



FRANKS HOME ON THE OTTAWA.

The Chore-boy of Camp Kippewa.

A Canadian Story.

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CHAPTER II.

THE CHOICE OF AN OCCUPATION.

THE fact was that Mrs. Kingston felt a strong repugnance to her son's following in his father's footsteps, so far as his occupation was concerned. She dreaded the danger that was inseparable from it, and shrank from the idea of giving up the boy whose company was now the chief delight of her life, for all the long winter months that would be so dreary without him.

Frank had some inkling of his mother's feelings, but, boy like, thought of them as only the natural nervousness of womankind; and, his heart being set upon going to the woods, he was not very open to argument.

"Why don't you want me to go lumbering, mother?" he inquired in a tone that had a touch of petulance in it. "I've got to do something for myself, and I detest store-keeping. It's not in my line at all. Fellows like Tom Clemon and Jack Stoner may find it suits them, but I can't bear the idea of being shut up in a store or office all day. I want to be out of doors. That's the kind of life for me."

Mrs. Kingston gave a sigh that was a presage of defeat as she regarded her son, standing before her, his handsome face flushed with eagerness and his eyes flashing with determination.

"But, Frank dear," said she, gently, "have you thought how dreadfully lonely it will be for me living all alone here during the long winter—your father gone from me and you away off in the woods, where I can never get to you or you to me?"

The flush on Frank's face deepened and extended until it covered forehead and neck with its crimson glow. He had not taken this view of the case into consideration before, and his tender heart reproached him for so forgetting his mother while laying out his own plans. He sprang forward, and, kneeling down beside the lounge, threw his arms about his mother's neck and clasped her fondly, finding it hard to keep the tears back, as he said:

"You dear, darling mother! I have been selfish. I should have thought how lonely it would be for you in the winter time."

Mrs. Kingston returned the embrace with no less fervour, and as usually happens where the other side seems to be giving way, began to weaken somewhat herself and to feel a little doubtful as to whether, after all, it would be right to oppose her son's wishes when his inclinations toward the occupation he had chosen were evidently so very decided.

"Well, Frank dear," she said, after a

pause, while Frank looked at her expectantly, "I don't want to be selfish, either. If it were not for the way we lost your father, perhaps I should not have such a dread of the woods for you, and no doubt even then it is foolish for me to give way to it. We won't decide the matter now. If you do go to the woods, it won't be until the autumn, and perhaps during the summer something will turn up that will please us better. We will leave the matter in God's hands. He will bring it to pass in the way that will be best for us both, I am confident."

So with that understanding the matter rested, although of course it was continually being referred to as the weeks slipped by and the summer waxed and waned. Although Frank felt quite convinced in his own mind that he was not cut out for a position behind a desk or counter, he determined to make the experiment, and accordingly applied to Squire Eagleson, who kept the principal store and was the "big man" of the village, for a place in his establishment. Summer being the squire's busy season, and Frank being well known to him, he was glad enough to add to his small staff of clerks so promising a recruit, especially as, taking advantage of the boy's ignorance of business affairs, he was able to engage him at wages much below his actual worth to him. This the worthy squire regarded as quite a fine stroke of business, and told it to his wife with great gusto, rubbing his fat hands complacently together as he chuckled over his shrewdness.

"Bright boy, that Frank Kingston! Writes a good fist, and can run up a row of figures like smoke. Mighty civil, too, and sharp. And all for three dollars a week! Ha, ha, ha! Wish I could make as good a bargain as that every day." And the squire looked the picture of virtuous content as he leaned back in his big chair to enjoy the situation.

Mrs. Eagleson did not often venture to intermeddle in her husband's business affairs, although frequently she became aware of things which she could not reconcile with her conscience. But this time she was moved to speak by an impulse she could not control. She knew the Kingstons, and had always thought well of them. Mrs. Kingston seemed to her in many respects a model woman, who deserved well of everybody; and that her husband, who was so well-to-do, should take any advantage of these worthy people who had so little, touched her to the quick. There was a bright spot on the centre of her pale cheeks and an unaccustomed ring in her voice as she exclaimed, with a sharpness that made her husband give quite a start of surprise:

"Do you mean to tell me, Daniel, that you've been mean enough to take advantage of that boy who has to support his widowed mother, and to hire him for half the wages he's worth just because he didn't know any better? And then you come home here and boast of it. Have you no conscience?"

The squire was so taken aback by this

unexpected attack that at first he hardly knew how to meet it. Should he lecture his wife for her presumption in meddling in his affairs, which were quite beyond her comprehension as a woman, or should he make light of the matter and laugh it off? After a moment's reflection, he decided on the latter course.

"Hoity, toity! Mrs. Eagleson, but what's set you so suddenly on fire? Business is business, you know, and if Frank Kingston did not know enough to ask for more wages it wasn't my concern to enlighten him."

Mrs. Eagleson rose from her chair and came over and stood in front of her husband, pointing her long thin forefinger at him, as, with a trembling yet scornful voice, she addressed him thus:

"Daniel, how you can kneel down and ask the blessing of God upon such doings is beyond me, or how your head can lie easy on your pillow when you know that you are taking the bread out of that poor lone widow's mouth it is not for me to say. But this I will say, whether you like it or not: if you are not ashamed of yourself I am for you." And before the now much-disturbed squire had time to say another word in his defence, the speaker had swept indignantly out of his presence and hastened to her own room, there to throw herself down upon the bed and burst into a passion of tears, for she was at best but a weak-nerved woman.

