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AFLOAT IN A GREAT CITY

A STORY OF STRANGE INCIDENTS

BY
Frank A. Munsey
FRANK A. MUNSEY,
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FRANK A. MUNSEY

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AFLOAT IN A GREAT CITY.

I.

ON a dark November night—the wind blowing strongly from the east, chilly and dispiriting—a boy, thinly and most shabbily dressed, emerged from a side street carrying in his hand a coarse sack partially filled. He walked aimlessly up Broadway till he reached Union Square, and there, taking a position opposite Fourteenth Street, leaned wearily against a tree.

He had no especial object in going there rather than to any other part of the great city. He drifted there as a deserted boat drifts upon the ocean; and yet there was a stronger influence operating upon him than the effect of wind and current upon the boat—a mysterious something that directed his steps to this point.

The scene about him was picturesque. The broad branches of the tree against which he rested, together with their leaves and twigs, were photographed, by the electric light, in shadows of rare beauty upon the stone walk at his feet.

A little to the left was the great statue of Washington upon his horse in full military armor, and still nearer was Lafayette; while to his right stood, facing him, the monument of Abraham Lincoln.

Just across the street were tall, handsome buildings, and directly in front of him, on the sidewalk, were many richly dressed ladies and gentlemen hurrying along Fourteenth Street on their way to the Star Theater to see a famous tragedian in one of Shakspeare's great plays.

They passed gaily by without being heeded by him or giving him a passing thought, though in his rags he was a conspicuous figure amid the more cheerful objects that surrounded him.

Presently a lady and gentleman drew near, accompanied by a boy who had seen, probably, about sixteen summers.

The boy's dress was that of extreme elegance. He carried lightly in his hand a small silver headed cane, and wore upon his head a hat of the latest shape. His feet were encased in patent leather shoes of the most pointed style, while his trousers fitted tightly to his long, slim legs.

Upon his upper lip was a down like substance, barely visible by the strong rays of the electric light. Altogether he presented the appearance of an exquisite dude.

For some reasons this party especially attracted

the attention of the friendless boy by the tree. He looked at them sharply to determine whether he had ever seen them before. He concluded that he had not, and yet he felt a strong fancy to know something of them.

He had never felt so keen an interest in any one before; and why in these people, more than in others, he asked himself.

“Perhaps it’s that dude’s long legs,” he said to himself with a smile.

The party was now directly opposite him, and the lady turned her sweet, motherly face, and gave him a look of sympathy that passed over him like an electric current, and awakened within his breast a tenderer feeling than he had ever before known.

“Poor boy, how I pity him, and what a sad, sweet face he has!”

This much our young friend heard the kind woman say, and the warmth of his poor, starved nature went out to her, while the crystal drops of gratitude that rolled down his cheeks told her, in one hasty glance, the effect her kind words had had upon him.

“He is no ordinary street boy,” she thought, and, notwithstanding his repulsive dress, she would gladly have stopped, had not the gentleman hurried her along that they might reach the theater in time to see the opening of the play.

“Such sympathy for a *ragged little Arab* like that—te-he-he-he! aw, it’s quite too funny, you know!”

This remark from the exquisite youth, and his thin, irritating laugh of ridicule, in which his father joined, speedily froze the warmth of our young hero’s feelings and aroused his indignation.

His manliness and naturally high spirit rebelled against being insulted by any one, and instantly he dropped his sack and started out to teach the young dandy a much needed lesson in civility.

The crowd of theater goers was so large, however, that he could not easily reach him, and it was fortunate that he did not, for upon reflection he saw plainly the folly of such an act.

He followed closely behind the unknown party that had so suddenly stirred within him these extreme emotions, and overheard the following conversation:

“You ought to be ashamed, Perry, to speak in that spirit about any one,” said the lady, reproving the owner of the long legs and patent leather shoes.

“So his name is Perry,” thought our hero. “I am glad to learn so much, any way.”

“Why, he is only a gamin—a mere ragpicker,” answered Perry contemptuously.

Again our young friend found it difficult to

restrain himself from collaring the author of this remark ; but said he to himself, " the time of reckoning will come for you, my fine fellow, and I shall make it a point to be present on that day."

" Whatever he does for a living, he is nevertheless human, and is therefore entitled to the sympathy of all," replied the lady.

" Aw, yes, but you see *we men* don't have as much sentiment as ladies."

" It is quite evident that you have not, Perry. But suppose, for instance, your position were exchanged with that of the boy of whom you speak so scornfully. Would you not then crave some sympathy and assistance?"

" Aw, good gwacious ! what an absurd supposition ! The very ideah of me being dressed like that gamin and picking rags for a living ! Oh, it is quite too funny, eh-ha-ha-ha !" and again his father laughed approvingly.

" But you have not answered my question."

" Oh, but don't you see, I can't imagine myself in such a position," replied the boy.

" Why not?"

" Because, eh—really, you see—I wouldn't know how to be a ragpicker."

" Well, I hope you will never have to learn how ; but remember, my boy, wealth often leaves one very suddenly, and then it is but a single step from a palace to poverty."

“You are quite right,” answered the father, “but you see Perry is young, and does not look upon these matters as we do, so do not be too hard on him.”

Perry winced, for he thought himself a great man, and did not care to be looked upon as *young*.

“I do not wish to be hard upon him,” replied the lady, “but I should like to see him grow more thoughtful and humane.”

A cold wind blew up Broadway, bringing with it a cloud of dust.

“I know he must be cold this chilly night in his tattered garments,” said she, referring to the poor boy, and she drew her wraps more closely about her with a shiver.

Father and son shrugged their shoulders.

“Oh, he is tough,” answered the latter heartlessly.

“What makes you think so?”

“Well, eh—because he is, you know.”

“I do not know it, and besides you give no reason.”

“I meant—eh—they all are.”

“He means,” said his father, coming to his aid, “that these gamins are so accustomed to exposure that they do not feel the cold as much as you would suppose.”

“Yes, undoubtedly they are often subjected

to cold and hunger ; but yet they cannot stand everything."

"Very true, but most of them seem rather happy in their peculiar existence."

"The buoyancy of youth, I suppose, gives them that appearance. Still many of them seem like little old men."

"They are men—full grown men—in the experience of the rough side of life, while yet mere boys."

"It makes my heart ache to think of their condition," answered the lady tenderly.

"It is a sad feature of our great city, to be sure ; but what can one do? There are so many of them that one does not know where to commence with charity," he replied, as if acts of charity were sweet to him, when in reality he cared only for his self interest.

"I think you would be safe in commencing on this boy," answered the lady. "He looked hungry as well as cold."

"Come, come, I fear you are getting sentimental over this young gamin," said he, skilfully avoiding the point ; "but why over this boy more than any other?"

"I cannot explain why. I could not express it in words, and yet——"

"It is decidedly a vague impression, then," interrupted—shall I say her husband? But I do

not know, for they are total strangers ; and yet if I were forced to give a guess upon the matter I should say that the three compose one family—father, mother, and son.

“ Yes, it is an impression,” answered the lady, “ but one that has taken a deep hold upon me.”

“ How very odd,” put in Perry, “ and such a horribly ragged specimen ! ”

“ It was his *face* that impressed me. It was intelligent—handsome even.”

Imagine our young friend walking behind this party and hearing himself discussed in this manner. What must have been his feelings, and what a conflict of emotions there must have been in his breast !

“ I hope you would not lose the chance of seeing this great actor simply to look after that unknown boy,” said the man presently.

“ No,” answered the lady, after a little thought in which she sought to learn her duty. “ No, on your account I would not ; but——”

Here her reply was suddenly interrupted by a party of friends who just then came up and joined them.

The poor lad looked wistfully after them as they left the sidewalk and passed through the great doors of the theater.

II.

“ I NEVER saw any one look at me as that lady did,” thought the shivering boy, while he retraced his steps to his old position on the square. “ I know from her face she is a good woman, and she spoke so kind and pitying like. How I would like to work for her ! I am sure she would dress me up—well, more than I am now, anyway.

“ But her son ought to be taken down a peg,” he continued, discussing the matter in his mind ; “ and I would like to do it, too. He is a regular dude, and a hateful one at that ; but I think he is about like his father. I shall get square with him yet, and perhaps some day I will have as good clothes as he has on, and then no one will know I ever wore rags.

“ I wonder who I am, anyway, that I should live in that den, and if I ever had a father and mother like other boys,” mused he, as he once more rested against the tree.

“ Of course I must have had a father and mother like everybody else ; but it does seem to me sometimes as if I never had any. If I

had, why did they ever give me to that wicked old woman, to live in that place and endure her abuse?

“Perhaps she and her gang stole me away from them, and they have been hunting for me all this time—ever since I was a baby. Who knows? I wonder how long ago that was? I think I’m about fourteen, but I’d like to know exactly; for now I never have a birthday, ’cause I don’t know when it is,” said he sadly. And the next thought in this mental problem, and the one which naturally forced itself upon him, made his young heart ache with grief.

“Yes,” he admitted sorrowfully to himself, “they may be dead—my own father and mother. How I wish I could remember them!” and for the second time that night the tears rolled down his pale cheeks.

“I wonder if I look like them, and if they were rich or poor!” he continued, speculating upon this subject, which for him had a strange fascination.

He felt a keen desire to know something of his ancestors—something about the people who were his own flesh and blood.

He felt that those with whom his lot had been cast were none of his kin, for he was in no sense like them—coarse, low, and repulsive. How he came to be with them was a mystery that he was

most anxious to solve. The story of his early life—that part which memory could not recall—he longed to know. He had tried every means at his command to obtain some light upon this question.

He had asked the squalid old woman, with whom he had passed all his remembered life, to tell him his story.

But the request only brought down upon him more abusive treatment, while the much coveted information was withheld by this repulsive specimen of humanity, almost devilish in character.

From others of her gang he had tried, by coaxing and bribing, to get a clue that would aid him in solving this problem.

But all proved to no purpose. That they knew much he felt sure, and the fact that each guarded the secret so carefully led him to believe there was a deep plot connected with his early life—a mystery surrounding it, so dark that it seemed to him he could never penetrate it.

And this thought gave the subject additional interest—so much so that he found himself hour after hour indulging in the wildest speculations upon the matter, as he knocked about hither and thither among the rubbish of a great city.

But he was more than a dreamer, more than a mere speculator upon the past, though with him there were the strongest reasons for such a

tendency. Nevertheless, he had an eye to the future ; for he possessed a strong ambition, and a degree of intelligence rarely seen in a boy of his age.

His education, such as it was, had been picked up in the busy streets of New York, by observation and by the hardest kind of experience. He was older than his age, so long had he been in contact with the world. He had grown up literally between kicks and cuffs, and deprived of the love and the privileges that make a boy's life sweet and happy—that make it worth living.

Almost all boys growing up amid such surroundings would become coarse and degraded ; but it was not so with him. He must have inherited from his parents, whoever they were, a capacity for good behavior and manly conduct. And now the events of this evening, the slurs heaped upon him by Perry, kindled anew his ambition and determination to make a break in his present life, and to leave the old woman and her filthy ragpicking forever.

But when he considered what a fierce storm this would raise, and how cruel she and the gang about her could be in a matter of revenge, he hesitated, and trembled at the result that might follow.

True to his purpose, however, and with manly

courage, he said slowly and firmly, as if measuring the force of each word :

“ I am not her boy, and *I will not be her slave.* I shall leave her, come what may, and commence a new life.”

Presently he raised his head, and turning to the right saw, at a little distance, the figure of a man whose eyes were fixed intently upon him.

His face was kind and sympathetic, thoughtful and sad, generous and humane. It was the great statue of Abraham Lincoln.

Our young friend was not superstitious, and yet he felt peculiarly impressed—almost as if his very thoughts had been read by the bronze likeness of the martyred president.

Then he called to mind the stories he had heard of him—of his early hardships in life. Though of a different character from his own, they were perhaps quite as hard to overcome, and the thought encouraged him to push on in his purpose to make a man of himself.

“ It is so cold and so late, I will go home tonight,” he said to himself, and he reached down mechanically for his partially filled sack.

It was not there, much to his surprise and regret. He looked all about the tree, but could not find it.

“ I must have left it by the other tree,” he thought.

Again he was disappointed, for here he could find no trace of it.

"It has been stolen," he was forced to admit. "Somebody took it while I followed that dude to the theater. Oh, I wish I had never seen him," he sighed, and he threw himself upon a bench to think.

"If I go home without that sack of rags there will be trouble. The old woman will be mad, and will make a lively row."

He shrank from encountering her wrath. He knew she would say he sold it. This of course he would deny, and yet what explanation could he give? He felt that a crisis had come, and he decided to maintain his dignity, and not submit tamely to her abuse.

"Why go home at all?" said he, "for I am going to leave her tomorrow, anyway."

But the cold wind, which had now become more penetrating, helped him to decide the point; and he started with a heavy heart for the place he called home—a hovel, filthy and in all senses most unhomelike. Still it was a shelter from the chill night air.

He walked down Broadway for a number of blocks, then turned to his left and followed this course till he found himself in the vicinity of Cherry Street and the East River. I will not locate the place definitely, but will say that his

destination—the place he called home—was not many blocks either way from this neighborhood.

He groped his way through a dark narrow passage that led into a court, and thence to the outer door of the old building in which he lived—a sort of human hive, so closely were its numerous denizens crowded together. Our young friend opened the door and entered. The passageway was dark—dark as the blackest ink—and the air was heavy and foul, as if the very wood of the old structure were combining with rags and rubbish to produce this peculiar compound odor. No wonder the poor boy looked thin and pale after breathing such air.

He ascended the stairs till he reached the fourth floor, and walking a few steps to the left, placed his hand upon the latch of a door.

Something told him to pause a moment and listen before entering. He did so, and heard what seemed to him like angry voices.

“Shall I go in now I am here?” he asked himself. “Yes, I will not turn back, but will meet the worst bravely,” and he opened the door and passed in.

III.

THE room was large and dirty. Here and there were piles of rags and scraps of paper, as they had been sorted into the various grades. In one corner was a lot of bones—beef bones, probably—for the manufacture of bone ware. Another corner contained a large pile of old shoes—some good enough to be mended, others suitable only to be worked over into cheap shoes, and the poorest of the lot good for nothing but to be converted by chemical process into imitation gutta percha, from which buttons, combs, etc., are manufactured.

Old tin cans, bottles of all descriptions, bits of iron, nails, brass, etc., formed a part of the collection to be turned into money. On a shelf was a well filled box of cigar stubs, picked up from the sidewalk, from spittoons, and from the gutter, to be converted into “choice cigarettes,” or ground into snuff.

The walls were black with dirt, and the ceiling was low, and dingy with smoke and dust. An old cook stove served to keep the room warm, while the only light came from an old lamp with

a broken chimney—one probably found among the waste rubbish of the city.

And this den—for it was nothing more than a den—so filthy and squalid, was what this poor boy called *home*! It was the only home he knew, and, much as he loathed it, it served as a shelter from the cold and gave him a place to lay his weary head at night.

Unattractive and unhomelike as this place was, it did not in any sense compare in ugliness with the spirit that ruled over it—an old woman of most repulsive appearance.

Her forehead was low and receding; her eyes small and deeply set under heavy, overhanging brows, and her skin wrinkled and coarse. She had a large, long nose, hooked like a vulture's beak, which had become red through heavy drinking, and thus it contrasted strongly with the rest of her face, which had grown dingy and almost black, like the surroundings in which she lived.

Her teeth, the few scattered ones still remaining, black stumps as they were, added much to her forbidding appearance.

The dress she had on—or more properly the apology for a dress—was filthy and tattered, and her whole manner was coarse and low.

The peculiar action of her little eyes, reddened by drink, and set far back in her head, was a

sight that might well cause a shudder. Hers was indeed an evil eye.

“I heard voices, surely I did,” thought the lad, as he entered the room and found no one there save the old woman. “I must have been mistaken,” he finally concluded, “but I did think I heard a strange voice; and she looks ugly, too, as if she had been quarreling with some one. It is strange.” And here his thoughts were interrupted by Mother Grimmis, for that is the name by which she went.

“Where have you been all this time, you young imp?” demanded she angrily, as the boy entered the room.

A frown passed over his face at this greeting. He paused a moment, thinking how best to reply, for he saw she was much excited, and badly under the influence of drink.

“Answer me or I’ll make yer wish yer’d never got here alive, yer good for nothing, you!” and she stamped her heavy shoes ominously upon the floor.

“Where should I have been?” he asked, by way of answering her question.

“Yer orter been earnin’ me some money.”

“That is what I started to do.”

“What yer started to do—didn’t yer do it, yer good for nothing?”

“I did earn some, and——”

“I’d orter turn yer into the street, yer soft mouthed pauper, you !”

“I’m not a pauper, nor ever was,” said the boy, firing up.

He was not sure of this, but he ventured the statement.

“Oh, yer not, are yer?”

“No, I’m not,” replied the lad firmly and with proper dignity.

“’Tis only me that keeps yer from it, then—me that feeds yer and gives yer a place to sleep.”

“You don’t keep me from it, for I earn you three times as much as I get out of this miserable hovel.”

“Miserable hovel, is it? Bad luck to the day I ever saw yer !” replied she more excitedly.

Our young hero saw the battle had actually commenced, and he felt he might as well speak his mind fearlessly. It was useless to go back now.

“It was worse luck for me,” he retorted indignantly. “I might have been something besides a street ragpicker if I had never seen you.”

This was too much for her, and she made a dive at him as if her purpose were annihilation ; but he eluded her wicked grasp by a marvelous leap which took him completely over a table and put him out of her reach. So, instead of grabbing

him as she intended, she clutched frantically at the air, and the resistance of this was so slight that she fell headlong upon the pile of old shoes.

This made her desperate, and she hissed between her scattered teeth an imprecation that I forbear to give; but by way of making the most of her defeated purpose she grabbed one of the big heavy shoes at her feet and threw it savagely at his head.

He dodged the missile skilfully and made toward the door, thinking to stop the battle by leaving instantly. But now he was not so fortunate, for Mother Grimmis, suspecting his purpose, and being nearer the door, quickly took a position between him and the only means of exit.

"No yer don't!" she shouted triumphantly. "I'll show yer who I am, yer miserable imp."

"I don't want a row with you," he said calmly.

"I'll row yer to yer sorrow."

"Well, you won't, for I'll not stay another day in such a den."

"Yer won't, won't yer?"

"No, I will not."

"Yer'll see to your sorrow, for I've got yer and I'll keep yer a *prisoner*."

The word "prisoner" came out with a terrible emphasis, and made the boy positively shudder.

Her little eyes snapped fire, and her wrinkled visage looked dark and threatening, like the great black clouds before a furious tempest.

“I don’t belong to you, and you have no right to keep me.”

He felt now more than ever that he was of different kin, and he asserted this boldly.

“I’ve got yer in my clutches, and I’ll keep yer there,” said she, with tremendous force, thrusting her hands from her in a demoniacal gesture that fairly terrified the boy. He had never seen anything in all his life so awful as was this woman’s attitude toward him.

She seemed possessed of a mad frenzy, and the action of her long bony fingers sent a chill through the lad’s frame, as they worked so threateningly. The nervous twitching of her mouth, the movement of her deep sunken eyes—spiteful, even wicked as it was—and the ominous grating together of the few black stumps in her mouth, alarmed him. He instinctively drew farther away from her, that he might be the better prepared for whatever movement she made, and said in reply :

“Yes, you probably stole me from my friends, or you never would have had me.”

“I’d better never seen yer,” said she.

“You don’t deny it, then?” replied the boy, feeling he had gained a point.

"I do deny it—steal an imp like you!" she snarled derisively.

"How did you get me, then?" said he, following up the slight clue to the subject so dear to him.

"None er yer business."

"It is my business, and I have a right to know it."

Mother Grimmis held fast to the door, fearing that if she left it he would in some way dodge her and make his escape.

The boy noticed this, and was shrewd enough to try and hold her to this subject till she should become calmer. He feared that if, while so excited, she were to discover that he brought home no sack of rags, serious trouble would follow. And she had grown somewhat quieter when she made the dreaded discovery.

Immediately firing up again, she demanded to know where the pack was.

"I don't know. I——"

"Don't know?" interrupted she angrily.

"I was going to explain," he replied.

"Yer better—mighty quick, too."

"But you interrupted me——"

"Tell me, I say, what you done with it," again interrupting him.

"I stopped to rest, and set it down beside me, and——"

“A pretty lie; yer sold it to get money for yourself, yer thief.”

“I told you the truth, and I am not a thief, much as you have tried to make me one,” replied the boy, with burning indignation.

“I’ll show you whether it’s a lie or not,” shouted the old hag; and, grabbing a cudgel, she made a desperate plunge toward the defenseless lad, who prepared to make the best resistance he could.

“Stop where you are,” suddenly shouted a heavy voice, and a tall, strong man sprang between Mother Grimmis and the boy.

This voice terrified her, and she retreated again to the door.

“This has gone far enough,” shouted he, in a resolute, determined tone.

“What business is it to you?” retorted the old hag, fairly trembling with anger.

“I’ll make it my business to protect him from any further abuse from you. If I’d known this sooner, he shouldn’t have stayed here as long as he has.”

“Yer robber, you,” hissed the old woman.

But the tall man made no reply, and turning to the boy, he said:

“Ben, has this woman always abused you like this?”

Ben—such was this boy’s name; and when my

readers learn that, they know nearly as much about him as he knew himself.

But Ben was almost paralyzed with surprise—so much that he paused before replying, and said to himself:

“Who is this strange man? He must know me, for he calls me Ben. Have I ever seen him anywhere before—and why does he take such interest in me?”

IV.

THE man was above the average height, had a dark complexion and wore a full beard, rather long and very black ; so black, indeed, that it gave him a swarthy look. A deep scar was prominent upon his face.

It started downward near the top of the ear, on the right cheek, and rounded well up under the cheek bone. His eyes were as black as his beard, his features were hard, and stamped him as a man without refinement, whose sense of morality was withered by long contact with evil.

And yet this man, forbidding as was his appearance, had a better heart, a tenderer sympathy, than old Mother Grimmis.

Woman is better than man. Her moral standard is much higher. She is kinder, more sympathetic, and more generous to those in trouble, and yet when she falls, she falls to a lower depth of infamy than man. She will do things from which he would turn away, against which his nature, sordid and evil as it might be, would rebel.

I do not know whether my readers will agree

with me in this view, but I believe there are facts that will bear me out in the statement.

Mother Grimmis was a fair illustration of this theory, though there have been still more marked cases of feminine depravity than hers.

I speak of this that I may not be criticised for representing this old woman as she really was—wicked and heartless.

While Ben was leaning against the tree on Union Square, busily forming his plans for the future, she had been quarreling with this strange man. Neither would yield to the other in the matter for which each was contending. The scene became a stormy one, and at its very height our hero returned home. They heard him ascend the stairs, walk to the door of the room, and place his hand upon the latch.

“Who is it?” asked the man excitedly.

“It’s the boy,” she replied sulkily.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I know his step.”

“I must not be seen by him,” he replied uneasily; and grabbing his hat he stepped quickly into a small closet, the door of which happened to have in it quite a large hole. Through this he had a good view of the room, and saw the boy as he entered.

Mother Grimmis had become so enraged at the man that she could hardly contain herself; and,

unable to vent her spite upon him, she turned upon the boy in the cruel manner shown in the preceding chapter.

The man witnessed this treatment from his retreat, and his whole nature protested against such mad abuse.

“But it won’t do for me to show myself to the boy, much as I would like to protect him,” said he to himself.

When, however, the old hag made the dive for the boy that resulted in her fall, the man could hardly restrain himself from rushing out and punishing her as she deserved.

He was upon the very point of doing so, when he saw the lad escape her grasp by his marvelous leap.

“By Jove, he’s a keener—that boy is,” exclaimed he, almost aloud, and he felt a thrill of delight.

He noted well the old hag’s manner from his hiding place, so awful it had become; and his sympathy for the boy was so fully aroused that when her final plunge came, he, no longer able to restrain himself, rushed from the closet and saved the lad from a blow that might have proved serious.

So sudden, so unexpected, was the man’s appearance, that it was not surprising that Ben became speechless for a few moments.

But after he recovered from the surprise, he reached his hand out to the tall stranger, and thanked him sincerely for shielding him from the old hag's fury.

"I am very glad to protect you," was the reply.

"Thank you, sir. It did look as if I needed some protection about that time."

"I should say so, and it is fortunate I was here. But tell me," he continued, "how long has this been going on?"

"It was never like this before, sir."

"Have you never been abused, then, till tonight?"

"I can't say that and tell the truth; but——"

"Don't be afraid to speak out."

"But it might be worse for me," said Ben cautiously.

"I will protect you from her. I want to know what sort of treatment you have received. It has been bad, I feel sure," said the stranger, casting a threatening glance at Mother Grimmi, who was now walking backward and forward by the door, like a caged lioness—furious with anger.

"Yes, it has been nothing but abuse ever since I can remember," replied the boy boldly; "but I have made up my mind to stand no more of it."

"You are right. I would not stand it if I were you."

"I don't think it would be safe to remain after tonight's performance."

"No, it would not; and I only wish I had known before about this treatment—you shouldn't have stayed all this time."

"No, I suppose not," answered the boy mechanically, while he repeated to himself these words, "I only wish I had known before of your treatment—you shouldn't have stayed all this time," and he looked closely at the man to try to make out if he had ever seen him before.

He could not decide this point satisfactorily to himself. Had he seen him on the street he would have said, "No, I have never seen this man. He is a stranger to me." But now he felt that he remembered the ugly scar on his cheek, though he did not recognize the face in any way.

"I am certain I have seen that scar before, or one just like it," said he to himself finally; "but I can't remember when or where—it seems so far away, so dim an impression."

"Have you any place to go to?" asked the stranger, after a pause.

"No; nowhere in particular."

"Nor any money?"

"No, sir."

"How will you get along, then?"

"Oh, I will manage it all right," replied the boy cheerfully.

"Remember, it is a cold night."

"Yes, I know it is, but I am accustomed to the cold."

"If I had any money I would give it to you."

"Thank you, sir, you have already been very kind; but I can manage in some way."

"If you prefer to remain here till morning I will stay with you and see that you are not harmed; that would be better for you than wandering in the streets on a cold, stormy night."

"No, I would not wish you to do that; and besides, I want to go. I prefer to get away from this place forever."

Mother Grimmis looked daggers at him, and muttered a characteristic threat.

"Then you shall go," replied the man, as if he had absolute authority.

"I am very thankful to you, sir, for your kindness. I am ready to go, as soon as I can get away."

"Have you nothing to take with you?"

"No, nothing."

"No clothes?"

"No, sir, only the ones I have on. I want nothing else from here."

Ben was most anxious to leave at once. He feared that, if he delayed, something might prevent his escaping from the old woman. The strange man had certainly been kind to him, and

yet he feared him. His appearance was forbidding, and for some reason the boy instinctively shrank from him.

“Very well, you may go, then,” said the man coolly, as if there remained now no further obstruction. But there was an obstruction between the boy and the door, a very lively one, in the shape of Mother Grimmis herself; and she objected most emphatically to the permission granted by the newcomer, and hot words followed fast between them.

She guarded the door carefully for a while, but as the scene grew more lively, and her uncontrollable temper rose higher, she neglected this important post.

Ben had been watching eagerly for a chance to reach the door, and when the opportunity came he shot by her like an arrow, and was on his way down the old stairs, covering half a dozen steps at a leap.

And he did not stop when he reached the street, but kept on running till he found himself on the corner of Grand Street, when he paused for breath and looked back, half expecting to be grabbed and taken back to old Mother Grimmis’ den.

V.

AND here he waited, listened, and wondered, but no step did he hear.

No one in that vicinity was moving. The street lamp on the opposite corner burned dimly; but it was very dark in that squalid, dingy part of the city. Not far away was the great East River. In that direction all looked black, and the melancholy lapping of the waves, raised by the occasional passing of a late boat, had an unpleasant effect upon the nerves of the lad.

Yet he felt happy over his escape, and his mind became absorbed in thinking over the dramatic scenes through which he had just passed, and in speculating as to who the tall stranger, with the ugly scar upon his face, could be.

“Why didn't I ask him?” said he to himself; “perhaps he would have told me. I would like to know him. He talked as if he knew me, and had authority to act with me as he chose. The longer I think, the more it seems to me I have seen him before. He may know all about me—what my real name is and where I came from. He has been so kind to me that perhaps he would

tell me. But then he may not know. I believe he does, though, from the way he talked. He wouldn't have allowed me to remain there, he said, just as if I were his own boy, or he had a right to do with me as he pleased.

"If he had never seen me before, he wouldn't have talked that way," continued the boy in his process of speculation and reasoning. "I wonder why he hid when I went into the room. I was sure I heard voices, and now I know he didn't hide for nothing. If he didn't want to see me, there must be some cause for it, and that is what I want to find out; but how am I to do it? If I had had any sense I would have asked him to tell me where I could see him; but I didn't think then, as I wanted to get away from him and old Mother Grimmiis.

"I wonder why he was there with her, and what they were quarreling about. Perhaps they are having a lively time now, and one or the other of them may get hurt. I'm glad I'm away from that wicked old hag, and I hope I will never set eyes on her again; but I will be lucky if I don't, for she will try to have me captured by her gang; and if she does get me—well, I don't know; I don't like to think about it; it fairly makes me shudder."

Thus he spent a little time in thought, and then wondered how he should pass the night.

His situation was a forlorn one. Where should he go? What should he do? Not a cent in his pocket, not a friend had he to whom he could go for shelter. The cold wind, blowing up from the river, pressed him for an answer to this question. He felt that he must do something; standing there—surrounded by those old buildings, in a locality about which he had heard frightful stories—was not to his liking.

The stillness of the night was oppressive. The clock in a distant church tower now commenced striking. Ben counted eleven strokes, and how clear and loud they were! He had never before heard them sound like that. Again it was still, very still, and the lad felt oppressed with a sense of loneliness. With a heavy heart he turned to go. His muscles worked stiffly, and a cold chill passed over him as he stepped on the crossing, where the wind struck him more pitilessly than ever.

And now suddenly came a crashing sound, only a little way up the street, as if something had been moved, and in moving had fallen to the sidewalk. All was quiet again, not a sound to break the stillness; and the boy felt a sickening sense of fear. What could it be? Was it a robber, or was it a repetition of one of the old scenes—stories to which he had listened with open mouth and boyish terror?

These thoughts hastily passed through his mind, and again he listened. Now he thought he heard a faint noise—yes, he was sure of it, for the sound was approaching him. Almost anything would have alarmed him, and his fear increased till he thought a change in his location especially desirable ; and yet he was curious to see whoever or whatever was coming down the street.

As a compromise, however, between his desire to get away from that corner and his curiosity for investigation, he walked part way across the block, and there took a position in a secluded niche, where he was shielded from the light on the corner, and yet would be able to see any object passing down the street.

He had scarcely taken this position, when a big shaggy dog came in sight, and stopping directly under the gaslight, looked about him and sniffed the air. He was very large and powerfully built.

“Perhaps he is waiting for his master,” thought Ben ; “a robber or something worse ; who knows?”

But as no one appeared, the boy concluded that the noise up the street was caused by the dog—possibly by tipping over a barrel, or something of that sort ; and his fear commenced to abate.

He was almost ashamed of himself for having been so badly startled. He need not have felt this, for in such lonesome surroundings a very slight sound, aided by a frightened imagination, will seem like almost anything naturally to be dreaded.

After sniffing the air for a while, the dog deliberately turned and came toward our young friend with a sort of a swinging trot.

Ben saw this, and instantly became alarmed again, as well he might. It had not till now occurred to him that this huge brute might prove a worse enemy than man.

“Shall I run?” he asked himself, but very sensibly he concluded that such an act would prove dangerous.

The dog was fast approaching, and the boy groped about in the darkness, searching for a club or anything that would serve as a weapon of defense. But he could find nothing, and he decided to stand well in the shade, and keep so still, if possible, that the dog would pass by without noticing him.

Nearer and nearer he came, till within a few yards of Ben; and then he suddenly stopped and looked back.

The lad's anxiety deepened. Would the dog turn and go the other way, or would he come on and attack him? This suspense continued but a

few moments, for after renewed sniffing the great St. Bernard again fell into a lazy trot.

Now he was almost opposite the boy's partial hiding place. The trot still keeps up; soon he has passed him.

At this the boy's heart bounds with a feeling of relief, and yet he keeps as still as death. A long breath, even, might attract the dog's attention.

Now the dog comes nearer again, but the boy doesn't move, except to shrink within himself. A man would have been scarcely less frightened, for there is hardly anything more terrifying in the night than the growl of a great dog. With no means of protection, one feels keenly his helplessness against the possible attack of the savage brute. It is a trying position, and one that will make the strongest man shudder.

Not being able to defend himself, Ben saw that his only wise course would be one of kindness, and he attempted to speak. His mouth opened, but there did not seem to be air enough left in his lungs to produce an intelligible utterance.

Failing in this, he reached out his hand, with the palm down, as if to stroke the dog.

Herein he showed rare presence of mind. The growl ceased, and as that ceased speech returned to the lad, and he spoke kindly to the big St. Bernard. The dog wagged his tail in a way that seemed to say :

“I accept your greeting, and am glad to be friends with you;” and by way of apology for his gruff manners, he stepped up and licked Ben’s hand affectionately.

In return for this, he got several reassuring pats on the head; and then their friendship was sealed.

VI.

BEN'S fright was over now, and, though weak from its effect, he felt glad the dog had come along, for he was a fine, great fellow, and seemed more of a friend than the people with whom his life had been thrown.

The dog was a fine specimen of the St. Bernard breed. A collar was around his neck—a handsome, silver plated one; and it bore this name: “William Montgomery, No. — Lafayette Place, New York.”

“He has strayed away from his owner,” thought Ben, “and I must take him home. Perhaps a reward will be offered—of course it will, for so valuable a fellow as he seems to be; but it didn't cost me anything to find him. It was he that hunted me up; but what a fright he gave me! You did, didn't you, old fellow?” addressing his canine friend, and patting his head affectionately.

