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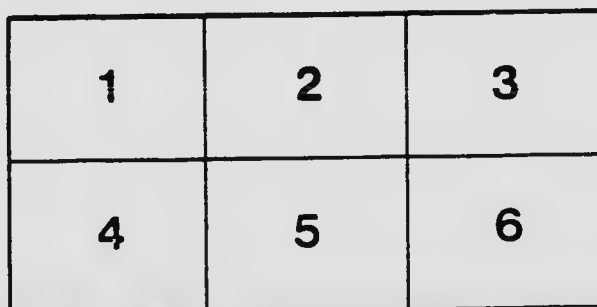
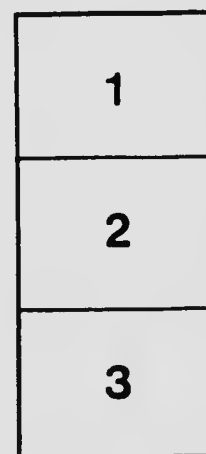
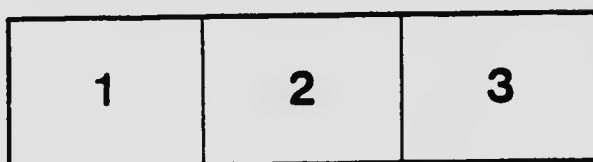
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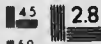
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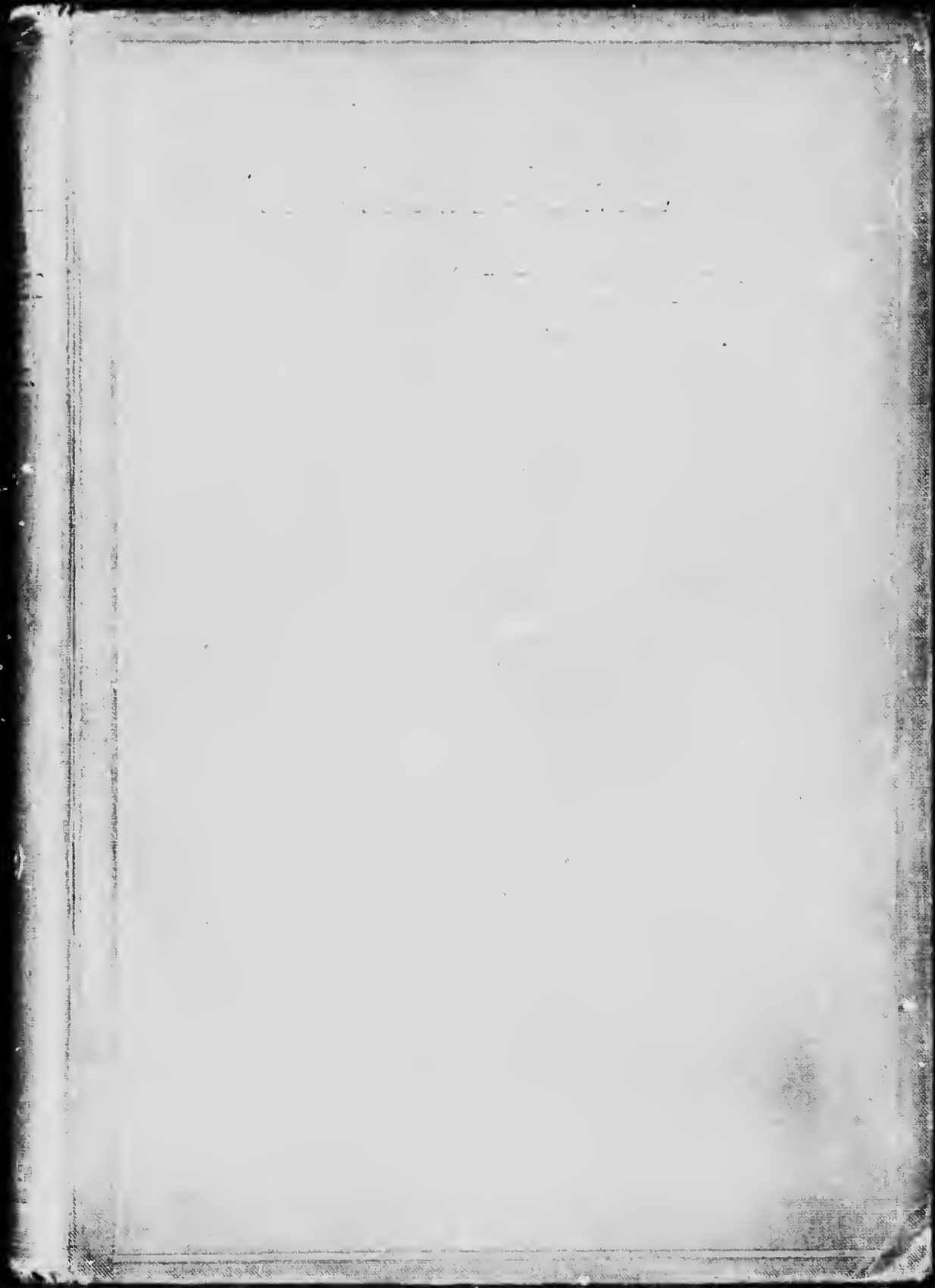
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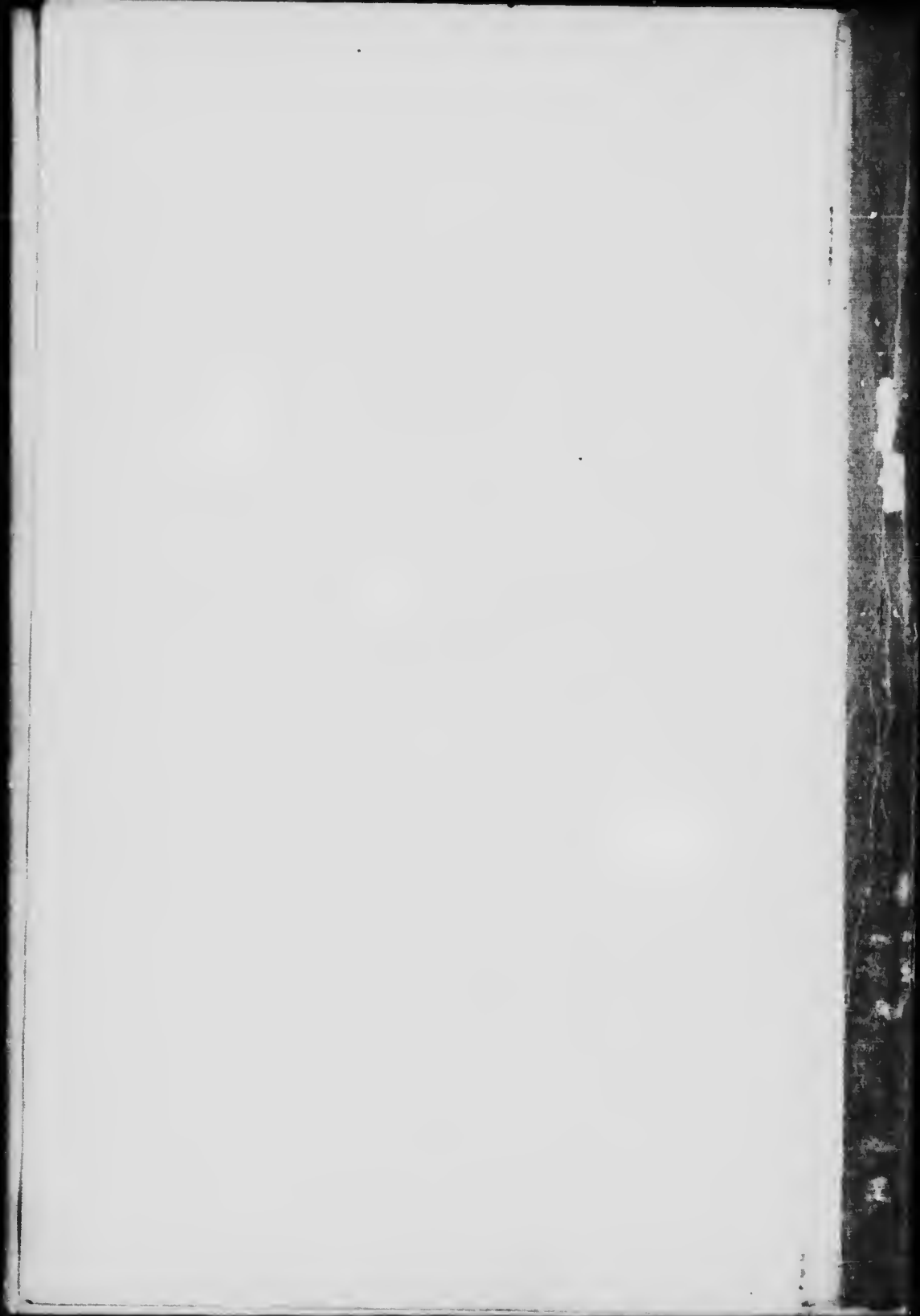
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THE LOST JEWEL

OF THE

MORTIMERS.

BY

ANNA T. SADLIER.



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"THE LOST JEWEL OF THE MORTIMERS"
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The Lost Jewel of the Mortimers.

Chapter I.

THE MANSION AT PINE BLUFF.

When Julian Mortimer received the invitation to visit his grandfather at Pine Bluff, near the sea, it was, indeed, an event in his life; though he by no means understood its import. He supposed, in his careless boy-fashion, that the old gentleman had suddenly grown weary of solitude and had bethought himself of city relatives, who seldom got a whiff of salt-air or a glimpse of the country. His mother, who was better informed, looked somewhat pale and anxious, standing thoughtfully at the window commanding the street, on the morning fixed for the departure. She heard Julian announcing the good tidings to sundry of his boy friends who had not already heard them:

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"I'm going down to Pine Bluff to my grandfather's, and I guess I'm going to have a pretty good time,—I'm *sure* of it. There's lots of boating there, and a pony to ride and a gun to shoot with."

"Shoot what?" inquired one of his hearers, with a touch of mockery.

Julian replied, rather vaguely:

"Oh, rabbits, birds, anything! Bother that carriage! Why doesn't it come? We'll be late for the train."

"There's time enough," observed his mother from the window. "It wants nearly an hour of train time."

Julian, by way of passing the time, began to hop up and down the block on one leg, and presently engaged in a friendly tussle with his next-door neighbor. Anything was preferable to keeping still. Meanwhile his mother at her post of observation was reflecting.

"He may find his grandfather rather stern, and I'm afraid of that matter of the jewel. I'm sure those tests are dangerous, and—"

Julian interrupted her by a great shout. The carriage was in sight. Mrs. Mortimer quietly put on her widow's bonnet and but-

toned her coat. She knelt a moment, as was her habit, to ask for protection on the journey. Then she gathered up the various small articles of luggage—the trunks having already gone,—and preceded her restless son into the waiting vehicle.

The journey was an uneventful one, and to Julian rather wearisome; though he flattened his nose against the pane in the effort to see everything. But he felt as if he should never arrive at that mysterious, wonderful end of the journey, which seemed like a leap into the future; for he pictured to himself all sorts of glories in connection therewith. He talked incessantly—that is, in the intervals of regaling himself with “peppermint chew” or sucking an orange,—and asked his mother all manner of questions.

It was afternoon when the first, strong, pungent whiff of salt-air reached them and delighted the city boy’s nostrils. But it was dusk when the train drew up with a jerk, and mother and son found themselves at a country station, where many others were alighting too. Vehicles of various kinds stood waiting, and greetings were shouted to arriving passengers from groups of loungers on the

platform. A tall figure in dark green livery presently stepped up to where Mrs. Mortimer stood, looking around her uncertainly.

"Mrs. Robert Mortimer?" inquired the man.

On being answered in the affirmative, he seized the lady's satchels and led the way to a handsome family carriage, of somewhat old-fashioned make. Julian felt quite in awe of this equipage, as well as of the solemn coachman, who shut them in as if he were imprisoning them for life. But when the splendid pair of horses were once in motion, going at a rapid pace over a smooth road, the boy could not contain his delight. He thrust his head out of the window and fairly hurried to the ocean, as he caught sight of it, foaming and wave-crested, booming on the rocky shore, at the foot of the bluff along which they were driving. His mother had to restrain him several times, having a wholesome respect for the grave official on the box.

At last the carriage came to a stone wall, severely plain and spiked on top with iron spikes, and drove through a huge iron gate; which with a touch of his whip the coachman caused to clang behind them. This gave the

mother an uncanny feeling of the closing of prison gates upon her, but Julian cried:

"Isn't this jolly, mother? It's exactly like a storybook. I hope there'll be some other fellows round, though; and then we'll have a tiptop time."

"There is certainly no 'fellow' at your grandfather's," replied Mrs. Mortimer, "unless he has invited some of the others."

"What others?" inquired Julian, wonderingly.

His mother was silent. The "others" vaguely referred to the various branches of her husband's family, with whom, however, she had no acquaintance. Fortunately, Julian's attention was distracted by the scarlet berries of the sumach, and by the squirrels darting about and curiously eying the equipage as it swept round the curves of the avenue. On either side were glorious trees, promising many a game of hide-and-seek. Julian, with the eye of a connoisseur, had already selected certain of the tallest trees, which he meant to climb on the morrow.

His interest was finally absorbed, however, by the house when it appeared in sight,—long, low and of colonial fashion, with so

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many windows, a veranda running all about it, thick ivy concealing its outer walls, and with a general air of well-being which pleased and impressed the travellers. As they alighted, a tall, somewhat florid gentleman, very carefully dressed and with the evidences of prosperity in his whole appearance, advanced to the head of the steps, greeting the new arrivals courteously. Immediately in his wake appeared a trim housemaid, who seized satchels and umbrellas and vanished as if she had been an automaton.

"Welcome, my dear Mrs. Robert!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "And welcome, Julian!"

His keen eyes surveyed the fine, manly figure of his grandson standing before him, cap in hand, with bright, upturned face, and fearless eyes of brown, and chestnut curls clustering close-cut about the head.

"He has an air of being—adventurous," commented the grandfather. "Well, we shall give scope to that sort of thing here; and really he is very like, very like *him*."

Mrs. Mortimer smiled nervously, knowing the other's meaning.

"He doesn't resemble his father at all,"

went on Mr. Mortimer,—“not in the least.”
“No, not in the least,” agreed Mrs. Mortimer.
“He is exactly the opposite in every respect.”

“The better for this quest,” remarked the grandfather, somewhat dryly. “But I am keeping you standing here. How very thoughtless! Pray enter!”

He ushered both visitors into an apartment which to Julian appeared the very synonym for luxury: the lozenge windows, with vivid yellow panes; the hard wood floor rug-strewn; the piano, the pictures, the easy-chairs and divans.

“Rest for a few moments in the morning room,” said the old gentleman. “The maid will bring you tea and show you to your apartments. We shall meet at dinner at half past seven. We are very punctual here, Master Julian.”

He shook his finger playfully at the boy, as if he suspected him of the opposite quality of unpunctuality; but Julian was quite undisturbed by the suggestion, though it brought a contraction to his mother’s smooth brow.

The grandfather having gone, Julian’s eyes grew big and round as he stared hard at all the costly objects about him, walking with

hands deep in his pockets, and occasionally giving an involuntary whistle.

"Mother", he said at length, in a somewhat subdued tone, "it's just like one of those castles I used to read about when I was a kid."

"It is a castle of mystery," said the mother, absently.

"Of mystery?" cried Julian, eagerly catching at the word.

"I mean that I know so little about it," explained the mother evasively. "It always puzzles me, and so does its master."

"Grandfather?" cried Julian. "Oh, he's fine, mother! And he has such grand clothes, and I saw him take out such a watch! I wish it was dinner-time, so as to see him again, and hear what he's got to say."

The maid entering with tea cut short Julian's discourse; and presently she led them up to a delightful suit of apartments, cheerful and sunny in daytime, but which just then were brilliantly lighted with electric lamps. A great linden thrust its branches in at the sitting-room window; and on the huge hearth blazed a fire, for the evenings were chill. Julian stretched himself full-length on the

rug, and gave way to quite unusual inaction as he gazed into the fire. He was lost in thought, for his mind was already full of dreams and plans.

His mother, having completed her toilet, sat lost in thought, till a great gong, resonant but silvery sweet and clear, rang through the house, and at the same moment a tall clock, which Julian had remarked upon the staircase, sounded half past seven.

"Dinner!" cried Julian, adding that he was "as hungry as a hunter", and rushing to open the door and precede his mother downstairs. When the two approached the drawing-room, the door was thrown open by a servant, and they found themselves in presence of the master of the house and of three boys, all standing silently and somewhat uncomfortably about the stately and gorgeously appointed apartment.

"Oh, goody!" said Julian to himself. "There are some fellows here. I wonder who they are? I guess they must be the 'others'." For he remembered his mother's phrase. He gazed at them cheerfully and with interest, while his grandfather spoke as follows:

"Mrs. Robert and Master Julian, these are

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Masters William Sedgwick, John Jacob, and Walter Worthington, belonging respectively to the families of Sedgwick Mortimer, Jacob Mortimer, and Worthington Mortimer."

They were, indeed, the "others". Mrs. Robert Mortimer inclined her head and smiled at each boy in turn. Julian greeted them all with easy and cordial good-fellowship, to which each lad responded according to his nature. They were all very different, the one from the other, in manners and appearance; the first named being short, thickset and freckled; the second, tall, dark and hatchet-faced; the third, blue-eyed, pale and with nondescript hair.

Mr. Mortimer, taking out the handsome gold repeater which had so attracted his grandson's fancy, tapped it significantly, saying:

"In consequence of this ceremony of introduction, we are exactly five minutes late for dinner,—quite an unusual occurrence."

He gave his arm to his daughter-in-law, and the boys all passed in together, in a somewhat sheepish silence, which even Julian did not feel inclined to break.

Mrs. Mortimer was placed at her father-in-

law's right hand; Sedgwick, the thickset lad, in virtue of age, sat opposite.

"Julian, I believe, is the youngest," observed the grandfather, eyeing the boy as he spoke.

"I'm fifteen my next birthday," declared Julian promptly,—at which the other boys stared; for they stood in awe of the florid old gentleman and would by no means have addressed him uninvited.

"Fifteen is quite an advanced age," said the grandfather, in a tone which somehow left a slightly disagreeable impression on the mother's mind. "But it still leaves you, Master Julian, in the position of the youngest. Sedgwick is, I am informed, seventeen, John Jacob sixteen, and Walter Worthington a month or two younger. But you are still old enough to take your share of what may be demanded of you, and to enjoy adventure; otherwise you should not be here."

As none of the boys understood the meaning of this mysterious speech, they made no attempt to answer, and silently devoted themselves, with an appetite which even the old gentleman's presence could not subdue, to the excellent dinner—soup, roast fowls, tender vegetables, puddings, cakes and fruit.

"To-morrow morning I will see you all in the library," said the grandfather, dismissing the boys from his presence and courteously leading his daughter-in-law to the morning room, where he invited her to seek recreation in the magazines and light literature strewn about, or to try some of the new music which stood temptingly in a stand by the grand piano. This promised a treat to Mrs. Robert, who was an excellent musician; but she felt inexplicably anxious and heavy-hearted, and could not bring herself to disturb the silence of the room by any music of hers.

"You will excuse me, I know,—for to-night at least," said the host. "My evenings are usually devoted to my books. In my library I always find perfectly congenial society, and so have got into unsocial habits."

His daughter-in-law begged of him to make no change in his custom on her account, and felt a very sensible relief when he left her to her own thoughts.

Meanwhile the boys were out on the lawn, looking about and talking busily. Julian, within a few minutes, had inquired of his cousins what school they went to, what classes they were in, whether they had got to the

“asses’ bridge” in geometry, where they lived, and who were their chums. Sedgwick was disposed to treat him with good-natured contempt as a “kid”; John Jacob was reserved and somewhat moody; but to Walter Worthington Julian was soon displaying a valued pocketknife which had got mixed up with the rosary given to the boy by his teacher, and on which he faithfully said his beads once a day. Walter responded with similar marks of confidence, displaying a hard-wood top, a fishing line, and a bit of punk, relic of past fireworks.

“Rum place this,” grumbled John Jacob.

“Oh, I think it’s fine!”

“You do, curly pate,—do you?” laughed Sedgwick. “So do I. Wouldn’t mind owning it.”

“Look here, why do you think it’s rum, John Jacob?” inquired Julian.

“Say, cut that!” retorted the hatchet-faced one. “Call me Jake. And I think it’s rum because it is.”

Though they thus disagreed on one important point, they very soon joined the others in a game of leapfrog, till a bell sounded and a peremptory message came from their grand-

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father that this was the signal for bed. There was much grumbling, especially on the part of John Jacob. Julian acquiesced with cheerful philosophy; Walter—or, as he had requested to be called, “Wat”—said little; and Sedgwick’s growling was tolerably good-natured. So night and darkness found Julian and the “others” at Pine Bluff with but little realization of how momentous was the occasion.

Chapter II.

THE READING OF THE DOCUMENT.

The following morning brought a summons for each boy to the library; and even Julian, despite his natural fearlessness, felt timid when he passed within the portals of that vast room, sacred to the privacy of old Mr. Mortimer. That gentleman sat at a table with a parchment spread out before him. The document was yellow with age and sealed with quaint seals. The grandfather looked paler than his wont, and there was a stern, hard expression upon his face as he fixed his eyes intently upon each boy in turn. Julian alone never quailed before him; yet the look seemed to pierce him through and through, and an odd feeling came over the lad that each had been brought there to be tried and condemned to some unknown sentence.

"I have brought you here," said Mr. Mortimer, leaning back in his chair and speaking with deliberation, "to make known to you

a quest, or competition, which the mad eccentricity of an ancestor has imposed upon his race."

There was a world of bitterness in the old man's voice; however, he went on:

"It is true you are not obliged to accept these conditions. Any one of you may arise, when he has heard what I have to say, and leave this room and this house, never to return. And who knows but that such might not be the wisest course?"

The curiosity of the boys was by this time at fever heat, but none of them dared to put a question.

"Nevertheless", he added, "you will probably decide otherwise; for youth, generally speaking, is rash, adventurous, full of confidence in its own raw metal, and has little to do with wisdom."

He paused again, and strange expressions crossed his face, which an older observer might have interpreted as anger, self-contempt, bitterness and regret; but the listeners were anxious only to hear the end of this wondrous narrative.

"I may as well warn you," resumed Mr. Mortimer, "that I attempted to fulfil these

conditions and failed; that each of your fathers failed,—some miserably.”

The old man's eyes rested on Julian as he spoke the last words.

“My father before me failed, his father failed, and so goes back this absurd tradition to the fountain-head. And what has this quixotic whim of our forbear done for his descendants? It has put enmity between father and son, set brother against brother. It has left them all discontented and has prevented legitimate effort in any other direction. It has occurred to my mind, moreover, that it may be a myth, a pure invention, an allegory. The lost jewel of which I am about to read to you may have no existence. There may be no hidden room. Now I shall read you the document, and I must modernize the language somehow or it will be impossible for you to follow the visionary's words.”

He unfolded the document with a hand which trembled somewhat; for he vividly recalled the day upon which he in his youth had heard that reading, and, with beating heart and glowing cheek, had vowed never to rest till he had found the lost jewel of the Mortimers. Well, he had grown weary soon,

and had found inglorious ease instead. All the rest had been beyond him. Adjusting his gold-rimmed glasses, he began to read, without further comment :

“I, Anselm Benedict Mortimer, being an exile from my country for the profession of the Catholic and Roman Faith, and having for that reason, with my father, crossed the seas, am desirous that my descendants should be imbued with those qualities of truth, valor, purity and honor which have been theirs since the days of chivalry. I do hereby bequeathe to that one amongst them who shall discover what shall henceforth be known as the lost jewel of the Mortimers—it is a ruby of exceeding great price, of unusual size and coloring,—the finder of the stone shall come into possession of large sums of money variously invested, with all accumulations thereupon; and, after the death of the occupant then in possession, shall become the owner of the mansion of Pine Bluff, built by my father on first coming to these colonies.

“But the discovery of this jewel, which is concealed in a hidden room, can not be made without much diligence and courage; and the seeker must undergo ordeals which shall

develop manliness, fortitude, endurance, with a habit of truthfulness. For being discovered in a single falsehood shall disqualify him for the quest; and his conduct must be in imitation of those knights who were enrolled in the Order of Chivalry.

"Till the jewel be discovered, the aforesaid mansion shall remain in possession of the eldest son of the eldest branch. But even if he have heirs direct, he must relinquish it to him who finds the jewel. Meanwhile he shall have sufficient monies to maintain him in comfort, and, if he will, in the luxury befitting his station.

"The eldest son of each branch may alone enter the competition; nor may any younger brother be substituted in his place; nor shall it take place until the youngest competitor has attained his fifteenth year. The list of ordeals through which the seekers must pass are here subjoined, but need not be told to them in detail until they shall have entered upon the quest. Let them but understand that their courage, fortitude and manliness shall be put to severest tests."

Here ended the reading of the document, and the boys looked at one another. To

Julian, at least, it seemed as if the twentieth century had faded away, and as if the grim, wainscoted library were a chamber in some enchanted castle. The books themselves seemed spectral, and the grandfather a powerful enchanter. The possession of the ruby or of the wealth which accompanied it did not appeal very much to Julian: it was the promised adventures which fairly turned his head; the thought of seeking for a lost jewel and a hidden room through unknown dangers and thrilling experiences. True he began to remember how frequently his mother had been in sore straits for money to meet all expenses, to pay for his education and to keep him clothed and fed. It would be a fine thing to have a lot of money to give her, and the jewel too, and to let her live in this beautiful house forever.

He looked about him: the other boys were plainly excited. The hatchet-faced boy was leaning forward, his eager gaze fixed upon the parchment. Sedgwick tapped his foot nervously upon the floor, as though he were eager to start that moment upon the quest. Wat's pale face glowed with excitement.

“You will have till to-morrow morning,”

said Mr. Mortimer, "to decide whether you will accept or not."

"Of course we'll accept, sir!" cried Julian, enthusiastically.

"What! Can it be you are a manmon-worshiper already, Master Julian?" asked the grandfather, with that peculiar intonation in his voice which always brought a contraction to the smooth brow of Julian's mother.

"Oh, it will be such splendid fun, sir!" Julian answered.

The old gentleman elevated his eye-brows.

"It is the chance of a lifetime," broke in John Jacob, excitedly, "to get rich in an instant!"

His voice rang through the room, clear and metallic, with a vibrant eagerness in it strange in one so young.

"You, John Jacob, are oblivious to the fun, I perceive," said the grandfather. "What are *your* views, Sedgwick?"

"Oh, I say, sir," replied the oldest of the Mortimers, "no one in his senses would give up such a chance. And, then, the adventures!"

"You seem to unite the practical and the romantic. How about Walter Worthington?"

"I only wish I were bigger and stronger,—that's all!" cried the pale boy. "But, anyway, I'll try even if it kills me."

"It has killed some before now," warned the grandfather. "But youth must take its own wild way, I suppose. However, you have till to-morrow morning to think it over. If after the night's reflection you are still of the same mind, you will be enrolled in the band of fortune-seekers, and will very shortly begin your hunt for the hidden room and the lost jewel, as they are somewhat incorrectly called. I should be inclined to reverse the title and speak of the lost room and the hidden jewel—if, indeed, either one or the other exists."

The coldly doubting cynicism with which he spoke of the possible non-existence of the room and the treasure, had no effect on the sanguine spirits of the boys. They were presently out upon the lawn, talking at the top of their voices, arguing, speculating; already examining the façade of the mansion for traces of the hidden room; and prepared, had the word been given, to enter upon any ordeal or inaugurate in any way whatever that wonderful series of adventures.

"Of course if I get it," said Julian, "I'll divide with the rest of you."

"No, no," answered John Jacob, who had convinced himself that he, and he alone, must find the jewel, "there's to be no division."

"Find the ruby first, and then we'll see about the rest," observed Sedgwick, dryly.

"I know I won't get it," said Walter, despondingly; "but I mean to try."

"Cheer up, sonny!" urged goodnatured Sedgwick. "You'll gain nothing by being downhearted."

"Even if none of us find anything," put in Julian, "we'll have lots of fun."

"And come in for some hard knocks, curly pate," said Sedgwick, who commended the lad's spirit in taking an easy and cheerful view of the situation.

