

IN SPITE OF HIS BIRTH.

At eight o'clock the great doors were unfastened and in rushed the whole crowd, each eager to be first at the office. But they were instantly marshaled into line by a floor-walker, who made them file in an orderly manner before Mr. Flinn, who was to pronounce sentence upon them.

"For Ned felt as if his chance was small among so many, and most of them older than he, but, as it happened, he was the very first one to be singled out by the gentleman, his bright, clean face, nicely brushed hair, and quiet manner having prepossessed him in his favor.

"Your name?" demanded Mr. Flinn, while his eagle eyes searched the frank countenance looking so earnestly into his.

"Edward Wallingford, sir."

"Age?"

"Twenty last March."

"Where do you live?"

"No. — Harrison avenue."

"With your parents?"

"With my mother, sir; I have no father."

"What do you want to do, errands or cash?"

"Anything that you wish, sir."

"Hum—blighting, I'm sure," said the man, approvingly. "When can you come?"

"I'd like to begin now," said Ned, eagerly.

All right, youngster; that's business, and you shall have, Morris—beckoning to a clerk—take this lad to the manager of the retail grocery department, and tell him to instruct him regarding his duties. Your pay will be a dollar and a half a week for the first month," he continued, to Ned, "and, if you do well, will be raised to two dollars after that."

Our young hero was then marched off to the stocking counter where he was at once launched upon his business career.

He was bright, quick and willing, and so civil to the clerks that he became a general favorite before the day was over.

"Small little chap, that—bright as a button, and ready to do anything you ask him," remarked one of the clerks to another, during the afternoon of Ned's first day of service.

"Humph! he's smart enough! but as for being obliging, that's the way with them all the first week or so; but it soon wears off, and I'll wager he'll be no better than the common run a fortnight hence."

But this prophet of evil failed for once in his prognostications, for Ned was bound to please and bound to rise, and he diligently and faithfully performed every duty, never forgetting to be civil and good-natured even in the midst of the greatest rush of business.

One rarely sees a prouder or a happier boy than it was when Saturday noon came—it was now the first of July, and Saturday afternoon was given to all the employees of the great store during the month of July and August—and he put into his mother's hands his first week's earnings, even though it was the small sum of one dollar and a half.

Mrs. Wallingford kissed him with tremulous lips.

"You dear boy," she said, fondly, as she smoothed back the moist hair from his forehead, "aren't you tired out?"

"No, indeed, Mamma, I feel as frisky as a kitten," Ned replied, "I have all this afternoon to play, or rest, or do anything I like." he returned brightly, and bravely refraining from mentioning the fact that he had had great blisters on each heel, where his old boots had chafed him in running back and forth a cart his duty.

But he did not care to spend the afternoon in idleness, and he remained quietly in the house, and though he tried hard to conceal that his feet and legs ached in every joint, he could not prevent his blisters from showing themselves to his wearisome and uncomfortable mother.

Sunday proved to be a rainy day, and Ned was not sorry, for he did not feel much like going to Sunday school. He was glad enough of an excuse to lie on the lounge and rest his weary limbs, while he read aloud to his mother from his library book.

Mrs. Wallingford was glad to rest, and felt quietly grateful to have a dollar and a half in her purse with which to begin the week. She had not been as well as usual during the last few days, and consequently she had not been able to finish her work, and she had found it very difficult to provide sufficient food for their absolute needs during the week just ended.

Monday morning, however, found Ned much refreshed, and ready to begin work again. The blisters were nearly healed, and his legs "as limber as ever," so he started forth to resume his duties with as much courage and enthusiasm as ever.

On Wednesday morning of this second week, as he was crossing from Essex street into Chauncy, his sharp eyes caught sight of a small green slip lying close to the curbing of the sidewalk.

"Sneoping to pick it up, he discovered it to be a roll of money.

A thrill of joy went tingling through him to his very toes, as he circled to in his small brown hands, while his heart beat with great startled pulsations, the excitement of the discovery making him almost faint for a moment. But, regarding his composure after a moment, he examined the tiny roll and found that it was composed of four ten-dollar bills, in fresh, crisp green paper.

"Forty dollars!" he murmured, with a sense of exultation, not unmingled with wonder, "was there ever such a lucky boy? Now, Mamma can have what she likes, and I can have a new jacket, and a pair of trousers, and—"

A feeling of dismay shot through him as the thought came to him that the money did not rightly belong to him—that some unfortunate person had lost it, and it must be returned to the owner as soon as possible. He looked wistfully, "Mamma could go to the seashore for a week, and I could buy a new hat, and a pair of less crocheting keeps her side all the time.

