



BENEATH HIM.

"I would starve first!"
"Then starve!"

Uncle Adoniram Barney, as he was called by all who knew him, had been having a serious conversation with his nephew Charles. Charles had lost his temper entirely, and Uncle Adoniram had at last reached the utmost limits of forbearance. The question under discussion was the advisability of the young man's seeking some occupation in which he would be sure to earn his living.

Charles was twenty-one, and his uncle up to this time had assisted him in every possible manner; but, strangely enough, though possessed of a fine intellect, carefully cultivated, he had done nothing to earn his own living. He had been unwilling to study for a profession, and at this time had small prospect of obtaining a situation, and smaller prospect of keeping a position if he found one.

"If I could only find where I belong," Charles began again. He had cooled down a little, and was disposed to argue the point a trifle further. "I can never make a good clerk or book-keeper, and you know as well as I do that I am utterly lacking in mechanical ability."

"And the worst of all is, Charles, you are utterly lacking in the quality of application," Uncle Adoniram replied. "You talk about your lacks as if they were something to be proud of. If you have got fair common sense and a fair education you can make a good clerk or a good book-keeper, and you could learn a trade if you wanted to. It is all bosh, every bit of it, and now that you have come to man's estate you ought to be ashamed of such childish balderdash. I have given you the best advice I could under the circumstances, and whether you follow it or not is your own affair."

"Decidedly," said Charles, rising in a white heat. "I always supposed you cared something about me; but when a fellow's only relative, and that relative a rich man, advises him to look out for a situation as car-conductor, there can certainly be but one opinion about it."

"You are right, Charles," said Uncle Adoniram, "there can be but one opinion. I decline, for your own good, to go on supporting you: and taking into consideration your constant failures to support yourself, I advise you to try for a car-conductor's position. You will learn to be accurate and attentive. You will know what it is to work for your bread; and this in my opinion, you need to know more than anything else."

"Then you don't care for the humiliation, the social ostracism, that will be the inevitable results of such an occupation?" the young man inquired as he nervously turned the knob of the door he had just opened.

"Not a red cent!" Uncle Adoniram replied. "If a man is going to be cut by his friends for earning, in the only way that is open to him; an independent living, then social ostracism is the healthiest thing I can think of. The only thing that should humiliate an able-bodied man is dependence upon others. You have become so accustomed, Charles, to being looked out for, that the alternative seems very undesirable to you."

This was "putting it hard," as Uncle Adoniram told himself afterwards; but the case was desperate and heroic treatment the only kind that would answer. "Your charity shall not be further trespassed upon," was the proud answer. "If I ever

take a relative to bring up, Uncle Adoniram, I will be still more generous, and refrain from twitting him with how much he has cost me. Here is the money you gave me yesterday, and which I was mean enough to take," and the young man emptied the financial contents of his pockets on his uncle's desk. "Since you have turned me out of doors, sir, I prefer to go penniless. Good morning."

Uncle Adoniram was on the point of calling his nephew back, but thought better of it and sat perfectly quiet as the angry man slammed the door and walked down the street.

"There was a good deal of temper about that last performance," said Uncle Adoniram, "but there was some honest pride as well. I don't just see how the boy is going to get along without money; but I suppose he won't starve as long as his watch lasts."

The old man was right. Charles pawned the watch which had been left him by his father, and then searched diligently for a job. He left nothing undone to secure what he considered a suitable situation, but his efforts were useless. There was a call for mechanics, and employment enough for professional men, but for him there was absolutely nothing.

There were a hundred clerks and book-keepers to one situation, a gentleman to whom he applied told him, and with a touch of pity for the evident discouragement of his applicant asked him a few sensible questions.

"Now, if you understood stenography," he said after a careful catechism, "I could show you some court work which would be very remunerative."

Charles shook his head. His experiences were beginning to make him feel very small.

"I should be glad to help you," the gentleman went on kindly, "but I really don't see any way to do it. I know of a position you could have at once as car-conductor, but—"

The young man's face was ablaze, and his eyes looked as if they would strike fire. "But what?" he asked, as his companion did not finish the sentence.

"If you were a relative of mine," the gentleman replied, "and had tried for other positions and failed as you tell me you have, I should say, put your pride in your pocket and buckle to it. I should tell you also to make use of every spare moment, and study stenography as if your life depended upon it."

"But when a man once takes such a position,"—Charles began in feeble remonstrance, his face still scarlet.

"He is always obliged to keep it, you were going to say," the gentleman interrupted. "That is stuff and nonsense. If you have the right pluck and ambition, and application, you can make your job a temporary affair, a bridge across a stream; and if you are above accepting such a position, or too indolent and unambitious to work into something better if you do accept it, then you are not worth saving;" and with this the gentleman turned away.

Charles had twenty-five cents of the watch money left in his pocket. This was the sum total of his earthly possessions. The way in which this gentleman looked upon the pride which made him hesitate about accepting the position of car-conductor seemed the expression of all business men from his uncle to the present one.

"Well, what do you say?" the gentleman inquired, returning a moment to speak to him.

"If you will show me how to secure the situation you spoke of," Charles replied, with a lip which would quiver a little in spite of all he could do. "I will go immediately and see about it."