"Who cares!" cried Julian. "But I wish it were to-morrow. It seems a week off."

"And so we all began," commented the grandfather. He was leaning against the library window, which commanded a view of the lawn. Beside him stood his daughter-in-law, who had come to ask him what it all meant, and if her son were to be permitted to tell her of his share in the famous Mortimer secret. He reassured her upon this point.

"I shall certainly advise Julian to give you every detail."

"He is sure to tell me," the mother answered, "unless he were forbidden to do so. He has never concealed a thought from me in his life."

The old gentleman regarded her with his inscrutable smile.

"He is unlike his father," he observed.

"The very opposite in every way," agreed Mrs. Mortimer. "His father often, with a view to spare me, withheld confidences, which it would have been better had he given me."

"Are you in favor of your boy undertaking this quest?"

"That I can answer better when I know more. Of course I have the general knowledge that in each generation there is some test or ordeal, which the oldest son in the various branches undertakes; but further than that I know little."

"It has been a sad business altogether," declared the grandfather. "Some, as you know, went down to the grave sadly disappointed, ever yearning for that unattained treasure. Others, again, wandered away into

the by-paths of life, embittered and discontented; while others did as I have done, and I suppose were not much the worse for it. After an attempt to fulfil a few of the conditions, I dropped out of the contest, and simply put the matter out of my mind. Never has any one succeeded, and for my part I do not believe that success is possible, for the simple reason that the prizes offered do not exist at all, in my opinion."

"As far as I am concerned, I would rather he had nothing to do with it," said Mrs. Mortimer. "I would keep him far, far indeed, from all danger. But it might not be the best thing for the boy. Effort is a great thing; endurance—"

Here she was interrupted by the voice of Julian crying:

"Mother, mother, where are you?"

Excusing herself to Mr. Mortimer, the mother hurried to where Julian stood waiting, breathless.

"I have been upstairs and downstairs looking for you," he said. "I want to tell you all about everything. It's the queerest story you ever heard. There's a lot of money and a jewel shut up in a hidden room, and we'll have all sorts of adventures looking for them."

"Let us go up to our rooms, dear," replied his mother in her calm way; "and then you can tell me quietly without jumbling your words."

"All right, mother!" agreed Julian, and together they mounted the broad stairs, past the tall clock which ticked away the hours so solemnly. "I wish it would go faster!" Julian exclaimed, staring at the timepiece as he passed. "I want it to be to-morrow, till we get enrolled and begin the adventures."

"You will begin soon enough," sighed Mrs. Mortimer.

"It will be such splendid fun!" cried Julian. "All the other fellows are wild about it too. I'm going to get up at dawn."

"You're very brave overnight," smiled his mother.

Just as they entered their apartments, Julian, carrying out a train of thought in his own mind, observed:

"John Jacob cares most about the jewel and the money, but I guess all the others want the adventures even more."

Mrs. Mortimer's face contracted as, with sudden pain, she thought of another besides John Jacob to whom those mysterious prizes

had become as an absorbing dream, haunting him day and night.

"Of course it would be all right to get the money; wouldn't it, mother?" Julian inquired.

His mother regarded him with a new anxiety. What if avarice should seize upon that noble soul to blight and wither it? But no: the face, open, sunny, fearless, reassured her. She drew a chair to the hearth, and motioned Julian to come near her.

"Money, dear boy, is a great power for good and can never be despised. But, O my son, the passion for it has wrought more harm than all else in this weary world!"

"I don't care much for it myself," said careless Julian,—“as long as a fellow has enough to eat and some clothes to wear. But you can do a lot of things with it, I suppose. O mother, I wish it were to-morrow! And I do wonder what adventure we shall have first?”

Julian threw himself down upon the rug as he spoke, and rested his curly head against his mother's knee; and there were a few moments of deep silence, during which the boom of the sea was heard beating fiercely against the rocks.

32 THE LOST JEWEL OF THE MORTIMERS.

Presently the mother's voice broke the stillness of the room:

"Well, now, Julian, tell me all about it."

Chapter II..

JULIAN TELLS HIS MOTHER.

"First, mother," began the boy, "there's some old man—I think he's old, anyway—and he said he was an exile from his country for the Faith. Now, that's fine, mother. I'd rather like to be an exile for my religion. But he left a jewel—a great, big ruby—and a lot of money to any fellow that can find the stone. For it's lost in a hidden room, and—"

"Did you say *any* fellow?"

"Oh, any of us—the oldest boy in each branch of the Mortimers! And we've all got to look for it—Sedgwick, Jake, Wat and I. Won't it be fun? There's to be lots of adventures, and the old chap wants us to do all kinds of things that are hard and pretty dangerous."

Mrs. Mortimer's face paled and she sat very still and rigid, her eyes fixed upon the fire; while Julian, who had knelt up beside her in his excitement, watched her with glowing cheeks and eager gaze.

“Did he say what his reason was for making all these conditions?” she asked presently.

“Oh, yes! He said he wanted his descendants to have truth and honor and fortitude and a lot of other things; and he thought having to work so hard for the jewel and the money would be good for us.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Mortimer. “That puts it in a new light. I thought it was, perhaps, some evil genius who had resolved to put a curse upon his descendants.”

“Jake says he’s a bloke, but I think he’s fine, mother. I liked his letter ever so much.”

“Since his intentions are good, it alters things,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “And it seems to me that the descendants themselves have only to keep in the right path to succeed, by the blessing of God. But they’ll need that.”

“Yes. Father Wallace at the college used to say: ‘Get God’s blessing on what you’re going to do, and then go ahead’.”

“Yes, that is the true spirit. And I would wish you to go into this contest as St. George went to conquer the dragon. We love to read of glorious ones like him. Think of his splendid courage, and how he went, lance in rest, straight for that horrible foe.”

The mother, pausing, cast a loving look at the bright, brave face before her, and the chestnut curls glistening in the dancing fire-light.

“But”, she continued, “there are other heroes—many of them—who have never mounted a steed nor ridden over any plain nor worn shining armor nor carried burnished spear; and it is the very qualities they possessed that your ancestor wishes you to acquire.”

Mrs. Mortimer was excited, carried out of herself by this new crisis in her son's life. Supposing the jewel and the fortune to be real—and, despite her father-in-law's coldly doubting words, she believed in them,—success in the quest would open out a noble prospect for her Julian. And while her mother's heart quailed at thought of the dangers through which her darling would have to pass, she reflected that nothing worth having was ever obtained without effort, and that danger was everywhere around. The adventures would be a tonic and a stimulant to future effort. If, in the eagerness of the moment, she remembered the boy's father, who had wrecked his life on what he lived to

call a fool's quest, it was to console herself with the assurance that Julian was of another mould, and, moreover, completely under her influence.

"If you go into this contest, then, Julian, it must be with a noble motive. The merely commercial spirit by which you tell me John Jacob is possessed will never carry you through such an undertaking, nor will your own mere love of fun be any better. By catching the spirit of your ancestor and striving to carry out his wishes, you will gain much even if you fail."

The boy's face grew earnest as he listened. Under all his careless gayety of manner he was full of fine feeling, and whatever was high and noble always appealed to him.

"You must be like the knights of old, my dear. I have often read to you about them."

"Yes, they were splendid fellows. I guess, mother, it would be pretty hard for us boys to be like them."

"Not so hard as you think. You have only to try. Think it well over before you give your answer to-morrow, and try to feel as the knights used to feel when they were entering the Order of Chivalry. When if you choose to accept the conditions—"

"Of course I'll accept, mother!"

"To be sure you will, rash boy!" laughed his mother. "But try, at least, to look upon the affair as something more than a frolic."

After that there was silence. The mother did not believe in too much preaching. When she spoke again, it was to inquire of Julian:

"Which of your new companions do you like best?"

"Well, let me see! Sedgwick has the best muscle: we were trying out there, and he's a good fellow. Little Wat hasn't much muscle, but I like him even if he *is* a bit girlie and always wishing to be big and strong."

"What about John Jacob?" asked the mother.

Julian hesitated. Something in the last-named boy jarred upon Julian's perfect honesty and openness of character.

"Jake's all right, I guess," he answered, doubtfully. "But—well, he laughs at fellows, and he likes to be very smart, and he says he knows more than his father by a heap. He's cocksure of finding the jewel, because he'll play some tricks and get out of adventures that are too hard. I told him I didn't think

that was quite straight, and he snatched off my cap and ran away with it, calling me 'Julia!'

Now, this was an offence which Julian could ill brook—but he suddenly remembered that he was telling tales.

"I didn't mean to talk about it. Of course he was only in fun. But I was just trying to describe what he's like."

"He is very like one who will overreach himself with his cunning," said Mrs. Mortimer. "But all *you* have to do is to go straight yourself, and not heed what others do."

"That's so," agreed Julian. "Every fellow's got to stand on his own feet. And I told Jake he'd better let my cap alone in future, and myself too, or I'd make him."

His mother was amused at the boy's pugnacity.

"Keep your energies for the quest," she said smilingly. Then, as she regarded Julian's handsome face, her mother-love awoke and with it a very passion of fear. "O my darling," she cried, "what if this quest should take you from me, or blight your beautiful life?"

She seized him in her arms and held him close pressed to her, great lad as he was; and he returned her embrace with his boyish bear's hug.

"Dearest little mother," he cried, "nothing will ever take me away from you; and I'll always love you anyhow, and do what you want!"

The firelight shut in mother and son as in a charmed circle, ruddy and burnished. The sea boomed outside at the foot of Pine Bluff, and on the stairs the great clock tolled midnight.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Julian. "It's tomorrow!"

"Dear me, yes; and here you've never been to bed! Hurry off at once; and, O my boy, my boy, whatever happens, be true to yourself and to God!"

"I will!" answered the lad solemnly, standing still a moment, the ruddy firelight glowing upon his face, his head thrown back and his mouth smiling.

"My brave young knight, I believe you will," said the mother. "And now to sleep, darling! And try not to dream of dangers."

"Perhaps I'll dream where the ruby is,"

said Julian, as he vanished through the door. "I read a story like that once."

He was gone, and the mother heard his feet pacing up and down in the adjoining room, while his mind was full of dreams and hopes, and of that wonderful morning which seemed so far away. His head was scarcely on the pillow, though, when he fell asleep, and never dreamed at all, but woke to see the sun shining in, a broad ribbon across the floor, and heard the shrill voice of John Jacob already upon the lawn. Julian was out of bed in a moment, and hurried through his toilet, rushing down at last with bounding step and beating heart, the very picture of a healthy, happy boy.

"Halloo, Jake!" he cried from the door, putting his hand trumpet-wise to his mouth to give a lusty shout.

"Halloo!" answered Jake, who was busy poking amongst the weeds on the Bluff, as if he had begun the search on his own account.

"I thought you were to be up at dawn."

"I never woke," laughed Julian; "and of course mother didn't call me. How did *you* get up so early?"

"I couldn't sleep," Jake answered, shortly.

"And it isn't so very early. It's near eight."

"Near eight? Where are the others?"

"Snoozing, I suppose, as you were," said Jake. "I guess I'll beat you all easy enough, if you go on at that pace."

"Don't crow too loud!" exclaimed Sedgwick's pleasant voice from the brushwood. "I was up a good sight before you, Jakey."

Jake, somewhat taken aback, growled out an inarticulate word or two, and went at the weeds with greater energy than ever.

"Looking for an underground cave?" inquired Sedgwick.

"No, I'm not!" retorted Jake,—getting very red, however. "I'm trying to pass the time till breakfast's ready."

"I've a bit of an appetite myself," said Sedgwick. "I've been down to the shore. I could eat *you*, curly pate, boots and all."

"Try on Wat!" laughed Julian, as Walter appeared, looking paler and more sallow than ever.

"He's not such a tempting morsel as you are," answered Sedgwick.

"Don't try to be too funny," put in Jake.

"But I say there's the gong!"

"Goody!" cried Julian, beginning to run,

while the silvery notes of the summons to breakfast still floated out over the lawn. "I'm starving too."

So in they all trooped to a substantial breakfast; their grandfather, who sat stately at the head of the table, saying not a word of the events of the day before nor of the days to come; but helping everyone to cold ham or bacon and egg, to radishes, toast or tea, as if such momentous questions as the search for a fortune had never been under consideration. He joked with each boy in turn after his peculiar fashion; and it was only when he stood up from table that he requested all to be in attendance in the library half an hour later.

"As if we've thought of anything else!" whispered Jake.

"Except breakfast!" added Sedgwick.

"Half an hour seems a good while to wait," observed Julian. "Let's do something to pass the time. Let's play tag."

Now, this proposal seemed rather beneath the elder boys' dignity; but presently they relaxed and went at it hard and fast, their voices borne upward into the tall trees, and downward to mingle with the hoarse voice of the waves.

A few moments before the time appointed Mrs. Mortimer called Julian to her and bade him kneel for that space in the solitude of his room, to ask for the blessing he desired, and to resolve that he would be brave and strong and full of endurance. So that he entered the library with a feeling different from any of the rest—assured that he had put the matter on a solid basis and was relying on a strength greater than his own.

The library looked much less sombre than on the preceding day. A long window opening to the floor let in floods of sunshine, which lay on the green carpet as though on a sward. The books seemed to wear a bright and friendly aspect, and even the grandfather was smiling cheerily. He sat back in his chair and greeted each boy with a nod and a laughing word. But it was not in the library that the final agreement was to be made, or the conditions to be laid down for the contest. So presently Mr. Mortimer, arising, said:

“I will now lead the way to the west wing, that you may enter the competition and be enrolled in the adventurous band of fortune-seekers in the presence of Anselm Benedict himself.”

The boys were startled at the idea of being admitted into the presence of a man dead for about two hundred years. But they made no sign, and obediently followed their stately relative through long corridors, hitherto unvisited, toward the west wing, a part of the house which was never used.

At last the grandfather turned abruptly into what he called the west wing and paused before an oaken door, curiously carved in many a quaint device. The old man's voice trembled as he threw wide the heavy portal and motioned across the threshold.

"Now, lads, who enters here has entered upon the quest."

With one accord the boys followed him into the room.

Chapter IV.

ANSELM BENEDICT.

The boys, having crossed the threshold, found themselves in a spacious chamber, wainscoted and hung with gorgeous tapestry. Its furniture was of most ancient fashion. The chairs, straight and high-backed, had carved legs, representing the claws of animals. There was no carpet upon the floor, which was of highly polished oak. In the center of the room stood a massive table, so heavy and substantial that it might have been made from some monarch of the forest; it was piled with all manner of curious objects. The windows were stained and mullioned. Over the whole place hung an indescribable air of mystery—the enchantment of the past. It was precisely like a page out of Scott, while some romance of the Middle Ages seemed to lurk in every one of its corners.

The grandfather stood still a moment, looking round him; then he said:

"I am now about to introduce you to Anselm Benedict himself."

Advancing to the very end of the room, he touched a spring in one of the tapestried panels. Instantly a door flew open, displaying an alcove richly hung with tapestry of velours, and displaying a figure which caused every boy to start. So cleverly was the portrait arranged that it seemed as if the personage represented were really alive and might at any instant begin to speak.

Julian's first startled feeling gave place to one of profound astonishment.

"Why, I thought he was old," he exclaimed, involuntarily; "and instead he's young and handsome!"

The boyish voice sounded oddly out of place in that apartment, heavy with the shadows of the past, and it gave Julian himself a creepy feeling.

Handsome that mysterious ancestor undoubtedly was; straight and tall as an arrow; with a sensitive face, full of fire and passion; eyes whose strange depths thrilled even the least impressionable of the boys; curling locks falling loose over the shoulders; and a mouth that expressed courage and tenderness,

as well as scorn for what was mean or base or cowardly.

"He's just splendid!" said Julian.

John Jacob was busy appraising the severely plain but rich habiliments, the fall of costly lace at neck and wrists; while Sedgwick was most occupied with the sword, so richly jewelled at the hilt.

Walter whispered to Julian:

"He has awful eyes! They scare me like everything!"

In a moment the grandfather stood regarding the portrait with a cynical smile, as if he were an enchanter who had brought this splendid figure from out the past, and was scornful of his own power. After a moment or two of silence, Mr. Mortimer began to address his ancestor as follows:

"So, Anselm Benedict, your face is once more uncovered to the light, and a new generation—shall I say 'of your victims'?—are arrayed before you. These like the others, are full of mad daring, eager to fulfil your commands and certain of success. You best know if success is possible."

It seemed as if the proud dark eyes of the pictured youth answered the old man's taunts

with defiance, whereas in the voice of the living man there was a deep bitterness against the dead.

“Yes, there you are, after two hundred years or more; and your influence is still upon us. There you are about to enroll in your service these four young lives. What will you make of them, Anselm Benedict? What has your mad whim made of your descendants?”

The speaker seemed to have forgotten for the moment the presence of his four young listeners, who looked from him to the portrait with interest and curiosity.

“I shall, however, do my part, since you have imposed upon each occupant of this mansion the duty of seeing your commands enforced and your wishes made known to all who seek to enter upon the competition.”

Having thus addressed the portrait, he turned to the boys.

“To-night you will fulfil the first condition. Each one of you in turn must spend an hour after midnight here, alone, with Anselm Benedict. Face to face with him, you shall look into the very depths of your own nature, and discover if you have the

qualities necessary for success in this quest, and if you are determined to pursue it."

Now, this was not precisely the sort of adventure upon which any of the boys had counted, and not one amongst them relished it. Walter Worthington grew pale to the very lips. Sedgwick shifted uneasily from one foot to another and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. John Jacob looked perturbed and a frown darkened his hatchet face; while Julian revived his own courage by promising himself to get his mother to say her beads for him. His sagacious mind began to reflect:

"He was a good man, this Anselm Benedict, or he wouldn't have been exiled for the Faith; and he wants us to be good, because he said so in his letter. So he won't do us any harm. Besides, courage is one of the things that he thinks his descendants should have."

Meantime the grandfather was watching the boys, and smiling with deep and somewhat contemptuous amusement. He saw, after all their eagerness to begin and their defiance of difficulties and dangers, how little this first test was to their liking.

"The service of this Anselm Benedict is not precisely a summer frolic, my lads," he observed; "and you will have to obey his commands very exactly indeed, or give up all chance of finding the ruby and the fortune. Therefore. Sedgwick, as soon as the clock in the hall tolls midnight, you will be brought to this place by a messenger, and here remain till one o'clock. At that hour John Jacob will take your place. At two it will be the turn of Walter Worthington; and last of all Master Julian will be led here by one specially appointed for the task."

A thrill ran through his auditors as each one was cited thus to appear in the silence and ghostliness of night. It was like a summons to a secret tribunal, where the thoughts and feelings of each one should be made manifest.

"Am I right, Anselm Benedict?" inquired the grandfather.

And it seemed as if the king eyes of the portrait made answer:

"Yes."

"Now, go out, all of you, down to the shore," said the grandfather. "Keep your nerves steady for to-night. You, Julian, need

not be anxious about your mother, as I shall take her out to drive with me. And you will be notified in due time to assemble here to learn the second test."

He waved his hand in dismissal, and they all trooped off, rather a silent and preoccupied band of boys at first. It seemed as if the shadow of that fatal competition had already shut them in. However, they rallied a good deal when they reached the shore. The salt air brought color to their cheeks and a sparkle to their eyes, as they grouped themselves upon a huge rock, looking out seaward and discussing the situation. John Jacob had very little to say. He was busy revolving in his own mind if it would be possible to shirk this ordeal, which he particularly dreaded, and to cover up the deception successfully.

Julian was the first to recover his cheerfulness. He began to roll about in the sand, to gather pebbles and send them splashing out to scare the sea gulls; then he took off his shoes and stockings, so that he might walk close to the water and let the incoming waves roll over his feet. After a while Sedgwick joined him, and the pair had a royal time, racing over the sand, dabbling in the

water, and indulging in impromptu wrestling matches. John Jacob meanwhile lay back upon the sand, staring up at the sky, full of his own plans; and Walter wandered dispiritedly up and down, kicking at the sand with his toe.

"Halloo you fellows!" cried Sedgwick. "If you knock under at the very first blow, you'd better chuck the whole business."

"The letter told us at once we'd have to be brave," added Julian. "Of course we didn't exactly think of that kind of bravery; but I guess we'll get through somehow, and it's no use worrying beforehand. The next thing we have to do may be easier."

"Confound him for an old bloke!" cried John Jacob. "What does he want to keep us up all night for?"

"I'm afraid I'll never get through the hour," lamented Walter.

"Well, you see, fellows, it's got to be done," remarked practical Sedgwick, "or you may as well bid good-bye to the stone and the fortune."

"I'll never do that," said John Jacob, springing up and pacing restlessly about,—"not if I die for it."

"So say we all!" chimed in Julian, taking off his cap and waving it in the air. "Hurrah for the jewel and the hidden room!"

A strange and startling thing followed; for his words seemed to be repeated clearly and distinctly from within the solid rock beside which the boys were gathered. They all turned and stared as if the rough granite would reveal the secret. But no: it stood stern and gray in its mighty strength, jutting away out into the water, where the waves churned themselves into white froth around its base.

"I guess it's an echo of some sort," suggested Sedgwick. "But it sounded mighty queer."

"Mighty queer, indeed!" muttered John Jacob. "I don't half like how things go around this place."

There were tears of positive alarm in Walter's eyes. He could not trust his voice to speak.

"Of course it was an echo!" cried Julian, rallying his courage. "Hurrah, I say, for Anselm Benedict and the lost jewel of the Mortimers!"

Again the words came back clearly and

distinctly, though with a hollow and sepulchral sound.

"Well! I won't try it again," said Julian. "We've had enough of that. I vote that we go back to the house."

The vote was carried. Bright as was the sunshine, wholesome and pure the air, the boys seemed to have lost their taste for the shore; and they went back to the house, sitting upon the veranda, very gravely and quietly for them, discussing the one absorbing topic of the night-watch.

"I wonder what we'll think of it to-morrow morning?" said Julian. "It's bound to be ghostly and all that. But it's rather thrilling, the sort of thing the hero does in tales of adventure; and he always comes out all right."

"If we could go all together!" put in Walter.

"It wouldn't be much of a test if we could do that, sonny!" Sedgwick exclaimed, somewhat contemptuously.

John Jacob was silently pondering in his own mind on the possibility of slipping through the servant's hands and not going into the room at all.

"What do servants care about tests?" he

thought. "I can slip down again at two o'clock, and when he unlocks the door get in behind him."

John Jacob was so elated with this plan that he quite recovered his good humor, and chuckled to himself till Julian asked:

"Halloo, Jake, what's the joke?"

"I'm laughing at the idea of us fellows being in such a pickle about nothing. What is it to stay in an empty room for an hour!"

Julian's opinion of his cousin's courage rose considerably. He was quite impressed by his boldness, and frankly said so. But Sedgwick remarked, rather dryly:

"I hope you're laughing hardest at yourself; for you were the most scared of all when you heard what we had to do, and when that echo came out of the rock."

"I wasn't either," contradicted Jake. "Wat was scared nearly out of his wits."

"We were all pretty badly frightened this afternoon," said Julian. "I feel creepy about it yet and about to-night. You must have a lot of pluck, Jake."

"I have a level head," said that worthy, enigmatically; "and I guess we'd better try to put the whole business out of our minds till the time comes."

This being good advice, all four tried hard to follow it and to forget the evil hour which awaited them.

Mr. Mortimer and his daughter-in-law had been absent all day, having driven over to a neighboring villa, &c. It was quite dark when they returned, and Julian's mother went straight to her room.

When nine o'clock came, the grandfather despatched the boys to bed. Julian, going upstairs, found his mother very pale, with traces of tears on her face, and dressed for out of doors.

"What is the matter, mother dearest? Where are you going in the dark?"

"Julian, dear lad, I have to leave you. Your grandfather declares that my continued presence here would give you an advantage over the other boys. John Jacob has no mother, and the others cannot be spared from home. I think he is right, Julian. You must stand on an equal footing with the rest."

"I will go with you, mother, and give up the whole job. What do I care for rubies or money!"

"No," said his mother. "Having undertaken this quest, it is best for you to pursue

it to the end, if possible. You must not begin life with a failure."

"If only you could stay!"

"Since I can not, I commit you to the care of our Mother in heaven; and I leave you prayer as your best weapon. In it you will find strength and all else you need."

As she spoke there was a sound of wheels without.

"The carriage come for me!" she declared; and the mother held her boy in a close embrace, letting her tears mingle with his.

When Julian was left alone, he knelt and prayed with all the fervor of his boy's heart. It reminded him of the time when he was planning to steal away to be a martyr in China or Japan, and of the struggle it cost him to think of leaving his mother. She had, happily, discovered his intentions, and advised him to wait till he was grown up.

He got into bed, very lonely and miserable. But he soon fell asleep, and was awakened by the clock tolling twelve. He remembered that Sedgwick was just then being led into the west wing, and for a time he tossed about excitedly. Presently, however, he dozed off again; and was aroused this time by the strangest figure he had ever seen.

Chapter V.

THE FIRST TEST AND ITS RESULTS.

The strange figure standing beside Julian's bed when he awoke was that of a tall man, who seemed in the dim light to be quite gigantic. His face was pale and withered and covered with a close network of wrinkles; his hair was powdered in the fashion of a bygone age, and tied in a queue at the back; and his dress was a costly but out-of-date livery, with knee-breeches and shoe-buckles. This personage stood intently regarding the boy, through whose mind flashed the question:

"Can this be Anselm Benedict himself grown old, or magically preserved these two hundred odd years?"

Presently a harsh, metallic voice, which sounded weird and unnatural at that hour of the night, broke the stillness.

"Arise: your time has come. The time-piece without strikes three."

Julian obeyed as in a dream, the old man

leaving him while he dressed; and as they went down the broad staircase, the boy caught a brief glimpse of a wild, haggard face staring out at him from a doorway. Julian shuddered.

"If Jake, who was so brave in the afternoon, looked like that, the test must be awful."

But he clasped his rosary close and prayed to our Heavenly Mother to help him; and, so praying, passed through the dread portal, being firmly impelled across the threshold with surprising strength of arm by his ancient guide. He found himself in darkness, save where the bright rays of electric light shone full upon the alcove and brought out with startling effect the face and figure of his ancestor. Surely that was the countenance of a living man! Those eyes, looking into his with fire and tenderness, belonged to a real man; that half-scornful, half-tender smile about the lips would broaden into a laugh, or harden into sternness. Some such bewildered thoughts were passing through Julian's mind, as he watched with boyish gaze, startled, yet full of eagerness.

He was afraid with that strange, creepy,

shuddering horror which the hour and place inspired. But he tried to think how those knights of old, about whom his mother had so often read to him, would have acted under similar circumstances. Valor, with truth and honor, was one of their first qualities. He realized suddenly how this brave ancestor himself would have despised a coward. He breathed his little prayer for courage, threw back his head and marched straight up to the portrait, looking full into that noble face. Then he sat down, of his own accord, in the massive chair, which had stood where he was, as tradition said, for more than two hundred years; while its great arms, like claws, seemed to seize and hold him.

He looked quite a small boy, he pleased and insignificant, in his twentieth-century costume of jacket and knickerbocker. But there was a fine courage about him, and the strength that comes from a naturally noble disposition which has been carefully trained and vigilantly watched over by a loving and intelligent mother. Little by little he learned from him; he forgot the horrors of the new west wing, the dark room with its furniture and appointments which had survived many gen-

erations of Mortimers, and the terrifying stillness of the night. He became conscious of a growing admiration for that brave gentleman living on the canvas, for his beauty and manliness, for the heroic things he had done, and for his crossing seas an exile for the faith. He forgot himself and even his faults and follies, which his grandfather had informed him should be laid bare to the searching gaze of those piercing eyes. He felt as if he had known this Anselm Benedict, and a desire grew in his mind to learn more of his ancestor's life and character. He knew he had been a soldier and a favorite of some king, that he had been driven into exile and had endured much persecution; but he determined, if possible, to learn his history. He cried out in enthusiasm that he, too, should like to lead the same life; and he fancied that the smile on the pictured lips grew more tender, and that the eyes looked into his with kindness, as if he had found a friend.

So quickly passed the hour that he was astonished when the quaint servitor put his hand upon his shoulder and told him his time was up. Julian sprang to his feet, crying out in quite a natural and friendly way:

"Oh, isn't he splendid! But it can't be an hour yet! It seemed so short! I had a heap of things to think of!"

