"a good while before I shall need your services. Do you feel tired?"

"Yes, sir; I have been on my feet all day."

"Wait a minute."

He went out and returned in a moment.

"I have engaged a room for you," he said. "You can occupy it now if you like it, and after our expedition return to pass the balance of the night. You can leave your valise there, as it will only be in your way on the boat."

"Thank you, sir."

This solved one of Jed's problems in a pleasant manner. The waiter led the way up stairs to a small room just large enough to hold a bed and washstand, and said, "That'll do you, I guess."

"Oh yes," responded Jed cheerfully.

"The gentleman says you can lie down, and he'll call you when you're wanted."

Jed was glad of this permission, for he felt very much in need of rest. He took off his coat and laid down on the bed. The couch he found not a very luxurious one. It consisted of a thin—a very thin—mattress laid upon wooden slats, and the pillow was meagre.

But he soon fell asleep, and slept so soundly that it seemed as if only five minutes had elapsed when some one shook him, and opening his eyes, they rested on his sallow-faced employer.

"Time to get up," said the latter abruptly.

Jed sprang from the bed, and, his eyes only half open, said, "I am ready."

"Follow me, then."

He followed his guide, who walked rapidly through the dark streets till he reached a pier not far from the Battery. There was a boat moored alongside, rising and falling with the tide. There was one man already in it.

"Come along!" said his guide briefly.

Jed descended a ladder, and took his place in the boat. His companion seized the oars, signing to Jed to take his seat in the bow. Then he began to row, much better then Jed could have done.

They struck out towards Governor's Island, passed it, and proceeded a considerable distance beyond. Here lay a yacht. There was no light on board, so far as Jed could see, and it looked to be quite deserted.

The rower slackened his speed (he had not yet called upon Jed to row) and said quickly: "I want you to board that yacht. Go down into the cabin. There

you will see a box, perhaps a foot square and ten inches deep. Bring it to me."

"But," said Jed, in bewilderment, "is—is it yours?"

"No," answered the sallow-faced man composedly. "It belongs to a friend of mine, the owner of the yacht. I promised to come out and get it for him."

CHAPTER XXIX. A SURPRISE PARTY.

The words of the sallow-faced man dissipated any suspicions which Jed may have entertained, and he clambered on board the yacht without much difficulty, for he was active and agile.

"Good!" said his employer. "Now go into the cabin, and be quick about it."

Jed did not understand why he should be quick about it. There was plenty of time, he thought.

Another thing puzzled him, now that he had had a chance to think the matter over. Why was the visit postponed till near midnight?

A city boy would not have had his suspicions so easily allayed; but Jed was unused to city ways, and, it may be added, to city wickedness.

The cabin seemed to be dark. He felt his way down stairs, and struck a match which he had in his pocket in order to see better the location of the box. He had just picked up the latter, finding it to be heavy, when he felt a hand laid on his arm, and looking up, met the stern gaze of a young man about twenty-eight years of age.

"What are you about here, young fellow?" he asked abruptly.

Jed was a little startled, but, not being aware that he was doing anything wrong, he replied composedly, "I was taking this box, sir."

"I see you were; but what business have you to take the box?"

"I was sent for it."

"Sent for it?" repeated the young man, looking puzzled. "Who sent you for it?"

"The gentleman in the boat outside."

"Oh ho! So there is a gentleman in the boat outside?"

"Certainly, sir. Isn't it—all right?"

"Well, I should say not, unless you consider theft right."

"What!" exclaimed Jed aghast. "Is the man who employed me a thief?"

"It looks very much like it."

At this moment the sallow-faced man called in an impatient tone, "What are you about there, you lazy young rascal? Don't be all night!"

"Is there more than one man in the boat?" asked the young man in the cabin.

"Yes, sir; there are two."

"The harbor police ought to be somewhere about. I'll rouse them if I can."

The young man went to the port-hole which served to light the cabin and fired a pistol.

"Confusion! There's some one on the yacht!" exclaimed the sallow-faced man. "We must get off."

Dipping his oars in the water, he rowed quickly away, leaving Jed to his fate. But the shot had been heard on another boat not fifty rods distant, and the piratical craft was pursued and eventually overhauled. Meanwhile Jed remained on board the yacht, whether as a prisoner or not he did not know.

"Your companions have taken alarm," said the young man. "I hear them rowing away. They have deserted you."

"I am glad of it," said Jed. "I don't want anything more to do with them. Will you tell me if that box contains anything valuable?"

"Probably the contents are worth five thousand dollars."

"Is it possible!" ejaculated Jed in amazement.

"You see you have lost quite a prize," said the young man, eyeing him closely.

"Don't say that I have lost a prize," returned Jed half indignantly. "I supposed the man who sent me for it was honest."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said that the box belonged to a friend, who had employed him to get it."

"All a lie! I am the owner of the box, and the yacht also, and I have no acquaintance with your principal. If I had not been here he would have got a rich prize."

"I am glad you were here," said Jed earnestly.

"I don't understand your connection with such a man. How much were you to be paid for your services?"

"Two dollars," answered Jed.

"Didn't it strike you as singular that you should have been employed on such an errand?"

"Well, a little; but I am a stranger to the city, and I thought it might be because I was inexperienced."

"Do you mind telling me how long you have known the person who employed you?"

"I met him for the first time at five o'clock this afternoon on the Battery. He asked me if I wanted a job, and that is how I came to be engaged."

"That sounds plausible and I am inclined to believe you."

At this moment they were interrupted. There was a sound of oars, and leaving the cabin, Jed and his companion saw the boat of the harbor police under the side. It had in tow the boat in which Jed had come from shore.

"Was there any attempt to rob the yacht?" asked the captain of police.

"Yes, sir," answered the owner.

"Have you one of the thieves aboard?"

"No, sir."

"That's not true!" said the sallow-faced man, now a prisoner. "That boy came with us," and he pointed to Jed.

"Is that true?" asked the police captain.

"This boy was sent on board by the thieves, but he was quite ignorant of the character of his employer. He is a country boy, and was an innocent agent of the guilty parties."

"You are convinced then of his innocence?"

"Entirely so."

"We shall need his evidence against these men. Will you guarantee that it shall be forthcoming?"

"Yes, captain. I will give my name and his, and will call at your office tomorrow morning."

"That will answer."

The young man took out one of his cards, bearing the name of Schuyler Roper, and wrote Jed's name, which he had ascertained, underneath.

"You will be responsible for the boy's appearance, Mr. Roper?" said the officer respectfully, reading the name by the light of a lantern.

"Yes; he will stay with me."

This seemed satisfactory, and the boat rowed away.

"I am very much obliged to you for believing in my innocence, Mr. Roper," said Jed earnestly.

"You have an innocent face," responded the young man kindly. "I am sure you are a good boy."

"I hope you won't see any reason to doubt it. I am afraid I am putting you to trouble," continued Jed, realizing that he could not leave the yacht, and was thrown on the hospitality of the owner.

"Not at all. I can accommodate you easily. You must be tired, if you have been about the city all day."

Jed admitted that he was. In fact he felt very tired, and found it hard work to keep his eyes open.

"I have sleeping accommodations for six persons on board my yacht, so that I can easily provide for you. So far from giving me trouble I shall be glad of your company, though I don't expect any more visitors to-night."

Mr. Roper pointed out a comfortable bunk, and Jed lost no time in taking possession of it. He sank into a deep sleep, which was only broken by a gentle shake from his young host. As he opened his eyes, and they met the unusual surroundings, he was at first bewildered.

"Don't you know where you are?" asked Schuyler Roper, smiling. "Don't you remember boarding my yacht with felonious intent last night?"

"Yes," answered Jed with an answering smile. "I remember that I was taken prisoner."

"Then you are subject to my orders. When I am on a cruise we have meals aboard the yacht, but I am not keeping house now. If you will assist me, we'll direct our course to land and find breakfast somewhere."

Jed did not know much about a yacht, but he liked the water and proved very quick in comprehension, so that in a comparatively short time they had reached the Battery. Here Mr. Roper found two men whom he had engaged to help man the yacht, and leaving the Juno in their charge he walked up Broadway with Jed.

"We will take breakfast at the Astor House," he said.

"I dined there yesterday," replied Jed.

"You did!" exclaimed the other in a tone of surprise. "Yet you tell me you are penniless?"

"Yes, sir, but I fell in with a gentleman whom I knew at Sea Spray, a Mr. Foster."

"Not Howell Foster?"

"Yes."

"I know him very well. If he is a friend of yours, I shall feel that I am justified in reposing confidence in you."

Just then Mr. Foster entered the room.

"Good morning, Jed," he said in a friendly tone. "So you like the Astor well enough to come back?"

"I am here by invitation of Mr. Roper."

Mr. Foster, who was shortsighted, now for the first time observed Jed's companion.

"So you know Roper, too?" he said. "Why, he's one of my closest friends. When did you pick him up, Schuyler?"

"I caught him boarding my yacht on a marauding expedition last night," said Roper, smiling.

"Bless my soul! What do you mean?"

"Sit down and take breakfast with us, and I will explain."

"And what are you going to do with this desperate young man?" asked the broker at the end of the story.

"I shall invite him to accompany me to Bar Harbor on my yacht. But first we must call on the harbor police, as our testimony will be needed to convict the rascals who came near robbing me of five thousand dollars' worth of valuables."

CHAPTER XXX.

JED ENTERTAINS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Though the trial of the harbor thieves was expedited, it was a week before Jed and Mr. Roper were able to leave New York. Jed's testimony settled the matter, and the two thieves were sentenced to terms of five years' imprisonment.

"I'll get even with you yet, young fellow!" muttered the sallow-faced man, eyeing Jed with deep malignity as he left the witness-box.

"Where is your trunk?" asked Mr. Roper after their first visit to the office of the harbor police.

"I never owned one, Mr. Roper."

