

quart measure and tin pail. Tom was already pushing his way through the bushes to the path along the river.

A thick bank of fog, which had been creeping from the coast, now began to envelop them in its damp folds. The boys could feel its chill as soon as it reached them. Jim's ragged jacket was destitute of buttons, but he always carried a supply of pins in one of his sleeves. These made good substitutes. Tom did not own a jacket, so he trudged stolidly on.

Up the river they went, past the great factories whose outlines appeared as dim shadows in the fog, along the canal where the water flowed, swift and silent, and then across the fields and through the woods and thickets where every leaf and twig sagged with the weight of the moisture which the fog had left.

The boys said little as they trudged drearily along. They were wet, cold, and discouraged. Neither of them had had anything to eat since long before daylight. At last Tom stopped abruptly.

'S'pose you could go home and carry the pails? he asked. 'Tain't over a mile.'

'Of course,' answered Jim, promptly. 'But what for? Where you goin'?'

'I'm goin' away,' replied Tom, harshly. 'I can't stand it any longer. I'd 'a' gone 'fore now if it hadn't been for you an' ma.' Then, seeing the pinched face grow suddenly white, he added, more kindly: 'There ain't no use for me to stay. If you an' me stayed on the flats we'd never know nothin'. It's too far off for schoolin', and' pa'll never help us to be anybody. There ain't no two ways 'bout that. I can stand by ma best by gettin' to do somethin' outside.'

Jim regarded him gravely for a few moments. 'I s'pose you're right,' he said, at length; 'but I sort o' hate to leave ma.'

'Why, you can't go!' hastily; 'you're too little. You ain't but 'leven an' I'm goin' on fourteen. Besides, we can't both of us leave ma; she'd be too lonesome.' Then, lowering his voice; he continued, confidentially: 'You must tell ma, by herself, that I'm not goin' far. But she'd better not tell pa. I s'pect I shall git a job in a factory or somewhere, an' be makin' money. Maybe I can git ma some shoes an' things 'fore it's very cold. Then there's the night schools we've heard tell about. Maybe I can go to them. I'd hate to grow up a fool.'

Jim looked at him, irresolutely. 'If we could only both go!' he sighed.

'If we did there wouldn't be anyone to look after ma, an' she'd be awful lonesome.'

The little fellow's face began to clear at this thought, and he drew himself up to his full height. 'I suppose I had ought to stay an' look out for her,' he said, meditatively; 'but when I git big you'll be sure an' come back to stay, so I can go off—won't you, Tom?'

Tom promised, and a moment later disappeared in the fog. Jim gazed after him until the last sound of his footsteps had died away in the distance, then he picked up the pails and vanished in the opposite direction.

The next day found Tom sorting waste in the carding room of one of the great factories. There had been little difficulty in getting work. Cotton factories have an inordinate appetite for boys, and ten minutes after he had applied for a job, Tom was seated on an empty bobbin box in front of a great pile of waste. The work was hard and dirty and the hours were long, but the boy gave such matters little thought. He was at work and earning money, and for

the first few days he was almost happy.

But as the weeks went by he grew less satisfied with his position. Who was doing his work at home, now? Who cut wood and brought water from the far-away spring? Who caught fish and dug clams and gathered mussels? Who watched over the sad-eyed, weary mother and kept her from doing hard work? Jim was willing, but could such a weak little fellow do it all? Tom knew that he could not, and gradually a troubled, uneasy expression came into his eyes.

He was attending the night school now, but somehow it did not give him the satisfaction he had anticipated. Over and over he told himself that he was doing the only thing possible, that he was doing it as much for their sake as for his own, that if he went back to the flats, there would be no future for any of them. But it was of no



'Ma!' he suddenly exclaimed; 'you are still barefoot.'

use. Visions of his mother moving wearily about the lonely cabin, and of little Jim doing work that was too hard for his frail body, made him more and more dissatisfied with himself.