"Good for you!" said his companion. "I will go with you," and the rich merchant passed his arm through that of his struggling, poverty stricken companion, and in this way they sought the office of the great railway company. A few brief words and the ugly business was settled. The young man would take his place the next morning at six o'clock, with a small but sufficient salary.

"I have the best works on short-hand," the gentleman told Charles as they were about to part; "and if you will step round to the house with me I should be happy to lend you the books. My daughter studied stenography for fun. It took her one year to learn the system, by studying a little every day. You ought to be able to beat a girl at the business."

Charles smiled. Application? That was what his uncle said he needed more than any other quality. Should he take this man's books, and promise him to spend his spare time in the study of stenography? How strangely his affairs were being taken out of his hands. The young man had always believed that the great business of the universe was taken care of, but this was the first time he had ever felt that his small affairs were in any way managed or directed. Now it seemed to him as if his ways were in some incomprehensible manner being ordered.

Of course, there was neither generosity nor justice in the matter, and everything was all wrong; still some power outside of himself was responsible, and he wondered as he looked over the strange characters that evening in the book his new friend had lent him, which straggling mark his life was like. They all meant something, that was one comfort,—some letters, some phrases; but the zigzag character which stood for him would doubtless be the one of smallest account. It might be an interrogation point, he thought; surely no one asked more questions or received less answers.

He had had one meal that day. His remaining twenty-five cents must be saved for breakfast the next morning. How he was to manage for a full week without any money was a physical and mathematical problem which he was not equal to.

"Sufficient unto the day," and "Think not of the morrow," were the last words on his lips before going to sleep; and they were repeated with so much reverence, and such evident desire to get hold of the faith which was dimly dawning upon him, that his good angel must have felt comforted.

Promptly at six the next morning the young man took his place on his car. The first thing to do was to sweep it out. Charles Barney had never handled a broom in his life, but he gave his mind to the work, and succeeded in appearing much less awkward than he felt. There was a good deal to learn, indeed much more than he supposed, but he listened to the numerous instructions with attention, and his new work commenced.

It was not quite as dreadful as he had supposed. Still it was distasteful enough, and the poor fellow wondered if he should ever get used to it. At noon, on his return to the car-station, he found a letter from his new friend, with an enclosure of five dollars.

"I had an impression," it said, "that you were entirely out of money. I tried once when I was about your age to live without eating. It didn't work. I am sure it won't in your case. Come in and see me some time when you have leisure. Keep up your courage, and stick to your stenography."

The first thought that went through the young man's mind as he read and re-read this kind letter was that this rich merchant didn't feel himself above associating with a car-conductor. To do him justice he recognized that this was a very mean consideration. Then he wondered how long it would be before he could return the money, and concluded he could do it in two weeks. Then and not till then would he call on the gentleman.

Only an hour could be given to study in the first twenty-four hours of his new life; but this time was a refreshment instead of a drag, and when he put away his book for the sleep he must have, it was with reluctance.

He had been employed about two months when one morning Uncle Adoniram stepped on his car. His first impulse was to pull his hat down over his eyes and avoid recognition if possible, but Charles Barney was learning manliness as well as application and he immediately thought better of it. The old man

did not look up when his nephew gave him his change; but Charles said softly, "Good morning, uncle," and then he sprang to his feet.

"Charles!" he exclaimed, grasping the conductor's hand. "Charles, my boy, how do you do?"

There was abundant love and heartiness in Uncle Adoniram's voice and manner, and there was something more that was new to Charles. He knew now that for the first time his uncle really respected him, and out of this a stronger courage was born.

"I have been very lonely without you," the old man said, as he stood on the back platform with his nephew; "and I have been worried about you, too. Why have you not been home, Charles?"

"Because I wanted to see if I was really going to keep my position," the young man answered; "and because, uncle, I wanted to rid myself of all feeling of humiliation before I saw you again."

"Where do you stand in the matter now?" Uncle Adoniram inquired, as he brushed a tear from his cheek.

"Almost on my feet," Charles replied. "Are you looking for anything else, my boy?"

"I am studying stenography with all my might, uncle, and am getting along finely. By-and-by I shall have mastered it, and then I can always find employment."

"Your discipline has made a man of you, Charles!" said his uncle. "I knew it would. Don't stay away from the old man, my boy. God bless and keep you."

The young man went home the next day, for he felt that his uncle needed him; but he still kept his position as car-conductor, and studied every spare moment. His uncle read to him, and laughed at the strange characters he so deftly put on paper, and in this manner a year went by. Then Charles Barney found more congenial employment, helped to it by the merchant who had been his steadfast friend. He had served an invaluable apprenticeship to the inexorable taskmaster, Necessity, and had been an apt scholar, not only learning dispatch and application, but finding out that a true man can ennoble the lowliest labor.—Eleanor Kirk.

A BOY SHOULD LEARN

- To build a fire scientifically;
- To fill the woodbox every night;
- To shut doors in summer to keep flies out;
- To shut doors without slamming;
- To shut them in winter to keep the cold out;
- To do errands promptly and cheerfully;
- To get ready to go away without requiring the united help of mother and sisters;
- To be gentle to his little sister;
- To wash dishes and to make his own bed when necessary;
- To sew on a button and darn a stocking;
- To be kind to all animals;
- To have a dog if possible, and make a companion of him;
- To ride, shoot, and swim.