"Your valise, then."

"It is at a small hotel near the Battery."

"Get it and bring it on board the yacht."

Jed did so, and Mr. Roper asked to see it.

"You are poorly equipped, Jed," he said. "That reminds me that if I am going to monopolize your services I must pay you some salary. How will fifty dollars a month answer?"

"But, Mr. Roper, I can't earn as much as that."

"Perhaps not, but if I am willing to pay it, you can set your mind at rest. I will see that you are better provided with clothing, undergarments, et cetera. Here, give me a piece of paper."

Mr. Roper drew up a list of articles which he thought Jed might need—a very liberal list, by the way—and sent him with a note to his own tradesmen, with directions to supply him with such articles as he might select. He also gave him an order on his own tailor for a suit of clothes.

"But, Mr. Roper, it will take me a long time to pay for all these out of my wages," protested Jed.

Schuyler Roper laughed.

"My dear boy," he said, "I haven't the least idea of making you pay for them. Just look upon me as your older brother, who is able and willing to provide for you."

"I am deeply grateful to you, Mr. Roper," responded Jed earnestly. "I certainly stumbled into luck when I boarded your yacht."

"I don't know how it is," said Roper, as he eyed Jed thoughtfully, "you didn't seem a stranger to me even when I first saw you. It seemed natural for me to look after you. I am an only son, and you never knew what it was to have a brother. I begin to think that I have lost a great deal in being so much alone."

"You may be deceived in me, Mr. Roper. You know very little of me, and that is not at all to my advantage."

"Well, I admit that, Jed. Considering that I caught you in the act of robbing me, I may be said to have known you at your worst."

"You know nothing of my past life."

"You shall tell me all about it after a while, when we are not so busy."

Meanwhile Jed became familiar with his duties on board the yacht, and during the absence of Mr. Roper was regarded by the men as his representative.

No one could have treated him with more generous confidence than his new friend. Jed was intrusted at times with considerable sums for disbursements, and was proud of the confidence reposed in him. Of Mr. Roper, except that he appeared to be a rich young man, he knew next to nothing, till one day he fell in with his watering-place friend, Howell Foster.

"You are still with Schuyler?" he asked.

"Oh yes, sir. I am going with him to Bar Harbor."

"And then?"

"I believe he means to keep me with him."

"You are in luck. Schuyler is a generous, open-hearted young man, liberal to a fault, and ready to do anything for one he takes to. I suppose you know that he is rich?"

"I thought he must be."

"His father died two years since, leaving him half a million of dollars. He spends freely, but does not squander his money. He is paying for the college education of a poor boy in whom he feels an interest—the son of an old bookkeeper of his father's—as I happen to know. He is a favorite in society, but has never shown an inclination to marry."

"Is his mother living?" asked Jed.

"No; she died before his father. He is very much alone in the world."

"That is why he is so generous to me, I think."

"Perhaps so, but it is his nature to be kind. By the way, Jed, when my family comes back from Sea Spray I would like to have you call upon us. We live on Madison Avenue."

"Thank you, Mr. Foster. If I am in New York I shall be glad to do so."

"I begin to think I am getting into society," thought Jed. "It is not over three months since I left the Scranton poorhouse, and here I am adopted by one rich man and welcomed at the house of another."

It was natural that Jed should feel elated by his good luck. But he was not allowed to forget his early adversity, for on the fourth day after entering the service of Mr. Roper he met on Broadway, just above Chambers Street, his old enemy, Percy Dixon.

Percy was the first to recognize him.

"Oh it's you, is it?" he said in considerable surprise.

Jed smiled. He felt that he could afford to disregard Percy's impertinence.

"My dear friend Percy," he said. "How well you remember me!"

"Yes, I remember you, and so does Mr. Fogson of the Scranton poorhouse."

"Remember me to the kind old man!" said Jed comically.

"How soon are you going back?"

"Not very soon. Of course it would be pleasant to me to be able to see you every day, Percy, but——"

"You needn't flatter yourself that I would take any notice of you. What are you doing for a living?"

"I am going yachting in a few days."

"What! Oh, I understand. You have hired out as a sailor."

"Well no, not exactly."

"What yacht are you working on?"

"Perhaps you would like to visit it?"

"Yes, I would," said Percy, feeling puzzled and curious.

"Come to the Battery with me, then. We'd better board the next car."

Percy followed Jed into a Broadway car, and Jed, to his surprise, paid the fare.

"I was going to pay the fare," said Percy.

"Oh never mind!" returned Jed carelessly.

"I don't want to put you to expense."

"Oh! it's not worth minding."

Arrived at the Battery, Jed called a boatman and said, "Row me out to the Juno, beyond Governor's Island."

Jed leaned back in the boat, and Percy stared at him in wonder. When they reached the yacht one of the men produced a ladder, and Jed led the way on

board.

"Any orders, Mr. Gilman?" asked the sailor respectfully.

"No, Kimball; I haven't seen Mr. Roper since morning, and don't know if he wants anything done."

"Do you think you can spare me to go on shore for a couple of hours?"

"Yes, you may go."

Jed went to the side and said to the boatman, "You may take this man on shore, and come back in an hour and a half for my friend and myself."

"Now, Percy, allow me to offer you a little refreshment."

Jed went to the pantry and brought out some cold meat, bread and butter, and two bottles of ginger ale, with the necessary dishes.

"I can't offer you anything very tempting," he said, "but the boat ride may have given you an appetite for plain fare."

Percy could hardly conceal his surprise. He stared at Jed as if fascinated.

"Won't you get into trouble by making so free with your master's things?"

"Who told you I had a master?"

"Who owns this yacht?"

"Mr. Schuyler Roper."

"He must be rich."

"I hear that he is worth half a million dollars," said Jed in an off-hand manner.

"And how did you get in with him?" asked Percy rather enviously.

"It was an accident," answered Jed, by no means disposed to tell Percy the particulars of his first meeting with Mr. Roper.

"Suppose he should come now, what would he say to your making so free?"

"That he was glad to have me entertain my friends."

"You seem to be pretty sure of your footing with him."

"I have reason to be. He tells me to look upon him as an older brother."

"He may find you out some time," suggested Percy with disagreeable significance.

"What do you mean?"

"He may find out that his *younger brother* was raised in a poorhouse."

"I have no doubt he will learn it if he gets acquainted with you."

"What do you mean?" asked Percy coloring.

"That you would probably tell him. By the way, has Mr. Holbrook got home from Chicago yet?"

"I believe not. Do you expect he will take you back?"

"No; I prefer my present position. I shall probably sail for Bar Harbor with Mr. Roper on Saturday."

"It's strange how you've got on since you left the poorhouse," said Percy uncomfortably.

"Yes; I think even you will agree that I did well to leave it."

"Your luck may turn," added Percy hopefully.

"Perhaps it will, but I hope not."

Presently the boatman came back, and Jed sent Percy back to the city, paying the boatman in advance.

"It beats all how that pauper gets along!" reflected Percy, but from his expression the reflection gave him no pleasure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JED RETURNS GOOD FOR EVIL.

In the short time before the Juno left for Bar Harbor, Schuyler Roper became quite intimate with Jed. There was never a trace of condescension in his manner to his boy friend, but Jed was always treated as if in birth and position he was the equal of the young patrician. Together they walked about the city, and frequently dined together, always at some expensive hotel or restaurant.

"What time is it, Jed?" asked Mr. Roper one day as they were passing the Star Theatre.

"I am afraid I left my watch at home," answered Jed, smiling.

"Then we shall have to supply its place."

Schuyler Roper turned the corner of Fourteenth Street, and led the way to Tiffany's well-known establishment on the corner of Fifteenth Street and Union Square.

"Let us see some gold watches," he said to a salesman.

A tray of handsome timepieces was produced.

"How expensive a watch would you like, sir? Is it for yourself?"

"No, for this young gentleman. Look over these watches, Jed, and see what one you like best."

Jed made choice of a very neat gold watch with a handsome dial.

"What is the price?" asked Mr. Roper.

"A hundred and twenty-five dollars."

Jed opened his eyes wide in astonishment. A hundred and twenty-five dollars seemed to him a very large sum, and so unaccustomed was he to

expensive jewelry that he had not known that there were any watches so costly.

"Very well; we will take it. Show me some gold chains."

Choice was made of a fifty-dollar gold chain. It was attached to the watch, and Mr. Roper, handing it to Jed, said, "Put it in your pocket."

"Do you really mean the watch and chain for me?" asked Jed, almost incredulous.

"Certainly."

"How can I thank you, Mr. Roper?" said Jed gratefully.

"My dear boy," rejoined Roper kindly, "I want your appearance to do me credit. That *you* will do me credit I feel confident."

It was about this time that Jed met an old acquaintance—one whom he had no reason to remember with kindly feelings. He had occasion to go across Cortlandt Street ferry, when on board the boat he saw in front of him a figure that seemed familiar. He walked forward till he could see the face of the young man to whom it belonged. Then it flashed upon him that it was Maurice Graham, the young man who had invited him to his room on Twenty-Seventh Street and robbed him of his small stock of money.

Now that the tide had turned, Jed did not feel so incensed against the fellow as at first. Still he determined to let him understand that he knew exactly how he had been swindled.

He touched Graham on the shoulder, and the young man wheeled round with an apprehensive look, which he did not lose when he saw and recognized Jed.

"Did you touch me?" he asked, with an evident intention of ignoring Jed's acquaintance.

"Yes, Mr. Graham. We parted rather suddenly, you remember," said Jed significantly.

"Oh, I see. You are——"

"Jed Gilman."

"I was wondering what became of you. I was called up town to the house of a sick friend that evening, and when I went back the next day Mrs. Gately told me you had gone away."

"Indeed! Did she tell you that I was robbed of thirty-five dollars during the night, and that I awoke penniless?"

"No," answered Graham faintly. "I am surprised."