It wouldn't be honest."

He reflected and turned a half-desperate eye on the receipt and walked on, trying to

indifferent way, although a vigorous struggle was going on between his conscience and this terrible temptation, which had come upon him in such a time of need.

"Mother would never use it," he said to himself, "but I do need a new suit—my trousers are patched so I am ashamed to turn my back to anybody, my jacket is darned, besides getting too small, and too short in the sleeves, and I surely ought to have a straw hat instead of this hot, heavy cap. I could buy a piece at a dime, and—and say it was given to me."

"Thou shalt not steal!"

It seemed almost as if the words had been shouted at him through a trumpet, for they fell like a stinging lash upon his conscience, and the blood rushed hot and red into his face with a sense of shame and dishonor.

"I wonder what makes people have such horrid thoughts," he murmured. "A thief and a liar! What an ugly sound it has! I never told a lie yet, and I never stole a penny. I guess I won't begin now, just as I got into business for myself, to ruin my reputation. No, sir, I'll be honest, if I have to wear patches three days."

With a look of resolution on his young face, he quickened his pace almost to a run, as if he hoped thus to outrun the temptation, and, entering the store, made his way directly to the superintendent of his department, and told him what had occurred, producing the bills in corroboration of his story.

The man, looking into the frank, clear eyes upraised to his, realized an admirable nobility of the boy.

"Well, sir, you are a lucky youngster," he remarked, as he counted the money which Ned had given to him.

"I think that somebody else has been very unlucky," Ned quietly returned.

"Wouldn't you like to keep these bills?" the gentleman asked, just to test him.

"I should like to have forty dollars, sir, more than I can tell you, for my mother and I are very poor," Ned said, very gravely, "but I would not like to keep this money from its rightful owner."

"That's the way to talk, my boy!" said the superintendent, in a tone of hearty commendation. "All you boys stick to those principles of honor and you'll make a noble man."

Ned colored with pleasure.

He felt prouder to have won such praise from his superior, than he would to have been presented with the forty dollars. Still, he wished that those covetous thoughts, on finding the money had not come to him, for he made him feel ashamed and half guilty, and there was no one to tell him that he was a stronger and better boy because they had come to him, and he had resisted them thus gaining a signal victory, and strengthening his mind against future temptations.

"I suppose it will have to be advertised," he said, after a moment of thought, while his color deepened; "but I haven't any money to pay for it."

"I will attend to that," the superintendent replied, "but if the money isn't called for after four weeks, you can claim it, less the charge for advertising."

"Can I?" exclaimed Ned, with a sudden joyful heart, "then I have then instantly felt ashamed of himself for it, and added, "All the same, sir, I hope the owner will come for it."

The superintendent took the money to the office to be deposited, and related to a member of the firm the circumstances of Ned's finding it, and enlarged upon his evident honesty and nobility of purpose.

"Keep your eye on that youngster, Mr. Pratt, for a few weeks," was the proprietor's reply, "and if he continues to show himself capable and worthy we will advance him. An honest boy like that is worth keeping and using well."

So, it Ned had not known it, the discovery of a great temptation was likely to prove of greater and more lasting benefit to him than the forty dollars would have been.

Three weeks slipped by, and nothing of the kind occurred to our young hero.

He continued to be prompt and diligent in his business, was kind and attentive to the clerks, whose industry he was happy to do, while his unvarying cheerfulness, and a certain wit and quickness at repartee won him a warm place in every heart. One morning an old gentleman of perhaps sixty years presented himself at the desk of the cashier of the firm.

He was small of stature, with a thin and rather aristocratic face, keen gray eyes, overshadowed by heavy iron-gray brows, and hair of the same hue. He was clad in a dark, mixed suit that had evidently done service for a long time, and which would have been much the better for the use of a wisp and a sponge. His linen was fresh and clean, however, but his hat—a stovepipe of somewhat ancient date—like his suit, would have improved his shoes, as to color and polish, if not as to fit.

"I've come to see about this," he briefly remarked, as he showed a slip of printed paper through the window of the cashier's desk.

It was the advertisement regarding the finding of some money, which the superintendent of Ned's department had caused to be inserted in two of the leading papers of the city.

"Well, what about it?" as briefly demanded the cashier, while he shot a glance into the aged face before him.

"Simply this—I lost a roll of bills—four tens, issued by the Prudential Bank on the 7th of July, and somewhere between Avon and Beach streets, explained."

"Where, sir?" the cashier, thoughtfully, asked.

"Close to the curbing on Essex street."