Left to himself, the squire shifted about uneasily in his chair, and then rose and stumped angrily to the window.

"What does she know about business?" he muttered, "If she were to have her own way at the store she'd ruin me in a twelve-month."

Yet Mrs. Eagleson's brave outburst was not in vain. Somehow or other after it the squire never felt comfortable in his mind until, much to Frank's surprise and delight, he one day called him to him, and, with an air of great generosity and patronage, said:

"See here, my lad. You seem to be doing your work real well, so I am going to give you a dollar a week more just to encourage you, and then if a little extra work comes along"—for autumn was approaching—"ye won't mind tackling it with a will; eh?"

Frank thanked his employer very heartily, and this unexpected increase of earnings and his mother's joy over it for a time almost reconciled him to the work at the store, which he liked less and less the longer he was at it.

The fact of the matter was a place behind the counter was un congenial to him in many ways. There was too much indoors about it, to begin with. From early morning until late evening he had to be at his post, with brief intervals for meals, and the colour was leaving his cheeks and his muscles were growing slack and soft, owing to the constant confinement.

But this was the least of his troubles. A still more serious matter was that his conscience did not suffer him to take kindly to the "tricks of the trade," in which his employer was a "passed master" and his fellow-clerks very promising pupils. He could not find it in his heart to depreciate the quality of Widow Perkin's butter, or to cajole unwary Sam Struthers, from the backlands, into taking a shop-worn remnant for the new dress his wife had so carefully commissioned him to buy. His idea of trade was that you should deal with others as fairly as you would have them deal with you; and while, of course, according to the squire's philosophy, you could never make a full purse that way, still you could at least have a clear conscience, which surely was the more desirable, after all.

The squire had noticed Frank's "pernickety nonsense," as he was pleased to call it, and at first gave him several broad hints as to the better mode of doing business; but, finding that the lad was firm, and would no doubt give up his place rather than learn these "business ways," he had the good sense to let him alone, finding in his quickness, fidelity, and attention to his work sufficient compensation for this deficiency in bargaining acumen.

"You'll be content to stay at the store now, won't you, Frank?" said his mother as they talked over the welcome and much-needed raise of salary.

"It does seem to make it easier to stay,

mother," answered Frank. "But ——" And he gave a big sigh, and stopped.

"But what, dear?" asked Mrs. Kingston, tenderly.

Frank was slow in answering. He evidently felt reluctant to bring up the matter again, and yet his mind was full of it.

"But what, Frank?" repeated his mother, taking his hands in hers and looking earnestly into his face.

"Well, mother, it's no use pretending. I'm not cut out for keeping store, and I'll never be much good at it. I don't like being in doors all day. And then, if you want to get on, you've got to do all sorts of things that are nothing else but downright mean, and I don't like that, either." And then Frank went on to tell of some of the tricks and stratagems the squire or the other clerks would resort to in order to make a good bargain.

Mrs. Kingston listened with profound attention. More than once of late, as she noticed her son's growing pallor and loss of spirits, she had asked herself whether she were not doing wrong in seeking to turn him aside from the life for which he longed; and now that he was finding fresh and fatal objections to the occupation he had chosen in deference to her wishes, she began to relent of her insistence, and to feel more disposed to discuss the question again. But before doing so she wished to ask the advice of a friend in whom she placed much confidence, and so for the present she contented herself with applauding Frank for his conscientiousness, and assuring him that she would a thousand times rather have him always poor than grow rich after the same fashion as Squire Eagleson.

The friend whose advice Mrs. Kingston wished to take was her husband's successor as foreman at the depot for the lumber camps—a sensible, steady, reliable young man, who had risen to his present position by process of promotion from the bottom, and who was, therefore, well qualified to give her just the counsel she desired. At the first opportunity, therefore, she went over to Mr. Stewart's cottage, and, finding him at home, opened her heart fully to him. Mr. Stewart, or Alec Stewart, as he was generally called, listened with ready sympathy to what Mrs. Kingston had to say, and showed much interest in the matter, for he had held a high opinion of his former chief, and knew Frank well enough to admire his spirit and character.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Kingston, it's just this way," said he, when his visitor had stated the case upon which she wanted his opinion: "if Frank's got his heart set upon going into the woods, I don't know as there's any use trying to cross him. He won't take kindly to anything else while he's thinking of that, and he'd a big sight better be a good lumberman than a poor clerk, don't you think?"

Mrs. Kingston felt the force of this reasoning, yet could hardly make up her mind to yield to it at once.

"But, Mr. Stewart," she urged, "it may only be a boyish notion of Frank's. He thinks, perhaps, he'd like it because that's what his father was before him, and then he may find his mistake."

"Well, Mrs. Kingston," replied Mr. Stewart, "if you think there's any chance of that being the case we can settle the question right enough in this way: let Frank come to the woods with me this winter. I will give him a berth as chore-boy in one of the camps, and if that doesn't sicken him of the business then all I can say is you'd better let the lad have his will."

Mrs. Kingston sighed. "I suppose you're right. I don't quite like the idea of his being chore-boy; but if he's really in earnest, there's no better way of proving him."

When Frank heard that his desire for a winter in the woods was to be gratified after all, he felt too delighted to find any fault with the position, humble though it was, as he well knew, which Mr. Stewart offered him. The prospect of release from the un congenial routine of store-keeping filled him with happiness, and his mother almost felt reconciled to let him go from her, so marked was the change in his spirits.

(To be continued.)

Is everything now upon the altar?