"I thought you might be. Are you in the habit of borrowing money from people who are asleep?"

"What do you mean? You don't think I took the money?"

"Yes, I think you did."

"Why, didn't I tell you that I spent the night with a sick friend in—in Eighty-Seventh Street. How could I rob you?"

"You came back during the evening and found me asleep."

"That's a mistake!" said Graham quickly.

"It is true. Mrs. Gately let you in, as she informed me the next morning."

Maurice Graham looked very much disconcerted, and looked eagerly to the Jersey shore, which they were fast approaching.

"Do you know that I would have had no breakfast if Mrs. Gately had not taken compassion on me?"

"You don't look—very destitute—now."

"I am not. I have been lucky enough to find a good position. But that thirty-five dollars belonged to me. How much of it can you return to me?"

Maurice Graham colored and looked embarrassed.

"I—the fact is," he stammered, "I'm almost broke."

"Is this true?"

"On my honor I've only got a dollar and ten cents in my pocket, and I don't know what will become of me when that is gone."

"You have got rid of it very quick."

"I've been a fool," said Graham gloomily. "I spent it mostly on pool and drinks. Then of course I've had to live."

"But your situation——"

"I haven't any."

"Perhaps you will meet another boy from the country."

"I treated you awful mean—I know I did," burst out Graham, "and I've been very sorry for it. I've often wished that I had left you five dollars."

"Well, that would have helped me. But don't you think it would have been better to have left me the whole?"

"Yes, it would; but I am very unlucky."

"I am afraid you don't deserve good luck. Isn't there anything you can do?"

"Yes."

"Can't you find another broker to take you in his office?"

"I never was in a broker's office," confessed Graham.

"What was your business, then? I suppose you had some way of making a living?"

"I am a barber by trade, but I got tired of the confinement, and so I thought I'd become a sport. I started out with a hundred dollars which it took me a year to save up, and I got rid of it in two weeks. Then I fell in with you."

"And with my thirty-five dollars."

"Yes."

"The best thing you can do is to go back to your business."

"I would if I could."

"Why can't you?"

"Because my razors are in hock."

It is the custom of journeymen barbers to supply their own razors and a pair of shears for hair-cutting.

"I suppose that means in pawn?"

"Yes."

"When can you get a place if you get your razors back?"

"I can go to work to-morrow."

"What sum will get them out?"

"Four dollars and a half."

"Where are they?"

"In a pawnshop on the Bowery."

"Come with me and I will get them out for you if you will promise to go to work."

"I will," answered Graham earnestly. "I'll give you my word I will."

"Come back on the next boat, then, and I will go with you to the pawnshop."

"It will take up your time. You don't mean to give me in charge when we reach New York?" said Graham apprehensively.

"No; I am willing to give you a fresh chance. I hope you will improve it."

Jed took out his watch to note the time.

"Is that watch yours? It's a beauty," said Graham.

"Yes; it came from Tiffany's."

"Did you have it when I met you?"

"No; if I had, that would have gone the same way as the money."

"You must be awfully lucky!"

"I suppose I have been. At any rate I have been honest."

"Honesty seems to pay. I must try it."

"I advise you to," said Jed, smiling.

When Jed parted from Graham it occurred to him that he would call on Mrs. Gately. She had provided him with a breakfast when he needed one, and seemed kindly disposed towards him.

When he rang the bell of the small house on Twenty-Seventh Street, Mrs. Gately herself came to the door.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?"

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Gately?"

The old lady peered through her glasses.

"Why bless me!" she said, "if it isn't the young man from the country. But you're dressed so fine I hardly knew you. I hope you're prosperin'."

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Gately. I have been quite lucky, but I was pretty low in spirits as well as in pockets when I left you."

"Why, you're lookin' fine. Won't you stay for supper? Luella Dickinson will be home soon—she that tends at Macy's. I've often spoken to her about you. Luella's very romantic."

"I am not, Mrs. Gately, and I'm afraid I can't stop. I must be on board my yacht in an hour."

"Your yacht! Bless me, you don't mean to say you've got a yacht?"

"Well, it belongs to a friend, but we enjoy it together."

"Have you seen the bad young man who robbed you?"

"Yes; I saw him this afternoon."

"You don't say! Did you have him arrested?"

"No; I helped him get some things out of pawn."

"That's a real Christian act, but I don't think I'd have done it. You deserve to prosper. I wish you could stay and meet Luella."

"Some other time, Mrs. Gately."

At supper the landlady told Miss Dickinson of Jed's call. Luella expressed great regret that she had not seen him.

"I should fall in love with Mr. Gilman, I know I would," she said. "Why didn't you ask him to call at Macy's?"

"I will when I see him again."

CHAPTER XXXII. AT BAR HARBOR.

About eleven o'clock one forenoon the yacht Juno came to anchor in the harbor of Mount Desert.

Jed gazed admiringly at the rugged shores, the picturesque village, the background of hills, the smaller islands surrounding the main island, like the satellites of a larger planet.

"It is beautiful!" he said. "I never dreamed of such a place."

"Yes," said Roper, "it is by far the most attractive island on the American coast. I think we shall find it pleasant to stay here for a time."

"I shall enjoy it at any rate," said Jed. "Where shall we stay?"

"I generally go to the Newport. It is one of the smaller hotels, but its location is excellent, being very near the water. Besides, I am expecting my aunt, Mrs. Frost, to arrive in a few days. She always goes to the Newport, and has the same room every year. There is the hotel yonder."

Mr. Roper pointed out a pleasant but unpretentious hostelry on the left of the pier.

"The large house farther up the hill is Rodick's," he said. "Rodick is an old name at Mount Desert, and the island just across from the wharf, separated by a bar, was once called Rodick's island."

The yacht was anchored, and Jed and Mr. Roper were rowed to shore. They secured rooms at the Newport, and walked up the hill.

As they passed the post-office Schuyler Roper said, "I will see if there are any letters awaiting me. There may be one from my aunt."

Jed waited at the door. Mr. Roper came out, holding a letter which he regarded with some curiosity.

"Here is a letter in an unknown hand, post-marked Scranton," he said. "I don't know any person living there."

"I do," said Jed. "It was my old home."

"Then why should it be addressed to me? It ought to have been sent to you."

"Will you let me see the handwriting?" asked Jed.

His heart beat a little rapidly, for he recognized the hand as that of Percy Dixon.

"I know who it is from," he said.

"Is it from a friend of yours?"

"No, an enemy."

"I don't understand."

"You will understand when you come to read it, Mr. Roper. It is from a boy whom I entertained on the yacht three days before we sailed for Bar Harbor. He has probably written you in the hope of injuring me."

"Does he know anything to your disadvantage then?"

"Not to the disadvantage of my character. But please read the letter, Mr. Roper, and then you will understand."

Schuyler Roper's curiosity was aroused, and he cut open the envelope. The letter, which was written in a schoolboy hand, read thus:

DEAR SIR:

Though I am a stranger to you, I will take the liberty to write and let you know something of the boy who is travelling with you. He is not fit to associate with a gentleman like yourself, for he was brought up in the poorhouse in this place, and lived here till four months ago, when he ran away, and has been living since by hook or by crook. He has a great deal of cheek, and that is what has helped him to push himself in among people who are far above him.

Perhaps you may like to know who I am. My father, Squire Dixon, is a prominent man in Scranton, and is Overseer of the Poor, which makes him a sort of guardian of Jed Gilman. He could force him to go back to his old home, but the boy gave so much trouble, being naturally headstrong and rebellious, that he thinks it best to let him follow his own course. Probably Jed will some time apply to be taken back to his old home, as he is likely to be found out to be an impostor sooner or later.

I have taken the trouble to write you because my father thinks it very proper that you should know the character of the boy whom you have taken into your employ. When I was in New York lately he invited me to go on board of your yacht in order to show off. He made as free as if the yacht were his own, treating me to a lunch, and ordering the men around as if he owned the yacht. I couldn't help being amused, remembering that he was nothing but a pauper a few months since.

Excuse me for taking up so much of your valuable time. I have no ill-will against Jed, but I should think better of him if he would keep his place, and not try to intrude into fashionable society.

Yours respectfully,
PERCY DIXON.

Jed noticed the face of Mr. Roper rather anxiously when he was reading this letter.

"Will it prejudice him against me?" he asked himself.

He felt that in that case he should indeed be depressed, for he had come to have a sincere attachment for his patron. He was reassured by the smile that lighted up the young man's countenance as he finished reading the letter.

"This letter appears to have been written by a great friend of yours, Jed," he said. "He is a great friend of mine, too, for he seems afraid that I shall be injured by associating with you, and so puts me on my guard."

"I thought as much," said Jed. "I suppose he tells you that I was brought up in the Scranton poorhouse."

"Yes; is this true?"

"Yes," answered Jed soberly.

"But how did it happen? Did your parents lose their property?"

"I know nothing of them, Mr. Roper. I was only two years of age when I was placed in the poorhouse. Mr. and Mrs. Avery were in charge. They were kind people and took good care of me."

"Did they never tell you the circumstances of your being placed in the institution?"

"No; but Mrs. Avery always promised that she would tell me all she knew on my sixteenth birthday."

"Are you not sixteen yet?"

"Yes; but when I reached that age Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were in charge of the poorhouse. Mr. and Mrs. Avery were removed by the father of this Percy Dixon who has written to you."

"What sort of people are they?"

"Mean, selfish and unkind to the poor people who are unfortunate enough to be under their charge. Mr. Fogson tried to tyrannize over me, and I rebelled."

"I can't blame you," said Roper.

"Finally I ran away, as Percy writes. It was high time I did, for I felt able to earn my own living, and was ashamed to be supported by the town, though I am sure I did work enough to pay for the miserable board I got at the poorhouse.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Avery were in charge I did not feel my position. It seemed to me as if I were living with kind friends. When they went away I realized that I was a pauper. Indeed, Mr. and Mrs. Fogson reminded me of it half a dozen times a day."

