

JOHN ARMSTRONG
MECHANIC;
OR,
FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP
OF THE LADDER.

A Story of How a Man Can Rise in America.

CHAPTER IV.

FALLING OFF THE LADDER.

He found Mrs. Shafer waiting for him, and as soon as she saw him, she came nervously to him, saying tearfully:

"Oh, Mr. Armstrong, I'm real sorry. I know you wasn't to blame; but what kin a poor widdler do. They swears they'll all leave together if you stay, and I've got ter give ye notice. I don't want nothin' for the trifle of wittles you ate, and you can hev'er dinner here; but you'll hev to look out 'nuther place to-night."

John heard her through, and slowly nodded his head, as he said:

"In course, marm, twelve dollars a week aint to be throw'd away. If ye'll give me my dinner I'll pay for it at once. I don't ax no favors. Reckon New York's a big place, and I kin find some where to eat afore I starve."

Then she brought him out a plentiful dinner, which he ate and paid for, after which he asked, quietly:

"Where's the young man as I hit, marm? He warn't in the shop at work. I'm sorry if I hurt him bad."

She pointed over her shoulder, to the next room in a frightened kind of way.

"He's there," she whispered, "listenin' I reckon. Don't say nothin', please."

"Oh, no," said John; "I wouldn't like to quarrel with him, marm. But if you'll be so good as to tell him a word from me, I guess he won't feel so bad."

"And what's that?" she asked, curiously.

"Waal, ye see, 'twarn't fair my hittin' him, if he hadn't a made me. I used to be in chums with a fightin' man wunst, when I were servin' my time; and he used ter put on the gloves with me and teach me all he know'd, till he lowed I could e'en a most whip him afore I were twenty-two. And since that time he put two jobs on me with the gloves on strangers, and I knocked 'em both out, and once I got kinder 'shamed' to think I might be call'd a fighter, and give it up, owing to dad's bein' sick. But I thought mebbe if ye'd tell your Mr. Stryker how I were jest, as one might say, in the business, he'd not feel so bad. I know what these gentlemen is when they gets whipped. They feels as if it oughtn't ter be so. Will you tell him?"

"Sartinly, Mr. Armstrong. Why; I seen it all through the windy, and I say how you looked as if you was the most skeert of the two."

"I war, marm—I were, I were thinkin' all the time I'd have to hit out, and loss my place for whippin' the boss's nevy. I'd e'en a most made up my mind to take a bastin', only—"

"Only what?" she asked, for he had stopped.

"Only," he returned, in a low voice, "I thought of that pore gal runnin', and I thought he'd got arter her again, and my old dad would ha' felt 'shamed' of me then. Ye know dad said as how the old sojers of the army never fought so well as arter they'd been whipped again and again, so the enemy got tired of tryin' to keep 'em whipped, and finally they clomb right on 'em and beat them. Waal, Mrs. Shafer, marm, good-bye, marm. Hope you'll 'sense the liberty I've tuk in talkin' so much, and here's wishin' you long life and health, marm."

Then John walked away back to the shop, feeling lonely and deserted, and said abruptly to Steve Barker:

"Mister, I aint sure on it, but seems to me you said 'twarn't nothin' last night 'bout your bein' willin' to take a bastin', reasonable. Aint it so?"

Barker looked at him dryly, replying:

"Yes, it is. But you wanted to go w' gemmen 'ems. Thought you'd get enough of 'em—confound 'em!"

"Well," returned John, slowly, "there aint no hard feelin' betwix us, as I know on, and if so be ye're willin' to let your lady give me a bastin', I'm willin' to pay for it, if she don't give me my walkin' ticket to-night."

"They won't give you no walkin' ticket," returned Steve, scornfully.

"The old man knows when he's got a good hand. He won't let you go, never fear. If he did, I'll go with you. A good riveter needn't long for work now."

John felt comforted at this, and Steve then went to bargaining with him for the price of his board, in a way that showed how money was uppermost in the Englishman's mind at the moment.

By the time they had settled it to mutual satisfaction, the bell rang, and work began again, when the two went to their task with such vigor that, when the six o'clock whistle blew, Steve cried out:

"A good day's work, after all, marm. I told you we'd do it. Come along now, and the old woman'll give you a real old country supper. None of their Yankee 'fixins', as they call them."

"The boss wants to see me first," said

John, doubtfully. "If ye could wait a minit or so—"

"Wait be hanged! I'll go with you," replied Barker, heartily. "When Steve Barker takes a shine to a man, he don't do things by halves, he don't. I'll go to the boss with you."

And just at that moment they saw the well-known figure of the chief of the iron work at the office door, so John went thither, followed by Steve.