The man stared at him in genuine surprise, muttering under his breath, "A miracle!" as he bent his head before the portrait with something of genuine respect and affection, put out the lights, and thrust Julian from the room; after which he locked the door, and in silence followed him through the winding corridors, the lantern he carried casting wavering gleams on wall and ceiling. He conducted Julian to his apartment, and the boy said:

"Good night!—I don't know your name."

"Nicholas", said the guttural voice.

"Good night, Nicholas!" repeated Julian.

The man, in reply, straightened himself—for he had been a soldier in his youth,—and for the first time in his career of service with the Mortimers made a military salute to one of the fortune-seekers.

When Nicholas had retired, Julian's first care was to kneel and offer a fervent act of thanksgiving to the Blessed Virgin; though indeed he scarcely realized that the first ordeal was over. It was then four o'clock; but,

despite his fatigue, he wished it were time for the house to be astir, that he might meet the other "fellows" and hear their experiences.

"Jake looked pretty well scared," he thought. "Something different must have happened to him."

Julian nestled comfortably amongst his pillows, wishing that his mother were there, so that he could tell her all about it.

"There's no one understands a fellow as she does," he reflected; "knows just what you want to tell her."

When at last Julian woke and saw the sun, like an old familiar friend, looking in at the windows, he hurried downstairs, where he found Sedgwick upon the lawn. The latter looked very pale and tired, but he had a new something of manliness and dignity about him which even careless Julian noted. The two stood and looked at each other.

"Well, curly pate?" began Sedgwick.

"Well, old fellow?" responded Julian.

"It was a hard pull."

"Not nearly so hard as I thought. And the time passed so quickly!"

Sedgwick stared.

"It didn't go very quick with me," he said, gloomily.

"What did you do first?" Julian inquired.

"Oh, I suppose we all did about the same! That rum-looking old chap came for me—"

"Nicholas", put in Julian.

"How on earth did you learn his name?"

"I asked him," Julian replied, simply.

"Crikey, but you're a cool one! Anyway, old Niek—if that's his name—came for me at twelve sharp. The tolling of the hall clock sounded like the Doomsday trumpet, or something or other. He pushed me in; the room was all dark, except the lights round the picture; then he locked the door."

Julian nodded. "It was exactly the same for me," he assented.

"I never was in such a pickle in my life," Sedgwick avowed frankly. "I felt as if there were a thousand spooks hanging about the corners. I was afraid to look around, and I didn't care much about staring into Anselm's face. After a bit, though, I felt as if I must look; so I stared at him as hard as I could. Then I began to shiver and shake, as if he was searching me through and through and finding out everything I ever did. Great

Scott, but he's a corker for turning you inside out and making you ashamed of yourself! I quaked, I can tell you. I got through the hour somehow, and you bet I never was so glad to see any one in my life as old pigtail."

John Jacob came up while Sedgwick was still speaking, and a more haggard and miserable object in the light of the summer morning it would be hard to imagine. The great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and he was shivering as if with cold.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Jake?" asked Sedgwick, suddenly catching sight of his ashen face and staring eyes.

"It feels like ague," Jake said, with a laugh so wild and forced that his companions were startled. "I guess there's malaria or something here, and if this goes on I'll have to try change of air."

"Look here, Jake," answered Sedgwick in his downright fashion, "you're in a blue funk since last night. Out with it, man! I was myself. Tell us what happened. You'll feel all the better for it."

Thus adjured, Jake began,—taking care to keep back certain portions of the revelation relative to his little scheme of yesterday.

“When we got to that infernal door I just turned round for a minute to look back, and that old blackguard in livery—”

“What’s the good of calling names?” protested Julian.

“He caught me by the back of the neck and gave me such a shove into the room, that I very nearly landed foremost against the table. Then he planted me in that confounded chair and went out. The room danced round me. I was seared,—I’ll admit that. It seemed as if demons or something were hopping about, and grinning faces looking out of corners, and voices chattering. The place is haunted, or the Old Boy himself is there. Anyhow, I wanted to get out of staring at that old bloke upon the wall, and I thought I’d try another chair. The moment I tried to get up, the arms stretched out and held me fast.”

While he spoke, Jake’s terror in the memory of that moment became uncontrollable, and he had to wipe the beads of sweat from his forehead.

“It was horrible! I thought they were the arms of something that had caught me.”

The other boys uttered horrified exclamations.

"I found out that they were just iron clamps to hold a fellow if he tried to get out," went on Jake. "And I heard a voice—it was the same one that came out of the rock, I'll swear to it—saying: 'Coward! traitor!' Just because I wanted to take another chair, I suppose. So there I was forced to stare at that odious picture, while that horrid Anselm seemed to read off a list of everything a fellow ever did. He's a wizard, that's what he is; and I'm not at all sure that he hasn't kept himself alive by some black art."

In his excitement Jake blurted out what he would at another time have carefully hidden.

"I was nearly wild by one time the old monster came and unfastened the arms, chuckling to himself like a fiend. As soon as we reached the hall I got away from him, and never stopped running till I got into my room. Oh, if there are any more tests like that, I guess I'll take grandfather's advice and quit!"

When Julian asked for Wat, he was told that he was not yet out of bed; though later in the day he heard all details. Wat frankly admitted that when first put into the chair he

must have been unconscious, for he remembered nothing. After he woke up again, he got on better than he had expected.

All the boys were surprised to hear Julian's account of his own night's adventure.

"I was so busy looking at Anselm Benedict and thinking about him, that the dark room didn't bother me a bit," explained Julian. "I tried to remember the few things I had heard about him and to piece them together. I didn't find the time long at all. Nicholas was good enough to me. He came up to my room with me and gave me a salute like that."

As Julian raised his hand to his forehead to imitate the sign, Jake cast a sour, envious look at his cousin. From that moment he began to dislike him.

Sedgwick, on the other hand, cried out admiringly:

"You're a brick, Julian! I guess you've got more grit in you than any of us."

"Oh, well—I said my prayers before going down, and all that," Julian added, lest the others might suppose he was boasting of his own strength.

Sedgwick fidgeted and looked uncomfort-

able. He had forgotten all about his prayers in the excitement of the moment.

Jake gave a wild laugh. "I guess if I said prayers, I'd be ashamed to tell any one," he sneered.

"Why should I be ashamed of saying my prayers?" Julian asked, in all simplicity.

"Because prayers are good enough for girls, but what boys say them?"

"All the fellows at the college said them every day," Julian declared stoutly. "And some of the squarest fellows there used to go oftenest to the chapel."

"A rum lot they must have been," grumbled Jake.

"Prayers helped me a good deal, I know," Julian went on, addressing Sedgwick. "But, anyway, I'm glad that test is over. I was horribly afraid when old Nicholas came to get me—"

"In spite of your prayers!" interposed Jake.

"I began to say them *then*," Julian explained.

"You ought to have been a girl, Julian Mortimer!" Jake retorted.

Julian's face flamed.

"I tell you what, Jake," he cried, "if you dare to say such things to me!"

"Don't heed him, sonny!" put in Sedgwick. "You were the best man of the lot last night, and so you can afford to let Jake spout. He's pretty well bowled out this morning."

"I ought to have remembered that," admitted Julian, "and have known how to take a joke."

While he was saying so breakfast was announced, and the grandfather received them. His keen eye noticed that Julian's face was as brave and bright as ever, and his appetite undisturbed. He also observed the signs of past conflict in the other lads, and all but laughed outright at Jacob's broken-down appearance. He made no allusion to the matter, however, till breakfast was over. Then he observed, with his cynical smile:

"Of the four little Indians, one has fallen down, leaving but three. I hear, however, that Walter Worthington means to rise up again. This afternoon, if he be sufficiently recovered, I will announce to you the second test. Meantime go out and play football or something of the sort. Outdoor exercise, John Jacob, is an excellent tonic for ague."

John Jacob flushed scarlet but said nothing,

and off they all trooped. But they had not the energy to attempt so strenuous a game as football; and their grandfather, looking out of the window at them, said to himself:

"The poison begins to work. One is knocked under, two have no heart for play; and the other has escaped marvellously so far, but he is depressed by his comrades."

Walter Worthington presently appeared, looking very pale, with great circles under his eyes; but his spirit was less subdued than Jake's. He was determined to continue the quest, if, as he said, his strength only held out.

"I wonder what the next test will be?" Julian observed, meditatively.

And the boys all wondered in turn and tried to guess, but it was of no use. Not an idea suggested itself, and they could only wait for the afternoon, when their grandfather should make known to them the second test. He did not keep them long in suspense. Immediately after luncheon he summoned all four to meet him in the library, thence to proceed to the presence of Anselm Benedict, where all tests were announced.

"I think," said Mr. Mortimer, "that was

second trial will commend itself much more to you than the last. But I must remind you that diligence, activity, endurance will all be brought into play."

Julian regarded his grandfather with eager eyes, which began to sparkle with interest and excitement; while even the haggard Jake, the weary and dispirited Wat, and the sobered and saddened Sedgwick plucked up heart a little. Their grandfather regarded them with a tantalizing expression out of half-shut eyes. He enjoyed playing with their curiosity and delaying the answer to the question which hung on every lip:

"What can be this second test?"

Chapter VI.

A CAMP IN THE FOREST.

Before announcing the second test, the grandfather arose from his chair and signed for the boys to follow him. All of them except Julian did so with visible trepidation; for they knew that he was leading them into the presence of Anselm Benedict. Julian felt an eager desire to see once again that portrait which had so completely fascinated him, and he remarked to his grandfather as they passed along the corridor:

"I feel as if he were a friend, sir."

"Eh!—what?" inquired the old man in surprise, and he stood a moment and looked down at the eager face. "Whom do you mean?"

"I mean Anselm Benedict, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer.

"Is there any book about him in the library?" Julian asked.

"There is a book," answered the grandfather slowly.

"May I see it, sir?"

"I suppose so. No one has ever made the request before. The midnight hour in that gentleman's society was generally found to be sufficient." He ended with a short laugh.

"There's another thing I wanted to ask you, sir," said Julian, as the long corridor they were pursuing turned into the west wing. "Where does Nicholas keep himself?"

The grandfather cast upon the boy so strange a glance that it startled even the fearless Julian.

"What do *you* know about Nicholas,—how did you find out his name?"

"I asked him," Julian answered simply.

"When?"

"When he brought me back to my room last night."

Mr. Mortimer stared. "Well, you are a wonderful boy!" he exclaimed. "Few, except in the message he had to deliver, have ever heard the sound of his voice."

"He told me his name was Nicholas, and then he did this,"—and Julian imitated the military salute.

"He did that, did he?" queried the grandfather, in astonishment. "Then, let me tell

you, he saw in you, my boy, something which he never saw in any of your race."

They were now at the mysterious door.

"Grandfather", asked Julian, stopping before it, "who is Nicholas?"

"He is the evil genius, he is the avenger," exclaimed Mr. Mortimer in a strained, hurried voice.

Without giving time for any further explanation, he opened the door and entered. Julian followed close; the other boys came on slowly, passing over the threshold with reluctant steps, and remaining in that portion of the room farthest from the portrait. But Mr. Mortimer, having touched the spring of the panel, motioned them with a quick, impatient gesture to advance. He was plainly excited and in a nervous mood.

Sedgwick looked pale; but he confronted the portrait bravely, with that manliness which Julian had before admired. Jake's face was positively hangdog; and Wat's lip quivered as, white to the lips and with trembling hands, he placed himself beside his cousins. But Julian's countenance was bright and cheerful, and he smiled at his handsome kinsman of long ago, who seemed to flash a friendly greeting from his dark eyes.

"I shall announce your second decree, Anselm Benedict," Mr. Mortimer declared curtly, "and Nicholas can do the rest. Your ancestor here portrayed before you," the old man went on, addressing the boys, "directs that you shall go forth into the forest which lies to the right hand of this dwelling, extending inward from the bluff, and there encamp for a period of two weeks. During this time you shall perform all menial offices for yourselves, procuring the chief part of your own food, and maintaining during the day, and on certain nights when the moonlight shall permit, a search for the cavern in the forest, undeterred by whatsoever obstacles may offer."

Even the most dejected of the boys began to kindle into positive enthusiasm. Here, at least, was a test after their own hearts. Why, it would be capital fun!

"If during that period of two weeks no trace of the cavern is found, the competitors are free to abandon this test and continue to pursue the search in other ways, or they may obtain an extension of the original time and remain longer in the forest. I know of a person who has spent the greater part of his life in that way. I should be inclined to be-

lieve that the cavern is a fabulous one, so many having failed in the search. But there is a tradition from way back, that one did find that cavern and thus fulfilled the second test."

"Did only *one* find it out of all who have ever been looking for it?" asked Julian, awe-stricken.

"Only one," answered Mr. Mortimer.

And Julian looked inquiringly from his grandfather to the young face in the portrait, where the same smile seemed to greet him, and whence a feeling of hope and encouragement entered his heart.

"If one has found it," said the boy, with sudden enthusiasm, "another may, and perhaps it will be some of us."

"Perhaps", agreed the grandfather coldly.

"Anyway, it will be fine fun camping in the woods and looking for a cave."

"You are a very sanguine young person," said Mr. Mortimer. "But let that pass. You will all leave for the camp at four o'clock, and return two weeks hence, victor or vanquished. It will be to your interest to give as much time as possible to the search during the day and on the appointed nights.

Loitering by the wayside will never find the cavern. You are now dismissed, and I would advise you all to proceed to your rooms and make preparations for approaching departure."

The boys could hardly control themselves in the old gentleman's presence, following him in silence along the corridor; and he had scarcely disappeared into the library when they broke into an eager buzz of talk, each voice rising above the other. Even Jake was jubilant as any one. He believed that his own peculiar methods of action and his ferret-like disposition would avail much in such a search; and he was boy enough to enjoy the idea of a two weeks' frolic in the open air.

The little band assembled on the lawn precisely at four o'clock, and set off in the direction of the forest. As Julian looked back, the great mansion of Pine Bluff seemed to stare darkly at them. But a ray of sunlight fell across the veranda, stretching down upon the lawn; and a bird with a flute-like note flew joyously up into the blue. Both seemed like friendly messages to the lads, telling them of hope and gladness.

The forest, as they approached it, looked somewhat dark and forbidding.

"It is like the forests in the fairy-tales I used to read when I was little," observed Julian; and there on the outskirts was Nicholas, precisely like the goblin or the dwarf or the genius who used to lead adventurous mortals into the gloomy depths. He was standing under a tree, spectral in its shadow; and he solemnly came forth to meet them.

"Good day, Nicholas," cried Julian cheerily.

The ghost of a grim smile crossed the old man's lips as he slightly nodded his head, precisely like a wooden image, and marshalled the boys into the forest before him. He traversed each leaf-strewn path with quick, martial strides.

Julian promptly began to sniff the odors of the woods.

"I like that piny smell," he said gleefully. "And mixed up with it there's sassafras and wild flowers and lots of things. The forest is just full of smells."

Wat darted off into the underbrush after a squirrel, and came back laughing from the chase, with a faint color on his pink cheeks. Sedgwick cut himself a fine stout cudgel and decapitated several bushes. Jake plucked

absently at the leaves as he passed, and stuffed a handful of slimy ones, picked up from a marshy pool, down Julian's back. Julian gave a wild yell, supposing that a snake had touched him; while Jake doubled up with malicious laughter.

At last they reached a clearing in a dense grove of ancient trees; and here stood, with spectral solemnity, four tents, awaiting their occupants. Nicholas, having thrust each boy into that lodging designed for him, disappeared as silently as he had come. There was something weird about these canvas dwellings, snow-white in the summer sunshine, standing out in relief from the dark wood and background; and their interiors seemed, at first, unreal and mysterious. A basket of eatables stood inside each entrance; some clean straw was thrown into a corner, with a rug folded upon it. There was fishing tackle, a crab net, and a gun, which with one accord each boy set himself to examine, calling from tent to tent in the excitement of the discovery. When they had spent a short time unpacking, and setting their new houses in order, the boys came forth, fully of one mind with regard to supper. Their first thought

was of a stream and how they should procure water.

"I suppose the old lunatic didn't set up the tents where there was no water," said Jake, looking all about him.

"There's water down there," replied Sedgwick, pointing over the bluff to where the dull boom of the sea was heard. But Jake took no notice of the witticism, and all began seriously to reflect upon the means of getting water for present and future wants.

"We'd better explore," suggested Julian.

And explore they did, hurrying off in different directions. Over an hour had elapsed and Sedgwick, Jake and Wat had returned, weary and disappointed, to the camp.

"It's one of that old dotard's tricks," said Jake, in bitter spite; and the others thought so too, and wondered what they were going to do about it. All at once they heard a faint shout, which grew gradually nearer; and soon Julian appeared, very red in the face and dragging a heavy pail.

"That fellow always succeeds," said Sedgwick. "I believe he'll get the ruby."

Which remark made Jake turn almost black with envy. He set his teeth hard, while

Sedgwick and Wat ran forward to help their comrade.

"Good for you, youngster!" cried Sedgwick when he saw the pail of clear, sparkling water. "But where's the stream?"

"Oh, it's about a mile away!" laughed Julian. "Nicholas is bound to give us plenty of work; and, of course, grandfather warned us that we'd have lots to do while we're out camping."

"Well, we'll have to take turns in going for the water,—that's all," observed Sedgwick, philosophically.

Jake muttered darkly to himself; and Wat, as usual, deplored his want of strength.

"If you're not able to drag water, Wat," "I can take your turn and you can do something else instead. But now we had better get wood together for a fire."

All hands set to work collecting sticks, and presently there was a huge, roaring fire, built well to the centre of the clearing. The kettle, which Nicholas had left near at hand, was filled with water. It soon began to sing away as merrily as though it were on a hearth instead of in the heart of a wood surrounded by tall trees, through which the yellow glow of

sunset began to appear, while the birds in their leafy nests sang their vesper song.

Each boy now unpacked his basket.

"I say," exclaimed Sedgwick, "here's some raw potatoes!"

"Let's put them in the hot ashes," shouted the other three in chorus.

This was no sooner said than done.

"There are some hard-boiled eggs here too," added Sedgwick, diving again into his basket.

"I've got some sandwiches in mine!" yelled Julian. "Hurrah!" And the cheer was taken up and echoed through the forest.

"There's some jam in mine,—not too much," declared Jake, who had already, in the secrecy of his tent, hidden two pots for private consumption. (It may as well be mentioned here that this secret hoard was taken from the hiding-place and restored to the basket during the following day, much to Jake's dismay and disgust.)

"There are some fine peaches and biscuits in my kit," said Wat. "But I guess we'd better not use everything to-night; for it's my belief we won't get much more from the house."

"You're right there," assented Jake.

"It won't matter very much," said careless Julian, who was indeed a little too much disposed to neglect all thought of the morrow. "We can take what we want and leave the rest. But I know I'm just starving."

"Ditto!" cried Sedgwick.

Julian dived into his basket again and brought out a tablecloth, and in a few moments a very luxurious meal was spread, to which was added a pot of coffee and the potatoes plucked from the hot ashes. That was a royal supper, and everything else was forgotten but the enjoyment of the moment.

"He's given us a fine spread for the first night," remarked Sedgwick; "and the fragments may do for to-morrow. But I guess after that we'll have to look out pretty much for ourselves."

"I'll try to shoot things," volunteered Julian.

"I might pick up some clams on the beach," Wat added.

"We can all catch fish, of course," Jake declared.

"And there must be a place to go crabbing," Sedgwick concluded, "or he wouldn't have left the nets."

"Hurrah for life in camp!" shouted Julian, getting up and dancing about in pure joyousness.

Supper being finished, the boys settled themselves round the fire; for the cool, fresh air, redolent at once of forest and sea, which sprang up with the going down of the sun, made the blaze delightful. And as the stars came out one by one in the heavens above, the four, banded together in this strange quest, sat around the fire and told stories of adventure and of robbers and of ghosts; as they talked in lowered tones of the strange history of the Mortimers, and the mansion at Pine Bluff with its mysteries known or suspected. At last they began to feel drowsy and went to bed, to sleep soundly till the morning light and the songs of the birds woke them again.

Julian was first up, and could hardly remember where he was when he heard the rustling of the leaves and the singing of the birds. He looked about at the white walls of the tent, and sniffed at the fragrant branches with which he had overlaid his bundle of straw. Then he sprang up, drawing deep breaths of the air, while he donned his gar-

ments and rushed to Sedgwick's tent, to ask him to come to the beach for a plunge into the salt waves. It was quite a climb down over the edge of the bluff, but the two active fellows cared little for that. They were soon swimming around, diving under water or splashing up and down like a pair of porpoises. Now they let an enormous wave seize them, to carry them into shore; again they stood where great breakers broke, to be thrown down and completely swamped.

But even such delights as these had to come to an end, and the two were presently scrambling up the bluff, hallooing and shouting. Wat had lit the fire; and Jake had gone off, unwillingly enough, for water. The sandwiches left from the night before were rather stale; but, then, there was homemade bread, with fresh butter. The coffee warmed over from supper was not free from the charge of muddiness; but the hungry boys cared little for such drawbacks as these, particularly those two amongst them who had spent a half hour in the brine.

"It's all very well for you fellows to sneak off by yourselves for a bath," grumbled Jake, "and leave me to go and get water."

"Oh, shut up!" retorted Sedgwick. "You're a born grumbler. Julian went for it last night and I'll go next time. As for the bath, the sea's big enough for everyone, if you hadn't preferred to snooze."

Jake darted an evil look at the speaker, but thought it better to be silent. After a pause, however, he announced:

"I'm going fishing after breakfast."

"Not until sunset," said a voice near at hand.

The boys stared; but, look around as they might, they could see nothing.

"That cursed voice again!" muttered Jake.

"And no echo this time," observed Sedgwick, "because it didn't repeat the same words."

"It sounded like Nicholas' voice," remarked Julian, thoughtfully.

"As if any one ever heard that old dummy speak!" sneered Jake.

"I did," said Julian, "just once."

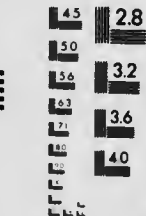
"Oh, I suppose we all heard him say a word or two!" snapped Jake. "Besides, where is Nicholas? He can't make himself invisible, I suppose."

"I don't know," said Julian gravely.



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He remembered the strange look Mr. Mortimer had bestowed upon him when he had inquired about the old servitor. It occurred to him (for boys brought up as Julian had been, often have a strong dash of poetry in their composition) that Nicholas might have some kind of occult power. Of course he did not say so, for he had a boy's horror of ridicule.

Sedgwick was meanwhile looking all about.

"There's no Nicholas here," he declared decidedly, as he sat down upon the stump of a tree, chewing a bit of Sassafras root.

"I hope they're not going to begin any antics to make this place unendurable," growled Jake, who was a coward at heart and did not like these mysteries.

Before long Nicholas himself appeared. They could see him very far off along the path, advancing from the very edge of the forest.

"There! You see he wasn't 'round here at all!" cried Jake; and Julian did not contradict him.

Nicholas had come to start the boys upon the search. They agreed that for that day, at least, they should separate, each boy taking a certain portion of the forest.

"It's not so very big," said Sedgwick. "I don't see how it can be so hard to find the cavern."

"Did Nicholas laugh? No: his face was imperturbably grave, as he stood waiting for the boys to set out.

"In what direction shall we go?" asked Walter.

"Suppose we do like the boys in the fairy-tales starting to seek their fortune?" said Julian. "Let us each blow a piece of paper into the air, and whichever way it comes down follow that."

They had a good deal of fun over this suggestion, because sometimes the paper did not come down at all, or two or three fell precisely at the same spot. At last each piece took a contrary direction, and the boys prepared to start accordingly. Nicholas had brought some crackers and cheese from the house, and each boy strapped a neat package of this to his shoulder.

And now the explorers lost no time in setting out, providing themselves with stout cudgels and plunging into the respective wooded paths which opened before them. Sedgwick and Jake met with no adventures

at all, though they prosecuted the search with the utmost diligence. It might almost be said that Jake literally poked his nose into every crevice and cranny; for he was full of the ardor of the hunt, and the glow of the ruby and the glint of gold seemed fairly to dazzle his eyes. If Sedgwick did not poke with his nose, he did with his stick, and got a lot of solid enjoyment out of his morning in the woods; so that his honest face was fairly aglow with good humor and the high spirits engendered by the glorious air and the forest life.

Julian, whose path had led into the heart of the wood, likewise prosecuted the search very diligently. He even climbed to the top of tall trees, which was surely an unnecessary performance, as it would have been rather difficult to discover a cavern from the height of a tree. But it was a rest to sit up among the cool branches, swinging idly upon a bough, the leaves fanning his hot face as they stirred in the breeze. It was up there that he munched his crackers and cheese. But he did not linger too long. The thought of the cavern spurred him on. He slid down again to earth and pursued his way. At last he

heard Walter calling; and, hastening in that direction, found him with one foot stuck in a marshy piece of ground. He had to pull it out with some trouble, after which they went on together. Julian kept wishing for his gun, that he might have a shot at some of the rabbits or wild pigeons or other birds, which would have given them a fine supper.

"I hope we shall get good things to eat," said Walter, "because I want to keep up my strength."

Julian looked at him curiously. He had never heard any boy talking about his health. But he liked Walter: he thought him a square little chap, anxious to be brave and to do his best.

"It must be a bother to feel weak," he said. "I have always been as strong as a horse, except when I had measles."

"I wish I were strong!" sighed Walter. "But, I say, what's that over there?"

Chapter VII.

THE ADVENTURES OF A NIGHT.

Julian turned hastily in the direction indicated by Walter's staring eyes, but saw nothing.

"I could almost swear I saw a big dog or something standing over there!" whispered Walter, tremblingly.

"Perhaps it was a bear?" suggested Julian.

Both boys stood still with a thrill of mingled fear and gratification.

"If I had my gun I'd have a shot at it from behind a tree," continued Julian.

"Better not," said Walter, almost under his breath. "It might—it might be something else. Do you know, Julian (I don't mind saying this to you, for you won't laugh at a fellow), I really think this forest is haunted?"

Julian stared, but he did not "pooh-pooh" the assertion, as Sedgwick would have done. He remembered his own thoughts about Nicholas and the queer voice they had heard more than once. There certainly seemed to be something mysterious about this place.

"I don't believe in spooks," he said at last.

"I don't either," replied Walter; "but everything's queer about here,—those voices and things. And I'm afraid of that Nicholas."

"Nicholas isn't a bad sort of fellow," observed Julian; but there was doubt in his tone. Nicholas certainly was mysterious.

The two boys, with one accord, turned away from that ill-starred spot. It being then after five by Julian's silver watch, of which he was so proud, they turned homeward, intent on supper; for their long day of exercise had made them hungry.

Though they were tired when they reached camp, Julian declared that he would go down to the shore, as it was low water, and try to get some fish. He took his line and started, Sedgwick trudging off in an opposite direction for water, and Jake and Wat undertaking to look after the fire.

"I hate that cub!" said Jake spitefully, gazing after Julian's retreating figure.

"What cub?" asked Wat, innocently.

"Why, the Grand Pasha, the Czar of all the Russians, the Grand Mogul, my Lord Julian de Mortimer!" hissed Jake.

"Julian?" inquired Walter, in surprise.

"Why, what is there to hate about him? He's always jolly and ready to help. But, then, he's strong and well."

"Yes: he's made of cast-iron, nerves and all," agreed Jake. "And I tell you, Walter, I hate the whole kit and boodle of them—the man Mortimer, that crazy loon of a Nicholas, Sedgwick; but most of all I hate Julian and his 'friend', Anselm Benedict."

Walter had been brought up at home, away from other boys; he had never heard just that sort of talk before, and it made him uncomfortable. Moreover, both boys heard distinctly a laugh—scornful, amused—proceeding from they knew not where. Walter started to his feet in alarm, and Jake's flow of eloquence was suddenly checked.

"It's some trick of that old dotard!" he muttered to himself.

But there was little more said and the two lads kept pretty close together till Julian's cheerful whistle was heard coming up the cliff. He had been absent a comparatively short time; and there he was with a string of silvery, shining fish, quite sufficient for the supper.

"I didn't wait for any more," he observed

apologetically, "because I knew we wanted our supper. I guess we can do with these."

They then set to work to light their fire, so as to be ready on the return of Sedgwick, who had evidently tarried by the way.

"Hurrah! hurrah! here he is!" cried Julian; and Wat waved his cap wildly, while Jake sat darkly brooding.

