

Captain Solon's Boy.

(The 'Youth's Companion.')

Year in and year out, month in and month out, a stream sets in from the country to the cities,—a stream of youthful life, coming from homes to live without the restraints of home; coming for better or for worse.

Myron Walker had come in this great current from a home of peace, of kindness, and of homely uprightness. His home was by the sea, and from his early boyhood, when he had ventured first upon the water, in a skiff rigged with a little sprit-sail of cotton cloth, until he was a well-grown lad, he had had every care, every training, all the best surroundings that a New England home can give a boy to fit him for the battle if life.

His father's home was pleasant in situation. It stood close by the shore of a little bay, and by it was the old barn where the swallows built, and where the old white horse stood switching flies in summer and with his head thrust with absurd gravity on the children at their play.

Close on the shore was the shop where Captain Solon Walker, Myron's father, worked at building boats. The business was growing, and Captain Solon, as everybody called him, had found it pleasanter of late years than going to sea in a coaster; and he had strongly wished that Myron would stay at home and learn the trade. But no; Myron had a great longing to be what he called a gentleman, and to the city he had gone. He was bright and quick, however, and he had given great satisfaction to his employers, and was rising.

High noon in the city, and burning heat. Everybody walking on the shady side and keeping indoors, as far as possible. Few sales in the shops, except of bathing-suits. No business really good but that of the harbor-steamers. Dull and quiet everywhere; dull and quiet in the store of Shaw & Barnes, where Myron and a fellow-clerk stood looking out through the broad show-window.

Neither was over nineteen, but they held themselves to be gentlemen; their clothes fitted well, their low shoes fitted well, their shirt-bosoms lay flat and smooth, their neck-scarfs were held in place by broad gold rings.

'I wish my vacation began to-day,' said Myron's companion, listlessly. 'When does your train leave?'

'Three-twenty,' said Myron. 'And I shall be glad enough to get out of this hot place for a while, though it's wretchedly dull down home.'

'What's the old gentleman's business?' asked the other. 'I don't know as I ever asked you.'

'He always used to go to sea,' said Myron; 'but he builds boats now.'

'What! you don't mean works with his hands at it, like a mechanic?'

'Well, yes,' said Myron, with an apologetic air. 'But you know how it is in the country; nobody thinks any the less of him for it there.'

His companion softly whistled. 'Oh, no!' he said. 'That's all right. But it's lucky for you he lives so far off. It would be a regular circus to have him galloping round town, where the fellows would see him in brown overalls and in shirt-sleeves, and lugging a high-top dinner-pail.'

'Myron!' called Mr. Shaw, from the little private office.

Myron went in.

'Close the door,' said his employer.

Mr. Shaw, Mr. Barnes and a tall, hard-

featured man, whom Myron had never seen, were there.

'Myron,' said Mr. Shaw, 'I have missed a good deal of money in the last six months, although I haven't said anything about it, for fear of doing injustice to somebody. You were the last one in the world I should have suspected, but now, in the presence of this officer, I feel obliged to ask you to show us what money you have in your pockets.'

Myron turned color. 'I don't see that it's of any consequence to you,' he said. 'There is nothing but my own money there.'

'Myron,' said Mr. Shaw, 'this can hardly be more unpleasant to you than it is to me; but I have good reasons to believe that you have in your pockets now some gold and silver pieces that were in the drawer last night, and have not been paid out to any one. Will you show us what you have?'

'No, sir! I don't propose to lower myself by doing any such thing. I don't propose to be treated like a thief!'

'Very well,' said Mr. Shaw. 'Mr. Officer, I have nothing further to say.'

The officer took from his pocket a warrant for the arrest of Myron F. Walker on a charge of larceny.

'I don't see but you'll have to go with me,' he said. 'By the way, you may be interested to know that I've got a few things that I found in your bedroom this forenoon.'

'Stop!' said Myron. 'I see you've got me in a corner, and I suppose I may as well make a clean breast of it,' and he emptied his pockets. There were five coins marked like the one Mr. Shaw had shown.

'Now,' said the officer, 'you can come with me. I'll provide you with a vacation free.'

