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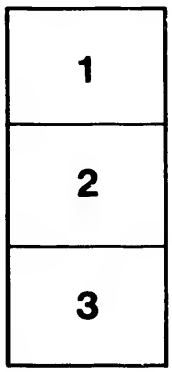

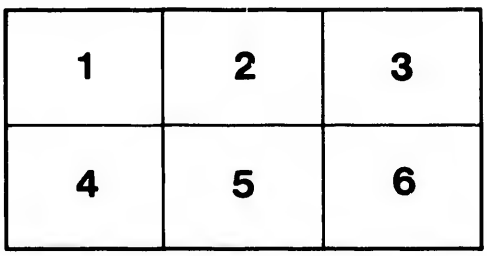

STURDY AND STRONG

OR

HOW GEORGE ANDREWS MADE HIS WAY.

BY

G. A. HENTY,

Author of "The Young Carthaginian;" "With Clive in India;" "In Freedom's Cause;" "The Lion of the North;" "With Wolfe in Canada;" "Facing Death;" &c.

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PREFACE.

Whatever may be said as to distinction of classes in England, it is certain that in no country in the world is the upward path more open to those who brace themselves to climb it than in our own. The proportion of those who remain absolutely stationary is comparatively small. We are all living on a hill-side, and we must either go up or down. It is easier to descend than to ascend; but he who fixes his eyes upwards, nerves himself for the climb, and determines with all his might and power to win his way towards the top, is sure to find himself at the end of his day at a far higher level than when he started upon his journey. It may be said, and sometimes foolishly is said, that luck is everything; but in nineteen cases out of twenty what is called luck is simply a combination of opportunity, and of the readiness and quickness to turn that opportunity to advantage. The voyager must take every advantage of wind, tide, and current, if he would make a favourable journey; and for success in life it is necessary not only to be earnest, steadfast, and

true, but to have the faculty of turning every opportunity to the best advantage; just as a climber utilizes every tuft of grass, every little shrub, every projecting rock, as a hold for his hands or feet. George Andrews had what may be called luck—that is, he had opportunities and took advantage of them, and his rise in life was consequently far more rapid than if he had let them pass without grasping them; but in any case his steadiness, perseverance, and determination to get on would assuredly have made their way in the long run. If similar qualities and similar determination are yours, you need not despair of similar success in life.

G. A. HENTY.

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STURDY AND STRONG.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE.

"YOU heard what he said, George?"

"Oh, mother, mother!"

"Don't sob so, my boy; he is right. I have seen it coming a long time, and, hard as it seems, it will be better. There is no disgrace in it. I have tried my best, and if my health had not broken down we might have managed, but you see it was not to be. I shall not mind it, dear; it is really only for your sake that I care about it at all."

The boy had ceased sobbing and sat now with a white set face.

"Mother, it will break my heart to think

that I cannot keep you from this. If we could only have managed for a year or two I could have earned more then; but to think of you—you in the workhouse!"

"In a workhouse infirmary, my boy," his mother said gently. "You see it is not as if it were from any fault of ours. We have done our best. You and I have managed for two years; but what with my health and my eyes breaking down we can do so no longer. I hope it will not be for long, dear. You see I shall have rest and quiet, and I hope I shall soon be able to be out again."

"Not soon, mother. The doctor said you ought not to use your eyes for months."

"Even months pass quickly, George, when one has hope. I have felt this coming so long that I shall be easier and happier now it has come. After all, what is a workhouse infirmary but a hospital, and it would not seem so very dreadful to you my going into a hospital; the difference is only in name; both are, after all, charities, but the one is kept up out of subscriptions, the other from the rates."

His mother's words conveyed but little comfort to George Andrews. He had just come in from his work, and had heard what the parish doctor had told his mother.

"I can do nothing for you here, Mrs Andrews. You must have rest and quiet for your eyes, and not only that, but you must have strengthening food. It is no use my blinking the truth. It is painful for you, I know. I can well understand that; but I see no other way. If you refuse to go I won't answer for your life."

"I will go, doctor," she had answered quietly. "I know that it will be best. It will be a blow to my boy, but I see no other way."

"If you don't want your boy to be alone in the world, ma'am, you will do as I advise you. I will go round in the morning and get you the order of admission, and as I shall be driving out that way I will, if you like, take you myself."

"Thank you, doctor; you are very good. Yes, I will be ready in the morning, and I thank you for your offer."

"Very well then, that's settled," the doctor said briskly. "At ten o'clock I will be here."

Although a little rough in manner, Dr. Jeffries was a kind-hearted and humane man.

"Poor woman," he said to himself as he went down stairs, "it is hard for her. It is easy to see that she is a lady, and a thorough lady too; but what can I do for her! I might get her a little temporary help, but that would be of no use—she is completely broken down with anxiety and insufficient food, and unless her eyes have a long holiday she will lose her sight. No, there's nothing else for it, but it is hard."

It was hard. Mrs. Andrews was, as the doctor said, a lady. She had lost both her parents while she was at school. She had no near relations, and as she was sixteen when her mother died she had remained at school finishing her education and teaching the younger children. Then she had obtained a situation as governess in a gentleman's family, and two years afterwards had married a

young barrister who was a frequent visitor at the house.

Mr. Andrews was looked upon as a rising man, and for the first seven or eight years of her marriage his wife's life had been a very happy one. Then her husband was prostrated by a fever which he caught in one of the midland towns while on circuit, and although he partially recovered he was never himself again. His power of work seemed to be lost; a languor which he could not overcome took possession of him. A troublesome cough ere long attacked him, and two years later Mrs. Andrews was a widow, and her boy, then nine years old, an orphan.

During the last two years of his life Mr. Andrews had earned but little in his profession. The comfortable house which he occupied had been given up, and they had removed to one much smaller. But in spite of this debts mounted up, and when, after his death, the remaining furniture was sold and everything settled, there remained only about two hundred pounds. Mrs. Andrews tried to get

some pupils among her late husband's friends, but during the last two years she had lost sight of many of these, and now met with but poor success among the others. She was a quiet and retiring woman, and shrank from continuous solicitations, and at the end of three years she found her little store exhausted.

Hitherto she had kept George at school, but could no longer do so, and, giving up her lodgings in Brompton, went down to Croydon, where someone had told her that they thought she would have a better chance of obtaining pupils; but the cards which some of the tradesmen allowed her to put in the window led to no result, and finding this to be the case she applied at one of the milliners' for work. This she obtained, and for a year supported herself and her boy by needlework.

From the time when George left school she had gone on teaching him his lessons; but on the day when he was thirteen years old he declared that he would no longer

submit to his mother working for both of them, and, setting out, called at shop after shop inquiring if they wanted an errand-boy. He succeeded at last in getting a place at a grocer's, where he was to receive three shillings a week and his meals, going home to sleep at night in the closet-like little attic adjoining the one room which his mother could now afford.

For a while they were more comfortable than they had been for some time; now that his mother had no longer George to feed, her earnings and the three shillings he brought home every Saturday night enabled them to live in comparative ease, and on Sunday something like a feast was always prepared. But six months later Mrs. Andrews felt her eyesight failing, the lids became inflamed, and a dull aching pain settled in the eyeballs. Soon she could only work for a short time together, her earnings became smaller and smaller, and her employers presently told her that she kept the work so long in hand that they could no longer employ her. There

was now only George's three shillings a week to rely upon, and this was swallowed up by the rent. In despair she had applied to the parish doctor about her eyes. For a fortnight he attended her, and at the end of that time had peremptorily given the order of which she had told her son.

To her it was a relief; she had seen that it must come. Piece by piece every article of clothing she possessed, save those she wore, had been pawned for food, and every resource was now exhausted. She was worn out with the struggle, and the certainty of rest and food overcame her repugnance to the house. For George's sake too, much as she knew he would feel her having to accept such a refuge, she was glad that the struggle was at an end. The lad had for the last six months suffered greatly for her sake. Every meal to which he sat down at his employer's seemed to choke him as he contrasted it with the fare to which she was reduced, although, as far as possible, she had concealed from him how sore was her strait.

George cried himself to sleep that night, and he could scarce speak when he said good-bye to his mother in the morning, for he could not tell when he should see her again.

"You will stop where you are, my boy, will you not?"

"I cannot promise, mother. I don't know yet what I shall do; but please don't ask me to promise anything. You must let me do what I think best. I have got to make a home for you when you are cured. I am fourteen now, and am as strong as most boys of my age. I ought to be able to earn a shilling a day somehow, and with seven shillings a week, mother, and you just working a little, you know, so as not to hurt your eyes, we ought to be able to do. Don't you bother about me, mother. I want to try anyhow what I can do till you come out. When you do, then I will do whatever you tell me; that's fair, isn't it?"

Mrs. Andrews would have remonstrated, but he said:

"Well, mother, you see at the worst I can

get a year's character from Dutton, so that if I can't get anything else to do I can get the same sort of place again, and as I am a year older than I was when he took me, and can tie up parcels neatly now, I ought to get a little more anyhow. You see I shall be safe enough, and though I have never grumbled, you know, mother—have I?—I think I would rather do anything than be a grocer's boy. I would rather, when I grow up, be a bricklayer's labourer, or a ploughman, or do any what I call man's work, than be pottering about behind a counter, with a white apron on, weighing out sugar and currants."

"I can't blame you, George," Mrs. Andrews said with a sigh. "It's natural, my boy. If I get my eyesight and my health again, when you grow up to be a man we will lay by a little money, and you and I will go out together to one of the colonies. It will be easier to rise again there than here, and with hard work both of us might surely hope to get on. There must be plenty of villages in Australia and Canada where I could do well with teach-

ing, and you could get work in whatever way you may be inclined to. So, my boy, let us set that before us. It will be something to hope for and work for, and will cheer us to go through whatever may betide us up to that time."

"Yes, mother," George said. "It will be comfort indeed to have something to look forward to. Nothing can comfort me much to-day; but if anything could it would be that plan."

The last words he said to his mother as, blinded with tears, he kissed her before starting to work were:

"I shall think of our plan every day, and look forward to that more than anything else in the world—next to your coming to me again."

At ten o'clock Dr. Jeffries drove up to Mrs. Andrews' humble lodging in a brougham instead of his ordinary gig, having borrowed the carriage from one of the few of his patients who kept such a vehicle, on purpose to take Mrs. Andrews, for she was so weak

and worn that he was sure she would not be able to sit upright in a gig for the three miles that had to be traversed. He managed in the course of his rounds to pass the workhouse again in the afternoon, and brought George, before he left work, a line written in pencil on a leaf torn from his pocket book:

"My darling, I am very comfortable. Everything is clean and nice, and the doctor and people kind. Do not fret about me.—Your loving mother."

Although George's expressed resolution of leaving his present situation, and seeking to earn his living in some other way, caused Mrs. Andrews much anxiety, she had not sought strongly to dissuade him from it. No doubt it would be wiser for him to stay in his present situation, where he was well treated and well fed, and it certainly seemed improbable to her that he would be able to get a better living elsewhere. Still she could not blame him for wishing at least to try. She herself shared to some extent his prejudice against the work in which he was employed.

There is no disgrace in honest work; but she felt that she would rather see him engaged in hard manual labour than as a shop-boy. At anyrate, as he said, if he failed he could come back again to Croydon, and with a year's character from his present employer, would probably be able to obtain a situation similar to that which he now held. She was somewhat comforted, too, by a few words the doctor had said to her during their drive.

"I think you are fortunate in your son, Mrs. Andrews. He seems to me a fine steady boy. If I can, in any way, do him a good turn while you are away from him, I will."

George remained for another month in his situation, for he knew that it would never do to start on his undertaking penniless. At the end of that time, having saved up ten shillings, and having given notice to his employer, he left the shop for the last time, and started to walk to London. It was not until he began to enter the crowded streets that he felt the full magnitude of his undertaking. To be alone in London, a solitary atom in the

busy mass of humanity, is a trying situation even for a man; to a boy of fourteen it is terrible. Buying a penny roll, George sat down to eat it in one of the niches of a bridge over the river, and then kneeling up watched the barges and steamers passing below him.

Had it not been for his mother his first thought, like that of most English boys thrown on the world, would have been to go to sea; but this idea he had from the first steadily set aside as out of the question. His plan was to obtain employment as a boy in some manufacturing work, for he thought that there, by steadiness and perseverance, he might make his way.