The next day was spent somewhat aimlessly. A night's search by the light of the moon was to begin after sunset. Their supper was very early and consisted of a brace or two of wild pigeons, which Sedgwick, who was an excellent shot, had succeeded in bringing down; and of some red plums which Julian had discovered growing wild somewhere. The boys set out immediately after, going in different directions, but agreeing to meet at "moorise" and enjoy the hunt together.

Nothing could be more beautiful than those first cool sunset hours, with the rosy lights in the western sky reddening all the landscape. The moon was rising, a silvery arc, above the marsh lands where they had agreed to meet, and which was the identical spot where Julian and Wat had seen, or fancied they saw, some

strange animal. Now a curious awe fell upon the boys; they stared at the moon, which was just showing its face above the treetops. Julian had an odd feeling that it looked pale, and that its light upon the marsh was cold and flickering, making weird, uncertain shadows.

"Not a blessed sign of a cavern!" cried Sedgwick.

"Ten to one, grandfather's right and the horrid old bloke is fooling us," growled Jake.

"Well," said Julian, "even if he were, it's worth while, if all the tests are going to be like this two weeks' camping in the woods."

"Yes," agreed Wat, "I feel a heap better and stronger since I've been out here. But where are we going now?"

"Let us go to the other side of this marsh," suggested Sedgwick. "None of us have gone that far yet."

There was just a moment's hesitation on Julian's part, which was fully shared by Wat; but the former reminded himself that courage was amongst the qualities in which Anselm Benedict had been pre-eminent, and which he desired to be reproduced in them. He therefore prepared to set forth with a cheery "all right!"

Walter visibly hung backward; but he did not care to voice his feelings, and he did not dare to stay alone anywhere within the precincts of the forest, which he had come to regard with almost superstitious awe. Jake was quite prepared to penetrate anywhere on the remote chance of finding the cavern, which he felt convinced was the first clue to the other and more important objects. Moreover, like Sedgwick, he was unaware of any special reason for avoiding the marsh.

So the boys were presently feeling their way gingerly, so as not to get their feet stuck in the mud. They stopped abruptly, however, as a great, striped snake, hissing, thrust its scaly length across the path. Sedgwick at once aimed a blow at the reptile with the heavy stick which he carried, and struck it full in the head. John Jacob entered into the struggle and struck furious and repeated blows at the still hissing and spitting snake. As it at last lay motionless, Julian looked down upon it with a strong feeling of repulsion indeed, but at the same time with an odd sort of pity. Foul and venomous as was the creature, it had been going its own way, gliding about in the dark depths of the forest,

where it was rarely disturbed by human feet.

John Jacob continued to hammer away, to the tune of "Tally-heigh-ho, the grinder!"

When this amusement palled, and Sedgwick shouted to them all to come on, Jake raised the dead snake on the point of a stick and carried it with him, for the sole purpose of playing tricks upon Julian whom he hated, and Wat whom he knew to be nervous. As they passed through a dark clump of trees, into the blackness of which the moon scarce sent a ray, Jake suddenly brought the slimy skin of the reptile into contact with Julian's cheek. Julian, forgetting the snake and believing himself attacked by some unknown adversary, promptly struck out with his stick; so that Jake received, as he said himself, such a "crack" upon his head as kept him at a safe distance from Julian for the remainder of that expedition.

"I didn't know it was you, Jake," Julian explained.

"You lie there!" cried Jake, furiously.

The hot blood mounted to Julian's face, and it was by a strong effort that he controlled himself. He made a short ejaculation to our Blessed Mother, as his professor had taught

him to do; and thought of Anselm Benedict, who would certainly have advised the mastery over self, and have taught that it was no part of courage to rush into every vulgar quarrel. Then he said, quietly:

"Look here, Jake, you're out there! I don't tell lies, and I say again that I didn't know it was you. But, anyway, what right had you to hit me with that disgusting snake?"

"Curly pate is right there!" put in Sedgwick. "And I'm mighty glad, Jake, he struck out as he did. You'd better let that youngster alone, or you'll get the worst of it."

Now, Jake was rather afraid of Sedgwick, who was big and strong, so he did not argue the point; and they all went on in silence, till suddenly they were startled by a rushing sound in the brushwood. Presently a huge beast rushed toward them with flaming eyes and panting jaws. What sort of animal it was they could not very well tell; for the uncertain light of the moon gave merely the outline of its form and the gleam of its fiery eyes.

Jake turned deadly pale and fled without a moment's warning. The beast, seeing him detached from the rest, darted forward in

pursuit, gaining rapidly upon the fugitive. In his haste and fear, Jake's foot caught in the tangled undergrowth, and he fell heavily to the ground. In another moment the fangs of the beast would have been in the prostrate boy, but Julian, hastily making the Sign of the Cross, flew after the furious animal and brought the full weight of the stick which he carried down upon its flanks.

The monster turned upon this new assailant, forsaking Jake, who got up and continued his flight. Julian, thus left alone, succeeded in getting behind a tree; after which ensued a conflict, not so much of strength as of agility, between these strange adversaries. Sedgwick tried his best to make a diversion in the rear, harassing the flank of the enemy; but the animal seemed unwilling to be diverted from its pursuit of Julian. How it might have ended would be hard to say, but Julian had an inspiration.

"Try to keep his attention for a minute," he called out to Sedgwick, "till I light a match."

This Sedgwick did by dealing a tremendous blow on the animal's hide, which made it turn quickly in his direction. The next mo-

ment Julian held a blazing torch of newspapers in either hand, and these he resolutely thrust into the animal's face. The effect was instantaneous. The angry brute stood still a second, then deliberately turned tail and trotted off into the brushwood.

"The sooner we can go in the opposite direction the better," whispered Sedgwick to Julian, who stood, panting and breathless, leaning against the tree. "He may return to the charge at any time."

So, as soon as Julian could draw breath, the two lads started off as fast as their legs could carry them. Walter Worthington had long before followed Jake; and they encountered him at a good distance from the scene of the conflict, with actual tears in his eyes at his own want of pluck. He quickly apologized for it on the usual plea of feeble strength.

"That's all right, sonny," said Sedgwick, good-naturedly. "You couldn't have done anything, anyway; and we can't all be like Julian. He's as brave as a lion. I guess he'd take the cake with Anselm Benedict."

He looked with honest admiration at his cousin, while Julian cried:

"Don't *you* talk, Sedgwick! You stood by me and helped me like a hero. Only for you I'm sure the beast would have had me. And," Julian added, his generous heart feeling sorry for Walter, who would fain have been a hero also, "I don't blame you at all, Wat. You're not strong, and you couldn't have done a thing."

"The one I blame is that hound of a Jake," said Sedgwick, wrathfully. "Running away and leaving you in the lurch after you had saved his life!"

Jake, who was lurking near by and had heard this conversation, was filled with greater rage than ever against Julian, which he poured out afterward to Wat, who told him in return that he was just like one of the ungrateful dwarfs in the fairy-tales.

"If there are any more of these beasts roaming about here, we shall have our work cut out," reflected Sedgwick, gloomily. "Even as it is, we may meet that same ugly customer again."

† Julian could not help a shudder. He remembered those fiery eyes, and the hot breath which had all but touched him. Jake was shaking, and shook all that night, with ar-

other of those attacks resembling ague. Wat was plainly despondent, and Sedgwick had lost his hopefulness.

"I'm afraid, after all," he said, as the four trudged along, pursuing the search in a more or less perfunctory manner, "that there's no such thing as a cavern. We're just being kept here two weeks to try our mettle; and unless some of us get eaten up in the meantime, we'll all go back to the mansion at Pine Bluff like a parcel of whipped hounds—say, what's that?"

"What's what?" queried Jake eagerly, shivering all over.

Sedgwick strained his eyes, peering into the darkness; and everyone stood still—while suddenly on the stillness broke a long, low, wailing sound.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Sedgwick.—
"What can it be?"

Julian breathed a prayer, Wat stopped his ears, and Jake said in a stifled voice:

"I'll leave this confounded old place tomorrow. It's full of spooks and wild beasts."

There was silence for a moment, save for the booming of the water on the shore. But as the listeners waited, the sound came again

through the air, rising as it were out of the ground and soaring upward to the treetops.

"It's like the Banshee my old Irish nurse used to tell about," whispered Julian, as the four boys looked at one another in genuine fear and drew closer together. At last Julian spoke again: "Fellows, I guess we had better go forward to meet it, whatever it is. That's what Anselm Benedict would have done."

Jake broke into such a torrent of abuse against the dead-and-gone ancestor that the other boys were startled, and Julian at last protested.

"Look here, Jake," said he, "I don't call it the square thing to talk like that. None of us were forced to come into this contest at all, and we can get out as soon as we like; but while we are in, let us try to behave like gentlemen."

"Bravo!" said a voice, apparently close beside them,—a voice so deep, so hoarse that it was like the waves against the rock.

The boys started apart and began to look in all directions; but look as they might there was nothing to be seen. And while they sought, the wail rose again, louder, more piercing than before. Jake and Wat both

took to their heels, the former saying that he was going back to camp and would clinch the whole thing.

"Hi, you fellows, don't do that!" cried Julian. "You may lose the contest. Don't give up like that!"

"Who'll know?" Jake called back; halting, however, in his flight.

"Well, we can't tell that," Julian answered. "But, anyhow, we'd better see the thing out fairly."

Reluctantly the two turned back; and then Julian and Sedgwick advanced slowly and cautiously. They had not gone very far, when they saw a figure which seemed to them gigantic in the pallor of the moonlight; and the figure waved its arms wildly and fearfully.

"Sweet Mother," cried Julian, "pray for us!"

Jake was thoroughly frightened and uttered an unearthly yell, while even stout-hearted Sedgwick quailed.

"What in the name of heaven is it?" he asked.

Presently they heard, mingled with the noise of the sea and the weird murmurs of the forest, mutterings which at first were indis-

tinguishable. Then, after a few seconds, came a long, hissing whisper, which fairly froze the blood in the boys' veins:

"I seek—I seek the lost jewel of the Mortimers! Woe—woe is me!"

It was some time before any one rallied from the terrible dread into which this apparition had cast the little band of explorers. Then Julian said:

"I think I know who it is. It's that terrible man grandfather spoke of one day—'the Mad Hermit of the Forest'."

Chapter VIII.

THE MAD HERMIT.

Julian spoke in a thrilling whisper, which seemed to be repeated in ghostly fashion from aisle to aisle of the forest. Involuntarily, the little group grew closer together; and in the silence that followed Sedgwick asked:

“Who was he?”

“It’s a queer story. Grandfather told me just a little of it one day. He didn’t say that he lived in these woods, but only that one of the Mortimers lost his wits looking for the cavern, and he’s still seeking it, and everyone calls him the Mad Hermit.”

“Here he comes!” cried Walter, turning to run in the opposite direction; while Jake climbed a tree, and even Sedgwick began to edge away from the spot. Julian alone stood his ground.

“I guess he’s harmless,” he said to himself, “or he would have been shut up.” And so, trying to keep up his courage, he waited

the swift approach of that spectral, emaciated figure.

It was clad in a tattered gown, with a cloak thrown over the shoulders and waving wildly in the wind. The hair and beard likewise streamed in the night blast, and a withered hand grasped convulsively at a tall staff. The face was ashen pale, the eyes wild and staring, and the restless steps were of one who could never be still. v

At first the spectre appeared to see nothing, but talked and muttered incessantly. Suddenly, however, catching sight of Julian, the Mad Hermit stopped.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, a kind of surprise lighting up the haggard face. "You're the ghost of Bob Mortimer, I suppose. Don't you remember, Bob, when we started to seek the cavern? Ha! ha! we didn't find it quite so quickly as we thought. But listen hither, Bob!"

He came close till his hot breath touched Julian's cheek; but the little fellow stood his ground, gazing up at the apparition with frightened yet resolute eyes.

"You're little, Bob,—you're very little," the Hermit went on.

"You see you didn't grow. There is a cavern, Bob," he added in a piercing whisper. "It's where the marsh moves; it's where the wild beasts are. Ha! ha! but I couldn't get in. Ha! ha! I must be going, Bob!"

Then his face took on a look of cunning.

"There's no cavern, Bob,—of course not! You'll never find it. Go back to town, Bob,—go back to town!"

Wildly waving his arms, he flew on and was lost in the forest.

Julian stood still. Were those words the raving of a lunatic, or had the Mad Hermit in reality given him a clue to the location of the cavern? It was an inspiring thought. Next time the quest began, he should venture once more into that ill-starred neighborhood of the marsh, and seek, in spite of all obstacles, for the cavern. What if he were to find it? His heart beat fast, his pulses throbbed.

One thing was certain: he must tell the others. He had acquired this knowledge accidentally: all must know and have an equal chance. His boyish idea of honor so carefully cultivated at home and at school pointed out his duty here with unerring precision. It also

seemed to him that his grandfather ought to be told, so that he might be the judge as to whether or not this foreknowledge interfered with the honest finding of the cavern. When the last trace of the Hermit had disappeared, Julian raised his voice.

"Hie, Sedgwick!" he called.

And that boy, who was at no great distance, advanced in a somewhat shamefaced way, saying frankly that the appearance of the Hermit had put him in a "blue funk", though he was not afraid of most things. Jake, too, came down from the tree; while Walter presently emerged from a thicket grove near by, full of apologies for his own want of courage.

"Never mind that now," said Julian. "He didn't do me any harm, and he wasn't so very awful. He mistook me, I guess for my father. But, fellows, he said something important."

"What! the Wandering Jew there?" asked Sedgwick. "I'm blest if this Hermit isn't exactly like the picture of him."

"Oh, he's daft!" cried Jake, contemptuously. "It doesn't matter what *he* says. He's as mad as a March hare." ✓

"Well, anyway," declared Julian, "I'm going to make you all as wise as myself; and if it's a madman's ravings, why, we're no worse off than before."

The curiosity of the others began to be excited.

"Out with it, curly pate, whatever it is!" cried Sedgwick.

"Is it—is it anything about the contest?" Jake inquired.

"Don't keep us in suspense," put in Wat.

"Well, he said there was a cavern, and that the entrance was at the moving marsh, where the wild beasts are."

Sedgwick whistled.

"There may be something in it, Julian," he decided. "We've been pretty well through the rest of the wood; and probably no one has ever gone far in exploring the marsh, especially with that animal—whatever it is—there." And after a moment or two of reflection, he added: "Look here, Julian, it was very square of you to tell the rest of us fellows and give us all a chance."

Julian fidgeted and turned red. The praise confused him.

"That's all right, Sedgwick," he said,

awkwardly. "Hearing it in the way I did, it wouldn't have been fair to keep it from you. Of course if I had found it out for myself, it would have been different."

X "You're always on the square, Julian," spoke up Walter.

But Jake said not a word, and his face was disfigured by an ugly sneer.

"Before we do anything about it, though," declared Julian, "I think we ought to tell grandfather, and ask him if it makes any difference having found a clue in that way."

"All rot," cried Jake, angrily; and even Sedgwick was disposed to think that it was fair enough,—one of the chances of that mysterious wood.

"I think so myself," agreed Julian. "But, still, I would rather tell grandfather and feel sure about it."

Then followed a somewhat heated discussion, in which their voices rose higher and higher, one above the other, after the manner of the most ordinary boys. Finally Sedgwick and Walter came round to their cousin's view, and it was decided that on the morrow he should go to the mansion at Pine Bluff and acquaint Mr. Mortimer with all that had

occurred. Jake, too, veered round and acquiesced in this arrangement with a suddenness which would have aroused the suspicion of less honorable and less unsuspecting lads. They were glad, in fact, that harmony was restored, especially as it was now time to return to camp.

The moon had long since set, casting a wild, lurid light over the forest, and the whiteness of the dawn began to brighten the eastern sky. So the boys turned their steps toward the tents, beginning to feel drowsy and very weary after the excitement.

Suddenly upon their path appeared the wild figure of the Mad Hermit, going at full speed and waving his arms as if in a frantic appeal to the heavens above. The boys, with scared faces, stood by to let him pass. He did not notice them at all, and pursued his way, rushing along the forest paths, and finally disappearing in a clump of trees. He was a weird phantom in the faint morning light, and the boys one and all felt a shiver run through them. Somehow, this solitary being, forever intent on that quest which had robbed him of his reason, seemed a prophecy and a warning; and even the most careless of

boys, no less than their elders, have at times their premonitions and their fears of coming ill.

But when they reached camp, a very commonplace incident drove all these unwholesome fancies from their mind. There was a cat—a common, everyday Tabby—busily engaged in eating the string of fish which Sedgwick had caught and hung up on a tree for their breakfast. At first they believed it a wild cat, and were for approaching it with precaution and with carefully levelled guns. At last, however, with a hearty burst of laughter, they discovered that it was only a lean, half-starved pussy. It is very undignified to relate, and quite a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, that these four explorers, engaged in so momentous a quest, now indulged heartily in a cat hunt. They pursued the animal with wild yells, with bursts of laughter and occasional throwing of missiles. But Mistress Tabitha was sly and finally escaped into a tree, far above their malicious pursuit; taking with her the remnants of a fish, which she enjoyed in their actual sight, as they lay resting at the foot of that giant oak. Each one threw a parting

pebble at her, in good-humored defiance. None of them touched her, and Tabby continued her meal, watching with gleaming eyes of green her late adversaries depart toward the camp.

Each boy, having munched a piece of bread, threw himself down in his tent to sleep off the fatigues of the long night's chase. Julian lay wakeful for a time, watching the stars as they peeped in between the flaps of his tent, and revolving in his mind the encounter with the wild beast, and the still more terrifying, though less perilous, meeting with the Mad Hermit. Once or twice he fancied that he saw the weird figure hovering about the tents; then he tried to remember what his grandfather, in a few brief, cynical sentences, had striven to tell him of this singular being. Finally his thoughts got into a tangle, confused, bewildered, mingled with the sounds of the forest and of the sea; and at last he had floated off into that paradise of untroubled sleep, where the old are young again, and the world-weary are light of heart, and from which boyhood emerges with renewed vitality, hope and energy.

It seemed to Julian when he woke that he

could never wait to gain his grandfather's consent, or anything else; but that, once his breakfast was swallowed, he must hasten to the marsh and find the entrance to the cavern, in the light of the Hermit's words. As a first step towards action, he rushed out of the tent to light the fire, deferring his morning plunge in the sea till the kettle was filled with water and hung over the blaze.

"I mustn't lose a moment," he said to himself. "I'll go and see grandfather and get back here by midday. That will give us a fine, long afternoon for the search."

Tabby had interfered a good deal with the morning meal. But when Julian went to bathe, as it was low water, he found a few clams on the beach. The four boys relished them later, with salt and pepper, finding them a pleasant addition to their bread and butter. When everything was put away, Julian prepared to start upon his mission; but as he neared the edge of the forest, whom should he encounter but Nicholas, standing with arms outspread, plainly barring his passage?

Julian looked up into the rugged face earnestly.

"I must go!" he said.

Nicholas shook his head from side to side, precisely like some wooden image.

"I've got to go!" Julian repeated; and again Nicholas shook his head.

Julian was perplexed.

"I have to tell my grandfather before I can go on with the quest; so, Nicholas, you must let me go."

The wooden face relaxed somewhat.

"I must let him know about the Mad Hermit and what he told me."

"Aha!" the voice came suddenly from the rugged figure, which still barred the path; and there was a glow of interest, of curiosity, almost of suspicion in the face, as a gleam of sun on a rock.

"He told me, you see, Nicholas, where the entrance of the cavern is, and I must ask grandfather if it is right to go on looking when we have got the clue."

Nicholas, with a trace of eagerness never perceptible before in his imperturbable face, broke his habitual silence.

"You will not give up?"

"No," said Julian, solemnly. "With God's help, I mean to keep on; only I want to do everything fairly."

The arms were withdrawn, and Nicholas, making once again the military salute, stepped aside. Julian, with a simple "Thank you, Nicholas!" passed on his way; while the old man looked after the brave figure of the boy, just touched with the morning sunlight,—and looked and looked till he had to wink away some very human tears from his eyes.

It was a beautiful morning, and as Julian hurried on, the beauty of it seemed to sink into his heart; for a peaceful heart, a good conscience, and a joyous temperament give to Nature a gladness that is indescribable. Every honest boy experiences this when he gets up on a summer morning and goes forth for a ramble by sea or land.

It seemed to Julian's impatience that the way was very long to the mansion at Pine Bluff; but at last its roof and gables came in sight, and the dwelling itself, solemn and drear, with the shadows of more than two centuries upon it. Julian entered at the garden, and, passing by the flowering beds and bushes of roses and other bloom, he reached the familiar lawn. It was very silent now, since "the fellows" were all gone from it; and with something of awe Julian passed

across its bars of light and shade, where the sun came through the elms guarding it on every side. His figure looked strangely small; but his face had that brightness upon it which one associates with the sunshine; and his hair, as he took off his cap to wipe his forehead, shone, too, in the wandering sunbeams. X His grandfather, perceiving him from the library window, felt a glow half of pleasure, half of vexation. Had this little chap come to disturb his beloved solitude? And had he been, after all, the first to give up the contest? With these thoughts was a certain pleasure, owing to the gladness of the boy's face and to his brave and manly bearing.

"If *he* has given up, the others have no chance," the old man thought. "And yet I am surprised. I did not think he would have accepted defeat so speedily."

And then Mr. Mortimer heard the young voice saying outside his window:

"May I come into the library, grandfather? I have something very important to tell you."

The old man could scarce restrain a smile at the gravity with which this message was delivered; and he looked down at the small figure, with its resolute air, and into the bright eyes gazing so earnestly into his own.

"Come in, then," he said, "and let us hear the momentous tidings. One would think you were an ambassador from the Czar of All the Russias."

And Julian, accepting the invitation, went up the steps and in at the open door, taking his way to the library, where Mr. Mortimer sat awaiting him.

Chapter IX.

AN AFTERNOON'S ADVENTURES.

When Julian entered his grandfather's library, the boy's figure acquired a peculiar dignity from the surroundings. It was as if a bright spirit of Youth had suddenly invaded precincts which had become the exclusive property of Age. The grandfather surveyed his visitor for a moment in silence, then he spoke:

"To what am I indebted, Master Julian Mortimer, for this early return from your sylvan solitude?"

"I just came back to speak to you, sir."

"Ah! Not for an extended stay? Not with a view to giving up the contest?"—and his eyebrows were very satirical.

Julian flushed.

"I do not think I shall ever give up, grandfather," he said proudly,—“unless I see that it is utterly useless.”

The grandfather smothered the sigh which rose to his lips, and, from under contracted

brows, studied the fearless countenance and the shining hair before him. On his lap rested an open treatise, which discussed some abstruse problem of life with which youth has nothing to do.

"I thought it was fairer to come and tell you," said Julian, "that I met the Mad Hermit."

The grandfather started.

"That is, we all met him, coming along just like fury. But he spoke to me."

"Why to you?"

Julian hesitated. He did not want to say that the others, even Sedgwick, had run away.

"He mistook me for my father, called me Bob," explained Julian; "and he told me where to look for the entrance of the cavern."

"He told you *that!*" exclaimed the grandfather, leaning forward in strong excitement.

"Then, my boy, if you find that, half the battle is won,—or so I have always heard."

"He told me it was in the moving marsh, where that wild beast is."

"The moving marsh! the wild beast!" repeated the grandfather thoughtfully; then he leaned back in his chair. "Pshaw, child! he is mad,—remember he is mad!"

"But may we try?" inquired Julian, looking earnestly into his grandfather's face. "Will it be fair if we find the cavern after getting the clue from the Hermit?"

The grandfather stared. He was an upright man, as men go; but this point of honor was beyond him.

"That's what I came to ask you," went on Julian.

"You came to ask me if you might make use of this knowledge gained from the mad-man?" asked Mr. Mortimer.

"Yes, sir."

"Did the others agree with you in thinking my judgment necessary?"

"Well, we had an argument, but at last they all agreed, even Jake."

Mr. Mortimer looked away out over the sunlit lawn, into some far distance, as though he was seeking for his own sunny youth. Perhaps he strove to remember if this quality of absolute truthfulness and sincerity had cast a glow over that beautiful land of the long ago. Then, with something like pain contracting his forehead for an instant, he answered:

"I have no power to decide in such a case:

no instructions have been left. But my individual opinion is that you should certainly proceed to act upon this knowledge. Of course it may prove to be a Will-o'-the-wisp, but you are entitled to what light it gives."

Having so decided, Mr. Mortimer was silent a moment; then he inquired, with some curiosity:

"Did the Hermit give this information to all the boys?"

"No, sir," said Julian. "I think I was the only one who heard."

"Then I presume you will follow the clue for your own benefit?"

"Oh, no!" cried Julian, his fair face flushing. "I couldn't do that. I have already told them; for I want to go ahead fairly."

The grandfather's eyes were dimmed this time with a very unusual moisture, akin to that mist which had obscured the orbs of Nicholas on the edge of the forest,—akin to that dimness which clouds an old man's vision when he catches sight of the half-forgotten sky of youth aglow with trustfulness, hopefulness, and the light of integrity.

"My boy," he said, "unless the lost jewel and the hidden room be but shadows of a

dream, I believe you will some day discover them; for you have been found worthy."

He rose and, with old-fashioned courtesy, made a stately bow. Julian was half abashed, half awestricken.

"You should have been Sir Julian de Mortimer," the old man continued, relapsing into a sportive vein, "and have worn a suit of unstained armor, borne a lance that was invincible, and uplifted the good sword Excalibur. But, as it is, you are only a boy of the twentieth century, with your own ideals to work out; and you shall presently have luncheon with me. After that I shall entrust you with the volume which records the life and doings of our common ancestor, this redoubtable Anselm Benedict. You will guard it carefully and return it to me when next you come from the forest."

The luncheon was served with the usual formal stateliness. The old man presided with dignity; the boy, who seemed small and insignificant in those great rooms, sat beside him and enjoyed the good things with a boy's hardy relish. His grandfather watched him approvingly, saying to himself that the lad had really very good table manners. Little

was said, and after the meal the oddly assorted pair returned to the library. When they had been sitting there a few moments, the grandfather drowsy and dozing in his chair, Julian suddenly rose.

"I am afraid, grandfather, I shall have to be going," he announced.

Mr. Mortimer started, awoke, rubbed his eyes and looked at his grandson, amused at his tone and bearing.

"Indeed! And pray what's your hurry, Julian?"

"Well, you see, sir, I promised the others to get back as soon as I could, so that we might begin the search for the cavern this afternoon."

"So eager!" sighed the old man, gazing out again through the window to what might have been the lost hills of youth. "Well, I must not keep you. I will give you the volume as a precious loan. It is of much value as an historical record,—though few of us have ever so much as opened it."

✚ The grandfather adjusted his glasses and cast his eyes down the pages of a folio, evidently a list of books in the library. Then he rose and pressed a spring in the wall: a cup-

board stood revealed. Its shelves were laden with many things which to Julian's eyes seemed like treasures: slippers of Spanish leather with silver buckles; daggers with elaborate hilts; quaintly carved tennis balls, with which tradition said a king of France had played a king of England; stirrup cups of the long ago; snuff-boxes, fur-trimmed gantlets, ancient manuscripts, curious Missals. Amongst these last Mr. Mortimer sought and found a volume bound in leather, richly jewelled, with solid silver clasps of rare workmanship. Having taken it forth, he blew the dust from its cover and wiped it with a silken duster.

"Here, my boy," he said, "is the history of our eccentric ancestor, Anselm Benedict Mortimer, of unquiet memory."

It hurt Julian to hear his grandfather's tone of disparagement toward a person whom he had already transformed into a boyish idol. For the most generous and high-minded of boys are usually hero-worshippers and exalt some one to a pinnacle, whether it be the successful pitcher or catcher in a baseball contest, the professor who by some eloquent lecture has won their admiration, the mathe-

matician who has demonstrated a difficult proposition, the circus-rider who has ridden the wildest mustang, or the great general who has commanded the applause of a nation. Julian was no exception to the rule, and this tendency in his nature had been encouraged and directed into safe channels by his mother. Just now he had given the first place in his imagination to the somewhat visionary ancestor who had imposed so stern an ordeal upon his descendants.

"I entrust you with this volume because I know you will value and care for it," declared Mr. Mortimer.

"But, grandfather, I am afraid. It is so handsome, so costly! Suppose it should get lost?"

