Title: Digging for Gold: A Story of California

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Release date: September 20, 2016 [EBook #53095]

Language: English

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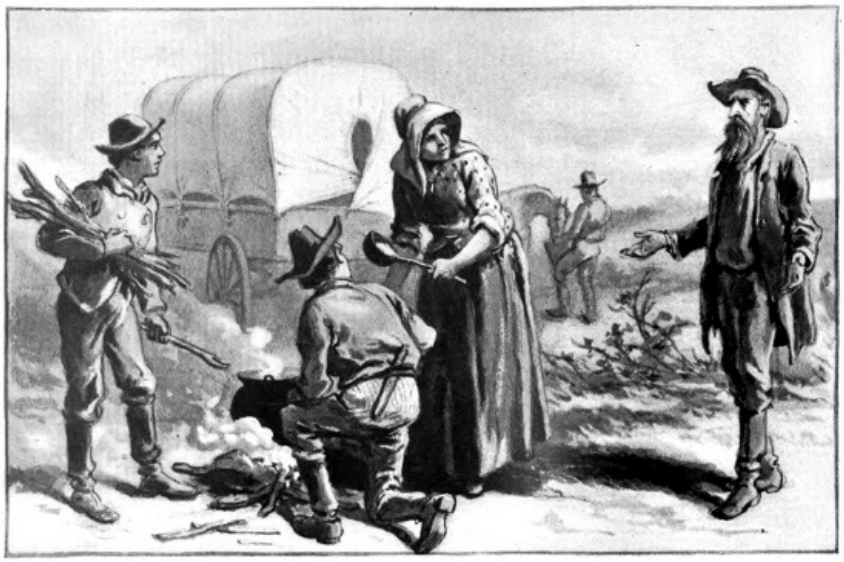

DIGGING FOR GOLD

A STORY OF CALIFORNIA

BY

HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

AUTHOR OF "THE RAGGED DICK SERIES," "TATTERED TOM SERIES,"
"LUCK AND PLUCK SERIES," "PACIFIC SERIES," ETC., ETC.

PHILADELPHIA
PORTER & COATES

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DIGGING FOR GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

GRANT AND HIS MOTHER.

"Mother, this is an important day for me," said Grant Colburn, as he entered the kitchen with an armful of wood, and deposited it in the box behind the stove.

His mother looked up from the table where she was cutting out pie crust, and asked in surprise, "What do you mean, Grant? Why is to-day any different from ordinary days?"

"I am sixteen to-day, mother!"

"So you are, Grant. I ought to have thought of it. I am sorry," she added wistfully, "that I haven't got a present for you, but you know Mr. Tarbox——"

"Is the stingiest man in the country. Yes, I know that well enough."

"I actually haven't a cent that I can call my own, Grant."

"I know that very well, mother. It was an unlucky day when you married that old skinflint."

"Don't call him that, Grant," said his mother, with an apprehensive look in the direction of the door.

"He's all that, and more if possible. When did he give you any money last?"

"Two weeks ago."

"And how much did he give you at that time?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"What a shame! Why, if you had hired out as his housekeeper he would have been compelled to give you more."

"Yes, Grant," sighed Mrs. Tarbox, "I wish I were his housekeeper instead of his wife. I should be more independent."

"He made a good bargain when he married you, mother. But I never understood why you married *him*."

"I acted for the best, as I thought, Grant. You know how your poor father left us. After his affairs were settled, there were only two hundred and fifty dollars left, and you were but twelve years old. I took in sewing, and earned what I could, but at the end of a year I had used up a hundred dollars of our small capital. Then Mr. Tarbox asked me to marry him, and I agreed, for I thought it would give us a comfortable home."

"A comfortable home!" repeated Grant. "We have enough to eat, it is true, but you never worked so hard in your life, and I can say the same for myself. I was barely fourteen when Mr. Tarbox took me away from school, and since then I have had to work early and late. At five o'clock, winter and summer, I have to turn out of bed, and work all day, so that when night comes I am dead tired."

"That is true, Grant," said his mother, with a look of distress. "You work too hard for a boy of your age."

"And what do I get for it?" continued Grant indignantly. "I haven't any clothes. Charlie Titus asked me the other day why I didn't go to church. I was ashamed to tell him that it was because I had no clothes fit to wear there. It is a year since I had my last suit, and now I have grown out of it. My coat is too short in the sleeves, and my pantaloons in the legs."

"Perhaps I can lengthen them out, Grant."

"You did it six months ago. There is no more chance. No, I'll tell you what I am going to do. I'll ask Mr. Tarbox for a new suit, and as it is my birthday, perhaps he will open his heart and be generous for once."

"It is a good plan, Grant. There he is now, out by the well curb."

"Then I'll speak at once. Wish me luck, mother."

"I do, my son. I heartily wish you good luck now and always."

Grant opened the side door, and went out into the yard. Seth Tarbox looked up, and his glance fell upon his step-son.

"Come here, Grant," he said, "I want you to turn the grindstone while I sharpen my scythe."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Tarbox. I want to speak to you."

"Go ahead! You can speak if you want to," said Tarbox, slightly surprised.

"It is my birthday to-day."

"Is it? How old be you?"

"Sixteen."

"A boy of sixteen ought to do a great deal of work. Why, you are 'most a man."

"I do a good deal of work, Mr. Tarbox, but I don't seem to get much pay for it."

"Hey? You want pay? Why, don't you get your victuals and clothes?"

"I get my victuals, yes. But I don't get clothes, and that is just what I want to speak to you about."

Mr. Tarbox began to grow uneasy. He knew what was coming.

"What have you got on, I'd like to know?" he inquired.

"Some rags and overalls," answered Grant bluntly.

"They're good enough to work in. You've got a suit to wear Sundays."

"Have I? It's hardly fit to wear common days. Why, it's a year since I had the suit, and I've outgrown it."

"I'm afraid you're getting proud, Grant," said his step-father uneasily.

"I'm not proud of my clothes, I can tell you that. Mr. Tarbox, I've worked for you the last year early and late, and I think I ought to have a new suit. It will make a nice birthday present."

"Money's very skerce, Grant," said his step-father uneasily, "and clothes are very high. I gave twelve dollars for that last suit of yours. It came hard. Think how long it takes to earn twelve dollars. I haven't had a suit myself for ten months."

"But you can have one if you want it."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Grant," said Mr. Tarbox, with a bright idea. "You're 'most as big as I am.

You're unusually large for your age. I'll buy a new suit for myself, and give you mine. Your mother can fix it over to fit you."

Grant's face assumed a look of disgust.

"Thank you, Mr. Tarbox," he said, "but I don't want to wear your old clothes. If I can't have a new suit I don't want any."

"'Pears to me you're mighty particular."

"I don't think so. I only want what's right. Most boys of my age have at least two new suits a year. Charlie Titus had three." 7

"Then his father's very foolish to gratify his love of finery. Come, we'd better go to work."

"You haven't answered my question yet, Mr. Tarbox."

"What is it?" asked Tarbox peevishly.

"Will you buy me a new suit?"

"Wait two or three months, Grant."

"Why should I wait two or three months? I need the clothes now."

"Money may be easier then."

"I am not willing to wait."

"'Pears to me you're very headstrong, Grant Colburn," said the farmer in a tone of displeasure.

"I want my rights. I won't work if you are going to deal so closely with me."

Seth Tarbox frowned, and looked perplexed. But presently an idea came to him and his face smoothed.

"Perhaps we can fix it, Grant," he said in a conciliatory tone.

Grant felt encouraged. It looked as if his request were to be granted. 8

"I shall be very much obliged to you," he said.

"Wait a minute! You aint got my idea. Your mother has money."

"What if she has?" asked Grant suspiciously.

"If she will lend you ten or twelve dollars to buy a suit I'll make it up to her in, say three or four months."

Grant's face darkened. He knew very well that the money never would be repaid, and he penetrated the crafty design of his step-father.

"No, Mr. Tarbox," he said. "My mother's money must not be touched. There's little enough of it, and I don't want her to run the risk of losing it."

"But she won't lose it. Didn't I say I would pay it back?"

"Why can't you advance the money yourself?"

"Didn't I tell you money was skerce?" said Seth Tarbox irritably.

"I know you've got money in two savings banks, besides some railroad bonds. Tom Wilson told me the other day that you had over five thousand dollars in money and bonds." 9

"Tom Wilson don't know anything about my affairs," said Tarbox hastily. "I'll think it over, Grant, and mebbe—I won't promise—I'll see what I can do for you. Now we'll go to work. It's a sin to be idle."

CHAPTER II.

RODNEY BARTLETT.

Mr. Tarbox's farm was located in Woodburn, rather a small town in Iowa. He was originally from Connecticut, but at the age of thirty removed to the then frontier Western State. He owned a large farm, which he had bought at the government price of one dollar and a quarter an acre. He also owned a smaller farm a mile and a half west of the one he occupied, and this he cultivated on shares. It had been a lucky purchase, for a railway intersected it, and he had obtained a large price for the land used. Besides his two farms, he had from six to seven thousand dollars in money; yet it seemed that the richer he grew the meaner he became. He had a married daughter, living in Crestville, six miles away, and when he died she and her family would no doubt inherit the miserly farmer's possessions. Like her father she was selfish and close so far as others were concerned, but she was willing to spend money on herself. She had a son about the age of Grant, who liked to wear good clothes, and was something of a dude. His name was Rodney Bartlett, and he looked down with infinite contempt on his grandfather's hard-working stepson.

Just before twelve o'clock a smart looking buggy drove into the yard. The occupants of the buggy were Rodney and his mother.

"Hey, you!" he called out to Grant, "come and hold the horse while we get out."

Grant came forward and did as he was requested. Had Rodney been alone he would not have heeded the demand, but Mrs. Bartlett's sex claimed deference, though he did not like her.

"Just go in and tell your mother we've come to dinner."

But Grant was spared the trouble, for the farmer came up at this moment.

"Howdy do, Sophia!" he said. "What sent you over?"

"I wanted to consult you about a little matter of business, father. I hope Mrs. Tarbox will have enough dinner for us."

"I reckon so, I reckon so," said Seth Tarbox, who, to do him justice, was not mean as regarded the table. "How's your husband?"

"Oh, he's ailing as usual. He's lazy and shiftless, and if it wasn't for me I don't know what would become of us."

By this time the two had entered the house. Rodney stayed behind, and glanced superciliously at Grant.

"Seems to me you're looking shabbier than ever," he said.

"You're right there," said Grant bitterly, "but it isn't my fault."

"Whose is it?"

"Your grandfather's. He won't buy me any clothes."

"Well, you're not kin to him."

"I know that, but I work hard and earn a great deal more than I get."

"I don't know about that. Maybe I can hunt up one of my old suits for you," Rodney added patronizingly.

"Thank you, but I don't want anybody's cast-off clothes; at any rate, not yours."

"You're getting proud," sneered Rodney.

"You can call it that if you like."

"Don't you wish you was me, so you could wear good clothes all the time?"

"I should like to wear the good clothes, but I'd rather be myself than anybody else."

"Some time I shall be rich," said Rodney complacently. "I shall have all grandfather's money."

"Won't it go to your mother?"

"Oh, well, she'll give it to me. I hope you don't think you and your mother will get any of it?"

"We ought to, for mother is making a slave of herself, but I don't think we will. If your grandfather would do more for us now we wouldn't mind inheriting anything."

There was a tapping on the front window.

"That means dinner, I suppose," said Grant.

"Are you going to sit down with us?" asked Rodney, eying Grant's costume with disfavor.

"Yes."

"In those clothes?"

"I haven't time to change them. Besides my Sunday suit isn't much better."

At the table, toward the close of the meal, Rodney said, "Grandfather, Grant isn't dressed very well."

Seth Tarbox frowned.

"Has he been complaining to you?" he asked. "He's been pesterin' all the mornin' about new clothes. I told him money was skerce."

"I can save you expense, grandfather. I will give him an old suit of mine—one I have cast off."

"Why, that's an excellent plan," said Tarbox, brightening up. "Do you hear that, Grant? You won't need to buy a new suit for yourself now."

"I don't care for any of Rodney's old clothes," answered Grant, with an indignant flush.

"Sho! sho! You're acting very contrary. Rodney's suit is a good deal better than yours, I've no doubt."

"I don't know whether it is or not, but I'm entitled to new clothes, and I want them."

"What do you say to that, Mrs. Tarbox?" demanded the farmer, looking over at his wife.

"I say that he is right. Grant has worked hard, Mr. Tarbox, and he ought to be decently dressed."

"Rodney," said his mother, "your kind offer is thrown away."

"So I see," said Rodney, extending his plate for another piece of pie.

"I'm sorry you take Grant's part, Mrs. T.," said the farmer. "I won't countenance no extravagance. What's the use of spending good money when a suit of clothes is offered for nothing."

“If the suit is a good one,” retorted Grant, “why does Rodney lay it aside?”

“There is a difference between him and you,” said Mrs. Bartlett in an acid tone.

“What difference?”

“I’m a gentleman and you’re a farm boy,” said Rodney, taking it upon himself to answer.

“I shan’t always be a farm boy!” 16

“No, you won’t be a boy when you’re grown up,” returned Rodney, looking around to see if his joke were appreciated.

“There aint no disgrace in bein’ a farm boy,” said Seth Tarbox. “I worked on a farm myself when I was a boy, and I’ve worked on a farm ever since.”

“I’m going to college, and be a lawyer,” said Rodney in a consequential tone.

“It costs a sight of money to go to college, Sophia,” said Tarbox deprecatingly.

“I shall make a lot of money when I am a lawyer,” explained Rodney. “Why, I read in the paper that there are some lawyers that make fifty thousand dollars. Besides, I may get elected to Congress. That’s better than working on a farm. When Grant is getting fifteen dollars a month and his board, as a hired man on a farm, I will ride in my carriage, and live like a gentleman.”

“I may be a rich man myself,” interrupted Grant.

“You a rich man! Ho, ho!” laughed Rodney. “You look like it.”

“No, I don’t look like it, but I may get there all the same.” 17

“You talk a good deal for a boy of your age,” remarked Mrs. Bartlett in a tone of rebuke.

“No more than Rodney.”

But Grant, looking at his mother, saw that she was disturbed, and refrained from noticing any further speeches of his young antagonist.

“By the way, father,” said Mrs. Bartlett, “you remember John Heywood, of our town?”

“Yes; what of him?”

“He’s just got back from California.”

“It’s dreadful expensive goin’ to California.”

“That isn’t of much account if you can bring back a lot of money.”

“Did John Heywood bring back a lot of money?” asked the farmer, pricking up his ears.

“He brought back ten thousand dollars.”

“Sho! How you talk!”

“It’s true, every word of it.”

“How did he make it?”

“Mining, I believe. He’s bought the Ezra Jones place, and is going to put up a nice house.” 18

Among the most interested listeners was Grant Colburn. His color went and came, and he seemed excited.

“How long was Mr. Heywood in California,” he asked.

“About a year. He was gone a good deal longer, for he went across the plains, and it took four months. He came back across the Isthmus.”

“I would like to go California,” said Grant thoughtfully.

“*You* go to California! A boy like you!” repeated Mrs. Bartlett scornfully. “What could you do?”

“I could make more money than I do here,” answered Grant with spirit.

“I reckon you won’t go in a hurry,” said Seth Tarbox composedly. “You haven’t money enough to get you twenty-five miles, and I s’pose it’s as much as two thousand miles from Iowa to Californy.”

Grant felt that there was a good deal of truth in his step-father’s words, but the idea had found 19 lodgment in his brain, and was likely to remain there.

“I mean to go sometime!” he said resolutely.

“You’d better start right off after dinner!” said Rodney in a sneering tone.

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE RESPONSIBILITY.

"Grant, you may go over to the other farm and ask Luke Weldon for the pitchfork he borrowed of me last week. There's no knowing how long he would keep it if I didn't send for it."

"All right, sir."

"Rodney can walk with you if he wants to."

"Thank you," said Rodney, shrugging his shoulders, "but I don't care to walk a mile and a half for a pitchfork. I'll go part way, though, to the village."

The two boys started out together. Rodney looked askance at his companion's poor clothes.

"You're foolish not to take the suit I offered you," he said. "Its a good deal better than yours."

"I presume it is."

"Then why don't you want it?"

"Because it will prevent your grandfather buying me a new one."

"Have you asked him?"

"Yes, I asked him this morning."

"What did he say?"

"That he would buy a new one for himself, and have his best suit cut down for me."

Rodney laughed.

"You'd look like a fright," he said.

"I think so myself," assented Grant with a smile.

"You'd better take mine than his. Grandfather isn't much like a dude in dress."

"No; he tells me that I dress as well as he."

"So you do, nearly. However, it does not make much difference how an old man like him dresses."

Rodney rather approved of his grandfather's scanty outlay on dress, for it would enable him to leave more money to his mother and himself.

"Do you know how old grandfather is?" asked Rodney.

"I believe he is sixty-nine."

"That's pretty old. He won't live many years longer probably. Then the property will come to mother and me."

"Shall you come to live on the farm?"

"Not much. Mother says she'll sell both farms, and then we may go to Chicago to live."

Grant did not like Mr. Tarbox, but he was rather disgusted to hear his grandson speculate so coolly about his death.

"Don't you think grandfather is failing?" continued Rodney.

"I don't know that he is," answered Grant coldly.

"Mother thinks he's got kidney disease. Old men are very apt to have that trouble."

"I never heard him complain of being sick."

By this time the two boys had reached the village.

"I think I'll drop into the drug store," said Rodney. "They keep cigarettes there, don't they?"

"I believe so."

"Mother don't like me to smoke, but I do it on the sly. I'll give you a cigarette, if you want one," he said, in an unusual fit of generosity.

"Thank you, but I don't smoke."

"It's just as well, for you are poor and couldn't afford to buy cigarettes. Well, I suppose you've got to go on."

"Yes."

So the two boys parted. Rodney entered the drug store, and not only bought a package of cigarettes, but drank a glass of soda water. It did not occur to him to offer Grant soda water, for that would have cost a nickel, while a cigarette was inexpensive.

"Somehow I don't like Rodney," said Grant to himself as he walked along. "He seems anxious to have his grandfather die in order to get hold of the property. I wouldn't want to feel that way about anybody, though money would be very acceptable."

Grant walked a mile farther till he reached the farm. Luke Weldon, who had taken it on shares, was in the yard.

"Well, Grant, have you come to see me?" he asked with a good-natured smile.

"Yes, Mr. Weldon. Mr. Tarbox wants his pitchfork, which you borrowed last week."

"Was the old man afraid he wouldn't get it back?"

"Perhaps so."

"He doesn't mean to let anybody get the advantage of him. Well, come to the barn with me, and I'll give it to you."

Grant followed Luke to the barn, and received the borrowed article.

"It beats all how suspicious Seth Tarbox is," continued Luke. "You know I run this farm on shares. The old man is dreadfully afraid I shall cheat him in the division of the crop. He comes over spying round from time to time. How do you like working for him?"

"Not at all," answered Grant bluntly.

"Does he pay you any wages?"

"I work for my board and clothes, but I don't get any clothes. Look at me."

"The old man is awful close. I sometimes ask myself how it is all to end. He stints himself and his family, and all his money will go to his daughter Sophia and her boy."

"They are over there to-day."

"How do you like the boy?"

"About as much as his grandfather."

“He’s a disagreeable young cub, and about as mean as the old man.”

“He offered me a cigarette this morning,” said Grant smiling.

“Did you accept?”

“No, I do not smoke. He offered me one of his old suits, too, but it was only to save his grandfather the expense of buying me a new one.”

“I suppose you accepted that.”

“No, I didn’t. I will have a new suit or none at all.”

“I like your spirit. I wish I could have you to work for me.”

“I would rather work for you than for Mr. Tarbox, but there is one thing I would like better still.”

“What is that?”

“To go to California.”

“What put that into your head?”

“Mrs. Bartlett was mentioning that John Heywood had just got back, bringing ten thousand dollars in gold.”

“Sho! You don’t say so.” 26

“And he bought a farm and is going to put up a new house.”

“Some men are lucky, that’s a fact. Ten thousand dollars, and he’s only just turned thirty. Well, I wish I were in his shoes.”

“I mean to go to California some time.”

“But how will you go? It costs money to go so far.”

“That’s true, and I don’t know where the money is coming from, but I mean to get there all the same.”

“If you had the money Seth Tarbox wouldn’t let you use it for that.”

“I’d like to see him stop me!” said Grant, nodding his head with emphasis.

“Well, I wish you luck, Grant, but I reckon it’ll be a good many years before you get to California.”

Privately Grant was of the same opinion, but the idea had entered his mind, and was not likely to be dislodged.

There were two ways of going home, one through the village, the same way he came, and the other across the railroad and over the fields. This was no shorter, but there was a variety in it, and 27 Grant decided that he should take it.

A hundred feet from the place where he crossed the railroad there was a bridge spanning the creek, not wide, but lying some twenty feet below. The bridge was about fifty feet long.

As Grant gave a careless glance at the structure, which he was not intending to cross, he saw something that startled him. The supports of the further end of the bridge had given way, and it hung, partially fallen, supported only from the other end. It was clear that no train could pass over it in its present condition without being precipitated into the creek below.

“Good Heavens,” thought Grant, “there’ll be an accident! I wonder what could have weakened the bridge.”

It was useless speculating about this point. The danger was imminent, for in less than ten minutes a train was due.

Grant thought of going to the village and giving the alarm, but there was no time. Before he could 28 return the train would have arrived, if on time, and the accident would have happened.

“What shall I do?” Grant asked himself in excitement. “The engineer will have no warning, and the train will push on at its usual speed.”

A vision of the wrecking of the train and the death of innocent and unsuspecting passengers rose before Grant’s mind, and he felt that the catastrophe must be averted if possible. If only some one would come along with whom to consult. But he was alone, and on his young shoulders rested a terrible responsibility.

What could he do?

CHAPTER IV.

GRANT SAVES THE TRAIN.

“I must signal to the engineer in some way,” thought Grant. “How shall I do it?”

He felt in his pocket and found that he had a white handkerchief of large size. He wore a soft felt hat. This he took off, spread the handkerchief over it, and then lifted it in the air on the tines of the pitchfork. Then he sought a place where he might attract the attention of the engineer.

About two hundred feet from the bridge there was a small eminence on one side of the railroad. It was just in front of a curve, and this seemed to Grant the best place to station himself. He posted himself there, raised the pitchfork, and waited anxiously for the train.

By and by he heard the cars approaching. His heart was in his mouth.

“Will they see me?” he asked himself. “If not——” but he could not bear to think of the alternative.

As the train drew nearer and nearer he began to wave the hat vigorously, shouting at the same time, though he knew that his voice would be drowned by the thunderous noise of the train.

Nearer and nearer came the train. Would it stop?

All at once his heart was filled with joy, for the train began to slow up, and stopped just a little beyond where he was standing.

Grant ran forward till he was abreast with the engine.

“What’s the matter, boy?” demanded the engineer, half inclined to be angry. “If you are playing a trick on me, I’ll give you a good horse-whipping.”

“It’s no trick,” answered Grant earnestly. “The bridge just ahead is broken down.”

“Good Heavens! is this true?”

“Get out and see for yourself.”

The engineer lost no time in following Giant’s advice. He and his young guide walked forward, and he saw that Grant’s information was correct.

“It’s a narrow escape,” he said slowly. “The train would have been wrecked, and by this time in all probability I should have been a dead man.”

By this time a number of passengers, curious to know what had happened, and why the train had stopped so suddenly, got off the cars and advanced to where the engineer stood with Grant at his side.

“What’s the matter,” asked the first man.

“You can see for yourself,” answered the engineer, pointing to the bridge.

“Good Heavens!”

“You’ve been as near death as you probably ever will be without meeting it.”

“And what saved us?”

“This boy,” said the engineer, pointing to Grant. “But for him, some of us would be dead men at this moment.”

Grant blushed, for all eyes were fixed on him.

“It was lucky I was here and discovered the broken bridge,” he said.

“Gentlemen,” said a portly, gray-haired man, a clergyman, “this boy has under Providence been the means of saving our lives. He deserves a reward.”

“So he does! So he does!” exclaimed a dozen men heartily.

“Let me set the example,” and the minister took off his hat and deposited therein a five dollar bill. “I am not a rich man—ministers seldom are—but what I give, I give with all my heart.”

“Here is another!” said the engineer. “I am perhaps under deeper obligations than any one.”

“Let me contribute!” said a sweet-faced old lady, and she dropped another five-dollar bill into the minister’s hat.

Then the passengers generally brought forward their contributions, though some were able to give but a silver coin. There was one notable exception: One man, when he saw what was going forward, quietly shrunk away, and got back into the train.

“Who’s that man,” asked the engineer sharply.

“I know,” said an Irishman, who out of his poverty had given a dollar. “It’s Mr. Leonard Buckley, of New York. He’s worth a million. He is rich enough to buy us all up.”

“No matter how much money he possesses, he is a poor man,” said the minister significantly.

“He’s given all his life is worth to the world,” said a passenger cynically. “When he dies he won’t be missed.”

“And now, my young friend,” said the clergyman to Grant, “let me make over to you this collection of money as a small acknowledgement from the passengers of this train of the great service you have rendered us.”

While the collection was being taken up, Grant stood as if dazed. All had passed so suddenly that he could not realize what it meant. Now he found a voice to speak.

“I don’t think I ought to take it,” he said. “I didn’t do it for money.”

“Of course you didn’t!” said the clergyman. “If you had, your act would have been far less commendable, though it might have been as effective. I think you need not hesitate to take the money.”

“Take it, take it!” said more than one.

So Grant took the hat, and held it awkwardly for a moment, hardly knowing what to do with the contents till some one suggested, “Put it in your own hat!”

Grant did so, and then the engineer went forward to examine the bridge more carefully, and decide what had better be done.

There was no further reason for Grant to remain, and he walked a little distance away and began to count his money. There were one hundred and forty dollars in bills, and about twelve dollars in silver.

“One hundred and fifty-two dollars!” said Grant, elated. “Now,” and his face brightened up, “now I can go to California!”

But what should he do with the money? He felt that it would not be prudent to carry it home, for his step-father would be sure to claim it. He might hide it somewhere, but there was danger that it would be discovered, and lost. Finally, he decided to carry it to Luke Weldon, and ask him to keep it for him for the present. Luke was a poor man, but he was thoroughly honest. There was no one in town who would not sooner have trusted him than Seth Tarbox, though Seth had twenty dollars to his one.

When Grant entered the farm-yard again, Luke looked up with surprise.

“What brings you back, Grant?” he asked.

“I want to ask a favor of you, Mr. Weldon.”

“I am always ready to do you a favor, Grant.”

“Will you keep some money for me?”

Luke Weldon was surprised. He knew pretty well how Grant was situated, and that money must be a scarce article with him. Perhaps, however, he had a little extra change which he was afraid of losing, he reflected.

“All right, Grant!” was his reply. “I’ll keep it for you. How much is it?”

When Grant began to draw the bills out of his pocket, Luke’s eyes opened with amazement.

“Where did you get all this money, Grant?” he asked. “You haven’t been—no, I can’t believe it possible you’ve been robbing the old man.”

“I should think not,” returned Grant indignantly. “I haven’t sunk so low as that.”

“But where did you get it? Why didn’t you ask me to take charge of it when you were here before?”

“Because I didn’t have it.”

“Have you got it since?”

“Yes.”

“Then you found it somewhere. It must belong to some one who hid it.”

“No, it doesn’t. It was given to me.”

“I want to believe you, Grant, and I never knew you to tell a lie, but it aint easy, boy, it aint easy. If you don’t tell me where and how you got it, I can’t agree to keep it for you. It might be stolen money for aught I know.”

“Then I’ll tell you, Luke. When I crossed the railroad I found the bridge was broken. I signalled the train just in time to stop it’s going across.”

“Sho! you don’t say! Then but for you the train would have been wrecked?”

“Yes.”

“I’m proud of you, Grant! Give me your hand. Why, boy, you’ve saved fifty lives, perhaps.”

“That’s what the engineer said.”

“But about the money——”

“The passengers took up a contribution, and here it is.”

“How much is there?”

“As near as I can tell, for I counted it in a hurry, there’s a hundred and fifty-two dollars.”

“And you deserve it all, Grant. Yes, I’ll keep it for you, and give it back whenever you ask for it.”

“I was afraid Mr. Tarbox might try to get it away from me.”

“So he would, I make no doubt. He won’t get it from me, I’ll tell you that.”

“Now I must be getting home. I’ve been away a long time.”

When Grant approached the farm-house, Rodney, who was standing in front of the house, hailed him.

“Say, there’s a rod in pickle for you. Grandfather’s awfully mad at your staying so long.”

CHAPTER V.

GRANT ORDERS A NEW SUIT.

Grant listened to what Rodney said, but Mr. Tarbox's anger did not signify as much to him as it would have done a few hours earlier. The money he possessed made him feel independent.

Seth Tarbox appeared at the door, ready to empty the vials of his wrath on Grant's devoted head.

"So you've been loiterin' on the way, have you?" he said harshly. "You've been twice as long as you need to be."

"Well, perhaps I have," Grant admitted coolly.

"So you own up to it, do you?"

"Of course I do."

"And what excuse have you?"

"Do you expect me to work *all* the time?"

"I expect you to earn your board and clothes."

"I earn them both, and more too, but I don't get the clothes."

"Hey? Oh, I see. You loitered because I wouldn't buy you a suit of clothes," snarled Seth.

"You can take it that way if you want to," said Grant.

"What's got into you, Grant Colburn? 'Pears to me you are mighty independent all at once."

"That's the way I feel."

"You seem to forget that but for me you wouldn't have a home."

"When you get tired of providing me with a home, Mr. Tarbox, I will find one somewhere else."

"So you think, but if you leave my home you'll become a poor tramp."

Rodney laughed.

"I guess you're right, grandfather," he said.

Grant darted a look at him which showed that he understood the nature of his feelings.

"Well," he said, "I'll take the risk."

"I don't take back the offer of a suit of clothes, Grant," said Rodney smoothly. "I'll bring 'em over the next time I come."

"Yes, do, Rodney," put in his grandfather.

"You needn't take the trouble, Rodney," said Grant. "I shan't wear the suit if you bring it."

"I suppose you expect I'll buy you a new one," sneered Seth Tarbox.

"No, I don't."

"Then you are content to go as you are?"

"No, I shall have a new suit in a few days, if I have to pay for it myself."

"You're welcome to do that," responded Seth in a tone of satisfaction, for he concluded that Grant's mother would pay the bill, and that suited him.

No more was said to Grant on the subject of his delay in returning from the other farm. He had occasion a little later to go on an errand, and called at the village tailor's.

"Mr. Shick," he said, "I want you to make me up a good serviceable suit. How much will it cost?"

"It depends on the cloth, Grant. Here is a remnant that will wear like iron. I can make it up in two styles, according to the trimmings, seventeen dollars or twenty."

"I want a good suit, and will pay twenty."

The tailor was rather surprised, for he knew that Grant's step-father was a thoroughly mean man.

"Mr. Tarbox is getting liberal, isn't he?" he inquired. "That's more than he pays for his own suits."

"He isn't going to pay for mine."

"Oh, it's your mother, then."

"No, I shall pay for it myself."

"Will it be cash down?"

"Yes."

"I am glad you are so well off, Grant," said Mr. Shick, puzzled.

"So am I. You may rest assured that you won't have to wait for your money."

"Then I'll do a good job. You shall have as nice a suit as any boy in the village. You deserve it, too, Grant, for you're a hard-working boy."

"Just say that to Mr. Tarbox when you meet him," said Grant, smiling, "for I am afraid he doesn't fully appreciate me."

As Grant left the tailor's shop he met Rodney at the door. Rodney found the farm rather a slow place, and had made a second visit to the village.

"Hallo," he exclaimed, "have you been into the tailor's?"

"Yes,"

"I suppose you had business there."

"I had."

"What was it?"

"You can ask Mr. Shick, if you like. I'm in a hurry."

Rodney decided to act on this suggestion.

"How do you do, Mr. Shick?" he said politely, for he wanted to get some information. "I see Grant has just been in here."

"Yes."

"Are you going to make him a suit?"

"Yes."

Rodney was surprised.

"Would you mind showing me the cloth?" he asked. "I might like to get a suit myself."

"I shall be happy to fill your order. This is the cloth."

"It looks pretty good."