On one thing he was resolved. He would make his money last as long as possible. Three pennyworth of bread a day would, he calculated, be sufficient for his wants. As to sleeping, he thought he might manage to sleep anywhere; it was summer time and the nights were warm. He had no idea what the price of a bed would be, or how to set

about getting a lodging. He did not care how roughly he lived so that he could but make his money last. The first few days he determined to look about him. Something might turn up. If it did not he would set about getting a place in earnest. He had crossed Waterloo Bridge, and keeping straight on found himself in Covent Garden, where he was astonished and delighted at the quantities of fruit, vegetables, and flowers.

Although he twice set out in different directions to explore the streets, he each time returned to Covent Garden. There were many lads of his own age playing about there, and he thought that from them he might get some hints as to how to set about earning a living. They looked ragged and poor enough, but they might be able to tell him something—about sleeping, for instance. For although before starting the idea of sleeping anywhere had seemed natural enough, it looked more formidable now that he was face to face with it.

Going to a cook-shop in a street off the

market he bought two slices of plum-pudding. He rather grudged the twopence which he paid; but he felt that it might be well laid out. Provided with the pudding he returned to the market, sat himself down on an empty basket, and began to eat slowly and leisurely.

In a short time he noticed a lad of about his own age watching him greedily.

He was far from being a respectable-looking boy. His clothes were ragged, and his toes could be seen through a hole in his boot. He wore neither hat nor cap, and his hair looked as if it had not been combed since the day of his birth. There was a sharp pinched look on his face. But had he been washed and combed and decently clad he would not have been a bad-looking boy. At anyrate George liked his face better than most he had seen in the market, and he longed for a talk with someone. So he held out his other slice of pudding and said:

"Have a bit?"

"Oh, yes!" the boy replied. "Walker, eh?"

"No, I mean it, really. Will you have a bit?"

"No larks?" asked the boy.

"No; no larks. Here you are."

Feeling assured now that no trick was intended the boy approached, took without a word the pudding which George held out, and, seating himself on a basket close to him, took a great bite.

"Where do you live?" George asked when the slice of pudding had half disappeared.

"Anywheres," the boy replied, waving his hand round.

"I mean, where do you sleep?"

The boy nodded, to intimate that his sleeping-place was included in the general description of his domicile.

"And no one interferes with you?" George inquired.

"The beaks, they moves you on when they ketches you; but ef yer get under a cart or in among the baskets you generally dodges 'em."

"And suppose you want to pay for a place

to sleep, where do you go and how much do you pay?"

"Tuppence," the boy said; "or if yer want a first-rate, fourpence. Does yer want to find a crib?" he asked doubtfully, examining his companion.

"Well, yes," George said. "I want to find some quiet place where I can sleep, cheap you know."

"Out of work?" the boy inquired.

"Yes. I haven't got anything to do at present. I am looking for a place, you know."

"Don't know no one about?"

"No, I have just come in from Croydon."

The boy shook his head.

"Don't know nothing as would suit," he said. "Why, yer'd get them clothes and any money yer had walked off with the wery fust night."

"I should not get a room to myself, I suppose, even for fourpence?" George asked, making a rapid calculation that this would come to two and fourpence per week, as

much as his mother had paid for a comparatively comfortable room in Croydon.

The boy opened his eyes in astonishment at his companion requiring a room for himself.

"Lor' bless yer, yer'd have a score of them with yer."

"I don't care about a bed," George said. "Just some place to sleep in. Just some straw in any quiet corner."

This seemed more reasonable to the boy, and he thought the matter over.

"Well," he said at last, "I knows of a place where they puts up the hosses of the market carts. I knows a hostler there. Sometimes when it's wery cold he lets me sleep up in the loft. Ain't it warm and comfortable just. I helps him with the hosses sometimes, and that's why. I will ax him if yer likes."

George assented at once. His ideas as to the possibility of sleeping in the open air had vanished when he saw the surroundings, and a bed in a quiet loft seemed to him vastly better than sleeping in a room with twenty others.

"How do you live?" he asked the lad, "and what's your name?"

"They calls me the Shadder," the boy said rather proudly; "but my real name's Bill."

"Why do they call you the Shadow?" George asked.

"'Cause the bobbies finds it so hard to lay hands on me," Bill replied.

"But what do they want to lay hands on you for?" George asked.

"Why, for bagging things, in course," Bill replied calmly.

"Bagging things? Do you mean stealing?" George said, greatly shocked.

"Well, not regular prigging," the Shadow replied; "not wipes, yer know, nor tickers, nor them kind of things. I ain't never prigged nothing of that kind."

"Well, what is it then you do—prig?" George asked, mystified.

"Apples or cabbages, or a bunch of radishes, onions sometimes, or 'taters. That ain't regular prigging, you know."

"Well, it seems to me the same sort of thing," George said after a pause.

"I tell yer it ain't the same sort of thing at all," the Shadow said angrily. "Everyone as ain't a fool knows that taters ain't wipes, and no one can't say as a apple and a ticker are the same."

"No, not the same," George agreed; "but you see one is just as much stealing as the other."

"No, it ain't," the boy reasserted. "One is the same as money and t'other ain't. I am hungry and I nips a apple off a stall. No one ain't the worse for it. You don't suppose as they misses a apple here? Why, there's waggon-loads of 'em, and lots of 'em is rotten. Well, it ain't no more if I takes one than if it was rotten. Is it now?"

George thought there was a difference, but he did not feel equal to explaining it.

"The policemen must think differently," he said at last, "else they wouldn't be always trying to catch you."

"Who cares for the bobbies?" Bill said

contemptuously. "I don't; and I don't want no more jaw with you about it. If yer don't likes it, yer leaves it. I didn't ask for yer company, did I? So now then."

George had really taken a fancy to the boy, and moreover he saw that in the event of a quarrel his chance of finding a refuge for the night was small. In his sense of utter loneliness in the great city he was loth to break with the only acquaintance he had made.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Bill," he said; "only I was sorry to hear you say you took things. It seems to me you might get into trouble; and it would be better after all to work for a living."

"What sort of work?" Bill said derisively. "Who's agoing to give me work? Does yer think I have only got to walk into a shop and ask for 'ployment? They wouldn't want to know nothing about my character, I suppose? nor where I had worked before? nor where my feyther lived? nor nothing? Oh, no, of course not. It's blooming easy to get

work about here; only got to ax for it, that's all. Good wages and all found, that's your kind."

"I don't suppose it's easy," George said; "but it seems to me people could get something to do if they tried."

"Tried!" the boy said bitterly. "Do yer think we don't try! Why, we are always trying to earn a copper or two. Why, we begins at three o'clock in the morning when the market-carts come in, and we goes on till they comes out of that there theatre at night, just trying to pick up a copper. Sometimes one does and sometimes one doesn't. It's a good day, I tell you, when we have made a tanner by the end of it. Don't tell me! And now as to this ere stable; yer means it?"

"Yes," George said; "certainly I mean it."

"Wery well then, you be here at this corner at nine o'clock. I will go before that and square it with Ned. That's the chap I was speaking of."

"I had better give you something to give him," George said. "Will a shilling do?"

"Yes, a bob will do for three or four nights. Are you going to trust me with it?"

"Of course I am," George replied. "I am sure you wouldn't be so mean as to do me out of it; besides, you told me that you never stole money and those sort of things."

"It ain't everyone as would trust me with a bob for all that," Bill replied; "and yer are running a risk, yer know, and I tells yer if yer goes on with that sort of game yer'll get took in rarely afore yer've done. Well, hand it over. I ain't a going to bilk yer."

The Shadow spoke carelessly, but this proof of confidence on the part of his companion really touched him, and as he went off he said to himself:

"He ain't a bad sort, that chap, though he is so precious green. I must look arter him a bit and see he don't get into no mischief."

George on his part, as he walked away down into the Strand again, felt that he had certainly run a risk in thus intrusting a tenth

of his capital to his new acquaintance; but the boy's face and manner had attracted him, and he felt that, although the Shadow's notions of right and wrong might be of a confused nature, he meant to act straightly towards him.

George passed the intervening hours before the time named for his meeting in Covent Garden in staring into the shop-windows in the Strand, and in wondering at the constant stream of vehicles and foot-passengers flowing steadily out westward. He was nearly knocked under the wheels of the vehicles a score of times from his ignorance as to the rule of the road, and at last he was so confused by the jostling and pushing that he was glad to turn down a side street and to sit down for a time on a doorstep.

When nine o'clock approached he went into a baker's shop and bought a loaf, which would, he thought, do for supper and breakfast for himself and his companion. Having further invested threepence in cheese, he made his way up to the market.

The Shadow was standing at the corner whistling loudly.

"Oh, here yer be! That's all right; come along. I have squared Ned, and it's all right."

He led the way down two or three streets and then stopped at a gateway.

"You stop here," he said, "and I will see as there ain't no one but Ned about."

He returned in a minute.

"It's all clear! Ned, he's a rubbing down a hoss; he won't take no notice of yer as yer pass. He don't want to see yer, yer know, 'cause in case any one comed and found yer up there he could swear he never saw yer go in, and didn't know nothing about yer. I will go with yer to the door, and then yer will see a ladder in the corner; if yer whip up that yer'll find it all right up there."

"But you are coming too, ain't you?" George asked.

"Oh, no, I ain't acoming. Yer don't want a chap like me up there. I might pick yer pocket, yer know; besides, I ain't your sort."

"Oh, nonsense!" George said. "I should like to have you with me, Bill; I should really. Besides, what's the difference between us? We have both got to work for ourselves and make our way in the world."

"There's a lot of difference. Yer don't talk the way as I do; yer have been brought up different. Don't tell me."

"I may have been brought up differently, Bill. I have been fortunate there; but now, you see, I have got to get my living in the best way I can, and if I have had a better education than you have, you know ever so much more about London and how to get your living than I do, so that makes us quits."

"Oh, wery well," Bill said; "it's all the same to this child. So if yer ain't too proud, here goes."

He led the way down a stable-yard, past several doors, showing the empty stalls which would be all filled when the market-carts arrived. At the last door on the right he stopped. George looked in. At the further

end a man was rubbing down a horse by the faint light of a lantern, the rest of the stable was in darkness.

"This way," Bill whispered.

Keeping close behind him, George entered the stable. The boy stopped in the corner.

"Here's the ladder. I will go up fust and give yer a hand when yer gets to the top."

George stood quiet until his companion had mounted, and then ascended the ladder, which was fixed against the wall. Presently a voice whispered in his ear:

"Give us your hand. Mind how yer puts your foot."

In a minute he was standing in the loft. His companion drew him along in the darkness, and in a few steps arrived at a pile of hay.

"There yer are," Bill said in a low voice; "Yer 'ave only to make yourself comfortable there. Now mind you don't fall down one of the holes into the mangers."

"I wish we had a little light," George said, as he ensconced himself in the hay.

"I will give you some light in a minute," Bill said, as he left his side, and directly afterwards a door opened and the light of a gaslight in the yard streamed in.

"That's where they pitches the hay in," Bill said as he rejoined him. "I shuts it up afore I goes to sleep, 'cause the master he comes out sometimes when the carts comes in, and there would be a blooming row if he saw it open; but we are all right now."

"That's much nicer," George said. "Now here's a loaf I brought with me. We will cut it in half and put by a half for the morning, and eat the other half between us now, and I have got some cheese here too."

"That's tiptop!" the boy said. "Yer 're a good sort, I could see that, and I am pretty empty, I am, for I ain't had nothing except that bit of duff yer gave me since morning, and I only had a crust then. 'Cept for running against you I ain't been lucky to-day. Couldn't get a job nohows, and it ain't for want of trying neither."

For some minutes the boys ate in silence. George had given much the largest portion to his companion, for he himself was too dead tired to be very hungry. When he had finished he said:

"Look here, Bill; we will talk in the morning. I am so dead beat I can scarcely keep my eyes open, so I will just say my prayers and go off to sleep."

"Say your prayers!" Bill said in astonishment. "Do yer mean to say as yer says prayers!"

"Of course I do," George replied; "don't you?"

"Never said one in my life," Bill said decidedly; "don't know how, don't see as it would do no good ef I did."

"It would do good, Bill," George said. "I hope some day you will think differently, and I will teach you some you will like."

"I don't want to know none," Bill said positively. "A missionary chap, he came and prayed with an old woman I lodged with once. I could not make head nor tail

of it, and she died just the same, so you see what good did it do her?"