The dog answered “yes” with a wag of his tail—his chief means of expressing approval.

“I guess this is a piece of good luck—a sort of blessing in disguise—getting you,” said Ben,

still talking to his dumb friend; "I'm glad to have you, anyway; you are a nice old fellow." And the dog licked his hand in return for this expression of kindness. "I'd like to keep you; but you do not belong to me, so I shall take you to your owner."

They were now walking along side by side, the St. Bernard evidently as well contented with his temporary master as if he had been with him for years.

Presently they reached the Bowery, and, turning to the right, walked up that peculiar street.

The Bowery, a single wide street of about a mile in length, is a town within itself. No other American city has a place like it. There is but one Bowery on our continent, and that one is in New York.

It is a market place, and a place of residence, where men, women, and children are almost innumerable. They live, such as their living is—in the rear of the shops, in the shops, under the shops, and over the shops—wherever room can be made at night to stow away the children and stretch themselves out for a few hours' sleep.

Every nationality is represented there, and consequently every form of religious belief has its followers—the majority, however, being of the Jewish faith.

Everything imaginable can be found for sale

in the Bowery shops, and at prices adjusted to the customer's inexperience, his means, or his credulity.

The Bowery trader is a peculiar character. He is not a modest individual, and there is nothing delicate about his sensibilities. To hear him talk you would think he was giving his goods away, when actually he is getting a very large price for most inferior articles.

He is a philosopher, and his philosophy tells him to get people into his shop—get them in, get them in by some means, no matter what. And then for the fine work—the work of a born philosopher, of one who reads character, thoughts, and purposes. He draws out his victim, by one device and another, learns how much money he has, what he wants, and what he can be talked into buying.

I say victim, for the chances are that he will become the victim of a sharp transaction, however small it may be, before he gets out of the store.

Many clever dodges are employed by the merchant to draw people into his shop. The most effective way, and the one most practised in the Bowery, is to stand on the walk before the shop door and forcibly lug customers in, so to speak.

The shopkeeper hails them as they pass, calls their attention to something in his window, and

in some instances lays his hands upon the victims' shoulders and walks them into the shop.

Some of the larger stores employ several men, known as "pullers in," simply to run in customers.

And when I say that these men are generally paid according to the number of people run in, my readers will perhaps be able to form a slight idea of the noise and persuasive eloquence peculiar to the Bowery.

The street is always well filled with people, often crowded. Children are everywhere—in the shops, on the sidewalks, and in the street.

Through this din Ben passed proudly, with his handsome St. Bernard sticking closely to him.

The dog attracted much attention, and being in the hands of a ragged lad like Ben, the shrewd ones readily concluded that he had found or had stolen him, and was taking him home to hold for a reward.

They saw money here—ten, twenty, perhaps fifty dollars—and they looked covetously at the valuable dog.

At almost every shop door he was hailed. Great efforts were made to get him inside the shops with his prize. A dozen men wanted to trade the lad a suit of clothes for the St. Bernard. Much as he needed clothes, in his ragged, chilled condition, he refused these offers, and kept on

as fast as he could make his way through the crowd.

A pawnbroker, the owner of a very red face and a long, hooked nose, accosted him.

"Where you find him?" said he, referring to the dog.

Ben made no reply.

"I say, where you find him—the dog mid you?"

"I'm not obliged to tell you, am I?"

"It vas a civil question, vasn't it?"

"Yes, it was civil, but is it your business?"

"I vood make it my pishness, and your pishness mit fife dollar."

"What do you mean?" asked the boy.

"I mean dis. I gife you fife dollar——"

"But I can't sell him. He is not mine."

"You need de money, I see," said the man, taking hold of Ben's thin jacket.

"So I do, but I want to get it honestly or not at all."

"You can leave him mit me ; I lend you ten dollar on him."

"But how can I get him back, if I should spend the ten dollars? And if I don't spend it, what good will it do me? No, I will not do it."

"I gife you den twenty [dollar. Here it is, two ten dollar greenpacks," said the man, holding out the money to the lad.

They were new, crisp bills, and looked very tempting. Twenty dollars all his own—it would be a small fortune for him. But no, he must refuse it. He was commencing a new life, and he wanted to commence it right.

“No, sir, I can’t take them,” said he decidedly.

“You get not so much as mit me,” persisted the sharp money getter.

“Perhaps I won’t get anything,” replied the boy.

“And you voodn’t take twenty dollar mit my money?”

“No, sir, I have no right to take your money for this dog, and I will not do so under any conditions. But when I have one to sell I will come and see you.”

The man shrugged his shoulders expressive of his disgust at the boy’s honesty; and after a little further parley, he returned to his shop door.

One fellow with a villainous face followed the boy and claimed the dog as his own, and said he had lost him a few hours before.

But Ben knew this was false, and refused to give him up. Then the man threatened desperate measures; but, not succeeding in frightening the lad, he boldly attempted to take the dog by force. He, however, changed his mind very soon; for when he placed his hand on the collar,

of which Ben held a firm grasp, the big dog growled threateningly and turned upon him in a savage manner. Instantly the sneak abandoned his purpose and started to run, when the St. Bernard jumped at him and bit him.

A terrified howl came from the fleeing man, while the crowd yelled derisively as the man wheeled around a corner and disappeared from view.

Ben joined them in laughing at the comical side of the matter, and proceeded on his way.

He was now almost up to the Cooper Union, the great stone library built by Peter Cooper for the benefit of the poor classes ; and turning to his left soon found himself in Lafayette Place.

He walked down the street in search of the number corresponding to that on the dog's collar.

The night was so dark that he could not read the numbers, as they were dimly printed.

After searching carefully, and failing to find the right house, he retraced his steps to the beginning of the street, where he found a number from which he counted his way back to the middle of the block.

If he had made no mistake in counting, he was now before the right house ; but there was one building larger than the rest. Whether that should have been counted as one number or more he felt uncertain, and consequently was not

sure whether he was now ascending the steps of William Montgomery's house or not.

However, he pulled the bell, and waited for a response. All was dark in the house, so far as he could judge, and not a sound was to be heard. The place seemed deserted. So much time elapsed that Ben grew uneasy and began to think no one was living there.

VII.

ANOTHER vigorous pull at the bell, and presently Ben heard a sound; a window went up directly above his head, and a man's voice called out :

“ Who is it, and what do you want? ”

“ I want to know if this is where William Montgomery——”

“ Ah, I see ! my dog, my dog ! ” exclaimed the man in a tone of mingled pleasure and surprise as he got a glimpse of his highly valued St. Bernard, and without waiting for the boy to finish his sentence.

“ Sallie, here is the dog—a boy has him on the stoop now,” said Mr. Montgomery, suddenly drawing his head in, and speaking with almost childish enthusiasm. “ Wait a minute, boy, and I will come down and let you in—hold fast to the dog ! ”

This was spoken to Ben, and the window closed abruptly. It was but a few moments before Mr. Montgomery appeared at the door.

“ Come in,” said he kindly, “ and tell me where and how you found him ; ” and he took the

dog by the collar, and all stepped into a warm, luxuriously furnished room.

The great dog jumped upon his master, and showed plainly his pleasure at getting home from his aimless wanderings; while the man played with him, and by affectionate words and acts showed almost a boyish delight at his good fortune in recovering his dumb friend.

And now his wife appeared on the scene. With an expression of pleasure she threw her arms about the neck of the returned wanderer, and petted and talked to him almost as if he were a lost child come home again. The dog kissed her, and wagged his tail in his most expressive manner, trying to make evident his appreciation of the warm welcome he had received.

Ben watched this scene with profound astonishment. In all his life he did not remember to have seen so much affection displayed, and that it should be bestowed upon a dog seemed to him beyond all reason.

“By Jove,” said he to himself, “it beats all the stories I ever heard. I wonder what old Mother Grimmi would think if she could see this splendid room, and these folks going on in this way!”

“But tell me, where did you get him?” said Mr. Montgomery; and he took his eyes from the dog almost for the first time, and fixed them

searchingly upon the boy before him, so ragged and pinched. What a contrast was he to the rich surroundings, as he stood in that handsome drawing room! On every side was expensive furniture, bric-à-brac, with here and there a valuable work of art.

How soft the thick, rich carpet felt to Ben as he stood awkwardly upon it! Yes, he felt awkward and out of place in the midst of such luxury. He was amazed at the display of wealth; and as he chanced to contrast his own self with the scene before him, the thought overcame him, and he instinctively moved back, as if to leave the house unnoticed.

It was this movement that attracted Mr. Montgomery's notice, and caused him to turn his attention to our young hero.

The man's face changed as he gazed at the scantily clothed lad. That look of pleasure produced by the return of his St. Bernard gave place to one of kind sympathy and sorrow.

And without saying another word he touched his wife's arm expressively. She looked at him hastily, then turned her eyes in the direction of his gaze. His thoughts were plain to her, and with all her heart she joined him in his sympathy.

"Come and sit here, my son," said the man kindly, as he drew a richly stuffed chair before the sofa, and seated himself upon the latter.

His wife came and sat beside him, and both faced Ben as he occupied the chair drawn up before him.

“Tell me all about it, now, my boy ; tell me who you are and how you came by my dog.”

The man spoke so kindly, and with such evident interest, that Ben began to feel quite at ease, and told the story as I have told it to you. He told his experience at Union Square during the early part of the evening, and what he overheard while following Perry Boggs and his companions—of his subsequent resolution to commence a new life—of the dramatic events later on at Mother Grimmis’—of his escape and meditations—of his thrilling adventure in finding the St. Bernard—of his difficult progress through the Bowery, and the money offered him by sharpers, and told them also how little he knew of his early life, and how earnestly he desired to learn more.

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery listened eagerly to this sad dramatic story, made more forcible by the pitiable appearance of the lad, and the part they themselves had played in it through their own St. Bernard.

Many times they interrupted him, asking questions upon this and that point, and during the recital of the most pathetic incidents he saw the lady press her handkerchief to her eyes, while her breast heaved with pity.

VIII.

MR. MONTGOMERY now rested his head in his hand, apparently in careful study.

“And you put a notice in the *Herald*?” asked his wife.

“Yes.”

“How much reward did you offer?”

“Fifty dollars.”

“A pretty good sum of money?”

“Yes, to be sure; but I wanted the dog.”

“Yes,” she said thoughtfully, “I would rather have given five hundred dollars than lose him.”

“Five hundred dollars!” repeated Ben to himself, and he could hardly believe his own senses.

“The idea of paying five hundred dollars for only one dog!” and his amazement was strongly pictured on his face.

“You are very much indebted to this poor boy, then,” said the lady, with a kind look.

“I am indeed, and he is entitled to great credit for withstanding the temptations and eluding the various dodges of those Bowery sharpers. If the dog were in their hands, I should have to pay roundly to reclaim him.”

Ben was proud to be so handsomely commended, and yet he felt embarrassed, and moved about nervously in his chair, as if he would be gone. Mr. Montgomery noticed this, and realizing that they were all losing sleep, rose up from his seat and said :

“ Your name, you say, is Ben ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; Ben. ”

“ No other name ? ”

“ No, sir ; none that I know of. ”

“ That is strange. I may, however, be able to help you to find out your true name and real history, as I am a lawyer. You have interested me deeply, and I am under many obligations to you. ”

“ Oh, sir, do you think you can ? ” exclaimed Ben eagerly.

“ I can't say, of course ; but doubtless some light can be shed upon the matter. ”

This really was not quite so assuring as Ben would have liked ; nevertheless, he felt hopeful, though he was not quite clear as to what “ shedding light upon the matter ” meant.

“ Yes, I will do my best for you, my boy, ” continued the lawyer, after a slight pause.

“ If you will and can find out *who I am*, I will do anything for you—anything in this world that I can do, ” replied the lad with heartfelt sincerity.

“ I will promise you to do all I can, for you have done enough for me already. ”

“ Oh, I haven't done anything. He was good company, and I liked him as well as he did me ; so I don't count that doing anything, ” said our hero, referring to the dog.

“ You certainly did do a very important act ; doubtless a more important one than you can realize. ”

“ What did I do, then, that was of so much importance ? ” asked the lad, really curious.

“ You proved yourself an *honest* boy, a boy worthy of assistance. ”

“ Thank you, sir, for saying so, ” said Ben gratefully ; “ something always told me to be honest, though old Mother Grimmi tried to make me steal. ”

“ You were wise to follow your own well balanced sense of right and wrong, rather than obey a wicked command. Always act as rightly, and work honestly and faithfully to help yourself, and you will come out at the top. Remember this, my boy, for it will be of service to you many times in life. ”

“ I hope I will ; and what you say, sir, encourages me. ”

“ I am always glad to encourage boys to make men of themselves, ” said Mr. Montgomery, as he drew a large roll of bills from his pocket.

“ No, please do not pay me money, sir,” said the shabby, hungry boy.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because I would so much rather you would help me as you said, for I want to know who I am. Besides, old Mother Grimmis and her gang might get me again, and—well, I don’t like to think what might happen to me. The money would do me no good, for she would take it from me.”

“ But I will help you just the same,” said the kind hearted man. “ Where will you spend the night, if I don’t aid you with money ? ”

“ I don’t know yet, but I will find some place, I guess.”

“ Can’t he remain here ? ” asked Mrs. Montgomery. “ I can fix a room and bed.”

“ Oh, no, no, but I thank you all the same,” said the lad ; and he moved toward the door.

“ Then if you would rather go, you will take this money, so that you can purchase a night’s lodging and a good breakfast. Come to my office tomorrow morning at ten o’clock. You will find me at No. — Broadway, near Wall Street, and I will go with you and get you a warm and comfortable suit of clothes, and will provide for your immediate wants. I will also look into your case more fully, and see what can be done.”

“ Thank you a thousand times, sir, for your

kindness. It is the first kindness I have ever met with, and I do not know how to thank you for it all as I ought to."

"You could not show yourself more thankful, my boy; so feel at ease on that point, and consider both my wife and myself as your friends. We shall be glad to do all we can for you."

"We shall, indeed," said Mrs. Montgomery, "and I shall expect to hear from you again to-morrow evening through my husband."

"Yes," said the latter, "I will tell you then what there is in the case."

"Be sure and come to my office at the time appointed—ten o'clock—will you?" said he, addressing the boy.

"Oh, yes, sir! I shall only be too glad to do so."

"All right, then I shall expect to see you promptly. Good night." And both Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery grasped him warmly by the hand as he left the house.

"I wish I had ascertained where he has been living with that old woman—Grim—eh—Grimes—was that it?" said Mr. Montgomery, as he and his wife entered their pretty sleeping room.

"Grimmis—wasn't it?" replied his wife.

"Grimmis, ah, yes, that is it."

"I remember it struck me as an odd name, but quite an appropriate one."

“That is so.”

“Why do you wish you knew her address?”

“Well, I suppose there isn’t one chance in ten thousand for her to recapture the boy before ten o’clock tomorrow morning; and still I should feel safer if I knew her address.”

“I didn’t think of that.”

“Neither did I till too late. Well, we will hope for the best.”

“Suppose he shouldn’t come to your office in the morning?”

“Why, I should believe he had been recaptured, or that something unimaginable had happened to him. He has proved himself one boy out of ten thousand, when it is considered the sort of life he has led.”

“Yes, I agree with you; and, moreover, he has every reason for seeing you.”

“Certainly, and he will be there if nothing prevents him.” And thus the conversation ended for the night.

“I’m rich,” said Ben to himself, as soon as he had left the house; “five dollars, and all my own! By Jove, I’m lucky! This is a great night.”

His heart was as light as the air, and the cold had lost its dispiriting effect upon him.

“I wonder what old Mother Grimmi would think if she only knew all that had happened to

me," he asked himself; and he broke into a brisk run, unable to restrain himself from some physical exhibition of his buoyant spirit.

He didn't feel sleepy, and was therefore in no hurry to secure a lodging for the night.

He was now on the corner of Eighth Street and Broadway. Why he was there he did not know—did not even stop to think. He realized he was there, and that was all. He would not have realized even this had not the question whether to turn up or down Broadway forced itself upon him for an answer. He thought for a moment or two—thought honestly and soberly—when his hand found its way into his pocket and touched the new, crisp bill.

He was standing under a street light at that moment, and instantly the bill came out for another admiring glance.

He was too rich and too happy to think of anything but his good fortune, and herein he was not unlike the rest of the human race.

Accustomed to nothing but abuse and poverty, a few dollars and a few friendly, sympathetic words were more to him than a thousand times as much money and kindness would have been to Perry Boggs or any other boy with a cheerful home and all its luxuries.

He again commenced drifting, as he speculated upon the possible outcome of his interview with

lawyer Montgomery tomorrow ; drifting without apparent motive. Yet his wanderings that night brought about subsequent events that entered so deeply into this boy's life, that one would almost think he was influenced by some secret power, whose nature I cannot explain.

And influenced by this unknown force—if such force there really was—he drifted up Broadway ; not as he had in the early part of the evening, oppressed and discouraged, but with a light and happy heart in the thought of the prospect before him.

IX.

IT was a curious coincidence that he should have reached Thirteenth Street just as the play was over at the Star Theater, and the people were coming from the building ; and more curious still was the fact that the first persons upon whom he fixed his eyes were Perry and his companions.

He had not planned this second meeting—had not even thought of it. It was in fact long after the usual hour for the theater to close.

But it happened that this was a special occasion, and extra time had been given to the production of the play.

Ben was greatly surprised at so soon and so unexpectedly meeting this party again ; for since the more dramatic scenes through which he had passed that evening he had not thought of them, except in the recital of his life story to Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery.

But now, thrown in with them again, by chance or otherwise, something of the magnetic influence experienced some four hours before, when he first saw them, as he stood against the

tree on Union Square, seemed once more to possess him.

The sweet motherly face of the woman did not seem at all dimmed to him by his brightened prospects, and by the brief happiness that was now his.

The warm feelings in his breast that invited her love and sympathy were now warmer and deeper, though he seemed less in need of such a friend as he felt, and even knew, that she could be to him if only he could come before her notice and within the range of her kind, motherly affection. But in deep contrast with this sentiment was the bitter repugnance which forced itself upon him as he studied the vain, cold faces of Perry and his father.

"I will follow them now and find out where they live," said Ben to himself triumphantly, as the thought suggested itself to him.

But to his dismay a carriage just then drew up to the sidewalk, and the lady and gentleman stepped into it.

"It is no use after all," he thought, "for I can't follow the carriage;" and the feeling that he was baffled in his project dulled the edge of his keen spirits.

"Come, Perry, don't keep us waiting here in the cold," called out the boy's father.

The former was talking with a boy of about

his own age, who was evidently a dude like himself.

"You needn't wait," answered Perry, with an air of independence; "I will walk up with my friend George."

"You had better come with us, for it is already late, and very cold."

But after a little further parley, Perry succeeded in carrying his point, as he usually did, and started up Broadway arm in arm with his chosen companion, happy in his power to overrule his father's wishes.

Our young friend followed close enough to keep a sharp eye on him.

"Ah, here is Tiffany's," said Perry, as he and his friend neared the great jewelry store. "I bought myself a new watch here the day before yesterday."

"A gold one, I suppose?" said George.

"Well, I should think so. Do you suppose I would carry anything but gold?"

"Oh, no; I meant—er, I said I supposed it was gold."

"Yes, it ought to be, for it cost two hundred and fifty dollars," said Perry proudly.

"So much as that? It ought to be a regular swell."

"I should think so. In fact, George, it is a gentleman's watch, a regular gentleman's watch."

Thus they chatted till they reached Delmonico's, America's most fashionable restaurant.

"Let's go in and have a bottle and a little supper," said Perry, with a man of the world air.

"I don't care if I do," replied George, who had the erroneous notion that "a bottle" after the theater was quite the proper thing.

They took seats facing each other at a small table near a window. The room was well filled with fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen, who were eating, and drinking wine.

Perry ordered raw oysters on the shell and other refreshments—in all, a hearty meal—which he and his companion washed down with a bottle of expensive champagne.

Ben watched them through the window and studied the movements of the busy waiters, in swallow tail coats, as they hurried hither and thither with tempting dishes.

It was another world to him. Beautiful ladies toyed with dainty viands which had taxed the skill of artist cooks, and yet did not tempt their appetites, for they were not hungry. Eating, or more properly toying with food, at this late hour, was with them a social pastime.

How sweet those dainty dishes would have tasted to our young friend, who had known only the coarsest and most unpalatable food!

But this luxury was beyond him—so far beyond

that to suppose himself there would have required a considerable stretch of imagination. And yet the gulf was not too great for this poor boy's hopes to bridge ; for he looked ahead to the time when he would be able to dine at so fashionable a place as Delmonico's.

He saw Perry enjoying all these luxuries, and saw himself—felt himself—half starved and nearly frozen in the cold night wind. He would not give up his object, however, for he felt determined to ascertain where the young dude lived.

When Perry and his companion appeared again on the sidewalk, they were feeling merry. The wine had commenced to do its work and they were very talkative.

As Perry and his friend neared the "White Elephant," a well known billiard saloon on Broadway, the former chanced to look back, and in doing so saw Ben following but a little distance behind him.

He at once recognized him as the gamin who had provoked the discussion in the early part of the evening, and on this account he felt a grudge against him.

He had drunk just enough to feel that he could "do up" an ordinary prize fighter, and that with very little effort. He wanted both exercise and revenge, and consequently he decided that Ben

should become a target for his science ; and this decision was made without even asking our hero if he were willing to accept so grave and responsible a situation.

The idea pleased the would be pugilist so much that he could scarcely restrain his feelings of joy till the action should commence.

“ See how I’ll knock that dirty gamin out in the first round,” said he ; and then he worked his arms in what he supposed a scientific manner, and in other ways made himself ridiculous.

“ He is crazy,” thought Ben, “ but I guess he means me ;” and he laughed at the ridiculous actions of the exquisite youth.

“ What do you mean by insulting me, you ragamuffin ?” shouted Perry, by way of introduction.

“ I have not insulted you that I know of,” replied Ben firmly, as he attempted to pass on and avoid trouble.

“ You haven’t, have you ?” exclaimed Perry hotly, as he squared away in professional style.

“ I have not, and I would advise you to keep at a safe distance, if you don’t want to get hurt,” replied our hero indignantly.

“ Get hurt by you !” Perry laughed derisively ; then making a savage lunge at his supposed target, he shouted, “ Take that, and see if I need your advice !”

But the target was alive—very much alive, in fact—and warding off his opponent's blow retaliated with a stinging "tap" under his left ear.

Further sparring followed, and then the target, becoming more and more alive, "tapped" the exquisite youth heavily upon the cheek.

This brought Perry's temper to a boiling point. He was furious at his inability to handle a boy so much smaller than himself, and sore from the severe treatment he was receiving.

"I thought you were going to knock him out so easily," said George in a taunting way.

It was a cruel remark for a companion to utter, and it enraged Perry to a high degree.

Without replying, however—and in fact he had not much time just then for outside conversation—he withdrew a little, and then rushing upon Ben, made a furious pass; but the latter skilfully dodged the blow, and put in a rejoinder that lifted Perry off his feet, and sent him sprawling upon the sidewalk.

"Police! Police!" shouted the bold pugilist; "take him away from me!" and he groaned from mingled pain and fear.

In the mean time, a crowd had gathered to witness the excitement. This drew the attention of a policeman who just then came running up to see what was wrong.

He heard Perry's call, and dashing through the throng, seized him by the collar and quickly set him on his feet.

"There is the villain," said the latter, pointing to Ben, who stood calmly by awaiting the policeman's action. But now the official's big hand of authority grappled his arm tightly. Perry said he had been assaulted by Ben, and without provocation. The latter denied the charge, and attempted to tell his story, when the man of brass buttons cut him short, to listen to further statements from Perry, who wore fashionable clothes, and thus seemed to belong to a fashionable family. He gave his name as Perry Boggs, number eight hundred and — Fifth Avenue.

"That's a fashionable neighborhood," thought the policeman; and, accepting young Boggs' statement of the case, he let him go free, while the innocent and friendless boy was marched off to the station house.

X.

THIS had been an eventful night to our young hero, crowded as it was with incidents of an unusual nature; events among themselves contradictory, and yet all of so important a character that they seemed certain to exert a forcible influence upon his whole career.

“What can it all mean?” asked Ben of himself, as he sat in the station house cell, with a heavy heart, meditating, wondering, and now wiping away a sad tear as it rolled down his cheek.

“It seems like a dream; why did I follow that boy and get into this trouble, and when I was so happy, too?” and thus he thought and wondered, with his head buried deep in his hands.

He was not sleepy, and could not sleep, so utterly crushed were his spirits, as he reflected on his position, locked in a cell.

For an hour or more he studied the most dismal side of his situation, and found, not unlike many others, a sort of cold, gloomy pleasure in dwelling upon his own misery.

His mind had been strained, almost beyond its

capacity, in contemplating the saddest possibility of his case. Now, however, it rebounded, and took him to the more favorable side, and after a while his eyes grew heavy, and he slept soundly upon his prison couch.

In the mean time, Perry had returned home, and he, too, was not altogether happy. In fact, there was no very good reason why he should feel particularly light hearted. His right eye was badly swollen, and had grown very black, while his face showed various traces of the struggle. His fine clothes were soiled with blood and the mud of the street. His spirits, no longer exhilarated by champagne, had sunk to a very low ebb, so that altogether he was, for the time being, little better than a wreck. As his vanity could not tolerate this condition, he speedily summoned his father to his assistance on his arrival home.

Boggs senior made a hasty toilet, and hurried down to the drawing room with a feeling of alarm, wondering what could have happened to his son.

But the father's face grew whiter when he stood before his boy, and the feeling of wonder changed to one of amazement and pity—pity with an undercurrent of indignation; for Perry had brought this upon himself by a wilful disregard of his parent's wishes and advice.

And now he looked him over and took an inventory of him, as he stood, to see how much value he represented, and what repairs would be necessary to put him once more into running order; if, indeed, it could be done at all, which, at the present time, seemed doubtful.

A hasty explanation followed, Perry's story being, of course, colored so as to favor himself.

Whether the father believed it all I have serious doubts. Certain it is, however, that he looked troubled and anxious.

"It was the same boy, you say, that we met tonight at Union Square—the one who provoked so much discussion?" said Mr. Boggs, evidently hoping there might be some mistake.

"Yes, the same one," replied Perry feebly.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am," returned the son peevishly, "but what difference does it make?"

"It will make a greater difference than you would like, perhaps," answered the father somewhat tartly.

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind now."

"But I want to know," demanded Perry.

"No, it is nothing," was the evasive reply.

But there was a strange nervousness about his father's manner which made Perry feel that such was not the case, and the mystery aroused his

curiosity. After further conversation of an unimportant character, and after the application of suitable remedies to the bruises of the youthful wreck, he was put to bed, even more demoralized and unhappy than our young friend, now in custody of the city.

During the performance in the theater, Mr. Boggs' mind had often reverted to Ben, and the discussion his presence had started. The case began to interest him, and the more thought he gave to it the more troubled he grew.

Was he troubled because he had not exercised the charity that this opportunity offered him? Was this the cause, or was it something deeper and more mysterious that stirred his feelings?

The matter had taken so deep a hold of him that he was unable to bury it in sleep on retiring to bed. He rolled and tossed, harassed with contradictory conjectures and conclusions until Perry summoned him down stairs.

And now that he had heard his son's story—heard again, by a most remarkable coincidence, at such a late hour of the night, of this street boy, and had witnessed the painful effects of his encounter with Perry—he felt a strange sense of uneasiness, whether through superstition or otherwise will undoubtedly be known in the fuller development of our hero's life story.

Early in the morning, after a sleepless night,

Mr. Boggs dressed himself in a bold plaid business suit, and started for the station house in search of Ben.

On the previous night he had been dressed in black, with his beard combed down to a point. Now his dress was entirely different, and his beard was parted in the middle and brushed back.

With these changes and several other slight touches of disguise, he hoped our young friend would not recognize him.

By making it an object to the man in charge at the station house he gained admission to Ben's cell, after the latter had been rudely awakened from a sound slumber by the officer on guard.

"Here's a man who wants to talk with you, young feller," said this authority, and he strode out, leaving the strange man and the boy together. Ben rubbed his eyes, and wondered what this call meant. Then it occurred to him that such visits might be the usual thing in station houses, so he made an effort not to appear surprised.

"I came down to have a little talk with you," said the man.

"Yes," answered Ben cautiously.

"Yes, I saw you arrested last night, and I want to know if I can help you in any way," replied the stranger, with apparent candor.

"You are very kind, sir, and——"

“ No, not especially kind ; I came here because your case excited my sympathy,” interrupted the man. “ I did not think you had fair play, for the other boy seemed to escape scot free.”

“ It wasn't fair at all, for he picked the quarrel with me,” replied the lad.

“ So it seemed to me,” replied Boggs, as if he had actually been an eye witness.

“ Then you saw it all ? ” inquired Ben eagerly, for he hoped he had found a witness who could help him out of his difficulty.

“ Certainly, or how could I have known you were the innocent one ? ” returned the stranger, without a show of embarrassment at this falsehood.

He was working for a point that our hero little suspected, and hardly shrank from any means of accomplishing his purpose, as will be made apparent a little further on.

“ That is so,” replied the lad, convinced ; “ I wonder if you can help me prove that I'm not to blame ! ”

“ That is just what I came down for,” answered his pretended benefactor.

“ Thank you, sir, a thousand times ! And do you think I will get out ? Oh, I don't want to go to the Island ! It makes me almost sick to think of it ! ”

“ No doubt I can make it all right for you, as

the other boy was in the wrong. You ought not to be punished for his offense."

"That is so, and I don't think anybody ought to be blamed for letting a sick looking dude like that fellow have one or two good ones!"

Boggs senior winced at this, and coughed as a substitute for a reply.

Ben mistook this for a signal of approval, and consequently he continued in the same strain.

"He acted like an idiot, and I think he must be one to do as he does. If he had gone home, as his father wanted him to, he would have shown some sense, and I wouldn't be in this trouble now."

"As his father wanted him to!" exclaimed the man, nervous and pale with anger. "Do you know his father?"

Ben's remarks about Perry were cutting words for a father to hear spoken about his own son, while he was unable to remonstrate.

"Well, yes," answered the lad, "I saw the old duffer last night a couple of times, and I don't like him any better than his spindle legged boy."

The perspiration now stood out upon the man's face. He would have paid handsomely for the privilege of thrashing our young friend; but policy ruled him, and he adroitly turned the conversation to the point to which he had been leading

it, hoping to accomplish the real object of his visit.

“Have you no influential friend whom I can get to help me in getting you out of this scrape?” asked he.

“No,” replied the boy, after a slight pause, in which he was occupied in studying the man’s face.

“I have seen him before,” thought Ben, but where he could not determine.

“But where are your people—your father and mother?” continued Boggs, now getting down to the very core of his mission.

“I don’t know ; perhaps they are dead,” came the reply sadly.

“Don’t know ! Why that is very strange. Where do you live ? Tell me all about yourself, and perhaps I can be of service to you,” said the designing man.

He had gained the boy’s confidence, and now heard the main facts of his history—facts, by the way, that made the muscles of his face twitch, and caused him to move about nervously upon his seat.

He noted down old Mother Grimmis’ place of abode, and also took the address of Mr. Montgomery, to whom Ben referred, speaking of his engagement to meet him at ten o’clock that very morning.

Boggs soon thereafter took his departure from the station house a very nervous and unhappy man.

His worst fears, that had haunted him throughout the night, were true. This interview had confirmed them beyond a doubt.

He walked rapidly up the street, with his head bowed in deep thought.

"*It shall be done,*" he suddenly broke out aloud, as if to emphasize his own determination.

The peculiar, nervous utterance of this sentence, the gesture with his clenched fist, and his whole manner, would have impressed an observer that something of awful importance rested upon this man's mind.

Coming directly from an interview with our young hero, in so excited a state, it would seem that this determined purpose might in some way refer to him.

XI.

AT the usual morning hour for clearing the police docket, Ben, with others who had been locked up in the station house during the night, was brought before the police justice either to get his discharge or to receive sentence for his misconduct.

He expected to find there the kind hearted friend who had promised to come and prove his innocence. But he was nowhere to be seen.

The court now opened, and a tough looking customer was brought up first.

“Drunkenness, and an old offender,” said the policeman who had arrested him.

“Three months at the workhouse,” was the sentence of the keen, business like little judge; and the prisoner was sent down in charge of an officer.

Ben shuddered at this lightning like process of dealing out justice, and looked anxiously about for his friend.

He began to grow nervous, fearing he might be disposed of in like manner before assistance should arrive.

And now another unfortunate had gone down with a similar sentence.

The door opened, and several gentlemen came in. Our young friend watched anxiously for his man till it closed, and then his heart grew sick at the prospect before him. Now his turn came, and he stood up before the keen eyed judge. "Fighting in the street," was the policeman's charge.

"But, sir," ventured Ben in a frightened voice, "he struck at me first, and——"

"That is an old story," interrupted the judge, whose heart had become hardened, so many similar cases were daily brought before him; "thirty days on the Island." Our young friend's doom was sealed, and he was marched off; while the philanthropic Boggs was in his own room, plotting, plotting, forced to do so in self defense.

Our young hero, no longer his own master, failed, of course, to keep his engagement with Mr. Montgomery.

The latter was much disappointed at not seeing Ben as he expected. The matter troubled him throughout the day, and at night he talked it over with his wife, who was no less disappointed than her husband.

Both had conceived a liking for the lad, and, moreover, were strongly moved by the force of sympathy they felt for him.

Mr. Montgomery rang for a messenger boy, and by this means summoned a detective whom he knew to be an able and reliable man. Into his hands he placed the case, and instructed him to hunt up the boy.

Mr. Diggs, Artemas Diggs—for that was the name of the detective—promised to do his best, stating he would report the result during the morrow. He accordingly departed and set about his task. His first act was to put a notice in the *Herald*, in which he offered a reward for information regarding Ben's whereabouts. It stated that he had lived with an old woman known as Mother Grimmis, who kept a ragpick-ing establishment somewhere on the East side, near Cherry Street. He (the detective), it went on to say, had important information for the lad.