"So you ran away? What did you do first?"

"Perhaps you will laugh, Mr. Roper, but I became an actor."

Schuyler Roper looked amazed.

"But how on earth did you get a chance to go on the stage?" he asked.

"Through an actor whose acquaintance I made. He was playing in 'The Gold King.' The young actor who took the boy's part was taken suddenly sick, and they tried me. The manager seemed satisfied, and I played in it till the end of the season."

"There must be something in you, Jed, or you could not have met the requirements of such a position. Well, and what next?"

"I went to Sea Spray and was given the charge of a young boy, boarding at the Spray Hotel, by his father. I lost the place through the same Percy Dixon who wrote to you."

"How was that?"

"He informed the boy's aunt, in the absence of his father at Chicago, that I was only a pauper, and Miss Maria Holbrook discharged me at once."

"Do you think Mr. Holbrook would have discharged you?"

"I don't think so, for the boy was very fond of me."

"So am I, Jed," said Mr. Roper affectionately, "and I shall not allow young Dixon to separate us."

"Thank you, Mr. Roper," replied Jed gratefully.

"As to your history, you ought to know more of it. When we leave Bar Harbor I will let you go back to Scranton and obtain from the Averys all the information you can. You may get a clew that may lead to a discovery of your parentage."

"I hope so," answered Jed. "I don't like to feel that I have no relations."

"Meanwhile you may take this letter of your friend Percy's and answer it as you see fit."

A few days later Percy Dixon received the following letter:

MY DEAR AND CONSIDERATE FRIEND PERCY:

Mr. Roper has asked me to answer your kind letter. He appreciates your interest in him, but he doesn't seem to think that my company will injure him as much as you imagine. He thinks I shall enjoy myself better with him than in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson, and therefore won't send me away. We are staying at the Newport House, and enjoying ourselves very much. If you come down this way call on us, and I will give you a good dinner. Tell Mr. and Mrs. Fogson not to worry about me, as I am well and happy.

Yours truly,
JED GILMAN.

"I never saw such cheek!" said Percy in mortified anger as he tore Jed's letter to pieces. "It is strange how that young pauper prospers. But it won't always last!" and this reflection afforded him some satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE POORHOUSE RECEIVES TWO VISITORS.

Let us change the scene to the Scranton poorhouse. Mr. Fogson has just come in from splitting wood. It was a task to which he was very much averse, but he had not been able to find any one to fill Jed's place.

"Drat that boy!" he said, as he sank into a chair.

"What boy?"

"Jed Gilman. He ought to be here at work instead of roaming round doing no good to himself or anybody else."

"Perhaps he would be glad to come back. I dare say he has seen the time when he didn't know where his next meal was coming from," rejoined Mrs. Fogson hopefully.

"I hope so."

"I don't know as I want him back," went on the woman.

"I do! He's good for splitting wood, if he ain't good for anything else."

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, and Percy Dixon entered the house.

"How do you do, Master Percy?" said Mrs. Fogson deferentially. "I am always glad to see you enter our humble house."

"We were just talking of Jed Gilman before you came in," added Fogson.

"I saw him two days since," said Percy.

"You did!" exclaimed Fogson eagerly. "Where was he?"

"In the streets of New York. You know I went to the city Tuesday."

"What was he doing—blackening boots for a living?"

"Not much! I wish he was. That boy is about the luckiest chap I ever set eyes on."

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Fogson curiously.

"Invited me to go on board his yacht."

"What!"

"That's just what he did."

"He was bluffing. He wanted to deceive you."

"No he didn't, for I accepted his invitation and went on board."

"You don't say! Jed Gilman got a yacht!" exclaimed Fogson, his eyes almost protruding from their sockets.

"Well, I don't say it's his, but he acts as if it were. He hired a boat to take me out to the Juno—that's the name of the yacht, and it's a regular beauty—and took me on board and treated me to some lunch. He ordered the men about just as if he were a gentleman."

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs. Fogson, looking surprised and scandalized. "Did he explain how he came to have anything to do with the boat?"

"Yes; he said the owner had taken a fancy to him and was taking care of him."

"Did he say who the owner was?"

"Yes; it's Schuyler Roper, a rich young man living in New York."

"Well, what next?"

"I stayed on board an hour or more, and then went back to the city."

"It seems strange how that boy gets along. Mr. Roper will find him out sooner or later."

"I should say he would. I've written him a letter, and I brought it along, thinking you might like to hear it read."

So Percy read the letter already laid before the reader in the last chapter.

Mr. and Mrs. Fogson nodded delighted approval as Percy read his exposure of Jed's humble past.

"I do say that's about the best-written letter I ever heard," said Mrs. Fogson, as Percy concluded.

"Do you think so?" asked Percy with a gratified smile.

"Think so! I am sure of it. Master Percy, I had no idea you had so much talent. Did it take you long to write it?"

"Oh no, I just dashed it off in a few minutes," answered Percy carelessly.

"You ought to be a lawyer; you do express things so neat. Don't you think so, Simeon?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fogson. I always thought Percy a smart boy. But where are you going to send the letter?"

"To Bar Harbor. Jed said that they were going there in a day or two. I thought Mr. Roper ought to know what a low fellow he has with him."

"Of course he ought. You've only done your duty in informing him against Jed. When are you going to mail the letter?"

"To-night. It'll go off the first thing to-morrow morning."

"I'm very much obliged to you for letting us hear the letter, Master Percy. I expect it'll cook Jed's goose."

"Probably Mr. Roper will send him off as soon as he reads it. I'd just like to be there when it is read."

Percy left the poorhouse and went on his way to the post-office. He sealed the letter, first reading it over again to himself complacently, and inclined to agree with the Fogsons that it was a decidedly clever piece of composition.

He had hardly walked a hundred yards when he met a quiet-looking man of medium height dressed in a gray suit.

"Young man," said the stranger, "am I on my way to the poorhouse?"

"Well, sir," replied Percy jocosely, "that depends on your habits."

The other smiled.

"I see you are a young man of original humor. Is the building used as a poorhouse near by?"

"Yes, sir, that is it," said Percy, pointing to the forlorn-looking dwelling he had just left.

"Thank you, sir," said the stranger, and resumed his walk.

"I wonder what he wants," speculated Percy. "Perhaps he is a relation of Mr. and Mrs. Fogson. I wish I had asked him."

The quiet-looking man was soon at the outer door of the poorhouse, and knocked, for there was no bell.

Mrs. Fogson answered the knock, and surveyed the stranger with some curiosity.

"I believe this is the Scranton poorhouse."

"Yes, sir."

"And you, perhaps, are in charge."

"Yes, sir. Did you wish to see any of the paupers?" asked Mrs. Fogson, thinking that the visitor, who was inexpensively dressed, might be related to some of her boarders.

"First let me inquire how long you have been in your present position, Mrs. _____"

"Fogson."

"Exactly, Mrs. Fogson."

"Me and Fogson have been here about a year."

The stranger's countenance fell.

"Only a year!" he repeated. "Who was here before you?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Avery; but the Overseer of the Poor thought there was need of a change, and persuaded me and Fogson to come here."

"Very obliging of you!" murmured the visitor. "Can you tell me how long Mr. and Mrs. Avery were here?"

"Fifteen years."

The stranger brightened up.

"They live in the village—in a small four-room house not far from the post-office."

"Thank you," and the visitor took out a note-book and wrote something in it. He stood a moment silent, and then said, in a hesitating tone, "Is there a boy in the institution named Jed Gilman?"

Instantly the face of Mrs. Fogson expressed surprise and curiosity.

"There was!" she answered, "but he's run away."

"Run away!" ejaculated the stranger, looking disappointed.

"Yes; he was a bad, rebellious boy. Me and Fogson couldn't do anything with him."

"It is very sad," said the visitor with a dubious smile.

"Do you want to see him particular?" asked Mrs. Fogson.

"Yes; I wished to see him."

"Has he got into any scrape?" asked she with malicious eagerness.

The visitor eyed Mrs. Fogson closely, and saw at once that she was Jed's enemy.

"That's about the size of it," he answered. "Of course as you are his friend you would rather not tell me where he is."

"Who said I was his friend? I'll tell you with pleasure. Percy Dixon came and told me only a few minutes since. He's probably at Bar Harbor, or he'll get there some time this week."

"Bar Harbor!" repeated the visitor in evident surprise.

"Yes; he's working for a Mr. Roper—Mr. Schuyler Roper. He went down there on a yacht. If you want to arrest him, or anything, you'd better go down there right off, for Percy Dixon has written to Mr. Roper that Jed was brought up in the poorhouse, and will probably get bounced very soon."

"Thank you very much for telling me, Mrs. Fogson. I am glad you have put me on his track."

"You don't mind telling me what he has been doing?" asked the lady.

"No; I might defeat the ends of justice by doing so."

"Just so!" rejoined Mrs. Fogson. "I do wonder what that boy's done?" she said to herself as the stranger turned into the public road. "Very likely it's burglary, or forgery."

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE DETECTIVE.

The man in drab smiled to himself as he left the presence of Mrs. Fogson.

"I wonder whether that woman's husband has her amiable traits?" he speculated. "If so, the Scranton poor must be made very uncomfortable."

As he reached the village he met Percy Dixon once more. Percy had an ungovernable curiosity, and he crossed the street to intercept the stranger.

"I suppose you found the poorhouse," he said suggestively.

"Yes; I could not miss it after your clear directions."

"Are you related to Mr. and Mrs. Fogson?" asked Percy, rather boldly.

"Well no," answered the stranger with a smile. "I haven't the honor."

"Have you any relations among the paupers?"

"Not that I am aware of. However, I called to inquire after one of them—a boy."

"Jed Gilman?" said Percy eagerly.