The old man looked at Barker coldly.

"Do you want to see me, Barker?" he asked, so icily that most men would have shrunk back. But Steve never flinched, answering:

"Yes, boss, I do. I want to say—"

"Hush!" interrupted old Stryker, sharply. "If you have anything to say you will have to wait till I get through with this young man. I sent for him, not for you."

"I know it well," retorted Barker; "but I've got something to say, and I don't care if I lose my place for it. There's other shops where a good riveter can work. If this young man goes, I go too. That's all, boss. I've said it."

And he slouched back to an anvil and sat down on it, looking sulkily at Mr. Stryker, who said not a word in answer, but motioned John to enter the office, where he shut the door and took a seat before he said a word to the workman.

"Sit down, Armstrong," he said at last, pointing to the sofa. "Why were you late at work this morning? It was ten o'clock before you came in."

John turned a shade paler, but answered in a quiet, matter-of-fact way:

"I was in court, sir. They took me up last night, arter sweepin' out, and 'twere half arter nine afore they let me out."

"What was it for?" asked Mr. Stryker, bending his brows. "Mind, I've heard nothing certain. Only Sheppard told me of your arrest, and I heard from Mr. Munson that my nephew was struck with a slung shot. Are you the man that struck him?"

John bowed his head.

"Yes, sir, but not with a shot, or anything but jest my fist, and I didn't want to that, sir. If you want the hull story, sir, you kin get it from the lady that lives at this here address. She seen it all. I don't want to say nothin' more, sir. I s'pose I'm to be discharged. I s'pected it for whippin' the boss's nevy. I don't blame ye, sir. Blood's thicker than water."

And John handed the old gentleman the address of Ella Morton, which Mr. Stryker calmly copied before he said another word. Then he returned the slip to John, and observed:

"You're right, Armstrong. We have to do things we don't want to do sometimes. I shall have to discharge you."

John's heart sank within him at the words, though he had expected them. We are all apt to hope against hope.

Mr. Stryker turned to his desk, and wrote rapidly for several minutes, when he turned round again.

"You can do your sweepin' to-night and get your pay to-morrow morning for two days' work. I'd like to keep you, but it wouldn't do. I s'pose I shall lose Barker too. I'm sorry; but, as you say, blood's thicker than water. I must support my nephew, though I'd suspect he's in the wrong. Come here in the morning, as soon as you see me; but don't go to work with Barker. This is your last night in these works. Good night."

Then the old man went out, and said to Barker coldly:

"You needn't go to work to-morrow. I don't let my hands dictate to me. You can get your pay at the opening hour. You're discharged."

Then without waiting for the amazed Barker, who was growing cooler, to say a word, he strode out of the shop, his farewell words ringing in John's ears—"This is your last day in these works."

CHAPTER V.
CLIMBING AGAIN.

It was with heavy hearts and sober faces that John Armstrong and Steve Barker wended their way from the shop that night to go to supper. Barker had not expected to be taken at his word so promptly, and he had not been given the least opportunity for a quarrel. Mr. Stryker had discharged him quietly.

The feelings that comes over a workman suddenly cut off from work, with a family on his hands, is not a pleasant one, and Barker looked gloomy and revengeful as he slouched homeward. He was a good specimen of the imprudent artisan, who lives freely and never has any money saved. He said nothing all the way home, but showed John, with a sort of surly civility, to the hospitalities of his house, which was only a crowded tenement, where Mrs. Barker lived, with four children. But if Steve was surly, Phoebe, his wife, was a neat, cheerful Englishwoman, who welcomed John heartily, and made him sit down to a plentiful and wholesome supper at which Steve was the only silent member.

John watched him closely to see how he behaved to the children, and his eye brightened when he saw that the little ones brought their father, who did not

repulse them, though the gloom never left his brow during the meal.

"When it was over, he said to Phoebe: 'Give me some money, lass. I'm going out with Armstrong.'"

John saw the woman's face fall, and noticed that the children stopped talking and looked frightened.

Mrs. Barker gave a little nervous laugh, and observed:

"There is not much left, Steve. You know I had to pay—"

"Give me the money and hold your tongue, will you?" growled Steve, so savagely that John started at the sudden transformation.

All in a tremor Phoebe pulled out a little, old-fashioned purse, crying in a terrified tone:

"There, Steve, there! Don't be angry!" He snatched the purse and put it into his pocket.

"I'm not angry, if you don't make me," he growled. "Come, lad—let's go out!"

And without another word he slouched out of the room, leaving the woman and children white and scared.

John looked at them a moment before he followed; then he said in a low voice:

"Don't be skeered, marm. I'll see he don't come to harm."