This notice found a place in the columns of the morning *Herald*, while on another page of the same paper Mother Grimmis' name appeared again, and this time in bold headliues, which conveyed the intelligence of her death.

Mother Grimmis had ended her unfortunate career—for she was most unfortunate in the inheritance of degraded tendencies, or in being surrounded by influences that blighted the growth of her better nature, and molded her to the evil thing she was. But the manner of her death was a mystery.

XII.

TWO men read this startling report with unusual interest. They were William Montgomery and Anthony Boggs. It was the connection of our young hero with the murdered woman that caused this feeling in the minds of each. But the motives of their interest in him differed widely. The former thought only for the boy's good, while the latter would have felt happy had the lad lain dead.

Mr. Montgomery was puzzled. The circumstance was a most remarkable one. The suspicion that Ben was connected with the crime suggested itself to him, and not unnaturally. But he would not entertain this view. "For," said he, "the boy proved himself honest and worthy of my confidence, and it shall not fail him now. Before this mystery is cleared up he may need it, and need, too, the help of a friend," continued the kind hearted lawyer.

On the other hand, the scheming Boggs was busily revolving dark plans in his mind—plans that were designed to penetrate to the very fountain head of our young hero's life, and turn his

sunny nature from its natural course to a chilly and cheerless existence.

“The night before last, according to his own story, he had trouble with her, and left her house at a late hour,” argued Boggs to himself, as he studied the various plots that had suggested themselves to him.

“I can prove this by his quarreling with my boy at midnight. This shows he was not at home, and why wasn’t he there? That’s the question which he will have to answer, and the paper said she had been dead probably twenty to forty eight hours.

“Ah, I have it at last!” said the villain, rubbing his long, thin hands together, and smiling a cold, triumphant smile; “I have it—*he shall be the murderer!*”

This utterance, awful as it may seem, referred to the helpless lad, now on the Island, and that through the acts and falsehoods of Perry Boggs himself.

“And why not?” continued the wily schemer. “He is now a prisoner, and this fact alone would go against him; arrested on the very night of the murder, and in a quarrelsome mood, too! The very best of evidence; yes, the very best.

“He has no friends, and no one to help him; no friends,” and the man’s countenance fell as he repeated the last two words.

William Montgomery, the noted lawyer, sprang before him in his imagination, and he saw him befriending and defending the lad ; saw him sifting the evidence and penetrating deeply into the case as if aided by intuition ; saw him reading acts, motives, and interpreting them without hesitation ; saw him review the boy's history, and look beyond him and beyond the dead woman ; saw him fix his keen, penetrating eyes upon others—upon one other !

Ah, this was the thought that blanched his cheek, and froze the very blood in his veins !

He rose, and walked excitedly up and down the room ; then, feeling himself unable longer to bear the strain unaided, poured from a decanter a large glass of brandy and drank it at a single gulp.

This soon revived his spirits, raising them so effectually that he warmed again over this evil plot.

Another glass of brandy gave him confidence in himself and in his ability to overcome opposition.

And now he felt determined to push his plan, which was to have Ben apprehended as the murderer.

Mr. Montgomery's importance dwarfed—and the probability that he would trouble himself for a gamin was most remote.

“In fact,” said he, “the boy told me he had only seen this man once, so I need not worry about him. I’ve always got through with my business in some way, and I’ll succeed in this, too, or my name ain’t Anthony Boggs.”

And by way of emphasis he brought his fist down upon the table.

“Yes,” he continued, now well warmed by the brandy, “my mind is made up; that gamin *is* the murderer, and he will have to pay the penalty. He must be arrested at once. I will, I—er—I——”

But here was the rub. What could the author of this plot do without implicating himself? This idea just occurred to him when he found it necessary to decide upon his action.

He wished to keep himself in the background, and remain entirely unknown in the matter; but how could it be done? Some one must point suspicion to the boy, or the plot would fall through.

“But who will do it?” asked Boggs of himself, puzzled to know how to proceed.

He was wise enough to realize that a plot on which turned life and death was a pretty serious matter, and one that might prove disastrous to its author.

“If I said anything,” he argued to himself, “that would cause his arrest, I should be dragged into court.”

This thought reduced his temperature to quite a frosty point once more. He seemed to dread the sight of all places of justice.

“But it must be tried,” said he to himself, with an emphatic gesture, “for this boy once out of the way, and then——”

At this point this scheming rascal's thoughts were interrupted by Perry, who burst in upon him.

Perry knew nothing of Ben's life. He did not even know his name, and had no knowledge of his father's visit to the boy in the station house. He knew simply that Ben was a ragpicker—a very lively gamin, by the way—and as he read the notice inserted by Artemas Diggs, the detective, he recognized Mother Grimmi's name as the same as that of the murdered woman.

It was a coincidence that struck Perry as “quite too odd, you know,” and the thought actually suggested itself to his thin intellect that the boy, for whom the reward was offered, might possibly be the same one who had frescoed his face but a few hours before.

And the touches of the artist's hand were still most conspicuous in the vicinity of the young dude's left eye, where a very dark color had been spread as an artistic contrast to the lighter and brighter tints which were effectually daubed about his entire face.

Acting upon this supposition, Perry went to his father's room, paper in hand, and called his attention to Mr. Diggs' notice.

Boggs senior read it hastily. "Curse that boy," was his vindictive reply, as he savagely threw the paper upon the floor.

"Why, what is wrong now?" asked Perry, frightened at such a display of temper.

"Everything is wrong! It is enough to drive one mad!" was the petulant reply.

"What is it that would drive you mad?"

Not for thousands of dollars would he have answered the question, even to his own son.

"This infernal worry and anxiety, and all for you, too!" answered the father.

"All for me!" exclaimed Perry, alarmed at his father's words and manner.

"Yes, for you. But leave me alone. I don't want to talk to you now; I have matters to think about."

And so had Perry; for this revelation from his father caused him to think as he never had thought before.

That something of a mysterious nature formed a connecting link between his father and our hero now seemed certain to him.

And he studied and pondered over the matter, thinking as earnestly and steadily as one of his caliber could think. But had his mind been

ten times more logical and powerful, he would have accomplished nothing more in the way of solving the mystery ; for the cold, wicked facts were too deeply hidden for him to penetrate to them.

Left alone once more, the schemer studied his plot in the light of the new revelation made by this notice of Artemas Diggs.

It looked less feasible now than ever. The result, if it could be gained, would be a perfect triumph for him and his ; it would silence for all time the ever watchful something within, which was crying, by day and by night as well, danger, danger, danger ; and yet the chance was too hazardous for him to take. He shrank from the consequences that might ensue.

“ No,” he said decisively, “ it won’t do. I must fall back upon my first plan.” And he immediately walked to the side of the room and rang the bell for his coachman.

XIII.

WHILE our hero is watched by the sleepless eye of city justice, and while the plotting and anxious Boggs is bringing about measures for the fulfilment of his nefarious scheme, I will invite you to accompany me to another scene, where I will present you to some new friends.

In the "up town" portion of the city, on one of our famous avenues, where residences as fine as any in the world are numerous, Commodore Hopkins sat in the beautiful drawing room of his palatial home, with his wife and only child—a daughter of perhaps fourteen years of age.

Fairer features than hers are seldom seen, and yet they were rendered less noticeable by her still more fascinating eyes.

She lay in a half reclining position, with her long dark hair falling in natural waves over the pillow upon which she rested.

Her complexion, naturally white and delicate, was yet paler now, as if bleached by the early symptoms of disease.

Her father and mother looked anxiously at her pale and fast fading cheek, and, as if moved by a

single purpose, each struggled to repress a sigh, that the other might be spared the pain it would produce. For each knew only too well the sad message it would bear.

Presently the door bell rang, and Dr. Chadbourne, their family physician, joined them in the drawing room.

“And how is my little girl today?” said the doctor as he took his patient by the hand, after having received a warm greeting from Commodore Hopkins and his wife.

“I hope I am better, doctor,” was Bertha’s cheerful reply.

“I hope you are,” rejoined the physician.

His manner was closely observed by the anxious father and mother, as he felt her pulse, listened to her breathing, and tested her lungs.

“I think, commodore,” said the physician, “that a change would do Bertha far more good than medicine.”

“I have thought of that myself,” replied the father; “but what sort of a change would you recommed?”

“If her lungs were really affected, I would make a different suggestion; but as I believe her weakness is entirely due to an exhausted state of the system, I would advise a long sea voyage. Nothing, in my judgment, would do her more good.”

“ It seems a little strange, doctor, that we should both have come to the same conclusion. I have talked the matter over with my wife, and had decided to ask you for your opinion upon such a treatment.”

“ It is odd, to be sure, but your early life on the sea taught you, no doubt, the benefits to be derived from an ocean voyage.”

“ Do you mean a trip to Europe ? ” asked Mrs. Hopkins.

“ Oh, how jolly it would be to go there ! ” put in Bertha.

“ Yes, it is always jolly to go to Europe,” replied the doctor ; “ but I mean you shall take a much longer trip, say to Australia, or perhaps to China ; and go by a sailing vessel, away from the nauseating smell of a steam engine.”

Bertha looked thoughtful now. It seemed such an awful distance, that she hardly knew whether to feel pleased at the prospect or not.

“ Would Australia be a good objective point ? ” asked the commodore.

“ Yes, I think, in fact, as good as any that could be named.”

“ It seems so to me, for the winds on the Pacific are warm and invigorating.”

“ Yes, and then the trip in a sailing vessel will consume seven months. A long ocean voyage is just what she should have.”

“If you settle upon Australia,” continued the commodore, “we will go in one of my own ships, for I have one now in port loading for Sydney.”

“That is fortunate, indeed,” returned Dr. Chadbourne, and his face lighted up as if some piece of good luck had befallen him personally.

“But how soon does she sail?” asked Mrs. Hopkins, wondering if they could get ready in time.

“In about a week, I think,” replied her husband.

“Is she a safe ship? Of course she is, though,” put in the doctor.

“She is one of the best on the ocean,” replied Commodore Hopkins, “and is almost new.”

“Oh, papa, is it my ship?” asked Bertha, who was an interested listener.

“Yes, it is the Bertha Hopkins,” replied her father affectionately.

“Oh, won’t it be jolly to sail in her—in my own ship!” exclaimed Bertha, with some enthusiasm.

“We will go in her, then,” returned Commodore Hopkins, “if the doctor really advises it.”

“I do, indeed,” said Dr. Chadbourne. “I have given the matter careful thought, and am satisfied that you could make no wiser move.”

“I think so myself; and besides, we shall

have many advantages on board of our own vessel."

"*My* own vessel, papa," suggested Bertha.

"Yes, your vessel, my dear, for everything that belongs to your mother and myself is yours."

"Oh, how rich I am, if I have so many ships and all your business and money, and this house and furniture!"

"I wish I were worth half as much," said the doctor good naturedly; "but now, my little girl, you must make up your mind to get well and strong, so that you can enjoy all these riches." And after consulting further with the commodore and his wife, and advising them how to prepare for the journey, he took his leave.

The excitement attendant upon the preparations for so long a journey had an excellent effect upon Bertha's health; so when the day came for saying good by to her dear old home, and taking the carriage for the pier from which they were to start, she did it bravely, and showed such physical vigor that both her father and mother stepped upon the ship with lighter and happier hearts than they had known for many days.

XIV.

ANTHONY BOGGS directed his coachman to take him directly to a certain solicitor, whose office was in the lower part of the city.

Here he arranged with the lawyer to get Ben's discharge from the Island.

"Make all possible haste," said Boggs, "for there is no time to be lost."

"You shall be obeyed, sir," was the response.

"And have him taken to your office, and kept there till you receive further orders from me."

"I understand your wishes perfectly."

"Of course, if you hear from me before he is brought from the Island, you will act on my latest advice, and take him wherever I direct."

"Certainly."

"Very well, then, I will rely upon you," said Boggs, as he hurried from the room.

He now drove to one of the docks on the East River, beside which lay a large, handsome ship, and quickly leaving his carriage went aboard.

Everything was bustle and confusion; sailors and stevedores were hurrying hither and thither, loading the vessel and making ready for a start.

"You are just in time, Anthony, to see me again before starting," said a large, dark complexioned man, with easy familiarity.

This was the captain of the ship, and his manner indicated that he and his visitor were old friends. Caleb Steel was his name.

"I am glad I am not too late," answered Boggs nervously.

"So am I; but tell me, old fellow, what excites you so much."

"I was afraid I would not be in time to catch you, and I have been hurrying."

"Well, the time is limited, for a fact."

"Why, how soon do you sail?" asked Boggs, now fearing that he might be too late to accomplish the purpose he had in view.

"Well, about two hours from now I'll be saying good by to New York."

"Couldn't you delay starting for an hour or so longer, to accommodate me, if I need the time?" asked Boggs.

"What, old fellow, do you want to come with me?"

"No, not exactly myself, but I want you to do me a favor."

"You can rely upon me to do Anthony Boggs a favor at any time," returned the captain.

"I knew I could, and now come with me to your cabin, and I will tell you what I want."

In the cabin Boggs went on to say :

“ A matter that has annoyed me a good deal has come up since I saw you, and I want to put a stop to it at once. It is so foolish in itself that I don't like to explain it, and moreover it is sometimes delicate, as you know, to talk over family matters even with so good a friend as I know you to be to me. Feeling, then, as I do, I know that you will not ask me for my motives in pursuing the course I have decided upon.”

Caleb Steel was quite off his guard.

“ Certainly not,” said he ; “ Captain Steel pry into a friend's family affairs ! Well, I guess not.”

Boggs had thrown him entirely off the track by his adroit deceit, and had effectually silenced his curiosity for the present.

“ I knew you would spare me the embarrassment, captain, and yet be equally ready to do me a favor. Some men have so little regard for others that their curiosity must be satisfied before they stir an inch, but not so with Captain Steel.”

This flattery pleased the captain greatly. He was conceited, and he enjoyed nothing better than having his conceit tickled.

“ You are right, Anthony, you are right ; but tell me what I can do for you,” said he.

“ That is what I am coming to now,” returned

the schemer, and laying his hand on the captain's shoulder, he continued :

“I have sent for a boy, or rather sent my attorney to bring him here as soon as possible. He is the one whose association with my family has caused all my uneasiness, and I want to get him out of the way before his evil influence produces any worse results.”

This was most effective in convincing the captain that he should not try to get at the secret that prompted his friend's action. On the contrary, it quite satisfied him that he knew well enough already what the nature of the trouble must be.

“And you are just right in guarding your family and keeping Perry away from bad associations. I tell you, Anthony, bad company will spoil the best boy in the world,” said Caleb Steel, with a show of knowledge.

“Yes, I know that only too well,” said the scheming Boggs sadly, as if the captain had touched upon the true cause of his sorrow, while really he had to struggle to restrain a smile of triumph at his own cunning in misleading so effectually the one to whom he now looked for relief.

“And as you wish to get him out of the way I suppose you want me to take him,” said the captain.

“ Yes, that is just it. I hated to come to you, fearing it would be a bother, and then I remembered what you told me, when I helped you out of your difficulty, about doing me a favor, so I decided to come.”

“ Well, as I told you then, nothing in reason would be too much trouble for me to do it for you, so you can bring the boy on, and I will take him as you wish,” returned the master of the ship heartily.

“ Thank you a thousand times,” said Boggs, taking his friend’s hand in his own. “ I knew you would say yes, and wishing to show you some proof of my appreciation I have ordered sent to you for your own use a dozen cases of champagne and an equal amount of old Kentucky whisky.”

This statement made Caleb Steel very happy, as nothing suited him better than for his friends to show their appreciation of him in precisely this way, for Caleb was not a teetotaler either in sentiment or practice ; and now he thanked Boggs as warmly as the latter thanked him.

“ By the way, how old is the boy ? ” asked the captain.

“ Fourteen or fifteen, I should say—old enough to work, anyway,” was the reply.

“ That is what he will have to do on this ship.”

“ And that is what he should do. Understand me, captain—I have no tender sentiment about this gamin ;” and he again placed his hand on Caleb's shoulder and winked significantly.

“ I think I understand you.”

“ I hope you do, for otherwise you might shield him from the dangerous places, thinking you were doing me a favor,” said the villainous schemer.

“ Yes, I see,” returned the master of the vessel thoughtfully.

“ There are dangerous places, I believe, captain, in the life of a sailor.”

“ Dangerous places ! Well, that don't half express it.”

“ Just so, and when you have anything very dangerous to be done, you order your least valuable help to do it, I suppose.”

“ Why should you think so ?” asked the captain in lieu of an answer.

“ Well, you see, I argued that, if the boy who did it were lost overboard, the loss to you would be less,” said Boggs, in so suggestive a manner that his meaning was clear to the captain.

“ Why, do you think I would intentionally have the boy drowned ?” asked the latter in surprise.

“ N-n-no, I didn't say that, captain, but—er-er—well, of course I would not want you to

be responsible for any *accident* that might befall him, and you wouldn't be, either, if misfortune should overtake him in the shape of an *accident* ; ” and Boggs looked straight at the captain, and again winked in the same suggestive manner as before.

“ I understand from what you say, and your manner, that you would be glad if the boy were never to return home again,” rejoined the master of the ship.

“ You understand me perfectly now, and knowing your friendship for me, I shall have bright hopes of the outcome.”

Caleb Steel paused and looked down to the floor in deep study. Presently he was interrupted by the mate, who said he was wanted in another part of the ship.

“ In the mean time,” said Boggs, “ I will go and get the boy, and return as quickly as possible. Do not sail till I get the boy aboard ; ” and he hurried to his carriage and drove back to the solicitor's office.

XV.

WHILE Boggs was on the ship arranging the more important details of his plot, his solicitor was busy effecting Ben's release from city custody.

At the Jefferson Market Police Court the solicitor got the lad's discharge, by giving bonds to the extent of three hundred dollars as a guarantee of Ben's good behavior for thirty days.

This of course had been provided for by Boggs, so his attorney took no personal risks in the matter. The discharge paper went through its regular course and was then taken to the Island.

The solicitor made arrangements to have Ben brought immediately to his office on his return to the city, and then returned to his sanctum to await further orders from his client.

Soon after this Boggs came in, as expected, and was fully informed of all that had been done.

"How soon will he be here?" asked he anxiously, for every minute seemed an hour, for it was nearly time for the ship to sail.

"I am expecting him now," was the response.

“Bring him to me as soon as he comes—do not trust him to any one, but come yourself,” commanded the scheming villain.

“Yes, sir, but—er——”

“But what?” interrupted Boggs peevishly, as the possibility of some unexpected delay suggested itself to him.

“I started to ask you, sir, where you can be found. Without knowing this, I cannot very well take the boy to you,” returned the attorney, with a tinge of sarcasm, however dangerous to his business interests it might prove.

“Ah, yes, I forgot that! Come direct to the ship *Bertha Hopkins*, on the East River, near Wall Street—you can easily find her.”

“You will be on board, I suppose?”

“Yes, and in the captain’s stateroom.”

“But how shall I explain to the boy why I rush him aboard that ship?”

“You may say to him that the gentleman who called at the station house to see him, and who promised to be present at the trial to get him free, wants to see him—that he is spending the day with the captain of the ship *Bertha Hopkins*, and that he wants to see him at once on his release from custody, and that is why he asks him to come on the ship.”

Ben was most agreeably surprised at being returned from the Island. And now, when he

entered the solicitor's office and learned the story of his release from the island of city justice, his heart went out to his benefactor, and he condemned himself for having so hastily formed a prejudice against him.

So instead of going to the ship with a feeling of suspicion, he went with a light heart, prepared to thank the man, over and over again, who had done so much for him.

"Oh, what a pretty ship," exclaimed our young friend as he drew near the Bertha Hopkins. "I almost wish I was going on her myself." How little he knew then of the plot that was being sprung upon him! Could he have known this, and the wicked purpose of Boggs, how he would have shunned the vessel!

Just ahead of him, passing up the gang plank into the ship, were Commodore Hopkins and wife and daughter and nurse.

Ben eyed them critically, and thought if he were a sailor on that ship he should be glad to have such pleasant looking passengers. He had no idea, however, of being a sailor then, and gave them no further thought for the present.

The solicitor hurried him toward the captain's room.

Now Boggs had made it plain to the master of the ship that Ben must be betrayed into going to sea with him.

In justice to the captain I will record the fact that he did not take kindly to this idea, and yet he disliked to offend one who had previously done him a favor, so he yielded to Boggs' villainous project.

"If I had known half as much of this scheme as I do now," he said to himself, "I would have had nothing to do with the boy. I do not like smuggling him off to sea, anyway. Ten chances to one it will bring us bad luck," and he looked as if almost persuaded now to refuse point blank to have the boy come into the ship. Boggs noticed this, and was shrewd enough to change his tactics at once.

He had been trying to get the captain to take Ben into his room, and thus hold him till after the ship had got well to sea, but the latter's attitude in the matter had changed so conspicuously that he decided to remain aboard the ship himself till she had put to sea, and then to return to the city on the tugboat that towed her down the Bay.

Acting on this plan, he left the master of the ship, and went to the latter's room, where he waited alone for the appearance of the solicitor and Ben.

The ship was nearly ready to leave the pier; the captain was busy with preparations for starting, and was, moreover, not in the mood for further discussion of the boy's future.

Therefore the schemer occupied his time in writing a letter to the captain which showed very clearly his wishes. It was a cruel piece of villainy, that urged measures regarding our young friend which for the present I forbear to give. And before this letter was finished he was interrupted by the arrival of his solicitor and Ben. "Here is your young friend," said the attorney as they stepped into the room.

Boggs looked up nervously, and as he saw the lad before him, with his fine, well formed features and manly appearance, he even colored with shame at his own villainy.

Ben had expected to see his benefactor—the kind gentleman who had called upon him at the station house and who had now secured his release from the Island. And he looked at the solicitor questioningly, as much as to say, "This is not the man. Why did you bring me here?"

"Good morning, young man," said Boggs, by way of opening the conversation.

"Good morning, sir," said Ben suspiciously.

"I am afraid you thought I neglected you the morning of your trial, but I met with an accident that kept me from being present as I promised you."

"As you promised me!" exclaimed our hero. "When did you promise me that?"

"Why, in the station house when I called to

see you a few mornings ago. I should think you would remember that."

"I do remember it, sir, but—er—well you didn't look the way you do now."

Boggs grew very red in the face. He had, through his excitement and anxiety, forgotten his disguise on that morning, and now he was caught by the lad in this piece of trickery.

He stammered out an apology for an explanation, which was too transparent to deceive Ben.

The latter studied his face carefully, and saw that the features were the same as those of the man who called upon him that morning. But the man's face, as it now appeared, he felt sure he had seen before the episode of the jail.

Boggs questioned him about the Island, and impressed him with the idea that he had had very hard work to secure his release, but he added that whatever effort he had put forth had been done cheerfully.

Our young friend thanked him sincerely for his assistance, and began to feel very kindly toward him, whoever he was.

"I am only too glad that I could help you out of the trouble, for you did not get fair play. As I told you before, the other boy was responsible, for he commenced the fight."

This was an unfortunate remark for Boggs, for it suggested a new train of thought to Ben.

“Yes, but the judge would not believe me,” said he abstractedly, and he looked sharply at the man before him.

“Perry Boggs commenced the trouble,” he said to himself. “Boggs, Boggs,” he repeated several times over—ah, that name kindles anew his memory, and starting from the scene in front of the “White Elephant,” where he first learned Perry’s full name, he followed the trail back in his thought till he came to the carriage at the Star Theater.

And here he sees Perry, his father, and the kind hearted lady just as he saw them on that eventful night.

He compares the pictures in his mind with the man actually before him, and starts back with a sense of alarm as the fact dawns upon him that his supposed benefactor is no other than Perry’s father.

XVI.

A GUILTY conscience is always alive to danger, always watchful, suspicious, anxious; thus Boggs followed every look and act of Ben with keen, nervous eyes.

So when the latter stared back with alarm at his sudden discovery, the wily villain instantly knew the meaning. He read the lad's very thoughts—thoughts that made him turn pale at the mere suggestion of his own rascality.

But he had been too long accustomed to evil to easily lose his presence of mind, and now he showed a deep knowledge of human nature by skilfully hurling Ben's discovery back upon him.

“You act as if you had made some startling discovery,” said he, looking the lad sharply in the face.

Boggs' bold assurance threw Ben somewhat off his guard, and tended to embarrass him, as if he had done some unbecoming act.

“Yes,” he faltered in reply.

“Then it is very startling,” pursued Boggs, vigorously taking advantage of the lad's embarrassment—“startling that I should go your bail

and make all the effort to get you away from the Island—startling, and why? Simply because you think perhaps you have seen me before, or some other nonsense?”

Ben was figuratively driven into a corner, and did not know what to say for himself. He had been attacked in a way that he little expected, and for a time could think of no suitable reply. But soon his self possession came to him again, and knowing he was right he said, somewhat sharply:

“I don’t think I was surprised at nonsense, sir. It was because I just remembered where I saw you first.”

“And where was that?” asked Boggs, while he dreaded the answer.

“It was in Union Square a few nights ago, and later in the evening as you came out of the Star Theater,” answered the lad, now making his enemy wince and grow very red in the face.

“I suppose you are sure of that?”

“Yes, sir, I am sure of it.”

“What if you did see me?”

“Simply seeing you there didn’t amount to anything.”

“What do you mean by ‘simply seeing me’?”

“I should think you would know without asking.”

“Why so?”

“Do you remember what you said to me in the station house about seeing the fuss between Perry Boggs and me?”

“Yes, but what of that?”

“You saw us, did you?”

“Yes, I said.”

“And then told me afterward that Perry—your son——”

“My son!”

“Yes, sir; your son, or the chap you called son.”

“You must be crazy.”

“No, I’m not crazy. I heard you call him your son, and saw you try to get him into your carriage after the theater. And I saw you drive off, too, with a lady, so I can’t understand how you could see Perry and me,” said the lad firmly.

It seemed now Ben’s turn to drive his enemy into the corner, and he did it so successfully that Boggs appeared staggered by the boy’s boldness.

But he was a crafty villain, and he did not allow himself to lose his temper at so critical a moment; so, however disagreeable this catechising, he submitted as best he could, that Ben might continue to be absorbed in the subject.

He even managed the conversation so that it grew more and more spirited, and thus the time passed till the ship had cleared the dock, and Boggs had gained his point.

A heavy lurch of the vessel was now felt, and the solicitor jumped up with an alarmed look, and grabbed the door knob.

"Come back to your seat," demanded Boggs roughly, and the solicitor obeyed meekly.

"But I felt the ship roll," he faltered apologetically.

"Nonsense, you are dreaming."

"Well, *I felt* it move, and I am not dreaming," put in Ben.

"Something probably fell and jarred it, then," answered Boggs.

The lad felt uneasy, and as if some conspiracy were on foot; but it did not at first occur to him that he was in danger of being taken to sea, so long as Boggs and the solicitor remained on board.

And suppose he had realized it, what could he have done?

He might have protested, to be sure, but he was yet practically a prisoner—only out of jail by being under a bond for good behavior, and thus Boggs actually had him in his power, for at will he could have sent him back to the Island.

But now the solicitor's feeling of alarm spread to Ben, who felt the motion of the ship as if she were moving through the water, and for the first time the thought of a compulsory sea voyage occurred to him. A shudder passed over him at

this prospect, and then he determined to find out if it were already too late to get ashore.

Accordingly he made a move for the door, but was prevented from reaching it by Boggs, who suddenly sprang before him and placed himself against it.

"I want you to let me out," said Ben indignantly.

"Is that so?" returned Boggs sneeringly.

This made the fire show in the lad's eyes.

"*Yes, it is so,*" he answered in a most determined tone.

"Well, I won't," was the reply.

"You are a cowardly villain, and this proves it," said the boy boldly.

"Be careful what you say," replied Boggs savagely, for his temper had now come to the front.

"You have smuggled me aboard this ship to get me away from New York. Perhaps you are afraid I will get after that dude son of yours again."

Boggs made no reply to this, only he looked very ugly.

"And perhaps before I get through with you I may find out another reason for your wanting to get me out of the way," continued the lad.

This thrust made Boggs wince so noticeably that Ben remarked the effect with surprise. He

had spoken at random, as it were, but the words touched the schemer on a tender spot.

At this moment the captain entered his room and looked sharply at Ben.

“Well, captain, here he is,” said Boggs in a confused manner, as he pointed to Ben.

“So I see,” returned the officer, with a dark look.

“I will turn him over to your care now,” said Boggs, as if he had authority to do with Ben as he chose.

“But he has no right to turn me over to you, captain, or to any one else,” said our hero indignantly.

“Enough of that, youngster,” said the captain, in a severe tone, that fairly froze the lad’s spirits.

He saw that it was useless to protest further. He had been ensnared by Boggs and his solicitor, and now must make the best of his situation.

The captain called one of his mates, and taking him aside, talked so low that Ben could not make out what was said. That the conversation was about himself he felt sure by their manner, and he strained his ears to try and catch a few words.

Presently the mate turned to him and said, “Come with me, my lad,” and our hero followed him, leaving Boggs, the solicitor, and Captain

Steel alone in the stateroom. This was the boy's real separation from the land—from old New York, and from every one he had ever known.

What a sickening sensation crept over him as he thought of this, and then of the dangers of the sea and the cruel treatment he would perhaps receive !

At first he felt very bitter toward Boggs, who, by his treachery, had brought him there, but now he was more sick at heart than otherwise, and for the moment too greatly depressed to feel a just sense of indignation at the gross wrongs that had been done to him.

The mate, in whose charge he had been placed, informed him that he must act as cabin boy, and that meant that he must wait upon the officers and passengers of the ship.

These are the chief duties of a cabin boy, but sometimes other service is thrust upon him, as Ben learned to his sorrow.

Off Sandy Hook, Boggs and the solicitor left the ship and got aboard the tug that had towed the Bertha Hopkins from port ; in this way they returned to New York—the one going to his barren law office, and the other to his rich home on Fifth Avenue.

Just before they left the ship, Boggs handed a letter to the captain which he had written in the

latter's cabin, and which contained some very plain suggestions regarding Ben—suggestions of so wicked a nature that he feared the master of the ship might rebel, even now, against taking the lad with him, had he personally urged the points contained in this letter.

XVII.

BEN saw Boggs and the solicitor climb aboard the tug, and watched the little boat with intense interest as it turned around and steamed away for home.

How he wished himself aboard of her to be taken back to New York, where he could make known Boggs' rascally acts !

He felt sure that Mr. Montgomery would help him in this, and would do everything possible to secure the villain's punishment.

And this thought reminded him that he had not let Mr. Montgomery know anything of his whereabouts.

"If I had only done so," he said to himself sorrowfully, "he might have kept me out of Boggs' clutches, and now I wouldn't be in this great ship bound for, I don't know where—perhaps the bottom of the ocean."

"The bottom of the ocean." He repeated these words with a shudder. How he wished there was yet some way for him to escape !

Greater and greater the distance grew between himself and the little tug. He watched her with an intense eagerness, while the idea of escaping

from the ship took, every minute, a firmer hold upon him.

“I was smuggled on here, any way, and am under no obligations to remain, so I will leave the very first chance I get, and go back to New York.”

This was a very easy resolution to form, and quite a natural one, under the circumstances; but to put it into effect meant much more than he imagined.

He formed, however, several hasty plans, one of which was to slip away from the ship at her first stopping place; but this did not promise very well for him, as he afterward learned, for the captain did not intend making port till he reached the Cape of Good Hope.

Now the tug had entirely disappeared from view, and no longer was there a bit of land within the reach of his eye.

The sky was overcast, and a thick fog that settled upon them hastened the darkness.

He was called upon for this and that—work that naturally falls upon the cabin boy.

These duties he performed gladly, as the employment drew his mind from himself.

Presently the captain sent for him to do some work in his cabin. Ben was nervous, and fast becoming very dizzy from the motion of the ship, which was now pitching and tumbling

more than was altogether good for the lad's stomach.

Consequently he did not catch the captain's ideas as quickly as the latter thought he should, and being already provoked that the boy was forced upon him he fired up at the slightest pretext, and pushed him roughly against a chest, saying :

" You landlubber ! Don't you know anything ? "

" I tried to do the best I could, sir, " replied Ben timidly.

" Do you call this the best you can do ? If so, you'd better throw yourself overboard, and then I'd be rid of you. "

And he said this as only an ugly sea captain, who is absolute monarch of his ship, can speak.

" The work is new to me, " the lad ventured to reply.

" You ought to know enough to do it if it is. "

" I shall try to please you, captain, " faltered Ben, as he reeled and fell heavily against the captain's bunk, from the sickness that had now got the better of him.

Captain Steel now realized the cause of the lad's awkwardness, and he actually felt a tinge of regret that he had been so hard upon him.

He stepped to his cabin door for some one to take the boy away. At that moment the boatswain happened to be passing.

“Here, boatswain, take charge of this boy till he gets over this sickness, and get him out of my cabin,” said the master of the ship.

The sturdy sailor obeyed at once, and removed Ben from the captain’s room to his bunk.

Ben was deathly sick.

“Don’t mind it, lad,” said the old tar encouragingly; “you will soon feel better.”

“I hope so,” returned Ben feebly, but most thankful for these kind words.

“Boys are most always sick, but it does them good in the end,” the sailor continued.

Ben made no reply to this—he was much too busy just at that instant.

“I knew it,” laughed the sailor good naturedly.

“Well, I’m feeling a thousand times better, any way,” answered Ben, after a few moments.

“Of course you are, but you’re not off watch yet.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“I mean you’ve not got your legs yet.”

“Let me see,” said Ben, and he stood upon his feet—only for an instant, however, for he seemed to get the impression, and he got it without apparent delay, that standing was not becoming to him.

Doubtless he was right in this conclusion. There are times, I have observed, when men—

big, broad shouldered fellows, too—feel the same way—feel so all the way down to their boot straps.