"Yes; I believe that is his name. Are you acquainted with him?"

"I have known him for years."

"I suppose he is a friend of yours?"

"Not much. Do you think I would be friends with a pauper?"

"I don't know. I see no reason why not if he is a nice boy."

"But Jed isn't a nice boy. He's an artful, forward, presuming young jackanapes, and was awfully troublesome."

"I am sorry to hear it. Mrs. Fogson seems to think of him very much as you do."

"I should think she would. She and Fogson couldn't do anything with him."

"Mrs. Fogson says he isn't there now."

"No; he ran away after making a brutal assault on Fogson."

The man in drab felt an inclination to smile, but suppressed it.

"I don't know as I ought to have spoken against him," continued Percy with a cunning look of inquiry. "You may be after him."

The man in drab paused a moment, then assuming a look of mystery, said, "Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes," answered Percy eagerly.

"Come here, then."

Percy drew near, and the other whispered mysteriously, "*I am a detective!*"

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Percy, gazing at him with a species of awe, begotten of his idea of detectives as introduced into books which he had read.

The other nodded.

"And I am after Jed Gilman!" he continued.

"Is that so?" said the delighted Percy. "What has he done?"

"That is a secret which I am not permitted to reveal at present."

"Do you want to find him?"

"Very much."

"Then I'll tell you where he is. He's gone to Bar Harbor—in Maine, you know."

The detective nodded.

"He went on a yacht—the Juno—owned by Mr. Schuyler Roper—a rich New York gentleman."

"But how did he get into such company?"

"Oh, Mr. Roper took pity on him and gave him a place."

"Then you think he is comfortably situated?"

"Yes, but he won't be long."

"Why not?"

"Because I have written a letter to Mr. Roper, telling him Jed's real character. I expect he'll be bounced when that letter arrives."

"That would upset all my plans and enable him to escape."

Percy looked perplexed and disappointed.

"I am sorry for that," he said. "I guess I'd better write again and tell him to keep Jed another week."

"Perhaps you had better do so. Say that—— But no. I will telegraph to him to keep Jed with him till I arrive."

"That'll do better. You couldn't possibly tell me what Jed has done?"

"Not at present."

"You'll let me know sometime?"

"I think I shall be able to gratify your curiosity before long."

"I'll give you my address, and you can write to me. I wish I knew whether Jed had stolen anything or not."

"I cannot say a word! My lips are sealed!" said the detective in a solemn tone.

Percy was impressed. The man in drab quite came up to his idea of a detective.

"By the way," said his companion, "I want to call on Mr. and Mrs. Avery, who, I understand, know something of the boy's early life."

"They live there—in that small house. I'll go with you."

"No, I prefer to go alone. One can't be too careful."

"All right," said Percy. "I wonder what under the canopy Jed's been doing? It's likely he'll have to go to jail."

CHAPTER XXXV.

MRS. AVERY'S STORY.

The detective crossed the street, walked up a tiny footpath and rang the bell of the small house.

Mrs. Avery came to the door, a gentle-faced little woman with white hair. She looked inquiringly at the visitor.

"Mrs. Avery, I believe?" said the man in drab.

"That is my name."

"I would like the favor of a few words with you, madam."

"Come in then," and she led the way to a modest sitting-room.

"My husband," she said, introducing him to a kindly old man, as white-haired as herself.

"My name is Fletcher," said the visitor, "and I have come to you for information. But first, am I right in my belief that you were once in charge of the Scranton poorhouse?"

"Yes, sir. My husband and I had charge of it for fifteen years. We should have been there now, but for Squire Dixon, the new Overseer of the Poor, who wanted the place for some friends of his, Mr. and Mrs. Fogson."

"I have had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Fogson," said Fletcher with a smile. "I am sure, now that I have seen you both, that the change was for the worse."

"I fear that the poor people are very shabbily treated," said Mrs. Avery gravely. "It makes me feel very badly, but what can I do? Squire Dixon sustains them, and he has everything to say. But you say you want some information. I shall be glad to tell you what I can."

"I want information touching a boy, now perhaps sixteen years of age, bearing the name of Jed Gilman."

Mr. and Mrs. Avery immediately showed signs of interest.

"He has left the poorhouse," said Mr. Avery.

"So I am told."

"Do you inquire as a friend of the poor boy?" asked Mrs. Avery.

"Emphatically his friend. But first tell me, what kind of a boy is he?"

"A fine, manly, spirited lad, warm-hearted and attractive."

The detective looked pleased, but surprised.

"That doesn't correspond with what Mrs. Fogson told me," he said.

"I suppose not. She and her husband tried to bully Jed and overwork him, till he was compelled to run away. I don't know where he is now."

"But I do. He is at Bar Harbor, in the company of a rich gentleman from New York, and I believe employed on his yacht."

"I am thankful to hear it."

"But what I wish to learn are the circumstances attending his being placed at the poorhouse. I suppose you remember them?"

"Oh yes, as well as if it were yesterday, though it is fourteen years since."

"Go on, madam, I am all interest."

"It was a cold evening in November," began Mrs. Avery reflectively, "and I was about to lock up, though it was but nine o'clock, for we kept early hours at the poorhouse, when there was a knock at the door. I opened it and saw before me a young woman of dark hair and complexion, holding by the hand a pretty boy of about two years of age.

"Can you give me and my boy a night's lodging?" she asked.

"We often had such applications, and never sent away a decent-looking person. So I said yes readily enough and the two entered. They seemed hungry, and though it was late for us I gave them some bread and milk, of which the child in particular partook heartily. I asked the young woman some questions but she was very close-mouthed.

"'Wait till morning,' she said. 'The boy and I are very tired.'

"I asked no more but gave them a bed, and I suppose they both slept well. I was able to give them a small room to themselves.

"In the morning when I entered I found only the boy. The young woman had gone, but pinned to the child's clothing was this note:

"'I am obliged to leave the boy with you for the present. I hope you will take care of him. His name is Jed Gilman. Some time he will probably be called for. Don't try to find me for it will be useless.'

"That was all. Mr. Avery and myself were dumfounded, but we had taken a fancy to the boy and resolved to keep him. There was some difficulty about it, for he was not legally entitled to be brought up at the town's cost. However, Mr. Avery and I agreed to pay part of the expense for the first year, and after that he was looked upon as one of the regular inmates and cared for as such."

"And the young woman never called again?"

"Never."

"Nor sent you any message, oral or written?"

"Never."

"Was there any article of dress, or any ornament, left with the child that might help to identify it?"

"Yes. Wait here a minute and I will show you something which I have carefully preserved from that day to this."

CHAPTER XXXVI. "WHO WAS JED?"

Mrs. Avery went up stairs to her own room, but reappeared in five minutes. She had in her hand an old-fashioned gold locket.

"This," she said, "was attached to the neck of the boy when he came into our hands."

"Have you opened it?" asked the detective eagerly. "Is there a picture inside?"

"There are two miniatures—one on each side."

She opened the locket, and it proved to be as she said.

One of these was a miniature of a young and handsome man, apparently thirty years of age, the other of a young lady with a very sweet and attractive face, probably five years younger.

"These must represent the parents of the boy Jed," said the detective.

"So we concluded—Mr. Avery and myself."

"Does the lady bear any resemblance to the girl who brought the child to you?"

"Not the slightest. The girl was common in appearance. She probably filled the position of a servant or nursemaid."

"Did it occur to you that she might be in any way related to the child?"

"Not for a moment. He was evidently the child of parents wealthy or well to do."

"Did you form any conjectures relative to her or her object in bringing you the child?"

"No. There was nothing to serve as a clue. It was all guesswork on our part. Still the thought did occur to us that the child had been stolen or abducted from his people for some reason unknown to us."

The detective hesitated a moment, and then, having apparently made up his mind to confide in the worthy couple, said: "Your guess was very near the truth. The child, I have every reason to believe, was stolen from its mother—the father was dead—through the machinations of an uncle who wanted the boy's title and estate."

"Title!" exclaimed Mrs. Avery, in great surprise.

"Yes. This boy I believe to be the only son of the late Sir Charles Fenwick, of Fenwick Hall, Gloucestershire, England."

"Well, well!" ejaculated Mrs. Avery. "Then if the boy had his rights would he be Sir Jed Gilman?"

"No," answered the detective smiling. "He has no more claim to the name Jed Gilman than I have."

"What is his real name?"

"Robert Fenwick, as I have every reason to believe."

"Why has there been no search for him till now?"

"There has been a search covering all the intervening years; but the mother, who is still living, had no information to guide her, and the search has been a groping in the dark."

"And did the wicked uncle get the title and estate?" asked Mrs. Avery.

"Yes. He is enjoying both now."

"Is it a large estate?"

"It would not be considered large in England. Probably it amounts to five thousand pounds annual rental."

"Five thousand pounds!" said Mrs. Avery.

"Yes, or in our money about twenty-five thousand dollars."

"And this large estate ought to belong to poor Jed?"

"I submit that, if so, he will not need to be called poor Jed."

"And you say that the mother is living?"

"She is living, and in New York. She is comfortably established at the Windsor Hotel on Fifth Avenue. It is by her that I am employed. This is my card."

He drew out a small card bearing the name

JAMES PEAKE.

"Yes. I am an American," he said in reply to a question by Mrs. Avery. "I am a New York detective, and was detailed for this work by Inspector Byrnes."

"What sort of a person is Jed's mother?" asked Mrs. Avery.

"Still a beautiful woman, though she cannot be far from forty years of age."

"Does she look like the picture in the locket?"

"There is considerable resemblance—of course, making allowance for the difference in the ages of the two. This locket, Mrs. Avery, is most important, and will, I think, establish the identity of Jed Gilman with the stolen heir of the Fenwick estate. Will you permit me to take it and show it to Lady Fenwick?"

"Has she a title, too?"

"Certainly. She was the wife of Sir Charles Fenwick."