"Well, then, my lad, you or I would be responsible to the estate for a considerable amount; but, after all—" (he gave Julian a peculiar glance, which the boy was far from understanding, and finished his sentence) "after all, if you go on as you're doing, the price of this volume may be a very small matter to you by and by."

Julian said nothing, looking gravely up into his grandfather's face, with his head on

one side, as if anxious to understand his meaning.

"However," said the old man, laying his hand on Julian's arm with real kindness, "I shall be very much disappointed in you if the book gets lost or injured while in your possession."

"I don't know about that, sir," argued Julian. "Mother used to say I was very careless about my clothes."

Mr. Mortimer laughed.

"Well, you must take extra care of the book,—that's all. And see that it does not get spotted."

Julian received the volume as if he were accepting a trust, believing with all the confidence of youth that he would guard it with his life. Tucking it carefully under his arm, he took leave of his grandfather and set forth, trudging bravely along the road toward the forest, which lay bright and shimmering under the sun's rays, a mass of verdure.

When Julian reached the camp, he hurried into his tent to put the precious volume in a place of safety. Then he came forth to find Sedgwick and Wat stretched at length under the trees. They could give no account of

Jake. He had left camp very soon after Julian's departure that morning.

"I guess he's trying to shoot something for supper," remarked Sedgwick. "We're getting rather low for provender."

"I saw a tiny house on the edge of the forest, over near the cliff," said Julian; "and there's an old woman there has a cow. I'm going to try and get some milk, and perhaps butter, from her. I have a little money mother gave me. But I wish we could go to the marsh now while it's light. Of course we can't begin the search, though, without Jake. It would be unfair."

"It's a pity," cried Wat; "because it's a fine day, and there are clouds over yonder! I shouldn't wonder if it rains to-morrow."

"He's the greatest beggar for being out of the way when he's wanted," growled Sedgwick. "I vote, we all walk down toward the marsh. We may meet the fellow somewhere."

So off they all started; for anything was better than keeping still. And as they went, they sang lustily the last college song which had often disturbed the campus. When they drew near the sinister spot, a silence fell upon them, and even the bravest were conscious of

a feeling of trepidation. What was their consternation to hear faint but repeated cries as of distress. Some animal—or, more horrible thought, some human being—was in danger or pain of some kind or another. The boys listened and listened. That moaning, those faint cries for help, fairly curdled their blood. At last Julian cried, with a sudden flash of intuition:

“Jake!”

He began to run forward at full speed; the others, after some hesitation, following. They had run halfway round to the far side of the marsh, when they beheld a strange and horrible sight. Jake had sunk into the marsh as far as his knees. To the boys' excited imagination it seemed as if he must be drawn down before their eyes, after the manner of the storybooks. More terrible still, the beast that had before threatened their very lives, paced restlessly upon the bank, growling and sniffing, deterred only by the uncertain nature of the marsh from falling upon Jake. And as if to complete the chapter of horrors and to ensure the hapless lad's destruction, above him towered, secure upon a shaded knoll, the awful figure of the Mad Hermit, brandishing an axe in his powerful arms.

Julian was a brave boy, and he was most anxious to live up to the high ideal of courage and manliness set him by his illustrious ancestor, the chivalrous Anselm Benedict. But he stood now fairly petrified by fear, in presence of the threefold danger threatening the hapless Jake. Suddenly, with a great leap of the heart, it came home to him that he could not allow his cousin thus to perish. Something must be done!

Following this impulse, he stepped as lightly as possible upon the marsh. It quavered, but he continued his course, for there was no other means of reaching Jake, while the wild animal kept watch upon the opposite bank. The marsh was dotted, curiously enough, with little knolls, such as that upon which the Hermit had ensconced himself, and upon each of these knolls was a wide-spreading oak. These circumstances suggested to Julian's active mind the possibility of approaching the struggling Jake. He advanced as cautiously as possible to the first of these knolls, and seizing the outspreading branch of a tree, succeeded without difficulty in swinging himself to a tolerably secure position amongst the branches.

From this point he crept along carefully, till he was able to seize a branch of the tree which occupied the second knoll. After that he strove to make his way by springing from one tree to another, though the distance between was considerable, and he knew that if he fell he would, by the force of his own weight, be buried almost to a certainty in the noisome slime of the marsh. Nevertheless, he succeeded in swinging himself into the oak under which stood the Mad Hermit. Having securely planted himself upon an upper bough, he swooped down and seized the hatchet. The madman, who had been intent on Jake and had not taken any notice of Julian's manoeuvres, in his astonishment, let go of the formidable weapon. Julian having secured it, by a dexterous aim launched it into space. The Hermit became madly excited and turned to look for the offender, crying:

"Justice, justice must be done under high Heaven!"

The mass of foliage hid Julian from his view, and as he could not discover the new aggressor, he returned once more to his old enemy and bending seized Jake by the hair, with the ominous words:

"I will plunge you downwards and bury you in the quagmire!"

Jake uttered shriek after shriek, while the animal upon the shore redoubled its growlings and paced back and forth, sniffing more ferociously than ever. It almost seemed as if it would leap upon the uncertain ground, which had hitherto restrained it, and seizing upon Jacob, destroy that miserable boy's last chance of escape.

"You would dig! you would dig!" cried the lunatic, "you would find the cavern, but I tell you, you shall not, for it is mine. I keep a hundred lions there; Bob tried to find it; he couldn't and he went back to town."

As the Hermit spoke thus, Julian glanced at the spade upon the bank and realized with a curious sense of disgust and abhorrence, that Jake had actually come here on his own account, to steal a march upon his companions and discover the cavern without them. However, this did not interfere with his settled resolve to save Jake, if it were possible, no matter what might be the risk to himself.

The Hermit, whose unstable mind had for the moment wandered from its purpose of

bodily harm to Jacob, suddenly remembered his previous intentions, and seizing a firmer grip of his victim, began to dance him up and down, crying:

"I will bury you! I will bury you!"

"But if you bury him," cried Julian, from his vantage ground amidst the foliage, "he may find the cavern!"

The words proved magical.

"That is true!" cried the Hermit, "I will pull him out and cast him upon the shore for the wild beasts to devour."

Now this new feature of the programme filled Jake with a terror, which he expressed by renewed shrieks. Julian, too, was greatly alarmed; for the marsh had been the sole protection against the beast. And if the lunatic carried out this latest design, Jake was, indeed, lost. By a sudden inspiration, however, Julian began to cry out to the Hermit, from his vantage point above:

"No, no, help me to hoist him into the tree, and we'll fasten him up there; he'll be too far above the earth to find the cavern."

"Ho! Ho!" cried the lunatic, "is that you, Bob, cunning Bob? That's a good scheme. I'll pull him out of the quagmire and give you

his hands. Then, we'll get a rope and tie him up for the crows to peck at."

He actually seized upon Jake with a force and celerity which released the boy from his precarious position, and stood him up against the tree. Julian then quickly seized his cousin's hands, urging him in a whisper to help all he could, and to try to reach the lowest bough of the tree. Jake, who was quite unnerved, tried to grasp the tree trunk with his legs, and, by the assistance of Julian, managed to attain a secure position upon the outspreading branch.

But whether the combined weight of the two boys was too much for the bough, or whether Jake by some awkward movement had dislodged his cousin, it was impossible to tell: Julian slipped off the branch and fell heavily into the marsh, on the other side of the tree from that wherein Jake had so lately struggled. Julian thought he must have been losing consciousness; for he felt himself slowly, slowly descending, whither he knew not, but he believed it must be into the realms of death. He gave one swift thought to his mother on earth, another to his Mother in heaven.

Meanwhile Sedgwick and Wat ran along the shore, desperately watching the disappearance of their brave companion, and calling aloud in their anguish and terror.

Chapter X.

THE CAVERN IN THE FOREST.

Jake was at first horrified at the disappearance of Julian, and something like remorse entered his soul when he remembered the danger to which Julian had been exposed on his account. However, the thought of his own safety soon became uppermost in his mind. The grim fig of the Mad Hermit was still in evidence, tossing wild arms upward and addressing invocations to imaginary beings who seemed to people the air about him; while on the bank still paced restlessly, with ferocious snuffings, the angry beast.

Jake was sufficiently agile, once he had recovered from his first fright, and presently made for himself a temporary retreat in the topmost branches of the tree, secure for a time from his two assailants. As he sat there ruminating, a thought suggested by the demon of avarice began to take shape, half consciously, in his mind: that, after all, it was

as well if this Julian, who seemed likely to be a successful competitor in the great race, had really been removed from the arena. No one could help it: it was one of those happenings for which none could be held responsible. He did not directly rejoice, but he could not be expected to mourn for Julian, whom he hated. Julian was always popular, ever making friends, and doing plucky things which cost him little effort, and gaining applause from old and young.

While John Jacob was busy with these dark fancies, Sedgwick had made a pole of the branch of a dead tree which lay prostrate across a corner of the marsh, and strove to explore the depths into which his comrade had disappeared. When he at length realized that these efforts were futile, he stood irresolute and grief-stricken on the bank, in company with Wat, who alternately wrung his hands and wiped his eyes.

Sedgwick had meanwhile given very little heed to Jake, who now began to implore his assistance; for he feared that his companions might go away and leave him in his dangerous plight, with his two dreaded foes still in a position of vantage below him.

"Here I am stuck up in this tree!" he cried out, in a cautious whisper.

"Serves you right!" replied Sedgwick.—
"You're the cause of all the trouble,—coming here alone, like the sneak you are. Now, I suppose, you've gone and done for Julian, the best of the whole crowd and the only one who had the least bit of a chance to find the ruby."

The tears were very near the honest lad's eyes as he thus spoke; for he had learned to love his brave and generous cousin, and felt not the slightest envy at the general good-will he earned. However, he resolutely suppressed his emotion and went on, in a voice that sounded like a growl:

"I've a good mind to let you stick up there! Well, you'd better get on to the next tree and I'll give you a hand,—though I'd a great sight sooner give you the toe of my boot."

Sedgwick, however, in point of fact, gave Jake such efficient assistance that the latter presently stood upon solid earth, nervous and shaken by conflicting emotions,—a mere haggard wreck.

As they paused a moment, conversing in whispers, uncertain what to do and afraid to

attract the attention of the Hermit, that eccentric individual, with a wild shriek, suddenly fled howling into the forest; and at the same moment the beast upon the opposite bank seemed to realize that his late foe had descended to the earth, and so might come within range of his claws. He would, of course, have a considerable detour to make in order to come round the marsh; but he prepared to solve the difficulty, keeping watchful and terrifying eyes upon Jake.

With one accord Wat and Jake and Sedgwick took to their heels. The race was at first a severe one, and its upshot might have been doubtful; but, whether the attention of the beast was distracted, or for some other cause, he suddenly gave up the human hunt, to the intense relief of the boys. They now pursued their way, unmolested, but despondent and dispirited, toward the camp. Once there, Sedgwick set out to scour the edge of the forest in search of Nicholas; for he had a faint hope that that mysterious personage might in some way be able to give help where Julian was concerned. But of Nicholas there was no trace. Only the rising wind stirred the foliage of the trees or the dry leaves upon

the ground. Night was upon the solemn and drear, and both Sedgwick and Wat were determined to proceed to the mansion at Pine Bluff in the morning, acquaint their grandfather with what had occurred, and give up the "whole blessed job". Jake, despite his cowardice, was stubbornly determined to continue the pursuit, with the hope, daily becoming more faint, of discovering the jewel.

"I guess if you stay here alone you'll go mad like the Hermit," prophesied Wat.

That was an awful night at the camp. Julian's tent stood like a white spectre, a warning and a prophecy; and the dawn found the boys still wakeful, pale and haggard from the horror of what had befallen them. Sedgwick announced his intention of going first to the marsh, to discover if by any means Julian could have made his escape; and if this effort proved futile, he resolved that he would call upon the grandfather to organize a search-party, that might thoroughly explore, with spade and shovel, the mud and slime of the morass.

Jake positively refused to accompany him on his first expedition, alleging the utter uselessness of seeking for Julian, who had been

buried for several hours in the morass; and Wat frankly confessed that he was afraid to venture near the Hermit and the beast.

"If I were strong and well, perhaps I shouldn't mind so much," Wat declared apologetically.

Sedgwick, without answering, began his lonely way, in the first white light of the dawn, through the forest.

Meanwhile it is time to return to Julian, who felt himself descending through space with a curious rotatory movement, for which he could not account. In the confusion of his thoughts, he wondered that he was not choked with the slime nor swallowed up in the thick black marshy substance, as he had supposed would be the case. After rapidly revolving for some time, he suddenly came to a standstill on some soft and yielding surface, after which he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself he began to look about him. The boom of the sea sounded strangely near, and rocks gray and sombre stood around, in the light which had begun to grow dim. One thing was clear: he was not dead, nor were the objects which surrounded him mere spectral shapes. He lay

still a few moments, while sudden and sharp the remembrance of his mother flashed into his mind. What would she think, could she know of her boy's perilous position? The recollection, however, gave him courage. She was certainly praying for him earnestly, lovingly; and her prayers would help him whatever came or went.

At last he tried to move, and found to his satisfaction that he was unhurt. He rose to his feet and began to make observations. It was a strange scene, wild and desolate; and as his eyes wandered over sea and rocks, it became apparent to him that he was close to the entrance of a cave. Breathlessly he regarded the spot; while, with a bounding of the heart and quickening of the pulses, the thought occurred to him that here was the cavern of the forest.

The entrance, cunningly concealed, and upon which he had happened by the merest chance, tallied strangely with the description given by the Mad Hermit, and he had found it just when he was risking his life for his perfidious cousin. While scarcely dwelling upon this last consideration, he was very glad that he had made the discovery without tak-

ing any advantage of the madman's clue, except in so far that he had bent his steps toward the marsh on that particular afternoon.

He suddenly took his courage in his hands and passed within the portals of the cave, full of a throbbing sense of victory, which filled him with a curious elation. At first he entered merely a rocky vault, dark, with sea-stained walls and damp floor. As he traversed the winding passages, however, the atmosphere grew more and more dry; whilst the light which streamed in here and there from crevices in the rocks, revealed those beauties which have so often charmed adventurous explorers in the seabound caverns of granite-lined coasts. Innumerable tracteries of delicate, filmy creepers and almost infinitesimal flowers reminded Julian of the stories of the fairy kingdom with which in early childhood he had been familiar. Here and there a stalactite, hanging from a natural pillar and gleaming in the rays of a setting sun which streamed from without, filled the boy with a feeling of awe.

He wandered on and on, till at last he felt a wave as of hot air blowing in his face.

This so startled him that he was tempted to turn back. Bracing up, however, he made a few steps forward, and by a sudden turn found himself confronted by a large compartment, fitted up quite comfortably as a human habitation. A wooden flooring had been raised some feet above the rock pavement, and was covered with a thick carpet. Its coloring was dim and obscured by time, but it answered admirably its purpose of imparting warmth and comfort to the place. The walls were hung about with skins of beasts, some of which were uncouth and formidable, others glossy and shining, but all tending to exclude the outer chill and darkness. Easy-chairs stood about in careless profusion; there was a great table with dragon legs, upon which stood a pair of massive silver candlesticks containing two waxen tapers, and provided with snuffers and tray.

Last but not least, a fire burned bright and clear upon the hearth,—a chimney, or vent-hole, having been arranged to emit the smoke. This appeared to Julian most wonderful of all, and filled him with a very whirlwind of thoughts. He recalled, vaguely and confusedly, the vestal fire which the Roman maidens

had forever kept alight in the Temple of Vesta; the fires of the sun-worshippers; and he wondered if Anselm Benedict had contrived in any way whatever to have had this flame kept burning for over two hundred years.

He stood staring at the hearth as though he had seen a veritable apparition; whilst a low, chuckling laugh suddenly broke the stillness and increased his terror. He did not dare to turn his head, and was not aware that Nicholas stood just behind him till a deep, guttural voice, hoarse as the sea, sounded on his over-strained ears.

“For the second time,” it said, “a seeker has found this cavern.”

The boy, turning slowly, looked into Nicholas' deep-set eyes and saw a powerful emotion agitating the rugged features. Julian was half relieved, half terrified by the sight of the old man; for just then his identity seemed more than ever unreal. Together the boy and man stood looking into each others face for about three minutes, during which Julian murmured a “Hail Mary” and implored the help of his Mother in heaven. Then he ventured to speak.

“Nicholas,” he said, “you are sure that

this is the very cavern in the forest that we have been seeking all these days?"

"Yes!"

"And now may I go?" the boy queried eagerly.

"Not until sunrise to-morrow."

A shiver crept through Julian's frame.

"I am afraid to stay here alone," he said frankly.

"If you leave now, you renounce the inheritance," Nicholas replied brusquely. —

"Within the next half hour, if you still wish to be free, strike with this stick upon the cavern wall three times in succession. For that space of time I will hear and answer."

Julian involuntarily took the curiously carved stick which Nicholas placed in his hands, but before he could utter another word the old man had disappeared, and the boy stood alone in the growing darkness. The light from without, coming faintly through the winding passages, had died away completely; and the logs were burning with a steady glow, which gave heat but no longer much light. Julian paused irresolute, trying to make up his mind as to whether or not he should be equal to the dread ordeal of spend-

ing a night of solitude underground. He thought upon his mother, who would be so disappointed should he fail in this contest; he reflected upon the trials and dangers through which he had already passed; and at last his mind reverted to Anselm Benedict and the high qualities with which youthful fancy had invested him. He would never have allowed himself to be turned backward by cowardly fear.

Julian, by a sudden impulse, threw the stick to the far corner of the room. Neither would *he* weakly yield. Advancing to the hearth, he was cheered to discover a pile of pine knots ready to replenish the fire. He threw a few of them upon the fire, and drawing forward an armchair, sank into its depths. But, despite his brave resolve, he was far from being at ease. His eyes roved restlessly over the walls, which, fur-covered as they were, appeared spectral in the dimness; and at the rocky ceiling overhead, which seemed to conceal chaotic darkness. The firelight accentuated the blackness which settled down upon the cave, save when, more fearful still, there appeared above Julian's head phosphorescent gleams—livid, greenish white or lurid flame-colored.

Scarce comprehending their nature, they filled him with terror. He rose and began to grope his way toward the table. All at once his hand came in contact with a head. He recoiled in horror, only to rest his hand upon some clammy substance. In his affright he rushed to the hearth, snatched thence a pine knot, which he lit, thus providing an excellent torch, with which he also enkindled the two waxen tapers. He then discovered that the head was that of a leopard hanging from one of the skins upon the wall, and that the clammy substance was the nose of a stuffed silver fox.

But though the clear light of the candles, blending with the red glow of the torch, made every object in the apartment plainly discernible, and so relieved his worst fears, he suddenly felt the various surrounding objects intolerable, and fancied that the rocky cave without and the foaming waves of the sea would be less unendurable. He grasped his torch firmly and set forth to seek the mouth of the cave; but, owing to a wrong turning in some of the winding passages, he suddenly found himself in another large compartment, which, though very different in its appoint-

ments, showed signs likewise of human habitation. Rude chairs, boxes and kegs stood about; the ashes of a fire were upon a hearth; while guns, cutlasses and other less familiar weapons were strewn in the corners of this rocky chamber.

As Julian stood and gazed, with the roar of the sea in his ears, he realized with a thrill that here, ready to his hand, were some of those adventures which had fascinated him in the pages of boys' books. This must be the abode of sea-rovers, perhaps of pirates. While he familiarized himself with this idea, he was gradually seized with a fear, not of men but of the sea—the terrible limitless sea—which sounded so near, and into which an incantious step might hurl him. He shuddered as his imagination conjured up sea-monsters, strange uncouth fishes, the broken hulls of wrecked vessels, and the motionless forms of drowned mariners.

And while he grew every moment more terrified, the keel of a boat grated upon the rock, the sound becoming gradually louder and more distinct. Julian sank, trembling, upon his knees, praying with a fervor which surprised himself, as all of a sudden the grat-

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ing noise gave place to the rushing and trampling of feet, and a dozen rough fellows rushed into the compartment.

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Chapter XI.

AMONG SMUGGLERS.

A dozen or more rough men burst into the compartment where knelt the astonished and affrighted boy. Some carried oars or tarpaulins, others bore kegs, and still others were provided with formidable-looking weapons similar to those which stood about the cave. They were clad in red flannel shirts, trousers of coarse stuff tucked into huge boots, and slouch hats drawn down over their faces. They all stood still at sight of the boy, and some deep and terrible oaths disturbed the stillness of the cavern. Their first instinct was to rush upon Julian, but something in his appearance and attitude restrained them. A superstitious terror seized upon all except one or two of the most hardened.

"It is surely a sperrit or spook!" whispered one.

"*Oui, un revenant*,—one who has come back from the dead!" replied a Frenchman;

while the rest stood by, regarding Julian with reverence or curiosity, uncertain what to do.

The boy's eyes, distended by fear, were raised in supplication, and his hands were clasped as he fervently implored the help of our Heavenly Mother. Around him, upon the wall, was the gleam of strange weapons; and in a semicircle, regarding him intently, were the uncouth figures, who evidently made an habitual resort of this cavern. What they were, Julian could not imagine. Living in an inland town, he knew but little of smugglers, pirates or other water-side characters; and it was only his reading of more or less veracious boys' books which enabled him to form a guess as to their real character.

At last the captain, who was at once the shrewdest and fiercest amongst the men, having made up his mind that the boy was certainly of flesh and blood, approached and seized him rudely by the shoulder. Some of the band started forward as if to prevent a sacrilegious act, and then paused in an attitude of curiosity, as if to observe the outcome.

"Say, who be you and what be you doin' here?" growled the daring ruffian.

"I am Julian Robert Mortimer," said the

boy, rising and facing the rude circle, with head erect and flashing eyes.

"Mortimer!" echoed one and another uneasily. The name was an old one in the neighborhood and well known to all those the foreigners. It was moreover, tragically associated in their minds with many tales and an atmosphere of mystery.

"Yes, Mortimer," repeated the skipper, "and I am one of the seekers."

"And you're a seeker, too," muttered a desperado in an audible whisper. "I told you it was spoiling the name o' them dead-and-gone Mortimers come dodgin' around after the money."

But the captain, who was a stranger to the place, questioned eagerly:

"Seekers? Who are they?"

"Boys who are seekin' a jewel and a fortune," answered Julian, proudly.

"It ears to me," laughed the skipper, brutally, "you're in pretty much the same line with yourselves."

"I guess" put in one solemn-looking fellow, "he's speakin' about the kingdom o' glory,— the kind that the parsons chin about."

"Yes, that's it!" cried the Frenchman, excitedly. "It's a saint come to seek his salvation in this cave. I'm no saint, and I don't believe much in anything; but I don't want to hurt a saint."

"Be you a saint?" grunted the captain, not very clear as to what the other meant; and the question, despite his fear, sent Julian into a gurgling fit of laughter which prevented his answering.

"Best leave him alone and make tracks!" cried one.

"But what about the swag?" queried another.

"If you mean these things," observed Julian politely, glancing at the kegs, "they're quite safe with me."

"Safe, you bet," roared the captain, "till you bring the perlice about us!"

And he ripped out an awful oath, which made Julian's blood run cold; but he managed to control his feelings, and answered hastily:

"Oh, no! The only person that knows about this cavern has nothing to do with the police. Nicholas—"

"Nicholas!" repeated the smugglers,—and amongst some of them, at least, there was

evident trepidation. "Do you belong to Nicholas?"

Julian hesitated an instant, then said:

"I know him, and he's coming for me tomorrow morning."

There was a chorus of oaths and imprecations this time, such as Julian had never heard, and which seemed to intensify the horror of the scene, the semi-darkness of the cave, and the booming of the waters without upon the pebbly beach. The smugglers were rather alarmed by this intelligence, and Julian continued boldly:

"I guess Nicholas knows you're here, anyway; for he seems to know most everything and to hear what people say."

↳ This was a chance shot, but it had a marked effect.

"We'd best ship anchor, messmates," grunted one old salt. "The chap's right: Nicholas knows whatever's goin' on, and if he has biz to transact here, we'd better get out, and the quicker the better, swag or no swag."

"Waal," said the captain, "Nicholas or no Nicholas, this here chap's got to swear secrecy. You say Nicholas knows, but how d'ye know he knows?"

This was unanswerable, and some of the men began to mutter amongst themselves that there was no harm in precautions.

"So, my young cockatoo," roared the captain, "down on your marrowbones, and say what I tell you!"

He forced Julian down upon his knees and proceeded to formulate so awful an oath that even some of those hardened in crime actually shuddered. Their nerves had got a shock, and they were not quite sure yet as to whether or no they had been called upon to deal with the supernatural; while the mention of the mysterious Nicholas was far from reassuring. The boy's face turned pale with horror, and he threw back his head with the gesture of pride and courage so familiar to all who knew him.

"Stop!" he cried. "I wouldn't repeat those wicked words if you were to kill me on the spot!"

"I tole you it was a saint," murmured the Frenchman; and others secretly concurred in the sentiment.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to insult God like that!" Julian went on, borne out of himself by honest indignation; and as

he thus spoke, those in a position to make the comparison would have noted a marked resemblance in this young descendant to Anselm Benedict of heroic memory.

"If you won't swear as I bid you, we'll find means to make you," snarled the captain, with another frightful imprecation. The truth is, he trembled for his authority with his ungovernable crew, should he permit himself to be bearded by this mere stripling.

"You'll never find means to make me repeat that!" cried Julian. "I always disliked boys that said bad words and blasphemed God. I never wanted to have anything to do with them. And it's worse for grown-up men to use such language."

The clear young voice rose above the roar of the ocean, giving its honest testimony there in that underground cavern, surrounded by lawless and desperate men, far from all human succor. It was the fearlessness of a noble nature protesting against what was evil, and it wrung a reluctant tribute of admiration from nearly all who heard. Deep down in the soul of some of those wretched men old memories stirred, and across many a lurid scene shone the sunshine of innocence bright

and clear. The oldest amongst that fierce band mechanically drew a hand across eyes which were dimmed by an unwonted moisture.

Julian was unaware, however, of the effect which his gallant bearing had produced; and, looking around the circle of dark faces, he found no comfort there. The captain was absolute and none dared openly to oppose him. Something like a chill of fear crept into the young heart. He thought of his mother, and of her horror and consternation could she see him then; but he also remembered her oft-repeated injunction to have recourse in all dangers to God and His Blessed Mother. Then the memory of Anselm Benedict suffering exile and imprisonment for the Faith flashed into his mind. The boy's thoughts were brought back to his awful surroundings by the captain's voice giving a grim command:

"To the boats, then; and take him along if he won't swear!"

The men approached the boy with marked reluctance, and, securing his arms, led him swiftly away through the rocky passages of the underground retreat, till he felt the salt

air and the sea spray upon his cheek, and presently stood upon a pebbly beach, where three or four boats lay in waiting. He was thrust into one of these, which was soon manned by the captain himself with three or four of the crew. Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed when the little vessel was dancing on the foamy crest of the waves, moving rapidly outward. Despite the danger and uncertainty of his position, Julian's spirits began to rise. The love of adventure which in his far-off ancestor had stood out side by side with his higher qualities, now stirred in his young descendant, and he scarcely repressed a wild whoop of enjoyment as they followed their course out over the darkening sea.

There was a strong element of fascination in the situation, which appealed most powerfully to Julian's imagination. Who were these men and whither were they taking him? Why did they seem to fear Nicholas? With these conjectures were mingled a host of fancies more or less distinct. He pictured himself afar off in stormy seas, shut up, perhaps, in the hold of a vessel; or regaining his freedom and sailing to distant islands in search of treasure. This last consideration reminded

him of the fact that he was probably leaving the jewel of the Mortimers and the phantom fortune behind him; and he recollected with a pang that he was likewise leaving his mother in her loneliness, disappointment and sorrow. She would not even know his fate. The only consolation was that he could not have done otherwise, and she would have been the last to advise him to blaspheme God in order to secure his own safety.

As they went on, the sky became gradually overclouded, and the few stars which had appeared now vanished one by one; a moaning wind crept over the surface of the sea, stirring the wavelets into angry billows. As they grew in volume, they beat the boats about with terrific force, now tossing them high, now burying them in a deep trough. It was soon apparent that rough weather was at hand, and terror began to manifest itself upon the faces of the men, as they cast uneasy glances upon Julian, where he sat calmly in their midst, his face pale but steady and composed. For he was too inexperienced to dread the fury of the elements, and the gathering storm had, to the boy's nature, all the charm of novelty. He felt like giving a wild halloo

as wave after wave sent showers of spray over every inmate of the boat, and he had to hold his cap tightly on his head lest it should be blown away.