There was something, however, about the situation that pleased the boatswain, and he laughed the laugh of a jolly sea dog.

Such levity on the part of the sailor might not have seemed to Ben quite the proper thing. But it is certain that he offered no remonstrance—he hadn't the time, then, for discussing fine points of etiquette, for again he was devoting his entire attention to himself, and with a good deal of vigor, too. In fact, it seemed to him he had never before been so diligent in all his life.

“If it's all the same to you, I won't walk around any,” said he comically, when he thought it safe to venture a sentence of this length.

“No, I guess you won't, lad,” laughed the boatswain.

“Then I'll make myself as comfortable as I can.”

“There ain't much fun for you tonight on the Bertha”—he called the ship this for short.

“No, it don't seem much like fun,” returned Ben.

“Well, lad, don't mind it. If you're going to be a sea dog, you'll get used to hard knocks.”

“But I'm not going to be a sailor.”

“Not going to be a sailor?”

“No.”

“What are you here for, then?”

“’Cause I was smuggled aboard.”

“Smuggled aboard!” exclaimed the boatswain, and he gave a low, expressive whistle.

“Yes,” reasserted Ben.

“How did it happen?”

The lad explained, while the old sailor listened with rapt attention.

“You say he and the old man acted like friends?”

“You mean the captain?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, they did, and the captain called him Anthony, as if they were old friends.”

“There’s something wrong here, you may depend upon it,” said the sailor thoughtfully.

“The captain was ugly to me in his cabin, and because I didn’t quite suit him he said something about my throwing myself overboard, and then he would be rid of me.”

“’Pears as if he don’t want you, then.”

“If he don’t why did he smuggle me on here?”

“Perhaps the other man had a hand in the pie.”

“So he did.”

“Likely enough he wanted to get you out of the way for something.”

“I don’t see what it could be.”

“There might be a heap of reasons, and if you’re smart you’ll follow him till you find out. I like your cut, lad, and you can depend upon Dan Spiker for a lift in furlin’ that villain’s sails. I’ve knocked about these twenty years, and seen a great deal of cussedness off and on in my time.

“Depend upon it, I say, there is somethin’ crooked with this Boggs. And you say he is rich, and lives on the swell avenue in New York?”

“Yes; he lives on Fifth Avenue, and seems to be a rich man.”

The sailor made no reply, but whistled softly, as seemed to be his custom when thinking closely.

XVIII.

BEN felt he had made a friend in Dan Spiker, who would stand by him while on the ship. He had told him as much, and his honest, big hearted manner convinced the lad of his sincerity. Feeling thus assured of the boatswain's true friendship, Ben was less gloomy than before.

For the captain he felt a strong dislike, as he had good reasons for doing ; but this was of little importance in comparison with the bitter sentiment he now felt toward Boggs.

The conversation with Dan Spiker suggested a new train of thought to Ben. In fact, he had not examined into Boggs' motives for spirited him away, but now, as he argued the matter to himself, he saw that the latter must have had some strong purpose in getting him away from New York.

“ He shall suffer for this villainy if it takes me all my life to get square with him,” said Ben to himself with determination.

And then he wondered again and again what mystery connected him with Anthony Boggs. That there was something of the kind he felt

fully convinced, and he determined to unravel it.

The next morning he awoke possessed of a ravenous appetite, and feeling the perfection of health.

“Good morning, lad,” said Dan Spiker, when Ben appeared on deck. “You look like a new boy.”

“Well, I feel like one, too—new all through,” returned Ben.

“Read this,” said the boatswain, pointing to a small notice in a copy of the *New York Herald*, which he drew from his pocket.

Our hero ran his eye over it, and the color faded from his cheeks.

“After what you told me last night I thought it might mean you,” said Dan, referring to the notice.

“I think it does,” answered the lad, with a very puzzled look.

“What does it mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know Artemas Diggs, the man whose name is printed here?”

“No; I never heard of him before.”

“If it means you it’s curious what he wants.”

“I can’t tell nor can’t guess who he is.”

And now Ben opened the paper, and looking upon the first page saw, to his intense surprise, the big headlines announcing Mother Grimmi’s death.

This was the first intimation he had had of the affair, and to say that he was greatly surprised—startled even—would but faintly express his real feelings. “A probable murder,” and he read the line over several times, as if to be sure of his own senses.

“Are you growing sick again, lad?” asked Dan, as he noticed the boy’s pale face.

“No—er—but I can’t understand this matter.”

The sailor understood him to refer to the notice, and Ben was glad he construed his words in this way, for he felt that his situation was a delicate one—so delicate that he dare not make a confidant of any one at present.

“Mother Grimmi’s dead,” said he to himself, “murdered probably, and some one advertising for me—some one I never heard of, a detective, maybe; who knows?”

This view of the case startled him.

“Perhaps I’m suspected of being the murderer,” he continued, and the thought made the cold perspiration start.

Brutal as the old woman had been to him, he felt a degree of sadness at her sudden death, for she had made for him the only home he ever knew.

And now she had gone, he felt more alone than ever. The secrets concerning his early life, which she knew, were buried with her.

“One thing is sure,” said he to himself, by way of consolation, “if the officers are hunting for me, I’m better off on this ship than I would be in New York.”

He had already spent some time in Commodore Hopkins’ staterooms, helping the latter arrange things for the voyage. Ben found him very kind and social; but what pleased him far more than all this was the appearance of another—a sweet young girl of about his own age, the commodore’s daughter—Bertha Hopkins.

She had watched him with much interest as he did his work. Now and again she asked him some question which he answered timidly.

There was something odd about being addressed by such a pretty girl—odd indeed for him—for in his rough life he had never spoken to one of Bertha’s station.

He knew nothing of girl life, and like all boys growing up as he had, without their association, felt a prejudice against them, though if asked to define this prejudice he could have given no good cause.

However much Ben’s mind might have been warped in this way, it is certain, judging from late developments, that he made at least one exception to this rule; for as he became better acquainted with Bertha, he constantly planned to spend as much time as possible in her presence.

XIX.

IT is not the purpose of this story to recite the unimportant events that occurred on board the Bertha Hopkins farther than is really necessary that the reader may get the true coloring of the narrative.

Incidents, however, which in themselves seem trivial and commonplace, often grow in importance when connected with later developments.

My purpose is to bring together the various incidents in the life of our hero, and to arrange them so that the real bearing of one upon the other, and of each upon all, will be easily recognized by every one who follows Ben through his strange career.

During the first ten days of the lad's sea life nothing extraordinary occurred.

In this time, however, he became well acquainted with all on board, except the captain, and the more he saw of him the less he felt he knew of him.

Through Dan Spiker, the boatswain, the crew learned that Ben had been mysteriously smuggled aboard and forced into becoming cabin boy.

And this fact gave them a natural sympathy for him. Besides this, however, they liked him for his generous nature and agreeable manner. Therefore, he speedily became a favorite with sailors and officers alike—all except one, the captain.

The latter was severe, and sometimes almost cruel in his treatment of the boy.

Commodore Hopkins, much of whose life had been spent upon the sea, knew thoroughly the difference between proper discipline and abuse. He had noticed repeatedly the way Captain Steel treated our hero, and he felt sorry for him, and much annoyed that the master of the ship was capable of such cruelty.

Thus it happened one day, when the captain was unusually abusive to Ben, that the merchant, for such was Commodore Hopkins, approached unobserved and overheard the most vigorous portion of the tirade.

“Captain,” said he indignantly, and with a depth of meaning, “this abuse has gone far enough. This is not the first time I have noticed it ; and while I dislike to meddle with the captain of a ship, yet common humanity forces me to speak in behalf of this lad.”

Caleb Steel, the captain, grew very red in the face. Instantly his temper was at boiling point, and his pride was deeply cut.

“The discipline of this ship belongs to me, sir, I believe,” said he, as soon as he recovered from the surprise caused by this rebuke.

“Discipline!” exclaimed Commodore Hopkins. “Is that what you call it?”

“Yes, that is what I said,” doggedly came the answer.

“Then if such abuse as this is your idea of discipline, you shall never discipline another crew on my ships,” returned the merchant firmly.

This was a forcible argument to Caleb, for the very thought of losing his place, after all these years of hard work, gave him a sickening sensation, and he humbled himself before the owner of the ship sufficiently to apologize for his treatment of Ben.

He was a coward at heart, as bullies usually are, and therefore was easily cowed.

“He does nothing as he ought to,” said Steel falsely, referring to the lad, hoping by this remark to put himself in a more favorable light.

“Even if that is so, it does not warrant such cruelty; and, moreover, the boy has done everything for me with unusual intelligence,” returned the commodore; “but in my rooms he is treated kindly.”

The last part of this sentence had a sarcastic ring to it that made Steel wince.

But, regardless of his own bitter feelings, he felt there was but one card for him to play, and that one was marked "policy." Consequently he tried to excuse the matter, and promised Commodore Hopkins that he should have no further cause for complaint ; hoping by this means to reinstate himself again in the good opinion of the merchant.

Ben witnessed this scene with no little surprise. He had learned to look upon the captain of a ship, especially the captain of the Bertha Hopkins, as an absolute monarch.

How a passenger could have the hardihood to talk in this way to him he could not understand ; but that he appreciated the merchant's kindness is most certain.

Captain Steel retired to his cabin, and nursed his temper till he worked himself into an inordinate rage.

"The cursed lubber!" said he to himself, meaning Ben. "I'll make him walk the mark and pay for this mighty dear. I wish old Hopkins would tumble overboard, and that lubber with him."

Overboard !

Ah ! This is a suggestive thought ; he thinks of it as if it might, by some accident, actually occur, and should it, he would once more be lord of the ship.

“Overboard!” and he whispers the word to himself to see how it sounds to his ear—now a little louder he repeats it, and still again, while he takes from his pocket a letter.

Hastily running his eyes over it he reads these words in an undertone :

You will remember what I said to you this morning about dangerous places. You understood my meaning, I am sure. Carry out my suggestion and the house I own in Jersey City, worth \$5,000, shall be yours.

“Yes, I do remember what he meant,” said Caleb Steel to himself, as he meditated upon the dark thought before him.

“A five thousand dollar house, and no more trouble with old Hopkins on his account,” said Steel covetously. “Who would miss him any way—a ragged gamin without any friends?”

“Curse Boggs for bringing him on my ship,” he broke out savagely, after a pause, in which he seemed to study the possibilities of the case. “Why should he ask me to do his dirty work?” said he, with an ugly scowl.

“But——”

Ah! the five thousand dollars comes up before him again.

“Well, it’s more than the lubber is worth,” said Steel to himself, by way of compromising with his conscience.

“Five thousand dollars!”

How strangely fascinating these three simple words are to him as he speaks them aloud; and what a forcible argument they present. Now he drops his head into his hands and thinks.

His brows are knitted, as if some question of awful importance were pressing for an answer.

Doubtless his conscience is battling with the argument of the five thousand dollars. The former is sustained by his sense of right, by the laws of the state, by humanity, by the thought of his own family, by everything that is sacred and pure, and by Heaven itself. But against all this force stands boldly pitted a very subtle, dangerous enemy—*hard cash*. Which will appeal most strongly to this man, I wonder?

Ah, how he jumps at a slight noise, as if already guilty of crime! And thus startled, he looks pale and trembles like a convict.

“Curse this business!” he mutters with clinched teeth, and strikes his hand out forcibly, as if to hurl the thought from him.

But this was not so easily accomplished; for once having gained access to his mind, under favorable consideration, it clung there with demoniacal tenacity till it poisoned the man’s very thoughts.

Thus agitated, he opened a closet in the cabin and took from a case a whisky bottle—one of the very lot sent by Anthony Boggs. From it he

poured a large potion—larger than was his custom to take—and drank it with a smack, hoping by this means to drown his present annoyance.

“Old Crow,” said he, reading the label on the bottle; “mighty fine flavor, too, and went plumb to the right spot. I think I’ll try a little more.” And now another smack of approval.

Dev’lish good of Anthony, anyway, to send me this kind of stuff. There ain’t no better anywhere.”

Whisky—Anthony Boggs—Five thousand dollars.

Somehow they seemed all connected, and not only linked together, but attached to him as well.

“Yes—eh——”

And now he paused and rested his head on his hand.

“Well, if I must do it, I shall have to be mighty careful, that’s all,” said he, as if he had secretly given himself over to his devilish purpose.

“If I’m found out,” he continued—“but I won’t be. Caleb Steel knows what he is about. I’ll just wait my time, and *then*——”

The word “then” came out with emphasis, and there he stopped, for at that moment he was interrupted by one of the mates, who asked for certain orders concerning the sailing of the ship.

XX.

WHILE our young friend had been getting a little used to sea life, matters had taken a turn in New York that placed him in a most unfortunate position.

A post mortem examination had been held over the remains of old Mother Grimmis.

A heavy bruise was found on her forehead, as if she had received a terrible blow from a club, or something of that nature.

The skin was hardly broken, but the swollen, puffy condition of the flesh gave sufficient evidence to show that her head had, by an unknown means, come into forcible collision with some hard substance.

And whether this powerful blow had been leveled at her head by an assassin, or whether she inflicted it upon herself in falling, was a question that puzzled the inquest.

There were reasons in support of both theories.

The natural conclusion, however, was that she had been struck down with a cudgel, and that the blow had caused her death.

But careful examination showed that this was

not necessarily true, for her death might be accounted for in another way, and very naturally, too. When found, her head lay very near the stove, only a few inches from the edge of the ash pan—a cast iron pot with a thick edge. On this she might have fallen, and received her death blow.

“But would she have been likely to fall thus?” the jurors asked each other.

No, they thought she would not—not unless some special cause existed that would tend to produce such a result—a cause like heart disease, apoplexy, dizziness, or intoxication.

The autopsy revealed the fact that she had been a hard drinker. The tissues of her stomach were terribly inflamed and partially eaten away by alcohol.

It was further shown by chemical analysis that she was, at the time of her death, well under the influence of liquor. The gray and white matter of the brain showed signs of congestion. In fact, her whole system was so deranged that several diseases might have developed at any time, any one of which would have led to this fatal result.

It was, therefore, a very difficult case for the coroner, but one that doubtless would have been passed over lightly, owing, in part, to the woman's obscurity and miserable character, but for evidence which came out in the inquest and which pointed to foul play.

Almost immediately after the discovery of her dead body, several of the toughest characters who habitually frequented her den, and were spoken of as Mother Grimmis' gang, were arrested and held for appearance when wanted.

At this inquest, however, all were able to prove an alibi, and the evidence was of so strong a nature that they were discharged after being detained to give testimony upon the case.

And in this evidence Ben's connection with the old woman's den was clearly brought out.

The jurors looked at each other significantly. Here was a clue that promised fruitful results.

The "gang" were sharp enough to note this, and, that they might appear further removed from suspicion, gave their testimony a coloring that reflected very darkly upon Ben.

Inmates of the building were summoned, but none had seen any stranger enter Mother Grimmis' apartments, or leave them, on that fatal night.

It was learned from questioning the "gang" that the lad and Mother Grimmis had frequently quarreled.

This statement strengthened the theory now forming in the jurors' minds.

Circumstances were woven around Ben in such a way that suspicion pointed strongly to him, and the inquest took this view of the case.

They felt there was no positive evidence that the woman had been foully dealt with. It was one of those peculiar cases where death might have resulted from natural causes, or might have been the work of an assassin.

There were more reasons, however, for believing the former, and the coroner's verdict would have been rendered in accordance with this view but for the mysterious disappearance of Ben.

This in itself was so suspicious that the inquest did not feel justified in dropping the case without a proper investigation on the part of the courts.

XXI.

THE result of the coroner's inquest was published in the city papers much as I have given it in the chapter just ended.

And there were two men who read it with far greater interest than any others in the whole metropolis.

They were William Montgomery and Anthony Boggs.

The former was astounded at the idea. It seemed so improbable that the lad could be connected with such a crime, and yet there was before him the same circumstantial evidence that had been given to the coroner.

He handed the paper to his wife, pointing to the article for her to read, but said nothing.

They were at breakfast at the time.

"Oh, William! Can it be possible?" she said; "and he is the boy for whom we felt such sympathy."

"I can't believe it," replied Mr. Montgomery. "The evidence says nothing about the man who stepped out of a closet, and came between Mother Grimmi and the lad," he continued.

“That is so, but you know you have only the boy’s word for that.”

“That is very true ; but still, I believe what he told me. I am seldom deceived in reading character. Moreover, there is every reason for believing his story. In the first place, he showed himself an honest boy by bringing my dog to me, when he could easily have sold him for a good price. Again, if he had been guilty of this deed he never would have told us the story he gave of his life, and certainly he would never have let us know where he had lived—giving the name of the old woman—which he did, the very same that is here published.”

“Your view seems very reasonable, and I fully agree with you ; but where do you suppose he is now ?” returned the lady.

“Ah, that is a mystery ; but probably the secret will come out now, if he has not been spirited away for some purpose or other, by some designing villain.”

“I almost think he has, or he would have come to you as he promised.”

“So I think, and I shall see what I can find out.”

“Has your detective brought you any word yet ?”

“No, I have not seen Artemas Diggs for several days,” answered Mr. Montgomery ab-

stractedly ; " but I shall send for him to come and see me tomorrow about this matter," he added after a pause.

Anthony Boggs, on the contrary, had been hoping that this suspicion might fall upon Ben, so when he saw the report of the inquest he shouted to himself :

" Triumphant at last ! Anthony Boggs, you are safe from all the harm this young Arab can do you."

And he could hardly restrain his joy over the terrible misfortune that threatened the very life of our young friend.

Now he thought of the five thousand dollars he had promised Caleb Steel conditionally, and he wondered if there was no way by which he could withdraw the offer.

" For," said he, " it is like throwing so much money away, for if the gamin ever gets here alive the authorities will nab him, so he cannot bother me. I'll cable Captain Steel at Cape Town and tell him I withdraw my offer, and direct him not to do anything on my account. He said his first stopping place would be Cape Town. But, then, he won't be there for three or four weeks yet, and then, perhaps, it will be too late. The job may be done already, and he will claim his money—the dog !"

If Caleb Steel could have seen this villain's

expression as he uttered this remark his blood would have boiled.

“ Anyway, I’ll send the cablegram,” he continued, “ and I’ll make Steel prove when the *accident* took place if he ever asks me for the money. I can find out if the boy is on the ship when it arrives there, and the messenger’s receipt will tell if Steel gets the message.”

Accordingly the cablegram was sent to Cape Town with instructions to hold till the arrival of the Bertha Hopkins.

It was a queer thing to do, to cable so long before the vessel was due, but Boggs was so intent upon saving the five thousand dollar house that he acted on the impulse of the moment—not that he cared to prevent the crime he had incited.

But in the course of a day or two a new phase of this case began to be developed, which struck terror to the heart of Anthony Boggs.

The city authorities started out two detectives, to try to find Ben.

It was learned by them that a boy answering to his description had been sent to the Island for fighting, but that he had been returned on the surety of one Grymes Jessup, an attorney. They learned the date of the fight and then went to the policeman who made the arrest, to get the exact time of night when it occurred.

From him they learned the particulars of the

trouble, and got the name and address of Perry Boggs, which they entered in their notebooks.

Next they proceeded to the office of Grymes Jessup, the attorney.

The latter had been uneasy ever since seeing the report of the inquest, and now he showed positive alarm the minute the two detectives entered his scantily furnished office.

They proceeded at once to business, and asked him what relation he bore to Ben.

"A professional relation," was his answer.

"Did he solicit your services?" asked one of the men.

"No, sir, I can't say that."

"Why did you act for him, then?"

"It was my client I acted for."

"And the three hundred dollars bail you gave in your own name was for your client?"

"Yes."

"He authorized you to give it for him?"

"Yes."

"May I ask you the name of this client?"

"His name is Anthony Boggs."

"Boggs, did you say?"

"Yes."

The two detectives looked significantly at each other, and drew out the notebooks which contained the name of Perry Boggs.

"And he lives on Fifth Avenue, number —?"

“Yes, that is where he lives.”

“Thank you,” said the speaker. “But can you tell me where this boy Ben is now?”

“You will have to see Mr. Boggs for that information. That is his private business, so it would not be proper for me to talk about the matter.”

“Just so. Well, thank you for what you have said; we will not bore you further at present, but may call again.”

And the detectives passed out and started for the residence of Anthony Boggs.

XXII.

IMMEDIATELY after the two detectives left the office of Grymes Jessup, the latter hurried to a neighboring sanctum where a telephone was kept, and with this instrument called up Anthony Boggs.

“Some men just left my office to see you,” said he nervously.

“Who were they?” asked Boggs, alarmed lest some evil should, after all, overtake him.

“Detectives,” was the reply.

“What?” gasped the schemer, though he understood the word all too well.

“Detectives!” repeated Grymes Jessup, louder than before. “Don’t you see them. Be sure.”

Boggs supported himself against a table to keep from falling. “Detectives coming for me!” said he to himself, and he trembled from head to foot.

At this instant a lady opened the library door and entered the room.

And there before her was Boggs, white with terror, and looking as if he would faint as he held the telephone close to his ear.

"Why, what in the world is the matter?" exclaimed she, alarmed at his appearance.

The blood instantly rushed to his face, and his color became crimson.

"Let me finish with this man, then I will tell you," said he, to gain time.

"Anything more to say?" shouted he through the telephone to Grymes Jessup.

"You had better come to my office at once," returned the attorney.

"All right," was the reply.

"Good by," said Grymes, and hanging the telephone up he returned to his sanctum.

But Anthony Boggs pressed the instrument closer to his ear, and seemed to listen with renewed interest.

His back was now to the lady as he looked toward the transmitter, and he dreaded facing her, so he very cleverly pretended to be talking still, that he might have time for thought.

"I don't understand you," he called out, as if still actually talking to some one.

"Oh, yes, I see now;" and again he said, "is the market more quiet?"

All this deception was to avoid meeting the eyes of this lady. What should he say to her? It seemed to him that she was reading his very thoughts, and now saw him in his true character.

"Don't keep me in this suspense, Anthony, but

tell me what has happened," said the lady, alarmed and yet puzzled at the sudden change that had come over him as she entered the room.

"The bottom has tumbled out of one of my investments," said he falsely.

This excuse he invented while pretending to be engaged with the telephone.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said she feelingly. "Will you lose heavily?"

"A good stroke," said Boggs to himself, and he smiled at his own evil cunning. "I'm safe now from her suspicion, so I'll just cut this conversation short." Accordingly he shouted:

"Expect me in half an hour. I'll start at once. Good by;" and he turned and faced the lady.

She was a woman who would everywhere attract attention by her perfect figure and fine intellectual face, with its kindly, sympathetic expression. She was richly dressed, and her manner was commanding and refined. Could our young hero have seen her now he would at once have recognized her as the lady whom he saw on Fourteenth Street, as he leaned against the tree on that eventful night.

The peculiarity of Boggs' manner aroused her suspicions, and she fixed her eyes searchingly upon him, much to his visible discomfort.

His eyes fell before her steady, penetrating

gaze, and he moved toward the door like one convicted.

"The market," he muttered confusedly, "the market has——"

But he never finished the sentence, for at this instant a sharp pull at the door bell made him jump as if hit with a rifle bullet, and again the color left his face as completely as if he were dead.

"I must not be seen," said he excitedly, before he realized in what a suspicious light these words would place him. "Say I am not at home."

"But you are at home," returned the lady, "and I am not in the habit of saying what is not so."

"Take a seat in here, I will call Mr. Boggs," said the servant, as she ushered the two men into the drawing room.

"Here they come now," gasped Boggs, and there being no other avenue of retreat, he rushed into a closet like one demented.

"I thought Mr. Boggs was in here," said the servant as she came to the door to call him. "Two men want to see him."

"Apparently I am the only one here," answered the lady in her peculiar dignified manner. "But I will go with you and see what they want."

Boggs heard this and groaned.

"Would you like to leave any word for Mr. Boggs?" said the lady to the detectives as she entered the hall.

"We wanted to see him personally, madam," said one of the men. "But perhaps you can tell us something about the matter," he added, after pausing for a moment's thought.

"I may be able to do so," returned the lady, who seemed to know intuitively that some dark mystery was afloat.

"Well, then, what we want," he replied, "is to learn the whereabouts of the boy whose release from the Island Mr. Boggs secured by giving a bond for his good behavior, or rather, by instructing his attorney to do so for him."

"Mr. Boggs took a boy from the Island?" said she incredulously.

"Yes; and do you know nothing of the matter?"

"This is the first I have heard of it, sir."

"Then evidently we can learn nothing from you that will aid us in finding him."

"No, not unless you state the particulars about the boy, for if you do this, I might possibly call the case to mind," said the lady, who was now trying to gain some information regarding the matter.

Little by little, and by skilful tact, she got

the story from the detectives, all the facts they had learned, and now, for the first time, she knew the true cause of Perry's badly battered face.

And when she remembered that this occurred on the very night that she saw the lad by the tree on Fourteenth Street—the lad who impressed her so peculiarly—she naturally associated him with Perry's misfortune, because, in fact, the description of the boy by the detectives was quite true to him.

The matter troubled her so much that she found it impossible to throw it from her mind. There was a mystery about it that she could not understand.

She retired to her room to think as soon as the detectives had gone. She could not bear to join Boggs in the library—such a coward! And worse, for he was, as it now seemed to her, guilty of some crime, or he would never have acted as he did.

And now she had discovered the true cause of Perry's black eye and knew that he had told her a falsehood about it. This was beyond question, and the thought froze the affection she had felt for him.

XXIII.

BEFORE the detectives had got many blocks away, Boggs slipped out of his house, carefully avoiding all the inmates, and made his way, with all possible haste, to the office of his attorney.

He was nervous and agitated, and his face wore a look of unmistakable fear as he entered the presence of Grymes Jessup, Esquire.

"Have you seen them?" asked the latter, in a manner that showed his own alarm.

"No, but what is the row?" asked Boggs, while he seemed to shudder in anticipation of the answer.

"That boy," replied the attorney.

"Curse him! He will be the ruin of me yet," returned Boggs bitterly.

"And perhaps me, too," suggested Grymes Jessup coolly. "It was a bad piece of business, and they know it all."

Boggs' hands twitched nervously, and the color left his face.

"How did they find it out?" gasped he.

Grymes Jessup explained so far as he knew,

and after discussing the matter for a time, he and his client went to a noted counselor and sought advice.

From this legal light they learned that no law existed that would compel them, or either of them, to say anything whatever about the missing boy.

This view of the case was a surprise to Mr. Jessup, who thought he knew tolerably well what the law should be, even if, in fact, he knew very little of what it really was.

He looked at Boggs as if he questioned the soundness of the learned lawyer's advice, and Boggs, in turn, looked questioningly at the legal gentleman of great fame.

The latter, however, satisfied them that they could not be molested or forced to incriminate themselves in any way.

This information had a most cheering effect upon both Boggs and Grymes Jessup, and they agreed together to answer no questions touching upon Ben's whereabouts.

Nevertheless, their refusal to say anything upon the matter made their position all the more suspicious.

Later in the day, Artemas Diggs, the special detective employed by William Montgomery to look into the case, reported to the latter all the facts regarding Ben's trouble with Perry Boggs,

his arrest and conviction, and how his pardon was secured by Anthony Boggs, the father of the boy Ben punished so severely.

This information only served to increase Mr. Montgomery's interest in our young friend, and it strengthened his purpose to try and discover Ben's whereabouts, and to protect him, as far as possible, from suffering unjustly.

"This explains, then, why the lad did not keep his engagement and call upon me that morning," said the lawyer to himself; and he felt more than ever convinced of the boy's honesty.

But Ben was well at sea now, far away from Mr. Montgomery's aid, and from the strong hand of the law, which was waiting to grasp him on a charge of capital crime.

It was fortunate that he knew nothing of the suspicion that had been raised against him regarding Mother Grimmi's sudden and peculiar death.

Had he known this, his trials would have been almost beyond his strength to bear—a mere boy as he was—for, as I have already shown, his life on board the Bertha Hopkins was anything but desirable.

Since Commodore Hopkins' interference in his behalf, however, he saw a very favorable change in Captain Steel's manner toward him, and he tried to make the best of his enforced voyage,

always performing his duties in the most faithful manner.

Every day seemed to give him new life and new strength. The sea air robbed him of his pallor and gave him a rich color that indicated perfect health.

But the good effect of the ocean breezes was even more noticeable upon Bertha Hopkins than upon him. The salt air was a tonic to her; it quickened her appetite and invigorated her whole system. The cough that had so alarmed her parents was forced to give up its hold. Her strength returned, and the rosy color which had once been hers now came to her cheeks again.

Ben thought she was very pretty, but he liked her most for her kindness and agreeable ways. He had become very well acquainted with her, and during his spare moments they were together a great deal.

She liked the sea, and was out on deck much of her time, where she chatted familiarly with officers and sailors alike. But Ben being about her own age, and the only young person on board the ship beside herself, she naturally drifted toward him whenever she felt weary of reading and wanted a chat with some one other than her mother and father.

And thus the friendship of Ben and his fair young companion grew day by day. She told

him of her friends in New York, of her own elegant home, and pictured the life of luxury she had lived.

He listened to all this with the rapt attention that the average boy would show at the recital of an Indian war tale ; and in return he told her, little by little, much of his own peculiar experiences which he passed through on the busy streets of New York.

This phase of life was quite as new and interesting to her as the glimpse of wealth which she gave was to him.

And these simple anecdotes possessed a peculiar charm for each of these young people, situated as they were, away out in mid ocean, away from dear old New York and all former companions.

They were largely dependent upon each other for entertainment, but this burden—if burden it can be called—seemed to grow lighter day by day.

The books that Bertha brought with her somehow appeared to grow less and less interesting, while the stories of New York as related by Ben fascinated her.

But it is quite probable that this was due more to congenial company than to the merit of his stories or his superior way of relating them.

And now he began to think the life of a sailor was not so bad after all.

His resolution to desert the ship at the first port seemed unwise—in fact, the idea presented so many dangers that he very surprisingly decided to give up his purpose.

He learned that Bertha was bound for Australia, and it seemed to him all at once that he, too, would like to see that country.

XXIV.

CAPTAIN STEEL noted the friendship that had grown up between Ben and Bertha during their few weeks' association on shipboard, and he envied the lad the unmistakable pleasure he found in her presence. But as Caleb Steel was trying to win back Commodore Hopkins' good opinion, he dared not do anything to offend him. Therefore he did not interfere with Ben, saying to himself always, "Your time will come, you young lubber. Old Hopkins can say nothing to me if you *meet with an accident* some day," and then he would look at the weather to see if any signs of an approaching storm could be seen.

The Bertha Hopkins had been out nearly five weeks, and had encountered no storm of any consequence.

Fine weather continued day after day—just such weather as would ordinarily keep the master of a ship in high spirits, but on this occasion it was not so with Captain Steel.

He wanted to see a storm—not a light one—but one that would enable him to carry out his wicked plans.

At last it came, and struck the ship suddenly and with great fury, when she was not prepared for such a blast.

It was nearly night at the time, and the darkness shut in upon them almost without warning, as the storm itself had advanced.

The rain began falling in torrents, and the wind blew a fierce gale. The ship plunged and trembled as if it were a mere plaything tossed by the fury of the elements. All the crew were ordered aloft to take in sail, Ben being among the number. The great masts creaked and groaned with the terrible strain upon them, and swayed violently as the ship rolled and pitched in a way that threatened her destruction.

This was more of a storm than Caleb Steel had hoped to see, and every minute the force of the wind and rain seemed to increase.

He darted hither and thither, giving orders for the safety of the ship. The canvas could not be reduced quickly enough.

And now came a crash that painted terror upon every face—the foremast was gone—snapped like a reed before the fury of the gale.

The sails beat loudly as the men strove to take them in, and the rigging rattled so that it could be heard above the roar of the tempest.

In the excitement and anxiety of the hour, the captain quite forgot Ben and the plan he had

formed concerning him. But now, as he saw the brave tars make their way hand over hand in the ratlines, he called to mind his wicked purpose, and instantly sent for the lad.

The latter responded promptly to the summons, and was ordered sternly by the captain away to the main topgallant crosstrees to clear the rigging. The boy looked at the officer questioningly, as if he doubted his own senses.

"Start, you lubber!" shouted Caleb Steel, in a way that no longer left any doubt in the lad's mind as to the captain's purpose.

Instantly he commenced the perilous ascent that promised, inexperienced as he was, to terminate his life.

"It is brutal to send that lad aloft," said Dan Spiker indignantly to Commodore Hopkins.

"What, has the boy been ordered aloft?" returned the latter anxiously.

"Yes, and away to the topgallant crosstrees," replied the boatswain sorrowfully, as he rushed to another part of the ship.

"Cruel! cruel!" muttered the commodore to himself. "He will never come down alive, the poor lad." And through the darkness he caught a partial glimpse of the boy as he mounted higher and higher into the black tempest above.

On and on Ben climbed, thinking less of his own danger than the safety of the ship.

When the foremast gave way and came crashing down, he thought of Bertha, and asked himself what he could do to save her from perishing if the ship should become disabled, as he imagined she would.

It is but natural he should have thought of her safety, for she had entered more into his life and thoughts than any one else on board—than any one ever had before in all his past experience.

Starved as his whole life had been for the lack of a mother's love and kindness, and ignorant as he was of the refining influence of woman in her better development, he appreciated highly his association with a sweet, sunny natured girl like Bertha.

And day by day, as they chatted carelessly together, he had learned to look upon her as a sister, or as he thought he would feel toward his own sister if by penetrating the mystery of his life he were to discover one like Bertha. Thus, as he made his way into the rigging against the fury of the storm, the thought that perhaps his own efforts would save her life, as well as the lives of others, gave him the courage and strength to accomplish what would have been impossible under other circumstances. He had the advantage of being light and wiry, and his nimble fingers clung to the ropes with an unyielding grasp.