"But he'll go to drinkin'. I see it in his eye," sobbed the poor woman. "Oh, don't let him drink. It makes a demon of him. He comes home and beats us all, and—Oh, what has happened?"

"He's bin discharged, marm," said John sadly. "But never mind," he added, in a cheerful tone. "I won't let him spend his money to-night, and we'll get more work in the morning."

Here the voice of Steve roared from the bottom of the stairs:

"Armstrong! What the deuce ails you? Are you comin' or not? Hang you for a spoil sport!"

John nodded to the children and went down stairs, where he found Barker scowling and grumbling.

And he was slouching away when John suddenly caught him by the arm, saying coolly:

"Be ye a regular tarantula fule, or a born greeney, Steve Barker? This here aint no time to spend money that orter go for them pore little ones up stairs, when ye don't know wher the next a-comein' from. Now ye just look a-her, I took you for a man as was a man; but darn my skin, if you go off and get drunk to-night you aint no man at all!"

He spoke without a semblance of passion, but looking the other in the eye all the time, and the wild beast in Steve Barker quailed for a moment.

"Who talked of bein' drunk?" he growled, half apologetically. "I said beer. It's my own money to spend, isn't it?"

"No," answered John, firmly. "It aint, and you know it. That poor woman and the children had it, and you took it from 'em. You jest act like a man, and let beer alone to-night. 'Twon't do ye no good."

But Barker had turned his head to avoid John's eye, and now he suddenly wrenched away his arm.

"Leave me alone," he growled. "I'm no baby to be ordered about. If you want beer, come; if not—"

Without another word he turned and strode away, in as ugly a temper as John had ever seen him. He was a stout, square-built man, with the muscle of a giant, and John said to himself, half in despair:

"How'n thunder be I goin' to stop him! I'll hev to give him one, and that'll be two fights. But I must stop him somehow."

So saying, he ran after Steve just as the latter halted in front of a low corner grocery, and called out:

"Look-a-her, Steve—Mr. Barker, say! I tell ye what I'll do with ye."

"Well, what?" growled Barker, wheeling on him with the port of an enraged wild beast. You can't stop me, do you hear? I've licked a bishop afore this, as tried me, and got six months for it too. Think you can stop me? I'm goin' to drown sorrow, lad. Hang that old Stryker! You needn't go to work to-morrow, says he. I'd like him to know I'm as good a man as him or you!"

young days, he had Steve on his back with a thump that he purposely made hard as nearly to knock the breath out of the other's body, all without giving the Englishman a chance to grasp him.

Steve Barker lay still a moment, and then scrambled up, growling:

"Confound you! 'Twere a foul trick, I'll break your head for you."

In another instant he was hailing a shower of blows on Armstrong, who backed away, evading him, for a few steps and at last sent in a "hot one," right on the mouth of Mr. Barker, who went down slowly, with a dazed, silly smile on his face, and sat staring up at his antagonist as if he did not know what was the matter.

Then John put out his hand and said, in a quiet matter-of-fact way:

"There, I've downed ye twice. Now come home with me and get yer face washed. No hard feelin's, I hope?"

Steve got slowly up. The sullenness had gone from his face, though he was bleeding profusely from the nose and mouth, but his voice was quite good-humored as he said:

"You're a good'un. By crikey, you're a better man than Steve Barker, and I know when I've got enough. I'll come home with you. Odds but that smack made me see stars!"

He seemed to be perfectly reconciled at going without his liquor. The sudden stunning blow had given just the needed shock to his nervous system, and disposed him to seek quiet. John took him to the next hydrant, where he washed the blood off his face, and discovered a nose and lip puffed into very unsightly proportions; but it was with a perfectly sober, good-humored face that he went up to his room again and tossed his wife the purse, saying:

"There, lass, there! I've thought better on't, John and me will go to work at Vulcan Works to-morrow, please the pigs. Where's my pipe? Smoke John, will you?"

"No," answered Armstrong. "I've got to sweep up the shop yet, Steve, and the watchman will be waitin'. Good-night to ye."

And he went away to his task, feeling within himself a sense of satisfaction that broke out in words, as he said:

"Aint it different, fightin' a man as is a man, and a mean me? Steve's a good feller, if he is a Britisher. Darn my skin if I thought they had sich stuff in 'em. Not a particle of malice, and a good father when he is sober. Guess I kin get him to take the p'lige afore I've done."

Then he set to work at the shop with Sheppard, and it was only eight o'clock when they got through sweeping.

John laid down his shovel and looked round the vast shop with a sigh.

"Aint it a pity?" he said to Sheppard.