"I tole you!" broke in the Frenchman.—
"It's a saint, and the anger of God—the God he prays to—is after us."

Most of the others were disposed to concur in these sentiments, especially when lurid gleams of lightning began to part the dark clouds to the southwest, and the mutterings of thunder growled ever louder and louder.

"And look you there, skipper!" cried one of the crew, pointing to the rocky shore they had just left, which was illumined with flashes of light gleaming amongst the rocks,—now livid white, now red, now opalescent green.

"St. Elmo's fire!" exclaimed another, who in his youth had gone down to the sea in ships and had been familiar with many sights unknown to the offshore smugglers and wreckers amongst whom he now dwelt.

The men, turning, gazed with superstitious awe upon that granite-bound coast, illumined with strange lights. Nor was their uneasiness lessened by the tongues of flame which presently shot up from some hidden recess of

rock, and the meteors, or so it seemed, which mounted to the very heavens.

"That devil of a Nicholas!" muttered the captain. "He can do most anything with them meteors and things; and I reckon he can make fires blaze up jest as he wants them to."

Julian felt a shiver pass over him. Nicholas seemed to be surrounded, indeed, by all kinds of mysteries; and as he looked toward the shore, he fancied he saw his form fantastically enlarged in the dim light, waving great arms.

"The St. Elmo fire," croaked the travelled one, "means storm, it do, and death and misfortune."

The men with one accord begged of the captain to put into shore, and to return Julian to Nicholas and the cavern.

"I say, we'd better heave the lubber overboard, if so be he's the cause o' the foul weather," suggested the skipper. "Let Nicholas take him ashore if he's got a mind to."

Happily, however, the predominant sentiment was in favor of putting Julian ashore, and the captain reluctantly gave orders to

that effect. Nor was the order an easy one to obey; for the sea ran ever higher and higher, and the roar of the wind became more sullen and ominous; so that Julian felt in his whole frame the excitement of a life-and-death-struggle with the forces of air and water. The dogged silence of the crew was broken ever and anon by the hoarse shouts of the captain; while the dazzling glare of the lightning, the dashing of the white waves about the boat, with the swarthy faces of the men bending desperately to their oars, made a picture which remained in Julian's mind for many a day.

Sometimes, when his courage quailed, he quietly made the Sign of the Cross and whispered a "Hail Mary" to the Star of the Sea; then nerved himself to emulate the endurance of these rude seamen, who remained stonily silent save when necessary orders were given. More than one of them noted with admiration the resolute bearing of the boy, as he sat, a slender figure, with folded arms, pale face, and lips tightly compressed. Even the skipper was moved to something like approval; and, as he did not share in the belief of his crew regarding Julian's semi-supernatural

attributes, he all the more commended his manliness and fortitude, and inwardly cursed old Nicholas, who by his devices had deprived him of so promising a seaman.

"Them things he's sendin' up is signals," he muttered to himself, while he watched rocket after rocket soar upward into the blue. "He's warnin' me to bring back the young un,—that's what he's at; and the sea's sidin' with him. I couldn't never git the boats safe off the coast in this gale."

So ruminated the skipper, while he manfully handled his oars like the rest; their hard labor being at last of some avail. By a determined effort they sent the boats ashore, Julian being devoutly thankful when he heard the grating of the keels against the pebbles. He was hastily hustled ashore and through the entrance of the cavern; but not before he had remarked that there was no sign of Nicholas, and that rockets and fires were apparently going of their own volition.

Julian was left in the cavern whence the smugglers had withdrawn him, and which was now dark and silent. He did not remain there long. He began to wonder if the fire still burned upon the hearth, and if the tapers

were still alight in that more comfortable apartment from which loneliness had tempted him. Moreover, it seemed to him that perhaps, after all, it was there that Nicholas had wished him to remain.

He groped his way with some difficulty through the rocky passages, guided by a thread of light which soon deepened into a glow. There blazed the fire upon the hearth; and the candles in the silver candlesticks burned with a steady flame, as if only a moment had passed since he left the spot. To Julian it seemed as if this must be the work of enchantment. Wet and chilled as he was, the warmth and light were most welcome; and he sank into an armchair, realizing at the same time that he was not only very tired, but faint and hungry. Scarcely was he seated when he heard a slight grating sound; and, turning his head, he saw a species of shelf projecting from a corner of the rock. Upon it were plates piled with ham sandwiches and plum-cake, also a glass, and a small jug containing a hot posset of milk. This was sweetened and spiced, and was highly agreeable to the wearied boy. After partaking abundantly of this refection he settled himself in the arm-

chair and fell sound asleep. He woke just as a faint glimmer of dawn stole into the cavern. The fire had at last burned out, and only the two candles—evidently renewed—now relieved the dreariness.

Julian felt rested and refreshed, though somewhat stiff; and a sudden desire, born of his adventurous nature, seized him to explore the cavern. He took up one of the candlesticks and began to look about. He raised one of the skins, and found that it covered but the bare rock; another concealed what seemed to be a door. This, however, appeared to be securely fastened and resisted all efforts to force it open. He raised a third—the skin of a tiger,—and there was revealed a pair of winding stairs leading he knew not whither. As he stood, hesitating, at their base, it seemed to him that he heard a voice, and the voice he could have sworn was that of Sedgwick.

Chapter XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

Julian, hearing Sedgwick's voice, uttered a joyful exclamation, calling out at once in answer. But his voice seemed to die away in the echoes of the cavern. Julian, more intent just then on communicating with Sedgwick than on pursuing the windings of the stairs, descended promptly into a narrow passage, along which he followed the sounds from above and his comrade's piercing calls, till at last he found himself at the entrance to the cavern, and presently stood upon the sandy beach.

As he paused and looked about him, he noted a peculiar shelving rock, covered from top to bottom with a carpet of green moss, and forming almost a sliding tunnel from a height above. Julian regarded this strange descent closely, wondering within himself whether or not it was by means of it that he himself had tumbled downward. While he

was revolving this problem in his mind, he heard a shuffling noise, a stifled exclamation, and then a heavy dark mass came rolling rapidly over the moss-covered incline and landed at the boy's feet. He drew back, startled; and the next moment was almost paralyzed to discover, in the grey light of morning, that it was a human body which had thus rolled swiftly toward him.

After the first movement of terror he drew near to where the figure lay motionless, and found to his dismay that it was Sedgwick. Grieved at the thought that the comrade whom he loved best might be lying there dead, Julian bent over him, unfastened his necktie and the collar of his shirt. Then all at once he remembered his own fall, the brief period of unconsciousness which had followed, and hoped that things would go no worse with Sedgwick. He brought a little of the salt water from the shore in a clam shell and bathed the pale face and moistened the lips. In a very short time the unconscious boy showed signs of reviving. He opened his eyes, stared about him a moment, fixing bewildered eyes upon Julian's face. Then he asked, tremulously:

"Am I—are we—dead?"

Something in the question touched Julian's sense of the ridiculous and he burst into a hearty laugh; Sedgwick, looking at him a moment, began to laugh too. When their merriment had exhausted itself, Sedgwick exclaimed:

"So, curly pate, you're alive, after all! I guess you'll come through anything. But where on earth are we?"

"Get up and look around," said Julian.

As the first step toward following this advice, Sedgwick sat up; then, with Julian's assistance, he slowly rose to a standing posture, stretching himself, and feeling all his bones to be sure that they were unbroken.

"Whatever this place is," remarked Sedgwick, thoughtfully, "I guess I came down pretty much as you did. I was poking in the marsh, hoping to find you dead or alive, when the ground gave in, and here I am. It looks like—like the entrance to a cave!"

"It *is* a cave," replied Julian,—"*the* cave—the cavern in the forest. Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" echoed Sedgwick, catching the contagious enthusiasm.

"And I'm as pleased as anything that you found it, too," went on Julian.

"But you found it first," suggested Sedgwick.

"Oh, I don't think that matters, so long as you found it on your own hook, without any help from me!" declared Julian.

And together they pressed forward, Julian eager to show, and Sedgwick anxious to see the wonders of this mysterious place. When at last they stood in the largest room, before that fire which seemed to burn forever upon the hearth, Sedgwick said:

"Well, these are jolly quarters. I wouldn't mind living here for the rest of my days. But what's to be done now?"

"Wait for Nicholas, I suppose," Julian responded.

They had not long to wait; for, as if in answer to the thought, Nicholas stood suddenly behind them. He showed no sign of surprise at Sedgwick's appearance, though never before in all his years of service with the Mortimers had a second fortune-seeker found the cavern. Greatly to the boys' disappointment—for they would have enjoyed being together in the cavern,—Nicholas announced that he was about to take Julian away. But here came into play the favor

with which the old man had from the first regarded the youngest of the competitors. When Julian appealed to him, declaring that he would much rather stay a second night in the cave than return without Sedgwick to the camp, Nicholas, after a moment's consideration, gave his consent.

He left them as suddenly as he had come; and the boys, disregarding the opportunities for further search which the place might possibly afford, set to work to enjoy themselves. The morning hours were spent out upon the shore, clambering amongst the rocks, fishing with the tackle which was plentifully scattered about, and paddling in a boat which they found on the beach.

Of course Julian told his comrade all about the smugglers, and took him to explore their corner of the cavern,—which, by the bye, looked rather forlorn and dreary in the morning light, the empty kegs and even the weapons having a poor and commonplace appearance. Many a strange tale might the boys have heard, if the rocky walls could have spoken; for it had been a resort of lawless men from time immemorial, and there had always been a tradition in the neighborhood

of the existence of some secret hiding-place at some point along the coast. Of all this, of course, the boys were ignorant.

"I wonder if all the wild tales we read about these sort of people are true?" Sedgwick observed, thoughtfully, as he gazed about him.

"I don't know," replied Julian; "but I tell you what, Sedgwick, if it hadn't been for my mother's prayers, I't have been taken away and have seen far-off places and all that."

"But I don't suppose they go very far," said Sedgwick, "unless they're pirates instead of smugglers."

After a time they reluctantly returned to that habitable part of the cavern where Julian had spent his first night; and were much gratified to find upon the sliding shelf, which had so suddenly appeared before, a substantial meal of bread and cheese.

Having done full justice to the meal, they set about exploring the odd quarters in which they found themselves. Julian wanted to show his friend the winding stairs upon which he had stood when he first heard Sedgwick's voice; but for a long time the search for them seemed absolutely fruitless.

"I could almost swear it was behind that leopard skin," Julian said, discomfited; but the raising of that furry covering disclosed only the solid rock.

It was late in the afternoon when at last they came upon the missing stairway quite unexpectedly. They mounted it with eager haste, and came to a turning that led along a passageway they knew not whither. This they unhesitatingly followed; coming after a time to another winding stairs, which they mounted also, and pressed eagerly along a second passageway. Thus they continued for some time—now going upward, now pressing forward, led by occasional gleams of light from crevices in the rock, till at last they be-thought themselves of turning backward. It was then they realized, with sudden dread, that they were in absolute darkness. They stumbled on, however; but, instead of going downward, continued on and on upon the same level. It finally occurred to them that they were lost in a species of labyrinth, where the darkness grew more and more intense, and from which they knew no way of exit. But as they stood and shivered, another thought flashed upon Julian which set his pulses beating hard.

"Perhaps," he whispered to Sedgwick, "this passageway leads to the hidden room."

"I don't believe it leads anywhere!" cried Sedgwick. But his eyes, too, gleamed in the darkness and his cheek glowed with a certain excitement; for the very thought was a stimulant.

"Suppose we push on?" said Julian, eagerly. "We can't get lost altogether; or if we should, Nicholas will get us out some way,"—for Julian had come to have unlimited confidence in that mysterious personage.

"Here goes, then!" cried Sedgwick.

And together the boys made a rush forward as swiftly as the darkness would permit; feeling their way by rocky ledges, turning now this way, now that. At last they discovered that they were at the head of a stairs leading downward, which caused them to go very cautiously. This experience was but the first of several similar ones, so that they were often on the point of slipping and tumbling precipitately to the ground.

Once they were brought to a halt by what sounded like a mocking laugh. This was blood-curdling, coming through the silence and darkness, and re-echoed from passageway

to passageway. Suddenly, they perceived a gleam of light, and pressed toward it with beating hearts. They were approaching some place, they knew not where. Their expectation rose to fever heat. The gleam as of candles was mingled with the red glow of a fire. What were they about to see? What mysterious vision was to appear before their straining eyes? They came to a halt all at once, and saw before them the very cavern from which they had started. They stood still an instant, and then burst into a peal of laughter such as those rocky depths had never heard before. They sank into easy-chairs before the fire, and utterly exhausted by their late efforts, fell fast asleep.

When they woke they were disappointed to find that they had slept the whole night through, that it was daybreak and Nicholas was standing before them, ready to lead them back to camp.

"Why, we haven't seen half the place yet!" remarked Julian. "And perhaps if we had a little more time we might discover something."

But there was no relenting this time in the old man's wooden face; and the boys, having

first regaled themselves with a fresh supply of bread and cheese, were forced to take leave of that fascinating spot and follow whither their grim guide led.

Nicholas conducted them through some devions paths known to himself, and along the shore beneath the cliff. The sea stretched before the eager eyes of the two lads; it was pearly white, or flushed with the pink of the dawning, and catching quivering arrows of gold from the sky in the east. The tide was just coming in.

They reached camp just as the sun was high in the heavens. They found Jake sitting at the door of his tent. He cowered in a very paroxysm of fright when he first caught sight of Julian, whom he had supposed to be dead. But Julian's cheery voice very soon dispelled the illusion.

"Hello, Jake!" he cried out. "You see I'm alive and kicking!"

"You showed him a short cut to the cavern, Jaky," put in Sedgwick, maliciously.

The look of terror upon Jacob's ill-favored countenance gave place to an expression of rage and hate, just as Nicholas interposed, intimating in his monosyllabic fashion that

no information was to be given regarding the cavern. He also made the adventurous four understand that, though Jake and Wat would be obliged to finish their two weeks in the forest if they desired to continue the quest, Julian and Sedgwick were free to return to the mansion at Pine Bluff, and there await the announcement of the third and last test.

Wat, who had testified genuine delight at the return of his favorite cousin, began to protest that he knew he had no chance of finding the cavern, and wanted only to give up the contest and get out of the horrible forest. He declared that he would return to the house with Sedgwick and Julian.

Jake was divided between cupidity and cowardice. He still hoped that by some exercise of his wits he might discover the cavern, but he was dismayed at the thought of being left any longer without the protection and support of Julian and Sedgwick.

"Look here," observed Julian, "what do you say, Sedgwick, to seeing the two weeks out in the forest?"

"Hurrah!" cried Sedgwick. "It would be twice as much fun as waiting at the house."

Nicholas made no objection, and this point

was speedily settled to the satisfaction of all.

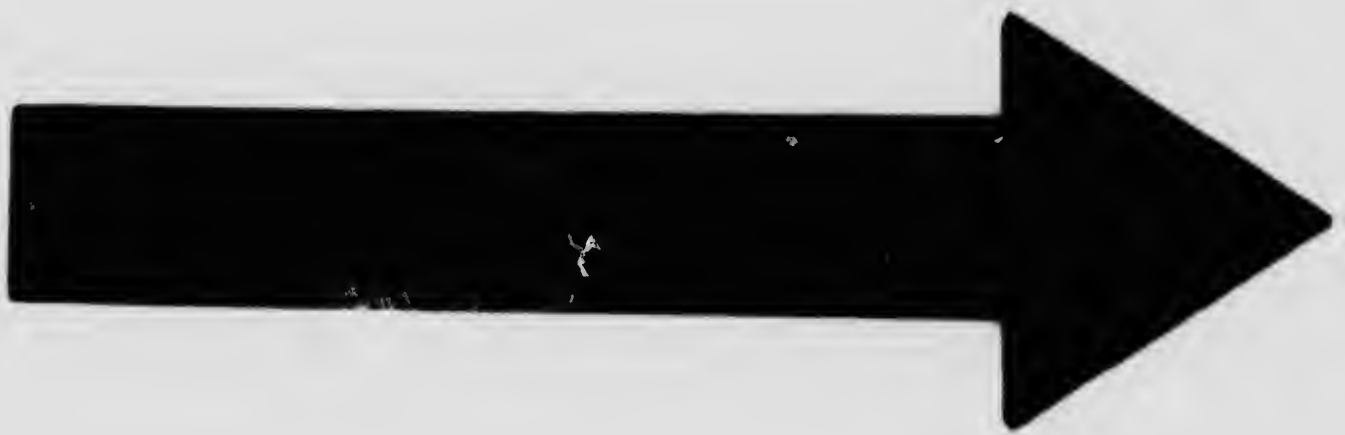
Everyone was hungry by this time, and Julian went off foraging. He remembered the little house near the cliff; and having made his way there, found a tiny woman bent nearly double. Her house was as small as herself and scrupulously clean. She looked up with her bleared eyes into Julian's bright face, as he stood, cap in hand, before her; and readily gave him the milk and butter for which he begged, with a few freshly baked scones thrown in. When Julian offered to pay, jingling his money proudly in his pocket, the old woman altogether refused to allow him, patting him kindly on the shoulder and bidding him come again whenever he wanted milk from her cow.

Julian ran home in triumph to the camp; and the breakfast was a splendid affair, after all, spread out on the green sward before the tents, while the birds sang overhead and butterflies flitted up and down the forest paths.

Chapter XIII.

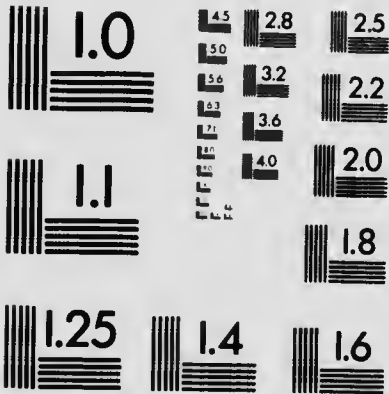
JULIAN MEETS WITH MISFORTUNE.

That evening Julian took out his treasured volume recording the life and times of Anselm Benedict the heroic. He threw himself at full-length upon the grass, losing himself completely in that fascinating chronicle of past scenes and personages, to which his youthful fancy lent an added glow. He read of that gallant, hopeless rally in the town of Worcester, when the Second Charles led on his followers against Fleetwood's Cromwellian troopers. There, in Friar Street, with pike and smallsword, Anselm Benedict Mortimer, with scores of other British gentlemen—English, Irish and Highland,—contested foot to foot and hand to hand the advance of the Covenanters. "It was a most furious contest," read Julian; "none that was whole ceasing to fight, but assisting their comrades so long as their strength served; ever esteeming more of their credit than of their safety."



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They fought with desperate valor, and the name of Anselm Benedict appeared in several dispatches of the day; and it was he again who, while the King was escaping by St. Martin's Gate to the north, at the moment when all was lost made a counter-movement with the Earl of Cleveland and a few other gentlemen and retainers, to draw upon them the fury of the Cromwellians and cover the King's retreat.

Numberless were the feats recorded of heroism, of reckless daring,—all inspired by unswerving loyalty to God and country; all showing that far-off ancestor to have been at once chivalric and romantic, valorous, and above all religious. They delighted the soul of his enthusiastic, hero-worshipping descendant under American forest trees; but even to his immature judgment they seemed less glorious than that after-struggle, when the man of mature years deliberately gave up fame and fortune and country "for that one true Catholic and Apostolic Faith, which is of a surety more precious to a man than goods of fortune, or even life itself." It was a splendid, inspiring tale—the flight, capture, fine, imprisonment in a dungeon, and finally

the death sentence,—all of which were unable to shake the superb courage and constancy of the confessor of Christ. The capital penalty was avoided by a hairbreadth escape; and Anselm Benedict took the path of exile over the ocean wastes and settled at last in the New England colonies, where toleration of a man's convictions was but slowly raising its head.

Sometimes, in his enthusiasm, Julian read aloud a paragraph or two from those annuals of the past; but it must be owned that they called forth only a half-hearted response from his auditors. Jake openly sneered; Wat could not understand, and kept putting exasperating questions, which proved that he had not the remotest idea of what the book was about. Sedgwick was a simple, honest lad, susceptible to good impressions, and willing to do right according to his lights; but he was totally without ideals, detested history, and had made his heroes chiefly of successful athletes or daring aeronauts.

That which did attract and hold Jake's attention was the outer covering of the volume, and the precious gems with which it was incrustured. His eyes fairly sparkled with cupid-

ity at their color and lustre, especially when Julian, in the simplicity of his heart, began to dilate upon the great value of the book. A plan was slowly forming in the boy's evil mind, by which he could at once injure Julian, whom he hated, and secure a substantial advantage for himself. He argued that if he could obtain possession of the book, it would not be by any means stealing. It seemed little likely now that he could ever discover the jewel and the hidden room. Should he by a lucky chance do so, the book would be but a small item in the list of valuables then falling to his share; while, in the contrary event, it was only fair that he, a genuine descendant of the Mortimers, should secure this small portion of their wealth. He, therefore, laid his plans carefully, and determined in the first place to discover where his unsuspecting cousin kept hidden the precious chronicle.

"You'd better be careful of that book of fairy-tales," sneered Jake, with an oblique look at Julian from out his dark eyes and a sharpening of his hatchet-face, "or you'll have old man Mortimer and half a dozen other blokes after you."

"Oh, I am careful!" said honest Julian, impulsively. "I keep it under my pillow at night, and in the daytime I hide it in a hole in the ground between the tent poles, with leaves and a rug over it."

Something in Jake's expression as he listened struck Sedgwick, and he hastily interrupted Julian, but too late to produce the effect he intended. Jake, having secured the desired information, skilfully changed the subject. But long after they had all sought the shelter of their tents, Sedgwick pondered upon the singular expression of John Jacob's face, and feared that it portended no good to Julian.

Next day was cheerless and cold, with a drizzling rain which finally intensified into a downpour. The boys, shivering in their tents, experienced to the full the discomforts of life in the woods, under leaden skies, when the dull drip, drip, drip, from the sodden leaves upon the path seemed interminably weary and monotonous.

"I guess if it had rained much, we'd have given up the whole job long ago," observed Sedgwick, poking his head in between the curtains of Julian's tent.

Julian looked up brightly. He had almost forgotten the matter in the fascinating story of Anselm Benedict's life and doings.

"I suppose it is dismal," responded Julian. "I wonder if there's any place where we could make a fire?"

Sedgwick's face brightened.

"Let's see!" he cried, looking out upon the landscape, which was not very promising. "Perhaps in that sheltered corner over there. Hardly any rain has got through; and it couldn't be dangerous, because the trees are so wet."

Julian, having waited long enough to conceal his treasured volume, went forth with his cousin to investigate. They brought out some dry wood from the tent, and presently had the satisfaction of kindling a blazing fire on the spot indicated by Sedgwick. Wat came forth from his quarters in great delight at the fire, which he hoped would prevent him from taking cold. Jake, too, strolled out, in lazy enjoyment of the crackling logs; though he did not vouchsafe one word of commendation to the kindlers of the blaze.

When the twilight fell, ghostly shadows began to creep in and out among the trees;

a bat, attracted by the blaze, came forth from obscurity and circled about; the katydids droned in the foliage; and a wind stirring up from the west dispersed the clouds and drove away the rain. The boys beguiled the time with stirring stories of daring and adventure; Julian drawing some of the wondrous anecdotes from the life of their common ancestor, the chivalric Anselm Benedict. At last it became time to think of supper, and it was found that water was needed from the spring. This occasioned some surprise, as a large tin pail had been filled after breakfast; and only one of the four—the enterprising Jake—knew that it had been purposely spilled. The only thing to be done was to fetch more, and Sedgwick and Julian set out to replenish the pail. This was precisely what Jake had expected, for he had gone with unusual alacrity to procure what had been needed for the morning.

Once the two comrades had disappeared, Wat devoted himself to the care of the fire, and Jake began to stroll carelessly about, edging ever toward the tents. Loudly proclaiming that he was going into his own tent for some cooking utensil, he remained there

but a moment. He stood at the door looking forth into the darkness. The damp, cool smell of the woods, heavy with the delicious fragrance of the forest depths, smote upon his nostrils. The drip, drip of the rain from the trees, like noiseless footsteps, startled him back each time that he attempted to move. The birds were all still in their nests; the hush of night lay over the forest; and the shadows of the woods, intensified by the glare of the firelight, concealed his movements from Wat, who was intent on stirring up the fire and heard only the crackling of the logs.

Hence it was an easy matter for the catlike Jake to slip from his own into Julian's tent, where everything lay around in a kind of cheerful disorder,—for Julian used to say that he needed his mother to tidy up. Once on the scene of the contemplated theft, the unscrupulous burglar quickly found his way to where the precious volume lay buried. He had found out the exact spot from Julian, and so lost not a moment in securing his booty. Thus it was that while merry-hearted Julian, in rain coat and rough hat, was swinging along the dripping paths in company with honest Sedgwick, a treacherous act against him was being done.

Jake, having secured the book, crept stealthily back to his own tent, panting and breathless as though he had been a long distance, with staring eyes and burning cheeks. It seemed to him as if he were an hour in passing from tent to tent. Once safe back in his own quarters, he hugged the precious volume to his breast with fiendish glee, and held it close to the open door that he might see the reflection of the firelight in the glowing gems upon the cover. It seemed to the excited fancy of the wretched lad that they glowed with a baleful light, and were living and conscious of his act.

All at once Wat called out to him:

"I say, Jake, I think you might help to keep up this fire!"

Jake started as if he had been stung. The voice seemed to be that of an accuser charging him with the theft. In his fright he almost dropped the book; but, presently rallying, he hid it in an obscure corner. Hastening forth, he almost rushed into the arms of Sedgwick, who fixed a penetrating look upon his agitated face, just then revealed by the firelight.

"Halloo, Jakey! You look as if you had seen a spook!"

"I—I have got a chill!" stammered Jake,—
"that's all."

"You wouldn't be so chilled if you had been carrying water for a mile or so," Sedgwick responded, after which there was a diversion for supper: broiling bacon, baking potatoes and cobs of corn in the ashes, and boiling the kettle to make a pot of hot coffee. For all, except Jake of the guilty conscience, this was really a festive supper. It only seemed to add to the hilarity that the coffee-strainer had got lost, so that the coffee was a trifle muddy, and some of the ears of corn were a little scorched.

When Julian went to his tent that night, he thought he would like to read a page of the fascinating memoirs. He carefully uncovered the hiding-place and put his hand into the hole. His fingers came in contact only with the paper which he had placed between the volume and the damp earth. He groped about feverishly: no volume was there. The cold sweat broke out upon his forehead, he trembled from head to foot. He snatched a candle from its place in a tin sconce on the wall, and sent its rays into the hole: there was nothing to be seen.

He threw himself upon the ground and burst into tears. In all the trials to which he had been subjected during the weeks that were past, he had never given way before. Many things conspired to make the loss of the memoirs peculiarly bitter: the trust which his grandfather had reposed in him, the inestimable value of the book, and probably his own disgrace. For it was not at all unlikely that his carelessness, even if no harsher name were put upon it, would disqualify him from pursuing the quest. He rose and stole out through the darkness, toward Sedgwick's tent. The stars were shining brightly after the rain, and some night-bird called afar in the distance. Sedgwick was sleeping soundly. Julian made no effort to arouse him; but, returning to his own quarters, remained awake, so that the dawn found him white-faced and haggard from the trouble of his thoughts.

A second time he peeped into Sedgwick's tent. This time the sleeper stirred uneasily and finally opened his eyes. He fixed them drowsily upon Julian, until something in his friend's face attracted even his wandering attention. He sat up, exclaiming

"I say, curly pate, what's up

"O Sedgwick," answered Julian, "my heart's broken: the book is gone!"

"The book!" echoed Sedgwick, who, not so interested in the memoirs as his cousin, did not remember at first what book was meant.

"Anselm Benedict's book," answered Julian, with a sob in his voice such as his cousin had never heard from him before.

With a sudden realization of what had happened and what it meant to Julian, Sedgwick started to his feet. He made a hasty toilet and accompanied his cousin back to the latter's tent, where together the two boys explored the hiding-place once more, but in vain.

"That villain Jake!" cried Sedgwick, with a sudden flash of intuition. "He has a hand in it, or I'm mistaken."