And still on he climbed, bidding defiance to the angry elements. But the rain beat upon him with awful fury, and the wind almost tore him from the mast to which he clung determinedly with hands and legs.

Little by little, however, he progressed till he reached the topgallant, where the terrible pitching of the ship almost hurled him from his place. The tall mast bent and cracked beneath him, so that every instant it seemed as if it would break and go crashing down upon the deck, or plunge into the mad ocean.

This thought almost paralyzed him with fear, and weakened his grasp so much that he came near being torn from his hold.

The wind shrieked through the rigging, and seemed to mock his efforts as he attempted to cut away the tangled rope.

It was so dark that the lad could see nothing—not even his hand, in which he held the knife, and yet he persevered, determined to accomplish his task.

The ship rolled so much that on deck even the sailors could not stand without holding fast to something by which to steady themselves. But away above them, eighty feet in mid air, where our young hero clung to the mast, how much greater and more violent was the motion!

At one minute it seemed to him as if he were

being flung to the bottom of the ocean, and the next instant the sudden reverse motion threatened to hurl him through miles of space to some other planet.

His situation was perilous in the highest degree, but, notwithstanding this, he cut away at the rigging, little by little, whenever an instant could be found between the terrible plunges of the ship.

And when he had accomplished this task he commenced his descent. Slowly he made his way down, being sure of his hold every time he moved his hands and legs.

And as he neared the deck, when the strain upon him was less, he felt an honest pride in what he had accomplished, and he wondered what Bertha would say to him—if she would praise him for the courage he had shown and the effort he had made for her.

Now came a terrible blast of wind that snapped the topmast with a triumphant shriek; and as the heavy spar crashed down through the rigging, it struck Ben a glancing blow upon the head, and instantly he fell as if lifeless upon the deck.

Commodore Hopkins, as well as Dan Spiker, had been on the lookout for the lad, but when they saw him strike the deck with a heavy thud and lie there motionless, a sickening sensation paralyzed them for an instant. Then they made their way to him as best they could.

“ Ben, my lad, are you hurt much ? ” said Dan feelingly, as he raised him up with the commodore’s aid.

“ Speak, lad ! ’tell us where you are hurt most,” continued the big hearted boatswain.

But no sound came back to cheer or give them courage—only the shrill sound of the wind greeted their anxious ears. The lad’s body was limp and showed no signs of life.

“ He is gone, the poor lad,” said Dan, in a broken voice.

“ I am afraid so,” returned Commodore Hopkins, with deep emotion.

“ The cap’n is to blame for it all. It was cruel—beastly cruel to send the lad up there.”

“ It was an outrage—little better than murder.”

“ But he had a grudge against the lad, I ’low, and that’s why he done it.”

Commodore Hopkins made no reply to this, whether because he was too much overcome with emotion or because he was revolving plans for Caleb Steel’s punishment, I cannot say.

“ Shall I call the cap’n to know what we will do with the lad ? ” asked Dan.

“ No,” said Commodore Hopkins emphatically, as if he could not endure the thought ; “ I will take charge of him. We will take him to my stateroom at once.”

XXV.

ON the way to his stateroom it occurred to Commodore Hopkins that it would not do to take Ben in that condition into the presence of his wife and daughter.

But there was an unoccupied cabin beside his room, and he decided that the lad should be taken there.

Caleb Steel, the master of the vessel, approached now.

"See what you have done," said Commodore Hopkins to him, as he pointed to the limp body of the lad.

"I?" said Steel, and he turned white with fear.

"Yes, you!" answered the merchant firmly. "It is little better than murder. Such brutality is beyond my conception."

"The ship had to be relieved or go down," stammered Steel in self justification, while his head hung like that of a convict.

"I have no time now to settle this matter with you. Give me the key to the stateroom adjoining mine."

Caleb Steel delivered up the key without a word, and slunk away to another part of the ship, repeating to himself these words :

“ He has no time *now* to settle with me,” and his manner showed his alarm only too plainly.

Ben was placed upon a bunk in the stateroom, and then Commodore Hopkins commenced an examination, such as would have been made by a physician. At first he thought the boy was dead ; but when he placed his ear over the lad’s heart he detected a faint beat.

This gave him courage, and he went to work, vigorously applying the remedies best suited to restore him.

He went into his own stateroom, and told his wife and daughter that Ben had received a severe fall, and was now unconscious. He cautioned them not to be alarmed, but nevertheless they were, and Bertha cried as if her heart would break. They went with him to where our young hero lay, unconscious and white, as if dead. Mrs. Hopkins could no longer restrain her tears, and Bertha buried her face in her hands, and sobbed with deep emotion.

A large swelling had now risen up on the lad’s forehead where the spar had struck him. The merchant considered this a good sign, and he worked upon him with renewed courage.

Bertha held smelling salts to his nostrils, while

her father and mother rubbed him, and did whatever seemed most likely to restore him to consciousness.

At last the muscles of his face twitched, and now came a long breath, then a lull again, which was followed soon by a still longer respiration. In another moment he moved his right hand, raised it to his eyes, and drew it back and forth, as if to remove a film that had gathered over them; the lids opened, and he looked around, but seemingly saw nothing, and again they closed. But now his brow contracted, as if thinking, or as if memory were again asserting itself.

All looked on with almost breathless suspense, wondering what the next indication of returning life would be.

Bertha stood by the side of the bunk, still holding the salts to his nostrils.

Presently he opened his eyes again and looked around—not with a dull, vacant stare, as before, but with a natural expression, mingled with surprise; and they fell upon Bertha, as she bent over him.

For an instant he looked serious and puzzled, and then a smile of recognition appeared. How this smile lighted up the faces of the three watchers!

“You know me, don’t you, Ben?” asked Bertha tenderly.

"Yes," answered the lad faintly, "of course I know you. But what has happened?"

Commodore Hopkins briefly explained about his fall, and urged him to keep quiet, fearing that too much excitement might prove bad for him.

He was very much exhausted, and complained of his head aching severely.

"The blow you received probably caused that," said Commodore Hopkins. "You must have struck your head against the deck."

"No," said Ben, "it was something that hit me. I remember dodging my head as I heard it crashing down."

"It was the topgallant mast that broke."

"The topgallant?" repeated Ben, as if he could not realize it.

"Yes."

"And I had just left it," said the lad with a shudder, as he thought how near he came to going with it.

This was the first time Bertha and her mother had heard of the terrible danger to which our young friend had been exposed, and they trembled with fear at the very thought of his peril.

And now, as Ben attempted to raise his left arm, a cry of pain came from his lips, that intensified the alarm felt by his friends around him.

“Oh!” groaned the lad, and he grew faint from the acute agony.

The tears streamed down Bertha’s cheeks as she looked with warm hearted, generous sympathy upon the suffering boy.

Commodore Hopkins noticed the limp action of the lad’s forearm, as he tried to raise it.

“My boy, where do you feel the pain?” asked the kind man tenderly.

But no reply came back.

“Ben!” said he, trying to rouse him.

But again no answer greeted him.

“He has fainted,” said the commodore, and a fresh fear spread over the faces of all.

Then he took hold of the lad’s left arm, and examined it hastily.

“This is what caused the pain,” said he. “It is broken between the elbow and wrist.”

“Poor boy!” said Mrs. Hopkins feelingly. “Bertha, can you apply the salts again? We must do something to restore him to consciousness.”

Bertha did as she was directed, and after a brief time he came out of his faint, looking whiter and more exhausted than ever.

Commodore Hopkins was afraid Ben had sustained internal injuries, and also that his skull might have been fractured. It was a fearful fall, which might have produced a complication of injuries.

Now Ben moved his head so that he got a good look at Bertha, which disclosed the tears in her eyes.

“Don’t cry,” said he, speaking to her softly. “I guess the ship will come out all right.”

“I am not thinking of the ship,” said she, in a way that made him realize that her tears were for himself.

This thought brightened up his face, and sent some color to his cheeks; and the action of the blood seemed to give him a little temporary strength, and for a time he felt more like his old self.

Commodore Hopkins felt encouraged at this change in his appearance, and prepared to dress his arm.

He understood enough of surgery to be able to set the broken bone—provided it was a simple break.

He made some splints, while Mrs. Hopkins prepared some linen swathes to wind around the arm.

Dan Spiker having got a minute from his work, rushed down to the cabin to learn Ben’s condition. The warm hearted sailor was very happy when he found the lad was alive and conscious.

Ben smiled when he saw him, and asked after the safety of the ship, which was still rolling frightfully.

“It don’t blow as hard as it did, so don’t be worryin’, lad. We will come out all right.”

“I hope so,” rejoined Ben.

“It is you that I’m worryin’ about, and not the ship,” said Dan, and he placed his rough, honest hand tenderly on the boy’s head, where the great bunch had swollen up.

“Oh, you here, Dan,” said Commodore Hopkins, who came in from his own stateroom with the splints. “Stop a minute or two and help me if you can. Ben has injured his arm, and I want to put these splints on it.”

Commodore Hopkins was careful not to say before Ben that the arm was broken, as he did not wish to frighten him.

He realized fully the suffering the boy must undergo in having the arm set. There was no ether or chloroform on board that could be administered to him to deaden the sense of pain.

The commodore knew very well that it would not do to be tender hearted, no matter how heroic the treatment. So he set about the operation.

Our young hero tried to be brave and make no complaint, but the pain was so intense as the bones were pulled back into place that he cried out as if pierced to the heart with a sword.

But this one outburst was all the complaint that he made. His face grew white once more, and he was lost in a dead faint.

“This is what I hoped would occur,” said Commodore Hopkins. “He will not suffer now while we are setting these bones.”

“Are both the bones broken?” asked Mrs. Hopkins.

“Yes, both snapped off, and very near together, too.”

“Will his arm be spoiled?” asked Bertha anxiously, as she wiped a tear from her eye.

“No, I hope not,” replied her father; “and if the bones are not slivered or badly shattered, I think I can bring it out all right.”

When the bones had been carefully set, and the splints put in place and firmly secured by means of the bandage, then restoratives were applied again to Ben, and he returned to consciousness.

XXVI.

WHEN the wind calmed, and the ship no longer seemed in danger of being lost, Captain Steel went to his cabin, agitated with fears and doubts. He wondered whether Ben was dead or alive. He did not know the exact cause of his fall, but the fact that he landed on deck led him to suppose that he did not tumble from the topgallant mast.

He was anxious to know if his purpose had been accomplished, and if he were now actually the owner of a nice house in Jersey City.

“But what if he is not dead?” asked Caleb Steel of himself. And then he meditated upon the matter for a long time.

He dare not go to the stateroom where Ben lay, to ascertain his condition, for he knew he would see Commodore Hopkins there, and he dreaded meeting him. He felt his own guilt forcibly—so forcibly that he looked upon himself almost as a murderer, as well he might.

Ben’s limp and apparently lifeless form was constantly before him, till at last he hoped that the boy was still alive. The house, he felt,

would only haunt him if it should fall into his hands, and he condemned himself for his wicked purpose.

He realized how fully he had incurred Commodore Hopkins' displeasure by this cruel act, and he saw that without doubt he would lose his ship, for he had no further hope that the merchant would allow him to command her again.

Caleb Steel was wretched. He now began to see the position in which he had placed himself.

"Everything has gone wrong with me," said he dejectedly, "and it is all because I listened to Anthony Boggs and yielded to his devilish purpose. I only wish he had crashed down on the deck instead of that lad; and if the fall had killed him the world would be rid of one more villain."

He drew Boggs' letter from his pocket with the purpose of destroying it, that it might no longer tempt him. He opened it, looked at it for a moment with a scowl, and then prepared to tear it in pieces. There was a bitter expression on his face and his eyes snapped fire as he clutched the poisoned paper in his hands, in the act of rending it into fragments.

"But stop!" said he with surprising suddenness. "I may need this scrap of paper for evidence. What if the boy is already dead?" And he laid the letter upon a table before him,

and then turned in his chair and buried himself in thought.

A knock sounded presently at his door.

"Come in," said he mechanically, as he continued thinking, and Commodore Hopkins opened the door.

Caleb Steel was not expecting him, and, in fact, little realized what he had said when he asked him in.

And as the owner of the ship faced him, he grew very white for a moment, and then his face became exceedingly red, and his embarrassment was painfully apparent.

The two men looked at each other for an instant without speaking, and then Caleb Steel dropped his eyes and seemed to shrink from the merchant's penetrating gaze—a look that charged him at once with the crime he had attempted.

This peculiar manner of censure was terrible for Caleb to bear. He felt his own guilt and knew that his very look betrayed him to Commodore Hopkins. If the latter had only spoken, and actually charged him with killing the boy, he would have been more at ease and could have attempted some defense; but now what was there for him to say, and how should he brave the withering silence that condemned him with a force beyond the power of words to equal? At

length Commodore Hopkins spoke with a peculiar emphasis, and said :

“ You did not accomplish your purpose after all.”

“ My purpose ? ” returned Caleb Steel.

“ Yes, that is what I said.”

“ I don't know what you mean, sir.”

“ Very well,” replied the merchant, as he eyed him sharply.

This answer seemed to put an end to discussion, and now silence ensued again.

Presently, however, it was broken by Commodore Hopkins.

“ But the boy is still alive,” he said, in a way that made his meaning clear—so clear that Caleb shrank within himself, and his face became the picture of guilt.

Another knock was now heard at his door, and how welcome was the sound to him !

Instantly he brushed by Commodore Hopkins, and opened the door, feeling an indescribable sense of relief. There he found the first mate, who wished to consult with him about the management of the ship ; for the storm was still running high, and the vessel was badly disabled.

Caleb Steel was too shrewd to miss so good an opportunity as this to escape from the presence of his employer. Consequently, he said to the latter that he was wanted on deck, and, without wait-

ing for a reply, immediately started for that part of the ship.

Commodore Hopkins thus found himself alone in Captain Steel's cabin, and he turned and started to leave the room. But in turning his eye fell upon an open letter lying upon a table. On the instant he thought nothing of this ; but before he reached the door, something told him to go back and see that letter.

He obeyed this impulse, and took the scrap of paper in his hand.

It ran like this :

NEW YORK, November 21st, 188—.

FRIEND STEEL :

I know you are too busy, in preparing for a start, to discuss the matter I suggested this morning. Of course, you naturally felt a little alarmed, when I first mentioned it to you, but the more you think of it the easier it will seem. The boy is here in your cabin with me now as I write you this note. He is only a street gamin, as I told you before, so nobody would ever miss him, if *some accident* should happen to prevent his ever returning to New York alive. You have been my friend for a long time, and I have found that I could always depend upon you, so I have no doubt about your finding some way to carry out our plan.

I own a nice house in Jersey City—on the Heights—that is worth five thousand dollars in cash. If you will do as I wish—and you understand what I mean—that house shall be yours. I will give you a deed of it, when you furnish me with proof that this gamin will never show up again in New York ; and you know as well as I that we could never feel sure about this so long as he is alive.

As I suggested, he might be put into the most dangerous places—perhaps sent aloft in a bad storm—way up to the

highest point. But you know all about this, so there is no use in my writing about that part of the program. Remember the five thousand dollar house is yours if you do not fail me, and I am so sure you will not that I shall have the house put in first class order, ready for your family to move in when you return home.

Captain Steel never disappointed any one, and I know he will not desert his old friend—myself.

Very truly,

ANTHONY B——.

P. S. I hope you will have a successful voyage.

XXVII.

AS Commodore Hopkins read this wicked letter he felt his blood boil with anger. The whole matter was clear to him now.

The master of his ship—the man in whose hands he had placed his own life and the lives of his wife and daughter—was a hired assassin.

His indignation was almost beyond his control, and he felt like having the miserable scoundrel of a captain punished as he deserved. But he knew too well the difficulties in the way, so he decided, after becoming a little calmer, to wait developments, and not make any hasty move.

He folded Boggs' letter, and placed it in his own pocket, feeling that he had a right to strain propriety in a case of this kind. And now he returned to his own cabin.

"Where is Bertha?" asked he of his wife nervously.

"She is watching with Ben," returned Mrs. Hopkins.

"Oh, yes, yes; I almost forgot about his injuries, poor boy. How is he now?"

"He seems to be resting comfortably; but

what has happened? You look pale and agitated."

"Yes, I feel so, and this is the cause," said he, handing Anthony Boggs' letter to her to read.

Mrs. Hopkins ran her eyes quickly over the pages and then shuddered, as she realized the awful purpose it revealed.

"Well, he wasn't successful in this attempt, any way," said Commodore Hopkins, "for the boy is still alive, and, so far as I can judge, ought to recover."

"I certainly hope he will. He has a sunny nature and a warm heart. Bertha has already become much attached to him."

"Yes, I have noticed she finds him entertaining; but that is not unnatural, as he is the only young person besides herself on board with us."

Mrs. Hopkins made no reply, but appeared absorbed in thought. Commodore Hopkins referred again to the Boggs letter, which he held in his hand and studied carefully.

"Steel's purpose," he continued, "was to get the five thousand dollar house; but this man must have a stronger motive than that for wishing the boy dead."

"You will keep the letter, I suppose," replied Mrs. Hopkins thoughtfully.

“ Most certainly I shall.”

“ What if Caleb Steel misses it ? ”

“ Yes, he will doubtless miss it, but you can feel sure he will never ask me about it.”

“ Will he suspect that you took it from his cabin ? ”

“ Without doubt he will.”

“ And will he make no effort to get it back ? ”

“ I can't think of any that he would be likely to make.”

“ He has shown himself a dangerous man—one ready to do anything, however cruel and wrong,” said Mrs. Hopkins, and she looked worried, as if she feared something serious might happen to her husband.

And now Commodore Hopkins and his wife went into the stateroom occupied by our unfortunate hero.

Close beside his cot sat Bertha. She was watching him attentively, and doing whatever she could to make his suffering less.

“ How do you feel now ? ” asked Commodore Hopkins.

“ I am more comfortable, thank you,” said Ben.

“ Have you had good attention since I went out ? ” asked Mrs. Hopkins.

“ Oh, yes,” said he, and his eyes met Bertha's with an expression of grateful appreciation, while a faint color spread over his cheeks.

But much more plainly did this crimson tint show itself on Bertha's face, as her eyes fell to the floor. She toyed with her handkerchief, like one embarrassed, though why she should have felt so even she herself could not have told.

The honest hearted boatswain now came into the room. He was just off watch, and intended to spend this time with Ben.

"I came in to relieve you, so you can get some rest," said he to Commodore Hopkins.

"But will you not need the rest yourself?" returned the latter.

"Oh, no," said he, "and besides, I would rather stay with the lad than not."

So it was settled that Dan should remain with Ben during his off watch.

"Call me if there is any change for the worse," said Commodore Hopkins, as he left the room.

Bertha was the last to say good night. She seemed loath to leave him as she lingered beside his cot and placed her soft, white hand upon his burning head.

This touch, so gentle and sympathetic, was healing medicine to our young friend, and his eyes expressed clearly the pleasure that her tender solicitude had given him.

And she noticed this, and thought of it when she had reached her own room—thought of it

with the simple pleasure of a child at making one happy ; and yet with something of inspiration in the thought.

The boatswain, realizing how much his young friend needed sleep, urged him to lie quiet and try to drop into a doze. And after a while he did so, and slept soundly at intervals throughout the night.

When Dan's off watch had expired, he arranged with one of the sailors to take his place as nurse, so that the boy would not be left alone for any length of time.

As he came out of the room occupied by Ben he met the captain of the ship.

"Where have you been?" asked the latter nervously, though he could not have helped knowing, as he saw him come through the door.

"With the cabin boy, sir," answered the boatswain.

"Is he alive?" inquired Caleb Steel, with unmistakable anxiety.

"Yes, but that's about all. His arm is broken, and he may be a deal worse smashed up, for all I know."

"I hope not," said the captain uneasily. The latter had discovered the loss of the Boggs letter, and he was therefore in a wretched state of mind. He remembered leaving it on the table, and felt certain Commodore Hopkins had taken it.

What would he not have given to get that letter back, and how soon he would have torn it into a thousand pieces ! But now it was too late, and the worst possible phase of fear haunted him.

“ If the lad should die,” said Caleb to himself, “ and from what the boatswain told me this does not seem improbable, where should I be then ? ”

Caleb Steel’s face became ashy white at this thought. He saw himself arrested, charged with murder, and proved guilty by the letter of Anthony Boggs.

He knew Commodore Hopkins would use it against him, so he looked for no mercy from the merchant, who, he felt, must look upon him as too vile to live.

XXVIII.

THE next morning Ben was somewhat feverish, as Commodore Hopkins had expected, but in the main his symptoms were favorable, and throughout the day he showed signs of improvement.

He was terribly bruised and thoroughly shaken up. His right ankle was so badly sprained that it gave him nearly as much pain as the broken arm.

But the fact that no signs of internal injuries had appeared led Commodore Hopkins to feel highly encouraged about his young patient, who received the best of nursing from Mrs. Hopkins and Bertha.

The latter, especially, lost no opportunity of showing Ben any little attention that would add to his comfort or pleasure. She kept wet, cool napkins constantly upon his aching head, and chatted encouragingly in a sweet and low tone.

What a rare luxury this attention was to Ben! It almost repaid him, as he thought, for the injuries he had received, and for the pain he was now suffering.

Every one seemed kind, attentive, and anxious for his recovery.

But what seemed stranger than all else was Captain Steel's manifest interest in his improvement. A stronger motive, however, than that of mere kindness prompted this feeling, for it was now a question that touched his own interest—his own life even—and this was the cause of his anxiety.

The weather had cleared, and the sun shone bright and warm upon the ship as she sailed merrily along over the sparkling waves.

Sailors worked with a light, cheerful heart, repairing the damages caused by the terrible storm of the night before.

Bertha appeared on deck several times during the day, and filled her lungs again and again with the soft, exhilarating air. Ordinarily she would have found rare enjoyment in the warm sunlight, but now she sacrificed this pleasure to spend her time with our young hero in the cabin below.

How delighted he was with the story of "Robinson Crusoe," which she read to him! He was ignorant till now of the rich treasure to be found in books, and this charming story—one of the best that ever was written—completely fascinated him.

But doubtless the reader gave it many addi-

tional charms. He watched her as she pronounced the words musically and without seeming effort. It seemed to him as if she must have the whole story committed to memory in order to slide over it so easily.

They discussed *Crusoe's* life on his island as fast as they progressed with the story.

Bertha got her map, and pointed out to him where the supposed island was situated, and then explained the map, and gave him a few hints on geography. This interested him and kindled his thirst for more knowledge of the same subject.

Bertha promised to teach him something of this study, and then they returned once more to the story.

Ben listened with the keenest attention and admiration, as she progressed with the strange tale. When she read of the footprints *Crusoe* saw upon the beach, he trembled with excitement and drew nearer to the fair reader, as if to catch the words so much the sooner from her pretty lips.

"Who could have made the footprints?" interrupted Ben excitedly.

"That is what *Crusoe* wanted to know," laughed Bertha; "but let me read on, and see what he thought about it."

And as the story pictured *Crusoe's* alarm, Ben took on something of the same feeling, and

looked as if he were about to be massacred by a band of roving cannibals.

“Why, what makes you so pale?” asked Bertha, as she looked up from her book. But as Ben realized that it was caused only by the thrilling scenes of which she was reading, and saw how little excitement she showed, he blushed and tried to appear unconcerned.

But Bertha refused to read any more to him on that day, fearing the excitement would not be good for him; so they chatted pleasantly for a while about the story, and then she told him something of the books she had read.

This subject interested him, and he made up his mind that he would not always remain ignorant.

“I wish I could go to school and get some education,” said he, when a pause had been reached in the conversation.

“I wish, too, that you could, Ben,” said Bertha.

“But of course I can’t, for that takes money,” replied he wistfully.

Bertha looked thoughtful and sober.

“Will you let me teach you?” she asked, after a pause, her face brightening up.

“You teach me?”

“Yes.”

“But you wouldn’t want to do that?”

"Yes, I should be glad to."

"Thank you. You are as good as you can be," said Ben, with sincere, childlike gratitude, and he reached out his well arm and pressed her hand in his.

But this act was not so much like that of a child. It seemed prompted rather by intuition, for it was a most unnatural thing for a street gamin to do.

Bertlia stammered in return some gentle protest as the color rose to her cheeks.

"And I would only be too glad to have you teach me," continued Ben.

"Then I shall do so with pleasure," answered his fair companion, "and we will commence in a few days, as soon as you are a little stronger."

Our young friend was very happy over this prospect, for he felt hungry for a better education; and it is just possible that he liked the prospect of being taught by so charming a teacher—most boys would.

During the next day they continued the reading of "*Robinson Crusoe*." When it described the cannibals, and the capture of the one whom *Crusoe* named "Friday," Ben's interest reached as high a point as that recorded on the previous day.

During that part of the story which treated of the cannibals he wore a look of the deepest

amazement. He knew he had seen some tough people in the worst districts of New York, and he supposed they were about as bad a lot as any to be found in the world; but, as he put it, "they don't eat each other."

In fact, he commenced to doubt the truth of the whole story now, for he couldn't realize how people could eat one another.

Bertha assured him, however, that there are those who do so.

Of course he believed the story now, but he thought the cannibals must surely be a species of beast.

On and on they read till but a few pages yet remained. He counted them one by one, anxious for more and more of the charming tale, and yet dreaded the approach of the end.

That was the first book he had ever heard read, and it seemed to him that he would never find another so good; so he wished, as many others have wished before him, that it might be prolonged indefinitely.

When, however, the end was at last reached, Bertha consoled him with the assurance that she had with her many other books, some of which she thought would please him quite as well as "Robinson Crusoe," and these she promised to read to him.

XXIX.

DAN SPIKER had dropped into Ben's state-room several times during the reading of "Robinson Crusoe." He had read it years before, but now it seemed almost new to him, and his interest in the story was scarcely less than that manifested by our young hero.

Bertha selected the "Swiss Family Robinson" as the next to read, believing it would please Ben nearly, if not quite, as much as the one just finished.

Dan Spiker managed to listen to a good proportion of this story also, and he pronounced it better than "Robinson Crusoe."

"Now, Dan," said Bertha—it was perfectly proper to speak thus familiarly on shipboard—"you have heard me read two big books, so I think it is your turn to entertain Ben and me with a story."

"But I'd a deal rather hear you read, miss," said Dan, trying to shirk the obligation.

"Well, I would rather have a story from you," returned Bertha.

"Yes, give us a good one, Dan," chimed in Ben.

As a matter of fact, however, he also would have much preferred listening to another story from Bertha ; but he saw she really wanted to hear one of the boatswain's yarns, so he was prompted to urge him to the task.

"What shall it be?" asked Dan.

"Oh, anything that will be exciting," answered Bertha.

"Would you rather have a true story or a regular sailor's yarn?"

"A true story," answered Bertha.

"Yes, give us the true story," joined in Ben.

The latter had now so far recovered from his fall as to be up and dressed. His broken arm was supported by a sling. The swelling on his forehead had entirely disappeared, but the sprained ankle was still very troublesome, and he could not use it at all.

This alone kept him a prisoner in his state-room, but a very happy one, owing to the almost constant presence throughout the day of his fair young companion.

Had she not been with him, his confinement would have been a great trial to him, for he had spent almost his whole life in the open air, drifting about the streets of New York.

"Well, if you want a true story, I will tell you something that happened in my own experience," said Dan Spiker.

“Oh, that will be ever so jolly,” exclaimed Bertha.

“Yes, if it’s only exciting,” put in Ben, “for you know that is what you said you want.”

“We will wait and see,” said she. “And now let us keep quiet so that Dan can commence.”

“Thirteen years ago last summer,” began the boatswain, after clearing his throat and assuming an unnatural tone of voice, as if to deliver a declamation, “I was a young sailor on a big passenger steamer bound for——”

Here he was interrupted by the appearance of Commodore Hopkins, who now entered the room.

“A social chat you all seem to be having,” said the latter, as he noticed the expression of interest on the faces of Ben and Bertha.

“Yes,” said his daughter, “Dan has just commenced a story.”

“That is a favorite way of whiling away time on shipboard,” returned her father. “When I used to follow the sea I enjoyed these sailor’s yarns hugely.”

“But this isn’t a yarn at all; it is a true story,” rejoined Bertha.

“Then probably I never heard it, and if Dan doesn’t object I should like to become a listener with you and Ben.”

This proposition made Dan show more signs of embarrassment than a country schoolboy exhibits on the occasion of his first declamation.

“Oh, do let papa stay and hear it,” pleaded Bertha, who saw that the boatswain appeared somewhat upset, and now hesitated about proceeding with his story.

At length, however, he yielded to the solicitations of all three, and prepared for a fresh start.

XXX.

“THIRTEEN years ago last summer,” repeated Dan, with evident embarrassment, “I was a sailor on board a large steamship called the Meguntuck.”

“That’s an awful funny name,” remarked Ben comically, and all laughed, including the boatswain himself.

“Yes, ’tis kinder odd, but I believe it is an Indian name,” replied Dan, and as no further interruption came, he proceeded as follows :

“We were on the return voyage from Cuba to New York. The steamer had a full list of passengers, and everything went well till off Cape Hatteras ; and then things took a bad turn. The heaviest fog I ever saw settled down on us one afternoon about four o’clock. It was so thick we couldn’t see anything ; all night it seemed to grow blacker and blacker. There was no telling what danger we were running into, but it was just as safe to go ahead as to stop, so we kept on going till about four o’clock in the morning, when suddenly we felt a tremendous crash, and the steamer lurched as if struck a death blow.

“ And before we had time to think of anything word was passed from one to another that a big hole had been knocked in the steamer’s side below the water line. This spread consternation among all on board—sailors and passengers alike—and in a few minutes the captain ordered the lifeboats lowered with all possible haste.

“ The steamer was rapidly filling with water, which rushed in with awful force through the great hole made by some unknown object.

“ But whatever hit us we never found out. If it was a vessel, she might have gone to the bottom like a rock, or slipped quietly away in the fog, if she was not too badly smashed by the collision.

“ Everything was confusion.

“ The passengers and most of the crew rushed around in a regular panic. Everybody grabbed a life preserver and crowded toward the boats.

“ Some of them acted perfectly crazy, as they fought their way to the front with, perhaps, but half their clothing on. Not much time was wasted in dressing, I can tell you. It was a terrible struggle for life, when every one fought for himself.

“ But the saddest of all was when a nurse girl deserted a baby, and left him to the mercy of the sea, while she plunged into the struggling crowd, and made her way toward the lifeboats.

"I tell you, commodore," said Dan tenderly, "that sight touched me down deep. I hadn't the heart to see that baby drown with no one trying to save him. How he cried, poor little fellow, when the nurse left him, and held out his little hands for help!"

"Oh, how terrible," said Bertha; "how could she be so cruel?"

"Yes, it was indeed terrible."

"But what became of him?" inquired Ben eagerly.

"I rescued him myself," replied Dan, with the sparkle of honest pride in his eyes.

"So he was really saved? And you did it all yourself," said Bertha. "How good you are, Dan!"

The latter blushed at this compliment.

"Yes, you deserve great credit," said Commodore Hopkins, who was an interested listener to the boatswain's story.

"What did you do with him?" asked Ben, whose interest was now excited.

"I took him to New York."

"Where were his father and mother?" inquired Bertha.

"That is what I have never found out. I suppose they were drowned, but I don't see why they were not with the child before the boat went down."

"So the steamer was really lost?"

"Yes, she went down soon after I had left her."

"And were there a lot of people drowned?"

"I really can't say. The fog was so thick I couldn't see any one, and after the boats had left the steamer they soon separated. But I think a lot of lives must have been lost."

"How old was the child?" asked Ben thoughtfully.

"I should think he was about a year or fifteen months old. He could walk, and was as bright and pretty as could be."

"And that was thirteen years ago?" pursued our hero.

"Yes, thirteen years ago last summer."

"Then he must be about fifteen now?"

"Yes, about that, poor child, if he is alive," said the boatswain sadly.

"Why, don't you know where he is?" asked Bertha, with surprise.

"No, I do not, though I've spent a lot of time and money hunting for him."

"How is that?" inquired Commodore Hopkins.

"Well, he disappeared very mysteriously, and that is all I know about it."

"What do you suppose became of him?"

"I always thought, sir, that he was stolen from me."

"Stolen!" exclaimed Ben, with a peculiarly eager expression.

"Yes, stolen; that's what I believe."

"But why should the child be stolen from you?" asked Commodore Hopkins.

"That's the mystery, sir," returned the boatswain, "and I've never been able to settle the question in my own mind."

"And you feel sure that no accident could have befallen him, such as tumbling into some hole or something of the sort where he would have died?"

"That couldn't have happened, for there were no such dangerous places around my home."

"Then it is possible that he strayed away and got lost."

"Yes, I know it is, but I don't believe he ever did so. As I said before, I think he was stolen by some one;" and the boatswain's manner indicated that he had no doubt upon this point.

Yet it was not at all improbable that he was mistaken, for his education on the sea did not necessarily make him a good detective.

"But, if he were stolen," argued Commodore Hopkins, "there must have been some object that prompted the kidnapping."

"Yes, I suppose that is so."

"You never heard a word from him since he disappeared?" continued the commodore thoughtfully.

"No, not a word, sir."

"That shows, then, that he could not have been stolen with a view to getting a reward for his return."

"No, it wasn't that, for of course I couldn't have given much reward."

"Do you imagine he was taken by his parents, or possibly by the nurse girl?"

"No, I don't think so."

"That is the only explanation I can think of."

"It don't seem likely to me, though, for the child's father and mother were fine appearing people. No, sir, I don't think they would do anything like that, for they must have been rich, and would have paid me handsomely for saving his life."

"Doubtless you are right on that point, but tell me how long had you been in New York with the child when he disappeared?"

"Only about three months, sir."

"Well, it is a mystery. I cannot understand it," said Commodore Hopkins finally, as he stroked his beard in thought.

"Thirteen years ago last summer—over a year old then—about fifteen now—a boy, too—father and mother drowned—rich folks—child stolen—never found."

