

FRED'S OBLIGATIONS.

"**I** AM under no obligation to these oys, whatever, father, and I don't see why you insist upon my inviting them to the picnic."

"I do not insist on your inviting them; only upon your thinking the matter over a little more closely before making your decision final. As I understand it, then, you wish to invite only those to whom you are under obligations, either of friendship or of service?"

"Yes, father, that is my idea exactly. Don't you think it a good one?"

"Well, perhaps. That is, if you can only carry it out. Be careful, though, and not omit anyone whom you ought by this rule to invite, as that would be adding ingratitude to forgetfulness of the service rendered," and Mr. White passed down the walk with a queer smile that left Fred in an uncomfortable state of doubt and wonder.

It was not for long, however, that a little matter like this could keep the boy's mind from the important work on hand, of preparing the list of boys to whom invitations were to go. Of course, his usual chums must be there, and, had that been all, the difficulty would not have been great. Fred, however, had determined to include upon this pleasure-trip all the neighboring boys who had done him any little service in the past year, or, as he expressed it, all to whom he felt under obligations.

First, there was Tom Mercer, who loaned Fred his sail-boat one whole afternoon. To be sure, Tom did not want to use it, but the accommodation was just the same to Fred. Then Jamie Potter ought to go, for he put in a good half hour helping to get the boat in trim for starting. Anyway, Jamie was not a bad sort of a fellow to have along, so down went his name. But what about his brother Willie? Jamie could not have helped at the boat if Willie had not taken his place in the corn-field. Willie's name was added.

Frank Barless walked three miles to return Fred's lost dog a month before; that proved his claim, and of course Frank's brother must

not be forgotten for taking his place and giving him the chance to go.

Fred was surprised at how the list grew, and when he finally ceased to add more names it was with a good deal of fear that he had omitted some he ought to have remembered. Reluctantly folding up the list he put it in his pocket-book and went down street, still thinking over his scheme. Somehow he was not half so well satisfied with it now as a few hours before; it seemed so incomplete. In fact, he really felt cross and discontented with himself and everyone else. And that reminded him, where was Johnnie Randolph this morning? He was always on the front porch in his wheel-chair on pleasant days, and no one could get past him feeling cross. His cheery smile and "Good morning" never failed to drive away the heaviest shadows and make everything seem cheerful. Evidently, Johnnie had not been at his post, and as a result everything went wrong. At the river dock Fred was met by the old carpenter with the assurance that his boat could not possibly be done in time for the picnic.

"You see," explained the old man, "my boy, Ralph, died last week, and now I have no one to bring my dinners to me, and must go myself on all my errands. You have no idea how many steps he saved his old father."

Fred turned back up street. Burt Wheeler met him with a distant bow and cold "Good morning."

"Such a dude!" exclaimed Fred to himself. "I'll never be like him if I have to watch myself all the days of my life. And there's young Connors. Ugh! How disgusting he is, fairly steeped in tobacco. I really am afraid I should have learned to smoke myself if it hadn't been for his horrible example. I really wonder if for that reason I am not under a little obligation to him. I hope not; but really I believe I am. And to Burt Wheeler, too, for that matter; else I might have been another such a coxcomb as he is."

"There is Jake Duncan," continued the boy, glad to be rid of unpleasant subjects. "He gave me a stout old race at school for the prize; made me study as I never did before."