Julian, however, refused to entertain this notion, or even so much as to question the guilty boy. Sedgwick had no such scruple, and put John Jacob through a tolerably searching investigation. Jake had planned out his part by this time, and acted it thoroughly. He affected the utmost indifference about the whole matter, declaring that it was

altogether Julian's affair if he chose to bring valuable books from the library and then report that they were lost. He threw out this last suggestion with so meaning a glance and so evident an insinuation that he very nearly provoked Sedgwick to violence.

Julian, however, had but one thought—to see his grandfather as soon as possible and make known the loss. He set forth through the forest at sunrise. The woods, fresh from the rain, gave forth delightful odors; and the leaves in their renewed verdure were hung with raindrops, glittering like jewels in the morning light. But Julian's heart was so heavy that he had no eyes for the beauties of nature. He sped on and on, and then had to wait an hour or more for the appearance of his grandfather.

Mr. Mortimer was an early riser, and took a constitutional on the lawn every morning at seven. On this occasion he scarcely stepped forth when he saw Julian running toward him. The boy, in his impetuous truthfulness, was only too eager to acquaint his grandfather with the loss he had sustained. He ran swiftly across the lawn and reached his grandfather's side, panting and breathless; under-

going one of those agonizing moments more common in early youth than is generally supposed. Sedgwick had advised him to spare himself this ordeal, and allow Nicholas, in his mysterious fashion, to acquaint Mr. Mortimer with the theft. But this course of action did not commend itself to the boy's manly fearlessness, nor to his sense of honor and justice. He alone was responsible and he alone must take all the consequences.

Mr. Mortimer looked down upon him with genuine kindness. He was growing attached to this fine-hearted lad, who alone of all who had run the traditional race had seemed to be imbued with the highest qualities of the dead-and-gone ancestor. His natural good feeling and kindness of heart, which had been embittered by his own failure, reasserted themselves, more or less, under Julian's genial influence, as the sun shines upon the hoar-frost of the valley and melts it away. He fully appreciated his grandson's indomitable spirit, high courage and thorough-going honesty. He told himself that he might trust this boy in any emergency and would never meet with disappointment.

"Grandfather," said Julian, his voice

choked with a very passion of grief and excitement, "I have lost the book,—Anselm Benedict's book!"

"What!" cried the grandfather, with an expression of such grief and disgust as confirmed Julian's worst forebodings.

"It was lost, stolen or something from my tent in the forest!"

"Stolen from your tent in the forest!" echoed Mr. Mortimer, with a sneering contempt which brought out all that was most repulsive in a countenance ordinarily handsome and marked by a certain philosophic calm. "And pray who was in the forest but yourselves, and perhaps a wild animal or two? Who could have taken it?"

"I don't know,—oh, I don't know!" cried Julian. "And I'd rather have cut off my right hand than have it happen."

"A right hand would not be of much use in this emergency," observed Mr. Mortimer in his coldest voice; "so that I would advise you, my young man, to hasten back to the forest and continue searching until the volume is found. The expense of replacing it would ruin your mother; and I think, though I am not yet sure, that the occurrence will

prevent your competing any further for the great prize."

Now, it flashed into Julian's mind that this was rather unjust, considering that Mr. Mortimer had almost forced the book upon him, hinting in high good-humor that he would no doubt be able to pay for it, if lost, out of the fortune accruing from the ruby. But he quickly dismissed the thought, being too generous to shift the blame from his own shoulders to those of any other.

"Have you reason to suspect any one?" inquired the grandfather.

"No, sir, I had it hidden away."

"Were the other lads acquainted with the hiding-place?"

"Yes; but, of course, none of them would take it. I wonder if an animal could have been the thief?"

"Animal indeed!" retorted the grandfather, who was furiously angry at the whole affair; the more so as he felt that he had been to blame for intrusting so precious a volume to a mere boy. "Get out of my sight, in any case; and don't come near me till you have some news of the volume!" the angry old gentleman concluded.

As poor Julian fled back to the forest, his heart bursting with new and painful emotions, feeling convinced that no boy had ever been so miserable before, he suddenly encountered Nicholas lurking in the shadow of the trees, like some gnome of the woods, and forthwith blurted out the story of his misfortunes. Nicholas' wooden face remained perfectly undisturbed by the recital; nor did he give Julian any sign of encouragement, save only a slight pat on the shoulder. Then he pointed toward the forest depths, saying laconically, "Go!"—and Julian was left alone.

He ran on and on till he reached the camp, with a faint hope springing up in his heart, even as the leaves raised their heads after being beaten down by the storm. But the day wore to afternoon and there was no trace whatever of the missing volume. Both Julian and Sedgwick, who had energetically pursued the search, were utterly discouraged. All at once, however, just as the shadows were purpling the west, a great outcry was heard in the trees adjoining the camp. Presently Nicholas emerged, grasping Jake by the back of the neck with one hand and holding up the missing volume with the other.

"You let me go, you old sneak! You stole the book yourself and try to pretend that I did it."

Nicholas took not the slightest notice of Jake's exclamations, nor of his frantic struggles to get free. He hurried the miserable boy into the very centre of the camp where Julian sat in dejection, with Wat hovering about, eager to offer any consolation in his power; and Sedgwick pacing up and down, his honest face showing genuine concern.

Nicholas shook off Jake as if he had been an obnoxious reptile, and held out the book to Julian. The latter could scarcely believe that he really saw the precious volume again. But his pleasure at its return was swallowed up in horror, disgust and indignation at his cousin's treacherous conduct. He could not trust himself to speak; however Sedgwick made up for the silence, expressing his feelings in forcible terms.

But here Nicholas interposed, and made them understand that matters must go on as before. So Jake, darkbrowed and sullen, was left unmolested; though needless to say that his presence there, after what had happened,

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threw a constraint over the remaining days in the forest. He tried hard to treat the matter as a joke, and declared that he meant only to play a trick on Julian, and would have restored the book in the end. This explanation Julian, with his customary generosity, was finally led to believe, and was on terms of comparative friendliness with Jake during the final residence in camp.

Chapter XIV.

BEFORE THE THIRD TEST.

The time was drawing near for the boys to leave the forest, when one evening Sedgwick and Julian were caught, at some distance from the camp, in a wild storm of wind and rain, with hailstones big as pebbles falling upon the paths and rattling against the boughs. The wind raged with such fury as to shake to their roots even the tallest trees. ✓

The boys, who were in a remote part of the forest, struggled along manfully for some time, accepting the buffets of the storm with cheerful indifference. But just as they began to grow exhausted, being thoroughly drenched besides, they caught sight of a singular-looking structure formed of the boughs of trees, which were piled one upon the other in a most fantastic manner; but, cunningly enough, were set over against a rock which had been carried thither by some strange convulsion of nature. This served as a bulwark

to protect the frail dwelling against the fury of the elements. By a common impulse, the boys made for this shelter, which they supposed to be deserted.

Scarcely had they crossed the threshold when they saw their mistake. The hut gave every sign of being inhabited, though all in the interior was in wild confusion. The disordered fancy of a madman was clear in the incongruous mingling of all sorts of oddities. Bits of colored cotton, torn prints, strips of cloth, grasses, snake skins, — all sorts of trivialities which had caught the wandering fancy of the Mad Hermit, were displayed upon the walls or hanging from the roof, and interlaced with festoons of cobwebs, the growth apparently of many years.

Upon a couch of leaves and straw in one corner lay the weird figure of the Mad Hermit, and it was evident even to the inexperienced eyes of the two observers that Death had claimed him. He lay in solemn majesty, his cloak gathered about him, his snow-white beard gleaming out of the stillness, his restless feet and wandering mind stilled forever.

The boys, awestricken, bent their heads reverently.

"Let us say a prayer," whispered Julian; and together they knelt in that strangely impressive scene.

The storm grew momentarily wilder and wilder, so that it seemed to threaten the hut with destruction,—though it, like its late occupant, had weathered many a storm. The lightning flashed through the loosely placed boughs which formed the walls, and across the calm face of the dead. As the boys recited the *De Profundis*, Julian suddenly caught sight of a small picture of the Mother of Sorrows stuck upon the wall. In the wild disorder of the place, it was as a beacon upon some stormy sea, the symbol of peace and mercy, the sign of at least a long-past faith. For the Mortimers had always been Catholics, and even the most degenerate among them had preserved the name and some outward practice of that religion which was synonymous with what was most honorable in their race.

"Let us say the Beads for him," observed Julian.

And so, amidst the howlings of the tempest, the two boys in some sort performed a *Requiem* over the mortal remains of that

singular being who had so long inhabited these desert places, and who, by his strange antics and weird appearance, had no doubt contributed to the wild tales which were in constant circulation through the country concerning the forest of Pine Bluff. Their only further care in the matter was to acquaint Nicholas with the death of the Hermit; and in due course his remains, very quietly, but with honor, were laid to rest in the vault sacred to the Mortimers.

When the pleasant two weeks in the forest had come to an end, the boys returned to the mansion at Pine Bluff. There was the sun shining on the roof of the dwelling; there were the blue pigeons sunning themselves in its rays and walking majestically to and fro; there was the lawn, with its tall trees sheltering colonies of rooks that settled there in the springtime; and there was the cliff overhanging the sea and bordered with thick pines. It seemed to Julian as if all things had grown very familiar and he had always known them, and yet that it was long since he had seen them; and Sedgwick was vaguely impressed with the same feeling.

"It is a jolly old place!" he said, looking

about with an air of satisfaction. "And if it's ever yours, curly pate, I am coming here to stay with you."

"Just as likely it will be your own," answered Julian, turning a somersault out of pure joyousness.

He instantly straightened himself to attention, however, as his grandfather appeared at the library window. Forgetting the last interview, which had been decidedly unpleasant, Julian ran forward to meet him with perfect freedom and cordiality. This was the very best course he could have taken, had he planned it deliberately; for it relieved Mr. Mortimer from the awkwardness of making a first overture after his late displeasure.

"Good morning, grandfather!" Julian cried out. "I'm glad to see you again."

"And to have got out of the enchanted forest, I suppose?" said the old gentleman; but there was a faint glow of pleasure on his pale cheek, and a sparkle in his eye at the hearty and spontaneous greeting.

"Oh, I liked being in the forest well enough!" Julian answered; "though we got lots of frights while we were there. But it's nice being back, and we're all dying to know about the third test."

"You won't have very long to wait for that," said Mr. Mortimer. "Immediately after luncheon I shall make the announcement, and in about half an hour you will hear the gong sound."

He then withdrew to the library, glad as he always was to return to his books; and the boys, left to themselves, ran and jumped and wrestled, climbing tall trees and startling the rooks into angry clamor. Julian set out to run a race with a chipmunk that was skipping along the hedge on the garden side of the lawn. But he soon gave it up, joining in the shouts of laughter with which Sedgwick and Wat greeted his endeavor.

After luncheon came the summons which was to lead them for the last time into the presence of Anselm Benedict.

So far Mr. Mortimer had given no signs to whether or no he had heard of Jake's latest misdemeanor with regard to the book. He had not referred in any way to the loss or recovery of the precious volume. Jake thought he had regained his confidence, and felt assured that Mr. Mortimer had accepted the excuse he himself had invented—that his abstraction of the book was merely a joke. He

was oppressed by no special uneasiness, therefore, when the grandfather turned the key and ushered the four into the presence of Anselm Benedict. Julian felt a keener admiration than ever for their remarkable ancestor, and was more eager than ever to study every detail of the face and figure of that splendid soldier, who had left so strong an impress on the annals of his time.

Mr. Mortimer surveyed the two boys for a moment or two in silence; then he touched the spring, revealing once more the now familiar portrait. He turned toward the pictured figure on the wall, no longer in mockery, but with a subtle deference and a more sympathetic understanding than ever before; and for this change Julian, though he knew it not, was responsible.

"Anselm Benedict," he said, "for the last time your four descendants are assembled in your presence; and it is my painful duty to declare the absolute unworthiness of one amongst them, either to appear here, or to take any further part in a contest which is primarily governed, at least, by the rules of gentlemanly conduct."

Jake's face grew livid during this address,

for his conscience told him that to him alone it could apply.

"Whatever may have been the faults and follies of the Mortimers," the old man went on, his voice growing colder and colder as he proceeded—"their lack of ambition, their supineness, or their want of energy,—they were at least gentlemen. One here present has failed most conspicuously in those qualities which even the best amongst them have retained. Therefore, I think I am only voicing your sentiments, Anselm Benedict, and following the rules you have laid down for this contest, when I request John Jacob to withdraw from this room and from this house, as well as from any further part in the search for the lost jewel of the Mortimers—"

"Grandfather!" cried Julian, eagerly interrupting, "if you mean that affair about the book, Jake explained! It is all right,—it was a mistake,—he did it for a joke."

Mr. Mortimer turned a rebuking eye—in which there was yet a moisture—upon the eager pleader.

"Please, grandfather," persisted Julian, "let us all go on together to the end! I'd hate to have Jake leave now,—we've gone so far!"

"What you ask is impossible," declared the grandfather. "He has violated every rule laid down for the contest. He has shown neither courage nor fortitude nor resolution. He has proved himself sadly deficient in truth, in honor, in fine feeling; and has put a climax to his inglorious career by an act not only of dishonesty, but of malice. For with the recovered volume was found a calculation of the amount which the book would probably bring, and of the injury which its loss would be to you."

If ever there was the picture of a beaten hound, it was Jake being hurried from the room and from the arena of possible success by the inexorable Nicholas. Julian felt a certain pity for him and a regret for the late occurrence.

"If I hadn't taken the book to the forest," he whispered to Sedgwick, "this would never have happened."

"The book be blowed!" answered Sedgwick. "It wasn't that alone: it was everything. He's the meanest hound—that Jake,—the most cowardly beggar I ever came across."

Here Mr. Mortimer imposed silence upon

them by beginning to consider the case of Wat.

“Walter Wortlington”, he said, “has not discovered the cavern as yet, it is true; nor has he shown conspicuously those qualities which tend toward success. But, if he so desires, and by consent of the other competitors, he may undertake the third test, even though the chance of success is diminished, as we are informed, by his failure to discover the cavern in the forest.”

Walter was beginning to protest that it was no use, that he had not strength enough for any more ordeals; but Julian nudged him to be silent and wait events; and Mr. Mortimer likewise advised him to hear what the third test might be before finally deciding.

The old gentleman then began to read from that formidable document, yellow with age, the final test, which was to decide whether or no any of the competitors should discover the hidden room and the lost jewel of the Mortimers.

“But one fortune-seeker has ever got so far in the quest,” declared the old man, “as to discover the whereabouts of the cavern. He belonged to a generation far removed from

ours, and his after-fate is not recorded, save that he failed in the third test. It is one of great difficulty, requiring courage, endurance, and ingenuity."

The boys waited breathlessly for an explanation of this third trial which was finally to try their mettle. They were awed and subdued by the expulsion of Jake from amongst them,—though Sedgwick, at least, was convinced of its justice; and Julian's mind began to wander off to the succession of brilliant episodes with which the soldierly figure on the wall was now associated. He was recalled by the voice of Mr. Mortimer explaining the nature of the test, and detailing in a very precise manner what was expected of the competitors.

Each boy was to be imprisoned for a night in a species of dark hole or underground passage in the earth. Thence he was free to make his way out, if he could; and a tradition had always existed that that way led to the finding of the room and the treasure. But no one had ever found them. Those even who had persevered in remaining the night—for to this an alternative was given by Nicholas appearing before midnight and asking if they

wished to be free—had been found at sunrise eager to be free, and willing to relinquish all prospect of success rather than remain longer in those gruesome quarters.

“If”, said Mr. Mortimer, when he had finished the details of the last ordeal, “no one has ever succeeded in this final test, only one ever got so far as to enter upon it. Therefore you should feel encouraged, my boys, and resolutely push on to what may be a glorious ending,—that is, if the whole idea of hidden room and lost jewel be not fables woven in the active brain of Anselm Benedict; some splendid mirage which he shows to the voyagers upon the ocean of life, to encourage them to proceed with energy, constancy, and endurance. And yet,” he went on after a pause, suddenly addressing the portrait, “why should I thus discredit your utterances, since one at least of your descendants has shown that simple truth and goodness may carry their possessor far on the road to success?”

His eyes took on a far-reaching, dreamy expression, as though he were revolving some problem in his mind. It seemed as if the antagonism which had existed between him and the brilliant if somewhat visionary an-

cestor were removed, and that this old and disillusioned man began to feel the same bond of union which linked Julian's glowing youth with the past.

"Now, my boys, concluded Mr. Mortimer, "I will not pretend to advise you as to whether or no you should relinquish all hope of further success, or enter upon an ordeal which few would have cared to undergo. It is full, no doubt, of difficulties, hardships and terrors, real or imaginary."

Julian, as the war horse at the sound of battle, pricked up his ears, figuratively; and, throwing back his head, declared that he would like to make this final trial.

"If we fail, you see, grandfather, we shall have tried everything; and don't you think that's better?"

The grandfather bowed his head as in a sort of deference; and Sedgwick, in his blunt way, declared that he would stand by Julian. But Wat most emphatically decided to give up any chance of success rather than go down in any dark hole.

"If I were strong, it would be different," he said; "but I might ruin my health, and my father and mother told me that I mustn't do anything of that kind."

This being settled, Walter Worthington was ruled out of the competition; and he accepted that result quite cheerfully, glad to be relieved of the necessity for any further effort. He was almost certain that he could not have succeeded in any case, and had persuaded himself that there was in reality neither room nor jewel, but only some kind of fable to try the mettle of the boys; and with him his health and personal comfort had always been of first importance.

So Sedgwick and Julian, being the only ones left in the arena, grew more and more excited, as they paced the lawn together in eager talk. Julian was full of bright hopefulness, which infected Sedgwick, who was in the main a sturdy and courageous lad.

Suddenly they came upon Jake lying full-length amongst the brushwood on the cliff, in very much the same spot where he had poked amongst the leaves on the morning following the arrival of the young adventurers at the mansion of Pine Bluff. Then he had been boastful, arrogant, confident of success; now he was fairly gnashing his teeth and clutching at the weeds growing about him, in a very agony of impotent rage and despair.

Julian pulled Sedgwick by the sleeve and endeavored, out of respect for the miserable boy's feelings, to steal away unnoticed; but Jake, chancing to catch sight of them, burst into a torrent of abuse against all concerned and especially against Julian. The language was such that Julian clapped his hands to his ears and ran away; while only contemptuous pity for his cousin's wretched plight deterred Sedgwick from administering personal chastisement.

Jake's disappointment, which his natural avarice and greed of gain would have rendered sufficiently keen, was intensified by the knowledge of what awaited him at home. His mother had long been dead. His father was a needy adventurer, who had failed in the first effort to discover the Mortimer jewel, had been embittered deeply by the failure, and had endeavored to eke out a scanty income by the exercise of his wits. While building on the chance of his son's success, he had failed to implant in him one of those sterling principles which alone could aid him in the great competition. Yet none the less bitter would be his disappointment, and none the less envenomed his fury against his unfortunate son.

Sedgwick and Julian had only one more glimpse of Jake's hatchet face, sullen and morose, with wildly staring eyes; and this was from out the carriage window as he was being driven to the station, in company with Wat.

The latter was in high good humor, delighted at the prospect of getting home. He knew that he would be well received, and that his indulgent parents would prefer the loss of a problematic fortune to the chance of their only child endangering health and strength in a contest which he knew to be beyond him. In fact, they had permitted him to enter into the competition only because he had been pleased with the novelty of the idea, and had set his heart upon seeking the hidden room and the lost jewel. The parents were in easy circumstances, the mother having brought a substantial inheritance to her husband; and they were not ambitious. Walter had, therefore, said a warm and cordial "Good-bye" to his comrades, particularly Julian, to whom he had become much attached.

"We must see each other often when all this is over," he had declared. "If there is a fortune, I hope you'll win it, Julian; though

Sedgwick is almost as near, and deserves it next best. I'm afraid, though, that grandfather is right, and that there isn't any fortune at all."

So Wat's last greeting was an effusive waving of his hand from the carriage window to the two upon the lawn, and the renewed hope that he would see them soon again, when the test was over.

"Oh, I wish it were well over!" said Sedgwick, staring after the carriage. "But I'm like you, Julian: I want to stick fast to the end. If you can do it, so can I; and I know my people would rather I held out to the end, even if I failed at last. My father said he always regretted not having gone in for the third test. Anyway, I wouldn't want to leave you, curly pate, lose or win."

"I hope we'll both win!" cried Julian, heartily. "And then I suppose they'll let us divide the fortune; and perhaps we can give some to poor old Wat, and unlucky Jake too."

"I wouldn't give that Jake a brass farthing," responded Sedgwick, full of honest indignation.

"Well, we may not get anything to keep

or give away," said Julian; "so we needn't bother yet. Come on,—I'll race you to the woods over there."

✓ Off they went as if neither of them had a care on his mind, or a thought of that trying ordeal which awaited him. Fresh air, sunshine, high spirits, a clean conscience were all with them, and they were richer than any prince. But when the chill of the early autumn evening came into the air, and mists stole into the glowing sunset of the western sky, their spirits became subdued, and they began to consider more gravely the curious experience before them. Sedgwick, by right of age, was to precede his cousin, as on former occasions. Should he succeed, Julian was to undergo a similar ordeal, without having communicated with the other, and so run an equal chance of securing the great prize.

"Suppose we say the Beads together?" suggested Julian. "We always said them at college, and I read in the book that Anselm Benedict carried his rosary with him all the time, and said it on the eve of battle or whenever he was exposed to any danger."

Sedgwick readily agreed to join in the prayers. For he had plenty of faith, though

in his upbringing it had been kept in the background; and until he met Julian, he had fancied that it was something of which a boy was more or less ashamed. Sedgwick had remarked this to Wat one day:

“Of all the fellows I have ever met, Julian’s about the only one who doesn’t seem ashamed of being good—of saying prayers or anything like that.”

And this being repeated to Julian, he had set his head on one side, as was his habit when thinking, and wondered why any fellow should be ashamed of saying his prayers or trying to be good.

So the two boys paced the lawn, in the shadow of the tall trees which for generations had shaded the mansion at Pine Bluff, and mingled their young voices with the sigh of the wind in the pines and the vesper song of the birds; repeating that old-time prayer which prelate and prince, the sage and illiterate, the rich and the poor, the great and the lowly, have said through the ages in the Church of God.

Mr. Mortimer, pausing at the window, heard the sound of their voices, and listened an instant to what they were saying. For the

tide was low that night, under the pine cliff, and the noise of the waves was silent, so that the words of the Rosary came distinct to his ears. The man who had grown world-hardened saw, as in a picture, his boyhood's home, and heard once more the prayer falling from lips long silent. Softly he withdrew, and with bowed head passed into his library, where the scientific thought of many generations had occupied his mind to the exclusion of that higher love, which was all contained in the words the boys were saying,—the mysteries of faith with their bearing on this life and the life to come.

Chapter XV.

THE FINAL TEST.

It must be owned that, as night drew near, Julian felt a creepiness in all his nerves; though it was Sedgwick, and not he, who had first to face the dread ordeal. The shadow of evening deepened suddenly, as in autumn is apt to be the case; purple clouds enshrouded the departing sun, as a pall of that royal hue envelops the bier of a conqueror; and a grayness stole over the landscape, bringing with it a deep hush. The birds were still in the boughs of the trees, the insect clamor subsided, and a star or two appeared in the heavens, as the boys came out from their substantial evening meal.

Nicholas, grim and fantastic as the shadows of the trees on the lawn, stood somewhat suddenly beside the boys. He had come to lead Sedgwick into duress vile. The cousins wrung each other's hand, as if they were never more to meet upon the green earth's

surface. Then Sedgwick passed through a portentous-looking trap-door, which Nicholas had opened in the very heart of the brush-work upon the cliff. Neither of the boys had discovered this entrance before, despite their constant researches.

Julian, left alone, cast a swift glance upwards at a star which shone, glowing and bright, in the gathering darkness; and it seemed to him like a beacon of hope. He went to bed early that night, and lay awake wondering how it fared with Sedgwick in those fearful subterranean depths, to which, imagination suggested, he must have gone. He recalled, as he tossed about, restless and sleepless, that first night when he had awaited the summons to appear in presence of their formidable ancestor and to begin the quest which was now so nearly ended.

He was up betimes in the morning; in fact, it was scarcely daylight when he appeared upon the lawn, and there was only a faint streak of dawn in the eastern sky. He wandered about aimlessly, listening with curious impatience to the cheerful chirping of the birds in the nests far overhead. And presently there was Nicholas and there was Sedgwick

beside him. Julian looked for a moment into his cousin's face. Its ruddy color was gone: Sedgwick was deadly pale, and there were traces of exhaustion in his whole appearance. Julian did not like to ask a question, but Sedgwick cried out:

"Oh, it was awful, Julian! And I have—failed!"

"Failed!" said Julian, aghast.

But Nicholas hurried Sedgwick away, nor did he allow any communication between the boys during the whole of that day.

It was one of the longest and most depressing Julian had ever known. He took his luncheon alone with his grandfather, who seemed in a silent mood, buried in thought, and scarcely heeding the presence of his grandson. Julian actually welcomed the coming of the dusk, though it brought him face to face with that dreaded ordeal, which he feared so much the more since his momentary glimpse of Sedgwick. Whatever it might be, it was better to have it over. He should at least go back to his mother, whom he was longing to see; and Sedgwick and he would meet and have some pleasant times together. Even if both cousins were unsuccessful in

finding the fortune, Julian argued that they would have many experiences to talk over and would be friends for life.

Just as Nicholas thrust the young adventurer through that dismal trap-door, he caught a glimpse of the same bright star which he had beheld on the evening previous, and which reminded him of the "Star of the Sea", to whom he had, in his boyish fashion, so tender a devotion. He felt in his pocket to be sure that his beads were there; and he held them close, as Nicholas shut the door with a bang, bolting it upon the outside; and Julian found himself in complete darkness.

The old servitor, however, had provided him with a winding circular taper of wax and a box of matches, so that he would have some means of guiding himself on his way. But in that first moment of dense, overpowering, palpable darkness, the boy felt as if he were wrestling with some giant, and he stood still, not even remembering to light his taper. He stumbled along blindly, mechanically, with an instinct that he should move at all costs from the spot on which Nicholas had left him. Occasionally he encountered the projection of a stone wall, damp and mouldy, from which

he recoiled, feeling as if he had touched some living thing.

For the time being his senses seemed benumbed, as it were; and a curious fancy came over him that he had died, and that this was the dark passage from Life to Death. Oddly enough, this whimsical idea made him remember to light his taper, which seemed symbolical of the light of faith, which alone can illumine that last dreary pathway. He struck match after match, but it was some time before one remained lit, so damp and mouldy was the atmosphere. At last, however, he succeeded in securing a clear light, which, though small, seemed to pierce the surrounding gloom, giving him courage to go on.

Sometimes he was discouraged to find himself up against a blind wall, with no apparent means of outlet, until at last he discovered a crevice and finally a narrow passage, through which he crept on all fours, startling toads and lizards from their accustomed quietude. Occasionally the noise of the sea sounded so loud and so close to him, that he was filled with sudden terror and stood still, trembling and clinging to the rock. What if an in-

cautious movement should throw him headlong into the fathomless depths, the waves swallowing him up in an abyss of blackness! Again, imaginary terrors crowded into his mind, strange spectres flitted before his eyes, fantastic images crowded his overtaxed brain, lurid lights seemed to gleam out of the darkness. A fear of the unseen filled him with horror. But perhaps the most terrifying thought of all was that he might have to remain there forever: that there might be no other exit save that by which he had entered, and that he might never be able to find his way thither again.

An intensity of longing came over him for a glimpse of the sky studded with stars, of the green grass or the waving trees, or of the sunlight on the surface of the sea. He felt that if only this might be, he would sacrifice cheerfully all the fortunes of the world; for "the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind" then appeared to him small and pitiful. But his resolute spirit at last asserted itself, and he reminded himself that he must take heart and press on, either to that goal of success which now seemed to him so shadowy and unreal, or at least to regain that outside world, with its life and warmth and brightness.

He began to recite his Rosary, at first mechanically, then with fervor, until his fears gradually were allayed and something of his natural buoyancy began to return. He fancied himself leading forlorn hopes or facing fearful odds, as Anselm Benedict had done; or, again, as being innured in some fearful dungeon for the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Faith, and making a dash for freedom. Thus passed the time; though he had, in reality, nothing wherewith to contend except silence and darkness. He began to remember how Sedgwick and he had got lost, apparently, in a labyrinth of passages, which finally led to the cavern; and he shrewdly conjectured that these windings led there, or somewhere else more advantageous. But even to reach the light and warmth and rest of the cavern seemed now most desirable.