These thoughts shot through Ben's mind like lightning, as he listened to the boatswain's story

with the keenest interest. The idea at once suggested itself to him that he might be the very lost child—"and why not?" he argued. "I'm about as old as that boy would be now, and if I was stolen and taken to old Mother Grimmis' den—as I believe I was—why it is just as likely that I was taken from Dan Spiker as from anybody else."

"Why, what makes you look so queer, Ben?" said Bertha, who then noticed his expression.

Instantly all eyes were turned upon him, and this brought the color to his cheeks.

"I was thinking about the child," returned he with evident embarrassment, for he felt that his own thoughts had been read.

"So was I," returned Bertha laughingly, "but I know I didn't look the way you did."

"Why, how did I look?" asked Ben.

"I can't tell, only you looked awfully funny, with your head resting in your hand, your mouth open as if you were swallowing every word, and your eyes fixed upon Dan in——"

"Oh, come now, don't make fun of me in this way," interrupted our young friend, who felt uncomfortable at being so freely discussed.

"No, I am not making fun, for truly that is just the way you looked."

"Well, Dan is the cause of it, for his story interested me."

“ I should think so from your appearance, and I feel quite jealous of Dan, for I read two whole books to you, and you didn't show half so much interest as you do in this story.”

The boatswain protested that he had not intended or even hoped to outdo Bertha.

“ It must be the application of the story that so interested Ben,” said Commodore Hopkins, who guessed at the secret, and he hit so near the truth that Ben's cheeks again grew crimson.

“ I don't quite understand you,” said Dan, puzzled at the merchant's remark.

“ I mean to say that Ben is perhaps applying your story to himself,” returned the commodore.

At this the boatswain fell into his old custom, and whistled softly to himself, as he eyed Ben keenly.

Bertha looked surprised and incredulous, but said nothing.

Commodore Hopkins moved about nervously, as he watched the boatswain studying the lad's features with such intense earnestness.

Ben himself breathed quickly and nervously, as he, with Bertha and her father, waited for the verdict—waited with never a word to break the silence till the boatswain should speak.

The latter is oblivious of this pause—oblivious of everything except the subject in his mind, as his thoughts go back to the lost steamship, to

the babe as he sees him, with outstretched hands, crying so imploringly. Then he passes to the scene at his own happy home, with the little fellow playing lovingly about his mother and sisters.

And now a light flashes in the sailor's honest eyes, and he almost fancies he sees before him the same features that appealed so strongly to him on that terrible night.

But at length he shakes his head with a sigh, as if unable to decide in his own mind whether or not our young hero is the lost child of his story ; and as he takes his eyes from Ben, and realizes the situation—sees all waiting for him to speak—he says awkwardly, as if to apologize for his manner, “ I can't make up my mind. His eyes are the same, and—well, it's been so long, I won't say.”

XXXI.

ALL felt disappointed at the boatswain's words, but none so much as Ben himself. He had hoped the sailor might recognize him as the lost child.

Commodore Hopkins and Dan discussed the matter at some length, and then Ben asked what the child's name was.

"Victor Van Vleet," answered Dan ; " or, at least, I suppose that was his name, as I found it engraved on the inside of a small gold ring that was on his finger."

"Victor Van Vleet," repeated Bertha. "Well, that name doesn't seem to fit you at all, Ben."

"No, I shouldn't know myself by it," he replied.

"Still, if it should turn out that you are the stolen child," said Commodore Hopkins, "the fact that your name was changed would not be at all strange."

"And you know he only has one name—Ben—now," said Bertha, addressing her father.

"Yes, I know that," returned the latter ; and then, turning to the boatswain, he said, "Al-

though you cannot identify Ben as the lost child, there is, on the other hand, nothing, as I understand you, to disprove the theory that he and the little fellow you rescued from the doomed ship are one and the same."

"That's it," said Dan, still eying our young hero thoughtfully.

"The fact, then, that Ben is about the right age, the probability that he was kidnapped when very young, and the similarity of features and eyes between him and the child, all favor the belief that he is your lost boy."

Ben's face brightened at this view of the case, and Bertha seemed much pleased at the prospect of her young friend's identification.

"And you say that the child's parents were rich?" said Ben.

"Yes, it was said on board the steamer that they were very rich," replied Dan.

"Was this babe the only child with them?" asked the commodore.

"Yes, the only one I saw."

"Then, if his identity could be established, he would inherit all this wealth, providing his parents were lost at sea, as you think they were."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"To be sure he would."

"But what do you imagine has become of the property?"

“ It probably went to his relatives.”

“ And would they have to give it up if this child could be found ? ”

“ Yes ; without doubt they would have to turn it over to him.”

Ben's eyes dilated at this turn of the conversation. He imagined himself rich—very rich—that is, if he really was Victor Van Vleet.

But even if he was, there seemed to him no way, after all these years, in which he could establish the legal proof.

To Commodore Hopkins, however, it did not seem so improbable, for he already had a clue, in the shape of Anthony Boggs' letter to Caleb Steel, which might, as he thought, unearth the whole secret.

The commodore became deeply interested in the case, and talked with Ben till he had learned all that the latter knew of himself, and then, as the ship sailed on day after day, he discussed the matter at great length with Dan Spiker, hoping the boatswain might see something in our young friend to connect him with Victor Van Vleet.

It happened one day that Ben saw Bertha writing several letters to friends in New York. This suggested the idea to him of informing William Montgomery, the lawyer, why he failed to keep his engagement with him. But he had never learned to write well enough for this pur-

pose, so he invoked Bertha's aid, and she cheerfully complied with his request.

In the letter, Ben told in brief everything that had occurred in his life since the night he found the big St. Bernard. He stated in full the part Perry Boggs and his father had acted, including the smuggling of himself on board of the Bertha Hopkins. He made clear his purpose to bring Boggs senior to justice if possible, and said that his ship was bound for Australia, and would not return to New York for seven or eight months.

When this letter was finished, placed in the envelope, and addressed, Bertha put it with others that were ready for mailing.

Shortly after this Commodore Hopkins chanced to notice this letter.

"William Montgomery," said he, with surprise; "why, that is strange—my lawyer—and why is Bertha writing to him, I wonder?"

The latter, on being questioned, said she had written the letter for Ben. But it seemed very odd to the commodore that this boy should know so distinguished a lawyer as William Montgomery well enough to write to him in a friendly way.

Ben, however, explained the matter to his satisfaction. Indeed, he was greatly pleased by the lad's recital of his Bowery experience, and glad to know that he had won the friendship of so generous and kind a man as Mr. Montgomery.

“ I think, Ben, your case had better be placed in his hands,” said he, apparently having given the matter careful thought.

“ My case ? ” questioned Ben.

“ Yes, the matter of finding out if you and Victor Van Vleet are really one and the same.”

“ But I have no money to pay him, sir.”

“ Never mind that, my boy. He has charge of all my legal matters. I will write to him to work up the case, and charge the expense to me.”

“ You are very, very kind, but I do not like to have you spend so much money for me,” replied Ben, with a spirit of thankfulness.

“ Oh, that’s nothing,” said the commodore carelessly. “ I feel enough interest in your case, since listening to the boatswain’s story, to pay the expense cheerfully myself, for the sake of having the mystery cleared up. I will write to Mr. Montgomery all the particulars of the case, and instruct him to go ahead with it ; but first I want you to tell me all you know about Anthony Boggs, and his reasons for wanting to get you out of the way.”

“ I don’t know,” answered Ben. “ I told you about the fight with Perry, his son, about his calling to see me at the station house, and about his getting my release from the Island, and bringing me on board this ship.”

“ And that is all you know about it? ”

“ Yes, sir, everything. ”

“ Very well, I will go now and write the letter, ” said the commodore, and he commenced his task at once.

He stated to Mr. Montgomery all the essential facts of the case as I have related them. He gave him a copy of the letter Boggs had written to Caleb Steel, and narrated the cruel treatment the latter had heaped upon the lad. He gave it as his belief that there was some mysterious connection between Boggs and our young hero, and said that the fact that the former now played the part of a rich man led him to believe that some foul play might have been practised upon Ben by the villain who sought his life. The commodore closed his letter by saying :

“ You will remember that the name found on the child’s ring was ‘ Victor Van Vleet. ’ This may furnish a clue that will help you. Do all you can, and charge the expense to me. I have become much interested in this lad Ben, who says he knows you, and did you a service in finding and returning a valuable dog, that had strayed away from home. ”

XXXII.

“MY boy,” said Commodore Hopkins to Ben one day, as they were nearing the Cape of Good Hope, “we shall soon make port. How would you like, upon our arrival, to return at once to New York?”

The suggestion surprised the lad, and he hesitated a moment before replying, and then asked, “Shall you return, too?”

“No, I do not expect to return at present, but it has occurred to me that it might help your case if you were in New York.”

“Yes, it might—er—” and he looked at Bertha for a moment, and then added, as the color mounted to his cheeks, “but I do not like to leave you.”

“Don’t want to leave me?” said the commodore, and he seemed to emphasize the word “me.”

“No—er—” returned the lad, becoming more and more confused, “you have been so kind to me, you know.”

It was only a few weeks before this that Ben had formed a rash but determined purpose to

leave the ship at the first possible opportunity ; but having met with such consideration as he was receiving now, it could not be expected that he would be in a hurry to get away. He actually preferred remaining on board of her to returning by a quick and agreeable passage to New York, where he might, through the efforts put forth in his behalf, discover himself to be the happy possessor of a great fortune.

The charm of sea life possibly enchained him to the ship—yes, perhaps so, and still there might have been another—a more gentle influence that fascinated him.

Be this as it may, he made it plain that he preferred remaining with those who had proved his friends, and so the commodore concluded to say no more for the present about his returning to New York.

In the course of a few days the ship anchored at Cape Town, where a stay of nearly a week was to be made for the purpose of repairing the damages which the ship had sustained during the heavy gale.

Ben, with his broken arm still in a sling, but evidently doing well, went ashore with Commodore Hopkins and his family, as if he were one of them. They went to a hotel and engaged rooms for the length of time their ship would be in port.

As soon as they were settled in their temporary quarters, Commodore Hopkins wrote the following letter to Captain Steel :

CAPE TOWN, ——— 188—

CAPTAIN CALEB STEEL :

DEAR SIR—I would advise you to take advantage of our stay in this port by *at once resigning* your command of the Bertha Hopkins. When the ship and cargo are properly turned over to me, as the owner of both, I will pay you the amount of salary due you up to this date, and also an allowance on the probable percentage of profit that would be yours were you to complete the entire voyage. I will, moreover, give you a sufficient amount to take you back to New York by steamer.

If you are wise you will accept this proposition without delay. Facts of a sterling character, to which I have been an eye witness, when connected with a writing now in my possession, force me, in justice to my family, whose lives have been intrusted to your care, to take this step unhesitatingly. You will understand me, I think, without further explanation. You may return an answer to me at this hotel.

Yours truly,

ELISHA HOPKINS.

On receiving the cablegram from Anthony Boggs, withdrawing his offer of the five thousand dollar house, Caleb Steel became very angry.

“The infernal villain,” said he, as he stormed back and forth in his cabin. “A nice time to refuse me the reward, after I have ruined myself, and all for him, too.”

Just then a letter was handed to him by a boy. He took it in his hand and instantly recognized the writing as that of Commodore Hopkins.

Opening it hastily, and with trembling fingers, he ran his eye over the page, while the color faded from his cheeks, and he shook with nervous agitation.

He threw himself upon a bench to think—wretched and disheartened.

“Oh, why was I such a fool!” he moaned, “when I had a ship like this? Now I am ruined, and my poor family——”

Here he broke down and cried like a child, penitent and sorrowful.

“Poor boy, poor boy!” said he; “how near I came to murdering him. I must have been crazy to listen to the miserable villain’s poison talk. And now I am ruined! No ship, no money, no reputation—everything gone. Curse Anthony Boggs, I say—the wicked scoundrel!”

“Yes, he is right—the commodore is right,” said Caleb Steel, after a pause. “He knows all, and has Boggs’ letter; so of course he could not be expected to let me continue in his employ any longer.”

The result was that Caleb Steel resigned his position before the day was over, and settled up his accounts on the terms proposed by Commodore Hopkins. After this was done he made all possible haste to get away from Cape Town, and beyond the sight of those who knew his disgrace.

The first mate, William Maxwell, a deserving, intelligent fellow, was promoted to the command of the ship. All the other officers were advanced one place, and Dan Spiker was elevated to the position of mate.

In a few days the ship had been fully repaired; then the anchor was weighed, and once more she put out to sea with all her canvas spread.

“I am glad to be on board again,” said Bertha, as she and Ben stood on deck, watching the sea birds that sported in the sunshine.

“So am I,” returned he, as he looked admiringly into her pretty eyes.

One can appreciate a picture, a sunset, or a beautiful landscape without being sentimental; so, too, it is possible that a boy should admire the charming manners and pretty features of so sweet a girl as Bertha, and still look upon her as a friend or sister.

But while Ben would soon have become tired of the landscape, he did not become weary of Bertha's presence.

He was now a passenger on board the ship, like a member of Commodore Hopkins' own family, and he and Bertha played together, read, studied, laughed, and talked, much as a brother and sister would have done—that is, if they had been seventy six times as fond of each other as brothers and sisters usually are.

Under the command of the new captain everything went smoothly, and all on board—sailors and passengers alike—seemed in the best of spirits.

Dan Spiker was delighted with his promotion, and felt, as he had good reason for feeling, from his intimate relations with Commodore Hopkins, that he was at last in a fair way to become master of a ship in the near future. Indeed, the commodore had intimated as much to him, and he felt very happy over the prospect.

XXXIII.

FOR ten days out the weather was clear and beautiful. Then they encountered a storm scarcely less powerful than the one which caused Ben's almost fatal fall. Through it, however, they passed with perfect safety, and on the following day sighted a vessel in distress.

As the *Bertha Hopkins* drew near to the disabled ship, Captain Maxwell discovered, by the aid of his glass, that she was an American vessel. Presently he recognized the name as that of a vessel which had cleared from the port of New York only two days before his own ship.

The *Leo Martin* was the name of the unfortunate ship.

It seemed that the storm struck her with relentless fury when she was under full sail. Her masts were carried away, and the hull so badly strained that she soon began to leak at an alarming rate.

All hope of saving her was very soon abandoned, yet the sailors worked incessantly at the pumps to keep her afloat, if possible, till assistance could be had.

The crew was speedily transferred to the Bertha Hopkins, and the Leo Martin, with her entire cargo, was abandoned—left to herself upon the broad ocean, soon to sink below the turbulent waves.

Ben stood on deck as the sailors came on board, and watched them with careful scrutiny.

He knew that they hailed from New York, and he wondered if he had ever seen any of them in the great city.

Presently he started back, as if alarmed or startled at some extraordinary discovery.

“Why, what makes you jump so?” said Bertha. “You are as white as you can be!”

“I was frightened, I guess, or something of that sort,” returned our hero, still trembling with excitement.

“Why, what could have frightened you so?” asked Bertha, with surprise.

“Do you see that tall man with the big scar on his right cheek?” said Ben, indicating.

“Yes.”

“Well, he is the one that frightened me. Do you remember what I told you about the strange man stepping between Mother Grimmis and me the night I escaped from her den?”

“Yes, certainly, I remember it perfectly.”

“Well, that fellow, that I just pointed out to you, is the man.”

"It doesn't seem possible," said Bertha, mystified.

"No, it doesn't, but it is so all the same."

"What shall you do?"

"I don't know; I am glad he is here, and still I hate to meet him."

"If he saved you from that wicked old woman's abuse, I should think you would be glad to see him."

"So I am on that account, and for another reason, too, and still I feel almost afraid of him."

The thought of Mother Grimmis came to him, and he wondered if the man had actually murdered her. He shuddered at the very idea. How terrible a murderer seemed to him! He shrank from meeting this fellow, though he had no proof that he was an assassin.

Ben had carefully avoided, in all conversation touching upon his history, any reference to Mother Grimmis' unnatural death. The matter came so near home, he feared suspicion would point to him. He knew nothing, of course, of the result of the coroner's inquest in New York; but, nevertheless, he chose not to reveal to Bertha his true reason for dreading to meet the man with the ugly scar.

Our hero now felt that he needed some advice. If Mother Grimmis had actually been killed, it

seemed to him that this man must have done the deed; "for," said he, "it occurred on the very night that I left him with her. I will go and see Commodore Hopkins, and talk with him about it."

Consequently, he made his way below, and in a short time found himself alone with Commodore Hopkins, to whom he told all he knew about the man.

"And you think this man might have murdered the old woman?" said the commodore thoughtfully, after having listened with much interest to Ben's story. "By the way," he added, "I have brought with me a large bundle of New York papers that were forwarded to me at Cape Town. Let us see what is said about the affair."

Ben shrank at the thought of what those papers might reveal, but he offered no protest to the commodore's suggestion.

"I remember seeing the bold heading about the murder of an old woman on the east side of the city," said the latter, as he spread the papers out before him, "but I seldom read murder cases, so I did not pay much attention to this one. Ah, here it is," he continued, as he read the identical report of the coroner's inquest, and now all at once the color seemed to depart from his face.

“What, what!” said he. “Why, I don’t understand this. A boy called Ben is suspected of having committed the crime, and he has now disappeared and cannot be found. This is alarming—it is, indeed. Charged with murder——”

“Oh, don’t, don’t, commodore,” cried out our young hero, in pain at this terrible revelation.

He had dreaded, and even suspected, that it might come to this, but had hoped that it might not. And now that the blow had come, he felt crushed, disgraced, disheartened.

“Oh, why do they say such wicked things,” he sobbed through the fast flowing tears, as his face was bent low upon the sleeve of his jacket.

For a time Commodore Hopkins said nothing, but put his mind upon the revelation made by the paper.

He studied the case logically, and quickly concluded that Ben was entirely innocent of all guilt.

Having decided this in his own mind, he proceeded to restore our hero’s courage, by assuring him of his support and friendship in this trying matter.

“If murdered at all,” said he, “this man might have committed the crime, and might not. It is possible some one else did it. But, regardless of all this, our point is to have this man clear you. If we can only get him to confirm what

you have said about the row at this old woman's den, and have a witness to the same, why, you will then be in a position to prove yourself beyond suspicion."

"Then we must say nothing about the murder?" said Ben.

"No, certainly not."

"What shall I say to him, then? I can't help meeting him now he is on the ship."

"That is just what you should do by all means, and you should appear to be very glad to see him again."

"So I shall be, on one account, for I think he knows something about me—perhaps all about who I am, and how I came to be with old Mother Grimmis."

"It seems to me, then, most fortunate that he is here."

"Yes, I don't know but it is," said Ben, feeling more cheerful.

"We must work carefully, so that he will not suspect our purpose. Tell him how much indebted you feel to him for saving you from old Mother Grimmis' abuse. I will make it a point to be with you, so that I can watch the effect. If he is guilty, I believe I can tell by his manner."

XXXIV.

IN the latter part of the day on which the crew of the *Leo Martin* was rescued, it chanced that the tall, dark man with the ugly scar drew away from his companions and stood alone by himself at a far end of the deck.

He appeared to be deeply absorbed in meditation, as he looked with a blank expression into space.

While in this mood, our young hero approached quietly to where he stood. But the man was so deeply in thought that he did not heed the lad's step till the latter stopped beside him and held out his hand for a friendly welcome.

This brought the man to his senses, and as he turned and dropped his eyes on Ben, he jumped back as if confronted by a ghost.

"Don't be alarmed," laughed the boy, who rather enjoyed the man's fright.

"But I was," returned the latter, "for I would have expected as soon to see the ghost of Captain Kidd as to meet you here."

"Well, I'm not much of a ghost," answered the lad.

“No, I should think not, with those red cheeks. You have made a wonderful change since I saw you last.”

“Yes, I suppose so, and I feel as much better as I look.”

“But tell me how you came on board this ship.”

A hasty explanation followed, wherein Ben said he had shipped as cabin boy, but he carefully avoided saying anything about being smuggled on board.

“We must have sailed about the same time,” said the man.

“Yes, that is so, but your ship proved less fortunate than this one. On that account I am sorry, but I am glad to see you all the same.”

“Well, Ben, you seem to be getting acquainted,” said Commodore Hopkins, who had approached quietly and unobserved.

“Yes—getting more acquainted,” he replied, “and I hope you will get acquainted, too.”

“I should be glad to,” replied the merchant.

Ben attempted to introduce the two men, but got somewhat confused, inasmuch as he didn't know the stranger's name.

“Hansel—John Hansel is my name,” said the man, coming to Ben's aid.

“I am glad to meet you, Mr. Hansel,” replied the merchant pleasantly.

“Mr. Hansel is the man, commodore, who saved me from old Mother Grimmi’s clutches the night I got away from her den. If it had not been for him I don’t know what would have happened to me.”

“Ah, indeed! Well, Mr. Hansel, you did a noble act. I congratulate you for having done Ben so good a turn—better, even, than I have done him since he came on board this ship.”

Hansel’s face flushed with pride.

“Thank you for the compliment,” he returned, “but what have you done for him?”

Commodore Hopkins related briefly how he had protected the lad from Captain Steel’s abuse, and then, leading up to the subject which he wished to discuss, said:

“Ben has told us a very interesting story of his life at the old woman’s den—Mother Grimmi, is that her name?”

“Yes,” answered Hansel, and then a frown passed over his face, as if he regretted having admitted any knowledge of the old woman.

He fixed his eye sharply upon the commodore to try and make out his purpose, but the latter’s genial manner threw him off his guard.

“Well, it must have been a dramatic scene when you sprang between her and the boy. It is lucky, Mr. Hansel, that you were there, or he might have been killed by the infuriated old

hag," said the commodore, in a generous, complimentary way.

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Hansel.

"I guess it was," put in Ben. "I've wished ever since that I might see you to thank you for your kindness."

"Oh, that's all right, and besides you thanked me at the time."

"Well, I didn't take time for much of anything, I was so anxious to leave that den."

"I didn't wonder at your haste in leaving, but I was afraid she would recapture you."

"No; she did not, and I guess never will now."

"Why do you say 'now' so emphatically?" asked Hansel, with a troubled look.

"I didn't intend to speak it that way," said Ben. "I only meant that I am so far away she cannot get at me very well."

"Yes, that is so," returned Hansel, more cheerfully than before.

Perhaps he thought by the boy's remark that he still supposed Mother Grimmis alive.

That certainly would have been the natural conclusion, but whether or not this was the thought that cheered him up I cannot say. Something, however, seemed to remove a burden from his mind, and his reticent manner changed to one of more frank geniality.

“When we get back to New York again,” said Commodore Hopkins, still holding to this subject, “I will see that she doesn’t get him in her clutches again—that is, if he is not able to take care of himself.”

This remark convinced Hansel that neither the commodore nor Ben knew anything about Mother Grimmi’s suspicious death, so thereafter he talked with careless freedom.

In the conversation that followed Commodore Hopkins skilfully drew from Hansel the fact that he had known Mother Grimmi for fully fifteen years. This made it seem probable that he might be well acquainted with Ben’s history.

XXXV.

“ I COULDN'T think, papa, where you and Ben were,” said Bertha, who now joined them on deck.

We have been here for some time, having a pleasant chat with Mr. Hansel.”

“ You always make friends, and enjoy yourself talking. But I almost forgot what I came for. Mamma wants to see you in the state-room.”

“ All right, my dear, we will go at once ;” and turning to Hansel, the commodore said, “ I will see you again soon.”

“ Aren't you coming with us, Ben ?” asked Bertha, as they moved away.

“ I will be down directly,” replied he ; and he wished he might join her at that instant, but he wanted to talk further with the newcomer.

“ He is a pleasant man,” said Hansel, when the commodore had passed from view.

“ Yes, and a very kind one,” replied Ben. “ He is the owner of this ship, too.”

“ The owner ?”

“ Yes.”

"What is he doing here?"

"He is taking a trip to Australia for his daughter's health."

"Well, he seems to have taken a liking to you."

"Yes, I know he has."

"You are in big luck, boy. If you work him right, you can make a stake out of him."

"I don't want to work him at all. Why should I?"

"To make some money, to be sure."

"I don't want to get my money in that way, and besides, I would prefer his friendship."

"I wouldn't be a chump, if I was you. Money is the best friend you can have, youngster."

"Well, suppose I have both friendship and money; wouldn't that still be better?"

"Why, how can you have both?" asked Hansel curiously.

He was alive to the subject of money, and now showed much interest in the conversation.

"Well, through Commodore Hopkins' assistance, I may learn that I am already rich," replied Ben; and he watched the man carefully, to note the effect.

The lad was leading up to the subject so dear to him—that of his early history.

Hansel's face instantly took on an eager, surprised look.

“Rich—you, rich?” said he, as if he doubted his own senses.

“Yes, I may be, but perhaps you know more about it than I,” said Ben, feeling that he was making good headway.

“I?”

“Yes, you.”

“Why, you talk like a child.”

“Well, I don’t think like one, for I know pretty well what I am talking about.”

Hansel became nervous and moved about uneasily.

“So you think I know more about you than you know about yourself?” said he, after a moment’s thought.

“Yes, that is what I meant,” said the lad, with assurance.

“What makes you think so?”

“I have very good reasons for believing as I do.”

“Suppose you state them, then.”

“That would be useless.”

“Why so?”

“Because you wouldn’t tell me any sooner how I came to be with old Mother Grimmis——”

“You talk as if I knew,” interrupted Hansel.

“Yes, I know I do,” was Ben’s quiet response.

Hansel eyed Ben sharply, with his brows knit in thought.

“ Well,” said he, after a pause, “ what has that to do with the money—the money that you imagine you are worth ? ”

“ Everything, sir ; for if I knew my early history, I could trace the money.”

A grasping, covetous look came into Hansel's face. Money—he wanted a share of it. Where was it? How could it be got?

“ Is it possible this lad is rich ? ” he asked himself, as he walked across the deck with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and his head dropped as if in deep study.

Ben watched him with surprise, and a still keener interest, to try and make out his thoughts.

“ What makes you think you are worth money ? ” asked Hansel, standing again beside the lad.

“ There are several reasons for thinking so,” answered Ben cautiously.

“ And what are they ? ” pursued the man.

“ I don't care to repeat them at present.”

“ But you want to pump me and find out all I know,” sneered Hansel, with a flash of temper.

“ I didn't ask you to tell me.”

“ No, but you tried to find out without asking.”

“ Well, I can find out,” said Ben, somewhat independently, “ just as I had planned to before you came on board, and when I never expected to see you again.”

“ You had better do so, then.”

“ So I shall, but it will take time and money to get at the facts.”

Ben discovered that the word “ money ” produced a peculiar effect upon this man, so he purposely alluded to it.

“ How much will it cost you,” asked Hansel, “ and who will pay the bills ? ”

“ Whatever the expense is, Commodore Hopkins will pay it until I get my money.”

“ Will he ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Suppose I could furnish the information, how much would it be worth to me ? ” said Hansel, with a grasping look.

Ben trembled with emotion. He felt that the man before him knew the story of his life, and how eager he was to possess it !

“ I don't know, but I will ask the commodore for you,” he returned.

“ What shall you say to him ? ” asked Hansel suspiciously, for he feared some complication might arise that would be bad for him.

“ I'll tell him that you know who I am, and how I came to be with old Mother Grimmis, but that you think the information is worth something to you.”

“ No, don't put it in that way,” said Hansel nervously.

“ But that is the fact, isn't it ? ”

“ I didn't say so. ”

“ Well, I don't want to play the part of a fool, ” said Ben independently. “ If you have no information to sell, what is the use of my talking to Commodore Hopkins ? It would only throw him off the trail he is on now. ”

“ Don't get too uppish, young man, ” returned Hansel. “ I am careful what I say—mind you, what I *actually say*—but if you want to imagine that I know all about your early history, why, very well ; I am ready to negotiate. ”

“ I think I understand you now. I will see the commodore as I proposed. ”

“ It will be no use for him to offer a mean sum, ” remarked the man, as Ben was about to go.

“ And it will be useless for you to demand an unreasonable sum, for you know he has another way of getting at the point. ”

“ I will be fair. You may say that I will ask only a fair price, ” said Hansel, alarmed lest he lose the chance to turn his information to good account.

Ben hastened to Commodore Hopkins' state-room, more excited than the small boy is on the arrival of the annual circus. He repeated the conversation between himself and John Hansel, substantially as I have given it,

“So he practically admits that he knows who you are, and how you came to be with old Mother Grimmiis,” said the commodore.

“Yes, that is it,” answered Ben excitedly.

“Well, I’m not surprised, and it may turn out that he had something to do with kidnapping you. I will see him in the morning, and try and fix upon a plan for getting whatever information he possesses.”

“In the morning?” repeated Ben, in a tone that expressed his disappointment.

“Yes, that will be soon enough. It is best not to seem too anxious, my boy. We are in for a long voyage, so there will be plenty of time,” said the commodore reassuringly.

“Yes, I suppose so,” answered the lad, but the words did not flow naturally. He had to force them reluctantly from his lips, though he little realized the danger this delay might occasion—a delay of a few hours only.

XXXVI.

THE day had been sunny and beautiful. In the whole broad firmament not a cloud could be seen. The air was pure and exhilarating, and it tempted our two young friends into remaining on deck long after the great, red sun had dipped into the ocean, and sinking from view, reflected its gorgeous tints upon the western horizon.

They watched these shifting scenes with admiration, and chatted lightly with happy hearts, as the gallant ship plowed merrily through the waves.

After a time the brilliant colors of the sunset faded, and a reddish hue spread quickly over the entire heavens.

“Why, how queer everything looks,” said Bertha; “and the whole sky has a peculiar tint. I wonder what it means?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” replied Ben. “I noticed it just before you spoke.”

“I hope nothing bad will happen, with us away out on this ocean.”

“I hope not, surely, and I can’t imagine anything except a storm that would bother us.”

"It has been so pleasant all day that it doesn't seem as if we could have much of a storm so soon," replied Bertha, looking into Ben's eyes.

"No, that is so," returned he reassuringly.

"But on this ocean they come up suddenly. I remember having read about frightful wind storms sweeping down over deserts and out upon the ocean."

"Do they come so far out as this?" asked Ben, with a wholesome dread of another storm, and he drew nearer to the sweet girl beside him, as if for mutual protection.

"Yes, I think so," replied she. "They blow ships far out of their course sometimes. These winds are called 'simoons.'"

"Simoons?"

"Yes; I believe the word is also spelled 'simooms.' It means a hot, dry wind that arises in the deserts."

"I hope it won't strike us, for I don't want another broken arm," said Ben, as he nursed the one previously fractured; and looking up he saw a black, ominous cloud that had appeared suddenly since the sun went down.

Placing his hand upon Bertha's arm, with a slight shudder, he called her attention to his discovery. Without speaking, she drew nearer to him, as a sense of fear came to her.

Small clouds were now driven hither and thither. The reddish shade had gone, and darkness seemed to fall with unusual rapidity.

“I am afraid a storm is really coming,” said Ben, and he tightened the pressure upon Bertha’s arm, and drew her yet closer to him as they watched the movements of the black clouds.

More and more threatening they appeared, and now the wind came with a greater force, and from a different quarter.

The approaching storm had been observed by the officers of the ship, and she was hurriedly put in readiness to withstand its fury.

How little our two young friends thought, as they leaned side by side against the bulwarks, that this was their last night on board that beautiful ship! But such was the fact, for twelve hours from that time she was a wreck—stranded upon an unknown reef.

The velocity of the wind increased every minute, and in less than half an hour it was blowing a fearful gale. The darkness closed in upon them—such an intense darkness as seldom occurs.

The gallant ship rode nobly over the monster waves, and inspired all on board with a confidence in her powers; and well did she deserve the praise bestowed upon her by officers and crew, for never before had she shown such superior seaworthiness.

A danger, however, foreign to the thoughts of all on board, lay buried beneath the waves for her destruction.

About four o'clock in the morning, while it was yet dark, she struck with terrible force upon a reef in mid ocean. The shock was tremendous. Everything on board the ship was overturned, and consternation reigned supreme.

The crew—brave, courageous men—hurried hither and thither, with fear and anxiety pictured on every face. What to do first no one seemed to know. That the ship had struck a reef all those familiar with the sea felt certain, but it was so dark nothing definite could be learned.

The wind had abated somewhat, but the sea was still running high, and the force of great waves thrashing against the stranded ship wrenched her so badly that it seemed she must break up before the dawn of day.

The situation was perilous in the extreme—the captain dare not lower a boat, and yet every minute it seemed as if the ship must go to pieces. Presently an enormous wave struck her a crashing blow, and she groaned and creaked as she ground upon the reef, and then settled as if breaking up.

Captain Maxwell ordered the boats lowered at once, knowing that to remain longer on board would mean certain death for all.

The first man to leave the ship was John Hansel. He was closely followed by the crew of the *Leo Martin*, who, taking him as a leader, madly rushed into the first boat that was lowered, and pushed off, regardless of the safety of others.

Another boat was quickly lowered, and Captain Maxwell ordered that the passengers of the ship—Commodore Hopkins, Mrs. Hopkins, Bertha, and Ben—should be the first to enter this boat. His order was obeyed, and then Dan Spiker, with four sturdy sailors, was sent down to man the craft.

Then a cry reached them that froze their very blood—a single piteous appeal from one, two, three, a dozen throats, and all was over!

All knew the meaning of this cry, but no one spoke—feeling that in the next few moments, perhaps, their fate would be the same as that of those who now sent back this hopeless appeal.

Water and provisions were loaded into the boat. By this time the darkness had so far lifted that Dan Spiker discovered that the reef at a little distance beyond rose to some height out of the water, and as the daylight increased he found that an island of some size lay before them.

Instead of attempting to reach the shore from that point, Dan ordered the boat put off, and directed the men to circle the island at a safe dis-

tance, to avoid being dashed to pieces on the reef.

On the opposite side of the island a little cove was found, where the water was comparatively quiet ; and here the boat was run in, and all were safely landed upon the narrow beach.