"And what is the name of the wicked uncle?"

"Guy Fenwick. He is known as Sir Guy Fenwick, but probably, almost positively, has no rightful claim to the title."

"Does he know that you are looking for his nephew?"

"I presume he has taken measures to keep acquainted with all the movements of Lady Fenwick."

"I wonder how the girl came to give the boy the name of Jed Gilman?"

"I think I can explain this. The name of this treacherous nursemaid was Jane Gilman. She selected a name as near to her own as possible. You say you have neither seen nor heard anything of this girl since Jed was left in your hands?"

"We have heard nothing whatever."

At this moment there was a ring at the door-bell—a sharp, quick, impatient ring.

Mrs. Avery answered it.

She came back, her face showing excitement.

"It is a woman of middle age," she said, "and she, too, has come to make inquiries about Jed Gilman."

The detective also looked excited.

"Do you think," he asked, "it can be Jane Gilman herself come back after all these years?"

"That's it!" said Mrs. Avery, her face lighting up. "I wondered where I had seen her face before. Now, though she is so much older, I recognize in this middle-aged woman the girl who brought Jed to the door fourteen years ago."

"Bring her in here, hear what she has to say, and place me somewhere, so that, myself unseen, I can hear what she says."

This was what the detective said in a quick, decided tone.

"Very well, sir, go in there. It is a small bedroom. You can keep the door ajar."

The detective lost no time in concealing himself.

The woman came in. She was a stout, florid-complexioned woman, rather showily dressed, with the look of an Englishwoman of the middle class.

Before we proceed to record the interview that took place between Mr. and Mrs. Avery and herself we must go back again to the poorhouse, and our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Fogson.

Twenty minutes after the departure of James Peake, the detective, this woman knocked at the door of the poorhouse.

Her summons was answered by Mrs. Fogson.

"What's wanted?" asked the poorhouse matron, looking inquisitively at the new arrival.

"Is there a boy named Jed Gilman living here?" asked the woman eagerly.

"Jed Gilman again!" repeated Mrs. Fogson. "What do you want of Jed Gilman?"

"Answer my question first, if you please."

"Such a boy was living here till lately, but he became very troublesome and finally ran away."

"Then he is not here now?" said the woman, looking very much disappointed.

"No, but I expect he'll have to come back some time. A bad penny generally returns. You haven't told me what you have to do with him?"

"Then I will tell you. I was the person who brought him here fourteen years ago."

"You don't say so?" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson, her little bead-like eyes sparkling with curiosity. "Was he your child?"

"Certainly not, but he was my brother's child."

"And what was your object in bringing him here?"

"My brother was dead, and the child was thrown upon me for support," answered the woman after a little hesitation. "I could not support him, and so brought him where I thought he would have a home. But you are not the woman who was in charge of the poorhouse at that time."

"No; that was Mrs. Avery."

"And is Mrs. Avery still living?"

"Yes; she lives in a small house in the village."

"I will go and see her."

But this did not suit the views of Mrs. Fogson, who was curious to hear more about the antecedents of Jed.

"Won't you come in and take a cup of tea?" she asked with unusual hospitality.

"I don't care for tea—it's slops," answered the visitor. "If you could give me a thimbleful of whiskey I wouldn't mind taking it. When I am tired and dragged out it goes to the right spot."

"Yes, I can give you a glass," answered Mrs. Fogson. "Me and Fogson generally keeps a little in case of sickness, though we wouldn't have it known, as this is a temperance town."

"You are safe with me, I won't mention it," said the caller.

She then learned that Jed was probably at Bar Harbor; but Mrs. Fogson found out very little from her in return. After a few minutes the strange woman set out on her walk to the Avery cottage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JANE GILMAN.

The visitor took a seat in the rocking-chair offered her by Mrs. Avery.

"Do you remember me?" she asked, throwing back her veil so as to give an unobstructed view of her full, florid face.

"Are you the girl who brought the boy Jed to me fourteen years ago?"

"The same. I don't find you in your old place."

"No; we—my husband and I—left the poor farm about a year since. Have you been there?"

"Yes, I saw the new woman, and a spiteful piece she is, I'll be bound."

Mrs. Avery smiled.

"I don't admire Mrs. Fogson," she said, "but I suppose that is natural."

"She tells me the boy is no longer in the poorhouse."

"No."

"Can you tell me why he left?"

"He was ill-treated by Mr. and Mrs. Fogson."

"That woman tells me he was very troublesome."

"We never found him so, and up to a year ago he was under our charge."

"I surmised as much. Then he has grown up a good boy?"

"Excellent. I feel great affection for Jed."

"That is gratifying to my feelings, seeing I am his aunt."

Mrs. Avery regarded her visitor with surprise.

"Do you claim Jed as your nephew?" she asked.

"Certainly. He is the son of my only brother."

But for her interview with the detective Mrs. Avery would have believed this story. As it was, she did not choose to dispute it. She only sought to draw out her visitor so as to understand better her object in calling.

"Are you willing to explain why it was that you were led to place your nephew under my care?"

"Certainly. There is no secret about that *now*. My brother, who was a blacksmith, failed, and was unable to support the boy."

"What was your brother's name?"

"Jedediah Gilman. That is why I desired to have the boy called Jed Gilman, after his father. My name is Jane Gilman."

"Then you are not married?"

"No," said Miss Gilman. "Not but I might have been married half a dozen times if I had wanted to. But the men are a shiftless lot, in my opinion."

"Not all of them. I never charged my husband with being shiftless."

"Oh, well, there are exceptions. But I liked my freedom, so I am Jane Gilman still. I may change my mind yet, and get married. There's a many after me, and I am only thirty-two."

Mrs. Avery was too polite to question her statement, but privately decided that the other was ten years older.

"Are you an American?" she asked.

"No, I'm English, and I'm proud to own it."

"Was Jed born in England?"

Jane Gilman hesitated, but finally answered in the affirmative.

"In what English town or village was he born?"

"Oh, lor, you wouldn't know any better if I should tell you. My brother came over here with Jed when he was a baby, to better his fortunes. He went out to Iowa, leaving the baby with me. But I found I couldn't get a place with a baby on my hands, and so I took it to the Scranton poorhouse."

"And where have you been since?"

"I went to Philadelphia and got a position there. Since then I've been in a many places."

"I wonder you didn't write to me for some news of the baby."

"I got news of him from time to time, though I don't mean to tell you how," answered Jane Gilman with a cunning smile. "But I've been away for the last three years, and so I didn't know that Jed had gone off."

"You must be disappointed not to find him."

"So I am. It seems so long since I've seen the dear child," and Jane drew out a handkerchief of ample size and pressed it to her tearless eyes. "Is he a nice-looking boy?"

"He has a fine, frank, open face, but you'll excuse my saying that he doesn't resemble you in the least."

"No," answered Jane, not the least bit disconcerted. "He didn't look like the Gilmans, but like his ma's family."

"What was his mother's maiden name?"

"Fenwick," responded Jane Gilman, having no suspicion that Mrs. Avery had heard the name before.

Mrs. Avery started.

"I've heard that name before," she said.

"Have you?" asked Jane, momentarily uneasy, but quickly recovering her self-possession she reflected that the Averys could not possibly know anything of Jed's real history. "I suppose there's a many Fenwicks in the world and some of 'em in America. My brother's wife was a good-looking woman, and the boy takes after her."

"She died young, I suppose?"

"Only three months after he was born."

"Is your brother still living?"

"No; he was killed in a railroad accident out in Iowa six months since. He was a brakeman on the railroad. He left me a tidy sum of money, and said that I was to look up Jed."

"This accounts for your visit, then?"

"Yes; I want to take my nephew with me and see to his education, as my brother wished me to."

"Did Mrs. Fogson give you any idea where he was?"

"She said he had run away, but she had information that he was at Bar Harbor, wherever that is, in the service of some rich gentleman."

"We have heard the same thing. What do you propose to do?"

"I'll have to go there, I suppose. But there is one thing I want to ask you about."

"What is that?"

"When I left the baby with you there was a gold locket suspended from his neck. Did you find it?"

"Yes, I found it."

"I'll thank you if you'll give it to me. I meant to take it at the time, but I went away in a hurry, as you know, and I thought it would be safe in your hands."

"I can't let you have it to-day, Miss Gilman."

"And why not?" demanded Jane suspiciously.

"I deposited it with a party I had confidence in, for safe keeping," replied Mrs. Avery.

"Then I'll be glad to have you get it as soon as you can. I want it," rejoined Jane Gilman sharply.

"How am I to feel sure you are entitled to it?" asked Mrs. Avery.

"If I am not, who is, I'd like to know? I'm the one that left the boy with you at the poorhouse."

"I presume this is true."

"Of course it's true. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Avery, I'm not much pleased with your trying to keep the locket. Are you sure you haven't sold or pawned it?"

"Yes, I am sure of that. But perhaps I shall not have to make you wait long for it. The gentleman in whose hands I placed it is in this house at this very minute."

Jane Gilman looked very much surprised.

"Where is he?" she asked.

Detective Peake answered for himself. He stepped into the room from the small bedroom and held up the locket.

"Is this the one?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the woman eagerly. "Give it to me."

Mr. Peake quietly put it back into his pocket.

"Not till I have asked you a few questions," he answered.

"What right have you to ask me questions?" asked Jane defiantly.

"I will assume that I have the right," the detective answered. "Whose miniatures are those in the locket?"

"They are my brother and his wife."

"Your brother doesn't seem to look like you, Miss Gilman."

"Perhaps you know better than I who it is," said Jane sullenly.

"Well, perhaps so."

"And who do you say they are?"

"Sir Charles and Laura Fenwick of Fenwick Hall, England."

Jane Gilman started to her feet in astonishment.

"Who told you?" she asked hoarsely.