"Yes, it is of excellent quality."
"How much do you charge for a suit off this cloth?"
"Twenty dollars is what I charged Grant."
It must be explained that Shick, being in the country, was obliged to put his prices a good deal lower for the same article than if he lived in the city.
"Well, I hope you'll get your pay," said Rodney shortly.
"I shan't trouble myself about that. Grant is an honest boy."
"Well, I'm glad you feel so confident."
Rodney left the shop abruptly, and, going into the street, came face to face with his grandfather.
"Grandfather," he said, "I've got some news for you."
"Have you, Rodney? What is it?"
"Grant has ordered a suit of Mr. Shick, for which the price is twenty dollars."
"You don't mean it?" ejaculated the farmer.
"Yes, I do. I suppose the bill will be sent to you," added Rodney, desirous of making trouble.
"I won't pay it!" exclaimed Seth Tarbox excitedly.
"You'd better see Mr. Shick about it."
Seth Tarbox entered the shop, looking flurried.
"Is it true, Mr. Shick," he said abruptly, "that Grant has ordered a twenty-dollar suit of you?"
"Yes, Mr. Tarbox."
"If you expect me to pay for it, you'll be disappointed. Did Grant tell you to charge it to me?"
"No; he said he would pay for it himself."
"I suppose he expects to get the money out of his mother," continued Mr. Tarbox, feeling somewhat relieved. "It will be a shame to make her pay so much. Why, I don't pay that for my own suits."
"Why don't you?" asked the tailor bluntly. "You can afford it."
"I don't believe in throwing away money," answered Seth shortly.
"You wouldn't. This suit of Grant's will wear like iron."
"It's all foolish extravagance. Rodney, my grandson, offered to give him one of his old cast-off suits."
Mr. Shick smiled.
"Probably Grant thought he would prefer a new one."
"But it's wasteful extravagance."
"Mr. Tarbox, you need a new suit yourself. You'd better let me make you one. You don't want your step-son to outshine you."
"I'll see about it. I can make the old one do a little longer."
When Mr. Tarbox got home he at once tackled his wife.
"Mrs. T.," he said, "I'm surprised at your letting Grant order a twenty-dollar suit. Truly a fool and his money are soon parted, as the saying is."
"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Tarbox, and I'll thank you not to call me a fool," she added, with a flash of spirit.
"You mean to say you haven't authorized Grant to order a twenty-dollar suit at Mr. Shick's?"
"Grant hasn't asked me to buy him a suit?"
"Well, he's ordered one, for Mr. Shick told me so. It aint possible that he's going to trust that boy. I don't understand it."
"Nor do I. I will speak to Grant about it."
Mrs. Tarbox felt anxious, for the story seemed strange and almost incredible. It did not seem like Grant, but still she knew that he was very anxious to have a new suit. She would have been willing to advance ten dollars to buy him a ready-made one, but twenty dollars in her circumstances would be extravagant.
Just then Grant entered the room.
"Grant," she said, "have you ordered a suit at Mr. Shick's?"
"Yes, mother."
"At twenty dollars?"
"Yes, mother."
"How could you be so inconsiderate? Mr. Tarbox will not pay for it, and I cannot afford to pay so high a price."
"Don't be worried, mother," said Grant quietly, "*I shall pay for it myself*."

CHAPTER VI.

SETH TARBOX MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Two pairs of eyes were fixed upon Grant in wonderment—those of his mother and Mr. Tarbox.

"Are you crazy, Grant Colburn?" asked Mr. Tarbox.

"Not that I know of, Mr. Tarbox."

"Do you mean to say you have got twenty dollars to pay for your suit?"

"Yes, I do."

"Show it to me."

"I haven't got the money with me."

"Where is it, then?"

"I decline to tell."

"Do you know, Grant, that I, as your step-father, and natural guardian, have a right to make you tell?"

"No, I don't. At any rate, I shan't tell."

"You're getting dreadful contrary lately, Grant. Mrs. T., I think we are going to have trouble with that boy. Of course Mr. Shick won't be paid, and he'll send in his bill to you or me likely. He can't make us pay, for he has trusted a minor without consultin' his parents or guardians. I wash my hands of the matter."

So saying, Mr. Tarbox left the room.

"Grant," said his mother, "I can't help feeling anxious. It does seem a crazy idea for you to order a twenty-dollar suit."

"Why should it, mother?"

"When you have no money to pay for it."

"Mother, did you ever know me to tell a lie?"

"No, Grant."

"Then, when I tell you that I've got money enough to pay for this suit, and more, too, you can believe me."

"Was it got honestly, Grant?"

"Of course it was."

"And the money is really and truly yours?"

"It is."

"Are you willing to tell me where you got it?"

"Not just yet, mother. I will before long."

"Well, Grant, I will trust your word," said Mrs. Tarbox, relieved, "and I am really glad of your good fortune."

"You won't worry any more, then, mother?"

"No, Grant."

"I am glad you haven't lost confidence in me."

Grant took an opportunity, after supper, to go to Luke Weldon's, and draw twenty-five dollars. On his way back he called at the tailor's, and paid Mr. Shick for his suit in advance. The remaining five dollars, in silver, he kept in his pocket.

"It is so long since I carried any money," he said to himself, "that I want to know how it seems."

Meanwhile Jotham Perry, a neighbor, called at the farm-house on an errand.

"That's a pretty bad thing, the breaking down of the railroad bridge, isn't it?"

"I haven't heard of it," said Seth Tarbox, pricking up his ears.

"Sho! I thought everybody knew it."

"How did it happen?"

"I don't know, except it gave way from old age. It's long been shaky."

"When was it found out?"

"This afternoon, just before the accommodation train came along. I tell you it was a narraw escape for the train. They stopped just a few rods before they got to the bridge."

"What made them stop? How did the engineer come to suspect?"

"It seems a boy came along that way, and saw the condition of the bridge, and signalled the train."

"A boy?"

"Yes. He had a pitchfork, and stuck his hat and a handkerchief on the tines, and so attracted the engineer's attention."

Mr. Tarbox opened his eyes wide, and a sudden revelation came to him.

"Why, it must have been Grant," he said.

"Didn't he tell you anything about it?"

"No."

"I heerd the passengers took up a collection for the boy, whoever he was. He must have got as much as twenty-five dollars."

"That's where Grant's money came from," exclaimed Seth Tarbox, slapping his leg vigorously. "He's gone and ordered a twenty-dollar suit, and been hintin' mysteriously that he'd got money enough to pay for it."

"Yes, I suppose that explains it. Well, the boy needs a new suit and he's earned it easy."

"But it's such a foolish way of spendin' his money. My grandson Rodney offered him a suit of his for nothin', and he might have given me the money to keep for him."

"Yes, he might," said Jotham with a queer smile, "but I think if I'd been in Grant's place I'd have done the same thing he did."

Mr. Perry went away directly afterward, and Seth Tarbox sought his wife.

"Where is Grant, Mrs. T.?"

"He went out to walk after his chores were done, but he didn't say where he was going."

"I've found out where he got his money," said Seth, nodding his head.

"Where, then? He didn't do anything wrong, I am sure."

"Well, no, not in gettin' the money, but he'd ought to have consulted me before bein' so extravagant." 52

"Where did he get the money?"

"He found out the bridge was broken, and signalled the train and saved it from being wrecked."

Mrs. Tarbox's eyes sparkled with maternal pride.

"It was a noble act," she said.

"The passengers took up a contribution, and Jotham Perry thinks Grant got about twenty-five dollars."

"He deserved it."

"Well, I'm glad he got it, but he had no right to spend it himself. Ther's one thing that don't occur to you, Mrs. T. What he did was done in time, and he lost at least an hour by the delay it cost. You know yourself how late he came home."

"What is that, Mr. Tarbox, to the lives of the passengers and the safety of the train?"

"You don't understand me, Mrs. T. Under the circumstances I think I ought to have half the money he received."

"Mr. Tarbox!" exclaimed his wife in profound disgust. 53

"That's so, and of course if I had it he wouldn't have no twenty dollars to throw away on a suit of clothes."

"You forget, Mr. Tarbox, that it has saved you the money you would have to pay for a new suit for him."

"It has saved me nothing. I wouldn't have bought him a new suit. My grandson, Rodney, was goin' to give him one of his old suits. Now I think of it, I'll go down and see Mr. Shick and warn him not to make up the suit, tellin' him that Grant can't pay for it with my permission."

"That will be a mean thing to do, Seth Tarbox."

Mrs. Tarbox always called her husband by his full name when she had occasion to feel displeased with him.

"You and I don't look on things in the same way, Mrs. T.," said her husband calmly. "I'll go and see Mr. Shick at once."

The tailor shop was still open for business when Mr. Tarbox entered.

"Well, Mr. Tarbox, have you come to pick out a suit for yourself?" 54

"No, I haven't. Have you cut out Grant's suit yet?"

"Yes; it is nearly finished."

"Then I'm sorry for you. You mustn't make it up?"

"Why not?"

"Because I shall forbid the boy to pay for it. He's got the money, as I've found out, but part of it belongs to me, and I won't have him spendin' it so extravagantly."

"I shan't be able to oblige you, Mr. Tarbox. The suit will be made up, as I agreed, and delivered to Grant."

"Well, you'll be takin' a risk. I've warned you that you won't get your pay."

"You are behind the times, Mr. Tarbox. You have taken your walk for nothing. The suit is already paid for."

"*What!*" ejaculated Mr. Tarbox.

"It is just as I said. Grant has paid me for the suit in advance. I advise you to give me an order and do the same thing."

Mr. Tarbox felt that he had been outwitted. He persuaded himself that Grant had treated him meanly. Of course there was no resource. He was too wise to ask Mr. Shick to refund the money, for he knew he would not do it. He found nothing to say, and shuffled out, looking down in the mouth. 55

"There goes the meanest man in town!" soliloquized the tailor, as his visitor walked slowly down the road. "Grant must have a pretty uncomfortable time at home. I am glad that in this case the boy has got the better of his step-father."

"He's got five dollars left," reflected Mr. Tarbox. "I'd ought to have that, for it was in my time that he earned the money. I'll go upstairs and get it to-night when Grant is asleep."

Grant went to bed about nine o'clock, for he was tired out, and he was soon asleep.

Usually he did not wake up at all till morning, but it so happened that this night he waked up about eleven, and saw Mr. Tarbox rummaging in the pocket of his pantaloons.

He hardly knew whether to feel amused or indignant. 56

"What are you doing here, Mr. Tarbox?" he demanded in a voice which he made purposely loud.

CHAPTER VII.

GRANT MAKES UP HIS MIND.

Mr. Tarbox had not bargained for Grant's being awake, and he had the grace to look ashamed, but he put a bold face on it.

"I've come for the rest of the money you got for stoppin' the train," he said.

"What right have you to it, Mr. Tarbox," said Grant, more amused than surprised. "It was given to me."

"Mebbe it was, but you stopped the train in my time, and I'd ought to have half the money."

"You can't have it, Mr. Tarbox."

"I know you've fooled away twenty dollars on a new suit, when you might have had Rodney's; but you got as much as twenty-five dollars, so Jotham Perry said."

"How did he find out?" asked Grant in artful surprise.

"Then you did get twenty-five?"

"Yes."

"So I thought. Well, I want you to give me the five. You came home an hour late."

"And you charge me five dollars for an hour? If you'll pay me at that rate, Mr. Tarbox, I'll work for you all my life."

"Quit your foolin', Grant Colburn," said Seth, feeling that logic was against him. "I'm your guardian, and I claim the money. I'll keep four dollars of it for you."

"The fact is, Mr. Tarbox, I've disposed of part of the money. I've only got a dollar left."

This was true, for Grant had given his mother four dollars, to buy a new print dress.

"What did you do with it?" asked his step-father, disappointed.

"I gave it to mother."

"You'd ought to have given it to me."

"I don't think so."

"Where's the other dollar?"

"It's in my vest pocket."

Seth Tarbox thrust his fingers into the pocket of Grant's vest, and drew out two silver half-dollars. It was better than nothing, but he felt disappointed.

"I'll take this," he said, "to pay for your time."

"You are welcome to it, but don't you think you could spare me one half-dollar?" asked Grant meekly.

"When you've gone and spent twenty for a suit? No, I guess not. You can think yourself pretty lucky to get as much as you did."

Seth Tarbox took the candle, and went slowly down stairs. Grant was so much amused by the way in which he had outwitted his step-father that he laughed loud enough for Mr. Tarbox to hear.

"That's a queer boy," said Tarbox to himself. "I don't think he's exactly right in his head. I'd ought to have got more than one dollar out of all the money the passengers raised for him; but still it's something."

When Grant came down stairs to breakfast the next morning he looked very cheerful, in spite of losing his money the night before, and laughed two or three times, without any apparent reason for doing so. Mr. Tarbox had suggested to his wife the propriety of giving up to him half the money she had received from Grant, but Mrs. Tarbox, yielding as she generally was, had positively refused. Indeed, Grant had made her promise to do so.

Grant's new suit was finished in time for him to wear it on Sunday. He had great satisfaction in entering the village church decently clothed. Indeed, he felt that he was as well dressed as any boy in town, and this was for him a decidedly new sensation.

Grant had one hundred and twenty-seven dollars left in the hands of Luke Weldon. He withdrew ten dollars, and bought some shirts and underclothing. This did not come to the notice of Mr. Tarbox, who was under the impression that Grant's stock of money was exhausted. Had he known the truth, he would have moved heaven and earth to get hold of the balance of Grant's little fortune.

Grant was anxious to see John Heywood, the returned Californian. He was more than ever determined to leave the service of his step-father, and make a bold stroke for a fortune. All day he thought of the Golden State of the Pacific Coast, and all night he dreamed of it. For him it had the greatest fascination. The idea of wandering across the continent to this wonderful new land became strengthened, and he felt that, with the sum he had at command, he would be able to do it. He spoke of it to his mother privately, and, though it made her feel anxious, he succeeded in persuading her that it would be for the best.

But he could do nothing without seeing John Heywood, and getting more information. He thought of going to Crestville, and accordingly, one morning after breakfast, he started without notifying Mr. Tarbox, and walked the whole distance—six miles.

Mr. Heywood lived half a mile this side of the village, and Grant had the luck to find him at home.

"Good-morning, Grant," said the young man. "What brings you to Crestville so early?"

"I came to see you, Mr. Heywood."

"You did? Well, I'm glad to see you. Won't you come into the house?"

"No, I'll sit down here," and Grant took a seat on a wood horse, while Heywood leaned against the well curb, and waited for his young visitor to open his business.

"I hear you have been very lucky in California, Mr. Heywood."

"Yes," answered the young man, with complacency. "I brought home ten thousand dollars. It makes me feel like a rich man. I'm only twenty-nine, and I didn't look to be worth that sum before I was sixty-nine. A clear gain of forty years!" he added with a laugh.

"You got it by digging gold, didn't you?"

“Yes.”

“And I suppose there’s more gold in California? You didn’t take it all?”

“I should say not. There’s piles, and piles of it left.”

“Is digging gold very hard work? Is it too hard for a boy?”

“You don’t mean to say you’re thinkin’ of goin’ to California yourself?” said Heywood quickly.

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, you’re a good, stout boy. I don’t see why you should not succeed. But you’ll have to work hard.” 63

“I am willing to.”

“What will your folks say?”

“Mother has given her consent. As for Mr. Tarbox, my step-father, he hasn’t got anything to say about it.”

“You are working for him now, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I’m working for my board and clothes. The board is fair enough, but he is not willing to give me any clothes.”

“That’s a nice suit you have on.”

“So it is, but I had to buy it with my own money. He hasn’t spent but ten dollars for my clothing in a whole year.”

“I’ve heard he was a mean man.”

“He thinks everything of a dollar. Mother made a great mistake in marrying him.”

“Then, under the circumstances, Grant, I don’t know as I blame you. But, you know, it takes money to go to California.”

“I know that. How much did it cost you?”

“I went across the plains. By the time I reached the mines I had spent about ninety dollars.”

“Ninety dollars!” repeated Grant in a tone of satisfaction. “But how am I to go, even if I have the money. I can’t start across the plains alone.” 64

“No, of course not. It’s always better to have a little company. There’s a family goin’ from this town in about a week—Mr. Cooper’s family. I am sure they will be willing to have you go with them. Shall I speak to them about it?”

“Yes, I wish you would.”

Much pleased, Grant set out on his long walk home. He found his step-father furious at his absence.

“Where have you been, Grant?” he demanded.

“Over to Crestville.”

“You’ve taken ’most a day of my time. It’s a shame! I can’t afford to take care of you, and give you victuals and clothes, when you’re playin’ truant half the time.”

“I don’t expect you to, Mr. Tarbox. I don’t want you to lose money by me,” said Grant demurely, “so I’ve made up my mind to leave you.”

“To leave me?” ejaculated Seth Tarbox, aghast. “Where are you goin’?” 65

“I’m going to California!”

Seth Tarbox dropped the hoe he had in his hand, and stared at Grant as though the boy had taken leave of his senses.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL IS SETTLED.

“Goin’ to Californy!” ejaculated Mr. Tarbox in a dazed tone.

“Yes. I’ve seen John Heywood—that’s what I went to Crestville for—and he tells me there’s a chance for a boy to make money out there.”

“Goin’ to walk, I s’pose,” said Seth satirically.

“I’m going across the plains, if that’s what you mean.”

“Where are you goin’ to get the money? It will cost a good deal.”

“I have made arrangements about the money.”

“Is John Heywood goin’ to supply you with funds?”

“I’d rather not tell,” answered Grant mysteriously. He was glad that this idea had occurred to his step-father, as he did not wish him to know that he had any funds of his own.

“I don’t know as I’ll let you go,” went on Seth Tarbox slowly.

“What right have you to stop me?” demanded Grant, not very much alarmed.

“I’m your step-father.”

“Yes; but you’re not my guardian.”

“Mind, I don’t say I’ll stop you,” said Seth, for an idea had occurred to him whereby he might turn the expedition to his own advantage. Should Grant bring back a good sum of money, he meant to get control of it, and thought he should succeed on account of the boy’s being so young.

“No, Mr. Tarbox, it wouldn’t be any use.”

“Does John Heywood really think you can make it pay?”

“He says there’s piles of gold there.”

“Piles of gold!” repeated Seth Tarbox, an expression of greed stealing over his face.

“Yes, that’s what he said.”

“I wish I was a young man. I ain’t sure but I’d go myself. But I’m sixty-eight.”

“That’s a little too old to go.”

“If you are prosperous, Grant, take care of your money and bring it all home. We’ll be glad to see you back safe and prosperous, your mother and me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Tarbox.”

This conversation relieved Grant’s mind. Even if Mr. Tarbox were opposed to his going, he meant to go all the same, but it was pleasanter to have no trouble in the matter.

The next day he went to Crestville again, this time to see Jerry Cooper, as everybody called him, and his son Tom, and ascertain whether they were willing that he should join their party.

Mr. Cooper, a weather-beaten man of fifty, was at work in his yard when Grant came up. Grant knew him by sight, and bade him good-morning.

“Has John Heywood spoken to you about me?” he asked.

“Yes. You’re the boy that wants to go to Californy with us.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You look kind of rugged; I guess you can stand it,” said the blacksmith, surveying critically Grant’s broad shoulders and athletic frame.

“Yes, Mr. Cooper; I’m not a city dude. I’ve always been accustomed to hard work.”

“That’s good. There’s a good deal of hard work in goin’ across the plains.”

“How long do you think it will take to make the journey?”

“About four months.”

“It will give us a good chance to see the country——”

“That ain’t what I’m goin’ for. When you get to be fifty years old you won’t care much about seein’ the country. You will be more practical.”

“I shall try to be practical,” said Grant, with a smile.

“It’s my belief we shall see more of the country than we care for. I wish it wasn’t so fur.”

“So do I. Some time there may be a railroad across the continent.”

Mr. Cooper shook his head.

“I never expect to see that,” he said. “It wouldn’t pay. You’re a boy, and by the time you get to be an old man there may be a railroad, but I doubt it.”

“When do you expect to start, Mr. Cooper?”

“Next Thursday. Can you be ready?”

“I could be ready to-morrow if necessary,” returned Grant promptly. “How much is it going to cost me, Mr. Cooper?” he added. “If you will tell me, I can give you the money in a lump, and you can undertake to see me through.”

“Mebbe that will be a good plan, as I shall have to lay in more supplies. We’ll say seventy-five dollars; and it will be well for you to bring a pair of blankets.”

“All right. I will give you the money now if you will give me a paper acknowledging the receipt, and what it is for.”

“Just as you say, Grant.”

Grant had brought a hundred dollars with him, and handed over to Jerry Cooper the sum he had mentioned, receiving back a receipt. This he put into his pocket with a sense of satisfaction. He felt that now the die was cast, and he was really bound for California; that he had taken the first step on the road to fortune.

On his way home he chanced to meet Rodney Bartlett. Rodney was walking with an affected step and swinging his cane. He had an idea that he was a striking figure and excited the admiration of all whom he met.

When his eyes fell on Grant, he started in genuine surprise.

“How do you happen to be over here, Grant Colburn?” he asked.

“I am here on business,” answered Grant.
“Oh, come over on an errand for my grandfather, I suppose.”
“No, I came on business of my own.”
Rodney arched his eyebrows.
“Oh, so you have business of your own?” he said, in a ironical tone.
“Yes.”
“What is it?”
“I don’t think you would feel interested in it.”
“Look here, Grant, I don’t believe you have any business here at all,” said Rodney rudely. 72
“It makes little difference to me what you think,” returned Grant briefly.
“I think you are playing truant from the farm—that you have come over here to get rid of work. If I were grandfather I wouldn’t let you come. I’d keep you at work.”
“You are very kind and considerate, as usual, Rodney. However, you are mistaken in one thing.”
“What’s that?”
“You think I am in the employ of your grandfather.”
“I know you are a farm boy.”
“I was, but am so no longer.”
“What do you mean? Has grandfather discharged you?”
“No, I have discharged myself. I don’t expect to work for your grandfather any longer.”
“What are you going to do? Do you expect to live without work?”
“No; I expect to work harder next year than ever before.”
“I don’t understand you,” said Rodney, puzzled. “Are you trying to fool me?” 73
“No.”
“Then what do you mean?”
“I start next Thursday for California.”
Rodney *was* surprised.
“You—don’t—mean—it!” he ejaculated.
“It’s true.”
“Who are you going with?”
“With Jerry Cooper’s family.”
“But you can’t go without money.”
“That’s true.”
“And you haven’t got any.”
“That’s a mistake. I have all I need.”
“Where did you get it?”
“That’s my business.”
“Who put you up to going?”
“I had a talk with John Heywood. He told me he thought I would succeed in making money.”
“Oh, I see. I suppose he was fool enough to lend you the money.”
Grant smiled, but did not answer. This confirmed Rodney in his belief. He looked at Grant with envy and dislike. With the amiable desire to depress him, he said, “I predict that you’ll come back poorer than you went away.” 74
“It may be so, but I don’t believe it.”
When he parted with Grant, Rodney went around to John Heywood’s house, with the view of ascertaining whether he had supplied Grant with the funds necessary for his journey.
“I think you are foolish, Mr. Heywood,” Rodney began, “to lend Grant Colburn money to go to California.”
John Heywood looked up from his work.
“Who told you I had supplied him with money?” he asked.
“Well, no one.”
“Then why do you say I did?”
“He must have got the money somewhere, so I concluded you had let him have it.”
“Then you concluded wrong. He never asked me to lend him money. If he had——”
“Well, if he had?” repeated Rodney eagerly.
“If he had, I should probably have done it. Grant Colburn’s a hardworking boy and a good fellow, and I think he’ll be happier out in California than on your grandfather’s farm.” 75
“It’ll be a relief to grandfather to have him go. He’s been supporting him for the last two years.”
“Grant has earned his living twice over. He’ll have to work hard in California, but he’ll be paid for it. I shouldn’t be surprised to see him a rich man some time.”
Rodney scowled and walked away. He thought the prediction ridiculous, and hoped it would not come true.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONG JOURNEY BEGINS.

The day before they were to start Grant came over and spent the night with Mr. Cooper and his family. The blacksmith had been guided by John Heywood in making his preparations. Independence, Mo., was at that time the usual starting-point for overland emigrants, and it was to this point that the little party directed their course. Mr. Cooper started with two horses, but at Independence he exchanged one of them for a yoke of oxen, being advised that oxen were upon the whole more reliable, and less likely to be stolen by the Indians. Here, too, he laid in a supply of flour, bacon, coffee, and sugar, with a quantity of rice, crackers, and smaller articles, for they were going through a land where there were no hotels, and must carry their own provender.

When they had completed their outfit they set out. A long journey lay before them. From Independence to the gold region was rather more than two thousand miles, and such were the difficulties of the way that they only averaged about fifteen miles a day. A detailed account of the trip would only be wearisome, and I shall confine myself to some of the salient incidents.

The custom was to make an early start and stop at intervals, partly for the preparation of meals and partly to give the patient animals a chance to rest.

One evening—it was about ten weeks after the start—they had encamped for the night, and Mrs. Cooper, assisted by Grant, was preparing supper, a fire having been kindled about fifty feet from the wagon, when steps were heard, and a singular looking figure emerged from the underbush. It was a man, with a long, grizzled beard, clad in a tattered garb, with an old slouch hat on his head, and a long, melancholy visage.

"I trust you are well, my friends," he said. "Do not be alarmed. I mean you no harm."

Tom Cooper laughed.

"We are not alarmed," he said. "That is, not much. Who are you?"

"An unhappy wayfarer, who has been wandering for days, almost famished, through this wilderness."

"Do you live about here?"

"No; I am on my way to California."

"Not alone, surely?"

"I started with a party, but we were surprised a week since by a party of Cheyenne Indians, and I alone escaped destruction."

Mrs. Cooper turned pale.

"Are the Indians so bloodthirsty, then?"

"Some of them, my dear lady, some of them. They took all our supplies, and I have been living on what I could pick up. Pardon my saying so, but I am almost famished."

"Our supper is nearly ready," said Mrs. Cooper hospitably. "You are welcome to a portion."

"Ah, how kind you are!" ejaculated the stranger, clasping his hands. "I shall, indeed, be glad to join you."

"What is your name, sir?" asked the blacksmith cautiously.

"Dionysius Silverthorn."

"That's a strange name."

"Yes, but I am not responsible for it. We do not choose our own names."

"And where are you from?"

"I came from Illinois."

"Were you in business there?"

"Yes. Ahem! I was a teacher, but my health gave way, and when I heard of the rich discoveries of gold in California, I gathered up, with difficulty, money enough for the journey and started; but, alas! I did not anticipate the sad disaster that has befallen me."

Mr. Silverthorn was thin and meager, but when supper was ready he ate nearly twice as much as any of the little party.

"Who is this young man?" he asked, with a glance at Grant.

"My name is Grant Colburn."

"You are the image of a boy I lost," sighed Dionysius. "He was strong and manly, like you—a very engaging youth."

"Then he couldn't have looked like you," was Tom Cooper's inward comment.

"Did he die of disease?" asked Mrs. Cooper.

"Yes; he had the typhoid fever—my poor, poor Otto," and Mr. Silverthorn wiped his eyes with a dirty red silk handkerchief. "Have you a father living, my young friend?"

"No, sir."

"Then it would be a gratification to me if you would look upon me as a parent."

Grant was quite overwhelmed by this unexpected suggestion.

"Thank you, sir," he said; "but you are a stranger, and I have a step-father living."

He said this on the impulse of the moment, as a reason for not acceding to Mr. Silverthorn's request, but it occurred to him that it would be about as difficult to regard Mr. Tarbox with filial feelings as the newcomer.

"Ah, he is indeed fortunate!" sighed Mr. Silverthorn. He had a habit of sighing. "My friend"—here he addressed himself to the blacksmith—"do you ever smoke?"

"Yes, when I get the chance."

"And have you, perchance, a cigar?"

"No; a cigar is too high-toned for me. I have a pipe."

"That will do."

"But I have no tobacco."

“Ah!” Here there was another long-drawn sigh.

After supper they sat down around the fire, to rest and chat for a while before retiring.

“I suppose, my friends,” continued Dionysius, “you would be surprised if I should tell you that I was once wealthy.”

“You don’t look like it now,” said Tom Cooper bluntly.

“No; indeed I don’t. Yet six years ago I was worth fifty thousand dollars.”

“I shall be glad if I am worth as much six years hence.”

“How did you lose it?” asked Jerry Cooper.

“Through the knavery of wicked men. I was so honest myself that I supposed all with whom I had dealings were equally honorable, and I was deceived. But I am happy to think that when I was rich I contributed to every good work. I gave a thousand dollars to the church in my town. I gave five 82
thousand dollars as a fund for a town library. All men spoke well of me, but when I lost my fortune all turned the cold shoulder, and I found I had no friends. It is the way of the world.”

“If you were a teacher I don’t see where you got so much money,” remarked Grant curiously.

“I didn’t make it by teaching, my young friend. An old uncle died and left me his money. He had been a miser, and never took any notice of me, so it was a great surprise to me when his will was read and I was constituted his sole heir.”

“I wish an old uncle would die and leave me fifty thousand dollars,” said Tom.

“Such may be your luck.”

“Not much chance of that. I haven’t got but one uncle living, and he’s as poor as Job after he lost all his flocks and herds.”

“I don’t complain of my unhappy condition,” said Dionysius meekly. “I have been rich and now I am poor, but I am resigned to the Lord’s will.”

“He seems to be a very good man,” whispered Mrs. Cooper to Tom. 83

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t take much stock in him,” he whispered back.

“How did you happen to escape when the rest of your party were destroyed by the Indians?” asked the blacksmith.

“The attack was made in the night. I had been unable to sleep, and I got up and went for a walk in the woods, hoping to become fatigued and drowsy. I was absent for an hour and a half, as well as I can estimate. When I returned to the camp, what was my dismay when I saw that my friends had been surprised, their goods confiscated, and a scene of violence enacted.”

“Were all killed?”

“I don’t know, but on the ground, by the dismantled tent, I saw a human arm which had been lopped from the shoulder.”

“Do you know whose it was?” asked Tom.

“Yes, it was the arm of a young man about your age, who doubtless had excited the anger of the Indians by resistance.”

Mr. Silverthorn put his red handkerchief to his eyes and sobbed, or appeared to do so, 84
convulsively.

“Excuse these tears,” he said. “They are a tribute to my murdered friends.”

“Did you follow the Indians? Did you try to find out where they had carried your companions?”

“No. It would have been no good. I was single-handed.”

“I would have done it!” said Tom resolutely.

“I would expect it of you, for you are a brave young man.”

“How do you know I am?”

“By your looks and manner. I am not. You may despise me, but I am obliged to confess that I am chicken-hearted. I am afraid I am a coward. It is not a pleasant confession, but I do not wish to represent myself other than I am.”

“Then I am afraid that you are not the right kind of a man to cross the plains to California.”

“I am not sure but you are right. I sometimes think so myself. But I hoped to retrieve my fortunes, 85
and in my state of health there seemed no other way open to me.”

“You haven’t had much encouragement yet?”

“No, but I feel that I am fortunate in meeting with your friendly party. And this emboldens me to make a request.”

“What is it?” asked the blacksmith.

“Will you let me travel with you? I am alone, quite alone. It would make me happy to be with you. The sight of that boy, who reminds me of my lost son, would be a daily source of happiness to me.”

Mr. Cooper hesitated, and the expression of his face showed that the proposal was distasteful to him.

“You can stay with us to-night,” he answered briefly. “I cannot promise more.”

CHAPTER X.

MR. SILVERTHORN'S TREACHERY.

The little party generally lay down to sleep soon after eight. The days were always fatiguing, and they were in the habit of rising early.

The weather was warm, for it was toward the end of June, and they did not even raise the tent, but lay down on the ground with a blanket underneath and above them. Mrs. Cooper generally slept in the wagon.

"We have an extra pair of blankets, Mr. Silverthorn," said Mrs. Cooper. "We cannot offer you a bed; you will fare as well as my husband and the boys."

"How kind you are!" murmured Dionysius. "To me this simple provision will be a luxury. For a week I have slept on the bare ground without a blanket."

"You need not go to bed as early as the rest of us, unless you like."

"My dear lady, if you don't object, I will retire into the woods for an hour and indulge in religious meditation. I wish to express my thanks to Providence for my happy encounter with your kind party."

"There is no objection, I am sure, Mr. Silverthorn," said Mrs. Cooper. "What a good man he is!" she said to herself.

"That man makes me sick," remarked Tom, aside to Grant.

"I think he is a humbug," whispered Grant.

"I am sure he is."

The little party stretched themselves on the ground, and Dionysius Silverthorn walked pensively into the woods.

When he returned, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper and Tom were asleep.

The pair of blankets assigned to the stranger lay ready for use. He did not immediately lie down, but thoughtfully surveyed the sleepers.

"They seem fast asleep, but perhaps it will be better to wait awhile," he murmured thoughtfully to himself. "It will not do for me to get caught. That young man, Tom, is very muscular, and the old man is strong in spite of his years. I will lie down awhile."

It was well for him that he decided thus, for Grant awoke—a thing unusual for him—and, looking around, saw their visitor.

"Haven't you gone to bed yet, Mr. Silverthorn?" he asked.

"No, my young friend; I have been into the woods, engaged in meditation and thanksgiving, but now I feel weary and I think I shall soon be lulled to rest. Do you often wake during the night?"

"No; it is unusual for me to wake at all."

"That is well. Boys like you should sleep soundly. I would I were a boy again! Good-night, my dear young friend."

"Good-night!"