Besides, he began to ask himself if there could be any truth in the supposition which Sedgwick had once set forth—that the cavern in some way held the secret and was closely connected with the discovery of the lost jewel and the hidden room. In any case, he was determined to try to reach the cave; and, if he could not get any farther, there at least to

await Nicholas in peace and comfort. With this in view, he continued upon his difficult way, not without sundry cuts and bruises and plenty of sharp blows from the projections of the rocks and the sudden turnings. At last he found himself going down, down, down, with considerable speed, as though he were upon an incline. It seemed to him that the toilsome way would never end. His strength began to fail, and he knew that he would soon become altogether exhausted.

Just as he felt a giddiness and faintness coming over him, he was conscious of a glimmer of light, and made a great effort to reach the brightness. In another moment he stumbled and almost fell into the familiar room of the cavern, where the mysterious fire still glowed upon the hearth. By a last effort he threw himself into an easy-chair, blowing out his taper and laying it beside him upon the table. He remained for a time in a perfectly lethargic state.

After a while, however, his dormant faculties awoke to life, and he began to look about him, his eager gaze discovering nothing new whatever. There was the hearth with great logs leaping in a cheerful blaze, and dry sticks

piled beside it, ready to be burned; there were the skins upon the walls and the rug upon the floor, and the table and the candlesticks and the easy-chairs. But was this cavern the end? Were the lost jewel and the hidden room but phantoms of the brain, as the grandfather had suggested; and the trials which the four adventurers had come through but tests of manhood, which should bear their own reward? Somehow, he could not believe this. He felt that Anselm Benedict would never have deceived them and so graphically described what had no real existence. Yet here he, and he alone, had come thus far in the third ordeal and had discovered nothing new.

He sprang from his chair with a sudden strong impulse of hope and courage. The cavern was not the end, but only the means to the end,—he felt assured of that. He would explore every nook and cranny of it. And just as he had come to this determination, he heard the grating sound in the wall, and there was the shelf with sandwiches, plum-cake, and a hot posset of milk. Surely he was the favorite of Nicholas, or whoever provided this mysterious refreshment. He partook of it eagerly; and, as though it had been the fabled

nectar of the gods, it seemed to fill him with new strength and energy.

It occurred to him still more forcibly that, since the dark labyrinths of winding passages all seemed to lead to this habitable portion of the cavern, the clue must be therein, and that some other passage might lead to that goal so long desired and so eagerly sought by generations of the Mortimers. He remembered the opening which he had seen on the morning when he had heard Sedgwick's voice above his head, and he could have sworn that it was under that particular leopard skin, from which green eyes now glared at him malevolently. And yet it was behind that precise covering that a rocky wall had appeared, hopeless and impenetrable.

Nevertheless, he approached it once more, undeterred by the gleam, baleful in the firelight, which shone in the eyes of the beast. They were only eyes of glass, which had replaced the natural orbs of the once fierce beast of the jungle; but they caught the flame and held it as if with suppressed fury. Julian raised the skin and peered at the gray rock, which seemed to stare him in the face. As he was about to drop the skin in discouragement,

ment, he suddenly perceived a curiously carved knob placed within a deep indentation in the stone. He seized this and it yielded: a door flew open, and there were the stairs going upward, two or three at a time, as he had seen them on that other morning. Instantly he began to mount; but, turning backward by a happy instinct, took his waxen taper and the matches from the table. Then he went on, with something of the feeling that the famous youth must have had, who heard above him the magic word "Excelsior!"

When he had mounted to a considerable distance, the stairs made a sudden turn, and there was a passageway similar, as he could not doubt, to those in which he had twice before stumbled blindly, only that this seemed smoother, and that the hand of man had clearly removed obstructions and fashioned a species of tunnel. The light from below still aided the glow of his taper, and he could see his way clearly; but after a time he had to depend entirely upon the glimmer of the wax light, and to pursue his way without the remotest idea as to whither he was going.

When he had gone on thus for some time, he began to hear occasional sounds, such as

the sougling of the wind in the forest trees, or the call of a bird. It flashed upon him that this tunnel led under the forest, and that here was the explanation of one mystery at least. Nicholas walking in that passage could hear voices from above and make his own voice heard. No doubt the tunnel reached down to the rocky shore where the mysterious echo had first been heard, and under those forest paths where stood the camp of the fortune-seekers. But if it led under the forest, what was its final destination? Did it extend as far as the mansion at Pine Bluff? And if so, with what portion of that edifice did it connect? Would it finally lead to the glorious end of all these adventures?

Julian's heart began to beat high, his pulses throbbed, and his feet fairly flew over the damp earth. The twitter of birds coming faintly from above warned him that the dawn was near, and a horrible fear smote on him that perhaps Nicholas would come to snatch him back from the very threshold of success. He had so often seen the old servitor appear at the most unexpected moment, that he would not have been surprised to encounter him coming through the solid rock or upward

from the ground at his feet. But all remained silent, save those whisperings of nature from above; and the boy, sanguine and glowing with renewed hope, urged on by the keenest curiosity, saw before him only the gray rocky sides of the passageway and the cold brown earth at his feet. At last he was brought to a full stop and nearly stumbled over the first of a flight of steps.

"More steps!" he muttered to himself, in discouragement; for they always seemed to bring him into more winding passages. However, he had no alternative but to mount the stairs or go back the way he had come. He looked all about him carefully. This was obviously the way out; and if that way led into the mansion at Pine Bluff, as he believed, he would naturally have to go upward from beneath the earth. He set his foot upon the lowest step. It was made of wood, mouldy and almost rotten: it creaked when he walked, and set numberless strange insects in motion. There was a rude sort of banister, and he seized upon this—though it did not feel secure in his grasp—and resolutely began the ascent. Presently a step broke with his weight, and he was very nearly thrown down into strange depths.

But the boy was not to be deterred now by any obstacles. Pride, ambition, hope, courage,—were all strong within him; the adventurous spirit of his ancestor was alive, and success lured him on, as the sirens of old lured the fabled mariners. He felt that nothing could have made him turn back till he reached the top of those stairs. Yet the stairs seemed very long, and it occurred to him, in his mad excitement, that surely they were taking him to the very roof of his grandfather's dwelling.

He paused every once and a while to take breath, trembling and panting with the thought of what might lie hidden at the top of that damp and mildewed stairway. He had left rocky passages and caverns behind him,—of that he was certain; and the boom of the sea sounded mellowed and softened to his ears.

All at once he stood still and listened. What sound was that, strangely familiar, but weirdly unreal in this stillness, and altogether unexpected in this scene,—metallic and vibrant, grating at first, then softened into melody? He knew at last what it was, and held his breath. What did it portend, and

were all his wanderings to have the commonplace outlet of the principal stairway in the mansion at Pine Bluff? Should he see the servants there, going noiselessly about their work; or his grandfather going down for his morning walk; or Nicholas, who never seemed to have any settled place of abode?

A passionate impatience seized upon the boy. If he suddenly found himself upon that well-known stairway, Nicholas would be there and would lead him away and end his dream forever, and tell him, perhaps, that the treasure he had sought did not exist, and that his adventures had been in vain. By an odd freak of memory, he recalled all the abusive names which Jake used to bestow upon the old servitor, and for a moment he felt tempted to pour them all out upon that unoffending head. Then he told himself that if, after all, the treasure that he sought proved mythical, it would be a good thing to get back to ordinary life and to be done with all these wild and strange adventures.

He stood thus and reasoned with himself long after the vibrant, metallic sound had ceased; for the ancient clock upon the stairs had finished striking the hour of five.

Chapter XVI.

SUCCESS AT LAST.

Yes, Julian was surely very close to the great clock on the stairs which always tolled out the hour in the mansion at Pine Bluff with great, solemn strokes, and which had summoned him to that first memorable interview with Anselm Benedict. But *where* was the clock? The steps, damp and creaking and festooned with cobwebs, upon which he stood, were not the luxuriously carpeted and immaculately clean pair of stairs down which his grandfather came in the early morning, and which he mounted again at night. And yet that clock had tolled, and was even now ticking away in his ear. It dawned upon him at last that he must be at the back of the timepiece, and that there was probably a door which gave entrance to the Mortimer dwelling. And as he stood uncertain, he grew tired of the darkness and silence and longed for the light, which he knew was even then

breaking over the surface of the sea; and for the voice of Nicholas or any other human creature to disturb this monotonous stillness.

The boy felt utterly discouraged as well as disappointed; for most likely he had chanced upon a secret passage from the cavern to the house, which had once been used and was now out of date. He stretched out his hand and it grasped the handle of a door; and, bringing his taper nearer, there was a rusty key. This jangled harshly as he attempted to turn it in the lock; but finally it yielded. He was indeed at the back of the clock in a kind of niche; and, giving way at once to weariness and despondency, he leaned heavily against the wall. As he did so he felt a gradual yielding, and the next moment found himself falling inward.

He was terribly frightened at first, believing that he was falling into some abyss; and then, as he stared and blinked, it occurred to him that he was upon a soft rug, and that the air about him was curiously stale and close, as of a room long shut from the light. He lay still a few moments, pondering, dazed and uncertain; then he sat up and looked about him, and finally rose to his feet. He wan-

dered about aimlessly, until interest and curiosity began to be excited by what he saw. It was an oddly shaped room, and so curiously contrived that it was evident no trace of it appeared from the outside. It was not dark, but the light seemed to be the reflection of other lights, and came glowing—now fiery red, now opalescent green, now royal purple—from stained windows which gave not upon the landscape without but upon a kind of circular corridor illumined by some outside windows.

A faint aromatic perfume pervaded the atmosphere, recalling to Julian's mind some of those quaint Indian legends he had heard; and the stillness was so great that he could almost hear his heart beat. The furniture was antique, of a style which he had never seen before, except in so far as it resembled that apartment below, where the pictured figure of the gallant cavalier held its solitary sway. Julia... felt oppressed by a sense of strangeness and of mystery, which seemed to transport him back into the past, from which he could never come forth again and be just an ordinary twentieth-century boy, going to school and being buffeted about by his classmates.

He scarce dared touch the beautiful and costly objects which lay strewn around, and he did not know the names of any of them. They might have been the work of some strange enchanter, who would lay a spell upon him, were he so much as to fix his eyes too intently upon the rare collection. A curious terror stole over him and seemed to benumb his senses, till all at once his wandering eyes encountered a picture of the Virgin Mother and Child, quaint with the shadows of antiquity, but fair and soft in its tints, mild and benignant in its expression. Before it was a costly vessel of silver, in which burned some perfumed oil. Julian afterward learned that the light had never been extinguished while two centuries and more had run their course, and the old world had seen its innumerable vicissitudes of joy and sorrow, and war and famine and pestilence. It was one of those lights which Anselm Benedict, like many pious Catholics of the generations gone, had ordered by his will should burn in perpetuity before a representation of "St. Mary".

Close by the picture, upon a spindle-legged table of satinwood, stood a curiously wrought

cabinet composed of various woods, incrusting with ornaments of solid gold, which were marvels of the artificer's art. With a species of awe Julian touched one of these, gently, delicately, as he might have touched a rose-leaf. Instantly a door sprang open, and there, upon a cushion of finest satin yellowed by age, lay a gorgeous jewel: a drop of living fire, a vivid crimson stain like the blood of a heart,—Julian knew not what to call it. He felt fascinated, bewildered by its beauty, as it gleamed and glowed in the light from "St. Mary's" lamp. In his inexperience the boy knew nothing of its value, but vaguely thought of the Sacred Heart of Jesus burning and glowing, the source of true wealth and power.

Perhaps it was this analogy which caused him to fall upon his knees, with a prayer of thanksgiving upon his lips for his preservation from many dangers. And as he knelt, bewildered, he remembered the legend of the Holy Grail, which his mother had read to him, and of the finding of the blessed cup by him who was pure of heart and steadfast. He fancied that the pictured face of the Virgin Mother smiled upon him; and as he knelt thus, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and

there was Nicholas. He rose and confronted the old servitor, who seemed borne out of himself by some overpowering emotion: the grim eyes sparkled, the wooden face fairly beamed with joy and excitement, and, raising his hand, he made a military salute to the young hero of the hour.

Then for the first time Julian realized the meaning of all these marvels. The ordeal was ended. He had come through all his trials triumphantly, and here were the hidden room and the lost jewel of the Mortimers. The knowledge came to him by a sudden flash of intuition. Nicholas had said nothing, and for the moment it seemed to the boy as if his heart would break with the wonder and the joy of it. The thought of his mother rushed into his heart. Like a torrent released by the springtime sun, he could go back to her now with the glad tidings; and she would be rich and never know the pressure of straitened circumstances any more.

"*He* will be glad!" cried Nicholas, in trumpet-like tones that were startling in the stillness.

"Who? Grandfather?" asked Julian.

"Grandfather! No!" replied Nicholas.
"He, the master, down below!"

Then Julian knew that he meant Anselm Benedict, of whom the servant spoke as though he still lived and moved and were capable of human feelings. And the boy experienced a sudden glow at the thought that he—he at least—had proved himself worthy and had finally conquered in the great race. This brought him to the remembrance of Sedgwick, and Julian's generous heart was filled with something like remorse. Sedgwick had striven bravely and had failed. He had come so far on the journey and had been compelled to turn backward unrewarded. Julian felt truly sorry, and dreaded the meeting when he should have to say to the cousin, to whom he was now deeply attached, "I have won where you have failed."

Nicholas, however, was troubled by no such regrets. He stood gazing at the ruby, lost, as it seemed, in a kind of reverential awe. Then he raised it from its satin bed and laid it in Julian's hand.

"Think of it!" he cried, in the same clarion-like tone. "After hundreds of years it is yours!"

A thrill passed through the boy, as though the ruby had been some sentient thing which,

suddenly resurrected, had responded to his touch. Still, he was glad when Nicholas relieved him of it and restored it to the cushion, whence it sent forth its wonderful flashes of fire in the flicker of "St. Mary's" flame. For human hearts are so constituted that triumph, success, the sudden realization of good fortune, or of great happiness, leaves them in a measure unresponsive.

Nicholas closed the door of the cabinet, and, taking Julian by the hand in a strong, warm clasp, which told of sympathy and of gladness, led the boy out of the room. But, instead of going down the dusty and worm-eaten steps by which Julian had ascended, they went out from behind the case of the great clock and down the principal stairs of the mansion at Pine Bluff, of which Julian was henceforth practically the master. The staircase and the hall looked different to him, as though they were touched with the quiet and peace of Sabbath sunshine; and so the boy, attended by the grim old servitor, passed down into the library, where sat Mr. Mortimer among his books. He, too, had a different aspect about him, as if he belonged to another world. He was buried in a ponderous vol-

ume dealing with scientific research. Julian ran straight to the old man's side.

"Grandfather," he exclaimed, "Anselm Benedict was right: there is a hidden room and a lost jewel!"

Mr. Mortimer turned ashen-white, and his hands shook as if he were suddenly stricken with palsy.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, in a tremulous, broken voice, "that—that you have found them?"

"Yes, grandfather," Julian answered, subdued, abashed at his own success, ashamed of having proved this old man's theories wrong.

Mr. Mortimer looked at him with an odd, puzzled, long stare, as though the boy were one who had come out of some long-past dream. But he said never a word more, turning his eyes at last away from the boy and out over the landscape, sunlit now with the fair morning beams. From the very depths of his heart he sighed, as men sigh for whom youth is vanished, with its hopes, its aspirations and its possibilities.

By a sudden impulse Julian laid his hand upon his grandfather's arm.

"I am only a boy," he said, "and what

does it matter whether I found the things or not?"

Then tears, the slow tears of age, began to steal down the old man's wrinkled cheeks, and through the mist which the moisture made he saw himself and the long ago; but saw, too, the simplicity, honesty, truth and generosity which shone in the face of the boy before him, and he acknowledged that for this time at least good fortune was deserved. He bowed his head upon his hands; and Julian, obeying an imperative sign from Nicholas, went softly out.

When he reached the lawn, the birds were singing a very pæan; they seemed to greet him with acclamation. It was their morning chorus of praise and joy. And the living green of the grass seemed fairer than ever to his eyes, and the trees were all burnished gold by the early sun, while the voice of the sea in a gentle murmur spoke of gladness.

Sedgwick came running in great haste to meet his comrade.

"I know you have found it!" he cried. "You *must* have found it, curly pate! It wouldn't be right if you didn't. The story would end all wrong."

Julian hesitated. The sight of Sedgwick's honest, ruddy face filled him with regret and something like confusion. His cousin had been so kind and so faithful in all their adventures, and had done him so many good turns! It seemed almost cruel to tell him of the success which had befallen himself, and of that wondrous room hidden away behind the clock-case, at the top of those creaking and worm-eaten stairs.

But Nicholas, who had set his heart upon Julian's ultimate triumph, and had early seen the promise of success in the boy, was troubled with no regrets whatever. He straightened himself to attention—a grotesque figure, an anachronism in that joyous sunlight,—he waved his hand as if inviting all the landscape to share in his joy, and to proclaim, as he was about to proclaim, Julian's triumph. He took off his hat and bowed ceremoniously to his young hero, who now shared in his heart the place long occupied by the traditional Anselm Benedict alone. Then he spoke out in tones clear and vibrating, which caught every echo and mingled with the hoarse voice of the waves:

“Know ye all, and be it known to you,

that the victor stands before you, the worthy descendant of the great and famous Anselm Benedict; and that he has found and shall forever hold in his possession that which was concealed in the hidden room—namely, the lost jewel of the Mortimers!”

Then Sedgwick's cap went up into the air, and for very joy he turned a somersault or two, which was in marked contrast to the old servitor's pompous proclamation, but which was fully as sincere and honest; after which he also straightened himself to his full height, and sent all the echoes ringing into the forest with a great shout of—

“Hip, hip, hurrah for Julian, for Anselm Benedict, the hidden room and the lost jewel found!”

Nicholas joined him with right good will in three times three. And the grandfather came to the window and saw Julian's small figure and shining hair glistening in the sun, his pale face aglow with happiness; while again and yet again went up that cry of “Hip, hip, hurrah for Julian, for Anselm Benedict, the hidden room and the lost jewel found!”

Chapter XVII.

JOY ALL ROUND.

It would be impossible to put into one chapter all those things which followed upon Julian's success; but his very first act was to summon his mother that she might share his triumph. Their meeting was a most affecting one, not easily to be set down in cold black and white. The mother was proud of her little knight; joyful, too, but fearful at times of the effect of success upon the character and future career of her boy.

At the request of Mr. Mortimer, she consented to take up her abode with her son in the mansion at Pine Bluff, with the stipulation that Julian should return to college and continue his education. From the very first the mother and son were full of projects which had for their ultimate aim the good of the greatest number. For Mrs. Robert always insisted that the fortune had been left them merely in trust, and that they had to consider

what would have been the wishes of Alwin Benedict in its disposal. They felt that Alwin would have been desirous of benefiting his descendants in every branch of the family and also of advancing the interests of those who lived in the neighborhood of the Bluff as well as in the surrounding country.

Mr. Mortimer who was now in the full sympathy and upon the most cordial terms with his daughter-in-law entered heartily into all these schemes, and gave young Julian in his new enthusiasm. He was devoted to Julian, who, in his turn, received his grandfather with the greater affection, and treated him with a deference and consideration beautiful to see. He anticipated his wants, listened with interest and appreciation to all his sayings, knew where to find his favorite books and when to leave him to his undisturbed enjoyment. Julian, indeed, as the years went on, remained the same bright, cheerful, happy creature, interested in all about him and reflecting universal love and sympathy. His piety, his pious and regular habits, his religious ethics, his example was as a beacon to all the country around, and had its effect even on the world-hungry character

of his grandfather, who gradually turned from the things that are passing to those that are eternal.

Every year, upon the anniversary of the finding of the jewel—which, by the way, was to remain in its shimmering cushion of satin, within the little cabinet beside “St. Mary’s picture”, until Julian should be of age,—there was a gathering of the Mortimers, seniors and juniors, and a solemn visit to the once hidden room, where the ruby was displayed and passed around among them. Before departing they assembled also around the picture of Anselm Benedict; and this became a traditional custom, a ceremonial of great weight in the family. Even the most obscure member felt that it in some way enhanced his importance to be one of the group around the portrait of their brilliant and picturesque ancestor; the more so as, through Julian’s influence, the chief incidents of his life and the most conspicuous traits in his character became familiarly known to them all.

From these family gatherings, however, Jake and his father were absent. Never once did they cross the threshold of the mansion

at Pine Bluff, though they were annually invited to do so. Julian had made over to Jake a handsome annuity, which the latter freely accepted, while openly expressing his hatred of the donor. He was heard of as an unscrupulous and over-sharp speculator in stocks, and bid fair, as his grandfather declared, to become a frequenter of bucket shops and other shady speculative resorts. Julian always thought with a kind of regretful pity of his cousin, and Julian's mother was full of sympathy for the erring lad and often deplored that they could do nothing whatever to help him.

Sedgwick received from the estate a very considerable sum indeed, as had been arranged by Anselm Benedict for any competitor who should have passed through many of the tests and acquitted himself honorably upon all occasions. And Wat was not forgotten; for, though he had not distinguished himself in any way, he had done nothing to forfeit the good opinion of those about him; and so he received a sufficient share of the fortune to delight him and his parents.

The two cousins spent nearly all their holidays, winter and summer, at the mansion of

Pine Bluff; and their visits there were gala occasions indeed. They lived over again every incident of those memorable weeks, when they had all been competitors for the Mortimer fortune and seekers after the jewel. There were, in the first place, many mysteries to unravel; and as many of these were connected with the grim and somewhat grotesque figure of Nicholas, the old man seemed to take particular pleasure in introducing the cousins to his most secret haunts.

For there was a whole labyrinth of secret passages and winding stairs,—some of them in the house and others without, leading into the forest or down to the cavern or the seashore. Most of them were known to the old servitor alone. He had spent many of his long years of service in their hidden recesses, and had his own apartments where no prying eyes might look upon them. This circumstance, with the antique style of dress he affected, his taciturnity, and his singular manner and appearance, had gained for him among the people about the reputation of possessing occult powers. Many amongst the generations of Mortimers whom he had served had not been altogether free from this super-

stition; and, being unable to account for his mysterious comings and goings, had been inclined to ascribe them to magic, or at least to some inexplicable cause which it was impossible to discover.

As for the old man himself, he had been so long the guardian spirit of the place, and the repository of all its secrets, that he almost fancied himself to have always existed, and to have been at Pine Bluff when the mansion was erected in the pioneer days of Anselm Benedict. He was seldom distant from Julian, save when the latter was absent at college; and he loved him with a love which gradually blended, as Nicholas grew extremely aged and his powers began to fail, with the worshiping tenderness with which he regarded Anselm Benedict. To hear his fragments of talk, it almost seemed as if, in some mysterious way, Julian the young and merry-hearted had changed places with that brilliant soldier of other days, who had long since mouldered into dust in the family vault of the Mortimers. This peculiarity of Nicholas gave Julian himself an uncanny sensation, which he once confided to Sedgwick.

"He makes me feel rather like a boy in a

fairy book," Julian declared, with a wry face.

"Well, you did go through adventures that beat the 'Wild West' tales all hollow," Sedgwick responded.

"So did you," said Julian.

"That's so, but I didn't come up to you. I didn't climb rickety stairs nor hear the big clock strike and suddenly find myself in a wonderful room. Why, it's a good deal like the Arabian Nights, and I don't wonder the old man feels like handing you bouquets ever since."

"But he needn't mix me with Anselm Benedict," replied Julian; "though, of course, it's a compliment, because any fellow would be proud to be like him. I'm really fond of Nicholas," he added hastily, lest Sedgwick might infer from his remarks anything derogatory to that faithful servant.

"So am I. He's a first-rate old chap," agreed Sedgwick, cordially; "and he gives us no end of a good time when we come here."

"Do you remember all the names Jake used to call him?" asked Julian.

"You bet I do!" answered Sedgwick. "And I sometimes felt like joining in myself."

"We were all rather afraid of him."

"No wonder, curly pate," exclaimed Sedgwick, "when he could go through thick walls and hear what we said everywhere, and then speak at our very elbow! We had a glorious time, though, Julian; and I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

"Neither would I," agreed Julian, enthusiastically, "even if I had never found the hidden room nor the lost jewel. I don't think any boys in our time ever had such queer experiences."

And they had a good many more, and very pleasant ones too. They encamped every summer for a few days in the forest, Nicholas remaining with them and supplying their every want. They made frequent visits to the old woman in the hut, who made fresh scones for them any day they wished, and gave them fresh milk from her cow. They became quite familiar with the supposed wild animal, which was indeed wild and fierce enough,—an enormous wolf-hound, of a breed that had been kept there from father and son to terrify lawless intruders. Sometimes they went to the hut of the Mad Hermit, which was hastening to decay, with all its curious contents. They heard many quaint tales of

him, his life and his singular doings, from Nicholas, who remembered him as a boy just entering upon the competition; and they never forgot to say a prayer for his soul.

But perhaps their greatest treat was to go down, for a few days at a time, to the cavern of the forest, where, under the guidance of Nicholas, they were constantly discovering new mysteries: secret stairs, doors opening in the rocks, shelves sliding forth from hidden recesses, and panels answering to secret springs. Many of these things, as well as the underground passages which Sedgwick and Julian had traversed, had to do with the contraband trade,—a fascinating and unscrupulous calling, in which many were engaged in the unsettled pioneer times of the colonies; whilst some of the Mortimers, like others of their class, had their own dealings with the ruthless violators of the law.

It was rather a disappointment to the boys that the smugglers, who had rendered memorable Julian's first visit to the cavern, seemed to have completely disappeared. Whether they had been terrified by Nicholas' mysterious doings and by their belief in his occult powers, whether they had been alarmed by

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the appearance of Julian, or had in some other way been led to suppose that the cavern was no longer a safe hiding-place, it was certain that they never visited their former resort, whence they had removed all traces of their presence.

Nicholas, however, showed the boys his way of producing what the uncouth seafarers had mistaken for the fire of St. Elmo; and, with their assistance, he set off many rockets, which were seen afar by the country people and gave rise to a variety of conjectures. Then, he often took the boys in his boat—quaint and old-fashioned, but most seaworthy,—and they made many expeditions to places in the neighborhood.

So that, all things considered, the mansion at Pine Bluff was a centre of great interest and happiness to three young lives at least; whilst old Mr. Mortimer learned, as it were, to live his life over again in them; and Mrs. Robert watched with pride, but with a never-relaxing solicitude, the growth and development of her idolized Julian.

“I am so afraid,” she observed to the grandfather, as they sat together in the library before a glowing fire, “that my boy’s head

may be turned by success as well as by the knowledge that he is the possessor of a fortune."

"I don't think any train of circumstances will turn his head," answered the grandfather, emphatically; "and I am sure he would have been just as fine a fellow even if he had been defeated in the quest. He would have borne his failure like a hero. We must admit that he at least has earned his good luck; but you and I know, by looking backward, it is far from being the best people who most frequently succeed."

"Very far, indeed," said Mrs. Robert, thoughtfully. "But I suppose everyone gets what is best for him; and the ideal character is that which supports good and evil fortune with equal countenance. Julian is, I think, of fine metal and not easily spoiled."

Here the two elders were interrupted by a shout from without, and Julian came rushing in, rosy from the nipping of the frosty air; and after him came the "other fellows"—Sedgwick and Wat,—the veterans of many a sham battle in the new-fallen snow on the lawn. Then, as they drew near to warm themselves in the blaze, Mrs. Robert looked

at her boy's bright face and hair shining in the firelight, and thought, by a sudden turn of memory, of the day when they were starting from their shabby home in town to accept the grandfather's first invitation, and how Julian had expressed the hope that there would be some "other fellows" there to enjoy the hospitality of Pine Bluff with him. Well, here were the other fellows, standing side by side with Julian, sworn friends and good comrades of his for evermore.

It all seemed dreamlike now, as some of those visions of the early morning touched with a roseate hue; and the mansion at Pine Bluff, the old gentleman among his books, were as unreal as the wonderful thought of the fortune and the ruby, the quest upon which these boys had entered, and in which Julian came forth a victor by the finding of the hidden room and the lost jewel of the Mortimers.

THE END.