"Here we've got the work down to a fine point, and I've got to leave. I kinder hate to do it. Got to like the old place, though I've only been here two days. But 'tain't no use cryin' over spilt milk. Lucky I kin sleep in the office, if 'tis the last night. Tell ye what, Sheppard, boss Stryker's a man all over, he is."

And, as Sheppard offered rude consolation, he stopped him with:

"Never mind. No use talkin'. Had to be done. Know it when I hit the boy. Reckon I won't have to fight no more. Hope so, anyway. Good-night."

And the simple-minded fellow was asleep before five minutes had passed, while Sheppard began his patrol of the shop.

It was early morning when John woke up and went round to Steve Barker's tenement, where he found Mrs. Phoebe, radiant as the day, at work getting breakfast, while Steve still slept.

She greeted him with a smile and whispered, pointing to Steve:

"Never was a better man when he's sober, Mr. Armstrong. The children were frightened to death at first; but he put 'em to bed hisself, and if I say it as shouldn't say it, never was a better husband than I've got."

Then they had breakfast, and John and Steve went back to the works as the seven o'clock whistle blew, to find Mr. Stryker walking about as usual among the men, his keen eye everywhere, saying little, but with a word in time for every one.

As soon as he saw them he went to the office, and they followed him there, where they found him with the pay-roll open before him.

He nodded to them, and said to Steve:

"You've two full days. Here's the money. Sign the roll and take it."

Steve turned a little red and took up the pen awkwardly, asking:

"Where must I sign, sir?"

"Where did you learn to write?"

"At Painted Post, sir," returned John, with some pride. "We had a first rate writin'-teacher in district school. Thank ye, sir. That's right."

And he pocketed his money with a slight sigh, when Mr. Stryker said in an indifferent sort of way:

"Ah, by-the-by, where do you think of going now, Armstrong?"

"I don't know, sir," returned John, frankly. "Steve, here, and me, we lowed we'd try the Vulcan works. I don't know rightly wher they be, sir, but Steve knows, I reckon."

Mr. Stryker nodded, and drummed on the table in an absent sort of way for several seconds, till he said:

"I'm sorry I've got to discharge you. I never said as much to a han'l before, but I mean it. I'd like to take you back, but it can't be done. You know that, Armstrong. Hush, don't speak. Well, you'll need a line to the manager of the works. I may as well tell you I went to see Mr. Morton last night. I found out the whole story from her, and I want to say to you, Armstrong, that I think you acted right all through. I honor and respect you. I hope you'll shake hands at parting and take this note from me to Mr. Handy, the manager of the Vulcan Company. It will get you work. Good-bye."

He held out his hand to John, who flushed up to the temples, and could hardly speak as he took the letter. But he managed to say:

"Thank you kindly, sir. Good-bye."

Then they went out of the office. Steve Barker looked unusually quiet and thoughtful as they passed through the shop among the workmen, who stared at them in surprise; and in a little while more they were in the street, wending their way to the Vulcan Iron Works, about six blocks off, John with the letter fast in his hand, addressed to "Mr. Abel Handy, manager Vulcan Iron Works."

As they neared the works, Steve said, in a low tone:

"Boss Stryker's what I call a real gem-man, after all."

"And I guess there aint no better, his companion replied. 'But here's the works. I feel we're goin' to get a good job here.'"

CHAPTER VI.
THE SECOND ROUND.

Mr. Abel Handy proved to be a sharp, energetic man, with much more talk and show about him than the plain old chief of the Excelsior Works. He was the superintendent for a corporation, instead of an owner in person, which made a difference in his manners. He had to please the directors and stockholders, while bullying his inferiors; but he took great pride in the works, which were far more showy than those of the Excelsior firm.

He glanced carelessly over Mr. Stryker's name at first, but read it a second time with more care, and at last ran a bell, which called up a boy, to whom he said:

"Take these two men to Birch, foreman of the riveters. Tell him to put them on at first-class work, to oblige Mr. Stryker, of the Excelsior, and report to me in the evening."

Then he nodded very slightly to the men whom he had not addressed in any way, and turned to his desk again, as if too busy to do anything but write, while Armstrong and Barker followed the boy through a shop even larger than the Excelsior, very neatly arranged, though there did not appear to be so much work doing. More than one machine was idle and the workmen were taking their time over their jobs in a way that had never been seen in the Excelsior shop. John and Steve were taken up to the foreman of the riveters, a tidy man, who had a keen intelligent face, and a comfortable well-fell air.

He looked at them rather superciliously at first, but put them to work at once on a new boiler, and before long the two friends were clinching rivets in a style that had never been seen before in the Vulcan shop.