Grant was soon asleep. An hour later Mr. Silverthorn, who had been lying quietly, lifted his head gently, and throwing off his blanket, rose to his feet.

He walked up to where Grant lay asleep.

"I wonder whether the boy has any money in his pocket?" he thought.

He went up softly to where Grant lay, and, kneeling down, quietly detached the blanket, so that Grant would be uncovered. Then he inserted his hand into his pocket, and drew out some silver change, about two dollars in all.

He looked at it with disappointment.

"Is that all he has?" he muttered. "It won't pay me for my trouble."

He was about to search his other pocket, but Grant stirred in his sleep, and, fearing he would awake, Dionysius rose hastily.

"I would try the others," he said, "but I don't dare to. If they should wake, they might murder me, particularly the young man. Now I will lie down again, and get up about four o'clock. I must have a little rest."

Dionysius Silverthorn was one of those men who can rouse themselves at any hour they fix upon. It didn't vary much from four o'clock in the morning when he rose and rubbed his eyes. It was already growing light in the east, and there was promise of a fine day.

"I feel quite refreshed," he said, stretching himself. "It is time I took my departure. Is there nothing else I can take?"

Some remains of the supper of the previous night had been left near the wagon, including a box of crackers.

"I will pocket a few crackers," said Dionysius, "and keep them for lunch. I will take the liberty of breakfasting before I go. Shall I take the blankets?" he said thoughtfully. "No, they would be in my way. I wish I had a little more money—but it would be dangerous to seek for it. I will, however, take the liberty of borrowing the horse, as he will materially assist me in my journey."

The horse had been tied to a tree. Mr. Silverthorn gently unfastened the rope and led him away. He was nervously anxious lest he should whinny or make some noise that would arouse the little party. But the horse seemed unusually docile, and, though he was probably sorry to be roused from sleep quite so early, allowed himself to be led away without any manifestation of discontent.

An hour later Tom Cooper stretched himself and opened his eyes.

"Another fine day!" he said to himself. "Well, we must make the most of it. It is high time we began to make preparations to start. Hello, Grant!" he said, shaking the boy till he murmured drowsily, "What is it, Tom?"

"Time to get up, Grant, my boy. We must be on our way by six."

Grant jumped up, and, throwing off the blankets, began to fold them up.

“Where’s Mr. Silverthorn?” he asked, turning his eyes in the direction of the stranger’s bed.

“There’s his blankets!” said Tom. “Perhaps he has gone to the woods to meditate,” he added, with a laugh. “I shan’t be sorry, for one, if he doesn’t come back.”

“Nor I,” assented Grant.

“It’s my belief that he’s a rascal!”

“Whether he is or not, *I* don’t like him.”

“You forget, Grant, that you are the image of his lost boy,” said Tom, with a laugh.

“I hope not. I shouldn’t like to look like any one belonging to him. Do you believe his story about the Indians attacking his party?”

“It may be true, though I think the man is capable of lying. Well, I must wake up father.”

The blacksmith was soon roused.

“A fine day!” he said cheerily. “We are in luck. Where is the horse?” he asked abruptly, the next instant. 92

Startled by the question, Tom and Grant turned their eyes in the direction of the tree to which old Dobbin had been tethered.

“Sure enough, where is he?” ejaculated Tom.

“Wasn’t he securely tied?”

“Yes,” answered Grant. “I tied him myself. He couldn’t have got away without hands.”

“I tell you what, Grant,” said Tom Cooper suddenly, “that scoundrel’s stolen him!”

“What scoundrel? Whom do you mean?” demanded the father.

“That tramp—Silverthorn.”

“Why, he’s gone, too!”

“Yes, and has stolen Dobbin to help him on his way. I’d like to get hold of the rascal!” And stern resolution glittered in the eyes of the young man.

“But I don’t understand it.”

“It’s easy enough to understand. The man’s a humbug. All his story was made up to impose upon us.”

“Then you don’t believe his party was attacked by Indians?” 93

“No, I don’t; but if I catch him he’ll think he has been attacked by Indians.”

“It will be a serious loss to us, Tom,” said the blacksmith, with a troubled face.

“We’ll get him back if we can, father. I wonder if the fellow has stolen anything else.”

Grant thrust his hand into his pocket and made a discovery.

“I’ve lost about two dollars in silver,” he said.

“It may have slipped out of your pocket during the night.”

Grant examined the ground on which he had been lying, and shook the blankets; but not one of the missing silver coins was found.

“No,” he said. “The silver must have been taken from my pocket. No; I had some bills in my right-hand pocket. I was lying on my right side, so he could not get at it without the risk of waking me up. Have you lost anything, Tom?”

Tom had been examining his pockets. 94

“No,” he said grimly. “The fellow didn’t dare to tackle me, I reckon. If I had caught him at it I would have strangled him. Father, how is it with you?”

“I am all right, Tom.”

“Then he didn’t get much outside of the horse. But that’s a serious enough loss. Poor Dobbin!”

“If I only knew which way he went,” said Tom slowly.

But this was not clear. There was nothing to do but to get ready for the day’s march, and set out. The loss of Dobbin made it necessary that all should walk except Mrs. Cooper, who sat in the wagon.

They had been about three hours on the way when a tramping sound was heard, and Dobbin came running up to the party, whinnying with joy.

“There’s nothing amiss with him,” said Tom joyfully. “I wonder how he got away from the man that stole him. Are you glad to get back, old fellow?”

There could be no doubt on that point, for the horse seemed content and happy. 95

“Where’s old Silverthorn, I wonder?” said Tom.

The question was soon to be answered.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INDIAN ENCOUNTER.

The country through which the Cooper party were now travelling was partially wooded. Soon, however, they would reach the long and barren stretch of country—the great salt plain—which was the dread of all overland parties. Then there would be no woods till they approached the borders of the Golden State.

About the middle of the afternoon, while the oxen were plodding along at the rate of barely two miles an hour, they received a surprise.

Tom Cooper, whose eyes were the sharpest, called out suddenly:

"Look there!"

Grant looked, but had to approach nearer before he could realize the situation. Then he saw a white man tied to a slender tree, while half a dozen Indians were dancing round him, uttering a series of guttural cries, which appeared to fill the captive with intense dread. It was too far to distinguish the features of the prisoner, but when they came nearer Tom cried out, "Dang me, if it aint Silverthorn!"

It was indeed Dionysius Silverthorn, and his plight was certainly a serious one.

"What shall we do?" asked Grant.

"We must rescue him," answered Tom. "He's a mean rascal, and he's repaid our hospitality by robbing us; but we can't let him be killed by those redskins."

"I'm with you!" said Grant.

By this time the Indians had caught sight of the approaching party. They ceased dancing and appeared to be conferring together. When Silverthorn saw that some of his own color were at hand he uttered a loud cry, and would have stretched out his hands if they had not been fettered.

"Help me! help me!" he cried. "Save me from these fiends!"

The Indians—six in number—seeing that there were but three in the approaching party, took courage and decided to maintain their ground. They uttered, a yell and fired a volley of arrows, one of which whizzed by Grant's ear.

Tom Cooper gritted his teeth.

"We'll teach them a lesson," he said.

He raised his rifle, and, aiming at the foremost Indian, fired deliberately. The redskin fell, pierced to the heart.

This appeared to strike his companions with dismay. They seemed panic-stricken, as well they might be, for the bows and arrows with which they were armed were no match for the rifles of the little party opposed to them. One of them raised his arm and uttered a few words; these were of course unintelligible to Grant and his companions, but their sense became apparent when he pointed to the dead Indian, and, with one of his companions, lifted him from the ground and began to beat a retreat.

"They won't trouble us any more, Grant," said Tom. "They are going away. But we had better keep on the watch, for they are a crafty race, and may meditate some treachery."

When they were beyond bowshot, Tom led the way to the spot where Mr. Silverthorn was eagerly awaiting deliverance from his uncomfortable position.

"Well," said Tom, taking a position where he had a good view of the captive, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Oh, please release me, Mr. Tom!" said Dionysius, in a pleading tone.

"Why should I? What claim have you on me?"

"The claim of humanity. You've no idea what I have suffered in the last hour."

"First, I want you to explain why you stole my horse."

"You've got him back," said Silverthorn, who could see old Dobbin browsing beside the wagon.

"Yes; but no thanks to you."

"Indeed, I only meant to borrow him for a while."

"And you borrowed Grant's money in the same way, I suppose."

"Put yourself in my place, Mr. Tom. I was penniless and destitute. How could I make my way alone through this wilderness?"

"So you robbed your benefactors! I take no stock in your story that you only meant to borrow the horse. Now own up, make a clean breast of it, and it will be the better for you."

"I meant some time to pay you for him; indeed I did. I knew that if I got to the mines I would soon be in a position to pay all my debts, and I should have regarded that as a debt of honor."

"The less you say about honor the better, it strikes me, Mr. Silverthorn."

"Please release me! I have been in this unhappy confinement for more than an hour."

Tom approached the tree and, drawing out a formidable looking jack-knife, sundered the cords that bound the captive, and he stepped forth, stretching himself with a sigh of relief.

"Permit me to express my thanks, my friend and benefactor!" he cried, sinking on his knees and grasping Tom's hand, which he pressed to his lips.

Tom pulled it away with a look of disgust.

"I have no confidence in you," he said. "I know how you treat your friends and benefactors."

"I have indeed done wrong," said Dionysius. "I am a weak, fallible man, but I never will wrong you again."

"I don't think you will, for I shall not give you a chance. Now tell me the truth about the horse. How did he escape from you?"

"I got off his back a moment, and he immediately turned and galloped away."

"You pursued him, of course?"

"A little way," answered Mr. Silverthorn, coughing apologetically; "but I soon gave it up. I said to

myself, ‘He will seek his owner, and I shall be saved from committing a sin.’“

Tom Cooper laughed.

“You were resigned because you had to be,” he said. “Now, about Grant’s money! Have you got it?”

“No; the Indians robbed me of it.”

“When did you meet the Indians?”

“It may have been two hours ago. I have no watch, and can only estimate the time.”

“Did they attack you?”

“They ran up and seized me. I stood still, for I knew that if I ran they would pierce me with an arrow.” 102

“Well?”

“When they caught me they searched my pockets and took the silver. Then I was glad that I had taken no more.”

“That is, you would rather Grant would keep his money than have the Indians get it.”

“Yes, Mr. Tom,” answered Silverthorn meekly. “It went to my heart to rob the boy, for he looked so much like my lost son. Forgive these tears!” and he drew out the red silk handkerchief, which the Indians had evidently not thought it worth while to take, and wiped his eyes.

“That man disgusts me, Grant,” said Tom. “He seems to have quite an affection for you.”

“It is all on his side,” returned Grant. “I don’t believe he ever had a boy.”

“Well, perhaps not. He seems a natural born liar. But it’s time we were pushing on. We have a long distance still before us.”

The wagon was put in motion, and the little procession started. Mr. Cooper drove the oxen, Mrs. Cooper sat inside the wagon, Tom led the horse, and Grant walked alongside. Sometimes Tom took his turn in driving the oxen, and sometimes Grant led the horse. 103

Dionysius Silverthorn started also, walking beside Grant.

Tom turned upon him.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I will walk along with you, if you will let me, Mr. Tom.”

“I think you’ve got more cheek than any man I know. After the trick you played upon us, you expect us to tolerate your presence.”

“Please let me accompany you, Mr. Tom. I might meet the Indians again.”

“Then go in a different direction. You cannot go with us.”

Mr. Silverthorn produced his red handkerchief, and rubbed his eyes again.

“It is a hard, cold world!” he said. “I am a very unfortunate man.”

“Perhaps you are; but I don’t think you deserve to be very fortunate. Just make up your mind that you are not going to travel with us. Had you behaved honorably, and not repaid kindness by theft, we would have allowed you to remain with us for a time; but now it is impossible.” 104

“I shall starve, and be found a wretched corpse by the wayside,” moaned Dionysius.

“Let him have some provisions, Tom,” said Mrs. Cooper, who was naturally compassionate. She had given up the idea that he was a truly good man, but she was not willing that he should be left quite unprovided for.

“I will do that,” said Tom.

He made up a small parcel of provisions, and handed them to Dionysius Silverthorn, who sat down on a stump, while the little caravan pushed on.

“That’s the strangest sort of man I ever encountered,” said Tom. “I wonder whether we’ll ever see him again.”

CHAPTER XII.

IN DIRE DISTRESS.

Some days later the party reached the great salt plains dreaded by all overland travellers. The sight of the vast, white prairies, utterly destitute of vegetation, with no plant or shrub visible, and no evidence that any had ever existed, was depressing enough.

“If we should get out of provisions or water here, Heaven help us!” said Tom apprehensively.

“How far will we have to go before we reach the borders of the plain?” asked Grant.

“I don’t know, but I have heard that it is very extensive.”

“How are we off for provisions?”

“That is what makes me anxious. Our supply is quite scanty.”

“And there is no chance to replenish it here?”

Tom shook his head.

“Don’t tell mother,” he said. “It would make her worry. It will be time for her to learn it if worse comes to worst.”

On the sixth day they were startled by a sight calculated to increase their fears.

It was a stranded wagon, with three gaunt, emaciated bodies stretched near it, all of them quite dead. There were two men and a woman.

“They must have died of hunger, or thirst, or both,” whispered Tom.

“What can have happened to them?” asked Mrs. Cooper compassionately.

“Perhaps they were weak, and unable to go farther,” said Tom evasively.

“It seems terrible that they should be exposed to the elements. Suppose some wild beasts should come and mangle their bodies.”

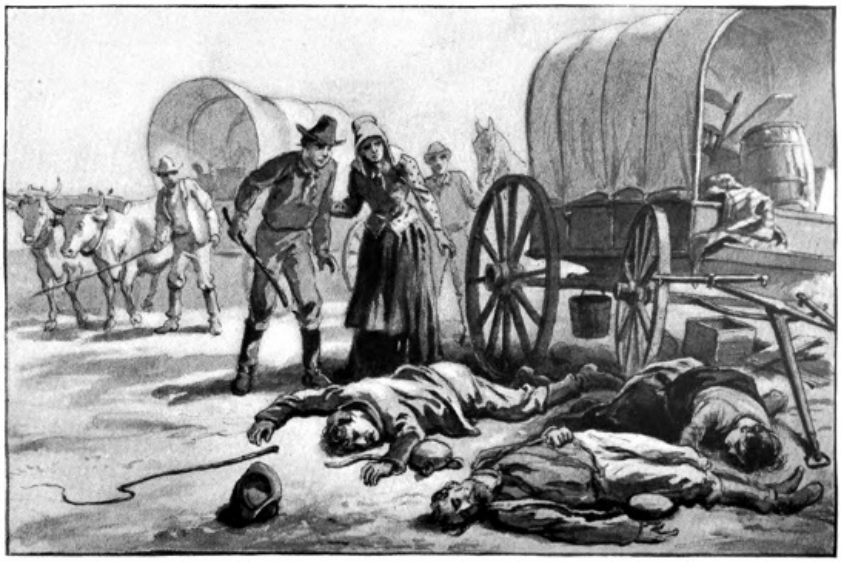
“Wild beasts are too sensible to be found in this region,” said Tom.

“Why?” asked his mother.

“Because,” answered Tom, hesitating, “the country is so barren and unattractive.”

“You seem to think wild animals appreciate fine scenery, like human beings.”

“Well, yes, in a measure,” and Tom nodded significantly at Grant, as if to caution him against saying anything that would reveal to his mother his real meaning.



A Horrible Discovery.—Death from Starvation.

“Tom,” said his father, “don’t you think we had better bury these unfortunate persons?”

“Yes, father. I will help you do it.”

“And I,” added Grant.

“First, however, let us see if we can find any letters or documents disclosing their identity. We ought to let their friends know what has become of them.”

In the pocket of one of the men Tom found letters showing that it was a party from Taunton, in Massachusetts. One of the men had a silver watch, and upon another was found a small sum of money.

“I will take charge of the watch and money,” said Mr. Cooper, “and when we reach any point where it is possible, I will send them on to their friends in Taunton, for that appears to have been their home.”

“What about the wagon, father?”

“We must leave it. We have all we can do in transporting our own.”

A grave was dug, and the three bodies were deposited therein. Tom looked sober, for he couldn’t help asking himself, “Suppose this should be our fate!”

He quietly examined the wagon to see if he could find any provisions, but there was not a scrap, or crust to be found.

“It was as I thought,” he whispered to Grant. “The poor wretches died of starvation.”

A week later the same problem confronted them.

“Grant,” said Tom, “I have been examining our food supply, and find that we have only enough to

last us two days."

Grant looked startled.

"And then?" he asked.

"I don't know. Unless we get a fresh supply we must die, like those poor people whom we buried a week since."

"Shall you tell your mother?"

"I must. She is entitled to know, for she is in danger like ourselves."

Mrs. Cooper turned pale, but seemed calm and composed when told of the state of affairs.

"We must make our provisions last as long as possible," she said.

"But how?" 109

"We must be placed on allowance."

"Half rations?"

"Yes. That will give us some additional time. We must make our two days' supply last over four days, and who knows what may happen in four days?"

"That is a sensible suggestion, mother, but let it only extend to Grant, father and myself. I don't want you to be stinted."

"What do you think of me, Tom? Do you suppose I would consent to fare better than my husband and son, and this boy, who seems like one of us? No, Tom, you should judge your mother better."

"You have shut me up, mother. I can't say anything in answer to that."

"I will show you that a woman has as much fortitude as a man. Besides, I do not have to work as hard as you. I can bear the deprivation better."

The days following were days of intense anxiety. Every morning, when they set out on their daily march, there was a prayer in the heart of each that something would happen before the sun set that 110 would relieve them from the haunting fear of famine.

But in all these days they met no one, and overtook no one. The sun rose hot and fiery, making the great alkali plain seem still more arid and cheerless. So far as they could see, they were the only people in the world; for, look as they might, they could see no other evidence of human habitation. But in the distance it was a relief to perceive some low rising hills, and by night time they reached an oasis, and, what cheered their hearts, a small stream of water, for they were very nearly out, and had felt the need of economizing. Now the oxen, and the horse, as well as themselves, were allowed to drink *ad libitum*. The animals drank with evident gratification, and looked sensibly cheered and relieved.

"Now, if we could only find some food, I should be perfectly happy," said Grant.

Only a few crackers were left, but these, dipped in the water, became palatable. But the serious question arose: "What would they do when these were gone?" It was a question that none of them could answer.

"I have often wondered, Grant," said Tom, "what it was like to want food. I begin to understand it 111 now. I remember one day a poor tramp came to our door, who said he had not tasted food for forty-eight hours. I looked at him with curiosity. I could not understand how this could happen to any one. All my life I had never known what it was to want food. I even doubted his word; but when mother invited him into the kitchen and set a plate of meat and bread before the poor fellow, the eagerness with which the famished wretch ate satisfied me that he had told the truth. Now, Grant, I will make a confession."

"What is it, Tom? Have you murdered any one?" asked Grant, with forced hilarity.

"Not that I remember. My confession is of a different nature. For four days—during the whole time that I have been on half rations—I have felt a perpetual craving for food."

"And I too, Tom."

"And now I feel weak and exhausted. It has been an effort to drag myself along to-day. The fact is, machinery can't be kept in working trim without fuel."

"I realize that, too, Tom." 112

"I presume father and mother have felt the same way, but I haven't dared to ask them. They say 'misery loves company,' but when the companions in misery are your own father and mother, it doesn't apply. Though I have to suffer myself, I wish they were spared the same privations that have undermined my strength."

It will be seen that Tom was better educated than the majority of young men born and brought up in the country. He had attended an academy in a neighboring town for a year, and had for a season taught the district school at Crestville. Grant found him pleasant and instructive company.

That night, when they went to bed, they were utterly without food. What were to be their experiences on the morrow they could not foresee, but there was plenty of room for grave apprehension.

"Grant, if we can get no food, I have decided what we must do," said Tom, as they lay down to rest at a short distance from each other.

"What is it, Tom? Have you thought of anything?" 113

"Yes; I suppose you know that horseflesh, though not to be compared with beef, is still palatable?"

"Yes."

"It is our last resource. Poor old Dobbin must die!" and the young man sighed.

At that moment the old horse whinnied.

"It seems as if he knew what we were talking about," said Tom.

"That will last us some time," remarked Grant, with renewed hope.

"Yes; I suppose the poor old fellow won't be very tender, but it is the only way he can serve us now. We can cook up quite a supply while the meat is fresh, and take it with us. It will give us a new lease of life, and something may happen before that supply is exhausted."

Tom consulted his father and mother, who, though at first startled, decided that it was the only thing to be done.

And so poor Dobbin's fate seemed to be sealed!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOLITARY CABIN.

When they rose the next morning, all looked serious. Each felt that the crisis had come. All eyes were turned upon poor old Dobbin, who, unconscious of his danger, was browsing near the camp.

"Grant," said Tom suddenly, "let us give Dobbin a small lease of life."

"Will it do any good, Tom?"

"I don't know; but this is what I propose: let us each take a rifle and go in different directions. We may find a deer or antelope to serve as a substitute for Dobbin, or something else may turn up."

"Very well, Tom."

So the two started out.

Chance directed Grant's steps into a sheltered valley. Coarse grass covered the ground, which seemed luxurious when compared with the white alkali plains over which they had been travelling.

Grant kept on his way, taking pains not to lose his bearings, for he did not care to stray from the party, and it was quite possible to get lost. There was no evidence of human habitation. So far as appearances went, this oasis might have come fresh from the creative hand, and never fallen under the eye of man. But appearances are deceptive.

Turning a sharp corner, Grant was amazed to find before him a veritable log cabin. It was small, only about twelve feet square, and had evidently at some time been inhabited.

Curious to learn more of this solitary dwelling, Grant entered through the open door. Again he was surprised to find it comfortably furnished. On the rough floor was a Turkish rug. In one corner stood a bedstead, covered with bedding. There were two chairs and a settee. In fact, it was better furnished than Robinson Crusoe's dwelling in his solitary island.

Grant entered and sat down on a chair.

"What does it all mean, I wonder?" he asked himself. "Does anybody live here, or when did the last tenant give up possession? Was it because he could not pay his rent?" and he laughed at the idea.

As Grant leaned back in his chair and asked himself these questions, his quick ear caught the sound of some one approaching. He looked up, and directly the doorway was darkened by the entrance of a tall man, who in turn gazed at Grant in surprise.

"Ah!" he said, after a brief pause, "I was not expecting a visitor this morning. How long have you been here?"

"Not five minutes. Do you live here?"

"For the present. You, I take it, are crossing the plains?"

"Yes."

"Not alone, surely?"

"No; my party are perhaps a mile away."

"Then you are on an exploring expedition?"

"Yes, sir," answered Grant gravely; "on a very serious exploring expedition."

"How is that?"

"We are all out of food. There isn't a crumb left, and starvation stares us in the face."

"Ha! Did you expect to find food anywhere about here? Was this your object?"

"I don't know. It was a desperate step to take. I have a rifle with me. I thought it possible I might come across a deer that would tide us over for a few days."

"How large is your party?"

"There are only four of us."

"All males?"

"Except one. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, and their son Tom, a young man, and myself constitute the party."

"Whence did you come?"

"From Iowa."

"I venture to say you have found what you did not expect."

"Yes; I never dreamed of finding a man or a human habitation in this out-of-the-way spot."

"And yet the time may come within twenty-five years when there may be a village in this very spot."

"I wish it were here now," sighed Grant. "And if there was one, I wish there might be a restaurant or a baker's shop handy."

"I can't promise you that, but what is more important, I can supply you with provisions."

As he spoke, he walked to one corner of the dwelling and opened a door, which had not thus far attracted Grant's attention. There was revealed a small closet. Inside was a cask, which, as Grant could see, was full of crackers, another contained flour, and on a shelf was a large piece of deer meat, which had been cooked, and appealed powerfully to Grant's appetite, which for four days had been growing, and now was clamoring to be satisfied.

Grant sighed, and over his face came a look of longing.

"Shut the door, quick," he said, "or I may be tempted to take what does not belong to me."

"My dear boy," said the stranger, and over his rugged features came a smile that lighted them up wonderfully; "it is yours. Help yourself."

Grant took a cracker and ate it quickly. Then he took a knife that lay beside the meat and cut off a slice, which he likewise disposed of. Then he remembered himself.

"I am selfish," he said. "I am satisfying my appetite, while my poor friends are suffering from hunger."

"Bring them with you. They shall breakfast with me. Or stay. I will go with you and invite them myself."

Grant left the cabin with his new friend. As he walked by his side he surveyed him with curiosity and interest. He was a tall man—six feet two, at the least, and he walked with a long stride, which he moderated when he found Grant had trouble to keep up with him. He was dressed in a gray mixed suit, and on his head he wore a soft hat. Despite his appearance and surroundings, Grant was led to think that he had passed a part of his life at least in a city.

"I see a question in your face," said the unknown. "You wonder how it happens that I am living alone in this wilderness. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir; I could not help wondering."

"I have been here but a month. I am one of an overland party that passed here four weeks since. 120
In wandering about I found this cabin, and I asked myself how it would seem to live here alone—practically out of the world. I always liked to try experiments, and notified the party of my intention. Indeed, I did not care to remain with them, for they were not at all congenial. They thought me crazy; but I insisted, and remained here with a sufficient supply of provisions to last me three months."

"And how have you enjoyed yourself, sir?"

"Well, I can't say I have enjoyed myself; but I have had plenty of time to meditate. There have been disappointments in my life," he added gravely, "that have embittered my existence and led to a life of solitude."

"Do you expect to remain the entire three months?" asked Grant.

"If I had been asked that question this morning I should have unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative. Now—I don't know why it is—perhaps it is the unexpected sight of a fellow being—I begin to think that I should enjoy returning to human companionship. You cannot understand, till 121
you have been wholly alone for a month, how pleasant it seems to exchange speech with another."

This remark gave Grant a hint.

"Why not join our party?" he said. "There are but four of us. You would make the fifth. We are going to the mines, if we ever get through this wilderness."

"Tell me something of your companions."

"Mr. Cooper is a blacksmith. He has lived all his life in Iowa, and is a good man. His wife is with him, and his son Tom, who is a fine, manly young fellow of twenty-one or two."

"Very well. Now I have been introduced to *them*, tell me about yourself. Are they relatives of yours?"

"No, they are not related to me."

"But you have relatives, have you not?"

"I have a mother."

"I see, and you wish to make money for her. Is she solely dependent on you?"

"No; she is married again. I have a step-father."

"Whom you do not like?" 122

"What makes you think so?"

"I read it in your face."

"No, I don't like Mr. Tarbox. He is a mean, penurious farmer, a good deal older than mother. She married him for a home, but she made a mistake. She is merely a house-keeper without wages. She would be better off by herself, with me to work for her."

"Has she any money at all?"

"About two hundred dollars. Mr. Tarbox has tried to get possession of it, but without success."

"You look well dressed."

"I bought and paid for the suit myself. I saved a railroad train from destruction, and the passengers made up a collection of over a hundred and fifty dollars for me. I bought this suit, and with the balance of the money I am paying for my trip to California."

By this time they had come in sight of the camp. Tom had already returned, evidently without luck, and was only waiting for Grant to appear to sacrifice poor old Dobbin on the altar of hunger.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

When Grant appeared with the stranger, Tom and his father looked amazed. Where could he have picked up an acquaintance in this wilderness was their thought.

"Tom," said Grant quickly, "you needn't kill Dobbin."

"Are you ready to take his place?" asked Tom. "Food we must have."

"My friends," interposed the stranger, "I come with your young companion to invite you to breakfast at my cabin. Perhaps etiquette requires that I should tell you who I am. Permit me to introduce myself as Giles Crosmont, an Englishman by birth and a citizen of the world."

"I'm Tom Cooper," responded Tom briefly; "and there are my father and mother. As for your invitation, we'll accept it thankfully. Do you keep a hotel hereabout?"

"Well, not exactly," smiled Crosmont; "but I have a cabin a short distance away, and am able to offer you some refreshment. Let me suggest that you follow me at once. Grant and I will lead the way."

"So you succeeded better than I, Grant?" remarked Tom.

"Yes; I found Mr. Crosmont's cabin, and was wondering if it were occupied, when he entered and made me welcome."

"Have you lived here long, Mr. Crosmont?" asked Tom curiously.

"Four weeks only."

"Alone?"

"Yes; I told Grant that it was a whim of mine to try the experiment of living in utter solitude."

"How do you like it, as far as you've got?"

Giles Crosmont laughed. He was amused by the frank curiosity of his young acquaintance.

"I've got as far as I care to go in this particular direction. After breakfast I may have a proposal to make to you."

They reached the cabin, and Crosmont hospitably produced his stock of provisions, to which his visitors did ample justice.

"Now for my proposal," said Crosmont. "I should like to join your party."

"You are welcome, sir; but, as Grant has probably told you, we are all out of provisions."

"I will turn over to you the balance of mine, and I have more concealed in the woods, at a little distance."

"Good!" said Tom, in a tone of satisfaction. "We will buy them of you."

"No, you won't. I freely contribute them as my share of the common expense. I can help you in another way also. I am a good shot, and I hope to add a deer or an antelope to your stock at frequent intervals."

"We shall be glad to have you join us," said Mrs. Cooper hospitably. "Our meeting with you is quite providential."

Giles Crosmont took off his hat and bowed respectfully to Mrs. Cooper. It was evident that he was a gentleman by birth and training.

"It was what I was waiting for," he said; "an invitation from the lady. I am afraid I must ask you to help convey the provisions to the camp."

"Grant and I will undertake that," said Tom, with alacrity.

"And I will help you," added the blacksmith. "We are in luck to find food on such an easy condition."

In half an hour the providential supply was stowed in the wagon, and the party, augmented to five, started on its way.

Generally Tom and Grant had walked together, but the stranger showed such a preference for Grant's society that Tom fell back and joined his father, leaving his friend and their new acquaintance to journey together.

"So you are going to California to dig for gold, Grant?" said Crosmont, as he moderated his pace to adapt himself to Grant's shorter steps.

"Yes, sir," answered Grant enthusiastically. "I wish I were there now."

"Suppose now that you should be fortunate, and secure, say, ten thousand dollars; you would be happy?"

"Oh, yes."

"To a boy like you, the possession of money seems sure to bring happiness."

"In my case, yes. Remember, Mr. Crosmont, I have a mother to care for. I should like to take her from Mr. Tarbox's house, where she is a slave, and give her a nice home of her own. That wouldn't take more than two thousand dollars, and with the balance I could go into business."

"Yes, you have your mother to live for," said Crosmont; and he dropped into a thoughtful mood.

"Will you go to the mines also?" asked Grant, less from curiosity than in order to break the silence.

"No—yes; I will go with you for a time; but the mines have no attraction for me."

"Don't you care for gold?"

"I have enough already."

Then, seeing that Grant's curiosity was excited, he added: "I don't mind telling you, Grant, that I am a rich man, rich beyond my wants, and I have no temptation to increase my wealth."

Grant regarded his companion with the respect that a boy of his age is apt to feel for a rich man—so rich that he doesn't care to increase his wealth.

"I wonder how it would seem to be rich," he said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you will have a chance to experience the feeling some time."

"I hope so."

“You are young, strong, self-reliant. In your favored country this will help you to become rich. But after you have acquired wealth, I doubt if you will find it makes you as happy as you expect.”

“But,” said Grant, “if I am rich I can help others. That will make me happy.”

“True!” returned the other, as if it were a new idea. “This ought to have occurred to me before. I will remember it.”

“Were you always rich, sir?”

“Yes. I was born to wealth. My father was a wealthy gentleman living in Devonshire, England. From my earliest years I was accustomed to all that wealth could buy. I never knew what poverty meant.”

“I should think you would wish to live in England.” 129

“If I lived there it would be alone.”

“Then you have no family!”

Giles Crosmont was silent, and a pained expression showed itself on his face.

“Excuse me if I have shown too much curiosity,” said Grant apologetically.

“There is no need to apologize, yet your question called up painful memories. I had a son—I don’t know if he is still alive—who must now be twenty-five years old. He disappointed me. I sent him to college, and he plunged into extravagance. I paid his debts twice. The last time, in my anger, I declined to do so. He forged a check on me for a large sum, paid his debts with part of the proceeds, and then disappeared.”

“How long ago was that?” inquired Grant, in a sympathetic tone.

“Four years. For a year I remained at my home, hoping to hear something from him, but no tidings came. Then I began to travel, and am still travelling. Sometime I may meet him, and if I do ——”

“You will forgive him?” 130

“I will try to reclaim him.”

“I wish my father were living.”

“You have your mother.”

“Yes, I wish I could see her at this moment.”

“I think you are a good boy. I wish my boy had been like you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Crosmont. I will try to deserve your compliment.”

“Grant and the Englishman are getting pretty thick,” said Tom to his mother.

“Yes, Tom. He seems to have taken a fancy to the boy.”