But George was too tired to enter upon a theological argument. He was already half asleep, and Bill's voice sounded a long way off.

"Good-night," he muttered; "I will talk to you in the morning," and in another minute he was fast asleep.

Bill took an armful of hay and shook it lightly over his companion; then he closed the door of the loft and threw himself on the hay, and was soon also sound asleep. When George woke in the morning the daylight was streaming in through the cracks of the door. His companion was gone. He heard the voices of several men in the yard, while a steady champing noise and an occasional shout or the sound of a scraping on the stones told him the stalls below were all full now.

George felt that he had better remain where he was. Bill had told him the evening before that the horses and carts generally set out again at about nine o'clock, and he

thought he had better wait till they had gone before he slipped down below. Closing his eyes he was very soon off to sleep again. When he woke Bill was sitting by his side looking at him.

"Well, you are a oner to sleep," the boy said. "Why, it's nigh ten o'clock, and it's time for us to be moving. Ned will be going off in a few minutes, and the stables will be locked up till the evening."

"Is there time to eat our bread and cheese?" George asked.

"No, we had better eat it when we get down to the market; come along."

George at once rose, shook the hay off his clothes, and descended the ladder, Bill leading the way. There was no one in the stable, and the yard was also empty. On reaching the market they sat down on two empty baskets, and at once began to eat their bread and cheese.

CHAPTER II.

TWO FRIENDS.

"I DID wake before, Bill," George said after he had eaten a few mouthfuls; "but you were out."

"Yes, I turned out as soon as the carts began to come in," Bill said, "and a wery good morning I have had. One old chap gave me twopence for looking arter his hoss and cart while he went into the market with his flowers. But the best move was just now. A chap as was driving off with flowers, one of them swell west-end shops, I expect, by the look of the trap, let his rug fall. He didn't see it till I ran after him with it, then he gave me a tanner, that was something like. Have yer finished yer bread and cheese?"

"Yes," George said, "and I could manage a drink of water if I could get one."

"There's a fountain handy," Bill said; "but you come along with me, I am agoing to stand

two cups of coffee if yer ain't too proud to take it;" and he looked doubtfully at his companion.

"I am not at all too proud," George said, for he saw that the slightest hesitation would hurt his companion's feelings.

"It ain't fust-rate coffee," Bill said, as with a brightened look on his face he turned and led the way to a little coffee-stall; "but it's hot and sweet, and yer can't expect more nor that for a penny."

George found the coffee really better than he had expected, and Bill was evidently very much gratified at his expression of approval.

"Now," he said when they had both finished, "for a drawy of 'baccy," and he produced a short clay pipe. "Don't yer smoke?"

"No, I haven't begun yet."

"Ah! ye don't know what a comfort a pipe is," Bill said. "Why, when yer are cold and hungry and down on your luck a pipe is a wonderful thing, and so cheap; why, a ounce of 'baccy will fill yer thirty pipes if

yer don't squeeze it in too hard. Well, an ounce of 'baccy costs threepence halfpenny, so as I makes out, yer gets eight pipes for a penny; and now," he went on when he had filled and lit his pipe, "let's know what's yer game."

"You mean what am I going to do?" George asked.

Bill nodded.

"I want to get employment in some sort of works. I have been an errand-boy in a grocer's for more than a year, and I have got a written character from my master in my pocket; but I don't like the sort of thing, I would rather work with my own hands. There are plenty of works where they employ boys, and you know one might get on as one gets older. The first thing is to find out whereabouts works of that sort are."

"There are lots of works at the East End, I have heard tell," Bill said; "and then there's Clerkenwell and King's Cross, they ain't so far off, and there are works there, all sorts of works, I should say; but I don't know

nuffin' about that sort of work. The only work as I have done is holding hosses and carrying plants into the market, and sometimes when I have done pretty well I goes down and lays out what I got in *Echoes*, or *Globes*, or *Evening Standards;* that pays yer, that does, for if yer can sell them all yer will get a bob for eight penn'orth of papers, that gives yer fourpence for an hour's work, and I calls that blooming good, and can't yer get a tuck-out for a bob. Oh, no, I should think not! Well, what shall it be? I knows the way out to Whitechapel and to Clerkenwell, so whichever yer likes I can show yer."

"If Clerkenwell's the nearest we may as well try that first," George said, "and I shall be much obliged to you for showing the way."

The two boys spent the whole day in going from workshop to workshop for employment; but the answers to his application were unvarying: either he was too young or there was no place vacant. George took the disappointment quietly, for he had made up his mind that he would have difficulty in

getting a place; but Bill became quite angry on behalf of his companion.

"This is worse nor the market," he said. "A chap can pick up a few coppers there, and here we have been a-tramping about all day and ain't done nothing."

Day after day George set out on his quest, but all was without success. He and Bill still slept in the loft, and after the first day he took to getting up at the same time as his companion, and going out with him to try and pick up a few pence from the men with the market-carts. Every other morning they were able to lie later, as there were only regular market-days three mornings a week.

On market mornings he found that he earned more than Bill, his better clothes giving him an advantage, as the men were more willing to trust their carts and rugs to the care of a quiet respectable-looking boy than to that of the arabs who frequented the garden. But all that was earned was laid out in common between the two boys, and George found himself seldom obliged to draw above a few

pence on his private stock. He had by this time told the Shadow exactly how much money he had, and the boy seeing the difficulty that George found in getting work, was most averse to the store being trenched upon, and always gave his vote against the smallest addition to their ordinary fare of bread and cheese being purchased, except from their earnings of the day. This George felt was the more creditable on Bill's part, inasmuch as the latter had, in deference to his prejudices, abstained from the petty thefts of fruit with which before he had seasoned his dry crusts.

George had learned now what Bill knew of his history, which was little enough. He supposed he had had a father, but he knew nothing of him; whether he had died, or whether he had cut away and left mother, Bill had no idea. His mother he remembered well, though she had died when he was, as he said, a little chap. He spoke of her always in a hushed voice, and in a tone of reverence as a superior being.

"We was poor, you know," he said to George, "and I know mother was offen short of grub, but she was just kind. I don't never remember her wacking me; always spoke soft and low like; she was good, she was. She used to pray, you know, and what I remember most is as the night afore she was took away to a hospital she saes,' Try and live honest, Bill; it will be hard, but try, my boy. Don't you take to stealing, however poor you may be;' and I ain't," Bill said earnestly over and over again. "When I has seed any chap going along with a ticker handy, which I could have boned and got away among the carts as safe as ninepence, or when I has seed a woman with her purse a-sticking out of them outside pockets, and I ain't had a penny to bless myself with, and perhaps nothing to eat all day, I have felt it hard not to make a grab; but I just thought of what she said, and I ain't done it. As I told yer, I have often nabbed things off the stalls or out of the baskets or carts. It didn't seem to me as that was stealing, but as you

says it is I ain't going to do so no more. Now look yer here, George; they tells me as the parsons says as when people die and they are good they goes up there, yer know."

George nodded, for there was a question in his companion's tone.

"Then, of course," Bill went on, "she is up there. Now it ain't likely as ever I should see her again, 'cause, you know, there ain't nothing good about me; but if she was to come my way, wherever I might be, and was to say to me, 'Bill, have you been a-stealing?' do yer think she would feel very bad about them 'ere apples and things?"

"No, Bill, I am sure she would not. You see you didn't quite know that was stealing, and you kept from stealing the things that you thought she spoke of, and now that you see it is wrong taking even littl things you are not going to take them any more."

"That I won't, so help me bob," the boy said, "not if I never gets another apple between my teeth."

"That's right, Bill. You see you ought

to do it, not only to please your mother, but to please God. That's what my mother has told me over and over again."

"Has she now?" Bill said with great interest, "and did you use to prig apples and sichlike sometimes?"

"No," George said, "not that sort of thing; but she was talking of things in general. Of doing things that were wrong, such as telling lies and deceiving, and that sort of thing."

"And your mother thinks as God knows all about it?"

George nodded.

"And that he don't like it, eh, when things is done bad?"

George nodded again.

"Lor', what a time he must have of it!" Bill said in solemn wonder. "Why, I heard a woman say last week as six children was enough to worrit anyone into the grave; and just to think of all of us!" and Bill waved his arm in a comprehensive way and repeated, "What a time he must have of it!"

For a time the boys sat silent in their loft,

Bill wondering over the problem that had presented itself to him, and George trying to find some appropriate explanation in reply to the difficulty Bill had started. At last he said:

"I am afraid, Bill, that I can't explain all this to you, for I am not accustomed to talk about such things. My mother talks to me sometimes, and of course I went to church regularly; but that's different from my talking about it; but you know what we have got to do is to try and please God, and love him because he loves us."

"That's whear it is," Bill said; "that's what I've heard fellows say beats 'em. If he loves a chap like me how is it he don't do something for him? why don't he get you a place, for instance? You ain't been a-prigging apples or a-putting him out. That's what I wants to know."

"Yes, Bill, but as I have heard my mother say, it would be very hard to understand if this world were the only one; but you see we are only here a little time, and after that

there's on and on and on, right up without any end, and what does it matter if we are poor or unhappy in this little time if we are going to be ever so happy afterwards. This is only a sort of little trial to see how we behave, as it were, and if we do the best we can, even though that best is very little, then you see we get a tremendous reward. For instance, you would not think a man was unkind who kept you five minutes holding his horse on a cold day, if he were going to give you enough to get you clothes and good lodging for the rest of your life."

"No, I should think not," Bill said fervently; "so it's like that, is it?"

George nodded. "Like that, only more."

"My eye!" Bill murmured to himself, lost in astonishment at this new view of things.

After that there were few evenings when, before they nestled themselves down in the hay, the boys did not talk on this subject. At first George felt awkward and nervous in speaking of it, for, like the generality of English boys, however earnest their convic-

tions may be, he was shy of speaking what he felt; but his companion's eagerness to know more of this, to him, new story encouraged him to speak, and having in his bundle a small Bible which his mother had given him, he took to reading to Bill a chapter or two in the mornings when they had not to go out to the early market.

It is true that Bill's questions frequently puzzled him. The boy saw things in a light so wholly different from that in which he himself had been accustomed to regard them that he found a great difficulty in replying to them.

George wrote a letter to his mother, telling her exactly what he was doing, for he knew that if he only said that he had not yet succeeded in getting work she would be very anxious about him, and although he had nothing satisfactory to tell her, at least he could tell her that he had sufficient to eat and as much comfort as he cared for. Twice he received replies from her, directed to him at a little coffee-house, which, when they had had luck, the boys occasionally patronized. As

time went on without his succeeding in obtaining employment George's hopes fell, and at last he said to his mate: "I will try for another fortnight, Bill, and if at the end of that time I don't get anything to do I shall go back to Croydon again."

"But yer can earn yer living here!" Bill remonstrated.

"I can earn enough to prevent me from starving, but that is all, Bill. I came up to London in hopes of getting something to do by which I might some day make my way up; if I were to stop here like this I should be going down, and a nice sight I should be to mother if, when she gets well enough to come out of the infirmary, I were to go back all in rags."

"What sort of a place is Croydon?" Bill asked. "Is there any chance of picking up a living there? 'cause I tells yer fair, if yer goes off I goes with yer. I ain't a-thinking of living with yer, George; but we might see each other sometime, mightn't we? Yer wouldn't mind that?"

"Mind it! certainly not, Bill! You have been a good friend to me, and I should be sorry to think of you all alone here."

"Oh, blow being a good friend to yer!" Bill replied. "I ain't done nothing except put yer in the way of getting a sleeping-place, and as it's given me one too I have had the best of that job. It's been good of yer to take up with a chap like me as don't know how to read or write or nothing, and as ain't no good anyway. But you will let me go with yer to Croydon, won't yer?"

"Certainly I will, Bill; but you won't be able to see much of me. I shall have to get a place like the last. The man I was with said he would take me back again if I wanted to come, and you know I am all day in the shop or going out with parcels, and of course you would have to be busy too at something."

"What sort of thing do yer think, George? I can hold a hoss, but that ain't much for a living. One may go for days without getting a chance."

"I should say, Bill, that your best chance

would be to try and get work either in a brickfield or with a market-gardener. At anyrate we should be able to get a talk for half an hour in the evening. I was always done at nine o'clock, and if we were both in work we could take a room together."

Bill shook his head.