"Who found it?"

"One of our cash boys."

"That's to pay?"

"The charge for advertising, of course—namely, the sum—and what-over besides that you add the boy can agree upon."

"Humph! Where will I find the boy?" the man asked, as he handed out the money for the advertising.

"I will send for him to come here," replied the cashier, as he wrote rapidly upon a slip of paper. Then calling a boy, he sent him down to the hosiery counter with it.

Five minutes later the boy returned, accompanied by Ned, who not knowing what was wanted of him, looked rather flushed and anxious at being summoned to the office.

"This gentleman wishes to talk with you for a few moments," remarked the cashier, indicating the stranger, and then returned to his books.

Ned felt his great frank, black eyes to the aged face, and the man gave a violent start, while a strange pallor settled over his countenance as he looked into them.

"What's your name?" he demanded abruptly.

"Edward Wallingford," Ned replied, wondering what the man could want with him.

"Wallingford! Wallingford!" he repeated, a startled look leaping into his eyes. "Do you—are you—"

He abruptly paused here, and, after a moment's pause, he said, "You are the boy who found my money."

"Oh, yes, sir; I found forty dollars. Was it yours?" Ned eagerly inquired, but flushing violently, for, despite all his efforts to resist the sin of covetousness, he could not help hoping that the money might have been lost by some rich person who would not take the trouble to search for it, and thus it would eventually come to him.

"Yes, it was mine, where did you find it?"

"Just on the corner of Essex and Chauncy streets."

"Well, I suppose you expect a reward. How much have I got to pay you for finding it?" asked the man sharply, as he fastened his keen, eagle glance upon the boy's handsome face.

Ned flushed again, and his eyes grew very bright with some unexpressed emotion; but he quietly replied:

"Nothing, sir; I am glad that you have your money back, and you are very welcome to what I have done."

He turned on his heel, and was about to go back to his duties, when the eccentric old man cried out, more sharply than he had done, "Wait a moment, please, sir, I have a question to ask you. You are a queer little fellow, but I like you. How much do you want for your services?"

"Stop; Edward Wallingford; I haven't got through with you yet."

CHAPTER IV.

Ned faced about obediently, the indignant blood still tingling in his cheeks, but still sense of injury and irritation vanishing from him, when he caught sight of the quizzical expression on the old gentleman's face.

"He's a funny old chap," was his mental comment, "it ought to be across, but I guess he isn't—he's a queer, though I'll bet he's awful tight."

"So I'm welcome to my money, am I?" repeated the stranger, with a rather refreshing. Didn't you expect to be paid for finding and returning it?"

"I don't think I expected much about it, anyway," Ned responded. "I found it, and I knew it was right that I should do my best to hunt up the owner, whether I got anything for it or not."

"But you think I ought to give you something, don't you?" persisted the old color.

Ned colored crimson again at the question. It was not pleasant to be catechized in this way regarding the duty of another, and he hardly knew what reply to make.

If the man had no sense of his own obligation, he was sure he was not going to instruct him as to his duty. He knew that if he had been in his place he would have been glad to give a poor boy a generous reward, and not make him feel uncomfortable over it, either.

"I rather think I'd like to give you something, if you'll say how much worth of it you want, and I'll give it to you," the old gentleman, as he still hesitated and appeared confused, while he regarded him curiously.

"Well, sir," Ned now said, and thinking he had better end the interview and get back to his work, "if you really like to make me some return—though I wouldn't claim anything—I should feel very much obliged to you if you'd buy me a pair of hats; my old cap isn't very comfortable this hot weather. They have some very decent ones in the store for fifty cents."

The aged stranger's keen gray eyes twinkled and the corners of his mouth twitched with amusement at this very moderate request.

"A straw hat, eh? So you've been wearing a cap all summer—a woolen one?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doesn't the firm pay you enough so that you could afford to buy yourself a straw hat?"

A flash of anger leaped into the boy's eyes, and his lips involuntarily curled with contempt, for he imagined that the man—the mean old miser—as he mentally dubbed him—was unwilling to put out even the small sum of fifty cents in return for his forty dollars.

"I get a dollar and a half a week," he said, trying to speak in a respectful tone out of reverence for his old man, though his voice trembled in spite of himself with unexpressed wrath, "but never mind the hat—I can go without it a while longer."

"But, tut," responded his companion, with a chuckle. "Edward Wallingford, you are a boy of considerable character, and I like spirit, if it is tempered with moderation. If you will mind about the hat; suppose you show me to the counter where they are sold."

The man's voice was now kind and genial, and a pleasant smile was hovering about his thin lips.