“No wonder. Grant is a good fellow. I wonder if this Mr. Crosmont is rich?” For Grant had respected the confidence of his new acquaintance and had not communicated what he had learned to his companions.

“I hope he is. Then he might do something for Grant, and the boy deserves it.”

“He’ll never get much from old Tarbox, I’ll be bound.”

Day by day they drew nearer to the land of gold. The stock of provisions held out wonderfully, for 131
Mr. Crosmont made good his promise, and more than one deer and antelope fell before his unerring aim, and eked out the supply. At length, after some weeks, they crossed the mountains and looked upon the promised land. From this point on there were settlements, and there was no fear of starvation.

CHAPTER XV.

ARRIVAL AT SACRAMENTO.

At length the little party reached Sacramento. This was already a place of some importance, as it was in the neighborhood of the mining region, and it was here that mining parties obtained their outfits and came at intervals to bring their gold dust and secure supplies. Situated, as it was, on the Sacramento River, with communication with San Francisco by water, it was, besides, the starting-point of numberless lines of stages bound for the different mines. For a town of its size the activity seemed almost incredible. The party went to a hotel, where, for very indifferent accommodations, they were charged five dollars a day. To the blacksmith, accustomed to village prices, this seemed exorbitant.

"We needn't engage board till night," suggested Tom. "We'll take our meals at a restaurant till then."

They were all hungry, and this suggestion seemed a good one. Looking about, Tom found a small, one-story building, on the front of which was this sign:

METROPOLITAN HOTEL AND RESTAURANT.

"What do you ask for breakfast?" inquired Tom, entering.

"A dollar a head!"

"A dollar!" repeated Mrs. Cooper, in dismay.

"Tom," said Mr. Cooper, "I haven't had a civilized meal or sat down at a table for months. No matter what it costs, I'm going to have breakfast now."

"All right, father! I guess I can do my share of eating."

Grant listened with dismay to the announcement of prices. Of all the money he had brought with him he had but ten dollars left. How long would it last?

"Grant, are you going to join us?" asked Tom.

"I don't know as I can afford it," answered Grant anxiously.

"We can't any of us afford it," returned Mr. Cooper. "Sit down, boy, and we'll borrow trouble afterward."

"Now," said Mr. Cooper, as he rose from the table, "I'll take a turn round the town and see what information I can gain. I'll turn in the wagon into the yard alongside. Mrs. Cooper, will you keep your eye on it while the rest of us go on a tour of inspection? I don't think the oxen will be likely to run away," he added jocosely.

"All right, father."

Mr. Cooper, Tom, and Grant set out in different directions.

Grant started on his walk feeling sober, if not depressed. Here he was, two thousand miles from his old home, with only nine dollars in his pocket, and the prices for living extortionate. How was he to get to the mines? Before he could get ready to leave Sacramento his money would be exhausted. Since he left home, four months before, Grant hadn't felt so perplexed and disturbed.

He had walked only five minutes, when he found himself in front of the Sacramento Hotel, the largest in the place.

Half a dozen stages were in the street outside, each drawn by four horses, and each bearing the name of some mining camp to which it proposed to carry passengers. The drivers were calling lustily for recruits. This was what Grant heard—"All aboard for Hangtown! Only four seats left! Who's going to Gold Gulch? Now's your chance! Get you through in six hours. Start in fifteen minutes for Frost's Bar! Richest diggings, within fifty miles!"

"I wonder what they charge," thought Grant. "I'll ask." He went up to the stage bound for Weaver Creek, and inquired the fare.

"Carry you through for ten dollars," was the reply. "Jump aboard. We'll start in half an hour."

"No," answered Grant slowly. "I shan't be ready by that time. Besides, I have only nine dollars."

"I'll take you to Frost's Bar for that," said the driver of the Frost's Bar stage.

"I suppose you will," interposed the Weaver Creek driver with a sneer. "Your regular charge is only seven dollars. You want to cheat the boy out of two dollars."

This led to an altercation between the rival drivers, in which some blows were exchanged, but neither was hurt. Before they had finished Grant had passed on. He knew that, with his limited capital, he could not afford to go to either place and arrive at the mines without a penny.

CHAPTER XVI.

GRANT GETS A JOB.

An hour later Grant was surprised to come across Tom sawing and splitting wood in front of a restaurant.

“What are you doing, Tom?” he asked, in surprise.

“Earning some money,” answered Tom complacently.

“How much will you get for the job?” asked Grant.

“Three dollars and my dinner. It won’t take me more than three hours to finish up the job. What do you think of that?”

“I’d like a job like it. I’m getting alarmed at the high prices here in Sacramento. I don’t know what I am going to do.”

“How much have you got left?”

“Only nine dollars, and it will cost me that to get to the nearest mines.”

“That’s bad!” said Tom, looking perplexed. “Perhaps father’ll lend you some.”

Grant shook his head.

“I don’t want to borrow of him,” he said. “He will have all he can do to look out for himself and your mother.”

“I don’t know but he will.”

“I guess I’ll get along somehow,” said Grant, with assumed cheerfulness.

“If I can help you, Grant, I will; but it isn’t like being out on the plains. It didn’t cost so much there for living.”

At this point a stout man came to the door of the restaurant. It was the proprietor.

“How are you getting on with the wood?” he asked Tom.

“Pretty well.”

“Whenever you want your dinner you can stop short and come in.”

“Thank you. I took a late breakfast, and will finish the job first.”

“Who is the boy—your brother?”

“No; it’s a friend of mine.”

“Do you want a job?” asked the proprietor, turning to Grant.

“Yes, if it’s anything I can do.”

“One of my waiters has left me and gone to the mines. The rascal left without notice, and I am short-handed. Did you ever wait in a restaurant?”

“No, sir.”

“Never mind, you’ll soon learn. Will you take the job?”

“How much do you pay?”

“Three dollars a day and board.”

“I’ll take it,” said Grant promptly.

“Come right in, then.”

Grant followed his new employer into the Eldorado restaurant, and received instructions. It may seem easy enough to wait on guests at an eating-house, but, like everything else, an apprenticeship is needful. Here, however, it was easier than in a New York or Chicago restaurant, as the bill of fare was limited, and neither the memory nor the hands were taxed as severely as would have been the case elsewhere. Grant was supplied with an apron, and began work at once. When Tom got through his job, and came in for dinner it was Grant who waited upon him.

Tom smiled.

“It seems queer to have you waiting upon me, Grant,” he said. “How do you like it as far as you’ve got?”

“There’s other things I would like better, Tom, but I think I’m lucky to get this.”

“Yes; yours is a more permanent job than mine. I’m through.”

“Just tell your father and mother where I am,” said Grant. “I hear I’m to sleep in the restaurant.”

“That’ll save the expense of a bed. How long do you think you’ll keep at it, Grant?”

“A month, perhaps, if I suit well enough. By that time I’ll have money enough to go to the mines.”

“Then you haven’t given that up?”

“No; I came out to California to dig gold, and I shan’t be satisfied till I get at it.”

When meal hours were over that afternoon Grant started out for a stroll through the town. As he was passing the Morning Star saloon a rough, bearded fellow, already under the influence of liquor, seized him by the arm.

“Come in, boy, and have a drink,” he said.

Grant shrank from him with a repugnance he could not conceal.

“No, thank you!” he answered. “I don’t drink.”

“But you’ve got to drink,” hiccoughed his new acquaintance.

In reply Grant tried to tear himself away, but he could not release the strong grip the man had on his coat-sleeve.

“Come along, boy; it’s no use. Do you want to insult me?”

“No, I don’t,” said Grant; “but I never drink.”

“Are you a temperance sneak?” was the next question. “Don’t make no difference. When Bill Turner wants you to drink, you must drink—or fight. Want to fight?”

“No.”

“Then come in.”

Against his will Grant was dragged into the saloon, where half a dozen fellows were leaning against the bar.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNPLEASANT ADVENTURE.

“Couple of whiskeys—straight—for me and the kid,” ordered Grant’s companion, as he came to a standstill in front of the bar.

“None for me!” said Grant quickly.

But, all the same, two glasses were set out, and the bottle placed beside them.

“Pour it out!” said the miner to the barkeeper. “I’m afraid the boy will get away.”

The barkeeper, with a smile, followed directions, and the two glasses were filled.

The miner tossed his off at a single gulp, but Grant left his standing.

“Why don’t you drink, boy?” demanded his companion, with an oath.

“I told you I wouldn’t,” said Grant angrily.

“We’ll see if you won’t,” said the miner, and, seizing the glass, he attempted to pour it down Grant’s throat, but his arm was unsteady from the potations he had already indulged in, and the whiskey was spilled, partly on the floor, and partly on the boy’s clothes. Grant seized this opportunity to dash out of the saloon, with the miner after him. Fortunately for him, Bill Turner, as he called himself, tripped and fell, lying prostrate for a moment, an interval which Grant improved to so good purpose that, by the time the miner was again on his feet, he was well out of harm’s way.

“I thought the drinking habit was bad enough at home,” thought Grant; “but no one ever tried to *make* me drink before.”

And now we will go back and see how it fared with Mr. Cooper.

Some quarter of a mile from the Metropolitan Hotel and Restaurant his attention was drawn to a blacksmith’s shop. That was his own line of business, and he felt a curiosity to interview his California brother-workman.

Entering, he saw a stout, black-bearded man in the act of shoeing a horse.

“Good-morning, friend,” he said.

“Good-morning, stranger.”

“I thought I’d take a look in, as you are in my line of business.”

“Is that so?” asked the blacksmith, looking up with interest. “How long since you arrived?”

“Just got in this morning.”

“Going to stay in Sacramento?”

“I am ready for anything that will bring money. I suppose I shall go to the mines.”

“Humph! Why not buy me out, and carry on your old business in Sacramento?”

“Do you want to sell?” asked Jerry Cooper, surprised.

“Yes; I want a little change. I might go to the mines myself.”

“Can’t you make money blacksmithing?” asked Cooper cautiously.

“Yes; that isn’t my reason. I haven’t seen anything of the country yet. I bought out this shop as soon as I reached Sacramento, and I’ve been at work steady. I want a change.”

“How well does it pay you?”

“I get big prices. A dollar for a single shoe, and I have all I can do. Why, how much money do you think I have made since I took the shop, a year since?”

“I can’t tell.”

“I’ve laid up three thousand dollars, besides paying all expenses.”

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed the blacksmith, impressed.

“Yes; I shan’t make as much money at the mines probably, but it’ll be a change, and not so hard work.”

“Then you want to sell out?”

“Yes.”

“What will you take?”

“A thousand dollars. That buys the shop, too. It’s dirt cheap.”

“It may be, but I haven’t the money.”

“I will take half cash, and a mortgage for the balance.”

“Suppose I bought, is there a house near by where I can live?”

“What family have you?”

“A wife and son; but I suppose Tom will want to go to the mines.”

“There is a cabin across the street with three rooms. It is empty. You can hire it for fifty dollars a month, likely.”

“Fifty dollars a month for a cabin with three rooms!” ejaculated Cooper.

“Yes; or you can buy it for five hundred dollars, I expect.”

“Seems to me prices are pretty steep in Sacramento.”

“So they are; but you can get rich faster than at home, in spite of the high prices.”

“Well, that’s a consideration, certainly. How much time will you give me to consider your offer?”

“Till to-morrow.”

“I’ll let you know by that time.”

Jerry Cooper walked away in a state of excitement. He felt that he would rather stay in Sacramento and carry on his own old business, with which he was thoroughly acquainted, than undertake gold-mining, of which he knew nothing. He was a man of fifty, and was not so enterprising as he had been when half the age.

“It seems a good chance,” he reflected. “But how will I get the money?”

He had five hundred dollars left, perhaps more; but all this would have to be paid down for the shop, without leaving anything to provide for his family in the interval before he got to earning an income.

“If I only had the money I would take the shop,” he said to himself. “I wonder if I could borrow

any. I might send home for some, but it would come too late."

He walked slowly back to the hotel and restaurant.

In front of it Mrs. Cooper was waiting for him.

"I'm glad you've come, father," she said. "I was afraid you would be gone all day."

"Were you discontented, mother?"

"No; it isn't that; but I've had an offer for the wagon and oxen."

"You have?"

"Yes; quarter of an hour after you went away a man came in and inquired of the landlord who owned the team. He was referred to me, and asked me if I wanted to sell. I told him I didn't know what your plan might be, but finally he offered me eight hundred dollars, or a thousand if Dobbin were thrown in."

"You should have accepted," exclaimed her husband excitedly.

"I didn't dare to. I didn't know what you would say. But he's coming back again, and—there he is!"

Fifteen minutes later the bargain was struck and the money paid, cash down.

"That settles it!" decided the blacksmith. "Mother and I will stay in Sacramento."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TRUE FRIEND.

The next morning, as Grant was enjoying a few minutes' rest, breakfast being over, he was surprised by the entrance of Giles Crosmont. It seemed pleasant to see a familiar face.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Crosmont," he said warmly. "Will you have breakfast?"

"No; I am staying at the hotel and have already breakfasted. I have come in to see you."

"I am glad to see you, sir. I was afraid we would not meet again. How did you know where to find me?"

"I met Tom Cooper on the street early this morning."

"Tom has gone to the mines."

"So he told me. That is, he told me he was to start this morning. You intended to go to the mines, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why didn't you go?"

"I hadn't money enough," answered Grant candidly.

"That needn't have prevented your going."

Grant looked inquiringly at Mr. Crosmont.

"I mean that I would have lent you a hundred dollars. That would have been enough, wouldn't it?"

"It would have been ample. You are very kind, Mr. Crosmont."

"Why shouldn't I be? I have more money than I know what to do with."

"But I might never have been able to repay you."

"I would have taken the risk of that. Besides, to be frank, I should have intended the money as a gift, not a loan."

"Thank you, sir," said Grant gratefully. "I never met such kindness before."

"Do you wish to give up your situation, and go to the mines at once?"

"No, sir. I enjoy feeling that I am so well paid for my labor. You see I never earned much before; Mr. Tarbox only gave me my board."

"And how much are you paid for your services here?"

"Three dollars a day and my board," answered Grant proudly.

"That is indeed high pay for a boy of your age. If you will let me advise you, don't let it make you extravagant. Don't form the habit of gambling. I notice there are several gambling saloons here."

"No, sir, I won't. I know nothing about cards."

"You could soon learn."

"Thank you for your advice, Mr. Crosmont."

"I give it because I feel an interest in you, Grant. I can't explain why, for I have met a good many young persons in my travels, and never was drawn to any one as I am drawn to you."

"I am glad to have so good a friend, Mr. Crosmont," said Grant earnestly.

"And I am glad to have found some one in whom I can feel an interest. I begin to feel that there is some object in living."

"Are you going to remain in Sacramento, Mr. Crosmont?"

"No, I start this afternoon for San Francisco."

Grant's countenance fell. Just as he had ascertained how true and reliable a friend Mr. Crosmont was, he was destined to part with him.

"Then I shall not see you again," he said soberly.

"I hope you will, Grant," returned Mr. Crosmont, with a friendly smile. "Indeed, I mean that you shall. I don't propose to lose sight of you. How long do you think you shall remain in your present employment?"

"One month, and possibly two. I would like to get a good sum of money together before I start. I shall need to buy a few things."

"What things?"

"Some underclothing, a new pair of shoes, and a new suit. The clothes I have on were pretty well worn out by the trip across the plains."

"Don't trouble yourself about that. I will take your directions on the size, and send you what you need from San Francisco."

"I can't thank you enough, Mr. Crosmont. It will save me a good deal of money."

"You will need all the money you can earn. Now I will give you my address in San Francisco, and if you have any occasion to ask help or advice write unhesitatingly. I shall travel a part of the time, but I shall always answer your letters as soon as I receive them."

"Thank you, sir."

"You have no father. Look upon me as a father or guardian, whichever you please. This will be my address."

He took a card from his pocket, and wrote upon it, under his name, "Care of C.D. Vossler, Jeweler, Market St., San Francisco."

"Mr. Vossler is an old friend of mine," he said, "and he will take care of any letters that come directed in this way. I don't know where I shall put up, so that it will be best always to address me, when you write, in his care."

"Thank you, sir. I will remember."

"Yes; don't lose the card."

Mr. Crosmont left the restaurant, and Grant did not again see him before his departure. He felt cheered to think he had found such a friend. Two thousand miles from home, it was worth a good deal to think that, if he were sick or got into trouble he had a friend who would stand by him, and to whom he could apply for help or advice.

The next day, in an hour which was given him during the time when business was slack, Grant went round to see Mr. Cooper.

He found the blacksmith busy in his shop. He had bought the little cabin opposite, and his family had already moved in.

"It didn't take me long to get established, Grant," he said with a well-satisfied smile.

"No, sir. I was quite taken by surprise to hear it."

"I did a good thing in coming to California. I am convinced of that. Why, Grant, how much do you think I took in for work yesterday?"

"Ten dollars," suggested Grant.

"Better than that—seventeen! Why, at this rate, I shall be able to buy back my old place in a year out of my savings." 155

"I am glad to hear of your good luck, Mr. Cooper."

"You have got employment, too, Grant?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much are you paid?"

"My board and three dollars a day."

"Why, that's fine, and you only sixteen years old, too. I shall be well pleased if Tom does as well at the mines."

"If he does well, I expect to join him in a month or two."

"I don't know as it's wise. Perhaps you had better stay where you are."

"I might not make as much money, but I should not be satisfied to come to California and not go to the mines."

"That's just exactly what I am going to do. Me and mother are better off in Sacramento. However, you are young, and that makes a difference."

"I must leave you now, Mr. Cooper, and get back to business."

"Are you a good deal confined?"

"Yes, that's the worst of it. I have to be at the restaurant in the evening till ten o'clock, but I can get off for an hour every afternoon." 156

"Well, come out and see us often. I would invite you to come and take supper some night, but I suppose you couldn't accept."

"No, Mr. Cooper, thanking you just the same."

"You haven't been homesick yet, Grant, have you?"

"No; except the first day, when I didn't know how I was coming out."

"And you wouldn't like to be back on Mr. Tarbox's farm again?"

"Not much; but I should like to see mother again, if only for a few minutes."

"If you do well, and carry home a good sum of money, you can make things comfortable for her, you know."

"That's what I am thinking of all the time."

Grant took leave of the blacksmith and went back to work. He was glad to think he had some one to call upon who reminded him of home. He worked long hours, though the labor could not be considered hard. There was one other waiter beside himself, a young man of twenty-five, named Albert Benton. He was thin and dark-complexioned, and Grant, without being able to explain why, conceived a dislike to him. He saw that Benton was inclined to shirk work, though he received higher pay than his young associate. He was paid five dollars per day and had a room outside. Mr. Smithson, the proprietor of the restaurant, had desired him to sleep in a small room over the restaurant, but he had declined to do so. Upon this the same request was made of Grant, and he complied, glad to save the price of lodging elsewhere. When the restaurant closed at ten o'clock, frequently Grant would go out for a short walk, as it was a relief to breathe the fresh outside air after being confined in the close atmosphere of the eating-house during the day and evening. Generally he and Benton went out together, but his companion soon left him, finding a simple walk entirely too slow and unexciting for his taste. 157

CHAPTER XIX.

GRANT FALLS UNDER SUSPICION.

It struck Grant as strange that his fellow waiter, though he received five dollars a day, never seemed to have any money on hand. More than once he had borrowed a couple of dollars of Grant, which, however, he always repaid.

"What can he do with his money?" thought Grant. "He gets very little chance to spend it, for he is confined in the restaurant from twelve to fourteen hours a day."

The mystery was solved when, one night, he saw Benton entering a notorious gambling saloon not far from the restaurant.

"So that is where he disposes of his money," reflected Grant. "I wish I could venture to give him a hint. But probably he would pay it no attention, as I am a boy considerably younger than he."

He did, however, find occasion for speaking soon afterward.

"Have you ever been to the mines, Mr. Benton?" he asked.

"No."

"Don't you ever expect to go?"

"I would go in a minute if I had money enough."

"I should think you might save money enough in a month or two. You get good pay."

"It's tiresome saving from one's daily pay. I want to make a strike. Some day I shall. I might win five hundred dollars in the next week. When I do I'll bid the old man good-by, and set out for the mines."

"*I* believe in saving. A friend of mine, now in San Francisco, warned me to keep clear of the gambling-houses, and I would be sure to get on."

Albert Benton regarded Grant suspiciously.

"Does the boy know I gamble, I wonder?" he said to himself.

"Your friend's an old fogy," he said, contemptuously.

"Don't you think his advice good?"

"Well, yes; I don't believe in gambling to any extent, but I have been in once or twice. It did me no harm."

If he had told the truth, he would have said that he went to the gambling-house nearly every evening.

"It's safest to keep away, I think."

"Well, yes, perhaps it is, for a kid like you."

No more was said at the time. But something happened soon which involved both Benton and his associate.

Mr. Smithson, the proprietor, began to find that his receipts fell off. This puzzled him, for it appeared to him that the restaurant was doing as good a business as ever. He mentioned the matter to the senior waiter.

"Benton," said he, "last week I took in fifty dollars less than usual."

"Is that so?" asked Benton indifferently.

"Yes; I can't understand it. Has the trade fallen off any, do you think?"

"Really, I can't say. It seemed about the same as usual—that is, the number of customers did."

"So it seemed to me."

"Perhaps they ordered less. Now I think of it, I feel sure that they did."

"That might explain it partially, but not so large a falling off."

"I suppose you haven't thought of any other solution of the question?" said Benton, slowly scrutinizing the face of his employer.

"Have you?"

"Well, sir, I have, but I don't like to mention it."

"Out with it!"

"I don't *know* anything, sir."

"If you suspect anything, it's your duty to tell me."

"Well, perhaps it is, but I might be doing injustice to Grant."

"Ha! what has Grant to do with it?"

"Nothing that I *know* of."

"Good Heavens, man, don't tantalize me in this way. What do you suspect?"

"Well, sir, the boy always appears to have money."

"He seems to be economical, and I pay him well. That counts for nothing."

"No, sir, but—some one told me that he had seen him entering a gambling-house on the street."

"Ha! that would account for his needing a good deal of money. By the way, do you ever enter such places?"

"I have entered out of curiosity, sir," answered Benton, with a burst of candor. "I wanted to see what they were like."

"Better keep out of them altogether."

"No doubt you are right, sir."

"But about the boy—have you ever *seen* him take anything from the drawer?"

"I couldn't be sure of it, but once when he was alone I entered suddenly, and saw him near the drawer. He flushed up and came away in a hurry. I couldn't *swear* that he took anything."

However, Benton's tone implied that he felt sure of it all the same, and so it impressed Mr. Smithson.

"Did you have any recommendations with Grant?" inquired Benton, in an insinuating tone.

"No; but, then, I had none with you, either."

"That is true. Still, I hope you have confidence in me."

“I know of no reason why I should not. Do you know if Grant drinks?”
“I don’t think he drinks *much*.”
“Does he drink at all?” asked Smithson curtly.
“One evening I saw him coming out of a drinking saloon pretty well loaded. That is the only time, however.”
“It was once too often. Benton, I have been greatly deceived in that fellow. I thought him a model boy.”
“So did I, sir, and I don’t think he is *very* bad now. Perhaps he has been a little indiscreet.”
“It is very kind of you to excuse him; but if what you say is true, I shall not be able to retain him in my employment.”
“Give him a little more time. Remember that I *know* nothing positive to his discredit. He *may* not have taken the money.”
This half-hearted defence of Grant led Mr. Smithson to think that Benton was his friend and spoke against him unwillingly. It never occurred to him that his senior waiter was only seeking to divert 164
suspicion from himself.
“Very well,” he said. “I’ll keep him on a week longer. Perhaps something may occur in that time to confirm my suspicions or discredit them.”
The result of this conversation was that the restaurant keeper was all but convinced that Grant was a sly young villain and was secretly robbing him. He had a friend, however, who had once been a detective in St. Louis, though now engaged in a different business in Sacramento.
He sought him out and told him the story.
Vincent listened attentively.
“It looks bad for the boy; don’t you think so?” Smithson asked.
“Yes, if all is true that is said against him. But who says it?”
“Albert Benton.”
“The old waiter?”
“Yes.”
“You have never yourself seen the boy drunk, or coming out of a gambling-house?”
“No.”
“Then all the testimony to that effect is that of the man Benton?” 165
“Yes.”
“May not Benton have an object in slandering the boy?”
“He seemed very reluctant to say anything against him.”
“That may be all artfulness, and to divert suspicion from himself.”
“You surely don’t think *he* would rob me?”
“Why not?”
“He has been in my employ for a year.”
“Then he ought by this time to have a good deal of money saved up—that is, if his habits are good.”
“I am sure he has not.”
“What evidence have you on the subject?”
“At one time, three months since, I thought of selling out the restaurant, and asked Benton if he didn’t want to buy it.”
“Well, what did he say?”
“That he hadn’t got fifty dollars in the world.”
“How much do you pay him?”
“Five dollars a day and his board.” 166
“Whew! and he spends all that?”
“He seems to.”
“Look here, Smithson, you are on the wrong tack. *He* is the thief, and not the boy.”
“I can’t believe it.”
“Leave the matter in my hands, and I will prove it to you.”
“How!”
“I shall follow Benton in the evening, and see how he spends his time and money. But you must be careful not to let him know that he is suspected. If anything is said of the disappearance of money, tell him that you attribute it to decrease in trade.”
“All right; I will do as you suggest.”
“He doesn’t know me, and will not imagine that I am watching him.”
Two days later Albert Benton, a little anxious to know whether he had himself eluded suspicion, asked his employer: “Have you found out anything about the lost money?”
“I am not sure that any has been lost,” answered Smithson carelessly.
“Have you watched the boy?” 167
“Yes, but he doesn’t look to me like a thief. It may be, after all, that we are doing less business.”
“Yes, sir; that’s very likely,” responded Benton, glad that his employer was disposed to regard the matter from this point of view.
“I don’t like to think that any one in my employ would rob me.”
“Very true, sir. It would be a great shame.”
“It’s all right!” thought Benton complacently. “It is better so. I don’t care to have the boy discharged. Some one might succeed him whom I couldn’t hoodwink so easily.”

CHAPTER XX.

BENTON IS TRAPPED.

Judging that his employer's suspicions were allayed, Benton ventured to take two five-dollar bills from the till before he went out in the evening. Currency was at that time mixed, and bills, as well as gold and silver, were in circulation.

He left the restaurant at the usual time. It so happened that Grant had something to do and did not go out with him. Benton, therefore, went at once to the gambling-house which he was in the habit of frequenting.

"I'm getting tired of being cooped up in the restaurant day after day," he said impatiently. "Why can't I make a strike? If I could scoop in four hundred dollars to-night I would leave Sacramento and go to the mines. Then I might strike it rich and carry home ten thousand dollars, as Grant's friend did."

Grant had told him the story of John Heywood's good fortune, and it had impressed him.

"If a clodhopper like that can make a fortune, why shouldn't I?" he asked himself.

So his purpose to go to the mines and try his luck was strengthened. If he had begun six months before to save money, he would have had enough to start before this, but Albert Benton was one of those who despised small and steady savings, and are always on the lookout to "make a strike," as he termed it.

"That boy won't spy on me to-night," he said to himself. "I must be careful. If the old man knew where I spent my evenings he would smell a rat. I wonder how much I've taken from the drawer in the last three months. Fully as much as my wages, I expect. Well, he can stand it. He's making plenty of money, anyhow."

It was in this way that he excused his thefts. Yet he felt that he would like to leave the restaurant and put himself in the way of making that fortune for which he yearned.

Though Grant was not in the street to see where he went, there was another who quietly noticed his movements and followed his steps. This was John Vincent, the ex-detective. From the first he had suspected Benton and doubted Grant's guilt. He was a man skilled in physiognomy, and he had studied Benton's face and formed a pretty accurate estimation of his real character.

"If Benton hasn't robbed my friend Smithson's till, then I lose my guess," he said to himself.

He did not, however, say much of his suspicions to the keeper of the restaurant, who, he saw, was disposed to consider Grant the guilty party. He waited till he had some evidence to offer in confirmation of his theory.

When Benton entered the gambling-house Vincent followed close behind him. Benton saw him, but did not know that he was a special friend of Mr. Smithson.

Vincent placed himself at a neighboring table in such a position that he could watch Benton. He saw him take out one of the bills which he had abstracted from the till, and stake it.

"What do you put down paper for?" asked a man beside him. "Gold is better."

"Bills are just as good," said Benton.

"I will give you gold for bills," said Vincent. "I want to send some money to the East."

"All right, and thank you," said Benton. "Here are two fives."

"And here are two gold pieces," said Vincent.

There was a secret look of elation on his face as he received the bills, and furtively noticed a red cross on the back of each. They had been secretly marked by himself as a trap to catch the thief, whoever he might be.

"Now I have you, my man," he thought. "This is the evidence I have been looking for. It settles the question of Benton's guilt and Grant's innocence."

Vincent played two or three times for slight stakes, and rose from the table after a while neither a loser nor a winner.

He did not go immediately, but stayed, like many others, simply as a looker on.

"Won't you join us?" asked Benton.

"No; I must go away soon. I want to write a letter. I only dropped in for a few minutes."

Albert Benton played with unusual good fortune. He had been in the habit of bewailing his poor luck, but to-night the fates seemed to favor him. The little pile of gold before him gradually increased, until he had four hundred and seventy-five dollars.

"Twenty-five dollars more, and then I will stop," he said. "To-morrow I will give notice to Smithson and get ready to leave Sacramento."

But instead of winning the sum desired, he began to lose. He lost twenty-five dollars, and in desperation staked fifty. Should he win he would still have five hundred dollars, and then he would leave off. Upon that he was quite determined. But again he lost. He bit his lips, his face flushed, his hands trembled, and there was a gleam of excitement in his eye. He had no thought of leaving off now. It must be five hundred dollars or nothing!

There is no need to follow him through his mutations of luck. At the end of an hour he rose from the table without a dollar. He had enough, however, to buy a glass of whiskey, which he gulped down, and then staggered out of the gambling-house.

"I was so near, and yet I lost!" he said to himself bitterly. "Why didn't I keep the four hundred and seventy-five dollars when I had it, and get the other from the restaurant? I have been a fool—a besotted fool!"

He pulled down his hat over his eyes and bent his steps homeward, where he tossed all night, unable to sleep.

But in the morning his courage returned.

"After all," he reflected, "I am only ten dollars worse off than when I entered the gambling house, and that was money I took from Smithson. I've had a pretty good lesson. The next time fortune

smiles upon me I'll make sure of what I have won, and leave off in time."

Vincent went straight from the gambling-house to the house of his friend Smithson. The latter came down stairs half dressed and let him in.

"What brought you here so late?" he asked, rubbing his eyes. 174

"Because I have some news for you."

"What is it? Nothing bad, I hope."

"Oh, no; it is only that I have found the thief who has been robbing you."

"It is the boy, then, as I thought," said Smithson eagerly.

"No, it isn't the boy."

"Who, then?"

"Who else is there? It is Albert Benton."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Smithson, dumfounded.

"Yes; there is no doubt of it."

"Come in and tell me how you found out." Vincent entered and sat down on a chair in the front room.

"I will tell you," he answered. "I took the liberty to go to your money drawer and mark four bills this afternoon. I marked them with a red cross on the right-hand corner of the reverse side. Well, Benton took two of those bills with him this evening when he stopped work."

"How do you know?"

"I was near by when he left the restaurant. I followed him at a distance, and saw him enter 175 Poole's gambling-house."

"Well?"

"I entered too, and took my place at a neighboring table. He produced a five-dollar bill, when some one suggested that gold was preferable. Upon that I offered to give him gold for bills. He produced two fives, and I gave him two gold pieces for them."

"Well?"

"Here they are."

The detective drew from his wallet two bank-notes, and showed Smithson the red cross on the reverse side of each.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALBERT BENTON IS UNMASKED.

“That’s pretty conclusive evidence, isn’t it?” said John Vincent, tapping the marked bills.

“I didn’t dream of it,” said the restaurant keeper.

“I did. I suspected him as soon as you told me he was trying to fasten suspicion upon Grant Colburn.”

“You don’t think the boy had anything to do with the theft?”

“I feel sure of it. The boy is an honest boy. You have only to look in his face to see that. I haven’t been a detective for nothing. I may be mistaken at times, but I can generally judge a man or boy by his face.”

“Does Benton know that you suspect him?”

“No. I wasn’t going to give myself away. By the way, he had quite a stroke of luck tonight.”

“At the gambling-house?”

“Yes. At one time he was a winner of nearly or quite five hundred dollars.”

“Then he will be able to make up to me the amount he has taken.”

“Don’t flatter yourself! I said he was a winner of that amount at one time. I didn’t say he went out with that sum. As a matter of fact, he lost it all, and left the place probably without a dollar.”

Smithson looked disappointed.

“Then,” he said, “I shan’t get my money back.”

“I am afraid not.”

“He must have taken hundreds of dollars.”

“Quite likely.”

“The villain!” exclaimed the restaurant keeper. “And I have paid him so liberally, too!”