Presently the third boat, containing those left on the doomed ship, including Captain Maxwell and the captain of the *Leo Martin*, followed the course taken by Dan Spiker, and in due time landed all safely upon the beach.

The boats were firmly secured, and then the party started across the little island, thankful for their own safety, but with heavy hearts and sad faces as they thought of the terrible fate of those aboard the first boat.

When they arrived on that side of the island where the treacherous reef stretched far out under the boiling surf, their eyes fell upon the mangled bodies of three of the unfortunate men, hurled by the angry waves far up on the coral strand. Portions of the shattered boat lay about them, showing that it had been dashed to pieces against the reef. The bodies of the remaining victims had doubtless been carried out to sea by the undertow.

The scene before them was a pitiable one. Silent tears streamed down the sunburned cheeks of the strong, brave men of that little party, while

Mrs. Hopkins, Bertha, and Ben sobbed as if their hearts would break.

The dead bodies were taken up tenderly by the rough, weather beaten hands of the honest sailors, and placed gently upon a soft green plat. John Hansel, the tall, dark man, was one of them. How white he looked as he lay there cold and motionless in death !

Ben thought of the kindness he had shown him, and the warm tears of sympathy flowed fast as he recounted these facts and considered his untimely death.

Whatever evil the unfortunate man had committed in his brief career was not considered now. If he had taken old Mother Grimmis' life, he had now paid the penalty with his own—paid it so far as was possible in this world.

He had the physique, the bearing, and the intellect of a man. He was not by nature inferior to his race ; but if guilty of the crimes of which he was suspected, how crooked, distorted, and scarred he must seem in that world to which his spirit had but just gone. How dwarfed and shriveled and ugly he will appear when surrounded with noble natures developed and rounded out into a pure, sweet life !

Let us hope that the dead man was not guilty of any crime, and therefore that he is now a larger and nobler man in the great eternity than

he had ever seemed to be in this life of trials and disappointments.

The ship had broken up, and large portions of the cargo came ashore, together with spars, sails, and rigging. Whatever would prove of value to the survivors was secured and taken to a place of safety.

The warm, bright rays of the sun now burst through the clouds and shone with unusual splendor. An observation was taken by Captain Maxwell and Commodore Hopkins which revealed the fact that the ship had been driven nearly a hundred miles out of her course by the storm of the night before ; and this is how she came to strike on the unknown reef.

The island, which was about a mile long and perhaps three quarters of a mile wide, was green and beautiful with its luxuriant vegetation.

On a little elevation overlooking the island a single grave was dug for the three bodies.

All stood with bowed heads as Commodore Hopkins read a chapter from his pocket Testament ; then, dropping upon his knees, the Christian man offered an appropriate and touching prayer. This was followed by the singing of a familiar hymn, which ended the simple but impressive service. Every eye was moist, and every heart was stirred as it had never been stirred before.

XXXVII.

BEFORE placing the bodies in the grave, Captain John Stoddart, of the *Leo Martin*, at the suggestion of Commodore Hopkins, searched the pockets of the dead men to see if anything could be found which should properly be returned to their relatives.

Nothing of any consequence was discovered save a well worn pocketbook, which was taken from the hip pocket of John Hansel. In it was found a number of papers and several trinkets which were supposed to be of little value.

The burial was now made, and then the little party retired to a soft, grassy spot near their boats. Here they threw themselves upon the ground and discussed their situation.

They were on an unknown, uninhabited island, a hundred miles or so from the track of all vessels. Their food and water supply were limited. To remain there, waiting for the possible arrival of some stray ship, meant starvation; to push out upon the treacherous ocean with their frail boats meant perhaps a still more horrible death, yet this they decided to do.

A lunch was brought from the boats and eaten with some relish, for it was now eleven o'clock in the forenoon. After the meal was over Captain Stoddart opened the pocketbook belonging to John Hansel and began examining the papers, to see if he could learn his residence or any desire that he might have wished to be carried out after his death.

After going through the papers, he turned to another compartment of the book, and there found a small gold ring—very small, indeed. It was carefully done up in tissue paper, and around that was wrapped a piece of thin, soft chamois skin. It bore the appearance of having remained thus wrapped up for many months, as it was badly tarnished and looked as if it had not been worn for many years.

"A baby's ring, it looks like," said Captain Stoddart, eying it carefully. "Perhaps it was at one time worn by a child of the dead man, else why should he have given it this affectionate care?"

All eyes were turned to the little golden object, and each felt curious to know its mysterious history.

Various surmises were given, and several of the old sailors were inclined to regard it with superstition. Why they should have felt so I cannot say, for indeed there is no *reason* to sustain superstition in any form.

Ben fixed his eyes upon it with more than an idle curiosity, as also did those who had listened to Dan Spiker's story.

"May not that be the very ring"—he asked himself—"the one that Dan told us about?"

Bertha looked at him, and seemed to read his mind, for her thoughts had been running in the same channel.

He recognized this, as they exchanged these meaning glances, and then she whispered something to her father. Ben felt that she was speaking about the ring—knew she was, even—and he became more and more excited.

Presently the commodore, acting on Bertha's suggestion, asked that he might examine the tiny ring. His request was instantly granted, and it was passed to him by Captain Stoddart.

How small it looked in the commodore's large, strong hands! He handled it with great care, lest it might fall, and become lost in the deep grass on which he was sitting.

Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he commenced rubbing it on the outside to remove the tarnish. When it had grown bright, he called Dan Spiker to him, and asked that honest toiler of the sea if he had ever seen it before.

"I can't say that I have, sir," replied Dan, examining it. "Not this same one, as I know of, but I used to see one that looked like it."

All looked on with surprise at this proceeding, and Ben and Bertha especially became so anxious that they found it difficult to await the process of investigation.

Next the commodore wound his handkerchief around a small pencil and inserted it in the ring. With a thorough rubbing the tarnish was fully removed, and then, placing his glasses to his eyes, he read this name :

VICTOR VAN VLEET.

Ben had watched him with intense interest, and as he saw his face light up he suspected the truth.

Without speaking, however, he passed the ring again to Dan, who instantly placed it to his eye, and, after a moment, said aloud, in a peculiarly surprised tone :

“It is the very ring—Victor Van Vleet ! How could it be in this man’s possession ?”

Every one looked puzzled and surprised. Commodore Hopkins smiled, for he regarded it as a very happy find. Ben moved about nervously, with flushed face and dilated eyes, too excited for the moment to know what to say.

“What does it all mean ?” asked Captain Stoddart of Captain Maxwell.

“I don’t know,” replied he. “I am as much puzzled as you.”

Overhearing this, Commodore Hopkins thought it only proper to explain, and he said :

“ Our friend here, Mr. Spiker, rescued a child from a wrecked steamer a number of years ago. Upon its finger was a small gold ring, inside of which was engraved the name ‘ Victor Van Vleet.’ He took the child to his home in Jersey City, and cared for it as he would have cared for one of his own. After it had been with him for several months it mysteriously disappeared, and has never been heard of from that day to this.”

“ And now we have the very ring,” put in Dan.

“ It is a remarkable coincidence,” said the two captains, and the several sailors nodded their agreement with the officers.

“ Yes, so it is,” assented the commodore ; “ but what makes it still more remarkable is that we believe this boy ” (laying his hand upon Ben) “ is the very one who once wore this ring, and that his true name is Victor Van Vleet.”

“ Is it possible ? ” exclaimed Captain Maxwell, as if hardly believing his own ears.

“ Yes, it is ; and I believe this little ring will enable us to prove his identity.”

“ I hope so,” said the captain.

“ And so do I,” “ and I,” “ and I,” responded every one, for Ben had become a great favorite with all.

With burning cheeks he thanked them for their good wishes—thanked them as an embarrassed boy naturally would when he found himself the object of so many eyes.

“Don’t be frightened, Ben,” laughed Bertha, amused at his confusion.

This remark, together with the lad’s nervousness, made every one for the moment forget the sad events of the day, and join Bertha in a harmless laugh at the boy’s expense.

“I should like to keep this ring for the present,” said Commodore Hopkins, addressing Captain Stoddart.

“Certainly you can,” replied the latter. “It will doubtless be of service to you and our young friend there,” meaning Ben.

“Thank you,” returned Commodore Hopkins; and he wrapped the ring as before and placed it securely in his own pocketbook.

“Now,” continued he, “we must commence thinking of our own safety. It is already nearly twelve o’clock. If we are to start today, we should lose no more time.”

“Then we will put the boats in readiness for an immediate start,” said Captain Maxwell.

He then ordered Dan Spiker and a number of the men to get all the sails and rigging that were secured from the wreck. When these were brought, sails were readily bent in both boats.

“Which boat shall we go in, papa?” asked Bertha.

“In the long boat, I think, my dear,” replied he.

“Yes, you will go in the long boat,” said Captain Maxwell, who overheard her question.

“And Ben will be in our boat?” asked she anxiously.

“Oh, yes,” replied he, as if that went without saying; and then he announced that all was ready for a start. Each man had received his orders, and at once made for the boat to which he had been assigned.

“Must Dan go in the other boat?” said Ben to Captain Maxwell.

“Oh, please let him come with us,” pleaded Bertha. “We all like him so much.”

“I had planned to have him go in that boat,” replied the captain, “but to please you and Ben I will let him come with us.”

The honest sailor's face readily showed how pleased he was at this change, and Commodore Hopkins, with Ben and Bertha, felt equally glad to have him with them.

The two boats now put out, and steering north-east by north entered upon a perilous and uncertain voyage. Every heart was heavy with many forebodings as the little island faded from view.

XXXVIII.

PUTTING out upon the mighty ocean in frail boats, searching for some stray ship of rescue, is a most depressing undertaking.

How hazardous such a venture seems when the innumerable dangers are considered—dangers of greedy monsters of the deep, of mountain waves and heavy winds, of starvation and burning thirst—thirst that dethrones the mind and turns civilized man into a raving, bloodthirsty animal.

Our little party thought of all these possibilities, as well as of the dreaded Malay pirate ships that are yet found in the Indian Ocean. When night shut in upon them, sadder hearts seldom beat than theirs.

Ben and Bertha were the least depressed of the party, for they realized the dangers less than the others, and their buoyant, youthful spirits enabled them in a measure to throw off the gloom that had now settled upon the faces of those better able to realize the perils of their position.

“I am sorry, Ben, that I did not do as you wanted me to, and get Mr. Hausel’s story before it was too late,” said Commodore Hopkins, hop-

ing by this conversation to divert his own mind from his surroundings.

“Yes, I am sorry, too,” replied the lad ; “but of course you did not expect the accident that overtook us.”

“No, certainly not. No one would have looked for such a terrible blow.”

“That is so. And perhaps, after all, the little ring will serve us as well.”

“I hope so, and believe it will—the ring, with the other evidence in our possession. Nevertheless, I wish we had obtained his story, for now it may take us longer to get at the facts.”

“Of course I feel anxious about it, but I can wait all right. I suppose we shall never know now whether old Mother Grimmiis was murdered or not,” said Ben, his head resting upon his hand, as he leaned upon the rail of the boat.

“No, I imagine not,” returned the commodore. “The secrets of her death were probably buried today with John Hansel.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” said the lad, as his mind wandered back over the past ; and thus thinking, he lapsed once more into silence, and all was still—not a voice was heard as the little boat sailed further and further out upon this vast ocean in its almost hopeless voyage.

After a time drowsiness crept over them, and all, save those on watch, slept soundly. In the

morning an observation was taken, which showed that they had made over a hundred miles since leaving the island. This brought them again into the track of vessels plying between Cape Town and the leading ports of Australia.

The sun rose clear and beautiful. Every eye was strained, looking in all directions for a sail. During the day the tops of several masts were seen, but all were far away. The following day passed with little to encourage them. Toward night the sky became overcast, and soon the rain commenced falling.

For twenty four hours this weather continued. The outlook became disheartening, and those with the most hopeful temperaments felt as if they would never again see home. Presently, however, the wind changed, and the clouds breaking away, revealed a sunset of the rarest and most brilliant beauty.

This sight gave the little party new courage and new hope. As the gloom of the storm passed away, their depressed spirits rose higher than they had yet gone since the wreck of their gallant ship. This was a rebound to natures that could not remain long cast down. It could not have been a premonition of a better fate than that which had stared them grimly in the face, though such was but a little way removed.

Early the following morning, a trim clipper

ship discovered their signal of distress, and, putting about, soon came alongside of them. They were quickly taken on board.

"How long have you been in these boats?" asked the captain of Commodore Hopkins.

"Nearly four days and nights, sir," the latter replied.

"Where were you bound when wrecked?"

"We were bound for Australia."

"Indeed. I have just come from there—from Melbourne"—said the officer, with a strong English accent, "and I am now on my return trip to Liverpool."

"I am glad to know that, for I feel now that I would prefer returning home to going, as I had intended, to Australia."

"From your pronunciation I take it you are an American."

"Yes, America is my country."

"Were you on a pleasure trip?"

"Well, not exactly. I came principally for my daughter's health, but I have business interests in Australia that I thought of looking after."

"Has your daughter improved as you anticipated?"

"Yes, I feel more than repaid on her account alone for all my loss and anxiety."

"I am glad of that, and I suppose your ship was well insured."

“Yes, but my personal loss, in the shape of baggage, was heavy. I am anxious to get into port, so that I can get a new outfit of clothing for my family and myself.”

“I dare say you are. Well, in about twenty days I will land you at Suez.”

“In twenty days?”

“Yes, and in less time if we have good weather and a fair wind.”

“I am glad to know that. The time will soon pass, and when once there we can soon reach London.”

“Yes, it’s a short run by the P. & O. steamer,” said the captain, as he smoked his cigar with evident relish. “Shall you go direct to London?”

“Yes, I think so. Still it is possible that my family may wish to go to Alexandria and a few other places on our return.”

“I think they would enjoy it. In fact, I should like such a trip myself. But if you will excuse me I will go and make the best arrangements possible for your comfort.”

“Certainly, do not allow me to occupy your time, and do not put yourself out too much for us.”

“I will look out for that,” returned the captain heartily.

“One word before you go,” said Commodore Hopkins, calling the officer back. “You will be well paid for all your trouble and expense.”

Whether this remark influenced the captain to do his best, or whether he did it from an inborn desire to make others happy, I cannot say. It is, however, certain that he made our friends very comfortable during the run to Suez.

Many pleasing incidents occurred to help while away the time, but as they had no direct bearing upon this story, they cannot be recorded in the brief history of our young hero.

At Suez Commodore Hopkins, his family, and Ben parted company with the crew of the *Bertha Hopkins*, the former going to Alexandria by railroad, and the latter direct to London by steamer.

Dan Spiker disliked leaving them, but as there was no other way he accepted the situation as cheerfully as possible.

Before they parted, Commodore Hopkins gave him his card and told him he wanted to see him as soon as he returned to New York. He intimated very plainly, much to the honest sailor's delight, that he would see him well provided for in the future.

"And, by the way, I came near forgetting to say that I want your testimony in establishing Ben's identity. This, you see, is important. Gain all the information you can relative to his case."

"Yes, I will do so; and I will be on hand whenever you want me."

“No doubt of that, Dan ; you are always reliable. I will write you when I shall be at home.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Dan ; and shaking hands heartily with the commodore, he went at once on board the London steamer.

He had already said good by to Mrs. Hopkins, Bertha, and Ben. They all were sorry to part with him, for, though in manner he was only a sailor, yet his heart was that of a nobleman.

In Alexandria Commodore Hopkins purchased a supply of clothing for his family, and Ben as well. He remained there a few days, during which time he cabled to his house in New York, saying that he had been wrecked, that the vessel was lost and crew all saved.

A reply came back which advised his speedy return, as business, owing to some unexpected change, needed his personal attention.

This decided him to go at once to Liverpool, and there take a steamer for New York.

XXXIX.

IN less than three weeks from their departure from Alexandria our friends found themselves, one bright winter morning, sailing into New York harbor. How homelike everything looked! Coney Island, Staten Island, the forts, the shipping, and the tall spires and big buildings of Brooklyn and New York, were all familiar objects to them. They had had a delightfully pleasant journey home, and Bertha's enthusiasm knew no bounds. She thought, evidently, of the many friends who would welcome her back to their merry circle. She was well and strong now, and what a round of enjoyment she would find in the winter sports, which had but just commenced!

But with our young hero the situation was quite different. What friends had he to welcome him home? He thought of this, and of the danger of being arrested and thrust into prison on the charge of murder. He knew, however, that he could prove his innocence, but, nevertheless, the idea of being arrested was depressing.

Another thought, however, made him feel still

more sad and lonely. This was the idea of being separated from the commodore and his family—from Bertha in particular.

He had learned to love them as the kindest of friends, who had made his life sunny and happy. What a sweet, charming nature Bertha had revealed, and how companionable and entertaining she had proved herself to him!

Now this association he felt must come to an end, and the thought sickened him, and made his heart ache with a sense of untold loneliness.

Bertha had been standing by his side, looking at the familiar scenes on every hand, which fully engaged her attention. She therefore gave him no thought for the time. In his depressed mood he felt this as a neglect, though it was but natural that she should have done as she did. Looking up now, however, she saw in his eyes tears which he was no longer able to repress. She at once suspected the truth, and in feeling tones asked him what made him so sad.

“Everything,” he answered slowly, and in a broken voice.

The question was a delicate one to answer.

“I am very sorry,” she replied. “I thought you would feel glad to get home again.”

“I ought to, I suppose, and I would if we could all live as we have during the last three or four months.”

“ But of course we can't on shore.”

“ No, I know it ; and the thought of the change is what makes me feel so lonely.”

“ I wish you wouldn't feel so.”

“ I wish so, too, but I can't help it.”

“ If you find that fortune, then you ought to be happy. I should think you would be glad to get back to New York to look after it.”

“ So I am on that account, and yet if I had a dozen fortunes I would not be as happy as I was on our ship when you used to read to me, and we had so many good times playing games and roaming around on deck.”

“ We did have delightful times, didn't we ? ” said Bertha, with enthusiasm.

“ Yes, we did, and now they are all over—forever, perhaps.”

“ Oh, don't say that. We may all go on a sea voyage again some time.”

“ I'm afraid that ' some time ' is a long way off.”

“ Well, but there's lots of fun to be had in New York, you know.”

“ Yes, if one only has friends, as you have. You know I have no friends here that I care much for.”

“ Mamma and papa are here. Don't you care for them ? I am sure they are your friends.”

“ Of course I care for them. They have been so kind and good to me, and so have you, too.”

“Then if you count me you have three friends.”

“I hope I may consider you one.”

“Why shouldn't you?”

“I don't know, unless—well, perhaps your old friends will occupy all your time.”

“You offend me, Ben, if you really believe what you say.”

“I don't want to believe it, surely, and I wouldn't offend you for the world.”

“Why do you say such foolish things, then?”

“I don't know, unless it is because I felt afraid you would not care for me any more as a friend.”

“And you felt badly about it?”

“I did, indeed.”

“Well, you were mistaken. I do not forget one so easily—one whom I—who has been so agreeable as you have,” said Bertha, blushing.

The color in her cheeks seemed to warm our hero's over chilled spirits.

“Thank you,” said he. “I am glad to feel sure about it. I really didn't think you would forget me.”

“I can't understand why you should have felt that way. How did you imagine I could forget you, when I shall see you so often?”

“See me so often?”

“Yes, of course. Don't you intend to come to see us at all?”

“ Nothing would please me so much.”

“ What, then, would keep you from coming ? ”

“ Well, you live in great style, you know,” said he, with some confusion, “ and your friends are rich and educated. You know the way I have lived, and that I have never been to school, so I thought you and your mother might not want me to call at your home.”

Bertha looked pained at this remark, and said tenderly :

“ I appreciate your feelings, Ben, and understand you now, but you are entirely wrong in supposing those reasons would tell against you. You can get the education, and whether you turn out rich or not will make no difference to us. Mamma and papa think everything of you.”

These words were sweet to Ben, and made him feel happy once more.

The conversation was interrupted by the commodore and his wife, who now joined them. Passengers crowded closely about on deck, and exchanged pleasant remarks with each other. Many were saying good by to the friends they had made on the steamer, for they knew there would be too much confusion after the steamer landed.

When our friends were finally landed at the dock, and had gone through the wearisome custom house formalities, Commodore Hopkins called a cab driver, and after exchanging a word with

him, motioned to his wife to follow him. He placed the small parcels inside the cab, and then handed his wife and Bertha in.

“ Good by,” said Ben sadly, at the same time extending his hand to Commodore Hopkins.

“ Why, what do you mean ? ” asked the latter. “ Do you suppose I ’m going to let you shift for yourself now ? Jump into the carriage, and drop such foolish notions at once. ”

Ben flushed with gratitude, and obeyed the command most willingly.

“ So you are going home with us, Ben ? ” said Bertha, surprised as well as he.

“ It seems so,” returned the lad, “ though I certainly didn ’t expect to do so. ”

“ Well, I am glad you are. We will have just as good a time as we did on our ship, and I have ever so many nice books that I will read to you, unless you prefer to read them yourself. ”

“ Thank you a thousand times. You are all very kind. I would rather hear you read the books—I enjoy them better. ”

The commodore looked at his wife and winked slyly.

“ Yes, you will enjoy yourself at our home, Ben,” said he. “ Bertha and her friends can entertain you as well as she and Dan Spiker did on shipboard, when you were laid up with a broken arm, and almost a broken head. ”

“ Poor Dan ! ” said Bertha. “ How he hated to leave us at Suez ! I like him, if he is only a sailor.”

“ The fact that he is simply a sailor is no sensible reason why you should dislike him,” said her father.

“ But many people would, you know.”

“ Many people are fools, too, you know. Dan is an intelligent, noble hearted fellow. I liked him myself, and shall give him a chance to show the mettle that there is in him.”

“ Oh, good, papa, I hope you will ! I wonder if he has arrived home yet ? ”

“ Probably not, but he will be here soon. I shall drop him a letter telling him we are here, so that he will call at my office, as he promised.”

The cab now stopped before the commodore's beautiful residence. The party alighted and passed in.

“ Now make yourself at home, Ben,” said the commodore.

“ He is afraid we wouldn't want him to visit us here,” remarked Bertha.

“ Nonsense,” replied her father, as he passed into another room. “ You must entertain him so well that he will see how foolish that idea is.”

“ Now, you see, Ben, what I told you is so,” said Bertha.

“ Yes, I see it is, and I believed you then.”

A servant showed him to a pretty room on the second floor, which he was to occupy while a guest of the family.

It was handsomely furnished, and looked very inviting. He had never seen so pretty a sleeping room before, and he wondered how the soft, plump bed would feel to him.

During the day Commodore Hopkins advised him to remain in the house, and not expose himself to any unnecessary danger, until the order for his arrest could be quashed. He was only too glad to act upon this advice, for he was uneasy and anxious, fearing his whereabouts might be discovered.

“Here is a letter I have written to my attorney, Mr. Montgomery,” said the commodore. “I will read it to you.”

It ran thus :

MY DEAR MR. MONTGOMERY :

I arrived home this morning. My family came with me, also Ben, whose true name is doubtless Victor Van Vleet. We are all well, notwithstanding the shipwreck which came near costing us our lives. I hope you can find it convenient to call and see us this evening. I want to know what you have done in the boy's case. I have some new facts to give you which will go far to sustain the theory I advanced in my letter mailed to you from Cape Town. The order of arrest which is now out against him must be quashed, and the sooner it is done the better.

Very truly yours,

ELISHA HOPKINS.

A messenger boy was called, and the letter was sent to Mr. Montgomery at his residence.

In the evening papers of that day, Anthony Boggs read the arrival of Commodore Hopkins and family, and this simple announcement struck terror to his guilty soul. He had learned from Captain Caleb Steel everything that occurred on the *Bertha Hopkins* up to the time he was driven from his command. He knew, therefore, of the strong friend Ben had found in Commodore Hopkins. He knew also that the latter had in his possession the letter that he wrote to Captain Steel, which urged that our hero should be put where he would never again return alive to New York. The thought of these facts made him shudder and grow white with alarm. He dreaded the reckoning that he now felt was sure to come.

XL.

WILLIAM MONTGOMERY received Commodore Hopkins' letter, and shortly after eight o'clock in the evening called at the latter's residence.

"I am very glad to see you home again after your long absence," said he, shaking hands heartily with the commodore and his wife; "and here is Bertha," he added, taking her proffered hand. "I should hardly know you, you have grown so round and rosy. Your red cheeks are very becoming to you. I am delighted to see you looking so well."

"Thank you; but I am afraid you flatter me, Mr. Montgomery," said Bertha, with a blush.

"No, indeed," protested he, while the commodore, with the sparkle of pleasure in his eyes, led him to where our hero stood watching them.

"This is our young friend—the one who found and returned your big St. Bernard. Don't you recognize him?"

"No, I certainly should not have known him," replied Mr. Montgomery; and then addressing Ben, he said:

“Is it possible, my boy, that you are the same one?”

“Yes, I suppose I am,” said Ben, as the lawyer pressed his hand warmly.

“So you are; your voice sounds natural, and now I recognize your features, but you have changed even more than Bertha. Then your face was thin and sallow, and now you are the picture of health.”

He might have noted a greater change yet in the lad's dress, for his thin, tattered suit had been replaced by neatly fitting clothes made from a rich, dark material.

He was undoubtedly a handsome boy as he stood there with flushed face, the cynosure of all eyes.

Bertha realized this, and felt proud that she could call him her friend. It seemed to her that he never looked so well before.

The surprise manifested by Mr. Montgomery told her that he was astonished at seeing such a fine looking boy, one so well dressed, and with such a manly, intelligent face.

“Well, what good news have you for us?” asked Commodore Hopkins presently. “What have you heard about Ben?”

“So far as I can say, the news is good,” replied Mr. Montgomery.

“I suppose you received my letter mailed from Cape Town?”

"Yes, but it reached me only a few days ago."

"It must have been delayed, then, for it was mailed over two months ago."

"I noticed the date, and was unable to account for the long time it took to come from Cape Town."

"I am sorry it did not reach you sooner."

"I regret the delay myself. Artemas Diggs, the detective who started in the case, has been out of town for the last two weeks. I have been waiting for him to return."

"So I suppose nothing has been done toward investigating the matter?"

"No, nothing since your letter came, I am sorry to say. I thought it best to wait for Mr. Diggs, who is an able detective."

"Doubtless that was the wisest plan. I know Artemas Diggs by reputation, having often seen his name in connection with important cases."

"Yes, he is well known. When Ben failed to come to my office as he had promised, I feared old Mother Grimmi had recaptured him at that time, so I started Mr. Diggs on the case. The information he got, together with that contained in your letter, points strongly to foul play."

Mr. Montgomery then handed the commodore a paper that contained an account of the coroner's inquest.

"I have seen that," observed the commodore ;

“but are there no new developments regarding the old woman’s death?”

“No, nothing since the inquest—none whatever—and I doubt seriously if she was murdered. Artemas Diggs holds to the same view.”

“How does he account for her sudden death?”

“He thinks she died from the effects of strong drink, either directly or indirectly.”

“Well, whatever caused her death will make no difference to us now, as we have the evidence to prove that she was alive when Ben left her hovel.”

“Is it possible?”

“Yes, there is no doubt about it. We saw the man who came to the boy’s rescue, and he confirmed Ben’s story in every particular.”

The commodore then related the circumstances that brought John Hansel on board the Bertha Hopkins—told all that passed between the unfortunate man and Ben; gave an account of the wreck, of the drowning and burial, and finally told the story of the small gold ring as it was related in a previous chapter.

“Victor Van Vleet; the name is cut plainly,” said Mr. Montgomery, as he held the tiny ring close to his eye. “This will go far toward proving the boy’s identity. Mr. Diggs will arrive home tonight. I will put him at work on the case again tomorrow morning, and considering

the points we have already in our possession, I shall hope for big results."

"I hope so, too; but in the mean time we must have the order of arrest quashed, if possible."

"That is a rather difficult thing to do, but I hope we can effect it."

Ben looked grave at this answer, for he dreaded the possibility of an arrest.

"The evidence is so direct I should think it ought to be fixed all right," said Commodore Hopkins, with a look of disappointment.

"So it ought. I will see the district attorney tomorrow morning, and present the case to him. He will doubtless want to see you, so I will make an appointment for the meeting."

"All right; I will be on hand whenever you want me, for I am anxious to get the indictment quashed, so that Ben may feel free and easy once more."

"Yes, it must be done. I will give the matter my personal attention," said Mr. Montgomery, as if he felt more than an ordinary professional interest in the case.

"When this question is disposed of, we can go ahead with the other, I suppose?" said the commodore.

"Oh, that will be started tomorrow morning, without reference to this matter."

"I am glad of that, for the sooner that villain

of a Boggs is brought to justice the better it will be for all."

"So it will. My suspicions were aroused against him long before your letter came, and now I am convinced of his villainy."

"I wonder what is the cause of his malice toward Ben?"

"I imagine it has something to do with money or he would never have been willing to offer such a reward as he did to Caleb Steel," said the lawyer, as he rose to go.

Turning to Ben he invited him to call at his house with the commodore's family, saying that Mrs. Montgomery would be very glad to see him.

Ben thanked him politely, and wondered at his own good fortune at being entertained by such hospitable people. A few months ago he was a half starved, half clothed street gamin, without friends, or any prospects to encourage him; now he was the guest of one of New York's best families, with warm friends, and a prospect of finding himself the possessor of a large fortune.

XLI.

ARTEMAS DIGGS reported at Mr. Montgomery's office early on the following morning, and received the instructions that he was to follow.

Half an hour from that time he might have been seen in the vicinity of Anthony Boggs' residence. He had commenced his work in earnest, and was now watching for the butcher's wagon.

Ben might have wondered what this long headed detective wanted of a butcher's wagon, had he known what Mr. Diggs was doing, but the latter had a well formed plan. Presently the long looked for wagon appeared, and Mr. Diggs quickly noted the name of the proprietor and his location. A few moments later he entered the butcher's shop.

"Good morning," said Mr. Diggs, with a pleasant smile.

"Good morning," returned the proprietor, hoping he had a new customer.

"I see you have some choice beef ; I think you may send a roast to my house."

"Yes, I have that, sir; none better in the market."

"I believe you. My butcher has not sent me any meat that will compare with this, I am sure."

"I'm glad to hear you say it, and I know, if you were my customer, you'd get the best—none but the best," said the big, fat butcher, straightening back with pride.

"There is the evidence all around here to sustain what you say," returned Mr. Diggs, pointing to the several large, fat beef carcasses that hung suspended by strong hooks. "I must tell my wife about your market and ask her to buy her meats of you."

"Thank you, sir; thank you! I like to deal with a man who appreciates a good thing the same as you do."

"Yes, I think I know good meat when I see it. I suppose you have a large run of trade."

"Yes, sir, a large run."

"And a good number of customers on the avenue, no doubt."

"Oh, yes, sir; yes, sir; and they pay well, too, you know."

"I should think they would. By the way, I saw your wagon, as I came along, before the door of a rich man whom I know a little by reputation."

"Is that so? What is his name?"

"His name is Boggs."

"Oh, Anthony Boggs. Well, I should say he is a good customer. He always wants the best, and nothing is said about the price, either. He is a very rich man, I am told."

"So I understand from those who know him. I wonder where he made all his money?"

"I can't say that, sir. I've heard, though, that he speculates some. Perhaps he made his money in that way."

"Maybe he did; anyhow, I've heard he used to be as poor as any man. He must be an enterprising fellow," replied Mr. Diggs, feeling very well satisfied with the progress of his interview.

"He must that, to make a fortune in these days, when so many men are going up."

"Yes, that is so. I wonder how old a man he is?"

"I should say he may be forty."

"So old as that? I supposed him to be a younger man."

"I think he can't be much less than forty. He has a son sixteen or seventeen years old."

"And he is the oldest child?"

"Yes, and the youngest, too."

"Then Mr. Boggs has no other children?"

"No. His wife has been dead, I believe, a good many years."

"Is that so? Who keeps house for him?"

"His sister. She has been with him ever since I have supplied the house with meat."

"I wonder if this sister is the lady Ben saw with Boggs the night that they went to the Star Theater?" said Artemas Diggs to himself.

"Well," said he finally, "I must not neglect my business any longer. You may send that roast to my house, number — West Forty ninth Street. I will see you again before long. Good day."

"Good day," said the butcher, thinking he had made a customer of a remarkably genial man.

Artemas Diggs felt that he had made a good start on the case. He knew now that Boggs was at one time a poor man, that he was a widower, and that his property must have been accumulated in a very short time. How it came into his hands was the main question, however, that he was now trying to solve. He bent his energies upon this point, especially while he sought to learn what connection Boggs might have with our hero.

He started out with the idea that Ben's presence was dangerous to Boggs' interests. This seemed clear, from the course taken by the latter in having the lad spirited away to sea.

Arguing on this theory, he naturally con-

cluded that there must be some money question at stake, and he went vigorously to work to determine what it was.

By the aid of a young man whom Mr. Diggs paid well for his services, he made the acquaintance of one of Boggs' servants—a rather talkative young woman. This propensity pleased the detective, and he employed every means at his command to keep her tongue wagging.

Gradually he led up to the subject which brought him there, while he heroically endured her senseless prattle.

“The butcher told me that Mr. Boggs is a very rich man, and a liberal one, too. I suppose he gives you an easy time?” said the detective.

“Him give us an easy time?” responded the servant. “I should think he did! He's the crossest old patch I ever seen. No one can do anything to suit him lately.”

“Is he different from what he used to be?” asked Mr. Diggs quietly.

“I should say so. He used to be good enough, but for three or four months he's been awful. I've threatened to leave him, but Mrs. Harding has coaxed me to stay, saying he was nervous and irritable.”

“No doubt he is nervous,” thought the detective. “I should be if I were in his place;” and then replying to the girl's remark, he said :

"Mrs. Harding—who is she?"

"She is his sister, the housekeeper."

"Then he isn't a married man?"

"His wife has been dead fifteen years or more."

"I should think he would get married again," suggested Diggs.

"So he would, if he could get the one he wants."

"Why can't he?"