Ned was quick to mark this change in him, and his own brow instantly cleared.

"Yes, sir; this way, please," he said, and turning led the way to the counter, where the cashier was standing following as fast as

and handed the little old man his money.

"I guess it's yours without any doubt," he remarked, so modestly, with a great temptation, a few weeks ago, and who was also so courteous to an inquisitive old man that he was brought to the attention of his friends, and the world will be the better for your having lived in it."

There was no name signed to this characteristic epistle, which was a great disappointment to Ned, and to Mrs. Wallingford also, who now realized that this strange being had only been trying to test Ned by his searching questions and his apparent generosity.

Upon unfolding the other slip of paper, the happy boy found it to be a postal money-order for ten dollars.

"Hurrah! Mamma, the old coddler has a brick, after all!" he exclaimed, waving the money-order aloft, while his face was radiant with delight.

"Now," he continued more gravely, "this will feed us for nearly a month; can you have a nice rest, mother, and not work on those horrid ma-

Mrs. Wallingford smiled as she fondly kissed his glowing cheeks.

"I do not expect about taking the rest, dear," she said, "but I am proud of my son to-night that I should be to have had a large fortune left me, and I stand in his eyes to emphasize her words."

But Ned, boy-like, thought more of the money than of the act which had brought it to him.

"Ten dollars! we haven't had so much at once for a long time!" he said. "That old man has done the handsome thing, and I thought him a dandy. This morning, I imagined it was almost like pulling his eye-teeth—though I don't believe he had any—for him to pay out that dollar!"

"Now, is there any little thing that you need?" he inquired, as he waited for his change, and running his glance over the boy's trim figure, noting his clean, nicely pressed, but clean, dirt-washed, worn, but neatly mended trousers and patched shoes.

"No, sir, thank you, and I can pay very much obliged for the hat; it's a dandy!" Ned responded, with luminous eyes, as he twisted it with satisfaction.

"And you are satisfied with it, to return for finding the forty dollars?" the man asked, curiously.

"Yes, indeed, sir, and mother will be pleased, too—my old cap was so heavy it made her feel badly to have me wear it."

"Humph!" grunted the old gentleman, "your mother will be pleased—how about your father?"

"I haven't any father," said Ned, gravely.

"Um—ah! Where did you get those great black eyes?" the man now asked, observing him with a strange interest.

"From my father, I think, sir, for my mother has the loveliest blue eyes you ever saw," he answered, with a slight blush in his tone as he spoke thus of his mother.

"Where do you live?" was the next query, but the aged lips were almost colorless as they voiced it.

"No. — Harrison avenue, fourth floor. Now, if you don't mind, sir, I think I ought to go back to my work."

"What is your work?"

"I'm a hosiery boy at the gent's hosiery counter."

"And you only get a dollar and a half a week?"

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"Well, I'd like to ask you just one more question, when you may go," the man said, drawing him a little aside, that no one else might hear.

"All right, sir."

"When you found that roll of bills, Edward Wallingford, didn't you want to keep it?"

All the blood in Ned's body seemed to fly into his face again at this pointed question.

His head dropped, and tears of mingled anger and shame rushed to his eyes.

It seemed very cruel that he must be made to confess the conflict which he had had between the most terrible temptation and his conscience.

The superintendent had asked him the same question. Did everybody imagine that he must possess a devilish disposition—that because he was a poor boy he was utterly devoid of principles of honor?

He felt bitterly humiliated, and his indignation began, a younger man he would have resented what he considered his insolent curiosity.

"Yes, sir," he said, humbly, and he felt that he was a little better off than he was when he was asked the question, while Miriam looked at him in his hands. "You see, we are so poor—mother had been some very decent ones in the store for fifty cents, and I thought if those forty dollars were only mine, I could go away from the hot city for a little while and get strong again. I know it wasn't right even to wish to keep it—but I just couldn't help thinking of it. At any rate—and now the great black eyes flashed frankly up into the old gentleman's face—"I'll keep it. If I don't have a chief for the biggest fortune in the world, I'll be glad you have it back again."

"Good-bye, sir," and turning, he darted away before the man could stop him, and ran nimbly downstairs to his duties, hoping he should never meet the owner of that forty dollars again, but wondering what the name of the "queer old coddler" could be.

When he went home at noon he told his mother all about his interview with him, and displayed his nice new hat with considerable pride.

Mrs. Wallingford was somewhat amused over the recital, and a trifle indignant as well, that her boy should have been subjected to such a catechizing, while she also thought the man rather mean to have bestowed only a dollar upon him in return for the large sum which he had lost.