“Well, Smithson, it might have been worse. I suspect you have a pretty tidy sum laid by.”

Smithson’s face changed, and he looked complacent.

“Yes, Vincent,” he said. “I’m worth a little money.”

“Good! Look upon this as a little set-back that won’t materially affect you, and put it down to the account of profit and loss.”

“Very, good! I will do so. But to-morrow I will give Mr. Benton his walking ticket.”

Albert Benton came to work as usual in the morning. His employer came in half an hour late. By this time the waiter had become resigned to his disappointment of the night previous. He recognized his folly in not making sure of the large sum he had at one time won, and determined to act more wisely in future.

Presently, when he chanced to be unemployed, Smithson beckoned to him.

“Benton,” he said, “you remember my speaking to you about missing money from the till?”

“Yes, sir; but I thought you decided that it was only a falling off in receipts.”

“Yes, I said that; but it seems to me that the deficiency is too great to be accounted for in that way.”

“You may be right, sir. You remember what I told you about the boy?”

“You think he took the money?”

“I feel about sure of it.”

“And you think he gambles it away?”

“Such is my impression.”

“How am I to find out the truth of the matter?”

“I would suggest that you have the boy searched. I feel sure that you will find that he has a considerable sum of money in his pocket.”

“That may be, but he will say that he has saved it from his wages.”

“Oh, yes; I have no doubt he will say so,” said Benton, nodding his head significantly.

“And it may be true. He doesn’t seem to spend much.”

“He has bought some clothes.”

“True; but he was quite able to do so out of what I pay him and have money left over.”

“Well, I hope it is so. I don’t want to harm the boy, but I thought it only due to you to tell you what I know.”

“You don’t appear to know much. You only suspect. However, I will call Grant and see what he has to say.”

Grant, being summoned, came up to where they were standing.

“Do you want to speak to me, Mr. Smithson?” he asked.

“Yes, Grant; about an unpleasant matter.”

“Have I done anything wrong? Are you dissatisfied with me?”

“I can’t say. The fact is, for some time past I have been missing money from the drawer.”

Grant’s look of surprise was genuine.

“I am very sorry to hear it,” he said.

“Of course the money could not have disappeared of itself. Some one must have taken it.”

“I hope you don’t suspect me,” said Grant quickly.

“I have always regarded you as honest, but Benton here tells me that you have formed some bad habits.”

“I should be glad to know what Mr. Benton has to say about me,” said Grant, regarding his fellow waiter with indignation. Benton, in spite of his assurance, could not help looking confused and ill at ease.

“He tells me that you are in the habit of visiting gambling saloons.”

“He has told you a falsehood,” said Grant boldly.

“I told you he would deny it, Mr. Smithson,” said Benton, determined to face it through.

“Has he seen me in a gambling-house?” demanded Grant.
“I have seen you coming out of one.”
“That’s false. If he can find any one to confirm his false charge, I will not object to your believing it.”
“I have no doubt a good many have seen you there.”
“Is there any other charge he brings against me, Mr. Smithson?”
“He says he has seen you under the influence of liquor.”
“That also is false. He has invited me to go into a saloon and take a drink, but I always refused.”
“Oh, you are an angel!” sneered Benton.
“I don’t pretend to be an angel, but I am honest and temperate, and I never drink.”
“I think, Mr. Smithson, if you will search the boy you will find a good sum of money in his pocket.”
“Is that true, Grant?” asked the restaurant keeper. 182
“Yes, sir. I have about a hundred dollars in my pocket.”
“I told you so,” said Benton triumphantly.
“I never knew there was anything wrong in saving money,” retorted Grant. “I am anxious to get together money enough to warrant me in going to the mines.”
“There is nothing wrong in that,” said Smithson kindly. “And now, Grant, that we have had Benton’s testimony against you, I want to ask you what you know against him.”
“I would rather not tell,” answered Grant.
“That is very creditable to you; but you must remember that you have a duty to me, your employer. Have you seen him enter a gambling-house?”
“Yes, sir,” answered Grant reluctantly.
“I told you, sir, that I had looked in once or twice,” said Benton, ill at ease.
“Only once or twice?”
“Well, I won’t be precise as to the number of times.”
“Were you in a gambling-house last night?” 183
“Yes; I looked on.”
“How long did you stay?”
“A few minutes.”
“Did you play?”
“No,” answered Benton hesitatingly.
“I wish I knew how much he knows,” thought Benton. “Somebody must have been telling him about me.”
“What, then, was your object in going in?”
“I was wakeful, and thought I would while away a few minutes there. When I felt sleepy, I withdrew.”
Just then Vincent entered, as previously arranged between him and Smithson.
“Mr. Vincent,” said the proprietor, “did you see either of my waiters in a gambling house last evening?”
“I saw him,” pointing to Benton.
“He admits that he went in, but says he did not play.”
“He seems to be forgetful,” said Vincent coolly. “He played for a considerable time, and had a great run of luck.”
Benton said nothing. He looked very much discomposed, but waited to see how much Vincent 184 could tell.
“So he was a winner?”
“He won nearly five hundred dollars.”
“That doesn’t look as if he were the novice he claims to be.”
“But he didn’t keep his winnings. He kept on playing till he lost all he had won.”
“You must remember, sir,” interrupted Benton, “that a green hand is often luckier than a practiced gambler.”
“So I have heard.”
“And if I did play, that doesn’t convict me of having stolen money from your till.”
“That is true.”
“I was foolish, I admit, and I mean to give up the practice.”
“You said you didn’t play.”
“Because I thought it would make you think I was guilty of theft.”
“On that point I have other evidence.”
“What is it? If Grant says he saw me take anything he lies.”
“I have not said it, Mr. Benton.” 185
“Then I should like to know what evidence you can bring against me.”
“Do you remember these two bills?” asked Vincent, taking out his wallet and producing two five-dollar notes.
“Well, what about them?” asked Benton doggedly.
“I gave you two gold pieces for them last evening.”
“Yes; I believe you did.”
“You took them from the money drawer before you left the restaurant.”
“That is false!”
“Do you see the cross, in red ink, on the reverse side of the bills?”
“Well, what of it?”
“I marked the bills in that way, so as to be able to trace them.”
“Well,” said Benton faintly.
“They were put into the drawer at three o’clock yesterday afternoon. They must have been taken out some time between that hour and the time when you produced them in the gambling-house.”
“I am the victim of a conspiracy,” said Benton, turning pale. 186

“If it is a conspiracy to put my friend here on your track,” said Smithson, “then you have some color for your statement. Mr. Vincent is an old detective.”

Albert Benton was silenced. Ingenious as he was, there was nothing left for him to say.

“Now, Benton,” said Mr. Smithson, “how much have you taken from me during the time you have been in my employment?”

“Perhaps a hundred dollars,” answered Benton sullenly.

“I am very much mistaken if the amount is not four or five times as great. Are you prepared to make restitution?”

“I have no money.”

“Then I shall feel justified in ordering your arrest. Your guilt is aggravated by your seeking to throw the blame on Grant.”

“I have a valuable diamond at home. I will turn that over to you,” said Benton, with a sudden thought.

“How much is it worth?”

“I paid three hundred dollars for it.”

“You can go and get it.”

Benton took off his apron, put on his hat, and left the restaurant.

Half an hour—an hour—passed, and he did not return.

“Mr. Smithson,” said Vincent, “the fellow has given us the slip. He won’t come back, nor will you ever see anything of his diamond. I don’t believe, for my part, that he had any.”

The detective was right. Benton managed to borrow fifteen dollars of a friend, and within an hour he had left Sacramento for good.

CHAPTER XXII.

PULLING UP STAKES.

Mr. Smithson supplied the place vacated by Benton without delay. He engaged a man of middle age who had come back from the mines with a fair sum of money. Before the first week was up, he made his employer an offer for the restaurant, and after some negotiation the transfer was made.

"I should like to have you continue Grant Colburn in your employment," said Smithson, with a kindly consideration for his young waiter.

"I am sorry to say that I cannot do it," answered his successor. "I have a young townsman at the mines who has not been very successful. I have promised to send for him in case I went into business."

"It is of no consequence," said Grant. "I have always wanted to go to the mines, and now I have money enough to make the venture."

The same day, by a lucky coincidence, Grant received the following letter from Tom Cooper:

HOWE'S GULCH, October 5.

DEAR GRANT:

I have been meaning to write you for some time, but waited till I could tell whether I was likely to succeed or not. For the first month I was here I only got out enough gold-dust to pay my expenses, and envied father and you, who have a sure thing. The fact is, nothing is more uncertain than mining. You may strike it rich, or may fail entirely. Till last week it looked as if it would be the last in my case. But all at once I struck a pocket, and have thus far got two hundred and seventy-five dollars out of it, with more in prospect. That will make up for lost time. I tell you, Grant, it is a very exciting life. You are likely any day to make a strike. Further down the creek there is a long, lank Vermonter, who in a single week realized a thousand dollars from his claim. He took it pretty coolly, but was pleased all the same. "If this sort of thing continues a little longer," he told me, "I'll become a bloated bondholder, and go home and marry Sal Stebbins. She's waitin' for me, but the old man, her father, told her she'd have to wait till I could show him two thousand dollars, all my own. Well I don't think I'll have to wait long before that time comes," and I guess he's right.

But I haven't said what I set out to say. That is I wish you would pull up stakes and come out here. I feel awful lonely, and would like your company. There's a claim about a hundred feet from mine that I have bought for twenty-five dollars, and I will give it to you. The man that's been workin' it is a lazy, shiftless creeter, and although he's got discouraged, I think it's his fault that it hasn't paid better. Half the time he's been sittin' down by his claim, readin' a novel. If a man wants to succeed here, he's got to have a good share of "get there" about him. I think you'll fill the bill. Now, just pack up your things, and come right out. Go and see father and mother, but don't show 'em this letter. I don't want them to know how I am getting along. I mean some day to surprise 'em. Just tell them that I'm gettin' fair pay, and hope to do better.

There's a stage that leaves Sacramento Hotel for "these diggin's." You won't have any trouble in findin' it. Hopin' soon to see you, I am,

Your friend,

TOM COOPER.

This letter quite cheered up Grant. He was anxious to find out how it seemed to be digging for gold. He counted over his savings and found he had a little over a hundred dollars. But lack of money need not have interfered with his plans. On the same day he received a letter from Giles Crosmont, from which we extract a paragraph:

Remember, Grant, that when you get ready to go to the mines, you can draw upon me for any sum of money you want. Or, should you lose your place, or get short of money, let me know, and I will see that you are not inconvenienced for lack of funds. I am thinking of making a little investment in your name, which I think will be of advantage to you.

"That's a friend worth having," said Grant to himself. "If I had a father, I should like to have him like Mr. Crosmont. He certainly could not be any kinder."

He wrote back that he was intending to start on the following day for Howe's Gulch, and would write again from there. He concluded thus: "I thank you very much for your kind offer of a loan, but I have enough to start me at the mines, and will wait till I stand in need. When I do need money, I won't hesitate to call upon you, for I know that you are a true friend."

He went round to see the blacksmith the next forenoon.

"How do you happen to be off work at this hour?" asked Mr. Cooper.

"I'm a gentleman of leisure, Mr. Cooper."

"How is that, Grant? You haven't been discharged, have you?"

"Well, I've lost my place. Mr. Smithson has sold out his restaurant, and the new man has a friend of his whom he is going to put in my place."

"I'm sorry, Grant," said the blacksmith in a tone of concern. "It doesn't seem hardly fair."

"Oh, it's all right, Mr. Cooper. I am going out to the mines, as I always intended to do. I shall start to-morrow morning."

"I wish you luck. I don't know how Tom is getting along."

"Then I can tell you, for I've had a letter from him. He writes that he is doing fairly well."

Jerry Cooper shook his head.

"I guess he ain't doing as well as he did on the old farm at home," he said.

"He writes very cheerfully and wants me to come out."

"He's too proud to own up that he's disappointed. Just tell him that if he wants to come back to Sacramento and help me in the shop, I can give him two dollars a day and his living."

"I'll tell him, sir. I hope you are doing well."

"I never did so well in my life," answered the blacksmith complacently. "Why, Grant, I've averaged ten dollars a day over and above all expenses ever since I took the shop. How is that for high?"

“Why, father, I never knew you to use slang before,” said Mrs. Cooper reprovingly.

“Can’t help it, old lady. It’s my good luck that makes me a bit frisky. If we were only to home, I’d give you money to buy a new bonnet and a silk dress.”

“Thank you, father, but they wouldn’t do me any good here. Just fancy me walking through the town dressed up in that style. How folks would stare! When I get home I won’t mind accepting your offer.”

“Well, folks don’t dress much here, that’s a fact. Why, they don’t dress as much as they did in Crestville. I never looked so shabby there, but nobody takes any notice of it. There’s one comfort, if I don’t wear fine clothes it isn’t because I can’t afford it.”

“If you’re going away to-morrow, Grant,” said Mrs. Cooper hospitably, “you must come and take supper with us to-night. I don’t know as I can give you any brown bread, but I’ll give you some 194
baked beans, in Eastern style.”

“I shall be glad to get them, Mrs. Cooper. I haven’t tasted any since I left home.”

“I wish I could send some to Tom,” said his mother. “Poor fellow, I don’t suppose he gets many of the comforts of home where he is.”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t carry the beans very conveniently,” said Grant, with a laugh.

On his way back to the restaurant, to make some preparations for his coming departure, he was accosted by a tall, thin man, who looked like a lay preacher.

“My young friend,” he said, with an apologetic cough, “excuse me for addressing you, but I am in great need of assistance. I——Why, it’s Grant!” he exclaimed in amazement.

“Mr. Silverthorn!”

“Yes, my young friend, it is your old friend Silverthorn, who counts himself fortunate in meeting you once more,” and he grasped Grant’s reluctant hand and shook it vigorously.

“You may be my old friend, Mr. Silverthorn,” returned Grant, “but it strikes me you didn’t treat 195
me as such when you took the money from my pocket.”

“I acknowledge it, Grant, I acknowledge it,” said Silverthorn, as he took the same old red silk handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes, “but I was driven to it by want and dire necessity.”

“Well, let it pass! When did you reach Sacramento?”

“Only yesterday. Ah, Grant, I have had sad vicissitudes! I wandered in the wilderness, nearly starving, till I came across a party of Pennsylvania Quakers, who aided me and brought me with them to this place.”

“I hope you did not repay their hospitality as you did ours.”

“No, no. I obeyed the promptings of my better nature. And now, how have you prospered? Have you been to the mines?”

“No, I have been employed in a restaurant.”

“In a restaurant! Oh, how the word moves me! Ah, Grant, I have not tasted food for twenty-four hours.”

“Come with me, then, and I will see that you have a dinner.” 196

He took Silverthorn to the restaurant and authorized him to order what he liked. Mr. Silverthorn was by no means backward in accepting the invitation, and Grant had a dollar to pay.

“I feel better!” sighed Silverthorn. “Do you think I could get employment here?”

“No; my place is taken.”

“And how are my old friends, the Coopers?”

“Mr. Cooper is running a blacksmith shop, and Tom is at Howe’s Gulch, where I am going.”

“Could you—you are so kind—pay my expenses to the mines? I should so like to see my friend Tom.”

“No, I couldn’t,” answered Grant bluntly.

“I thought I would ask,” said Silverthorn, by no means abashed. “Tell Mr. Cooper that I will soon call at his shop.”

“I don’t think he will care to see you,” thought Grant.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST DAY AT THE MINES.

About three o'clock in the afternoon the stage from Sacramento arrived at Howe's Gulch.

Among the other passengers Grant descended, his limbs sore from rattling over the roughest kind of roads, and stretching himself, he looked around him.

The stage had drawn up in front of the hotel, but it was not such a hotel as the reader is accustomed to see. It was a long, low frame building, with what might be called an attic overhead, which was used as a general dormitory, with loose beds of straw spread over the floor. Here twenty-five persons slept in a single room. Down below rude meals were supplied for those who could afford to pay the price.

But Grant felt little interest in the hotel. He expected to meet Tom Cooper, and looked out for him.

He had not long to wait.

"How are you, Grant? Delighted to see you. How's the folks?"

Grant turned, and in the bearded, roughly dressed miner found it difficult to recognize his friend of the plains—Tom Cooper.

His face lighted up as he grasped Tom's hand cordially.

"Your father and mother are well," he said, "and so is Mr. Silverthorn."

"What! have you seen that scoundrel?"

"I left him at Sacramento. He wanted me to pay his fare out here."

"You declined?"

"Yes; I thought he would be company for your father. He may adopt Silverthorn in your place."

"He's welcome to him, if he likes. It's good for sore eyes to see you, Grant. How do you feel?"

"Sore enough. I thought I should be shaken to pieces over the rough road."

"You are hungry, I reckon. Come into the hotel, and we'll have dinner."

Nothing loath, Grant followed Tom into the dining-room, where dinner was laid in readiness for the stage passengers. It was not such a meal as an epicure would enjoy, but Grant ate with great relish.

"So you have been doing well, Tom?" said Grant, between two mouthfuls.

"Yes; you didn't tell father what I wrote you?"

"No; you told me not to."

"What did he say about me?"

"He said that he didn't believe you were doing much; he thought you had better come back to Sacramento and help him in the shop."

Tom laughed.

"I think I'll stay here a little longer," he replied. "How is dad doing?"

"Finely. He is making ten dollars a day."

"Good for him! He wouldn't do for mining. Besides, there's mother. He's better off where he is."

"Where do you sleep, Tom?"

"Upstairs. I have a pair of blankets up there, and a pillow, and I don't need anybody to make my bed."

"I suppose I ought to have a pair of blankets."

"I'll buy you a pair. There's a chap going to leave to-day, and we can buy his. Now come out and see the mines."

Leaving the hotel, Tom led the way to the mining claims. There was a deep gulch half a mile distant, at the base of which ran a creek, and it was along this that the claims were staked out. They were about twenty feet wide, in some cases more. Tom led the way to his, and showed Grant the way he worked. He used a rocker, or cradle. A sieve was fitted in at the top, and into this the miner shoveled the dirt. Tom rocked the cradle with one hand, after it was filled, and poured water on the dirt from a dipper. Gradually the dirt was washed out, and if there was any gold it would remain in small gleaming particles mixed with black sand.

"Isn't that rather a rough way of working, Tom?" asked Grant, after his tour of inspection.

"Yes; I have been thinking of getting what the miners call a 'long tom'—no pun intended."

"What is that?"

I won't give Tom's answer, but quote a more accurate description from an English book published in 1857: "A 'long tom' is nothing more than a wooden trough from twelve to twenty-five feet long, and about a foot wide. At the lower end it widens considerably, and the floor of it is a sheet of iron, pierced with holes half an inch in diameter, under which is placed a flat box a couple of inches deep. The long tom is set at a slight inclination over the place which is to be worked, and a stream of water is kept running through it by means of a hose. While some of the party shovel the dirt into the tom as fast as they can dig it up, one man stands at the lower end, stirring up the dirt as it is washed down, separating the stones and throwing them out, while the earth and small gravel fall with the water through the sieve into the ripple box. This box is about five feet long, and is crossed by two partitions. It is also placed at an inclination, so that the water falling into it keeps the dirt loose, allowing the gold and heavy particles to settle to the bottom, while all the lighter stuff washes over the end of the box along with the water."

The dirt taken out of the ripple box has to be washed out afterward, so as to leave the gold particles.

"Where is the claim you have bought for me, Tom?" asked Grant.

"A little farther down the creek. I will show you."

"Lend me your cradle, and, see if I can work it."

Grant took the cradle and, under Tom's direction, shoveled in some dirt, and proceeded to rock it.

He was quite delighted when, as the result of his labors, a few specks of gold appeared at the bottom.

"How much does it amount to, Tom?" he asked, gathering it into his hand.

"Perhaps a dime."

Grant looked rather disappointed.

"It would take some time to get rich at that rate," he said rather ruefully.

"Yes; but there is always a chance of 'striking it rich.' That is what keeps our spirits up. By the way, Grant, I have a proposal to make to you." 203

"What is it, Tom?"

"Suppose we work together. We can take turns in digging, shovelling in the dirt, and rocking the cradle. That will be more sociable, and we can divide equally whatever gold we obtain."

"That will suit me exactly, Tom; but as you are more experienced than I, you ought to have more than half."

"No, Grant. It shall be share and share alike. There is another advantage. It will save getting an extra rocker."

"I am ready to begin at once."

"Are you not too tired?"

"No, Tom. I want to feel that I have begun to work. If I get tired I can sleep better to-night."

They worked for two hours, when they knocked off for the day. The work was done on Grant's claim. Tom estimated the result at a dollar.

"That is fifty cents apiece," he said. "To-morrow we'll do better." 204

"I don't mind, Tom. I have made a beginning. Now I feel that I am a miner."

At six o'clock they went to the hotel, which was a general lounging-place for the miners.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GRANT HAS AN ADVENTURE.

“Shall we take supper at the hotel?” asked Grant. “How much do they charge?”

“Two dollars a day for meals and lodging.”

“Isn’t that considerable?” asked Grant, rather dismayed.

“Yes, if one only earns fifty cents,” answered Tom, smiling.

“Do you like sleeping in such a crowd, Tom?”

“No; but there seems no other way, unless I bought a cabin, and I should feel too lonely.”

“But now there are two of us together. Why can’t we hire a cabin, and lodge and eat independently? We can take turns in doing the cooking, and it will be a good deal cheaper.”

“Do you know anything about cooking, Grant? I don’t.”

“Yes; I took some lessons at the restaurant. I can teach you all I know myself.”

“Then we can establish ourselves to-morrow. There is a deserted cabin a little way up the gulch, which no one seems to care to occupy. It is in fair condition, and the last occupant kept house, so that there are dishes and cooking utensils. We can take possession, and then, if any one disputes our right, we can agree to pay rent.”

“That will be capital,” said Grant, in a tone of satisfaction.

For a month Grant and Tom Cooper worked assiduously, sometimes at one claim, sometimes at the other. The life of a miner is full of excitement. Even when he meets with poor luck, there is the prospect every day of making a rich find. But in the case of the two friends it was always hope deferred. At the end of the month they sat down to consider the situation.

“Well, Grant, we don’t seem to get much richer,” said Tom, taking a whiff from a clay pipe, which was his evening luxury after a hard day’s work.

“We made fifty cents yesterday,” responded Grant soberly.

“Between us. That is twenty-five cents each.”

“On the whole, we have been losing ground during the last month. I am twenty dollars poorer than when I came here.”

“And I have fallen behind as much, or more than that.”

“Digging for gold isn’t what I thought it to be,” said Grant. “I was doing a good deal better in Sacramento.”

“That maybe; but we mustn’t forget that a man does strike luck once in a while.”

“It won’t do us any good to have some other man strike luck.”

“I see you are getting down-hearted, Grant.”

“Well, not exactly; but I think I’ve made a mistake. Neither of our claims amounts to much.”

“What do you propose, then?”

“I have nothing to propose,” said Grant modestly. “You are older and more experienced than I. I will follow your plan.”

“Then let us work three days longer. If, at the end of that time, nothing turns up, we will pull up stakes, and go elsewhere. We can’t afford to go on working and falling behind all the time.”

“Three days then, Tom.”

“You haven’t had any luck yet, Grant. I had a share before you came.”

“I am afraid my coming brought you bad luck.”

“Bad luck or not, I am glad to have you here. After a hard day’s work it seems pleasant to have some one to talk to.”

“If I should leave you, how would Silverthorn do?” asked Grant, smiling.

“Poor company is worse than none. I’d rather hustle by myself than have that man ’round.”

The next morning the two partners went to work as usual. They always started hopeful of good results, but, as the day wore away and results were meager, their hopes began to sink. That day they cleared between them a dollar and a half, while their expenses, at a modest calculation, so high were provisions, were nearly double this sum.

“Another day lost!” commented Tom as they sat over their evening fire, for it was beginning to grow cold at the close of the day.

“We won’t say anything about it,” said Grant. “Let the three days pass, and then we will consult.”

About the middle of the next afternoon Grant was attacked by a violent headache.

“I shall have to close up work for the day, Tom,” he said.

“Go to the cabin and lie down,” suggested Tom.

“I would rather go on a walk. The fresh air may do me good.”

Grant dipped his handkerchief in the stream, bathed his forehead, and then set out on a stroll to the south of the claims. Finding relief, he pushed on till he had probably walked a couple of miles.

It was a lonely stretch of country, and, with the exception of a boy, he met no one. His surprise was the greater, therefore, when at one point he heard a groan, evidently proceeding from some one in pain. He looked about him, and finally discovered an old man lying under a tree, doubled up with pain. It was hard to tell his age, for his appearance was neglected, and he had the air of one who lived apart from his fellow men.

“What is the matter?” asked Grant, in a tone of sympathy. “Can I help you?”

“I am suffering from an attack of rheumatism,” answered the old man. “It came upon me suddenly, and has disabled me, as you see.”

“What can I do for you?”

“If you can help me to my cabin it will be a great service.”

“Where is your cabin?”

“In the edge of yonder woods.”

He pointed feebly, and Grant, following the direction, espied a small hut, brown and discolored

with age, standing under the shadow of a rock about a quarter of a mile away.

He helped the old man to his feet, and half supported him as he walked toward the cabin.

“Are you often seized in this way?” he asked.

“Not often so suddenly and violently, though I have been in the grip of my enemy for years.”

Grant and the Sick Miner.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER LONELY CABIN.

They reached the cabin at last, and then a question which Grant was about to ask was answered. The old man lived alone.

The furniture was of the simplest: a bed, a couple of chairs, a table, and a few dishes.

"Is there no one to take care of you?" asked Grant.

"No, I need no one," was the quick reply. "I have remedies that will soon quiet the pain."

"I should think you would feel lonely."

"I prefer solitude to the society of mean, selfish, and designing men," answered the old man bitterly.

"All men are not mean or selfish."

"No doubt you are right, but those whom I trusted most have proved so."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Six years."

"Are you—poor? If so, perhaps I can help you."

"No, no; poverty is the smallest of my troubles. Look there!" and the old man drew from his pocket a handful of gold pieces. "I have enough to see me through the few years I have yet to live."

"But you have no occupation—no way to fill up your time?"

"I have a few books and my own thoughts. I will tell you what little is to be told. I came here six years ago, and for a time devoted myself to gold-digging. I was fortunate, and secured all I needed for my modest wants. Then I stopped, for I had no object in accumulating more. But you tell me about yourself. You are young to be in California."

"Yes, I came to seek my fortune. I was a poor boy, and my mother is unhappily situated. I came to see if I could not improve her lot and my own."

"What are you doing?"

"I am digging for gold."

"Where?"

"At Howe's Gulch."

"Have you succeeded?"

"So poorly that I am thinking of giving it up and going elsewhere. In Sacramento I worked in a restaurant, and made a good deal more money than I have made at the mines. I am twenty dollars poorer than when I came here."

"Are you alone?"

"No, I have a friend with me—a young man whose acquaintance I made in crossing the plains."

"Is he a true friend—a loyal friend?"

"Yes."

"Then there are such in the world. Those I have met have been of a different kind. Has he been any more fortunate than yourself?"

"Not since I arrived. He did something before I came, but I must have brought him bad luck, for he has been running behind ever since. We have not been making expenses for the last month."

"I never thought much of Howe's Gulch, though some have been fortunate there."

"Then it was not there that you found your gold?"

"No."

Grant wanted to ask the old man where it was that his claim was located, but hesitated, not knowing how the question would be received.

"I can direct you to a rich spot," said the old man, after a pause. "I had intended to let the secret die with me, but you have done me a service——"

"A very slight one," said Grant modestly.

"Not slight, for without your help I should have been unable to get home."

"I was glad to serve you, and do not need compensation. You may wish to work the claim yourself."

"No; my days of labor are over. I am sixty-five, and might easily be taken for ten years older. I shall be glad to contribute to your happiness and success, and that of your friend."

"Perhaps some one may have discovered and worked the claim."

"No; it is an out-of-the-way place, and has not attracted attention."

"How, then, did you discover it?"

"By accident. As to the richness, let this convince you: in less than six months I took out ten thousand dollars, and having no need of more, stopped working, and carefully removed all traces likely to betray the mine's entrance to a casual observer."

"It will be a great favor to Tom and myself. We ought to give you a share of the proceeds."

The old man shook his head.

"I shall not live long enough to spend the money I have," he answered. "You are welcome to all it will yield you. Come here with your friend to-morrow morning, and I will give you the directions that will enable you to find the claim."

"Can I do anything more for you before I go?"

"Yes; you may go to the stream behind the cabin and bring me some fresh water."

Grant did as requested, and, elated by his unexpected good luck, started on his return to Howe's Gulch.

When Grant reached the cabin jointly occupied by himself and Tom Cooper, he found Tom sitting outside, smoking his pipe.

He looked very thoughtful.

"Have you got rid of your headache, Grant?" he asked.

“Yes; I feel as lively as a cricket.”

“Then your walk has done you good?”

“A great deal of good,” answered Grant; but Tom did not detect the significance hidden in the reply. “How long have you been at home?”

“An hour.”

“Then you knocked off work earlier than usual.”

“Yes,” answered Tom soberly. “To tell the truth, Grant, I’m discouraged. How much do you think our day’s work amounts to?”

“Yours and mine?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“A dollar and seventy-five cents! I think, Grant, we had better inquire the location of the nearest poor house. We may want to ask admission.”

“There’s an old saying, Tom: ‘The darkest hour is just before the day.’” 217

“How does that apply here?”

“I will tell you. I have secured a claim from which ten thousand dollars was obtained within six months.”

“And then it petered out?”

“No; the owner stopped working it because he had money enough, and was satisfied.”

“Hasn’t it been worked since?”

“No.”

“How much did you agree to pay for it?” asked Tom, in excitement.

“Nothing. It was given me for a service I rendered the owner.”

“This seems like a fairy tale, Grant. What does it mean?”

“I will tell you;” and Grant related his afternoon’s adventure.

“Hurrah! we’re in luck!” exclaimed Tom, rising to his feet and swinging his hat in excitement. “If what you say is true, we’re made men.”

“I am glad you look upon me as a man,” said Grant, smiling.

“I’m only anticipating a little. I hope,” he added anxiously, “the old man won’t reconsider the matter.” 218

“Not much chance of it. I haven’t known him long, but I am quite sure that he isn’t that kind of a man.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

NAHUM STOCKTON.

“What shall we do with our old claims?” Before Grant could answer that question a step was heard, and looking up, the two friends saw approaching a tall, gaunt man of thirty-five—a typical Yankee—whose shabby attire indicated that he was “down on his luck.”

“Good-evenin’, friends,” he said.

“Good-evening,” responded Tom cordially. “Sit down with us, won’t you? I’ve got an extra pipe, if you would like a smoke.”

“Thank you; I’m just pinin’ for a smoke. Is this your tenement?”

“Well, we found it vacant, and squatted here. The owner hasn’t called on us for any rent yet.”

“You’re in luck.”

“Have you just arrived?”

“Yes, I have. I’m a rollin’ stone, and I haven’t gathered any moss.”

“There’s a good many in that fix.”

“Do you see that coin?” and the stranger took from his pocket a silver quarter and flipped it up in the air.

“Yes. Is there anything strange about it?”

“Well, there’s this—it’s the last and only piece of property now belonging to Nahum Stockton. If you are acquainted with the tax-collector, don’t mention it, for I wouldn’t like to be assessed on it.”

“I will respect your wishes, Mr. Stockton,” said Tom, laughing. “May I ask what are your plans?”

“If I can buy a claim for a quarter, I will settle down here and dig for gold.”

Tom looked at Grant, and Grant nodded, for he read his friend’s thought.

“Having so much money,” said Tom soberly, “you’d better buy a couple of claims.”

“That’s a good joke,” returned Stockton, with a grim smile.

“No joke at all! My friend and I own a couple of claims, and we leave Howe’s Gulch to-morrow. We will make them over to you without money and without price. As to a cradle, you can buy one on instalments.”

“Do you mean it?” asked Stockton eagerly.

“Yes; but I don’t want to deceive you in the matter. They haven’t been paying very well lately, and Grant and I are going elsewhere to prospect.”

“If they are paying anything, I’ll accept them with pleasure.”

“They are paying something, and of course there’s a possibility of striking it rich in either one of them.”

“Gentlemen,” said Stockton earnestly, “you don’t know what you’ve done for me. I was at the end of my resources, and felt kind o’ reckless. You’ve made a new man of me.”

“We are glad to do you a service. Grant, can’t you get us some supper? After eating, we’ll go and show Mr. Stockton the claims, for we shall want to make an early start to-morrow morning. Mr. Stockton, our supper will be a plain one, but we shall be glad to have you join us in eating it.”

“You can’t be gladder than I am,” said Nahum quaintly. “I haven’t had anything to eat since mornin’, and then it was only a slice of bread and a glass of milk and water with the milk left out.”