"That would be wery nice, but I couldn't have it, George. I knows as I ain't fit company for yer, and if yer was with a shopkeeping bloke he would think yer was going to run off with the money if he knew yer kept company with a chap like me. No, the 'greement must be as yer goes yer ways and I goes mine; but I hopes as yer will find suffin to do up here, not 'cause as I wouldn't like to go down to this place of yourn but because yer have set yer heart on getting work here."

A week later the two boys were out late in Covent Garden trying to earn a few pence by fetching up cabs and carriages for people coming out from a concert in the floral hall. George had just succeeded in earning three-

pence, and had returned to the entrance to the hall, and was watching the people come out, and trying to get another job. Presently a gentleman, with a girl of some nine or ten years old, came out and took their place on the footpath.

"Can I call you a carriage, sir?" George asked.

"No, thank you, lad, a man has gone for it."

George fell back and stood watching the girl, who was in a white dress, with a little hood trimmed with swansdown over her head.

Presently his eye fell on something on which the light glittered as it hung from her neck. Just as he was looking, a hand reached over her shoulder, there was a jerk, and a sudden cry from the child, then a boy dived into the crowd, and at the same moment George dashed after him. There was a cry of "Stop thief!" and several hands made a grab at George as he dived through the crowd; but he slipped through them and was soon in the roadway.

Some twenty yards ahead of him he saw the boy running. He turned up Bow Street and then dashed down an alley. He did not know that he was followed until suddenly George sprang upon his back, and the two fell with a crash, the young thief undermost. George seized his right hand, and, kneeling upon him, twisted it behind his back and forced him to open his fingers, the boy, taken by surprise, and not knowing who was his assailant, making but slight resistance.

George seized the gold locket and dashed back at full speed into the market, and was soon in the thick of the crowd round the entrance. The gentleman was standing talking to a policeman, who was taking a note of the description of the lost trinket. The girl was standing by crying

"Here is your locket," George said, putting it into her hand. "I saw the boy take it, and have got it from him."

"Oh, papa! papa!" the girl cried. "Here is my locket again."

"Why, where did you get it from?" her father asked in astonishment.

"This boy has just given it to me," she replied. "He says he took it from the boy who stole it."

"Which boy, Nellie? Which is the boy who brought it back?"

The girl looked round, but George was gone.

"Why didn't you stop him, my dear?" her father said. "Of course I should wish to thank and reward him, for the locket was a very valuable one, and the more so to us from its having belonged to your mother. Did you notice the boy, policeman?"

"No, sir, I did not see him at all."

"Was he a poor boy, Nellie?"

"Not a very very poor boy, father," the girl replied. "At least I don't think so; but I only looked at his face. He didn't speak like a poor boy at all."

"Would you know him again?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I should. He was a good-looking boy with a nice face."

"Well, I am very sorry he has gone away, my dear. Evidently he does not want a reward, but at anyrate I should have liked to thank him. Are you always on this beat, policeman?"

"I am on night duty, sir, while the concerts are on."

"At anyrate, I daresay you know the constables who are about here in the daytime. I wish you would mention the fact to them, and ask them if they get any clue to the boy who has rendered me this service, to let me know. Here is a card with my name and address."

After restoring the locket George made his way to the entrance to the stables, where he generally met Bill after the theatre had closed, and there was no farther chance of earning money. It was not till half an hour later that the boy came running up.

"I have got eightpence," he said. "That is something like luck. I got three jobs. One stood me fourpence, the other two gave me tuppence each. What do yer say? Shall

we have a cup of coffee afore we turns in?"

"I think we had better not, Bill. I have got sixpence. We will put that by, with the sixpence we saved the other day, for the ostler. We haven't given him anything for some time. Your eightpence will get us a good breakfast in the morning."

When they had comfortably nestled themselves in the hay George told his companion how he had rescued and restored the locket.

"And he didn't give yer nuffin! I never heerd tell of such a scaly trick as that. I should ha' said it ought to have been good for a bob anyway."

"I did not wait to see, Bill. Directly I had given the little girl her locket I bolted."

"Well, that were soft. Why couldn't yer have waited to have seen what the bloke meant to give yer?"

"I did not want to be paid for such a thing as that," George replied. "I don't mind being paid when I have done a job for anyone; but this was different altogether."

Bill meditated for a minute or two.

"I can't see no difference, nohow," he said at last. "Yer did him a good turn, and got the thing back. I daresay it were worth five bob."

"A good deal more than that, Bill."

"More nor that! Well, then he ought to have come down handsome. Didn't yer run like winking, and didn't yer jump on the chap's back and knock him down, and didn't yer run back again? And warn't there a chance, ef one of the bobbies had got hold of yer collar and found it in yer hand, of yer being had up for stealing it? And then yer walks off and don't give him a chance of giving yer nuffin. My eye, but yer are a flat."

"I don't suppose you will quite understand, Bill. But when people do a thing to oblige somebody, and not as a piece of regular work, they don't expect to be paid. I shouldn't have liked it if they had offered me money for such a thing."

"Well, ef yer says so, no doubt it's right,"

Bill rejoined; "but it seems a rum sort of notion to me. When people loses things they expects to pay to get 'em back. Why, don't yer see outside the p'lice station, and in the shop winders, papers offering so much for giving back things as is lost. I can't read 'em myself, yer know; but chaps have read 'em to me. Why, I've heerd of as much as five quid being offered for watches and sich-like as was lost by ladies coming out of theayters, and I have often thought what a turn of luck it would be to light on one of 'em. And now yer says as I oughtn't to take the money ef I found it."

"No, I don't say that, Bill. If you found a thing and saw a reward offered, and you wanted the money, you would have good right to take it. But, you see, in this case I saw how sorry the girl was at losing her locket, and I went after it to please her, and I was quite content that I got it back for her."

Bill tried again to think the matter over in his mind, but he was getting warm and sleepy, and in a few minutes was sound off.

Two or three days later the lads had, to their great satisfaction, obtained a job. Walnuts were just coming in, and the boys were engaged to take off the green shucks. Bill was particularly pleased, for he had never before been taken on for such a job, and he considered it a sort of promotion. Five or six women were also employed, and as the group were standing round some great baskets Bill suddenly nudged his friend:

"I say, my eye, ain't that little gal pretty?"

George looked up from his work and at once recognized the girl to whom he had restored the locket. Her eye fell on him at the same moment.

"There, papa!" she exclaimed. "I told you if you brought me down to the market I felt sure I should know the boy again if I saw him. That's him, the one looking down into the basket. But he knew me again, for I saw him look surprised when he noticed me."

The gentleman made his way through the women to George.

"My lad, are you the boy who restored

the locket to my daughter three evenings ago?"

"Yes, sir," George said, colouring as he looked up. "I was standing close by when the boy took it, so I gave chase and brought it back, and that's all."

"You were off again in such a hurry that we hadn't time to thank you. Just come across to my daughter. I suppose you can leave your work for a minute?"

"Yes, sir. We are working by the job," George said, and looking rather shamefaced he followed the gentleman to the side-walk.

"This is your boy, as you call him, Nellie."

"I was sure I should know him again," the child said, "though I only saw him for a moment. We are very much obliged to you, boy, papa and me, because it had been mama's locket, and we should have been very sorry to have lost it."

"I am glad I was able to get it back for you," George said; "but I don't want to be thanked for doing it; and I don't want to be paid either, thank you, sir," he said flush-

ing as the gentleman put his hand into his pocket.

"No! and why not?" the gentleman said in surprise. "You have done me a great service, and there is no reason why I should not pay you for it. If I had lost it I would gladly have paid a reward to get it back."

"Thank you, sir," George said quietly; "but all the same I would rather not be paid for a little thing like that."

"You are a strange fellow," the gentleman said again. "One does not expect to find a boy in the market here refusing money when he has earned it."

"I should not refuse it if I had earned it," George said; "but I don't call getting back a locket for a young lady who has lost it, earning money."

"How do you live, lad? You don't speak like a boy who has been brought up in the market here."

"I have only been here three months," George said. "I came up to London to look

for work, but could not get any. Most days I go about looking for it, and do what odd jobs I can get when there's a chance."

"What sort of work do you want? Have you been accustomed to any work? Perhaps I could help you."

"I have been a year as an errand-boy," George answered; "but I didn't like it, and I thought I would rather get some sort of work that I could work at when I got to be a man instead of sticking in a shop."

"Did you run away from home then?" the gentleman asked.

"No, sir. My mother was ill and went into an infirmary, and so as I was alone I thought I would come to London and try to get the sort of work I liked; but I have tried almost all over London."

"And are you all alone here?"

"No, sir, not quite alone. I found a friend in that boy there, and we have worked together since I came up."

"Well, lad, if you really want work I can give it you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" George exclaimed fervently.

"And your friend too, if he likes. I have some works down at Limehouse and employ a good many boys. Here is the address;" and he took a card from his pocket, wrote a few words on the back of it, and handed it to George.

"Ask for the foreman, and give him that, and he will arrange for you to begin work on Monday. Come along, Nellie; we have got to buy the fruit for to-morrow, you know."

So saying he took his daughter's hand, and George, wild with delight, ran off to tell Bill that he had obtained work for them both.

"Well, Nellie, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, I am glad you could give him work, papa; didn't he look pleased? Wasn't it funny his saying he wouldn't have any money?"

"Yes; I hardly expected to have met with a refusal in Covent Garden; but you were right, child, and you are a better judge of character than I gave you credit for. You

said he was a nice-looking lad, and spoke like a gentleman, and he does. He is really a very good style of boy. Of course he is shabby and dirty now, and you see he has been an errand-boy at a grocer's; but he must have been better brought up than the generality of such lads. The one he called his friend looked a wild sort of specimen, altogether a different sort of boy. I should say he was one of the regular arabs hanging about this place. If so, I expect a very few days' work will sicken him; but I shouldn't be surprised if your boy, as you call him, sticks to it."

The next morning the two boys presented themselves at Mr. Penrose's works at Limehouse. These were sawing and planing works, and the sound of many wheels, and the hoarse rasping sound of saws innumerable, came out through the open windows of the building as they entered the yard.

"Now what do you boys want?" a workman said as he appeared at one of the doors.

"We want to see the foreman," George

said. "I have a card for him from Mr. Penrose."

"I will let him know," the man replied.

Two minutes later the foreman came out, and George handed him the card. He read what Mr. Penrose had written upon it and said:

"Very well, you can come in on Monday; pay, eight shillings a week; seven o'clock; there, that will do. Oh, what are your names?" taking out a pocket-book. "George Andrews and William Smith;" and then, with a nod, he went back into his room, while the boys, almost bewildered at the rapidity with which the business had been arranged, went out into the street again.

"There we are, Bill, employed," George said in delight.

"Yes, there we is," Bill agreed, but in a more doubtful tone; "it's a rum start, ain't it? I don't expect I shall make much hand of it, but I am wery glad for you, George."

"Why shouldn't you make much hand of it? You are as strong as I am."

"Yes; but then, you see, I ain't been accustomed not to work regular, and I expect I sha'n't like it—not at first; but I am going to try. George, don't yer think as I ain't agoing to try. I ain't that sort; still I expects I shall get the sack afore long."

"Nonsense, Bill! you will like it when you once get accustomed to it, and it's a thousand times better having to draw your pay regularly at the end of the week than to get up in the morning not knowing whether you are going to have breakfast or not. Won't mother be pleased when I write and tell her I have got a place. Last time she wrote she said that she was a great deal better, and the doctor thought she would be out in the spring, and then I hope she will be coming up here, and that will be jolly."

"Yes, that's just it," Bill said; "that's weere it is; you and I will get on fust-rate, but it ain't likely as your mother would put up with a chap like me."

"My mother knows that you have been a good friend to me, Bill, and that will be

quite enough for her. You wait till you see her."

"My eye, what a lot of little houses there is about here!" Bill said, "just all the same pattern; and how wide the streets is to what they is up Drury Lane!"

"Yes, we ought to have no difficulty in getting a room here, Bill, now that we shall have money to pay for it; only think, we shall have sixteen shillings a week between us."

"It's a lot of money," Bill said vaguely. "Sixteen bob! My eye, there ain't no saying what it will buy! I wish I looked a little bit more respectable," he said, with a new feeling as to the deficiencies of his attire. "It didn't matter in the garden; but to go to work with a lot of other chaps, these togs ain't what you may call spicy."

"They certainly are not, Bill," George said with a laugh. "We must see what we can manage."