"She won't have him."

"I should think she would marry him—a man as rich as he is."

"She is rich herself, and don't need his money, though by good rights it is her own money, anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that all his property ought to be hers."

"Impossible! You are joking with me," said Mr. Diggs seriously, while he found it difficult to suppress his interest.

"No, I'm not. The law gave him over half of her husband's money when he died."

"So all of this property fell into his hands in that way?"

"That's it."

"And she is still rich, you say?"

"Yes, and is the nicest woman you ever saw."

"You know her, I take it?"

"I should say I did. She gave me ever so many presents when she was here."

"How long ago was that?"

"'Bout three months ago she visited here."

"You are in luck to know so many rich folks."

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"What did you say the woman's name is?"

"I didn't say, but I'll tell you now. Her name is Mrs. Van Vleet."

This reply almost took the detective's breath away.

"Mrs. Van Vleet!" he repeated to himself.

"Can it be possible!"

"I have heard that name somewhere before," replied Mr. Diggs, as if trying hard to recall where.

"It isn't a common name," said the servant.

"No, it is not. Does she live in this city?"

"No, she lives with her sister in Boston."

"And she has no children?"

"No, none that's alive."

"Poor woman! She was unfortunate to lose both her husband and children," said Mr. Diggs sympathetically.

"Yes, she was; but she only had one child, I believe."

"Did he live to grow up?" asked Mr. Diggs, assuming that the child was a boy.

“ No, it was lost at sea the same time her husband was drowned.”

“ Why, how did that occur ? ”

“ I don't know exactly, only the steamer went down and they were lost.”

“ Were they alone at the time, or was Mrs. Van Vleet on board the same steamer ? ”

“ She was with them, and got saved some way. I don't know how.”

“ Well, it was a sad case ; and then to think that Boggs should get so much of her property,” mused Artemas Diggs.

“ I should say so myself ; and Boggs was as poor as he could be then—only a ship carpenter,” said the girl contemptuously.

The detective had struck a rich mine of information, and he worked it most successfully.

“ You don't tell me ! ” replied Artemas Diggs. “ It's enough to make hard working folks like us envy him. Why should he have such luck any more than we ? ”

“ I says that to myself lots o' times, but some folks does have such luck, you know.”

“ Yes, that's a fact. But what relation was he to Mr. Van Vleet ? ”

“ Why, you see, Boggs' wife was a sister to Mr. Van Vleet.”

“ Oh, I see, and that's how it all came about.”

“ Yes, but the money is all Perry's, after all.”

"Perry! Oh, that's Boggs' son."

"Yes."

"Of course he was the heir, but I suppose Boggs manages the property."

"Yes, he is the guardian, or something of that kind. Anyway, he handles the money as if it was his own."

"Well, that's what I call luck," said Mr. Diggs thoughtfully.

After some further conversation, in which he learned Mrs. Van Vleet's Boston address, he and his talkative companion reached the Boggs mansion.

Leaving her at the basement door, after saying a more or less affectionate good night, he hurried to his home.

This walk in the cold, still night had been a most successful one for him.

True, he had played the part of a lover, but he felt that the end justified the means, for now he had all the information necessary for immediate action against Anthony Boggs.

XLII.

“GOOD evening, commodore,” said William Montgomery, extending his hand. “I called to report to you.”

“I am glad to see you,” returned Commodore Hopkins, as they entered the drawing room of his handsome residence, “and am anxious to know what progress has been made.”

“The progress has been far better than I anticipated. Mr. Diggs has outdone himself.”

“I am glad to hear you say so; but how did you get on with the district attorney?”

“That matter is practically settled.”

Ben and Bertha now entered the room, looking cheerful and happy.

After a friendly greeting, Mr. Montgomery said: “I was just saying to the commodore that the matter of your arrest is practically settled—you need feel no further uneasiness now.”

Ben’s hearty thanks left no doubt of his gratitude to the able lawyer for his services.

The district attorney had promised to quash the indictment, so there was no further danger of arrest.

“Now let us hear what Mr. Diggs accomplished,” said Commodore Hopkins.

Mr. Montgomery repeated the story much as I have given it to you. When he reached that part where the servant said the name of the lady who visited Boggs' house was Mrs. Van Vleet, our young hero's heart beat fast with a strange emotion.

“Then she was the lady I saw with Boggs?” he broke out excitedly.

“Yes, I imagine she was the one,” said Mr. Montgomery.

“I knew she was not Perry Boggs' mother. I knew it, though I couldn't tell why.”

“It is strange you should have been so impressed by her.”

“And stranger yet is the fact that she seemed at the same time to be equally impressed by you,” said Commodore Hopkins.

“I don't understand it,” said the boy thoughtfully.

“Do you think you would know her should you see her again?” asked Mr. Montgomery.

“I am sure I should. I shall never forget her face.”

“Well, I hope you will soon have the opportunity of meeting her again.”

“Oh, I do hope so,” said Ben, with enthusiasm.

“How would you like to go on to Boston to see her?”

“I wish I might,” replied the lad, his hopes rising.

“There is no reason why you can't go with Artemas Diggs.”

“Is he going on to see her?”

“Well, yes, unless I can persuade you to go instead,” said the lawyer to Commodore Hopkins.

“I?”

“Yes, I think you would be the proper one to go.”

“Well, I should feel delicate about going on such an errand.”

“Nonsense! I can't see why you should feel that way.”

“Well, suppose Ben should not prove to be her child—what then?”

“Why, you would have no cause to feel embarrassed; and, on the other hand, there is little doubt in my mind that he is her child.”

“So I think myself.”

“Certainly. All the evidence tends to this view. Otherwise, what logical reason could there be for Boggs' desire to put the boy out of the way?”

“None that I can see.”

“That is it exactly. Well, we will get at the bottom of this matter sooner or later. But what about Boston? Will you go?”

“What do you say, Ben? Would you rather have me go with you than Artemas Diggs?” asked the commodore.

“I would much prefer going with you, for I don't know Mr. Diggs,” replied the lad.

“All right, then, I will go,” said Commodore Hopkins, turning to Mr. Montgomery. “When do you wish us to start?”

“The sooner the better, as we wish to lose no time.”

“Yes, I suppose so; and I see nothing to prevent our starting in the morning.”

“Very well, then, I will tell Mr. Diggs that he need not go to Boston. Here is Mrs. Van Vleet's address.”

“Thank you; we shall need that. Now, are there any suggestions you have to offer—any special instructions?”

“No, I believe not. You should get the woman's story, and tell her the discoveries we have made—everything from first to last.”

Mr. Montgomery then said good night and returned to his home.

XLIII.

EARLY the following morning Ben found himself on board a fast train that landed him and the commodore in Boston in about six hours. Immediately they took a cab and drove to the house where Mrs. Van Vleet resided with her sister.

“ You may remain in the cab, Ben, and drive for an hour or so, and then return here. I want to see the lady before taking you into her presence,” said Commodore Hopkins, as he stepped upon the sidewalk.

He was shown into the drawing room, where he waited for Mrs. Van Vleet to appear. The house was handsomely furnished, everything looked neat and suggested the best of taste.

Presently a tall, fine looking lady, with a kindly, intellectual face, entered the room. It was Mrs. Van Vleet. Commodore Hopkins introduced himself, and then said :

“ I came here today on a peculiar mission, but one which I trust will result in righting a great wrong which I have reasons for believing has been perpetrated upon you and another.”

The lady looked puzzled. How had she been wronged, and why should this man—a total stranger—take the trouble to come to her on such an errand?

These thoughts suggested themselves to her, and her manner, therefore, was guarded and distant.

“I think, sir, you must have made some mistake. I am not aware of any injustice that has been done to me.”

“So I supposed, madam, and that is the reason why I came here today, or rather, one of the reasons. No, I think I am not mistaken in the lady. Your husband’s name was William Van Vleet, was it not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he was lost at sea a number of years ago?”

“Yes, fourteen years ago; but what has that to do with any injustice that you imagine has been done to me?”

“I simply wish to convince myself that I am right. Now I know you are the lady whom I wish to see. I will tell you my story, and then you will see my purpose in coming to you.”

“Thank you, sir; I shall be glad to hear what you have to say,” said Mrs. Van Vleet, who had begun to be favorably impressed with the commodore’s genial manner.

“Last November,” said he, “I sailed with my family for Australia. During the voyage the boatswain of our ship told us the sad story of a steamship that was lost at sea. Among the passengers he said there was a wealthy family whose name was Van Vleet. Since returning to New York I have learned by investigation that you were on board that ill fated ship. You are doubtless, then, the Mrs. Van Vleet to whom the sailor referred, though he believed that both you and your husband were lost at sea.”

“My husband and my baby were both lost on that fearful night,” said the lady, wiping a sad tear from her eyes, “and I was left alone.”

The recital of this event brought back to her afresh the sorrow that had clouded her life, and her breast heaved with a deep emotion.

“It was very sad,” said the commodore; “and yet I trust less so than you have supposed.”

“Why, what do you mean—what do you know?” said she eagerly, and with a gleam of hope leaping into her moist eyes.

“I believe your baby was saved,” replied Commodore Hopkins assuringly.

“Saved? My darling baby!”

“Yes, saved by the sailor to whom I have referred.”

“Saved? Oh, no, no, it cannot be,” said the lady, bewildered.

“ I believe there is little doubt of it, madam. The boatswain said he saved the child himself.”

“ And he has kept him from me all this time—oh, cruel, cruel man ! ” she cried excitedly.

Her face was pale as death, and she seemed struggling with her own reason, as she pressed her hand against her forehead.

“ Have you ever seen this ring ? ” said the commodore presently, as he handed her the tiny gold band taken from John Hansel’s pocketbook.

“ Oh, it was his, it was his—my baby darling ! ” she cried, almost hysterically, and then, as if by instinct, pressed it to her breast, while the tears coursed silently down her cheeks.

“ So you identify the ring ? ” said the commodore, after a pause.

“ Yes, it is like the one my baby wore.”

“ And the name, Victor Van Vleet——”

“ Yes, that was his name. But where is he now ? Oh, don’t say he is dead, after this hope you have given me ! ”

“ No, I will not say that, for I believe he is alive and well. But a cruel plot was entered into to defraud you out of the fortune to which he was the heir. This is why he was spirited away and his identity lost.”

“ Oh, tell me all, tell me all. I cannot endure this suspense ! ” cried the lady, as the commodore hesitated, thinking how best to proceed.

He now told Dan Spiker's story of the rescue. She confirmed the honest sailor's statements at every point, and upon relating how the child was deserted by its nurse she cried out as if pierced to the heart with pain, saying :

"Oh ! wicked, wicked woman ! How could she be so selfish and cruel as to leave my helpless baby in such an hour ! My husband and myself were prisoners in our own stateroom at the time, or he would have been in my arms—poor, dear baby !"

"How did it happen that you were prisoners?"

"Our door was caught so firmly it could not be opened till it was broken in."

"That was caused by the straining of the ship, I suppose."

"Yes ; and the instant we were released I went to the stateroom adjoining, which was occupied by the nurse and our baby, but they were both gone. We tried to find them, but could not, as we were forced to leave the ship without another minute's delay."

Commodore Hopkins continued the boatswain's story, giving in full all that had been stated.

"What could have been their object—the men that stole him away from the sailor?" asked Mrs. Van Vleet more calmly, and bringing her fine reasoning powers into action.

“ It was doubtless done to defraud you of your husband’s property.”

“ Oh, I can’t think that. How could any one be so cruel?” said she thoughtfully.

“ Such acts have often been done, and we have good reasons for believing that such was the motive in this case.”

“ It must have been done by our relatives, then—if at all,” she added, as if doubtful.

“ Certainly. Have you never suspected anything wrong?”

She hesitated before replying, and then said slowly, “ Yes, I have, but not exactly in this way.”

“ He covered his tracks well for a time, but——”

“ He?” interrupted the lady with a startled look. “ Whom do you mean?”

“ Under the circumstances there is but one man to whom I could refer.”

“ Oh, it can’t be—Anthony Boggs guilty of such a crime? No, no!”

“ It is a hard thing to say about any one, madam, but all the evidence tends to this view.”

He then told her how a strange boy, afloat in the streets of New York, had punished Perry Boggs—how he was arrested and locked up—told of Bogg’ visit to the station house to see the lad—how he was disguised, and how nervous he

seemed. He told how the boy was sent to the Island and afterward released on a bond given by Boggs' attorney, and taken directly on board a ship bound for Australia, and thus spirited away from New York.

"That explains his strange actions when the detectives called to see him about the boy," said Mrs. Van Vleet. "I felt sure then that something was wrong, and was so disgusted at his cowardice and deception that I cut my visit short and returned here the very next day."

The commodore now handed a letter to her to read. It was the one written to Caleb Steel, offering the reward to have Ben put where he would never again return to New York alive.

The color faded from her face as she discovered the villain's terrible purpose. Too much shocked to speak, she handed the letter back to the commodore, and bowing her head low, thought silently for a time.

Presently the commodore continued his story, and briefly related the events that occurred on shipboard.

"And you think he is my lost child," said Mrs. Van Vleet, at length—"the poor boy whom you protected?"

"I have no positive evidence to that effect but there is no other way of explaining Boggs' desire to get him out of the way."

“When can I see him? How I wish you had brought him on with you!”

“I anticipated your desire, and have brought him with me.”

“Brought him with you?”

“Yes.”

“But where is he? I can hardly wait to see him.”

“He will be here soon. I instructed the cabman to return with him in one hour, and the time is nearly up.”

“Oh, I cannot realize that he is my child—alive and a grown boy.”

“Well, you know it is possible that he is not your son. So you had better not feel too sure.”

“No, I will not—I——”

“Ah, here comes the carriage now,” said Commodore Hopkins, looking out of the window. “I will go to the door and call him in.”

“Ben, come here, please,” called the commodore, and the lad responded with a light, willing step.

As they entered the drawing room Mrs. Van Vleet arose and stepped forward to meet the boy. Her manner was agitated and nervous, and her face expressed a conflict between doubt and hope.

I have not the space to picture the scene that followed between mother and son—a son who

had never known a mother, and a mother who supposed that her child had died long years ago.

To one it was a resurrection from a watery grave ; to the other the realization of his boyish dreams. Now he had a mother—a dear, sweet mother, and his mother had a son whom she pressed to her breast with tender love and pride.

What a happy meeting after this long and cruel separation—a separation caused by the cunning hand of a wicked villain ! And now incidents and coincidences in the life of our hero of the strangest and most peculiar nature had brought them together once more.

Her husband's features were so distinctly seen in her son's face that she could not have been mistaken. Almost instantly she recognized him. Instinct was swifter than reason, and she clasped him lovingly in her arms amid tears of joy.

To Commodore Hopkins this was a refreshing scene, and well repaid him for all the expense and trouble to which he had gone for our young hero.

“The same face that I saw on Union Square that cold November night,” said Mrs. Van Vleet. “My heart condemned me for not going to you then, but how little I supposed you were my own dear boy !”

“And I, of course, didn't imagine you were

my mother. I thought you were Perry Boggs' mother."

Our hero, whom we will hereafter call by his true name, Victor Van Vleet, then told his mother how he followed her to the theater door, and heard her reprove Perry for his insolent remarks.

"I remember that you asked him how he would feel if his position was changed with that poor boy—meaning me—but I little thought it would ever come true."

"Neither did I," said his mother; "but it hurt me to hear Perry speak as he did."

"And it hurt me, too, and made me feel like giving him a good licking. I determined then that I would get even with him sooner or later."

"That time is very near at hand now, Victor," said Commodore Hopkins, calling him by this name for the first time.

"I hope it is," replied the boy, "but I don't know myself by that name."

"You will soon get accustomed to it, as one does to a new suit of clothes. You know yourself, and that is the main thing. Your character will be the same whatever name you go by. But this pleasant conversation must be cut short, as there is important work yet to be done. Boggs must be brought to justice for his infamous villainy, and the property that he now controls shall be yours."

XLIV.

COMMODORE HOPKINS returned home alone, leaving Victor to visit his mother until wanted in New York. He felt now that his responsibility was at an end. He had shielded the boy from danger, and cared for him as if he had been his own child. But one thing more remained for him to do, and that was to see that justice should overtake Anthony Boggs.

“Where is Ben?” asked Bertha with a look of disappointment, as her father entered the house.

“I left him with his mother,” replied the commodore.

“Then she was really his mother?”

“Yes, no doubt whatever about it.”

“What did Ben say, and how did he act? I wish I might have seen him.”

“I wish, too, that you could have witnessed the scene,” said her father; and then he told the story of their meeting.

“It must have been a happy reunion,” said Mrs. Hopkins.

“It was, indeed, and they both seem very happy now.”

“So I should suppose ; Ben is a charming boy. His mother must be proud of him.”

“She shows that plainly, and he is proud of his mother, as well he may be, for she is a refined lady.”

“But Ben will not stay in Boston all the time, will he?” said Bertha feelingly.

“I suppose he will ; that is, if his mother continues to reside there.”

A look of disappointment passed over her face.

“I thought he would come back with you,” said she.

“Well, his mother wanted him to remain with her, and as I had no authority in the matter, of course I made no objections.”

“We missed him very much,” said Mrs. Hopkins, “and Bertha was lonesome without him.”

“We shall all miss him, no doubt,” replied the commodore. “He seemed like one of our family.”

“Here is a letter, papa, that came for you yesterday,” said Bertha.

“Oh, it is from Dan Spiker,” said her father, when he had opened the envelope and read the boatswain’s name.

“From Dan? Oh, I am glad he is home again !”

“So am I. We may need his testimony in Victor’s case.”

“ It doesn't sound natural to hear you call him Victor.”

“ I know it does not, but we will soon get accustomed to it.”

“ Yes, I suppose so. How glad Dan will be to learn of Victor's good luck ! ”

“ I think he will be almost as glad as Victor was himself. He will be at my office today, this letter says. I must not miss seeing him. I can imagine just how anxious he will feel to hear what we have done in Ben's behalf.”

“ Don't you mean Victor's behalf ? ” laughed Bertha.

“ Yes, I accept the correction. I find it difficult, myself, to remember his new name.”

After breakfast was over, Commodore Hopkins went direct to William Montgomery's office. The lawyer greeted him pleasantly, and asked for a report of the Boston trip. On hearing the result he expressed his gratification at the happy outcome.

“ I knew that the trip would repay you for going,” said he.

“ It did, indeed—repaid me many times.”

“ I am heartily glad it did. You well deserved the pleasure you got from witnessing the happy scene.”

“ Thank you, but I fear you overlook your own efforts in the boy's behalf.”

“No, I do not ; for I have simply carried out your wishes in a professional way.”

“I am sure you wrong yourself, for, had I not asked you to work up the case, you would have done so on your own account. You had already employed a detective to investigate the matter.”

“Well, yes, I must admit that ; but then I have done so little for the boy that it seems as nothing in comparison with what you have done for him.”

“I cannot quite agree with you ; and besides, my work is now done. I have gone as far as I can, while there is yet much for you to do in the case.”

“To what do you refer ?”

“I refer to legal proceedings against Boggs.”

“Oh, I understand you now. Yes, it will doubtless develop into an important contest.”

“Yes, I imagine so.”

“The case is somewhat complicated. It may, therefore, take some time and a great deal of work to establish our claim. There is a large sum of money involved, which is now in Boggs' possession. This gives him every advantage.”

“But you do not doubt our final triumph ?”

“Oh, no. We have plenty of evidence in our possession, and as the case progresses will doubtless secure more.”

“ You will, of course, try to have him punished as well as to secure the property.”

“ Certainly. I have already taken steps for his arrest.”

“ I am glad of that. I want to see the villain punished.”

“ I think we agree perfectly in that sentiment, and trust the time is not far off when justice will overtake him.”

Dan Spiker, the honest hearted sailor, was rejoiced to learn of our young hero's good fortune in regaining his mother, and in finding himself entitled to a large fortune. He was anxious to see Victor and congratulate him, because he felt a real affection for the boy.

“ It will be necessary, Dan, for you to remain ashore for a time,” said Commodore Hopkins. “ We shall need your testimony to help establish Victor's identity.”

“ I would be glad to know about how long I shall be needed here, for I want to get to work again as soon as possible,” said the sailor.

“ I can't say when your testimony will be needed. But you can feel perfectly contented, as you will lose nothing by waiting.”

“ Thank you, sir. I am glad to do anything you want me to,” said Dan, with a look of pleasure. He felt assured by the commodore's manner that he would be well provided for.

XLV.

MR. MONTGOMERY presented our hero's case to the district attorney, who speedily procured from the grand jury an indictment against Anthony Boggs, charging him with having caused the abduction of a child from Dan Spiker's home ; with having spirited a boy away to sea, and with inciting one Caleb Steel to murder.

These were grave charges to be brought against any man, and Anthony Boggs had good cause for feeling the terror that well nigh overpowered him when the officers placed him under arrest.

To follow him through the long investigation that succeeded would be tedious and uninteresting to my readers. Neither have I the space to record the details of so long and wearisome a trial. It could not properly be made a part of this story, which is simply the history of our hero's strange career.

But all who have followed through this narrative the pale, scantily dressed boy whom they first met one cold November night on Union Square will, I believe, feel interested to know the

result of the legal contest with Anthony Boggs—the man who had wronged him cruelly, and finally, to protect himself, had sought his life.

When Mr. Van Vleet was drowned at sea Anthony Boggs was at work in Brooklyn as an ordinary ship carpenter. He lived in Jersey City, in a very humble way, his sister then, as later, filling the place of housekeeper.

The best of feeling did not exist between him and Mr. Van Vleet. The latter's sister had married Boggs against the wishes of her family, and this was the first cause for coolness between them. But a yet stronger reason for this feeling was the difference in the characters of the men. Mr. Van Vleet was genial, refined and intellectual; Boggs possessed none of these desirable characteristics. There was, therefore, nothing to hold them together save relationship, and that merely a connection by marriage. This slender tie was, after a while, severed by the sudden death of Mrs. Boggs, and now the two men drifted farther and farther apart.

Boggs, chafing at his poverty and made jealous by the rapidly accumulating fortune of his brother in law, grew more and more bitter toward him. There had been no interchange of good feeling between them for several months previous to the sinking of the ill fated steamer—the accident that cost Mr. Van Vleet his life.

Boggs had, however, kept a keen eye on the other's movements, and looked covetously to the property he now owned.

When he learned that his brother in law had been lost at sea, a look of triumph shone in his eyes, and then instantly his mind turned toward the property.

He had sufficient knowledge of the law to know that his son Perry was the only direct heir except Mr. Van Vleet's own child.

"If the child is lost, and there is no will, the bulk of his riches will be mine," said Boggs, with avarice in his countenance.

He employed a lawyer to look after his interests, and gave all his own energies to the case. The money he wanted, and would have if it could be had by any means, just or otherwise.

Mrs. Van Vleet was prostrated with grief over the loss of her husband and the supposed loss of her child. She gave business matters little attention.

Boggs, on the other hand, was alert, and keenly watching for any possible development that might yet arise to keep him from gaining his point.

To his great joy, it was learned that no will had been made by Mr. Van Vleet. He now began to look upon himself as a wealthy man, and proceedings had already been commenced in

court to have that property which would fall to an heir set over to his son Perry.

Everything progressed smoothly, and promised well for his interests, when, to his surprise, he learned, one day, through a sailor, that a child had been rescued from the steamer on which Mr. and Mrs. Van Vleet were passengers.

The news alarmed him, and he at once took measures to investigate the case. He found that the child was Victor Van Vleet, the direct heir to his father's property.

Between him, then, and William Van Vleet's riches stood this boy—and no other barrier.

He hated the Van Vleets, and coveted their wealth. Why should he allow this puny babe to thwart his purpose? He asked himself this question, and, with compressed lips, declared that he would not.

Evidence introduced into the criminal proceedings against him showed that he acted promptly upon this decision. It was proved that he gave a reward to have the child kidnaped and taken where his identity would be lost.

This being done, the property was in due time set over to Perry Boggs as the legal heir, Anthony Boggs being made trustee for his son.

After a time, he lost all knowledge of our hero. Whether he was living or not, he did not know.

Years passed by, and no word came from him, and yet Boggs felt always a sense of insecurity. He studied boys by the thousands and tens of thousands, wondering if among them he would ever see Victor Van Vleet, and yet dreading the possibility of such a discovery.

But the wrongdoer is sure to be punished sooner or later. Nearly fourteen years had passed by since his eyes had fallen upon the boy whom he had so outrageously wronged. In the mean time, his own son had grown to be a young man, and was now accompanying him to the theater when the dreaded discovery was made.

These facts, together with the chief incidents in our hero's life, were all brought out in the trial which resulted, finally, in Anthony Boggs' conviction.

His lawyers moved for a new trial, but the court, being convinced of the prisoner's deep villainy, denied the motion, and sentenced him to twenty years' imprisonment at hard labor.

Boggs' guilt being proved, and our hero's identity being established beyond a doubt, all the property that had fallen to Perry Boggs was retransferred to its rightful owner—Victor Van Vleet.

“Oh, but don't you see I can't imagine myself in such a position !”

This is the reply that was made by Perry Boggs

to a question by Mrs. Van Vleet, asking him if he would not crave some sympathy were his position exchanged with that of our young hero, who at that time was a half starved, half clothed street boy, without relative or friend.

No, Perry could not then imagine such a transition—he the “swell” youth, with fine clothes and abundant wealth. But now he was forced to realize that it had come true. The change humiliated and crushed him.

What to do and which way to turn he knew not. His education was most superficial; he had never been trained to work, and had no means of earning a living. Had he, however, possessed the spirit of a resolute, determined boy, he would have commenced to work at something, if ever so humble; but, instead of this, he humiliated himself before Victor and his mother, and asked charity from them.

Our hero was heartily congratulated by all his friends upon his absolute triumph over the man who had so cruelly wronged him, and upon the great fortune he had inherited. Dan Spiker's heart was overjoyed, but even his congratulations were not more sincere than those offered by her whose sweet companionship had made him so happy on that hazardous Australian voyage.

There was, however, in her voice a strain of sadness that attracted his attention.

“What troubles you, Bertha?” he said softly.

A sweet blush mantled her cheeks, and pausing for a moment, she said, “I suppose you will now return to Boston to live?”

This was not an answer to his question, but it enabled him to understand her better than ever before.

“No,” said he, “I am not sure of that. Mother and I have promised to meet your father and Mr. Montgomery tomorrow, to talk over several matters, and probably this question will be settled with the others. You see, it all depends upon what is to be done with me.”

“Why, what is to happen to you now?” asked Bertha, with a look of alarm darting into her pretty eyes.

“Oh, nothing serious,” laughed Victor, “only I am to have a tutor, or be sent off to boarding school. If I go away, mother will probably live in Boston, as she has been doing.”

“And if you do not go away to school, will you and she live here?”

“Yes, mother has promised me to do that.”

XLVI.

“ I THINK your best plan will be to employ a tutor for Victor,” said William Montgomery to Mrs. Van Vleet.

The question of our hero's education was the one under consideration.

“ I would prefer doing so, if by that means he will advance as fast,” replied the boy's mother.

“ I can hardly allow him to leave me now after our long separation.”

“ This is what I supposed ; and besides, he will doubtless do just as well with a good tutor as he would at boarding school.”

“ If I thought not, I would not allow my own feelings to influence his course. I want him to have the best advantages, so that he can get a good education. He seems ambitious for study.”

“ Yes, so he is ; and he learns so easily that he will soon overtake those who now have the start of him.”

“ I hope your prediction will prove true, and I can see no reason why it should not, providing he applies himself studiously.”

“ Yes, the lack of application alone would pre-

vent his advancement, but I have little fear of his showing such indolence.”

“Wealth, you know, often handicaps one’s ambition, but I sincerely trust his head will not be turned by the fortune he has inherited.”

“I think not ; his early experience taught him the value of money, and, moreover, he is accustomed to work, and this habit alone is worth a great deal to him.”

Turning now to Commodore Hopkins, Mrs. Van Vleet asked him what she should do for Dan Spiker.

“That depends largely upon what you feel like doing for him,” replied he.

“I feel that I should do a great deal for him. He rescued my baby when he was helpless and deserted by every one—rescued him at the risk of losing his own life.”

“That is true ; and he deserves great credit for such an act.”

“He deserves more than that. Victor agrees with me that we should give him a substantial reward for all he has done for him.”

“I fully agree with you, and felt certain that you would feel as you do. He will not expect anything, however. Whatever he has done for Victor was done with a noble spirit ; he had no thought of being rewarded.”

“No, I do not believe he had. But what can

we do for him? Would he take money, do you think, and would that be the best thing for him?"

"No, I do not believe he would accept money."

"But he must be paid for the time he has remained out of work on account of the trial."

"Oh, that, of course, he will accept as a matter of business."

"I wish you would give the matter some thought, and see what more can be done."

"I have already considered the problem," said the commodore calmly.

"Have you, and to what conclusion did you come?"

"I concluded that it would be better to put him in the way of making money for himself than to present him with money, even if he would accept it."

"Why so? Would he not be prudent with it?"

"I presume he would, but I do not believe in the principle of giving direct. It is much better to place one in a position where he can build himself up."

"I agree with you, and I would be glad to do something of the sort for Mr. Spiker. But what shall it be?"

"He is thoroughly capable of commanding a ship, and would like nothing better than filling such a position. I looked at a fine vessel yester-

day that can be bought at a reasonable figure. I have decided to take her, and make Mr. Spiker her captain."

"Have you really?" said Mrs. Van Vleet.

"Yes."

"But how does that give Victor and me a chance to aid him?"

"If you were to take a half interest in the ship, then you would accomplish your purpose, I think. Would you like to make such an investment?"

"Yes, if you advise it. I, of course, know nothing of shipping."

"It would undoubtedly prove profitable; and, moreover, Mr. Spiker would then feel that you had more than repaid him."

Thus it came about in a few weeks that Dan Spiker, the boatswain—the honest hearted sailor who always acted well his part—became Captain Spiker, commander of as fine a ship as sails out of New York harbor.

Our young hero was now most happily located, living with his mother in their own charming home on Fifth Avenue—the house formerly occupied by Anthony Boggs. It had been refurnished throughout, and handsomely decorated with pictures and rare works of art.

His own room was cheerful and handsome. Ornaments of various kinds were so arranged

that the effect was pleasing and artistic. Everything about the house suggested refinement and wealth.

His tutor was a genial young man, who entered heartily into his work, and did all in his power to push his pupil ahead in his studies; and his efforts were not wasted, for Victor applied himself with determination, to make up the time he had lost while afloat in the great city.

XLVII.

ONE bright June morning, just before the commencement of our hero's summer vacation, Commodore Hopkins and Bertha drove up to Mrs. Van Vleet's residence and called for him.

"Come with Bertha and me for a few hours, Victor," said the commodore, with a look of pleasure in his eye. "I want to show you something new."

He did not need a second invitation. On the contrary, he would have felt disappointed had he been obliged to remain at home. To go off with the commodore for an hour or two was a decided pleasure, as he was fond of the man who had been his benefactor; but to go with him, accompanied by Bertha, meant infinitely more to Victor.

They drove down the avenue and down Broadway to South Ferry. There they took a boat for Bay Ridge. Both Bertha and Victor wondered what the commodore's object was in taking them there. He told them that they would soon learn, and he would say no more.

"Oh, what a pretty yacht!" exclaimed Bertha,

as her eyes fell upon one riding at anchor near the landing.

“She is a beauty,” replied Victor.

“Papa, just look and see her. Isn’t she lovely?”

“Yes, she is rather a pretty yacht,” replied her father indifferently.

“And her name is—is B—Bertha,” said Victor enthusiastically. He was barely able to read the name at so great a distance.

“Is it, truly?” asked Bertha.

“Yes; just Bertha and nothing else.”

“How very strange, when our ship was named Bertha Hopkins.”

“Yes, so it is; but this boat was probably named for some other Bertha.”

Presently the landing was reached, and our party, to the surprise of Bertha and Victor, got into a rowboat, and were quickly rowed out to the handsome yacht Bertha.

“This is what I wanted to show you,” said Commodore Hopkins, with a smile, as they surveyed the handsome craft. “I bought her last week before she had been launched.”

The expressions of gratitude that poured forth from our young friends made clear their delight.

“How did you happen to buy her?” asked Bertha.

“I bought her because you and Victor are

always talking of the sea, and wishing you could live on the water. I thought you would both enjoy cruising along the coast more than going to some summer resort during your vacation."

"So we would—a thousand times rather," said both, in the very ecstasy of joy. Their happy faces went far toward repaying the commodore for his heavy investment.

Early in the morning of the Fourth of July, when patriotic guns on every side were booming, the *Bertha* weighed anchor, and spreading her snow white sails, speeded down the Bay.

Commodore and Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery, Mrs. Van Vleet, *Bertha* and Victor, made up the party on board the beautiful craft which had put out for a two months' cruise along the Eastern coast.

"It seems pleasant to be on the water again," said *Bertha*, as she and Victor chatted happily together.

"It does, indeed," returned her companion. "But I can't help thinking of the strange events that have happened since I sailed over this course about eight months ago. How heartsick I was then at being forced to go to sea! Now, nothing would suit me as well. Then I had no friends, no home, no relatives, no money. Now I have them all."

"It sounds like a story, doesn't it? And just

think, if you had not gone on our ship you would not have known Dan Spiker, and perhaps you would never have found your mother or secured your property."

"Yes, that is so. Good came out of Boggs' villainous purpose after all. I should never have known *you*, either," replied Victor, in a way that seemed to say he considered her friendship dearer to him than all else.

The meaning of this remark was so plain that Bertha could not fail to understand him, and the crimson tint that mantled her cheeks, her manner, and her reply, all showed that she appreciated the tender sentiment he expressed, rather than spoke.

Triumphant over his enemies, risen above all opposition, happy in his beautiful home, and yet more happy in his present association with the charming companion now chatting merrily by his side, we will wish him and her, and all on board the handsome yacht, a safe and delightful cruise along the picturesque coast of New England.

THE END.







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