Grant was in the cabin, making ready the evening meal. There was bread and butter, some cold meat, and cup of tea for each. Mr. Stockton ate as if he enjoyed every mouthful.

“You don’t ask me how I lost my money,” he said.

“You lost it, then; you didn’t spend it?”

“No; if I had got the worth of it I wouldn’t have cared so much, but to be cheated out of it by a mean scoundrel was a little too much.”

“Were you cheated out of it?”

“Yes. I’ll tell you how. Coming from ’Frisco I struck Frost’s Bar with a hundred dollars in my pocket. A hundred dollars! Sometimes I wonder if there is so much money in the world, now that I am dead broke! Well, I had been meaning to buy a claim, and was walkin’ ’round when I met a sleek appearin’ man, who looked as if butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth. He asked me what my plans were, and I told him I wanted to buy a claim. ‘You’re the very man I’m lookin’ after,’ he said. ‘I’ve got a rich claim here, but my health has given way, and I haven’t strength to work it. I’m willin’ to sell for half price.’

“Well, I looked at the claim, and I liked the appearance of it. The artful rascal found out how much money I had, and asked me a hundred dollars for the claim. ‘But,’ said I, ‘that won’t leave me anything to work it with.’ ‘I like you, Mr. Stockton,’ he said, as he grabbed my hand, and the tears came into his eyes. ‘I feel like bein’ a true friend to you. I’ll let you have it for ninety dollars, and that ain’t half what it’s worth.’

“Well, to make a long story short, I paid over the ninety dollars, and he wrote out a paper making over the claim to me. Then he shook hands with me and went away. I haven’t seen him since.”

“Wasn’t the claim a good one?” asked Grant.

“Yes, the best at the Bar.”

“Then I don’t see what you have to complain of.”

“I’ll tell you. The next mornin’ I went ‘round to take possession of my claim, when I saw a stout, good-looking man workin’ it. ‘Hold on, my friend,’ I said, ‘what are you doin’ with my claim?’

“‘Your claim!’ repeated Charles Ambrose, for that was his name. ‘What are you talkin’ about?’

“‘I reckon I speak plain enough,’ said I, provoked. ‘I bought that claim last night, and I mean to hold it.’

“‘Oh, you bought it?’ said Ambrose. ‘Of whom did you buy it?’

“On that I produced the paper.

“‘Here’s the document,’ I said. ‘It is signed by Dionysius Silverthorn.’”

“What!” ejaculated Tom and Grant jointly.

“Do you know the man?” asked Stockton.

“I think we do,” answered Tom Cooper. “He’s a tall, thin fellow, with a lamb-like expression, but he’s an experienced swindler.”

“You’ve about hit it. Did he swindle you?”

“No, but he tried to. Well, how did you come out?”

“At the little end of the horn. Silverthorn was off with my money, and I had nothing to show for it. I’d just like to get hold of him. He wouldn’t look quite so much like an innocent lamb when I got through with him.”

“I left him at Sacramento,” said Grant.

“I’ll hunt him up when I get a little money,” went on Stockton. “I’ve met scoundrels before, but he’ll take the cake.”

“Or anything else he can lay hands on,” said Grant, with a laugh.

They walked over to the mining-camp, put Stockton into possession of the claims, and introduced him to a miner, who agreed to sell him a cradle on instalments.

“Now, Grant,” said Tom, “we’ll go to bed, for we may have a long walk before us to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

PAUL CRAMBO.

Full of hope, Grant and Tom arrived at the cabin of the old man who had promised them his claim.

"How are you feeling this morning?" inquired Grant, when they were admitted.

"Rather stiff, but better than yesterday. Is this your friend?"

"Yes. His name is Tom Cooper."

The old man scrutinized him closely.

"It's a good face," he said. "You can trust him."

"I do."

Tom looked well pleased.

"You have come to ask me to keep my promise."

"Yes. Your offer was a very kind one. On the strength of it we have given our claims at Howe's Gulch to a stranger, who came to our cabin last night penniless."

"Then I shall be helping him, too. Are you ready to go to work at once?"

"Yes; that's our hope."

"The place where I made my pile is fifteen miles away. Are you good for a long walk?"

"I am," answered Grant.

"I will try to keep up with you," said Tom Cooper, smiling.

"My claim was on a creek at the base of a hill, about a mile from a village called Eldora. In the pocket of yonder coat I have drawn, roughly, a plan of the place, which will be a sufficient guide."

"May I keep the paper?" asked Grant.

"Certainly."

"If we start now, Grant, we can get there before night."

"Go, then, and may success attend you."

"Can't we do anything for you before we go, sir?"

"No, thank you. One thing, however, I will ask. In a month, let me know how you are getting along. I look upon you as my successors. I hope you may be as fortunate as I was."

The two friends set out with stout hearts, in excellent spirits. The walk was long and fatiguing, but there is nothing like hope to sweeten toil. About midway they sat down under a tree, and ate, with hearty appetite, the lunch they had taken the precaution to carry with them.

"I wish there was more," said Grant wistfully.

"Your appetite seems improving."

"There's nothing like a good walk to make a fellow feel hungry. I wonder how Stockton is getting along."

"He will make something at any rate. I pity Silverthorn if ever our long-legged friend gets hold of him."

After an hour they resumed their walk, and about four o'clock they reached their destination. They visited the location of the claim, and surveyed it with a guarded manner, not wishing to draw attention to it.

They fell in with a thin man, of medium stature, who talked in a drawling tone. He seemed to have a considerable share of curiosity.

"Where might you be from, strangers?" he inquired.

"We might be from China, but we aint," said Tom.

"Is that a joke?" asked their new acquaintance, puzzled.

"Yes; it's an attempt at a joke."

"I reckon you don't want to tell."

"Oh, yes; we're entirely willing. We came from Howe's Gulch."

"So? Did you strike it rich there?"

"No; we struck it poor," said Grant, with a smile. "We found ourselves headed for the poorhouse, so we switched off."

"I was at Howe's Gulch myself a year ago."

"Did you have luck?"

"Not much. I paid expenses."

"Are you mining now?"

"No; I'm farming. I live just out of the village—me and Mrs. Crambo, and a boy that's working for us."

"How far from here?"

"About a mile."

"How would you like a couple of boarders?"

"Are you going to stay 'round here?"

"We may—for a while."

"Come to the house, then, and speak to Mrs. Crambo. If she's agreeable, I am."

They accompanied their new friend to a plain, but comfortable house, looking not unlike a New England farm-house. Mrs. Crambo was a pleasant looking woman, weighing at least fifty pounds more than her lord and master. She was evidently the "better man of the two," being active and energetic, while he was slow and seemed to find exertion difficult.

"If you are willing to set up a hotel, Mrs. Crambo," said her husband, "I bring you two boarders for a starter."

"I shouldn't mind a little company," she said pleasantly. "How long have you been out here?"

"Not long enough to make our fortunes," answered Tom.

"Do you expect to make them out here?" she asked shrewdly.

"We would like to. Perhaps Mr. Crambo will put us in the way of doing it."

“Do you hear that, Paul?” she said, laughing.

Mr. Crambo scratched his head.

“I haven’t made my own yet,” he answered slowly.

“If it rained gold pieces, you wouldn’t pick up enough to keep you going for three months. You know you are shiftless, Paul.”

“Well, perhaps I am, Martha. I can’t get up and hustle like you.”

“No, you’re not one of the hustling kind. Well, gentlemen, if you want to stay with us awhile, and don’t object to seven dollars a week each, we’ll try to accommodate you. When do you want to begin?”

“Right off,” answered Tom, upon whose olfactories the savory smell of dinner, cooking in the next room, made an agreeable impression. “The terms are satisfactory.”

So it happened that Tom and Grant became inmates of the Crambo household. The first meal satisfied them that their hostess was a most accomplished cook, and the supper seemed to them 232
delicious.

“Have you had any gold-digging near here?” asked Tom.

“Not much. There was an old man who had a claim somewhere near where I met you, but I don’t think he made much. Finally he got discouraged and went away. That’s a good while since.”

“Evidently he doesn’t suspect anything,” thought Grant. “All the better. We shan’t have any competitors.”

“Then you don’t think he took much gold away with him?” he said aloud.

“No. I guess he wasn’t calc’lated for a gold miner.”

“He might have taken a lesson of you, Paul,” suggested Mrs. Crambo.

“I never had a good claim,” answered the master of the house. “If I had I’d have done as well as the next man.”

“It depends on who the next man was,” said his wife.

“There aint any more money in mining,” said Crambo dogmatically. “All the claims are petering 233
out.”

“I guess you are the one that’s petered out.”

“Perhaps you’d like to go into the business yourself, Mrs. C.”

“No, thank you. I’ve all I can do to take care of you and the farm. Help yourself to the doughnuts, Mr. Cooper.”

“Thank you,” said Tom. “I haven’t eaten a doughnut before, since I left home. Your doughnuts can’t be beat.”

Mrs. Crambo was pleased with this tribute to her cooking, and was very gracious to her new boarders. After supper she showed them to a chamber on the second floor, well and comfortably furnished.

“You two gentlemen will have to room together,” she said. “This is the only room I have to spare.”

“We shan’t object,” said Tom. “Grant and I are friends and partners, and are not likely to quarrel.”

“Crambo and I never quarrel,” she said, with a significant laugh. “He knows better.”

“Yes my dear,” said Paul meekly. 234

“We’re in luck, Grant,” said Tom. “For the first time in months we shall live like Christians.”

“I hope you won’t be offended, Tom, but I like Mrs. Crambo’s cooking better than yours.”

“That’s where you show your good taste. I wasn’t intended by nature for a cook, and I can say the same for you.”

The next morning the two friends set out after breakfast for the deserted claim. They opened it up, and soon found traces of past workings.

They had been there for about a couple of hours when Paul Crambo came along.

“What’s up?” he asked, in surprise.

“We’ve gone to work,” answered Tom.

“That must be the claim the old man used to run.”

“Very likely. I thought some one must have been at work here before.”

“Likely you’ll get discouraged and go off, as he did.”

“We’ll try to make enough to pay our board. That’ll keep us here, even if we don’t succeed very 235
well.”

“I never like digging for gold,” said Crambo. “It made my back ache.”

“Grant and I will try it awhile.”

Mr. Crambo looked on awhile and then sauntered away. It made him uncomfortable to see others work hard. He became fatigued himself out of sympathy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF SUCCESS.

Tom and Grant met with little success during the first two days, and were correspondingly disappointed. After all the high hopes with which they had entered upon this new enterprise, it was certainly discouraging to realize scarcely more than at Howe's Gulch. But on the third day they struck a "pocket," and in the next two days took out five hundred dollars.

"That's the way to do it, Grant," said Tom, his face fairly radiant. "It pays to dig for gold at this rate."

"So it does, Tom. I felt sure the old gentleman wouldn't deceive us."

"If it will only last, we shall make our fortunes."

"This pocket won't last, of course, but we may strike another. You know Mr. Gibbon told us he took out ten thousand dollars in six months."

"That is true, so we may hope for a good streak of luck."

"There is one thing I have been thinking of, Tom. Where shall we keep our gold-dust?"

Tom looked doubtful.

"If we could send it away," he said, "it would be better. Of course, if we keep it under our own charge we may be robbed."

"To begin with, we must not let any one know how well we are doing."

"That is important. The news would attract adventurers and thieves."

Finally it was decided to keep the dust for the present in a box at their boarding-place. In the room the two partners found a sailor's chest which had been left by a former boarder, who had left the house in arrears. Grant bought it of Mr. Crambo for a couple of dollars, and Paul seemed glad to get rid of it at that price. There was a good lock upon it, and into this chest their daily findings were put, till at the end of a fortnight, they had, according to Tom Cooper's estimate, about one thousand dollars.

Of their good luck neither Mr. nor Mrs. Crambo had the slightest idea.

"How are you making out at the mines, Mr. Cooper?" asked Mrs. Crambo one evening.

"So, so!" answered Tom indifferently.

"You'll never make your fortune at that there mine," said Paul.

"Oh, well, we are not ambitious," rejoined Grant. "If we make enough to pay our board and a little more, we shall not complain."

"I hope you'll do that," said Mrs. Crambo. "I have got used to having you here, and should be sorry to have you go. If you should find yourself short at any time, just put off paying your board. I am not afraid to trust you."

"You are very kind," said Tom warmly; "but we had a little money with us when we came, and we are doing enough to make it pretty certain that we can pay our board."

"You wouldn't if you didn't work harder than my husband."

"My dear," interposed Mr. Crambo, shrugging his shoulders, "I work as hard as I can. I wasn't made for hard work."

"I don't believe you were," said his wife. "You never have made a success yet."

"Except in marrying you," responded Paul.

Mrs. Crambo smiled.

"It may have been good luck for you," she replied, "but I am afraid that in becoming Mrs. Crambo I made a serious mistake."

"I suppose you regret not marrying Silverthorn," said Paul.

"Silverthorn!" exclaimed Grant and Tom Cooper in unison.

"Yes; his name was Dionysius Silverthorn, and he looked like a preacher. Do you know him?"

"We have met him."

"He taught a dancing school in Wisconsin—that's where my wife and I came from—and was rather sweet on her. I think she gave him some encouragement."

"You know I never did, Paul."

"I sometimes think you hanker after him yet, Rebecca."

"Well, between you and him I am not sure that there is much choice," retorted Mrs. Crambo.

"I can assure you there is," said Grant. "Silverthorn is the worst fraud I ever came across."

"I say the same," chimed in Tom.

"What do you know of him? My wife will be interested to hear," said Mr. Crambo.

Upon this the two partners gave an account of their personal experience with Silverthorn, and what they had learned of him through Nahum Stockton.

"Paul," said Mrs. Crambo, "that settles it. You needn't be jealous of Mr. Silverthorn. I wouldn't marry him if I were left a widow to-morrow. For the first time I begin to see that I might have done worse. By the way," resumed Mrs. Crambo, "I have had an application for board from another party."

"A gentleman?"

"Humph! I can't say as to that. It's a man, at any rate."

"What did you say?" asked Tom, a little uneasy. The presence of another boarder would render the discovery of their secret more likely.

"I said I would take him for a few days on trial," answered Mrs. Crambo.

"Is he in any business?"

"He says he is prospecting."

"What is his name?"

"I can't remember. However, we shall soon know, for he is to come this evening."

In fact, just at this moment, there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Crambo, answering it,

ushered in a person familiar to Grant, at least.

"Albert Benton!" he exclaimed.

"What, Grant, you here?" exclaimed Benton, in surprise.

"Why, are you gentlemen acquainted?" asked Mrs. Crambo.

"Yes," answered Grant briefly; "we knew each other in Sacramento."

Grant was by no means pleased to see his old associate in the restaurant.

"And what are you doing here, Grant?" asked Benton curiously. 242

"Mr. Cooper and I are working a claim," answered Grant unwillingly.

"Is it rich? Don't you want a partner?" inquired Benton briskly.

"No; we can do all the work that is required. But what are you doing?"

"Oh, I've been drifting around," said Benton evasively. "I was digging for gold a part of the time."

"Did you meet with any success?"

"Not much. I tell you, Grant, this mining business is played out. I don't know what I shall take up next. If I had capital, I would set up a restaurant of my own."

"You may be right about mining," said Grant. "We made very little at Howe's Gulch."

"I suppose you are doing better here?"

"We are not ready to retire yet."

"I am glad I happened to come here. It will be pleasant to be in the same house with an old friend."

Grant was truthful, and did not respond to the compliment. 243

About eight o'clock he and his partner went up to their chamber, where, as the nights were growing cool, they were accustomed to sit before a fire and chat of their prospects. Now their privacy seemed likely to be broken in upon, for Benton invited himself to go up with them.

"Come, now, this is what I call comfort," he said, and he leaned back in his chair and puffed at a cigar. "Reminds me of old times. I say, what a queer chap Crambo is!"

"He is rather peculiar, but a good-natured, pleasant man."

"Oh, I don't say anything about that, but he's got a wife that is twice as smart as he is."

"Mrs. Crambo knows how to cook. That is what chiefly interests us."

Albert Benton had an inquiring mind, and was gifted with a large measure of curiosity. He looked about the room, and his glance fell on the chest.

"What do you keep in that?" he inquired.

"Clothing," answered Grant briefly. 244

"What made you get a chest? A trunk would do better."

"We found it here, and bought it of Mr. Crambo. As neither of us had a trunk, we find it convenient."

"When do you go to work?"

"We have breakfast at seven o'clock, and generally get to work about eight."

"What sent you here? This isn't a mining region."

"I suppose we drifted here, as you did."

"Well, we'll see what'll come out of it."

At ten o'clock Tom Cooper suggested to their guest, who showed no disposition to retire, that Grant and himself were in the habit of going to bed early, as their work during the day fatigued them.

"All right! I'll see you both to-morrow," returned Benton, as he bade them good-night.

When he had left the room Grant said: "I'm sorry to see Benton here. I am afraid he will give us trouble."

"In what way? By giving us too much of his company?"

"Partly that, but if he had any suspicion as to the contents of the chest he wouldn't rest till he had opened it." 245

"He wouldn't find it a very healthy proceeding," remarked Tom Cooper grimly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BENTON HAS A PLAN.

Some days passed. The new-comer did not appear to find anything to do. He had sauntered out to the claim worked by Grant and Tom, and looked on, but had made no discoveries. He did not know whether to think they were prospering or not. He determined to obtain some information, if possible, from his landlord.

One morning, after the two friends had gone to work, he lingered at the table, asking for an extra cup of coffee as a pretext for remaining longer.

"Do you think my friend Grant and his chum are doing well?" he remarked carelessly.

"They can't be making much," answered Paul. "I think they are fools to waste their time here."

"They must be making something," said Mrs. Crambo. "They pay their board bills regularly."

"Do they pay in gold-dust?"

"No; in coin."

"Humph! what do they do with the gold-dust they get from the mine?"

"I don't know. I never inquired."

This was meant as a hint that Benton was unnecessarily curious, but he never took such hints.

"Is there any place in the village where they can dispose of it?"

"No," answered Paul; "not that I know of. They would have to send it by express to Sacramento or San Francisco."

"Where did you know Mr. Colburn?" asked Mrs. Crambo.

"We were employed together in Sacramento."

"He seems to be a fine boy—or young man, perhaps I ought to call him. So steady, so regular in his habits."

Benton shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's well enough," he answered, "but he's mighty close with his money."

"I approve of young men being economical," said Mrs. Crambo.

"But not tight. Why, I once asked Grant to lend me five dollars and, would you believe it, he wouldn't do it."

"Did he receive more pay than you?"

"I should say not. I received a good deal higher pay than he, as I ought to, being older and more experienced."

"Then," said Mrs. Crambo shrewdly, "I can't understand why you should need to borrow money from him."

"A man is sometimes hard up, no matter how large his income may be."

"It ought not to be so," said Mrs. Crambo dryly. "Our income isn't large, but I never ask any one to lend me money."

"Oh, well, I suppose you are a good manager."

"Yes, I flatter myself that I am a fair manager. I think it my duty to be."

"What a tiresome woman!" thought Benton. "I hate people who are always talking about duty."

This was not surprising, for Benton concerned himself very little about duty in his own case.

When he left the table, he said to himself, "It seems pretty certain that Grant and Cooper haven't parted with any of their gold-dust. The question is, where do they keep it?"

That day Benton strayed into a restaurant and boarding-house in the village, kept by a man named Hardy, and learned incidentally that he wanted to sell out.

"What do you want to sell out for?" asked Benton.

"I have got tired of the place. It is too quiet for me. I want to go to San Francisco. There's more life there, and more money can always be made in a city like that."

"How has the restaurant been paying?" questioned Benton.

"I can't complain of it. It has paid me about forty dollars a week, net; perhaps a little more."

"I have been in the restaurant business myself," continued Albert.

"Then you are just the right man to buy me out."

"Will you sell out for the money I have in my pocket?"

"How much have you?"

"'I have fifteen dollars in my inside pocket,' as the song has it."

Hardy shook his head.

"I want a thousand dollars for the place," he said.

"I will buy it, and pay you on instalments," said Benton.

"Well, I might agree to that for half the purchase money. Pay me five hundred dollars down, and the rest you can pay at, say, twenty dollars a week. I am sure that is a liberal offer."

"I don't think so. Besides, I haven't got five hundred dollars."

"Can't you borrow it?"

"I don't know." And then it occurred to Benton that perhaps Tom Cooper and Grant might be induced to advance that sum of money.

"Well, perhaps so," he resumed, after a pause.

"Find out, and then come and talk to me."

"Won't four hundred dollars do?"

"No. I shall need to take five hundred dollars with me to San Francisco."

"Is this the best you can do?"

"Yes."

"I will think of it, and let you know."

Albert Benton walked thoughtfully out of the restaurant. He had tried gold-digging, and didn't like it. His old business seemed to him more reliable, and this seemed a good opportunity to go back

into it.

"Hardy hasn't much enterprise," he soliloquized. "If he can clear forty dollars a week, I shouldn't be surprised if I could carry it up to sixty. I have never had a chance to show what I could do, always having had some one over me. I should just like to try it once."

Benton waited till his two fellow boarders got home from their day's work, and then opened the subject.

"I can tell you of a good investment for your money, Grant," he said.

"How do you know I have any money to invest?"

"I suppose you have been making some, and you never spend any." 252

"I never spend any foolishly, if that is what you mean."

"You don't seem to have much idea of enjoying life."

"Not in your sense. I enjoy life in my own way."

"I am glad you do, because you must have some money to lend me."

"To lend you?"

"Yes; I have a chance to buy out a fine restaurant in the village, but must pay five hundred dollars down. I am almost sure I can clear sixty dollars a week, net profit, from it. You know yourself that I understand the business."

"Yes, you ought to understand it."

"I understand it better than digging for gold. I soon tired of that."

"It is tiresome work," admitted Grant.

"And doesn't pay much."

"It used to pay better—in the early days, I should think."

"Well, Grant, what do you say? I can give you the restaurant as security, and pay you back at the 253
rate of twenty dollars a week. I'll pay you one per cent. a month interest."

"How much of the sum are you going to furnish yourself?"

"Why," said Benton, embarrassed, "I am not so fixed that I can pay anything at present. I've got an old uncle, over seventy years old, who is sure to leave me five thousand dollars, so that is additional security."

"I haven't five hundred dollars to lend."

"I didn't suppose you had, but your friend Cooper could chip in with you on the loan, and just draw his one per cent. a month regular. If that isn't enough, I would pay fifteen per cent. It would pay me, for it would put me into a good business."

"I don't know how Cooper will feel about it, Mr. Benton, but I prefer to keep what little money I have in my own hands."

"I think you might oblige a friend," said Benton crossly.

"There's a limit to friendship. I shall need my money for my own use."

Cooper said the same, and Benton saw that he must get the money in some other way. He 254
dropped the subject, in order to avert suspicion, and began to consider the scheme which all the time he had in view to fall back upon.

The next day, when the coast was clear, he went upstairs, and entered Grant's room. There was no lock on the door, for in California people were not suspicious.

"Now I wonder where they keep their gold-dust?" Benton asked himself. "It must be somewhere in this room, for they have no other place."

He looked about him. The room was very simply furnished. There was a bureau, with three drawers, which Benton was able to unlock, for he had a key that would fit it. There were only articles of underclothing inside, as, indeed, Benton anticipated.

"I think it must be in the chest," he decided, as he fixed his glance upon it. "Let me lift it."

He raised it, and found that it was quite heavy.

"That's the weight of the gold-dust," he reflected. "If I could only open it!" 255

He tried the different keys he had in his pocket, but none of them would answer.

"I must hunt up some more keys," he said to himself. "It will pay."

CHAPTER XXX.

BENTON LAYS HIS PLANS.

As Benton left the room, Paul Crambo, who was just coming upstairs, caught sight of him. Observing his landlord's surprised look, Benton, who was not easily disconcerted, said, "I was looking for a clothes-brush. I thought Grant might have one in his room."

"Did you find one?" asked Crambo.

"No."

"I thought he had one."

Paul Crambo entered the chamber, and pointed out a whisk-broom lying on the bureau.

"There is one," he said significantly.

"So there is," said Benton, for once looking confused. "Where could my eyes have been?"

"It is strange you didn't see it. It was in plain sight."

"So it was. I am very absent-minded."

Paul Crambo made no answer, but when he went downstairs he said to his wife, "I begin to mistrust that Benton."

"Why?"

Then Paul told what he had seen.

"You are right, Paul. He wasn't in there for any good purpose. I can't say I am very much surprised. I didn't take any fancy to him."

"Nor I. I wouldn't like to have him rob our two friends. They are fine fellows."

"We had better tell them to-night."

"I'll do it before that. I'll go out to their claim at once. The sooner they know it the better."

"Do so."

Paul Crambo didn't often call on the two miners, and they were a little surprised to see him approaching the claim.

"How are you, Mr. Crambo? Are you out for a walk?" asked Grant.

"Partly; but partly on business."

"Do you want to buy us out?"

"Well, not at present. I ain't in love with gold-digging. Is that Benton a friend of yours, Mr. Colburn?"

"He isn't a friend. He is an acquaintance."

"Do you like him?"

"Not overmuch."

"You had better look out for him."

"What do you mean?" asked Grant quickly.

"I don't think he's honest."

"You have some reason for saying that, Mr. Crambo," said Tom Cooper.

"Just before I left the house I saw him coming out of your room."

"Did he see you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He made a blind excuse; said he went in there for a clothes-brush, but he couldn't find one."

"Why, there was one on the bureau."

"So I found out when I went into the room. I called his attention to it, and asked how it happened that he didn't see it."

"Well?"

"He said he was very absent-minded. I think he didn't visit the room for any good purpose."

"I am sure of it," said Grant, and then he told of Benton's experience in Sacramento.

"If you have anything of value in your chamber," continued Paul, "I think you had better remove it, or make sure that it can't be taken away by your old friend."

"The fact is, Mr. Crambo," said Tom Cooper, "we have considerable dust in the chest which we bought of you. We have kept it secret hitherto, but I know I can rely upon you, and I want your advice as to what to do. You don't think Benton opened the chest?"

"No; he didn't have time. Besides, he had nothing with him."

"It won't be safe to keep it there any longer; but the problem is, what shall we do with it? We can't find a hiding-place for it here."

"If you will see Mrs. Crambo about it, I think that she has a trunk that you can use for the purpose."

"But wouldn't that be just as risky?"

"Not if the trunk is kept in our chamber. Of course that depends on whether you have any confidence in us."

"The strongest, Mr. Crambo," said Tom cordially. "The plan seems a good one. But the transfer must be made when Benton is out of the way."

"We must pick out the right time. To-night you can consult with Mrs. C. Then if Mr. Benton carries out his plan, and opens the chest, no harm will be done."

"I hope he will," said Tom. "I should like to watch the fellow's face, and see how disappointed he will look."

When Tom and Grant met Benton in the evening, it was difficult for them to treat him as usual. Tom had a strong desire, as he afterward told Grant, to seize Benton and shake the life out of him.

"Did you have a good day, gentlemen?" asked Benton nonchalantly.

"Oh, so, so! We didn't come across a bonanza."

"I have, but I can't avail myself of it."

“You refer to the restaurant?”

“Yes; I am afraid it will slip out of my hands if I don’t raise five hundred dollars within a week.”

“Have you any scheme for raising it?” asked Tom Cooper.

“Well, no, not exactly. I hope to find some one who will lend me the money. If you and Grant, now ——”

“We need the little money we have for other purposes,” interrupted Cooper.

“Oh, that’s all right. I guess I’ll raise it somewhere.”

“I suppose he means in our chest,” thought Grant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BENTON OPENS THE TRUNK.

Soon after supper Albert Benton went to the village, and this left Grant and Tom free to transfer their gold-dust to a trunk in Mr. Crambo's chamber. When the change had been made, Grant said in a satisfied tone: "Now, Benton can open the chest and welcome."

"I'd like to be present when he is doing it," said Tom Cooper.

Albert Benton was anxious to obtain a key that would open the chest. He scraped acquaintance with a clerk at the village hotel, and casually remarked: "I'm in a bad fix. I've got a trunk at home that I can't open."

"Why not?" asked the clerk.

"I haven't a key that will fit it. You don't happen to have any keys, do you?"

"I've got half a dozen," said the clerk, taking a handful from his pocket. "They are keys that I picked up about the hotel."

"Will you lend them to me?"

"Certainly. If you find one that suits, you can have it."

Benton took them, well pleased. From the size it seemed to him probable that one of them would fit the chest.

"Thank you," he said. "I will return them to you to-morrow."

"Oh, don't be in any hurry. They are of no use to me."

He left the hotel, and it chanced soon afterward that Grant and Tom entered it. Tom was in search of a cigar, for he was a confirmed smoker.

"I just had a call from one of your fellow boarders," remarked the clerk, who knew both Tom and Grant.

"Benton?"

"Oh, is that his name? I only knew that he boarded at Paul Crambo's. Seems a sociable sort of fellow."

"Quite so," answered Tom dryly.

"He is talking of buying a restaurant in the village—the one kept by Hardy."

"I heard him mention it."

"He says he was in that business in Sacramento."

"Yes," said Grant; "I knew him there."

"I did him a favor to-night—lent him some keys," continued the clerk.

As may be imagined, this announcement was of great interest to Tom and Grant.

"What did he want keys for?" inquired Tom.

"He said he couldn't open his trunk. He thought one of those I lent him might do."

Tom and Grant exchanged glances. They understood very well what it was that Benton wanted to unlock.

"Did he think he would raise the money to buy the restaurant?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, he said he was negotiating for a loan."

Meanwhile Benton had observed Tom Cooper and Grant walking together. He had the keys in his pocket, and was anxious to test the question whether one of them would fit.

"Why shouldn't I try this evening?" he asked himself. "It is a fine night, and Grant and Cooper will probably stay out some time. If I could only get the gold-dust and settle the matter about the restaurant to-morrow! Hardy won't keep it for me very long. He is likely to meet a man with money any time."

Benton kept on his way, and, seizing his opportunity, stole upstairs quietly and, as he thought, unobserved. But Mrs. Crambo saw him and suspected his purpose. When two minutes later Tom and Grant entered the house, she remarked: "Mr. Benton has just gone upstairs."

"I expected he would. He has borrowed some keys in the village."

Tom removed his shoes, and went upstairs softly. He saw at once that the door of his chamber was open. He approached quietly, and looked through the crack. There was Benton on his knees before the chest, trying one key after another.

At length he succeeded. The last key fitted the lock, and he raised the lid eagerly.

"Now for it!" he muttered in a tone of exultation.

When the lid of the chest was opened, a pile of shirts and underclothing was revealed. It is hardly necessary to say that Benton did not care for these. He was in search of something more valuable.

Eagerly he took out the clothing and piled it on the floor beside the chest. Then he looked anxiously for a box containing gold-dust, for it had occurred to him as probable that the two friends would keep their gold in a tin box. But to his deep disappointment no box was visible, nor any other receptacle for the coveted dust.

"I was on a false scent!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Where in the world do they keep their gold?"

He was beginning to replace the clothing in the chest, when the door was opened and Tom Cooper and Grant entered. Benton sprang to his feet in confusion, and tried to push his way out of the room. But at a signal from Tom, Grant closed the door and set his back against it.

"Now, Mr. Albert Benton," said Tom Cooper sternly, "what are you doing here in our room?"

In spite of his assurance Albert Benton did not know what to say.

"I—I was in search of some old linen to wrap round my ankle," he stammered.

"And so you entered our room, and broke open my chest?"

"I hope you will excuse me, I was indiscreet," muttered Benton.

"That is a very mild way of putting it," retorted Tom. "Benton, you are a thief."

"Do—you—mean—to insult me?" asked Benton.

"Yes, if the truth insults you. Shall I tell you what you were after?"

Benton did not reply, and Tom Cooper resumed: “You thought we kept our gold-dust in that chest.”

“Upon my honor!” protested Benton.

“The less you say about your honor the better,” returned Tom, with contempt. “Grant, what shall we do with him?”

Benton began to be alarmed. Tom Cooper was a young giant. He had been brought up to his father’s business, and his muscles were as firm and strong as steel. Benton knew very well that he would be like a child in his grasp.

“Spare me,” he said, “and I will not trouble you any more.” 268

“I don’t think you will if you know what is best for yourself. But you deserve to be punished for what you have already done. Grant, open the window.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Benton, in alarm.

“I’ll show you.”

Tom seized the thief, and bore him in his strong arms to the window. He held him outside, making a futile resistance, and then dropped him.

The distance to the ground was only fifteen feet, and Benton landed on all-fours, a little jarred, but not seriously hurt.

“Now,” said Tom, leaning out, “you had better leave this neighborhood as expeditiously as possible, or I will brand you as a thief, and let the citizens take what course they choose.”

Benton knew very well that in California at that time thieves were not tolerated, and were often strung up to a tree without ceremony. He felt that he had better not stand upon the order of his going, but go at once.

“Let me go into the house and get my things,” he said submissively. 269

“Have you settled up your board bill with Mrs. Crambo?”