When the noon whistle blew, and the new-comers threw down their hammers, Birch came to them, and said, in a sort of bantering way:

"I suppose you fellows are going to wet your names on the pay-roll? I know that's the rule of the shop."

"'Twarn't so in the 'Excelsior,' dryly replied Steve Barker, looking grim.

"Salsior be hanged!" retorted Birch. "They don't know how to do things in that dog-hole. We treat men like men here, and those that don't like it are quite welcome to quit. You're English, aint you? Well you know the rules."

Steve unwillingly went down into his pockets, growling:

"Well, if I must, I must, I s'pose."

John Armstrong made no difficulty about his share of the tax for he knew the omnipotence of custom. New-comers had to treat the men in their part of the shop, or take the consequence in ill-will. So the two contributed to the fund for beer, although they could ill afford it.

But when the beer came in, and Birch beckoned to them to join in drinking, Armstrong shook his head smilingly.

"No, thank ye, gents. I aint't thirsty for naught but cold tea; and me and my

mate's got enough in this can." Besides, I never drink beer, though I hain't no objections to your drinkin' it. Drink hearty gents."

And at the same moment he whispered to Steve, who was inclined to rise:

"Don't ye do it. 'Tis a tarantula mean rule. Let 'em drink alone, and they'll feel kinder 'shamed' on it."

Which actually turned out to be the case, when the workmen found that they could not quarrel with the new-comers, but had to drink their beer.

So the dinner hour passed over, and just before it closed Birch said in a startled kind of way:

"Hello! H'r's Gmlet Eyes. What in thunder's up?"

They looked round, and there was Mr. Abel Handy walking rapidly through among the idle machines, glancing to right and left with the eye of a hawk, and coming straight towards the place of the riveters.

When he arrived there he cast a sharp look all around him, and he spoke to Birch in a stern, quick way:

"How many men have you got on?"

"Nine, sir," replied Birch, in a manner as obsequious as it was possible to make it. "We're rather short handed, sir."

The manager frowned.

"I should say you were. I promised that boiler for the yacht to-morrow night, and it's hardly begun. What does this mean? You put on two men this morning. What have they done? Where's their work?"

"Here, sir," responded Birch, nervously, pointing to the new boiler. "They did pretty well for beginners."

The manager had been keenly eyeing the boiler, and interrupted him without ceremony.

"Show me the work of your senior pair. Who are they?"

"Johnson and Creamer, sir."

"Well, where is it?" asked Handy, as sharply as before; and Birch, not being able to collect his thoughts in time to lie, pointed it out:

"There, sir. The other end."

Mr. Handy strode over, looked at the work and came back with his lips twitching nervously.

"Is this all they did this morning?" he asked. "It's not two-thirds of the other men's work. Show me what the next pair did. Who are they?"

And so he went through the riveter's department in the keen, merciless way which had earned him the title of "Gmlet Eyes," the men looked scared, as well they might, for they had all been skulking work for days and days; the manager gleaning paler at each new discovery, his lips twitching, his eyes gleaming with anger, till at last he burst out into a frightful imprecation, that one never would have expected from one of his smooth and genteel appearance, and shrieked out:

"I'll bounce the whole gang of you, by all that's mighty. Every man Jack, but the two new men. It's enough to try the patience of a saint!"

And fairly choking with passion, he shook his fist at Birch, and strode off to the office, just as the whistle blew for work to be resumed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Good Introduction.
J. Kennedy, a merchant in Dixie, about three years ago introduced Hagyard's Pectoral Balsam to his customers by trying it in his own family for Coughs and Colds. Being pleased with results large sales followed, and it is now the favorite remedy in that neighborhood.

They all tell the same story. W. Thompson, jeweler, Delhi, suffered for years from Dyspepsia, got no relief until he used Dr. Carson's Stomach Bitters. He says it was just the medicine I needed. It has cured me.

Says Dryden
"She knows her man, and when you rank and swear.
Can draw you to her with a single hair."
But it must be beautiful hair to have such power; and beautiful hair can be restored by the use of CHAS. HARRIS' RENEWER. Sold at 50 cts. by J. Wilson 2m

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Loss and Gain.
CHAPTER I.
"I was taken sick a year ago with bilious fever."
"My doctor pronounced me cured, but I got sick again, with terrible pains in my back and sides, and I got so bad that I—"
"Could not move!"
"I shrunk!"
"From 228 lbs to 120! I had been doctored for my liver, but it did me no good. I did not expect to live more than three months. I began to use Hop Bitters. Directly my appetite returned, my pains left me, my entire system seemed renewed as if by magic, and after using several bottles I am not only sound as a sovereign, but