George's own clothes were worn and old, but they looked respectable indeed by the

side of those of his companion. Bill's elbows were both out, the jacket was torn and ragged, he had no waistcoat, and his trousers were far too large for him, and were kept up by a single brace, and were patched in a dozen places.

When George first met him he was shoeless, but soon after they had set up housekeeping together George had bought from a cobbler's stall a pair of boots for two shillings, and these, although now almost falling to pieces, were still the best part of Bill's outfit.

CHAPTER III.

WORK.

THE next morning George went out with the bundle containing his Sunday clothes, which had been untouched since his arrival in town, and going to an old-clothes shop he exchanged them for a suit of working clothes in fair condition, and

then returning hid his bundle in the hay and rejoined Bill, who had from early morning been at work shelling walnuts. Although Bill was somewhat surprised at his companion not beginning work at the usual time he asked no questions, for his faith in George was so unbounded that everything he did was right in his eyes.

"There is our last day's work in the market, Bill," George said as they reached their loft that evening.

"It's your last day's work, George, I ain't no doubt; but I expects it ain't mine by a long way. I have been a-thinking over this 'ere go, and I don't think as it will act nohow. In the first place I ain't fit to go to such a place, and they are sure to make it hot for me."

"That's nonsense, Bill; there are lots of roughish sort of boys in works of that sort, and you will soon be at home with the rest."

"In the next place," Bill went on, unheeding the interruption, "I shall be getting into some blooming row or other afore I have

been there a week, and they will like enough turn you out as well as me. That's what I am a-thinking most on, George. If they chucks me, the chances are as they chucks you too; and if they did that arter all the pains you have had to get a place I should go straight off and make a hole in the water. That's how I looks at it."

"But I don't think, Bill, that there's any chance of your getting into a row. Of course at first we must both expect to be blown up sometimes, but if we do our best and don't answer back again we shall do as well as the others."

"Oh, I shouldn't cheek 'em back," Bill said. "I am pretty well used to getting blown up. Everyone's always at it, and I know well enough as it don't pay to cheek back, not unless you have got a market-cart between you and a clear road for a bolt. I wasn't born yesterday. Yer've been wery good to me you have, George, and before any harm should come to yer through me, s' help me, I'd chuck myself under a market-waggon."

"I know you would, Bill; but, whatever you say, you have been a far greater help to me than I have to you. Anyhow we are not going to part now. You are coming to work with me to start with, and I know you will do your best to keep your place. If you fail, well, so much the worse, it can't be helped; but after our being sent there by Mr. Penrose I feel quite sure that the foreman would not turn me off even if he had to get rid of you."

"D' yer think so?"

"I do, indeed, Bill."

"Will yer take yer davey?"

"Yes, if it's any satisfaction to you, Bill, I will take my davey that I do not think that they would turn me off even if they sent you away."

"And yer really wants me to go with yer, so help yer?"

"Really and truly, Bill."

"Wery well, George, then I goes; but mind yer, it's 'cause yer wishes me."

So saying, Bill curled himself up in the

hay, and George soon heard by his regular breathing that he was sound asleep.

The next morning, before anyone was stirring, they went down into the yard, as was their custom on Sunday mornings, for a good wash, stripping to the waist and taking it by turns to pump over each other. Bill had at first protested against the fashion, saying as he did very well and did not see no use in it; but seeing that George really enjoyed it he followed his example. After a morning or two, indeed, and with the aid of a piece of soap which George had bought, Bill got himself so bright and shiny as to excite much sarcastic comment and remark from his former companions, which led to more than one pugilistic encounter.

That morning George remained behind in the loft for a minute or two after Bill had run down, attired only in his trousers. When Bill went up the ladder after his ablutions he began hunting about in the hay.

"What are you up to, Bill?"

"Blest if I can find my shirt. Here's two

of yourn knocking about, but I can't see where's mine, nor my jacket neither."

"It's no use your looking, Bill, for you won't find them, and even if you found them you couldn't put'em on. I have torn them up."

"Torn up my jacket!" Bill exclaimed in consternation. "What lark are yer up to now, George?"

"No lark at all. We are going together to work to-morrow, and you could not go as you were; so you put on that shirt and those things," and he threw over the clothes he had procured the day before.

Bill looked in astonishment.

"Why, where did yer get 'em, George? I knows yer only had four bob with what we got yesterday. Yer didn't find 'em, and yer didn't—no, in course yer didn't—nip 'em."

"No, I didn't steal them certainly," George said laughing. "I swapped my Sunday clothes for them yesterday. I can do without them very well till we earn enough to get another suit. There, don't say anything about it, Bill, else I will punch your head."

Bill stared at him with open eyes for a minute, and then threw himself down in the hay and burst into tears.

"Oh, I say, don't do that!" George exclaimed. "What have you to cry about?"

"Ain't it enough to make a cove cry," Bill sobbed, "to find a chap doing things for him like that? I wish I may die if I don't feel as if I should bust. It's too much, that's what it is, and it's all on one side; that's the wust of it."

"I daresay you will make it even some time, Bill; so don't let's say anything more about it, but put on your clothes. We will have a cup of coffee each and a loaf between us for breakfast, and then we will go for a walk into the park, the same as we did last Sunday, and hear the preaching."

The next morning they were up at their accustomed hour and arrived at the works at Limehouse before the doors were opened. Presently some men and boys arrived, the doors were opened, and the two boys followed the others in.

"Hallo! who are you?" the man at the gate asked.

George gave their names, and the man looked at his time-book.

"Yes, it's all right; you are the new boys. You are to go into that planing-shop," and he pointed to one of the doors opening into the yard.

The boys were not long before they were at work. Bill was ordered to take planks from a large pile and to hand them to a man, who passed them under one of the planing-machines. George was told to take them away as fast as they were finished and pile them against a wall. When the machines stopped for any adjustment or alteration both were to sweep up the shavings and ram them tightly into great bags, in which they were carried to the engine-house.

For a time the boys were almost dazzled by the whirl of the machinery, the rapid motion of the numerous wheels and shafting overhead, and of the broad bands which carried the power from them to the machinery on the

floor, by the storm of shavings which flew from the cutters, and the unceasing activity which prevailed around them. Beyond receiving an occasional order, shouted in a loud tone—for conversation in an ordinary voice would have been inaudible—nothing occurred till the bell rang at half-past eight for breakfast. Then the machinery suddenly stopped, and a strange hush succeeded the din which had prevailed.

"How long have we got now?" George asked the man from whose bench he had been taking the planks.

"Half an hour," the man said as he hurried away.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bill?" George asked when they had got outside.

"Didn't think as there could be such a row," Bill replied. "Why, talk about the Garden! Lor', why it ain't nothing to it. I hardly knew what I was adoing at first."

"No more did I, Bill. You must mind what you do and not touch any of those straps and wheels and things. I know when

I was at Croydon there was a man killed in a saw-mill there by being caught in the strap; they said it drew him up and smashed him against the ceiling. And now we had better look out for a baker's."

"I suppose there ain't a coffee-stall nowhere handy?"

"I don't suppose there is, Bill; at any-rate we have no time to spare to look for one. There's a pump in the yard, so we can have a drink of water as we come back. Well, the work doesn't seem very hard, Bill," George said as they ate their bread.

"No, it ain't hard," Bill admitted, "if it weren't for all them rattling wheels. But I expect it ain't going to be like that regular. They've just gived us an easy job to begin with. Yer'll see it will be worse presently."

"We shall soon get accustomed to the noise, Bill, and I don't think we shall find the work any harder. They don't put boys at hard work, but just jobs like we are doing, to help the men."

"What shall we do about night, George?"

"I think that at dinner-time we had better ask the man we work for. He looks a good-natured sort of chap. He may know of someone he could recommend us to."

They worked steadily till dinner-time; then as they came out George said to the man with whom they were working:

"We want to get a room. We have been lodging together in London, and don't know anyone down here. I thought perhaps you could tell us of some quiet, respectable people who have a room to let?"

The man looked at George more closely than he had hitherto done.

"Well, there ain't many people as would care about taking in two boys, but you seem a well-spoken young chap and different to most of 'em. Do you think you could keep regular hours, and not come clattering in and out fifty times in the evening, and playing tom-fools' tricks of all sorts?"

"I don't think we should be troublesome," George said; "and I am quite sure we shouldn't be noisy."

"You would want to be cooked for, in course?"

"No, I don't think so," George said. "Beyond hot water for a cup of tea in the evening, we should not want much cooking done, especially if there is a coffee-stall anywhere where we could get a cup in the morning."

"You haven't got any traps, I suppose?"

George looked puzzled.

"I mean bed and chairs, and so on."

George shook his head.

"We might get them afterwards, but we haven't any now."

"Well, I don't mind trying you young fellows. I have got a bed-room in my place empty. A brother of mine who lodged and worked with me has just got a job as foreman down in the country. At anyrate I will try you for a week, and if at the end of that time you and my missis don't get on together you must shift. Two bob a week. I suppose that will about suit you?"

George said that would suit very well, and

expressed his thanks to the man for taking them in.

They had been walking briskly since they left the works, and now stopped suddenly before the door of a house in a row. It was just like its neighbour, except that George noticed that the blinds and windows were cleaner than the others, and that the door had been newly painted and varnished.

"Here we are," the man said. "You had best come in and see the missis and the room. Missis," he shouted, and a woman appeared from the back-room. "I have let Harry's room, mother," he said, "and these are the new lodgers."

"My stars, John!" she exclaimed; "you don't mean to say that you let the room to them two boys. I should have thought you had better sense. Why, they will be trampling up and down the stairs like young hosses, wear out the oilcloth, and frighten the baby into fits. I never did hear such a thing."

"I think they are quiet boys, Bessie, and

won't give much trouble. At anyrate I have agreed to try them for a week, and if you don't get on with them at the end of that time, of course they must go. They have only come to work at the shop to-day; they work with me, and as far as I can see they are quiet young chaps enough. Come along, lads, I will show you your room."

It was half-way up the stairs, at the back of the house, over the kitchen, which was built out there. It was a comfortable little room, not large, but sufficiently so for two boys. There was a bed, a chest of drawers, two chairs, and a dressing-table, and a strip of carpet ran alongside the bed, and there was, moreover, a small fireplace.

"Will that do for you?" the man asked.

"Capitally," George said; "it could not be nicer;" while Bill was so taken aback by its comfort and luxury that he was speechless.

"Well, that's settled then," the man said. "If you have got any things you can bring 'em in when you like."

"We have not got any to speak of," George

said flushing a little. "I came up from the country three months ago to look for work, and beyond odd jobs I have had nothing to do since, so that everything I had is pretty well gone; but I can pay a week's rent in advance," he said, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, you needn't mind that!" the man said; "as you work in the shop it's safe enough. Now I must get my dinner else I shall be late for work."

"Well, Bill, what do you think of that?" George asked as they left the house.

"My eye," Bill exclaimed in admiration; "ain't it nice just! Why, yer couldn't get a room like that, not furnished, anywhere near the market, not at four bob a week. Ain't it clean just; so help me if the house don't look as if it has been scrubbed down every day. What a woman that must be for washing!"

"Yes; we shall have to rub our feet well, Bill, and make as little mess as we can in going in and out."

"I should think so," Bill said. "It don't seem to me as if it could be true as we're to have such a room as that to ourselves, and to walk into a house bold without being afraid as somebody would have his eye on you, and chivey you; and eight bob a week for grub regular."

"Well, let's get some bread and cheese, Bill; pretty near half our time must be gone, and mind we must be very saving at first. There will be several things to get; a kettle and a tea-pot, and a coffee-pot, and some cups and saucers, and we shall want a gridiron for frying rashers of bacon upon."

"My eye, won't it be prime!" Bill broke in.

"And we shall want some towels," George went on with his enumeration.

"Towels!" repeated Bill. "What are they like?"

"They are cloths for wiping your hands and face after you have washed."

"Well, if yer says we wants 'em, George, of course we must get 'em; but I've always

found my hands dried quick enough by themselves, especially if I gived 'em a rub on my trousers."

"And then, Bill, you know," George went on, "I want to save every penny we can, so as to get some things to furnish two rooms by the time mother comes out."

"Yes, in course we must," Bill agreed warmly, though a slight shade passed over his face at the thought that they were not to be always alone together. "Well, yer know, George, I am game for anythink. I can hold on with a penn'orth of bread a day. I have done it over and over, and if yer says the word I am ready to do it again."