“I have only five dollars!” he pleaded.

“Let the board go!” said Mrs. Crambo, who was on the stairs. “All I ask is that he shall go himself, and never come back.”

Benton crept upstairs, and, getting his small satchel, left the house. Where he went Tom and Grant did not learn, nor did they care.

“That fellow will never thrive,” said Tom. “He has made a bad beginning. Any man who wants to get rich by appropriating the property of another is sure to come to a bad end.”

“I guess you are right, Tom,” said Grant. “I am relieved to have Benton out of the house.”

“You have lost your boarder, Mrs. Crambo,” said Tom. “How much board is he owing you?”

“About five dollars.”

“We will pay that; won’t we, Grant?”

“Certainly,” answered Grant. 270

“I won’t accept it,” said Mrs. Crambo decidedly. “It isn’t your fault that Mr. Benton came here. As for the small sum he owes me, I can get along without it. It won’t break me. I don’t believe you and your friend have any money to spare.”

“We have been doing pretty well, Mrs. Crambo. We have no cause to complain.”

“I am very glad to hear it, for you are likely to stay here longer. You have been working hard, and you are entitled to all you have made.”

“Have you really been doing well, Mr. Cooper?” questioned Paul Crambo.

“Yes, Mr. Crambo; we haven’t made a fortune, but we have been very well paid for our work. Would you like to buy a share in the claim?”

Paul Crambo shook his head.

“Digging for gold doesn’t agree with me,” he said. “You are young men, and can stand it, but I have a pain in the back if I work over an hour.”

Tom Cooper anticipated this reply, or he would not have made the proposal. He preferred to have Grant for his sole partner. Nor did he care to have any third party know how rich the claim really was. Notwithstanding the hint he had given, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Crambo had any idea what a bonanza the boys had struck. 271

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LETTER FROM MR. CROSMONT.

Four more weeks passed. The claim continued to yield richly, and at the end of this time the two partners reckoned that they had somewhat over two thousand dollars.

"I wish we could sell the gold-dust, and invest the money where it would be safe," said Tom thoughtfully.

"If we were in Sacramento, we should be able to send it by express to San Francisco."

"True; but we have no means of doing it here."

"There are plenty who would undertake the job," suggested Tom.

"Could we find one that we could trust?" asked Grant shrewdly.

"That's the question," said Tom.

That same evening brought a solution of the problem. A man who had just arrived from San Francisco called at the house.

"Does a boy named Grant Colburn live here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have a letter for him from San Francisco."

Grant was summoned, and in some surprise received the communication.

"It is from Mr. Crosmont," he said joyfully, as he opened the letter and looked at the signature.

He read it aloud. It ran thus:

DEAR GRANT:

It seems a very long time since I have seen you, and I am in the dark as to your successes and prospects. As you know, my principal business is to look for my wayward son Gregory, who, I have reason to think, is in California. Now, all visitors to California come sooner or later to San Francisco, and it is for this reason that I have established myself here. Thus far I have not seen or heard of Gregory, but this is not at all surprising. He may be somewhere in the interior, and in that case there would be little chance of my hearing of him.

Meanwhile, I confess that I feel lonely. I am not a man to make many friends, and I have met no one in whom I feel an interest since I parted with you. I begin to think that I should like to have you with me, and I will promise that you will lose nothing by transferring yourself to San Francisco. Will you, on receipt of this letter, arrange to join me as soon as you can? I am the more anxious to have you do so, because I have not felt very well of late, and, if I should fall sick, I should like to have with me a tried and faithful friend whom I can thoroughly trust.

I don't know how you are situated. You may be in need. I, therefore, think it best to send by the bearer fifty dollars, which will pay your expenses to this city. You will find me at the Alameda Hotel in Stockton Street.

Though I am doing no business, I have made some investments in town lots which, I think, will pay me handsomely. I have bought two lots for you, which are recorded in your name. I look to see the present village of San Francisco become a large, populous and influential city. I may not live to see it, but you assuredly will. If you need more money, let me know. Let me see you soon.

Your old friend,

GILES CROSMONT.

"Well," said Tom, after the reading was ended, "one question is settled."

"What is that?"

"We needn't look any further for a messenger to take our gold to San Francisco."

"You mean that I am to take it?"

"Yes."

The two partners realized that Grant's mission would involve some risk. Californian routes of travel were in those days infested by robbers and road agents, who preferred making a living in a lawless way to the more creditable and less hazardous paths of industry. How to reduce the danger to a minimum was a subject of anxious thought.

"You had better not send all the gold-dust by me, Tom," said Grant. "Then, if I am robbed, it won't be a total loss."

This plan seemed wise, and Grant set out with about fifteen hundred dollars' worth of gold. He carried it in a valise, and, the better to divert suspicion, wore an old and shabby working suit.

"I am not proud of my appearance," he said, as he took a position in front of the mirror in their chamber. "What do I look like?"

"A healthy young tramp," answered Tom, laughing.

"I agree with you."

"However, there is one comfort; no one will think you have anything of value with you."

"What will Mr. Crosmont think when I make my appearance in San Francisco?"

"That you are down on your luck. However, you can explain to him."

The next morning Grant set out on his way to Sacramento. Tom Cooper accompanied him as far as the cabin of the old man to whom they owed their present good fortune. It was a long walk, and the valise, with its weight of gold-dust, was no light burden.

When they reached the cabin, they found Mr. Gilbert—for this was the old man's name—sitting on a chair in front of it. His face was naturally grave, but it lighted up when his glance rested on the two new-comers.

"I am glad to see you," he said; but, as his glance dwelt on Grant in his shabby attire, "you don't seem to have prospered," he added.

Grant laughed.

"Appearances are deceitful, Mr. Gilbert," he said. "I am in disguise."

"I don't understand you."

"Do I look as if I were worth robbing?"

The old man smiled.

"You look," he said, "as if you had just escaped from a poorhouse."

“Then the disguise is effective.” said Tom. “The fact is my young partner is going to San Francisco, and this valise, which he is taking with him, contains fifteen hundred dollars in gold-dust.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON TO THE GOLDEN GATE.

“Then you have really prospered?” said Mr. Gilbert.

“Yes, sir; we must have as much as seven hundred dollars more, but this was as much as Grant could conveniently carry. We depend on his shabby attire to save him from attracting the attention of robbers.”

“You will remain at the claim?” said Mr. Gilbert, addressing himself to Tom.

“Yes, I shall continue to work it. Grant is summoned to San Francisco by a friend whose acquaintance he made in crossing the plains.”

They stopped an hour to chat with the old man, and then, resuming their march, reached Howe’s Gulch in time for supper.

They were immediately surrounded by old acquaintances.

“Where are you bound, Tom?” asked one.

“Grant is going to San Francisco. He has an offer of employment from a rich man there.”

“Won’t you join us again?”

“No; I have a claim some way from here which will bear working a little longer.”

“The boy doesn’t look as if you had struck luck.”

“He will be all right when he reaches San Francisco.”

“How about yourself?”

“Oh, well, I am not discouraged. There are better times in store.”

One of the crowd was Nahum Stockton, to whom Grant and Tom had given their claims when they left Howe’s Gulch.

“Look here, Cooper,” he said. “You did me a good turn. I’ve done pretty well with the claim you gave me, and I want to show my gratitude. If fifty dollars will do you or the boy any good, I will let you have it.”

Tom Cooper wrung his hand cordially.

“You’re a good fellow, Stockton,” he said, “but we are not in want. I am glad you have done fairly well, but we don’t stand in need of help at present. If we ever do, we won’t forget your kind offer.”

“That’s right. You shall be heartily welcome to anything I have.”

The two partners went to the hotel and stayed overnight. They were pleased to think that no one suspected them of having been fortunate. There were some friends—Nahum Stockton, for instance—to whom they would have been willing to communicate it, but they considered it advisable, on the whole, to keep the matter a profound secret.

The next morning Grant took the stage for Sacramento, and arrived there without any exciting adventure.

“Go and see father and mother, Grant,” said Tom. “Don’t tell them too much, but let them know that I am making a living, and have no cause to complain.”

Mr. Cooper had just finished shoeing a horse, when Grant walked up to the shop.

“Why, Grant Colburn!” exclaimed the blacksmith, “it’s good to see you. But—” and here he surveyed Grant’s attire—“you look kind of seedy, don’t you?”

“Yes,” laughed Grant; “but there are no good tailors’ shops where I have been working.”

“Have you come to Sacramento to work?”

“No. I am bound for San Francisco. Mr. Crosmont has sent for me.”

“How did you leave Tom?” asked Mrs. Cooper, who had entered the shop, as she shook hands with Grant.

“Well and hearty, Mrs. Cooper.”

“Why didn’t he come with you?”

“Mr. Crosmont didn’t send for him.”

“How is he doing?”

“Well, he isn’t exactly a millionnaire yet,” answered Grant, with a laugh.

“I’m afraid not, if we’re to judge by appearances,” and Mr. Cooper shook his head, as he bestowed another glance on Grant’s outfit. “He’d much better give up this notion of gold-digging and come back here in the shop with me.”

“But at mining you may strike it rich any day, you know,” returned Grant cheerfully. “Tom has really reason to feel encouraged, and may surprise you by making his fortune yet.”

“Those aint the kind of surprises that grow on every bush,” and Mr. Cooper once more sagely shook his head.

After accepting of the hospitality of the kindly blacksmith and his wife, Grant proceeded on his journey.

He was lucky enough to secure the only remaining seat in the next coach for San Francisco, and was soon started on the last stage of his progress toward the Golden Gate. Of his fellow passengers two were miners, two farmers, one a school-teacher, another a boy of about Grant’s age, and the seventh a black-eyed gentleman, who listened attentively to all that was said, but made very few remarks himself.

Grant was glad to find his place next to the youngest member of the party, who gave his name as Robert Campbell, and stated that he had been on a visit to a relative in Sacramento.

“I trust we don’t fall in with the road agents,” remarked one of the miners, soon after they had got under way.

“Why, do you think there is any danger of it?” inquired the school-teacher anxiously.

“Well, that’s one of the things we may expect on such a trip as we are taking,” returned the miner, adding: “I’d much prefer they wouldn’t make me hold up my hands this time, however.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STARTLING INCIDENT.

The passengers in the stage now compared notes, and each gave an idea of the amount of his possessions. One of the miners owned up to five hundred dollars, another to eight hundred, and the teacher to two hundred. The farmers were still better provided.

"I've got about fifteen hundred myself," said the black-eyed passenger. "Of course it belongs to my principal, not to me, but I shall be held responsible if I am robbed."

"The boys haven't spoken," said one of the miners, jestingly. "Who knows but they may be the richest in the crowd."

Robert laughed.

"If the road agent comes along," he said, "he'll get so much from me," and he produced twenty dollars in gold.

"I've got so much," said Grant, producing three quarter eagles, fifteen dollars.

"You are better off than I thought," said Robert.

"I didn't think to include my wardrobe," added Grant.

"If you won't be offended," said Robert, "I have a suit in San Francisco that is better than yours. We are not far from the same size. I am sure my father will let me give it to you."

Grant grasped his hand cordially.

"You're a good fellow, Rob, and a true friend," he said. "If my friend in San Francisco doesn't provide for me, I will accept your offer with thanks."

"My friend," said one of the farmers, addressing the teacher, "I take it you have been at the mines."

"Yes, sir."

"You don't look very rugged, and I see you have a bad cough. Wouldn't it suit you better to get some work in the city?"

"Perhaps you are right. I thought a life in the open air would improve my health, but I overestimated my strength. My lungs are weak, and bending over weakened me and brought on a hemorrhage."

"I take it you have never done hard work."

"No; I was for fifteen years a teacher in Connecticut."

"A brother of mine has a real estate office in 'Frisco. He wanted me to be his clerk, but I would rather be my own boss. If you would like the chance, I will recommend you to him."

"Thank you," said the teacher. "I have been feeling anxious about the future now that I find a miner's life is too hard for me. If your brother will take me, I will gladly enter his employment."

"Were you ever a miner?" asked a passenger of the black-eyed man.

"No; I never dug for gold. I travel for a firm in San Francisco."

"Indeed! What firm? I am pretty well acquainted in 'Frisco."

The black-eyed man smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"My employers have cautioned me to be reticent about their business," he said. "Still, before we part company, I may introduce myself."

"Oh, just as you wish!" said the passenger, not altogether pleased.

"Did any of you ever see Stephen Dike?" asked one of the miners, addressing himself generally.

One by one answered in the negative, till the turn came to the black-eyed man.

"I once caught a glimpse of him," he said.

"What was his appearance?" asked one of the farmers.

"He looked to me like that gentleman," and the speaker indicated the consumptive teacher.

This remark naturally led to a critical examination of the teacher, and the man next to him, on the impulse of the moment, moved a little farther away.

"You are sure you are not the man?" asked one of the farmers jocosely.

The teacher smiled.

"If I am," he said, "I don't think you would any of you feel very much afraid of me. I suspect that I shouldn't be a success as a road agent. I haven't the necessary physique. You are better equipped by nature for it than I."

"I've got considerable muscle, that's a fact," said the farmer, who was a broad-shouldered, stalwart man. "But you don't often find men of my build in the ranks of these gentry. They are more apt to be—well, like our friend here," and he laid his hand on the shoulder of the black-eyed man.

"You compliment me," said the latter, opening his mouth and showing a set of very white teeth. "I will tell my employer, when I reach 'Frisco, that I have been compared to Stephen Dike."

"No offence, my friend!"

"None is taken. Indeed, I do consider it rather a compliment, for Dike is quite celebrated in his line."

"Better be quite unknown than to be celebrated in that way!" observed the teacher.

"You have doubtless often remarked that to your pupils during your career as a pedagogue," said the black-eyed man, with a sneer.

"It is quite possible that I may have done so," answered the teacher calmly. "You agree to it, don't you?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Speaking of Dike," remarked one of the miners, "a cousin of mine was returning from the mines, a year ago, with a thousand dollars in gold-dust—representing six months' hard labor—when the wagon on which he was a passenger was stopped by this rascal. My cousin was not armed, nor was either of the three other passengers, and Dike, though single-handed, had no trouble in robbing them all."

“What,” exclaimed one of the farmers, “did four men give in to one?”

“One man with two revolvers is a match for half a dozen unarmed men.”

“I don’t agree to that,” said the farmer. “I should be everlastingly mortified if I allowed one man to take such an advantage of me, if I had as many companions.”

“You think so,” said the black-eyed man, with a half sneer, “but if you were placed in like circumstances you would act just as he did.”

“You think so,” said the farmer in his turn. 289

“I know so.”

“You are very confident. On what do you base your remark?”

“On human nature.”

The farmer looked at him curiously.

“Well, perhaps you are right,” he said. Then turning to the miner, he asked: “Well, did your cousin lose all his gold-dust?”

“Yes; every ounce of it.”

“That was hard lines.”

“It was, indeed. The poor fellow had been in the country a year. During the first six months he hadn’t a particle of luck. During the next six months he made the money referred to. With it he intended to go home and lift a mortgage from the house in which he lived. But when he saw the fruit of his hard labor forcibly wrested from him, he became discouraged, took to drink, and died of delirium tremens in ‘Frisco three months since.”

“It was a hard case!” said the farmer in a tone of sympathy.

“It was, indeed. That scoundrel, Stephen Dike, I hold responsible for my poor cousin’s death. 290 There is one thing I live for,” and here he paused.

“Well?” said the black-eyed man. “What is it?”

“I want to meet the villain who killed him.”

“Suppose you should?”

“I would shoot him down like a dog.”

“That is, if you got the chance,” said the other, with an unpleasant smile.

“I would see that I had the chance if I ever met him.”

“Threatened men live long.”

“Look here!” broke in the farmer, eying the black-eyed man sharply. “You appear to take the part of this road agent.”

“Do I? Well, it is natural to me to take the part of one against many. You all seem to be down on poor Dike.”

“*Poor* Dike! Isn’t there good reason why we should be down upon him?”

“I don’t know. Probably the man has some good qualities.”

“Not one!” exclaimed the miner who had told his cousin’s story. “Not one!” 291

“Well, well; you seem to know him. Considering how free we have been with his name, it would be a great joke if we should have him stop us on our way.”

“I don’t think it would be a joke at all,” said Robert.

“Nor I!” added Grant.

“Oh, he wouldn’t meddle with you boys,” said the black-eyed man. “He would fly at higher game; for instance, our friend there, and there,” indicating the farmer and the miner.

“I suppose you speak with authority?” observed the farmer.

“What do you mean?”

“You speak as if you were in this fellow’s confidence.”

“Do you mean to insult me?” exclaimed the black-eyed man angrily.

“Oh, calm yourself, my friend! Why should I mean it that way? You can’t take a a joke.”

“Oh, if it’s a joke, I don’t mind.”

Then the talk about the famous road agent subsided. Gradually they passed beyond the limits of 292 population, and entered a mountain defile, dark with frowning hills on each side.

“Let me get out a minute!” said the black-eyed man, signalling to the driver.

The stage stopped. Once upon the ground the black-eyed passenger drew out his revolvers, and levelling them at the astonished travellers, cried: “Hold up your hands, gentlemen; get ready to surrender all your valuables. *I am Stephen Dike!*”

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TRAGEDY.

I have said that the passengers were astonished at discovering that the notorious road agent was their fellow-traveller. There were two, however, who were not wholly surprised—the miner who had related his cousin's story and the farmer who had had a sharp colloquy with the black-eyed man.

For a minute no one moved or spoke.

"Come," said Dike impatiently; "I have no time to waste. Give me your money."

"Do you want mine?" asked Grant, who was entirely willing to give up the small amount of gold coin he had with him, if he could save the dust in his valise.

"No; I don't care for the trifle you have, nor the other boy's money, but those miners over there must give up their treasure, and my agricultural friends also."

"If you want my money, come and get it!" growled the miner already referred to.

"I say the same," added the farmer.

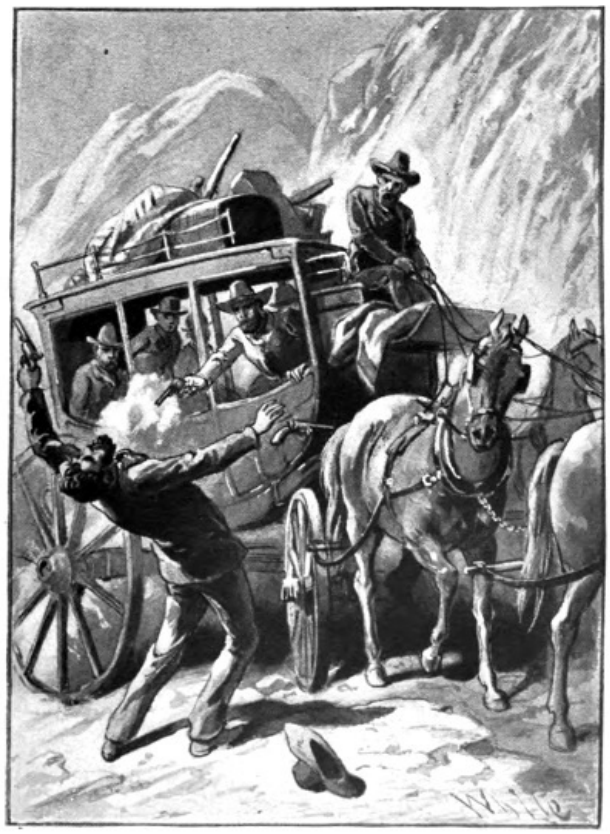
"I will stand no nonsense," said Stephen Dike.

"It's hard luck," grumbled the miner, "to give up all my hard earnings."

"Give up your money, and grumble afterward," rejoined Dike.

The miner thrust his hand into his pocket, and then, in an excited voice, exclaimed suddenly, as he peered out of the coach, "Ha, friends! there is help approaching. See!" And he pointed, with outstretched finger, beyond Stephen Dike.

The road agent, taken by surprise, turned quickly. The step was fatal to him. The miner, who had pulled a revolver from his pocket, fired without an instant's delay, and Stephen Dike fell backward, instantly killed. The miner's bullet had penetrated his temple. So unexpected was the assault that the road agent had not even time to discharge his own pistols. They fell upon the ground from his nerveless hands, and one of them accidentally went off, but did no harm.



THE ROAD AGENT MEETS HIS MATCH.

"My cousin is avenged!" exclaimed the miner grimly.

"Give me your hand, sir!" said the farmer. "You have saved us all, and rid the State of California of the most dangerous outlaw within its limits."

"It seems hard to rejoice in the death of a fellow-being," observed the teacher, "but no one can grieve over the taking off of such a man. Gentlemen, let us remove the body to some place less public."

The passengers got out, and were joined by the driver.

"There is a reward of five thousand dollars offered by the authorities for the capture of Stephen Dike, dead or alive," he said. "What gentleman killed him?"

"I did," answered the miner; "but I want no reward. I should look upon it as blood money. What I did, I did in defence of my fellow-passengers and myself."

Stephen Dike lay upon the ground, his features still wearing the cynical smile habitual to him. Death had come upon him so suddenly that there had not been time even to change the expression of his face.

"I suppose this man has committed many robberies?" said the teacher to the stage-driver.

"No one knows how many, but he has robbed my stage four times."

"How did it happen that you did not recognize him when he booked as a passenger?"

"He has always worn a mask when I saw him before. This time he became bolder, and presented himself without disguise. I remember being struck by his appearance, and wondering whether I had not met him before, but it did not occur to me that it was the famous road agent, Stephen Dike."

The passengers took the lifeless body, and drew it to one side of the road.

"Ought we not to bury it?" asked the teacher.

"I can't bear to put beneath the sod a man who, but fifteen minutes since, was as full of life as we are. Let us leave that office to some one else. We can affix to the tree, beneath which he lies, a paper giving his name." 297

This proposal was approved. One of the passengers produced a sheet of paper and a travelling inkstand, and this placard was affixed to the trunk of the tree:

This man is
STEPHEN DIKE,
THE ROAD AGENT.
Killed while attempting to rob the Sacramento coach.

"We ought, perhaps, to examine his pockets, and see if we can find anything to throw light on his career."

This was the suggestion of one of the passengers.

"No," said the miner; "leave that to the persons who may find him. If he has money about him, leave it to others. I have been the instrument of Heaven's retribution. Should I take anything of value from him, I would be degraded to his own level."

This remark seemed to voice the general sentiment, and, after an interval of only ten minutes, the stage was again on its way to San Francisco.

Grant and Robert were strongly impressed by what had happened. Neither of them had ever seen a death by violence before. 298

"It's awful!" said Robert, shuddering.

"But he deserved his fate," returned Grant.

"So he did; but it is terrible to have death come so suddenly."

"You are right, lad!" said the miner. "I feel entirely justified in what I did, but it was a fearful necessity. It is something I shall never be able to forget."

There was no further adventure to record in the two days' ride. Toward nightfall of the second day they reached the city of the Golden Gate, and the passengers separated. Grant regretted parting with Robert Campbell, to whom he had become warmly attached, but was glad to think they would have opportunities of meeting in San Francisco.

Before separating, he undeceived Robert as to his circumstances.

"I suppose," he said, "you think me very poor?"

"I wouldn't judge from your clothes that you were wealthy," returned Robert, smiling.

"That's why I wear them. In this valise which I carry, I have about fifteen hundred dollars in gold-dust." 299

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Robert in surprise.

"Yes; but only half of it belongs to me. I have more at the mines, however. I feared to be robbed, and so put on the appearance of a tramp. Now, I shall buy a respectable suit."

"I am glad you are able to do so; but even in your poor clothes I was glad to have met you."

"Thank you, Rob. We have known each other but two days, but I shall always look upon you as a friend."

The two boys shook hands cordially, and Grant set out in the direction of the Alameda Hotel. Before he arrived there, he saw Mr. Crosmont walking thoughtfully through Kearney Street, with his eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Mr. Crosmont!" he exclaimed eagerly.

Giles Crosmont looked up quickly, and his face brightened as he recognized Grant.

"Grant Colburn!" he cried joyfully, seizing the boy by the hand. "I am, indeed, glad to see you. When did you arrive?" 300

"Just now, by stage from Sacramento."

"And you are well? But I see you are. You don't look prosperous; but that doesn't matter. With me you will want for nothing."

"Mr. Crosmont," said Grant smiling, "you shouldn't judge a man, or boy, by his clothes. Do you see this valise?"

"Well?"

"It contains fifteen hundred dollars' worth of gold-dust."

"Yours?"

"Half of it is mine. Half of it belongs to my partner. I wore old clothes, because I did not want to be thought rich."

"Was there need of all this caution?"

"You shall judge for yourself. Our stage was held up by Stephen Dike."

"The daring road agent? I have heard of him. Did he plunder the passengers?"

Grant explained the ruse by which Stephen Dike had lost his life.

"He was a scoundrel! I have no pity for him. And now come with me, and I will take you to my home. I have two rooms, and I shall install you in one of them." 301

"How about my gold-dust?"

"As soon as you have washed, and are provided with a new suit, I will take you to a banker, who will weigh and allow you the market price for it."

"But I shall have no money to pay for the suit till I have sold the dust."

Mr. Crosmont smiled.

“The suit will be a present from me,” he said.

And no small present it proved to be, for clothing was very dear in San Francisco at that time, so that a ready-made suit, which could be bought in any Eastern city for twenty dollars, or less, cost ninety.

The gold-dust brought a trifle over fifteen hundred dollars, which was entered to Grant’s account on the books of the bank.

“Have you any letters for me, Mr. Crosmont?” asked Grant. “I haven’t heard from home for a long time.”

“Here is a letter which arrived by the last steamer.”

Grant read it eagerly. It was from his mother, and contained important news. Instead of reproducing the letter, we will go back to Grant’s Iowa home, and let the reader know what happened there since he started for the land of gold.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TARBOX FAMILY.

After Grant's departure his mother felt very lonely. She found very little satisfaction in the company of her husband, who became more miserly as he grew older. He began also to show signs of breaking health, and this did not escape the vigilant eyes of his daughter, Mrs. Sophia Bartlett, and her husband. They were not at all insensible to the fact that their father's property was a snug one, and that it would make them very comfortable when added to their own.

Sophia Bartlett began to feel suspicious that her father's second wife would attempt, by undue influence, to obtain more than her share of the estate. At least once a week she was accustomed to drive over with her son Rodney, when her husband was occupied by business, and learn all she could of what was going on at the Tarbox farm.

Rodney generally inquired after Grant, but not from friendly motives.

Some months after Grant's departure one of these visits was in progress.

"Have you heard from Grant, Mrs. Tarbox?" he asked, for it was in this way he always addressed his grandfather's wife.

"I heard last week," answered Grant's mother.

"How is he getting along?"

"He had just arrived in California. The journey across the plains is a long and tedious one."

"Did he have anything to do?"

"He was expecting work."

"Probably he won't get any," said Seth Tarbox. "The boy made a fool of himself when he left home. He might have had a good livin' here, but he was sot on trampin' to California."

"That's the way I feel," said Sophia Bartlett. "Young folks don't know what is best for themselves. As likely as not the boy will be sending home for money to get back."

"He won't get none from me," muttered Mr. Tarbox emphatically, "and I want that understood."

"He isn't very likely to send to you, Mr. Tarbox," said his wife, indignant at this attack upon Grant.

"I dunno about that. He's a headstrong boy, and always was."

"I am glad that my son Rodney is a good and dutiful boy, and is willing to be guided by my advice and his grandfather's."

Rodney understood that it was well to keep in the good graces of his grandfather, who might remember him handsomely in his will, and tried to look virtuous and meek.

"Yes," he said, "grandfather knows what is best for me."

"Rodney's case is very different," Mrs. Tarbox could not help saying. "His future is provided for, Grant had nothing to look forward to here except the life of a farm laborer."

"Is he too proud to work on a farm?" sneered Mrs. Bartlett.

"No more than your son Rodney," calmly replied Mrs. Tarbox.

"I've got something better to do than to work on a farm," said Rodney, in a lofty tone. "Just fancy me in overalls, ma!"

"To be sure!" chimed in his mother.

"It aint no disgrace to wear overalls," said Seth Tarbox, who did not aspire to be thought genteel, like his daughter and Rodney.

"Of course not, pa!" said Mrs. Bartlett, in a conciliatory tone. "You are a substantial farmer, and find it necessary to superintend your own work."

"I hope Rodney aint got no foolish notions about bein' too high-toned for honest work."

"No, pa; but Rodney isn't rugged, and his father and myself mean to make a lawyer of him."

"Humph! Some lawyers aint worth their salt."

"That's the case with some farmers, too, isn't it?" returned his daughter.

"I own you're right, Sophia. Why, there's Bill Jones is gettin' poorer and poorer every year. I've got a thousand-dollar mortgage on his farm," he chuckled, "and I guess I'll have to foreclose sooner or later."

"What will become of Mrs. Jones and her young children?" asked Mrs. Tarbox, in a tone of pity.

"That aint my lookout," said Seth Tarbox, in a hard tone.

"But surely you wouldn't turn the poor woman out into the street."

"It aint for me to look out for another man's wife and children, Mrs. T.," returned the farmer.

"But the farm must be worth a good deal more than the amount of your mortgage!"

"Yes," chuckled the farmer, "it's well worth three thousand dollars. So much the better for me!"

"You wouldn't take possession of it, and take such an advantage of the family!"

"Mrs. T., you don't understand business. When you talk in that way you only make yourself ridiculous. You'd better leave me to attend to business, and you look after the housekeeping," and he turned to his daughter for approval.

"You are right, pa," said Sophia, "and Mrs. Tarbox, though she means well, shows that she doesn't understand business."

Mrs. Tarbox bit her lip, but did not reply. She had made the discovery long since that the daughter was as cold and selfish as the father, and probably even more so.

"Mrs. Tarbox, have you got Grant's last letter?" asked Rodney.

"Yes."

"Would you mind letting me read it?"

Mrs. Tarbox hesitated a moment, and then replied: "A part of it is private, but I will read you the part in which he speaks of his position and prospects."

"Thank you. I would like to hear it."

Mrs. Tarbox took from her pocket a letter which she had perused half a dozen times already, and

read as follows:

"Well, mother, I have at last reached California. It is a long and tiresome journey across the plains. I hope, when I go back, I shall be able to go by steamer to New York. However, I made some pleasant friends on the way, and I have good courage, though my money is nearly out."

"Humph!" interrupted Seth Tarbox; "just as I expected."

"Grant didn't take a fortune with him," said his mother. "How could you expect he would have much money left when he reached the end of his journey?" 309

"I didn't, Mrs. T. That is what I said. Read on."

"I haven't decided yet what I will do first. I expect sometime to go to the gold fields, but I may get a position first and earn some money to buy my outfit. I am well and strong, and I am sure I can make a living some way."

"Mark my words," said Sophia Bartlett, "the time will come when your son will wish he had never left the farm."

"I don't feel sure of that," said Mrs. Tarbox. "Grant is a manly boy, and he can work in California just as well as here, and will be paid better than here."

"Do you mean to say that I didn't pay the boy enough for his work, Mrs. T.?"

"I will express no opinion on that subject. California is a new country, where labor is naturally more highly compensated than here."

"I am glad I am not in Grant's place," said Rodney.

"So am I," added his mother; "but you always had good judgment, Rodney."

"I hope so. When I am a man I may go to California, just to see the country, but I prefer to stay at home now." 310

"He has an old head on young shoulders," said his mother complacently.

"It's my birthday to-morrow, grandpa," observed Rodney significantly.

"Is it?" asked Seth Tarbox. "How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Well, well, I didn't know you were getting on so fast. There's a quarter for a birthday present."

Rodney accepted the coin, but turned up his nose at his grandfather's niggardliness, and expressed himself freely on the subject to his mother on the way home.

"What a mean old skinflint grandfather is!" he exclaimed. "Twenty-five cents, and he a rich man!"

"Hush, Rodney, don't let any one hear you speak in that way!"

"But he is mean! you can't deny it!"

"He is close," said Mrs. Bartlett cautiously. "Most farmers are, I believe; but just wait patiently, and the money which he has saved by his economy will come to us. You must seem grateful, or he may take a notion to leave his property to Mrs. Tarbox and Grant." 311

"Oh, I'll be careful, ma, never fear! I hope Grant Colburn won't get a cent."

"I don't think he will. In fact, I feel sure of it."

"Do you think Mrs. Tarbox will get much?"

"Not if I can prevent it!" said his mother, closing her lips firmly.

"I expect she only married the old man for his money."

"I suppose she wanted a home for herself and Grant."

"Will the law give her anything?"

"Yes; but I've thought of a way to get over that."

"What is it, ma?"

"If I can induce your grandfather to make a deed of gift to me of his property before he dies, on condition of my supporting him the rest of his life, that will evade the law." 312

"That will be a good idea. I shouldn't wonder if Grant and his mother had to go to the poorhouse at last. He'd come down off his high horse then."

"I hope not. Mrs. Tarbox can get employment as a housekeeper probably, and Grant ought to be able to support himself. Of course they must look out for themselves."