"It is not necessary for me to tell you. It is enough that I am commissioned by the boy's mother to find him and restore him to her. There may be trouble in store for you, Miss Jane Gilman," he added significantly.

Jane Gilman fanned herself vigorously and seemed very ill at ease.

"However," continued the detective, "you can save yourself and secure a handsome reward by giving me all the help you can, and making full confession of your stealing the child, and telling who instigated you to do it."

The woman hesitated, but her hesitation was brief.

"Will you promise this?" she asked.

"Yes. I am the confidential agent of Lady Fenwick, who is now in America."

"Then I'll do it. Guy Fenwick hasn't treated me right, and I don't mind if I do go back on him. It was he that hired me to make off with little Robert, though I didn't let him know what I did with him."

"And what was your present object?"

"To take the boy away and make Sir Guy pay a good round sum for my keeping the secret."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE SECURES AN ALLY.

"Are you in communication with Guy Fenwick? Do you know whether he is now at Fenwick Hall?" asked the detective.

"No, he is not there."

"Where is he, then?"

"At sea. In a day or two he will probably be in New York," answered Jane Gilman coolly.

Mr. Peake started. This was unexpected intelligence.

"What brings him to New York?" he inquired hastily.

"I do."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I wrote him some time since for a hundred pounds. He sent me five pounds and told me that I needn't call on him again."

"He doesn't seem much afraid of you."

"No; he thought the boy was dead."

"I suppose you told him so?"

"I let him think that the boy had died of fever four years ago. That made him feel safe, and he concluded that he had no more use for Jane Gilman. He'll find out!" and Jane tossed her head, in an independent manner.

"Have you any letters from him in reference to the matter?" asked Detective Peake.

From a pocket of unknown depth Miss Gilman drew out an epistle which she handed to the detective.

"You can read it if you want to," she said.

Mr. Peake opened the letter and read it. It ran thus:

MISS JANE GILMAN:

Your letter requesting me to send you a hundred pounds is received. Your request is certainly an audacious one. Why I should send you a hundred pounds, or even ten pounds, I am at a loss to imagine. The boy Robert, whose existence you think would be dangerous to me, is dead by your own admission, and my right to the Fenwick title and estates is undisputed and indisputable. If you expect me to support you for the balance of your life, your expectations are doomed to disappointment. You are strong and healthy, and are able to earn your own living in the sphere in which you were born. Besides, if you had been prudent you would have saved a considerable sum out of the large pension you have received from me during the last dozen or more years. I think it quite probable that you have a snug sum invested and are not in any danger of suffering.

Still I don't want to be hard upon you. I accordingly inclose a five-pound note, which you will please consider as a final gift on my part.

GUY FENWICK.

"Miss Gilman," said Detective Peake, "will you permit me to keep this letter—for the present?"

"What do you want to do with it?" asked Jane suspiciously.

"Use it against the man who calls himself Sir Guy Fenwick. In connection with your testimony it will prove valuable evidence."

"You have promised that I shall be well paid?"

"Yes, I can take it upon myself to promise that."

"Very well. You may keep the letter."

"One question more. You tell me that Sir Guy Fenwick is on his way to New York. Can you tell me why he is coming?"

"Yes. I dropped him a hint, in answer to this letter, that the boy Robert was still living, and this alarmed my gentleman," she added with a laugh.

"Did he write you that he was coming?"

"Yes."

"Have you that letter?"

"No; but I can tell you what was in it. He wrote that he did not believe my story, but he would come to New York, and I might call upon him at the Brevoort House on Monday next."

"You infer from that that he was anxious?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Yes. What did you propose to say to him?"

"That the boy was living, and that I could lay my hand upon him."

"That is why you came to Scranton?"

"Yes."

"I see. The whole thing lies in a nutshell. Even without your evidence I shall probably be able to establish the rights of my young client. But your help will make it surer."

"I am at your service, if you will keep your promise. What do you want me to do?"

"Go with me to Bar Harbor and see the boy."

"I would like to," said Jane Gilman with an expression of pleasure. "I haven't seen him since he was a baby. I'd like to see how he looks now."

"When he is restored to his title and estate he will not see you suffer."

"When will you start for Bar Harbor?"

"We shall leave Scranton by the next train."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

JED LEARNS WHO HE IS.

Mr. Roper and Jed were having a very enjoyable time at Bar Harbor. They made trips, chiefly on foot, to the various interesting localities—Schooner Head, Great Head, Hull's Cove and The Ovens—being favored with unusually fine and clear weather. They had just returned at four o'clock in the afternoon from a trip to the summit of Green Mountain when they were informed at the hotel that a gentleman wished to see them.

Mr. Roper took the card and examined it.

"James Peake," he said. "I don't know of any such person. Do you, Jed?"

"No, sir," answered Jed.

"You may bring him up," said Roper, turning to the bell boy.

In less than a minute the latter reappeared, followed by a plain-looking man, who scanned both attentively as he entered, but devoted the most attention to Jed.

"Mr. Peake?" said Schuyler Roper interrogatively.

"Yes, sir."

"You have business with me?"

"Rather with your young friend. Is he known as Jed Gilman?"

"Yes," answered the boy so designated.

"I am a detective from the staff of Inspector Byrnes of New York."

Jed blushed and looked uneasy. This announcement naturally alarmed him.

"Am I charged with any offense?" he asked quickly.

"No," answered Mr. Peake with a pleasant smile. "When I state my business I am inclined to think you will be glad to see me."

"I feel relieved, Jed," said Mr. Roper with a smile. "I took you without a character, and I trembled lest some terrible charge was to be brought against you."

"Rest easy on that score, Mr. Roper," returned the detective. "My mission may involve some one else in trouble, but not your young friend. Will you permit me to ask him a few questions?"

"I am sure he will be quite ready to answer any questions you may ask."

Jed nodded assent.

"Then, Mr. Gilman, may I inquire your age?"

"I am sixteen."

"What is the date of your birth?"

Jed colored and looked embarrassed.

"I do not know," he answered.

"Can you tell me where you were born?"

"No, sir," returned Jed. "I was left at the age of two years at the Scranton poorhouse by a girl who disappeared the next morning. Of course I was too young to know anything of my earlier history."

"Exactly; and you spent the intervening years at that interesting institution."

Jed laughed.

"It didn't prove very interesting at the last," he said. "When my good friends the Averys were turned out, Mr. and Mrs. Fogson succeeded them, and I concluded to leave."

"I am not surprised to hear it. I have seen Mrs. Fogson," remarked the detective dryly.

"Did she give me a good character?"

"Quite the contrary. She prepared me to find you a desperate young ruffian."

Jed laughed.

"Do I come up to your expectations?" he asked.

"Not altogether. I may conclude that you have no information in regard to your family or parentage?"

"No, sir. Can you"—something in the detective's face prompted the question—"can you give me any information on the subject?"

Jed fixed his eyes with painful intensity upon the visitor.

"I think I can," he answered.

"Who, then, am I?"

"To the best of my knowledge you are the nephew of Sir Guy Fenwick, of Fenwick Hall, Gloucestershire, England."

Both Mr. Roper and Jed looked exceedingly surprised.

"Sir Guy Fenwick?" repeated Roper.

"He is so called, but I have reason to believe he is a usurper, and that the title and estates belong to your young friend, who, if I am correct, isn't Jed Gilman, but Sir Robert Fenwick."

Jed looked dazed. Schuyler Roper went up to him and grasped his hand.

"My dear Jed, or rather Robert," he said, "let me be the first to congratulate you. But, Mr. Peake, are you prepared to substantiate Jed's claim to his title and inheritance?"

"I think so. I will tell you how the case stands."

When he had concluded, Mr. Roper asked, "And where is this nurse whose testimony is so important?"

"At Rodick's. I brought her with me to Bar Harbor."

"And what is your program?"

"I should like to carry our young friend with me to New York to confront the pseudo baronet."

"We will be ready whenever you say. I say *we*, for I propose to accompany Jed—I beg pardon, Sir Robert—and stand by him at this eventful period."

"Call me Jed, Mr. Roper, till I have proved myself entitled to the other name," returned the "poorhouse boy."

CHAPTER XL.

GUY FENWICK'S DEFEAT.

Sir Guy Fenwick sat in his handsome apartment at the Brevoort House. He was of slender build and dark complexion, bearing a very slight resemblance to Jed, but his expression was much less agreeable.

"Jane Gilman was to have called this morning. She ought to be here now," he muttered, consulting his watch. "She is certain to come," he added with a sneer, "for she wants money. I shall never be safe from annoyance while she lives. However, she can do me little harm."

There was a knock at the door, and a bell boy appeared with a card.

Sir Guy took it from his hand, and regarded it with surprise.

"Mr. James Peake!" he repeated. "What does he want?"

"I don't know, Sir Guy."

"Let him come up, but the interview must be brief, for I am expecting another party."

Directly afterward Detective Peake entered the presence of the baronet.

"You wish to see me, Mr.—ahem!—Mr. Peake?"

"Yes. Mr. Fenwick?"

"Mr. Fenwick!" repeated the Englishman, frowning. "I am Sir Guy Fenwick."

"I am aware that you call yourself so," said the detective quietly.

"What do you mean by this insolence?" demanded Guy Fenwick, his face flaming.

"You will understand me when I say I call in behalf of Sir Robert Fenwick, the real baronet."

Guy Fenwick half rose from his seat. He looked angry and alarmed.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I think you do. Sir Robert is your nephew, and the title and estate are his by right."

Guy Fenwick laughed—a harsh, mirthless laugh.

"Really," he said, "this is most amusing. Robert Fenwick is dead. If any one calls himself by that name he is an impostor."

"That remains to be seen. I have to inform you that Sir Robert Fenwick is in this city, in the company of his mother, who has received and acknowledged him."