"No, Bill, we needn't do that," George laughed. "Still, we must live as cheap as we can. We will stick to bread for breakfast, and bread and cheese for dinner, and bread for supper, with sometimes a rasher as a great treat. At anyrate we will try to live on six shillings a week."

"Oh! we can do that fine," Bill said confidently; "and then two shillings for rent,

and that will leave us eight shillings a week to put by."

"Mother said that the doctor didn't think she would be able to come out till the spring. We are just at the beginning of November, so if she comes out the first of April, that's five months, say twenty-two weeks. Twenty-two weeks at eight shillings, let me see. That's eight pounds in twenty weeks, eight pounds sixteen altogether, that would furnish two rooms very well, I should think."

"My eye, I should think so!" Bill exclaimed, for to his mind eight pound sixteen was an almost unheard-of sum, and the fact that his companion had been able to calculate it increased if possible his admiration for him.

It needed but two or three days to reconcile Mrs. Grimstone to her new lodgers.

"I wouldn't have believed," she said at the end of the week to a neighbour, "as two boys could have been that quiet. They comes in after work as regular as the master. They rubs their feet on the mat, and you can scarce

hear 'em go upstairs, and I don't hear no more of 'em till they goes out agin in the morning. They don't come back here to breakfast or dinner. Eats it, I suppose, standing like."

"But what do they do with themselves all the evening, Mrs. Grimstone?"

"One of 'em reads to the other. I think I can hear a voice going regular over the kitchen."

"And how's their room?"

"As clean and tidy as a new pin. They don't lock the door when they goes out, and I looked in yesterday, expecting to find it like a pig-sty; but they had made the bed afore starting for work, and set everything in its place, and laid the fire like for when they come back."

Mrs. Grimstone was right. George had expended six pence in as many old books at a bookstall. One of them was a spelling-book, and he had at once set to work teaching Bill his letters. Bill had at first protested. "He had done wery well without reading,

and didn't see much good in it." However, as George insisted he gave way, as he would have done to any proposition whatever upon which his friend had set his mind. So for an hour every evening after they had finished tea Bill worked at his letters and spelling, and then George read aloud to him from one of the other books.

"You must get on as fast as you can this winter, Bill," he said; "because when the summer evenings come we shall want to go for long walks."

They found that they did very well upon the sum they agreed on. Tea and sugar cost less than George had expected. Mrs. Grimstone took in for them regularly a halfpenny-worth of milk, and for tea they were generally able to afford a bloater between them, or a very thin rasher of bacon. Their enjoyment of their meals was immense. Bill indeed frequently protested that they were spending too much money; but George said as long as they kept within the sum agreed upon, and paid their rent, coal, candles, and what little

washing they required out of the eight shillings a week, they were doing very well.

They had by this time got accustomed to the din of the machinery, and were able to work in comfort. Mr. Penrose had several times come through the room, and had given them a nod. After they had been there a month he spoke to Grimstone.

"How do those boys do their work?"

"Wonderful well, sir; they are the two best boys we have ever had. No skylarking about, and I never have to wait a minute for a plank. They generally comes in a few minutes before time a d gets the bench cleared up. They are first-rate boys. They lodge with me, and two quieter and better-behaved chaps in a house there never was."

"I am glad to hear it," Mr. Penrose said. "I am interested in them, and am pleased to hear so good an account."

That Saturday, to their surprise, when they went to get their money they received ten shillings apiece.

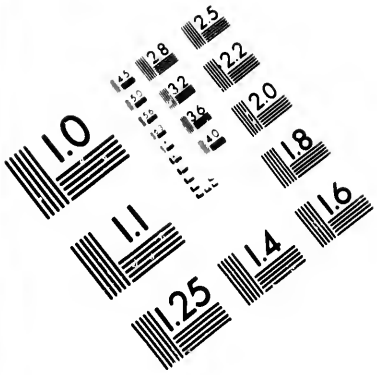
"That's two shillings too much," George said as the money was handed to them.

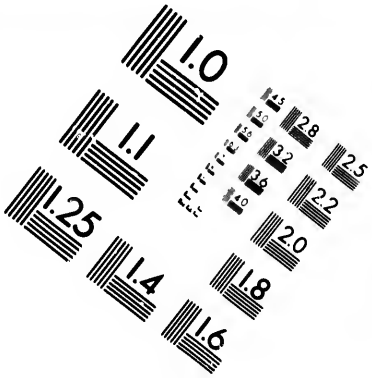
"That's all right," the foreman said. "The governor ordered you both to have a rise."

"My eye!" Bill said as they went out. "What do you think of that, George? Four bob a week more to put by regularly. How much more will that make by the time your mother comes?"

"We won't put it all by, Bill. I think the other will be enough. This four shillings a week we will put aside at present for clothes. We want two more shirts apiece, and some more stockings, and we shall want some shoes before long, and another suit of clothes each. We must keep ourselves decent, you know."

From the time when they began work the boys had gone regularly every Sunday morning to a small iron church near their lodging, and they also went to an evening service once a week. Their talk, too, at home was often on religion, for Bill was extremely anxious to learn, and although his questions and remarks often puzzled George to answer, he was al-





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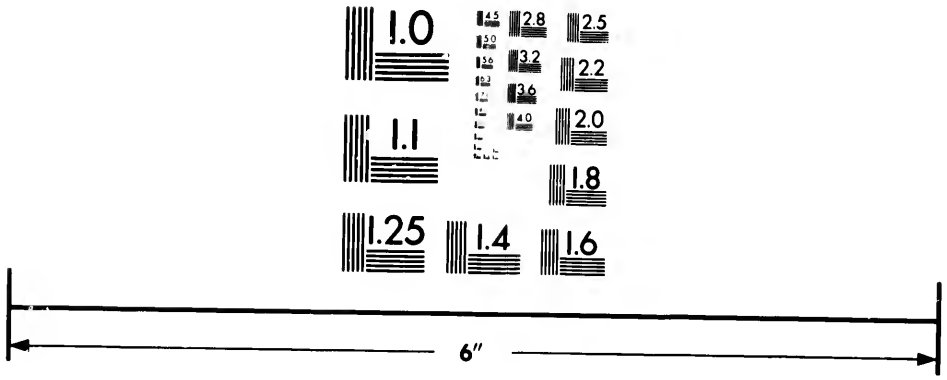

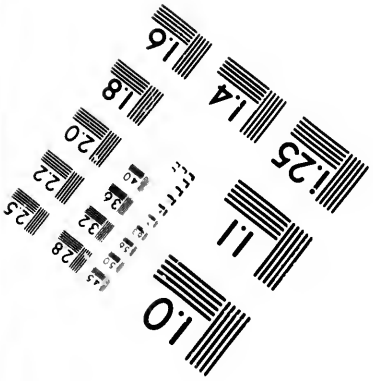

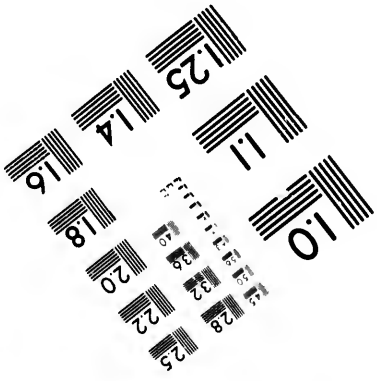

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ways ready to explain things as far as he could.

February came, and to George's delight he heard from his mother that she was so much better that the doctor thought that when she came out at the end of April she would be as strong as she had ever been. Her eyes had benefited greatly by her long rest, and she said that she was sure she should be able to do work as before. She had written several times since they had been at Limehouse, expressing her great pleasure at hearing that George was so well and comfortable. At Christmas, the works being closed for four days, George had gone down to see her, and they had a delightful talk together. Christmas had indeed been a memorable occasion to the boys, for on Christmas Eve the carrier had left a basket at Grimstone's directed "George Andrews." The boys had prepared their Christmas dinner, consisting of some fine rashers of bacon and six pennyworth of cold plum-pudding from a cook-shop, and had already rather lamented this outlay, for

Mrs. Grimstone had that afternoon invited them to dine down-stairs. George was reading from a book which he bought for a penny that morning when there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Grimstone said:

"Here is a hamper for you, George."

"A hamper for me!" George exclaimed in astonishment, opening the door. "Why, whoever could have sent a hamper for me! It must be a mistake."

"That's your name on the direction, anyhows," Mrs. Grimstone said.

"Yes, that's my name, sure enough," George agreed, and at once began to unknot the string which fastened down the lid.

"Here is a Christmas card at the top," he shouted. He turned it over. On the back were the words:

"With all good wishes, Helen Penrose."

"Well, that is kind," George said in rather a husky voice; and indeed it was the kindness that prompted the gift rather than the gift itself that touched him.

"Now, then, George," Bill remonstrated;

"never mind that there card, let's see what's inside."

The hamper was unpacked, and was found to contain a cold goose, a Christmas pudding, and some oranges and apples. These were all placed on the table, and when Mrs. Grimstone had retired Bill executed a war-dance of triumph and delight.

"I never did see such a game," he said at last, as he sat down exhausted. "There's a Christmas dinner for yer! Why, it's like them stories of the genii you was a-telling me about—chaps as come whenever yer rubbed a ring or an old lamp, and brought a tuck-out or whatever yer asked for. Of course that wasn't true; yer told me it wasn't, and I shouldn't have believed it if yer hadn't, but this 'ere is true. Now I sees, George, as what yer said was right and what I said was wrong. I thought yer were a flat 'cause yer wouldn't take nothing for getting back that there locket, and now yer see what's come of it, two good berths for us and a Christmas dinner fit for a king. Now what

are we going to do with it, 'cause yer know we dines with them down stairs to-morrow?"

"The best thing we can do, I think," George answered, "will be to invite all of them down stairs, Bob Grimstone, his wife, and the three young uns, to supper, not to-morrow night nor the night after, because I sha'n't be back from Croydon till late, but say the evening after."

"But we can't hold them all," Bill said, looking round the room.

"No, we can't hold them here, certainly, but I daresay they will let us have the feed in their parlour. There will be nothing to get, you know, but some bread and butter, and some beer for Bob. Mrs. Grimstone don't take it, so we must have plenty of tea."

"I should like some beer too, just for once, George, with such a blow-out as that."

"No, no, Bill, you and I will stick to tea. You know we agreed that we wouldn't take beer. If we begin it once we shall want it again, so we are not going to alter from what we agreed to. We see plenty of the misery

which drink causes all round and the way in which money is wasted over it. I like a glass of beer as well as you do, and when I get to be a man I daresay I shall take a glass with my dinner regularly, though I won't do even that if I find it makes me want to take more; but anyhow at present we can do without it."

Bill agreed, and the dinner-party down stairs and the supper two nights afterwards came off in due course, and were both most successful.

The acknowledgment of the gift had been a matter of some trouble to George, but he had finally bought a pretty New Year's card and had written on the back, "With the grateful thanks of George Andrews," and had sent it to the daughter of his employer.

At the beginning of April George had consulted Grimstone and his wife as to the question of preparing a home for his mother.

"How much would two rooms cost?" he had asked; "one a good-sized one and the other the same size as ours."

"Four shillings or four and sixpence," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And supposing we had a parlour and two little bed-rooms?"

"Five and sixpence or six shillings, I should say," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And how much for a whole house?"

"It depends upon the size. We pay seven shillings a week, but you might get one without the kitchen and bed-room over it behind for six shillings."

"That would be much the nicest," George said, "only it would cost such a lot to furnish it."

"But you needn't furnish it all at once," Mrs. Grimstone suggested. "Just a kitchen and two bed-rooms for a start, and you can put things into the parlour afterwards. That's the way we did when we first married. But you must have some furniture."

"And how much will it cost for the kitchen and two bed-rooms?"

"Of course going cheaply to work and buying the things second-hand, I should say

I could pick up the things for you, so that you could do very well," Mrs. Grimstone said, "for six or seven pounds."

"That will do capitally," George said, "for by the end of this month Bill and I will have more than ten pounds laid by."

"What! since you came here?" Grimstone exclaimed in astonishment. "Do you mean to say you boys have laid by five pounds apiece?"

"Yes, and bought a lot of things too," his wife put in.

"Why, you must have been starving yourselves."

"We don't look like it," George laughed. "I am sure Bill is a stone heavier than when he came here."