Not long afterward, unfortunately for Mrs. Tarbox, her husband lost fifty dollars. He had sold a horse to a man in a neighboring town for an excessive price, and fifty dollars remained due on the purchase money. This the purchaser refused to pay, and as his property was all in his wife's name, Seth Tarbox was unable to collect it, although, as may be imagined, he moved heaven and earth to accomplish it.

This made him feel very poor, and he determined to make it up by retrenchment in his personal expenses. Had the economy fallen upon himself he might have been justified, but as it occurred to him that by dismissing the woman who helped his wife on washing day he could save seventy-five cents a week, he was mean enough to make this proposal. 313

Mrs. Tarbox could hardly believe him in earnest, for she saw only too clearly at what he was aiming.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MRS. BARTLETT'S LITTLE SCHEME.

"Do you mean that I am to get along without Nancy, Mr. Tarbox?" Mrs. Tarbox said quickly.

"I've met with losses, Mrs. T.," replied Seth, "and I don't feel as if I could afford to pay out seventy-five cents every Monday for work that might as well be done in the family."

"Does that mean that you expect me to do it, Mr. Tarbox?"

"Ahem!" said Tarbox, a little embarrassed. "It's your duty to help bear my burden."

"I think I do that. I am sure that I work beyond my strength."

"We all have to work. Don't I work in the fields, Mrs. Tarbox?"

"You choose to do it. You are able to lead an easier life."

"Who says I am?"

"Everybody in the village knows that you are well to do, and have a large sum in the savings-bank."

Seth Tarbox frowned.

"If I have got a little money ahead," he said, "I don't mean to squander it in extravagant living."

"I don't think you are in any danger of it," remarked Mrs. Tarbox dryly.

Mr. Tarbox left the house, and made it in his way to call at the home of Nancy Stokes and give her notice that her services would not be needed on the coming Monday.

Nancy opened her eyes in surprise.

"Why, Mr. Tarbox," she said, "I've been goin' to your house for ten years. Have you got any other woman in my place?"

"No, Miss Stokes; but I've been thinkin' that I can't afford to pay seventy-five cents a week for washin'."

"Why, you haven't failed, have you, Mr. Tarbox?"

"No; but I've met with losses," answered Seth vaguely.

"They must be big losses if you can't afford the little money you've paid me."

"You may call it little, Nancy, but seventy-five cents a week amounts in a year to thirty-nine dollars."

"It'll take more'n one thirty-nine dollars to break you, Mr. Tarbox."

"You seem to know a good deal about my affairs, Nancy. I'm the best judge of that."

"Who's goin' to do the washin', then?"

"Mrs. Tarbox will do it."

"The whole of it?"

"Yes; my first wife used to do it."

"And died of broken health at forty."

Seth Tarbox did not relish the plain speaking of Miss Stokes, and turning on his heel, walked away.

Nancy made it a point to call at the farm during the day.

"I hear, Mrs. Tarbox," she said, "that you are going to do all the washing hereafter."

"Who told you?" asked Mrs. Tarbox quickly.

"Mr. Tarbox."

"He is mistaken," said Mrs. Tarbox calmly. "I shall do nothing of the kind."

"He expects it."

"I can't help that."

"Good for you, Mrs. Tarbox. Don't let him impose upon you. He's too mean to live."

The next Monday Seth Tarbox went out to his farm work in a complacent frame of mind. His wife had said nothing of the washing, and he concluded that when she found Nancy absent, she would turn to and do the whole herself. But when he returned to dinner he looked in vain for the clothes line.

"You're late about your washin', Mrs. T.," he said, as he entered the kitchen.

"I am not going to wash, Mr. Tarbox."

"How's that? You can't get along without having the clothes washed."

"I intend to wash my own, but I don't propose to do the rest."

"Wh-what?" ejaculated Seth, in dismay.

"You have taken it upon yourself to discharge Nancy. If the clothes remain unwashed, you are responsible."

"But, Mrs. T., my first wife used to do all the washing. She didn't have Nancy to help her."

"What your first wife did does not concern me. I do not propose to follow in her footsteps and die of overwork, as she did."

"It seems to me, Mrs. T., you don't realize your duty as helpmeet to your husband."

"And I don't propose to, if it requires me to work beyond my strength."

"If you do all the washing this week, Nancy may come to your assistance next Monday as usual."

"I decline to do it."

Seth Tarbox found that he was checkmated, and was obliged to make a second call upon Miss Stokes and countermand his first notice. But he felt very much dissatisfied, and the next day called on his daughter and laid the matter before her.

"I am not surprised," said Sophia. "Of course Mrs. Tarbox married you for your money. She expects you will leave her a good slice of your estate."

"She'll be disappointed," said Seth angrily.

"I don't know about that. Have you made a will?"

"No; why should I? You don't expect I'm going to die right off, do you?"

"No; but still, life is uncertain. If you don't leave a will, the law will give her something."

“Perhaps I shall live longer than she does.”

“Perhaps so, but she is twenty years younger than you. When she gets your money, she and her boy will have fine times.”

“Can’t that be prevented?” asked Seth.

“There is one way.”

“What is that?”

“I hardly like to tell.”

“Out with it, Sophia!”

“If you should make me a deed of gift of the property—at any rate, of the real estate—she couldn’t do anything.”

“But I don’t want to give the farm away.”

“Oh, it would only be a mere form. Things would go on just the same as before. But it would put a spoke in your wife’s wheel. Of course, pa, you know that I wouldn’t take any advantage of what you did. It makes me laugh, though, to think how you would come up with that mercenary woman.” 320

“Just so,” chuckled Seth. “Well, I’ll think of it.”

“That’s the first step,” reflected Mrs. Bartlett. “Now I know how to work on pa’s feelings, it won’t be long before he’ll adopt my plan.”

From that time Sophia lost no opportunity to enlarge to her father on his wife’s expectations of profiting by his death, till at last she accomplished her purpose. One day she and her father called at a lawyer’s office, and the deed of gift was made out, and Mrs. Bartlett took charge of the document.

“Mrs. Tarbox won’t know anything of this,” she said. “We’ll keep it secret, pa.”

“Yes, we’ll keep it secret.”

“If she knew, you’d find it hard to get as much work out of her.”

“That’s so!” chuckled Seth.

He would not have felt as well pleased had he known what a power he had put into the hands of his daughter.

We will now reproduce the letter which Grant received from his mother. After expressing the hope that he was in good health, and had something to do, she went on: 321

> I am very unpleasantly situated at present. Grant. A week ago Mr. Tarbox fell from a scaffold in the barn, and broke his leg. His daughter, Mrs. Bartlett, on hearing of it, came to the house with Rodney, and has taken possession of the sick chamber. I am kept out of it, though his wife. I won’t pretend that it hurts my feelings, but I don’t like to be treated as a servant in the house of which I ought to be the mistress. Mrs. Bartlett treats me with very little respect, and I have reason to think that she means to influence Mr. Tarbox to leave all his property to her. This would be a very poor return for all I have done since I married him. As you know, it was chiefly on your account that I did so. If you were doing well, I would not mind so much, but I can hardly hope that a boy like you can earn much among strangers.

Grant showed this letter to Mr. Crosmont.

“Write to your mother,” said the Englishman, “that she need feel no anxiety about you or herself. I will see that neither of you is in want.”

Grant accordingly wrote a letter to his mother that raised her spirits and gave her hope for the future.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FINDING THE PRODIGAL.

“Now,” said Mr. Crosmont on the morning after Grant’s arrival, “I have some work for you to do.”

“I am glad of it, sir,” replied Grant. “I should be homesick if I were idle.”

“I have great faith in the future of San Francisco,” continued the Englishman. “Real estate is sure to make rapid advances, and I am investing in lots all over the city. By the way, you are the owner of two lots on this street.”

“You are very kind, Mr. Crosmont,” said Grant gratefully.

“I mean to be. The lots are of large size, and only cost fifty dollars apiece. I could sell them for double that sum to-day, though I bought them only two months since. How much money have you belonging to Cooper and yourself?”

“Fifteen hundred dollars.”

“I advise you to invest a thousand in lots, under my direction.”

“You can invest the whole, sir. Tom Cooper has seven hundred dollars left in gold-dust, and that will be all the reserve we need.”

“Very well! For every dollar you invest, I feel sure that you can get five within a comparatively short time.”

“I will be guided by your judgment, sir.”

Grant succeeded in getting twenty lots for his money, half of which were entered in the name of Tom Cooper. When he had in his possession the deeds for all his property he began to feel like a capitalist.

“I wonder what Mr. Tarbox would say if he knew how I was fixed,” thought Grant. “He would want to be my guardian. I shall be glad when I can buy a nice home for my mother away from the whole Tarbox tribe. She works altogether too hard. If things go well she shall have an easier time henceforth.”

Mr. Crosmont opened a real estate office and put Grant in charge. Though he was the responsible head, he left the principal work, including the bookkeeping, in the hands of his *protégé*.

“You must have a regular salary, Grant,” he said. “Now, what shall it be?”

“Anything you like, Mr. Crosmont.”

“That isn’t business-like. The laborer is worthy of his hire.”

“Would ten dollars a week be too much? Then I could pay you my board.”

Mr. Crosmont smiled.

“I see, Grant,” he said, “you have no idea of the value of your services. You will have nothing to pay for board, for I consider your society sufficient compensation. I will, besides that, pay you a fixed salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a month.”

Grant opened his eyes in amazement.

“But, sir, you forget that I am only sixteen.”

“No, I don’t. In London or New York I should be unable to pay you anything like that sum, but here the case is different. Your salary, however, will be small compared with the profits you will realize on your lots.”

“I won’t count my chickens before they are hatched, Mr. Crosmont,” said Grant, smiling.

“That is usually the prudent course, but you are sure to gain a good profit on your land investment.”

Of this belief Grant had a very speedy confirmation, for within a week he was waited upon by a gentleman who wished to erect a hotel, on a site a part of which was owned by Grant and the balance by Mr. Crosmont. Mr. Crosmont managed the negotiations, and in the end Grant received two thousand dollars for his two lots.

“I should like to keep that money,” said Grant, “as I may have a use for it at home.”

“Very well. You can let it out on call at three per cent. a month. That won’t pay as well as real estate, but you will have it when you need it.”

A month later Grant received a letter from Tom Cooper. The important part of the communication was the following paragraph:

> Somehow it has leaked out, I don’t know how, that our claim is unusually rich, and I have been waited upon by a couple of New York men who have offered me five thousand dollars for it. I think it will be well to accept, especially as I am now alone. I have on hand now about twelve hundred dollars in gold-dust, which I mean to take to San Francisco myself. I shall make arrangements to receive the money in a draft on a San Francisco banker, and will pay you your share when we meet. Perhaps I might make more money by retaining the claim, but it is dull work living here alone, though I have a good home with the Crambos. You may expect to see me in a short time.

“I congratulate you, Grant,” said Mr. Crosmont. “You seem to be a favorite of fortune.”

About this time an event occurred which calls for special mention. One evening Grant was walking through Montgomery Street, in the neighborhood of Telegraph Hill, when his attention was called to a young man who was walking in advance of him with unsteady steps. Something in his manner led Grant to think he was in trouble. After some hesitation, he hastened his steps and touched the stranger on the shoulder.

The other turned, and revealed the face of a young man of perhaps twenty-seven. His expression was troubled, almost despairing.

“Can I be of any assistance to you?” asked Grant gently.

“I have eaten nothing for forty-eight hours,” said the other, in a hopeless tone. “I am without money and without hope.”

“Will you allow me to help you?” repeated Grant.

“You have spoken the first kind words I have listened to for weeks,” said the other. “I should enjoy

a cup of coffee and a plate of meat."

"Come with me, then," said Grant.

He led the way to a restaurant near by, and ordered a plain but substantial meal. The young man's face brightened, as a plate of beef-steak and a cup of coffee were placed before him. He ate with avidity and evident appetite.

When the meal was finished, he said: "You seem to be only a boy. What brought you to this city?"

"I was poor and wanted to earn a living."

"Have you prospects?"

"Beyond my expectations."

"I, too, came here to earn a living. I had some money with me when I arrived, but it is all gone now. Nothing that I took hold of prospered. When you spoke to me I was in despair. I was making 328
up my mind to commit suicide."

"That would be very foolish—and wicked."

"Perhaps so, but consider my situation. I had no prospects and no money. I have none now, but somehow when a man has filled his stomach he feels less despondent."

"I may be able to put something in your way. I came here a poor boy, but I am not poor now."

"And I—would you be surprised to hear that I am the son of a rich man and the heir of a large estate?"

"Yes," answered Grant, "I am surprised. You don't look much like it. In that case I don't understand why you should be in this condition."

"I can explain easily. I have been a prodigal son. I have wasted money in folly and dissipation, and alienated my father's affections."

"Have you seen or heard from him lately?"

"No."

"Then how do you know that he is estranged?"

"It can hardly be otherwise. He is an honorable man, and my conduct has shamed and humiliated 329
him."

"It is not too late to repent and turn over a new leaf."

"I fear it is. At any rate, I never expect to be reinstated in my father's favor."

"You can at any rate work for an honest living."

"Yes, I am ready to do that, if the chance is offered me."

"I am quite sure that you will have the chance. I could give it to you myself, but I have a friend here who is much better able than I."

"You give me new hope. What is your friend's name?"

"Giles Crosmont."

The young man started as if he had been shot. He showed signs of excitement.

"What name did you say?" he asked. "Repeat it."

"Giles Crosmont."

"Is he an Englishman?"

"Yes; he has a large estate in Devonshire."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed the young man; "Giles Crosmont is my father." 330

"Your father? Come, then, let me lead you to him at once."

"No, no," said the young man, hanging back. "He would not receive me."

"Would not receive you? He is in California for the express purpose of hunting you up."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the young man eagerly.

"Yes; he told me so himself."

"That is the best news I have heard for many a day. Take me to him, then, at once."

The surprise and deep thankfulness of Mr. Crosmont when Grant arrived with his son may be imagined. He held out his arms without a word, and folded the young man in his embrace.

"I am ashamed to come back to you, father," said young Crosmont, "after the way I have behaved."

"Let us forget the past, my son," responded the father. "Let us look forward to a bright future!" Then, turning to Grant, he said: "In restoring my son to me, Grant, you have fully paid me for all I 331
have done for you. You have placed me under the deepest obligations."

"And I, too, look upon you as my guardian angel," added young Crosmont, as he grasped the boy's hand in his.

"It was a mere chance," said Grant modestly.

"Say, rather, it was a providence," corrected Giles Crosmont reverently.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GRANT HEARS FROM HOME.

Tom Cooper reached San Francisco two weeks after his letter. “I stopped at Sacramento to see father,” he said. “I found the old gentleman doing well, and fully persuaded that I had made a mistake in not staying with him. He offered me four dollars a day to work in the shop. When I told him that I owned ten lots in San Francisco, was entitled to two thousand five hundred dollars for my share of the claim, and had considerable loose money besides, you ought to have seen him open his eyes. He was speechless for a minute; then he said: ‘You’re smarter than I thought, Tom. I guess you’d better go your own way, and I will look after the shop. I’m too old to dig for gold, but I am making a good living at my trade.’”

Tom cashed a check for five thousand dollars, and made over half to Grant.

“There’s some more money due you, Grant,” he said, “from the gold-dust I have brought with me.”

“Keep it all, Tom,” rejoined Grant. “I am rich enough without it, and you deserve some commission for selling the claim.”

Tom objected to this at first, but Grant insisted upon it. Tom took possession of his lots, and sold three on very advantageous terms within a month.

“I think you brought me luck, Grant,” he said. “Till you joined me I was plodding along comfortably, but making little more than I could have done at my trade. But after you and I began to work together in double harness, everything has prospered with me.”

“Not just at first, Tom. You remember our small earnings at Howe’s Gulch.”

“That’s true, but prosperity came afterward. It was your meeting old Mr. Gilbert that set us on our feet.”

“How is he? Did you call on him?”

“Yes. He is pretty well for him, but what a forlorn life he leads! Do you know he thinks a great deal of you?”

“I thought he did.”

“He inquired particularly after you, and said you were a fine boy.”

“It is well to have one admiring friend,” said Grant, smiling.

“You have many friends who are attached to you,” returned Tom.

“I have certainly received much kindness,” said Grant. “I seem to be appreciated considerably more here than at home.”

“How are things going on at home?”

“Not very well. Mr. Tarbox is sick, and his daughter has installed herself in his chamber, and is not willing that my mother should see him.”

“Does that trouble you?”

“No, for I am able to provide for mother better than her husband. When I go back I shall establish her in a home of her own.”

The very next day Grant received a letter from his mother, the contents of which were most important.

We reproduce it here:

Dear Grant:

Mr. Tarbox died last week. No one anticipated that his sickness would end fatally, but I attribute it to worry of mind. It appears that his daughter, Mrs. Bartlett, succeeded some time since in inducing him to deed the farm to her. I believe the argument she used was, that should he die, I would claim a good share of it as his widow. The law would no doubt have given me a claim to some portion of it.

Mr. Tarbox had scarcely given away the property than he repented it, and tried to persuade Sophia to give it back. She didn’t exactly refuse, for she knew that he had considerable other property which he could leave her at his death. But she made delays, and raised objections, till he saw that there was no hope of recovering the farm. You know how fond he was of money, and the fact that he had alienated so large a share of his property preyed upon his mind and actually made him sick. Then his daughter came and established herself in his room.

“Give me back the farm, Sophia,” I overheard him say one day. “It’ll be yours some day, but I want to keep it while I live.”

“Wait till you get well, pa,” she answered. “You are too sick to trouble yourself about business now.”

“I shall be sick till I get the farm back,” he answered.

“It’ll be all right. Don’t worry yourself.”

But he continued to worry, and the doctor says he fretted himself to death. It may be uncharitable in me, but I don’t think Sophia grieved very much over her father’s taking away, though she put on a suit of deep black at the funeral.

Well, the will was read the next day, and all the property outside of the farm goes to Sophia and Rodney. The farm being already hers, of course there is nothing left for me. My friends are very indignant, and Mr Tower, the lawyer, tells me that I have good reason to contest it. I am certainly very poorly paid for all I’ve done in the five years since we were married.

I remained at the farm for a day or two, but I found it so disagreeable, as Mrs. Bartlett evidently wished me out of the way, that I took board temporarily with Mrs. Draper in the village. You know I have some money remaining from what you left with me. Before that is gone I think I can get a chance to act as housekeeper for Mr. John Wilkins, whose wife recently died.

I feel quite lonely, and wish you were at home, but I am afraid you could not get any work that would pay you, and I am glad to hear that you are doing well in California. Write soon to your affectionate mother,

Helen Tarbox.

“Tom, I must go home,” said Grant. “My mother needs me.”

“But, Grant, won’t you come back again?”

“Yes. I have too many interests in San Francisco to keep away. I want to go home and establish my mother comfortably. Then I can return with a cheerful heart.”

“How will you go back—over the plains?”

"No, once is enough for me. I will go to New York by steamer, and then take the railroad to Iowa." 337

The next day, and before Grant could get ready to start, he received another letter.

This was from Tom Childs, a schoolfellow and intimate friend. Here it is:

DEAR GRANT:

I got your address from your mother, and I am going to write you a short letter. I wish I could see you, for you were one of my most intimate friends. I hope you are doing well, and so do all the boys wish you well except one. That one is Rodney Bartlett, who is now living here in Woodburn. He and his mother are up at the old farm, and your mother has been turned out. It is a great shame, I think, and so does the whole village. Mr. Tarbox's death seemed very sudden, but people think he worried to death. Anyhow, Mrs. Bartlett has got the whole property, except a thousand dollars, which were left to Rodney.

You ought to see that boy strut 'round. He 'feels his oats' as father says. He's got a gold watch, a very showy one, and takes it out every five minutes to look at it. You would think he was a millionnaire by the airs he puts on. The other day he asked me: "Do you ever hear from Grant Colburn?"

I answered that I was going to write you.

"He was a great fool to go to California," said Rodney.

"What was there to stay for here?" I asked. "His mother has been turned out of the house without a cent, and you and your mother have taken everything."

"That's perfectly proper," said Rodney. "We are blood relations to Mr. Tarbox."

"And she was his wife," I told him. 338

"Oh, well, she had her living for five years," said Rodney. "She'll get along well enough. She can hire out in some family. She's strong enough to work."

"She's been treated mighty mean," I said indignantly.

"Ma offered her twenty-five dollars," replied Rodney, "but she was too proud to take it. I s'pose she wanted more."

"Well, it was a pretty mean sum to give your grandfather's widow," I remarked.

"My mother understands what's proper," said Rodney stiffly. "Have you seen my new watch?"

"Where did you buy it?"

"Ma sent to New York for it. It cost sixty dollars. I guess it's as good a watch as anybody carries in Woodburn."

I wish, Grant, you could come home, and bring a better watch. How it would take down the pride of that young snob!

Oh, I mustn't forget to tell you that Mr. Jones—Abner Jones—is in trouble. It seems that your step-father held a mortgage of a thousand dollars on his farm, and it comes due in two or three months. Mrs. Bartlett threatens to foreclose, and unless he can get some one else to assume the mortgage, I am afraid the farm will be sold for much less than its value. It is worth three thousand dollars, but father says it won't fetch, at a forced sale, much over two thousand, perhaps only that sum. I pity Mrs. Jones. I was speaking to Arthur Jones yesterday. He feels very bad about it.

But I have written you a long letter. Let me hear from you soon.

Your true friend,

TOM CHILDS.

"There's another reason for going home," observed Grant, as he folded up the letter. "I shall start by the next steamer." 339

"I will expect you back in three months," said Mr. Crosmont. "While you are away my son will take your place in the office, but I shall miss you very much."

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

Grant did not write his mother that he was coming home; he wanted to surprise her. He landed in New York and took the train the same day for Woodburn. He arrived early one morning and went at once to the house where his mother was boarding.

Mrs. Tarbox's face lighted up with amazement and joy when she saw Grant.

"O Grant, can it really be you!" she exclaimed, as she embraced him.

"I don't think it is anybody else, mother," returned Grant, with a smile.

"How you have grown!"

"Yes, mother; I am three inches taller than when I went away."

"I have good news for you, Grant. Mr. Wilkins has engaged me as housekeeper, with a good salary."

"How much is he going to pay you?"

"Three dollars a week."

"You can't go, mother. I want you for my housekeeper, and will pay you five dollars a week."

"I wish you could afford to do it, Grant."

"I can, mother. As near as I can figure it out, I am worth about eight thousand dollars, and expect to be worth a good deal more within a year."

"This can't be possible! How could you—a boy of sixteen—gain so much money?"

"Partly at the mines, partly by speculating in real estate in San Francisco. But I will give you particulars hereafter. Are the Bartletts living at the farm?"

"Yes; but I hear Mrs. Bartlett wants to sell it. She and Rodney want to go to a city to live."

"And you didn't get a cent from the estate?"

"No; Mrs. Bartlett offered me twenty-five dollars."

"Which you very properly refused. No matter! You won't need to depend on that family for anything. You've got a rich son."

At this moment a buggy drove into the yard.

"That's Mr. Wilkins come for me," said Mrs. Tarbox. "Don't you think it will be best for me to accept the engagement?"

"No, mother: I shall provide you with a home of your own, and give you enough to keep it up. I will buy back the house that used to be ours when father was alive."

"O Grant, if you can!"

"I can. I shall be able to buy it for two thousand dollars."

"It has been offered for eighteen hundred."

"So much the better."

Here Mr. Wilkins entered the house. He was a pleasant looking elderly gentleman, with white hair.

"Well, Mrs. Tarbox, are you ready?" he asked.

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Wilkins; but my son Grant, who has just returned from California, wants me to have a home of my own."

"Why, why; so Grant is back—and looking stout and rugged. Have you done well, Grant?"

"Yes, Mr. Wilkins; far better than I expected. I am able to provide my mother with a home of her own, and while we appreciate your kind offer, she will be happier and more independent living so."

"I won't say a word against it, though I am disappointed. Your father was an old friend of mine, and I would like to have had his widow in my home. But I am pleased with her better prospects."

"Please don't mention my plan for her. I want to take some people by surprise."

"I'll be mum, Grant."

"Now, mother, I think I'll take a walk. I'll be back soon."

Out in the street Grant fell in with Tom Childs.

"I am delighted to see you, Grant," said Tom, grasping his hand. "Have you just arrived?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Were you lucky?"

Grant smiled, and pulled out an elegant gold watch.

"You wrote me to get a watch that would, beat Rodney's. Here it is!"

"What a beauty! What did you pay for it?"

"I bought it at Tiffany's for one hundred and twenty-five dollars."

Tom opened wide his eyes in amazement.

"A hundred and twenty-five dollars!" he ejaculated. "Then you must be rich!"

"I've got a little money."

"As much as a thousand dollars?"

"A good deal more."

"Then you've beaten Rodney both in money and a watch. I am awfully glad."

"What news is there, Tom?"

"Some bad news. You know, I told you about Abner Jones and the mortgage on his farm. It comes due in three days, and Mrs. Bartlett is going to foreclose and take possession of the farm."

"What's the amount of the mortgage?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Then she won't do it! I'll advance the money and assume the mortgage myself."

"Bully for you, Grant! Here's Mr. Jones himself coming. Tell him, and put him out of his anxiety."

Abner Jones approached with downcast eyes and sad face. He saw no way of saving the farm, and it would doubtless be sold far below its value. When he saw Grant his face brightened, for he had always liked the boy.

“Welcome home, Grant!” he said heartily. “When did you come?”
“I have just arrived.”
“Did you do well?”
“Finely. How is it with you?”
“I am about to lose my home, Grant,” he said sadly. “There’s a mortgage on it, held by Mrs. Bartlett, that I can’t pay.”
“And won’t she extend it?”
“No; she wants to get possession of it.”
“Can’t you get anybody to advance the money?”
“No; we have no capitalist in Woodburn that can command that sum in ready money.”
“You forget me, Mr. Jones.”
“What do you mean, Grant?” asked the farmer quickly.
“I mean that I will advance the money, Mr. Jones.”
“It isn’t possible that you’ve got so much as that, Grant?” 346
“I assure you that it is.”
“But you’ll straiten yourself.”
“No; I have brought double that sum with me, and have more in California.”
“Then I am saved! You have made me very happy, Grant.”
“It’s all right, Mr. Jones. I am making a business investment.”
A few minutes later Grant met Rodney Bartlett walking with a slow dignified step, swinging a light bamboo cane.
“Good-morning, Rodney!” he said, touching his hat with a smile.
“What! have you come back, Grant Colburn?” cried Rodney, in surprise.
“Yes, I arrived this morning.”
“Grandpa’s dead, and ma and I have got the property.”
“So I hear.”
“I suppose you hurried home to see if you couldn’t get some of it,” sneered Rodney.
“I think my mother could get a share if she went to law.”
“That’s where you are mistaken. You have come on a fool’s errand.” 347
“That isn’t what brought me.”
“If you want a place, perhaps ma will have you for a farm boy.”
Grant smiled.
“As she has you, I don’t think she will need me,” he said.
“Do you think I would soil my hands by farm work? I am a gentleman.”
“I am glad to hear it.”
“What do you say to that watch?” and Rodney complacently produced his gold chronometer.
“It is a fair watch,” said Grant, examining it.
“I should say it was! It cost sixty dollars.”
“Suppose you look at mine;” and Grant produced his. Rodney had not noticed that he had one.
Rodney looked paralyzed, for he saw that it was a much finer one than his.
“Is it oroide?” he gasped.
Grant laughed.
“It was bought at Tiffany’s, and Tiffany doesn’t sell oroide watches.” 348
“How much did it cost?”
“A hundred and twenty-five dollars.”
“I don’t believe it!” said Rodney sharply.
“I can show you Tiffany’s receipt,” he said, and he drew a paper from his pocket.
“And you spent all your money for that watch?” ejaculated Rodney.
“No; I have more left.”
Rodney walked away abruptly. All his pride in his watch had gone. He hurried back to the farm, and told his mother the astounding news.
“Ma,” he said, “you must buy me a nicer watch. I don’t want that farm boy to beat me.”
Mrs. Bartlett would not at first believe that Rodney’s story was correct. When convinced, she would not accede to her son s request.
“A sixty-dollar watch is good enough for a boy of your age,” she said. “Grant Colburn will come to the poorhouse if he spends money like that. If pa were living he could claim the guardianship of the boy and take care of his money. Do you know how much he has got?” 349
“He didn’t tell me.”
“It isn’t likely he has as much as you. I hear his mother is going to be housekeeper for Mr. Wilkins.”
But later in the day Mrs. Bartlett learned that this was a mistake. She was very much worried about Grant’s plans, and anxious to learn how much money he had.
Meanwhile Grant called on the proprietor of their old home and bought it for eighteen hundred dollars, only paying five hundred down, for he could get much better interest for his money in San Francisco, and could well afford to pay six per cent, interest on the balance. He bought the house just as it stood—furniture and all—as his mother had originally sold it. If the price of the property seems small, it must be remembered that Woodburn was a country village.
There was another surprise in store for the Bartletts.
On the day when the mortgage on the Jones place came due, Mrs. Bartlett, accompanied by her lawyer, called at the farm. 350
“Mr. Jones,” she said, “I have come to foreclose the mortgage on your place.”
“You can’t do it, Mrs. Bartlett,” replied the farmer.
Mrs. Bartlett closed her thin lips firmly, and her cold gray eyes rested on the farmer’s face.
“Why can’t I do it, Mr. Jones?” she asked, in an acid tone.
“Because I am going to pay it.”

“But you can’t do it!” she exclaimed, in dismay.

“Here is the money, ma’am. You’ll find it correct. Now, I’ll thank you to cancel the mortgage, Mr. Lawyer.”

“Have I got to take the money?” asked Sophia Bartlett.

“Certainly,” said the lawyer.

“Where did you get it? I didn’t know you had any,” she asked sharply.

“I am not obliged to tell; but I will do so to satisfy you. The money is kindly advanced by Grant Colburn.”

“That boy!” ejaculated Mrs. Bartlett furiously. 351

“Yes; he has been to me a friend in need.”

If evil wishes could have blighted him, Grant would have stood in great danger, for he had disappointed Sophia Bartlett in her cherished desire.

“It beats all how that boy has got on!” she muttered. “I wish he had never been to California.”

Prosperity makes friends. Though Rodney liked Grant no better he made friendly overtures to him now that he looked upon him as rich, but Grant, though polite, was cold. He understood the value of such friendship.

Now for a few concluding words. Grant returned to California. Eventually he intends to take his mother out there, for his business interests are growing more extensive, and in five years he will be a rich man. Mrs. Bartlett has sold her farm and gone to Chicago, but her pecuniary ventures have not been successful, and Rodney is by no means a dutiful son. He is growing extravagant, and is always calling upon his mother for money, while he shows no willingness to work. The whole family 352 is likely to end in poverty.

Giles Crosmont has returned to England with his son, leaving his California property in charge of Grant. He has invited Grant and his mother to visit him at his home in Devonshire, and, some summer, the invitation will probably be accepted. Tom Cooper has established himself in San Francisco, but his father and mother have returned with a competence to their home in Iowa.

“It was a lucky day, mother,” said Grant one day, “when I came to California to dig for gold.”

“Many came out here and failed,” returned his mother; “but you had good habits and the qualities that insure success.”

THE END.

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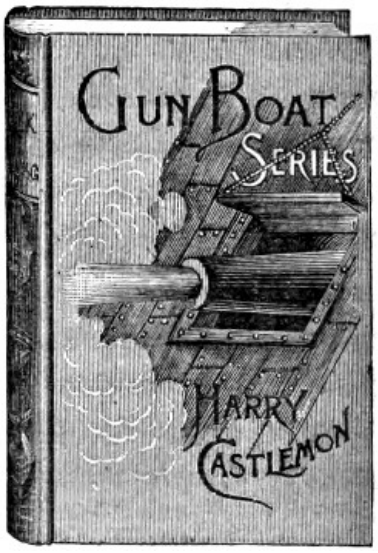

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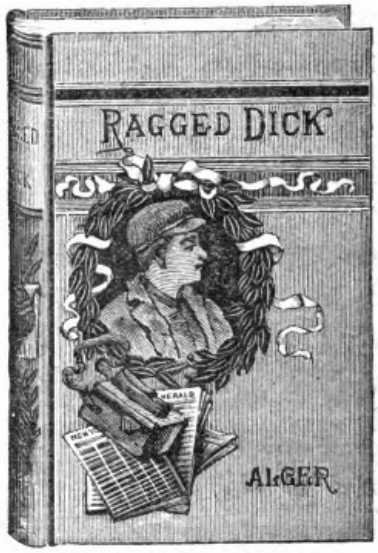

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50.5	I tell you it was a [narraw] escape for the train.	*sic*
69.22	I wish it wasn't so fur[.]"	Added.
132.20	"We needn't engage board till night[,]" suggested Tom	Added.
212.24	"I am digging for gold[?/.]"	Replaced.

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