"This is a conspiracy!" exclaimed Guy Fenwick, whose appearance showed that he was deeply disturbed. "It is a very foolish conspiracy, I will add. Of course I understand the object of my amiable sister-in-law in giving her countenance to what she must know to be an imposture. Do me the favor to inform me where you discovered the boy who impudently claims the title and estate which I inherited from my brother."

"Only by procuring the disappearance of that brother's lawful heir."

"Who says this—who dares say it?"

"You are partially acquainted with a woman named Jane Gilman?"

Guy Fenwick's countenance changed.

"Yes," he said after a pause, "I do know a woman of that name. She has been writing me blackmailing letters, and threatening to injure me if I did not send her a hundred pounds. So this is the mare's nest you have stirred up? I congratulate you."

"Call it a mare's nest if you like, Mr. Fenwick," said the detective undisturbed. "You may find it a very serious matter. Shall I tell you what we are able to prove?"

"If you please. I should like to know the details of this base conspiracy."

"Fourteen years ago Jane Gilman appeared towards nightfall at the door of a poorhouse not far away and left a child of two years old with the people in charge. Before morning she disappeared. The child grew up a healthy, sturdy boy; frank and handsome."

"So he prepared himself to claim the Fenwick title in an almshouse?"

"It wasn't his fault that he was brought up there, only his misfortune."

"What name was given him?"

"Jed Gilman."

"He had better retain it."

"Not while he has a better claim to the name of Robert Fenwick. Hanging from his neck at the time he was placed in the poorhouse was a locket containing miniatures of your brother, the late Sir Charles Fenwick, and Lady Mary Fenwick, still living."

"Have you the locket with you?"

"It is in safe custody. You will admit that this is pretty strong evidence of our claim. But we have in addition the confession of Jane Gilman, who testifies that, in obedience to your instructions, she abducted and disposed of the boy as aforesaid."

"This is a very cunning conspiracy, Mr. Peake, if that is your name, but it won't succeed. I shall defend my right to the title and estate; but if this boy is poor I don't mind settling a pension of a hundred pounds upon him, and finding him some employment."

"In his name I decline your offer."

"Then I defy you! What are you going to do about it?"

"Lady Fenwick has engaged the services of one of our most famous lawyers, and legal proceedings will be commenced at once. We will, however, give you a week to decide on your course."

"Give me the name of your lawyer. I will call upon him and show him that he has consented to aid an imposture."

Before the week ended, however, Sir Guy, to give him this title once more, had decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and had consented to surrender the title and estates, his nephew agreeing to pay him an income of a thousand pounds per annum, in order that he might still be able to live like a gentleman.

When matters were arranged Guy Fenwick returned hastily to England, and, making but a short stay there, went to the continent, where he would not have the humiliation of meeting old acquaintances whom he had known in the days of his grandeur.

CHAPTER XLI. CONCLUSION.

Not the least gratifying circumstance in his sudden change of fortune was Jed's discovery of a mother—a gracious and beautiful woman—to whom he was drawn in almost instinctive affection. Before leaving New York for his native land he expressed a wish to revisit Scranton, and view once more the scenes of his early privations. His mother not only consented, but decided to accompany him.

Mr. and Mrs. Fogson were engaged in their usual morning labors when a handsome carriage stopped at the gate. A servant descended and made his way to the front door, which Mrs. Fogson herself opened.

"Madam," said the servant bowing, "do you receive visitors?"

Mrs. Fogson espying the handsome carriage was dazzled, and responded graciously:

"We ain't fixed for company," she said, "but if you'll make allowances I shall be happy to receive visitors. Who is it?" she inquired curiously.

"Lady Fenwick and Sir Robert Fenwick, of Fenwick Hall, England."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mrs. Fogson, awe-stricken. "Tell 'em to come right in."

Jed assisted his mother to alight and walk up to the front door, Mrs. Fogson having retreated inside to change her dress.

"And you say you lived in this forlorn place, Robert?" asked Lady Fenwick with a shudder.

"For fourteen years, mother."

"I never can forgive Guy Fenwick—never!"

"I am none the worse for it now, mother."

Jed led the way into Mrs. Fogson's private sitting-room, where that lady found them. She stopped short at the threshold.

"Why, it's Jed Gilman!" she said sharply, with a feeling that she had been humbugged.

"Mrs. Fogson," said Jed, gravely, "I am Jed Gilman no more. I have found out that I am entitled to a large estate in England, but best of all I have found a mother, and am no longer alone in the world."

Mr. Fogson, who had followed his wife into the room, was the first to "take in" the surprising news. Jed's handsome suit, his gold watch-chain and diamond scarf-pin, as well as his mother's stately figure, convinced him that the story was true.

"No one is more glad to hear of your good fortune, my dear boy, than Mrs. F. and myself," he said in a gushing tone. "I have often thought that you were a nobleman in disguise."

"You never let me suspect it, Mr. Fogson," said Jed, amused. "Probably you didn't want to raise my expectations."

"Just so, Jed, I mean Sir Robert. We feel that it was an honor to have you so long under our roof—don't we, Mrs. F.?"

"Certainly, Simeon. If Lady Fenwick will permit me to offer an humble collation, some of my ginger snaps; you remember them, Jed, I mean Sir Robert."

"You are very kind," said Lady Fenwick hastily, "but I seldom eat between meals."

Just then Percy Dixon, who came with a message from his father, appeared in the door. He opened his eyes wide in amazement when he saw Jed.

"Jed Gilman!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"No, Master Percy," said Mrs. Fogson. "We have just learned that our dear Jed is Sir Robert Fenwick, of Fenwick Hall, England."

"Jehoshaphat!" cried Percy, astounded.

"Percy," said Jed, whose good fortune made him good-natured, "let me introduce you to my mother, Lady Fenwick. Mother, this is Master Percy Dixon."

"I am glad to meet any of your friends, Robert," said Lady Fenwick, really supposing that Jed and Percy were on intimate terms.

"Glad to know you—to make your acquaintance, Lady Fenwick," replied Percy. "Are you really and truly a lord, Jed?"

"No, not a lord, but a baronet. However, that needn't make any difference between friends like ourselves."

"No, of course not. You know I always liked you, Jed, I mean Sir Jed."

"Sir Robert," prompted Mr. Fogson.

"Sir Robert. I feel sort of confused by the sudden change," explained Percy embarrassed.

"Call me Jed, then. In Scranton I mean to be Jed."

"Won't you call at our house? My father, Squire Dixon, will be honored by a visit."

"We are to call on Mr. and Mrs. Avery first, and then if we have time we will call on you. Won't you get into the carriage and go with us, Percy?"

Percy Dixon accepted the invitation with intense delight, and long afterwards boasted of his ride with Lady Fenwick. Though Jed and his mother were able to spend but ten minutes at the house of Squire Dixon, the squire showed himself deeply sensible of the honor, and several times alluded to his dear young friend Sir Robert. It was the way of the world. Mr. and Mrs. Avery received from Lady Fenwick a handsome present in recognition of their past kindness to Jed, and this was the first of many.

Jed and his mother remained at the Windsor till they were ready to embark for England. While walking on Fifth Avenue one day he saw just ahead his little friend, Chester Holbrook, accompanied by his aunt, Miss Maria Holbrook. He hurried forward, and taking off his hat to Miss Holbrook, said, "Chester, don't you remember me?"

Chester uttered a cry of delight.

"Why it's Jed!" he said.

Miss Maria Holbrook, surprised at Jed's improved appearance, eyed him with suspicion.

"Where are you staying, Jedediah?" she inquired. "Have you a situation?"

"I am boarding at the Windsor Hotel, Miss Holbrook. I am in no situation."

"Then how can you afford to board at a first-class hotel?" asked the spinster in surprise.

"I am with my mother, Lady Fenwick. Allow me to hand you my card."

Jed placed in her hand a card on which was engraved the name:

SIR ROBERT FENWICK, BART.

The story had already appeared in the daily papers of New York, but Miss Holbrook never suspected that the young English baronet was Chester's humble guardian.

"Are you Sir Robert Fenwick?" she ejaculated in amazement.

"I believe so," he answered with a smile. "Now, Miss Holbrook, I have a favor to ask. May I take Chester in and introduce him to my mother?"

"I should also like to meet Lady Fenwick," said Miss Holbrook.

"I shall be most happy to present you."

"Isn't your name Jed after all?" asked Chester, as he confidently placed his hand in that of his former guardian.

"You may call me so, Chester; I wish you would."

Miss Maria Holbrook was delighted with her visit. Like many Americans, she had a great respect for English aristocracy, and did not understand that there was considerable difference between titles. It is wonderful how differently she came to regard one whom she had been accustomed to style

"that boy Jedediah." She was much pleased with Lady Fenwick's gracious reception, though she found it difficult to think of her as Jed's mother.

I neglected to say in the proper place that Jed did not fail to call, when in Scranton, on his two friends Dr. and Mrs. Redmond, and gave them a cordial invitation to visit his mother and himself if they should ever come to England.

He did not see fit to extend a similar invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Fogson. Misfortune has come to these worthy people. Their mismanagement of the poorhouse had become so notorious that the best citizens of Scranton not only demanded their removal from the poorhouse, but at the next town meeting defeated Squire Dixon for re-election to the position of Overseer of the Poor. Mr. and Mrs. Avery were invited to succeed the Fogsons, but felt that they were entitled to rest and quiet for the balance of their lives. The liberal gifts of Jed and his mother made them independent, and they were willing that younger persons should fill their old positions.

Jed devoted several years to making up the deficiencies in his education. The only disagreeable thing in his change of fortune was his removal from America, but he will probably arrange to spend a portion of his time in his adopted country, to which he feels the attachment of a loyal son. Then he has a link connecting him with it in the frequent visits at Fenwick Hall of his friend Schuyler Roper.

Notwithstanding his accession to the ancestral title and estate, he has not forgotten the fourteen years during which he was known as "Jed, the Poorhouse Boy."

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