"Well, young chap, it does you a lot of credit," Bob Grimstone said. "It isn't every boy, by a long way, would stint himself as you must have done for the last five months to make a comfortable home for his mother, for I know lots of men who are earning their two quid a week and has their old people in

the workhouse. Well, all I can say is that if I or the missis here can be of any use to you in taking a house we shall be right down glad."

"Thank you," George said. "We will look about for a house, and when we have fixed on one if you or Mrs. Grimstone will go about it for us I shall be much obliged, for I don't think landlords would be inclined to let a house to two boys."

"All right, George! we will do that for you with pleasure. Besides, you know, there are things, when you are going to take a house, that you stand out for; such as papering and painting, or putting in a new range, and things of that sort."

After their dinner on the following Sunday the two boys set out house-hunting.

"If it's within a mile that will do," George said. "It doesn't matter about our going home in the breakfast time. We can bring our grub in a basket and our tea in a bottle, as several of the hands do; but if it's over a mile we shall have to hurry to get there and

back for dinner. Still there are plenty of houses in a mile."

There were, indeed, plenty of houses in long regular rows, bare and hard-looking, but George wanted to find something more pleasant and home-like than these. Late in the afternoon he came upon what he wanted. It was just about a mile from the works and beyond the lines of regular streets. Here he found a turning off the main-road with but eight houses in it, four on each side. It looked as if the man who built them had intended to run a street down for some distance, but had either been unable to obtain the ground beyond or had changed his mind.

They stood in pairs, each with its garden in front, with a bow-window and little portico. They appeared to be inhabited by a different class to those who lived in the rows, chiefly by city clerks, for the gardens were nicely kept, the blinds were clean and spotless, muslin curtains hung in the windows, and fancy tables with pretty ornaments stood

between them. Fortunately one of them, the last on the left-hand side, was to let.

"What do you think of this, Bill?"

"It seems to be just the thing; but how about the rent, George? I should think they were awful dear."

"I don't suppose they are any more than the houses in the rows, Bill. They are very small, you see, and I don't suppose they would suit workmen as well as the others; at anyrate we will see."

Whereupon George noted down on a scrap of paper the name of the agent of whom inquiry was to be made.

"No. 8," he said; "but what's the name of the street? Oh, there it is. Laburnum Villas. No. 8, Laburnum Villas; that sounds first-rate, doesn't it? I will get Mrs. Grimstone to go round to the agent to-morrow.

This Mrs. Grimstone agreed to do directly she was asked. After speaking to her husband she said, "I will get the key from the agent's and will be there just after twelve to-morrow, so if you go there straight when you get out

you will be able to see the rooms and what state it's in."

"But how about Bob's dinner?" George asked.

"Oh, he will have it cold to-morrow, and I will set it out for him before I start."

"That is very kind, Mrs. Grimstone, thank you very much. It would be just the thing."

Accordingly, at ten minutes past twelve on the following day the two boys arrived breathless at No. 8 Laburnum Villas.

"Hurrah!" George shouted, "there is Mrs. Grimstone at the window."

The door was opened and they rushed in.

"It's a tidy little place," Mrs. Grimstone said; "and it's in good order and won't want any money laying out upon it."

The house was certainly small, but the boys were delighted with it. On the ground-floor were two little rooms opening with folding doors, and a little kitchen built out behind. There was a room over this, and two rooms above the sitting-rooms.

"That's just the right number," George

said, "a bed-room each for us; it couldn't be nicer; and what pretty paper!"

"And there is a good long slip of garden behind," Mrs. Grimstone said, "where you could grow lots of vegetables. Of course in the front you would have flowers."

"And how much do they want for it?"

"Seven and sixpence a week, including rates and taxes. I call it dear for its size, but then of course it's got the garden and it looks pretty and nice. The agent says it's been painted and papered from top to bottom since the last people left, but he says the owner won't let it unless somebody comes who is likely to stop, and he will want references of respectability."

"All right!" George said, "I can manage that," for he had already been thinking of the question in his mind; "and we can manage seven and sixpence a week; can't we, Bill?"

"We will try, anyhow," Bill said stoutly, for he was as much pleased with the cottage as George was.

They explored the garden behind the

house. This was about a hundred feet long by twenty-five wide. Half of it was covered with the stumps of a plantation of cabbages, the other half was empty and had evidently been dug up by the last tenants ready for planting.

"Why, I should think we shall be able to grow all our own potatoes here," George exclaimed in delight.

Mrs. Grimstone was a country woman, and she shook her head.

"You wouldn't be able to do that, George, not if you gave it all up to potatoes; but if you planted the further end with potatoes you might get a good many, and then, you know, at this end you might have three or four rows of peas and French beans, and lettuces and such like, but you will have to get some manure to put in. Things won't grow without manure even in the country, and I am sure they won't here; and then you know you can have flowers in the front of the house. But it's time for you to be off, else you will be late at the works. I am

sure it's more than half an hour since you came in. I will take the key back and tell them they shall have an answer by Wednesday or Thursday."

George did not think they could have been a quarter of an hour; however, he and Bill started at a trot, which they increased into a run at the top of their speed when the first clock they saw pointed to seven minutes to one. The bell was ringing as they approached the works, it stopped when they were within fifty yards, and the gate was just closing as they rushed up.

"Too late," the man said.

"Oh, do let us through," George panted out; "it's the first time we have ever been late, and we have run a mile to be here in time."

"Oh it's you, is it?" the man said, opening the gate a few inches to look through. "Ah, well I will let you in this time, 'cause you are well-behaved young chaps; but don't you run it so close another time, else you will have to lose your hour."

CHAPTER IV.

HOME.

THAT evening George wrote a letter to Dr. Jeffries at Croydon, saying that he had taken a little house for his mother to come to when she came out of the infirmary, and as he had kindly said that he would render her help if he could, would he be good enough to write to the agent whose address he gave, saying that Mrs. Andrews, who was about taking No. 8, Laburnum Villas, was a person of respectability.

The following evening he received a letter from the doctor saying that he had written to the agent, and that he was glad indeed to hear that George was getting on so well that he was able to provide a home for his mother.

On Wednesday at dinner-time Mrs. Grimstone handed George a key.

"There you are, George. You are master of the house now. The agent said the reference was most satisfactory; so I paid him

the seven and sixpence you gave me for a week's rent in advance, and you can go in when you like. We shall be sorry to lose you both, for I don't want two better lodgers. You don't give no trouble, and all has been quiet and pleasant in the house; and to think what a taking I was in that day as Bob brought you here for the first time, to think as he had let the room to two boys. But there, one never knows, and I wouldn't have believed it as boys could be so quiet in a house."

"Now we must begin to see about furniture," Bob Grimstone said. "The best plan, I think, will be for you two to go round of an evening to all the shops in the neighbourhood, and mark off just what you think will suit you. You put down the prices stuck on them, and just what they are, and then the missis can go in the morning and bargain for them. She will get them five shillings in the pound cheaper than you would. It's wonderful how women do beat men down, to be sure. When a man hears what's the price

of a thing he leaves it or takes it just as he likes, but a woman begins by offering half the sum. Then the chap says no, and she makes as if she was going away; he lets her go a little way and then he hollers after her, and comes down a goodish bit in the price. Then she says she don't particularly want it and shouldn't think of giving any such price as that. Then he tries again, and so they gets on till they hit on a figure as suits them both. You see that little tea-caddy in the corner? My wife was just three weeks buying that caddy. The chap wanted seven and six for it, and she offered him half a crown. He came down half a crown at the end of the first week, and at last she got it for three and nine. Now, the first thing you have got to do is to make out a list. First of all you have got to put down the things as you must have, and then the things you can do without, though you will get them if you can afford it. Mother will help you at that."

So Mrs. Grimstone and George sat down with paper and a pencil, and George was

absolutely horrified at the list of things which Mrs. Grimstone declared were absolutely indispensable. However, after much discussion, some few items were marked as doubtful. When the list was finished the two boys started on an exploring expedition, and the next week all their evenings were fully occupied. In ten days after they began the three bed-rooms and the kitchen were really smartly furnished, Mrs. Grimstone proving a wonderful hand at bargaining, and making the ten pounds go farther than George had believed possible. On the Sunday Bob went with his wife and the boys to inspect the house.

"It's a very comfortable little place," he said, "and that front bed-room with the chintz curtains the missis made up is as nice a little room as you want to see. As to the others they will do well enough for you boys."

The only articles of furniture in the sitting-room were two long muslin curtains, which Mrs. Grimstone had bought a bargain at a

shop selling off; for it was agreed that this was necessary to give the house a furnished appearance. Bob Grimstone was so much pleased at what had been done that he shared George's feeling of regret that one of the sitting-rooms could not also be furnished, and on the walk home said:

"Look here, George. I know you would like to have the house nice for your mother. You couldn't make one of those sitting-rooms comfortable not under a five-pound note, not even with the missis to market for you, but you might for that. I have got a little money laid by in the savings-bank, and I will lend you five pounds, and welcome, if you like to take it. I know it will be just as safe with you as it will be there."

"Thank you very much, Bob—thank you very much, but I won't take it. In the first place, I should like mother to know that the furniture is all ours, bought out of Bill's savings and mine; and in the next place, I should find it hard at first to pay back anything. I think we can just manage on our money,

but that will be all. I told you mother does work, but she mayn't be able to get any at first, so we can't reckon on that. When she does, you know, we shall be able gradually to buy the furniture."

"Well, perhaps you are right, George," the man said after a pause. "You would have been welcome to the money; but perhaps you are right not to take it. I borrowed a little money when I first went into housekeeping, and it took a wonderful trouble to pay off, and if there's illness or anything of that sort it weighs on you. Not that I should be in any hurry about it. It wouldn't worry me, but it would worry you."

A week later Mrs. Andrews was to leave the infirmary, and on Saturday George asked for a day off to go down to fetch her. Every evening through the week he and Bill had worked away at digging up the garden. Fortunately there was a moon, for it was dark by the time they came out from the works. Bill was charged with the commission to lay in the store of provisions for the Sun-

day, and he was to be sure to have a capital fire and tea ready by four o'clock, the hour at which George calculated he would be back.

Very delighted was George as in his best suit—for he and Bill had two suits each now—he stepped out of the train at Croydon and walked to the workhouse. His mother had told him that she would meet him at the gate at half-past two, and punctually at the time he was there. A few minutes later Mrs. Andrews came out, not dressed as he had seen her at Christmas, in the infirmary garb, but in her own clothes. George gave a cry of delight as he ran forward to meet her.

"My darling mother! and you are looking quite yourself again."

"I am, thank God, George. It has seemed a long nine months, but the rest and quiet have done wonders for me. Everyone has been very kind; and of course the knowledge, dear boy, that you had got work that you liked helped me to get strong again.

And you are looking well too; and your friend, I hope he is well?"

"Quite well, mother, but in a great fright about you. He is glad you are coming because I am glad; but the poor fellow has quite made up his mind that you won't like him and you won't think him a fit companion for me. I told him over and over again that you are not that sort; but nothing can persuade him. Of course, mother, he doesn't talk good grammar, and he uses some queer expressions; but he is very much changed in that way since I first knew him, and he tries very hard, and don't mind a bit how often I correct him, and he is beginning to read easy words quite well; and he is one of the best-hearted fellows in the world."

"If he is kind to you, George, and fond of you, that's enough for me," Mrs. Andrews said; "but I have no doubt I shall soon like him for himself. You could not like him as much as you do if there were not something nice about him. And you have succeeded in getting a room for me in the house in

which you lodge?" for George had never mentioned a word in his letter about taking a house, and had asked Dr. Jeffries if he should see his mother to say nothing to her about his application to him.

"Yes, that's all right, mother," he replied briskly.

"And you have got some new clothes since I saw you last, George. You wanted them; yours were getting rather shabby when I saw you at Christmas."

"Yes, mother, they were."

"I suppose you had to part with your best suit while you were so long out of work?"

"That was it, mother; but you see I have been able to get some more things. They are only cheap ones, you know, but they will do very well until I can afford better ones. I am not walking too fast for you, am I? But we shall just catch the train. Or look here, would you mind going straight by yourself to the railway-station. Then you can walk slowly. I will go round and get your box. I went in to our old place as I

came along, and Mrs. Larkins said she would bring it down stairs for me as I came back."

"No, I would rather go round with you, George. I want to thank her for having kept it for me so long. Even if we do miss the train it will not matter much, as it will make no difference whether we get in town an hour earlier or later."