At last he went to the overseer and gave up his job. 'I'm goin' home an' help do the work,' he said, in explanation. 'You see, my mother ain't strong, an' Jim's too little to do much. I hadn't ought to 'a' left. But I've saved up money enough to buy some shoes and things for ma, and I've got some school-books. Now, I'm goin' back an' work an' study till I git big an' strong enough to make a reg'lar good home for 'em.'

His step was light as he went down a side street to his garret in a rickety tenement near the river. He had been unwilling to spare money for board, and so had obtained this bare room for a dollar a month, and had 'found' himself by catching fish in the evenings and by purchasing a few—a very few—absolute necessities at a cheap grocery. There was nothing of his in the attic, but he owed fifty cents for two weeks in a second month. After this was paid, he hurried up the path by the mills and canal, and then out across the fields and through the woods towards his home on the flats.

He had not heard from that home for six weeks, and he wondered what little Jim would be doing, and if his mother's cold was any better. As he thought of the patient, cheerful mother, his hand went exultantly into his pocket to the little roll of silver which represented his six weeks' labor and his six weeks' economy.

A slight fog was rolling in from the

water, but it was not so thick but that he could distinguish objects several rods away. As he approached the house he saw Jim staggering up from the beach with a big load of driftwood upon his shoulders. This was thrown down beside the chopping block in front of the door, and the little fellow was turning away for more when he caught sight of Tom. For a moment he stood transfixed; then a look of delight flashed into his face.

'O Tom! O Tom!' he exclaimed, as he sprang forward. 'I'm awful glad to see you!' Then, in an awed whisper, 'Have you heard?'

'Heard? No. What?'

'Bout pa. He's 'most died. That night you left he fell off'n a bridge an' broke his leg, an' he lay there all night an' 'most froze, an'—an' the doctor says he musn't drink another drop—not for his life.' He glanced about hastily to see that no one was within hearing. 'Ma's jest kept with him constant, an' I've done the chorin' and' housework.'

'It must have been pretty hard for you,' said Tom, contritely. 'But how's ma?'

'Well, there has been considerable to do since you left,' acknowledged Jim, philosophically; 'an' ma, she's 'bout the same. There she comes now.'

'O Tommy, Tommy!' The big, fourteen-year-old boy tried in vain to choke back the sobs, as he felt himself folded in the quick, warm embrace of his mother. Then they stood back and gazed at each other.

'You look peaked, Tommy; have you been workin' pretty hard?'

'Yes'm, consider'ble. But 'twon't hurt me.' He raised his eyes to her face, curiously. Her cheeks were flushed, and a bright, glad look was in her eyes. What did it mean? Had she missed him so much?

She smiled, as though divining his thoughts.

'It is more than that, Tommy,' she said. 'God does everything for the best. I believe he is planning better things for us. But come and see your father.'

A lump rose in Tom's throat. See his father? Why, his whole life had been spent in trying to avoid him. What did it all mean? But he followed her, wonderingly.

'O ma!' he suddenly exclaimed, 'you are still barefoot. Here!' and thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew out the silver which he had momentarily forgotten. 'You must buy some shoes with this, an'—an' some shawls an' things.'

'You dear boy!' a sudden ring of gladness in her voice; 'now we can get the medicines an' nourishin' things your pa needs.'

'But your shoes, ma!' expostulated Tom.

'Never mind the shoes,' she returned, joyously; 'we must get your pa strong, first. God is very good to us.'

Tom scowled rebelliously, but after a talk with his father, he was as eager and hopeful as she. For that long night under the bridge, when he became sobered by the excruciating pain of his broken limb, and with the danger of freezing perilously near, had brought the man to realize his position as he had never realized it before. In the darkness and stillness, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he had felt the nearness of God, and had shuddered to himself. In answer to his almost hopeless cry had come the help which never fails.

Tom was almost too happy to sleep, that night. Like many another, he had followed the path of duty, only to find it leading to happiness, and the cross he had lifted had been transformed into a joy and blessing.