But both Ned and his mother changed their opinion regarding the eccentric old gentleman that evening, when the last post brought a letter directed in a cramped, old-fashioned hand to "Edward Wallingford, No. — Harrison avenue, Boston, Mass."

They wondered, before they opened it, who it could be from, for they never received letters, having no friends or relatives with whom to correspond.

When Ned cut the end of the envelope across two slips of paper fell out.

Picking up the first that came to

hand, he read aloud:

"The enclosed is for the very modest, honest lad who struggled so nobly with a great temptation, a few weeks ago, and who was also so courteous to an inquisitive old man that he was brought to the attention of his friends, and the world will be the better for your having lived in it."

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"Yes, indeed, sir, and mother will be pleased, too—my old cap was so heavy it made her feel badly to have me wear it."

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There was no name signed to this characteristic epistle, which was a great disappointment to Ned, and to Mrs. Wallingford also, who now realized that this strange being had only been trying to test Ned by his searching questions and his apparent generosity.

Upon unfolding the other slip of paper, the happy boy found it to be a postal money-order for ten dollars.

"Hurrah! Mamma, the old coddler has a brick, after all!" he exclaimed, waving the money-order aloft, while his face was radiant with delight.

"Now," he continued more gravely, "this will feed us for nearly a month; can you have a nice rest, mother, and not work on those horrid ma-

Mrs. Wallingford smiled as she fondly kissed his glowing cheeks.

"I do not expect about taking the rest, dear," she said, "but I am proud of my son to-night that I should be to have had a large fortune left me, and I stand in his eyes to emphasize her words."

But Ned, boy-like, thought more of the money than of the act which had brought it to him.

"Ten dollars! we haven't had so much at once for a long time!" he said. "That old man has done the handsome thing, and I thought him a dandy. This morning, I imagined it was almost like pulling his eye-teeth—though I don't believe he had any—for him to pay out that dollar!"

"Now, is there any little thing that you need?" he inquired, as he waited for his change, and running his glance over the boy's trim figure, noting his clean, nicely pressed, but clean, dirt-washed, worn, but neatly mended trousers and patched shoes.

"No, sir, thank you, and I can pay very much obliged for the hat; it's a dandy!" Ned responded, with luminous eyes, as he twisted it with satisfaction.

"And you are satisfied with it, to return for finding the forty dollars?" the man asked, curiously.

"Yes, indeed, sir, and mother will be pleased, too—my old cap was so heavy it made her feel badly to have me wear it."

"Humph!" grunted the old gentleman, "your mother will be pleased—how about your father?"

"I haven't any father," said Ned, gravely.

"Um—ah! Where did you get those great black eyes?" the man now asked, observing him with a strange interest.

"From my father, I think, sir, for my mother has the loveliest blue eyes you ever saw," he answered, with a slight blush in his tone as he spoke thus of his mother.

"Where do you live?" was the next query, but the aged lips were almost colorless as they voiced it.

"No. — Harrison avenue, fourth floor. Now, if you don't mind, sir, I think I ought to go back to my work."

"What is your work?"

"I'm a hosiery boy at the gent's hosiery counter."

"And you only get a dollar and a half a week?"

"Yes, sir; but if I do well they will give me more by and by," Ned said, cheerfully.

"Well, I'd like to ask you just one more question, when you may go," the man said, drawing him a little aside, that no one else might hear.

"All right, sir."

"When you found that roll of bills, Edward Wallingford, didn't you want to keep it?"

All the blood in Ned's body seemed to fly into his face again at this pointed question.

His head dropped, and tears of mingled anger and shame rushed to his eyes.

It seemed very cruel that he must be made to confess the conflict which he had had between the most terrible temptation and his conscience.

The superintendent had asked him the same question. Did everybody imagine that he must possess a devilish disposition—that because he was a poor boy he was utterly devoid of principles of honor?

He felt bitterly humiliated, and his indignation began, a younger man he would have resented what he considered his insolent curiosity.

"Yes, sir," he said, humbly, and he felt that he was a little better off than he was when he was asked the question, while Miriam looked at him in his hands. "You see, we are so poor—mother had been some very decent ones in the store for fifty cents, and I thought if those forty dollars were only mine, I could go away from the hot city for a little while and get strong again. I know it wasn't right even to wish to keep it—but I just couldn't help thinking of it. At any rate—and now the great black eyes flashed frankly up into the old gentleman's face—"I'll keep it. If I don't have a chief for the biggest fortune in the world, I'll be glad you have it back again."

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