'You don't mean that you're going to have me arrested, Mr. Shaw, now, after I have told you everything frankly?' said Myron.

'Young man,' said Mr. Barnes, 'we have only given you this chance to clear yourself because my partner couldn't be persuaded that you would steal, and insisted on your having this chance to clear yourself of taking this money. I was satisfied, for my part, that you had it.'

'All right!' said the boy, sullenly; and before the face of his wondering fellow-clerks he took his hat and passed out with the officer.

'Mr. Clerk,' said the district attorney, 'you may call No. 1542, Myron F. Walker.'

Myron was set at the bar.

'The defendant has pleaded guilty, your Honor,' said the district attorney, 'and the case comes up for sentence. It seems, by the indictment, that the prisoner is one of those luxurious young gentlemen who cannot get along, like your Honor and me, with a supply of the common wants of life, but must have (here he looked over the indictment) large quantities of perfumery and silk stockings and white dress-studs and French kid gloves, besides collars and cuffs by dozens. He has taken these things and various sums of money amounting in value, in all, to over four hundred dollars from his employers. Such cases have been too frequent of late, and I ask for a substantial sentence of imprisonment. But for the fact that restitution has been made by the boy's father, I should move, as I might upon this record, that he be sentenced as a common thief.'

'Has the defendant counsel?' asked the judge.

Captain Solon rose from his place beside his wife in the witness-seats, and came forward. His plain, homely dress and simple bearing were in strong contrast with the

dress and manners of those who sat around him.

'Your Honor,' he said, 'I am this boy's father. He has no lawyer, but I would ask the privilege of saying a few words to your Honor myself.'

'I shall be most glad to hear you,' said the judge, respectfully,—for he was a gentleman, and knew a gentleman when he saw one, though his dress and manners were not of the city fashion—'but first let me ask the young man a few questions.'

The court-room was full of lawyers and witnesses and spectators, for there were many other prisoners awaiting trial or sentence; and all eyes were bent on Myron.

'How long,' said the Judge, 'have you been in the city?'

'About two years, your Honor.'

'Now tell me,' continued the judge, 'how it was that being brought up by such a man as your father plainly is, you fell to stealing.'

'Your Honor,' said Myron, 'I never took a thing until within the last six or eight months. But last fall I got acquainted, at a ball, with four or five fellows that I have been around with a good deal since, and they all dressed a great deal better than I could afford to, and they had money to spend for everything, and finally I couldn't stand it. First I took two dollars from the till, and then I took more and more as I had a chance, and then I got to taking goods.'

'What did you do with these various articles?' asked the judge, looking over the list through his eye-glasses; 'you certainly cannot have used them all yourself.'

'No, sir,' said Myron; 'we were all in different kinds of stores, and we used to take things to exchange with each other.'

'Who are these young men?' asked the judge.

'Your Honor, I do not wish to tell,' said Myron.

'But suppose I should increase your sentence for not giving us the information?'

'Then I should take the sentence, your Honor,' said Myron.

'Well,' said the judge, 'if you understood these things better, perhaps you would see that the fair thing is to tell who these young men are; but as it is, I do not know but I think the more of you for keeping their names to yourself.'

'Now, Mr. Walker,' said the judge to Capt. Solon, 'I shall be very glad to hear you.'

'Your Honor,' said Capt. Solon, 'this boy has always borne, until now, the best character. It struck me as sudden as lightning when I got a telegram telling me of this, and I can't help believing that he was led astray by designing persons, and that his disgrace will be an awful lesson to him; and for these reasons I would ask your Honor to defer the sentence, and give him a chance to redeem himself. I can't doubt that something can be made of him yet. His mother would never outlive his going to prison, and his sisters would never hold up their heads again. It's hard enough for them, as it is; the girls want me, now, to move away from where we live. My family have lived on the same spot, your Honor, ever since the town settled, and this is the first time any one of them has been charged with a dishonest act.'

'But you know, Mr. Walker,' said the judge, 'that this case does not stand alone; examples must be made.'

'I know, your Honor; I have no word of excuse for stealing, but if the boy goes to the prison, probably that is the end of him, and I want one chance to save him. It seems to