As George could not explain his special reason for desiring to catch that train he was obliged to agree, and they stopped a quarter of an hour at their old lodging, as Mrs. Larkins insisted upon their having a cup of tea which she had prepared for them. However, when they reached the station they found that a train was going shortly, and when they reached town they were not so very much later than George had calculated upon.

They took a cab, for although Mrs. Andrews' box was not heavy, it was too much for George to carry that distance; besides, Mrs. Andrews herself was tired from her walk to the station from the infirmary, having had no

exercise for so long. When they got into the neighbourhood of Limehouse George got outside to direct the cabman. It was just a quarter past four when the cab drew up at No. 8, Laburnum Villas.

"Why, is this the house?" Mrs. Andrews asked in surprise as George jumped down and opened the door. "Why, you told me in one of your letters it was a house in a row. What a pretty little place! Is it really here, George?"

"It is here, mother; we moved the other day. There is Bill at the door;" but Bill having opened the door ran away out into the garden, and George, having paid the cabman, carried his mother's box in and entered the house with her.

"Straight on, mother, into the little room at the end."

"What a snug little kitchen!" Mrs. Andrews said as she entered it, "and tea all laid and ready! What, have they lent you the room for this evening?"

"My dear mother," George said, throwing

his arms round her neck, "this is your kitchen and your house, all there is of it, only the sitting-room isn't furnished yet. We must wait for that, you know"

"What! you have taken a whole house, my boy! That is very nice; but can we afford it, George? It seems too good to be true."

"It is quite true, mother, and I think it's a dear little house, and will be splendid when we have got it all furnished. Now come up and see the bed-rooms. This is Bill's, you know," and he opened the door on the staircase, "and this is mine, and this is yours."

"Oh, what a pretty little room!" Mrs. Andrews said; "but, my dear George, the rent of this house and the hire of the furniture will surely be more than we can afford to pay. I know what a good manager you are, my boy, but I have such a horror of getting into debt that it almost frightens me."

"The rent of the house is seven and sixpence a week, mother, with rates and taxes, and we can afford that out of Bill's earnings and mine, even if you did not do any work

at all; and as to the furniture, it is every bit paid for out of our savings since we went to work."

On hearing which Mrs. Andrews threw her arms round George's neck and burst into tears of happiness. She was not very strong, and the thought of the sacrifices these two boys must have made to get a house together for her completely overpowered her.

"It seems impossible, George," she said when she had recovered herself. "Why, you have only been earning ten shillings a week each, and you have had to keep yourselves and get clothes and all sorts of things; it seems impossible."

"It has not cost so much as you think, mother, and Bill and I had both learned to live cheap in Covent Garden; but now let us go down stairs, you have not seen Bill yet, and I know tea will be ready."

But Bill had not yet come in, and George had to go out into the garden to fetch him.

"Come on, Bill; mother is delighted with everything. She won't eat you, you know."

"No, she won't eat me, George; but she will think me an out and out sort of 'ottentot," which word had turned up in a book the boys had been reading on an evening previously.

"Well, wait till she says so; come along."

So linking his arm in Bill's, George drew him along, and brought him shamefaced and bashful into the kitchen.

"This is Bill, mother."

"I am glad to see you, Bill," Mrs. Andrews said, holding out her hand. "I have heard so much of you from George that I seem to know you quite well."

Bill put his hand out shyly.

"I am sure we shall get on well together," Mrs. Andrews went on. "I shall never forget that you were a friend to my boy when he was friendless in London."

"It's all the t'other way, ma'am," Bill said eagerly; "don't you go for to think it. Why, just look what George has done for me. There was I, a-hanging about the Garden, pretty nigh starving, and sure to get quadded sooner or later; and now here I am living decent,

and earning a good wage; and he has taught me to read, ma'am, and to know about things, and ain't been ashamed of me, though I am so different to what he is. I tell you, ma'am, there ain't no saying what a friend he's been to me, and I ain't done nothing for him as I can see."

"Well, Bill, you perhaps both owe each other something," Mrs. Andrews said; "and I owe you something as well as my son, for George tells me that it is to your self-denial as well as to his own that I owe this delightful surprise of finding a home ready for me; and now," she went on, seeing how confused and unhappy Bill looked, "I think you two ought to make tea this evening, for you are the hosts, and I am the guest. In future it will be my turn."

"All right, mother! you sit down in this arm-chair; Bill, you do the rashers, and I will pour the water into the pot and then toast the muffins."

Bill was at home now; such culinary efforts as they had hitherto attempted had generally

fallen to his share, as he had a greater aptitude for the work than George had, and a dish of bacon fried to a turn was soon upon the table.

Mrs. Andrews had been watching Bill closely, and was pleased with the result of her observation. Bill was indeed greatly improved in appearance since he had first made George's acquaintance. His cheeks had filled out, and his face had lost its hardness of outline; the quick restless hunted expression of his eyes had nearly died out, and he no longer looked as if constantly on the watch to dodge an expected cuff; his face had always had a large share of that merriment and love of fun which seem the common portion of the London arabs, and seldom desert them under all their hardships; but it was a happier and brighter spirit now, and had altogether lost its reckless character. A similar change is always observable among the waifs picked up off the streets by the London refuges after they have been a few months on board a training ship.

When all was ready the party sat down to their meal. Mrs. Andrews undertook the pouring out of the tea, saying that although she was a guest, as the only lady present she should naturally preside. George cut the bread, and Bill served the bacon. The muffins were piled on a plate in the front of the fire as a second course.

It was perhaps the happiest meal that any of the three had ever sat down to. Mrs. Andrews was not only happy at finding so comfortable a home prepared for her, but was filled with a deep feeling of pride and thankfulness at the evidence of the love, steadiness, and self-sacrifice of her son. George was delighted at having his mother with him again, and at seeing her happiness and contentment at the home he had prepared for her. Bill was delighted because George was so, and he was moreover vastly relieved at finding Mrs. Andrews less terrible than he had depicted her.

After tea was cleared away they talked together for a while, and then Bill — feeling

with instinctive delicacy that George and his mother would like to talk together for a time —said he should take a turn for an hour, and on getting outside the house executed so wild a war-dance of satisfaction that it was fortunate it was dark, or Laburnum Villas would have been astonished and scandalized at the spectacle.

"I like your friend Bill very much," Mrs. Andrews said when she was alone with George. "I was sure from what you told me that he must be a good-hearted lad; but brought up as he has been, poor boy, I feared a little that he would scarcely be a desirable companion in point of manners. Of course, as you say, his grammar is a little peculiar; but his manners are wonderfully quiet and nice considering all."

"Look what an example he's had, mother," George laughed; "but really he has taken great pains ever since he knew that you were coming home. He has been asking me to tell him of anything he does which is not right, especially about eating and that sort

of thing. You see he had never used a fork till we came down here, and he made me show him directly how it should be held and what to do with it. It has been quite funny to me to see him watching me at meals, and doing exactly the same."

"And you have taught him to read, George?"

"Yes, mother."

"And something of better things, George?" she asked.

"Yes, mother, as much as I could. He didn't know anything when I met him; but he goes to church with me now regularly, and says his prayers every night, and I can tell you he thinks a lot of it. More, I think, than I ever did," he added honestly.

"Perhaps he has done you as much good as you have done him, George."

"Perhaps he has, mother; yes, I think so. When you see a chap so very earnest for a thing you can't help being earnest yourself; besides, you know, mother," he went on a little shyly, for George had not been accus-

tomed to talk much of these matters with his mother—"you see when one's down in the world and hard up, and not quite sure about the next meal, and without any friend, one seems to think more of these things than one does when one is jolly at school with other fellows."

"Perhaps so, George, though I do not know why it should be so, for the more blessings one has the more reason for love and gratitude to the giver. However, dear, I think we have both reason to be grateful now, have we not?"

"That we have, mother. Only think of the difference since we said good-bye to each other last summer. Now here you are strong and well again, and we are together and don't mean to be separated, and I have got a place I like and have a good chance of getting on in, and we have got a pretty little house all to ourselves, and you will be able to live a little like a lady again—I mean as you were accustomed to—and everything is so nice. Oh, mother, I am sure we have every reason to be grateful!"

"We have indeed, George, and I even more than you, in the proofs you have given me that my son is likely to turn out all that even I could wish him."

Bill's hour was a very long one.

"You must not go out of an evening, Bill, to get out of our way," Mrs. Andrews said when he returned, "else I shall think that I am in your way. It was kind of you to think of it the first evening, and George and I are glad to have had a long talk together, but in future I hope you won't do it. You see there will be lots to do of an evening. There will your lessons and George's, for I hope now that he's settled he will give up an hour or two every evening to study. Not Latin and Greek, George," she added smiling, seeing a look of something like dismay in George's face, "that will be only a waste of time to you now, but a study of such things as may be useful to you in your present work and in your future life, and a steady course of reading really good books by good authors. Then perhaps when you have both done your

work, you will take it by turns to read out loud while I do my sewing. Then perhaps some day, who knows, if we get on very flourishingly, after we have furnished our sitting-room, we may be able to indulge in the luxury of a piano again and have a little music of an evening."

"That will be jolly, mother. Why, it will be really like old times, when you used to sing to me!"

Mrs. Andrews' eyes filled with tears at the thought of the old times, but she kept them back bravely, so as not to mar, even for a moment, the happiness of this first evening. So they chatted till nine o'clock, when they had supper. After it was over Mrs. Andrews left the room for a minute and went up stairs and opened her box, and returned with a Bible in her hand.

"I think, boys," she said, "we ought to end this first happy evening in our new home by thanking God together for his blessings."

"I am sure we ought, mother," George said, and Bill's face expressed his approval.

So Mrs. Andrews read a chapter, and then they knelt and thanked God for his blessings, and the custom thus begun was continued henceforth in No. 8, Laburnum Villas.

Hitherto George and his companion had found things much more pleasant at the works than they had expected. They had, of course, had principally to do with Bob Grimstone; still there were many other men in the shop, and at times, when his bench was standing idle while some slight alterations or adjustment of machinery were made, they were set to work with others. Men are quick to see when boys are doing their best, and, finding the lads intent upon their work and given neither to idleness nor skylarking, they seldom had a sharp word addressed to them. But after Mrs. Andrews had come home they found themselves addressed in a warmer and more kindly manner by the men. Bob Grimstone had told two or three of his mates of the sacrifices the boys had made to save up money to make a home for the mother of one of them when she came out of hospital. They

were not less impressed than he had been, and the story went the round of the workshops and even came to the ears of the foreman, and there was not a man there but expressed himself in warm terms of surprise and admiration that two lads should for six months have stinted themselves of food in order to lay by half their pay for such a purpose.

"There's precious few would have done such a thing," one of the older workmen said, "not one in a thousand; why, not one chap in a hundred, even when he's going to be married, will stint himself like that to make a home for the gal he is going to make his wife, so as to start housekeeping out of debt; and as to doing it for a mother, where will you find 'em? In course a man ought to do as much for his mother as for the gal who is agoing to be his wife, seeing how much he owes her; but how many does it, that's what I says, how many does it?"

So after that the boys were surprised to find how many of the men, when they met

them at the gate, would give them a kindly nod or a hearty, "Good-morning, young chaps!"

A day or two after Mrs. Andrews had settled in Laburnum Villas she went up to town and called upon a number of shops, asking for work. As she was able to give an excellent reference to the firm for whom she had worked at Croydon she succeeded before the end of the week in obtaining millinery work for a firm in St. Paul's Churchyard, and as she had excellent taste and was very quick at her needle she was soon able to earn considerably more than she had done at Croydon.

The three were equally determined that they would live as closely as possible until the sitting-rooms were furnished, and by strict management they kept within the boys' pay, Mrs. Andrews' earnings being devoted to the grand purpose. The small articles were bought first, and each week there was great congratulation and pleasure as some new article was placed in the rooms. Then

there was a pause for some time, then came the chairs, then, after an interval, a table, and lastly the carpet. This crowning glory was not attained until the end of July. After this they moved solemnly into the sitting-room, agreeing that the looking-glass, chiffonier, and sofa could be added at a more gradual rate, and that the whole of Mrs. Andrews' earnings need no longer be devoted.

"Now, boys," Mrs. Andrews said on that memorable evening, "I want you in future, when you come in, to change your working clothes before you come in here to your teas. So long as we lived in the kitchen I have let things go on, but I think there's something in the old saying, 'Company clothes, company manners,' and I think it is good when boys come in that they should lay aside their heavy-nailed shoes and their working clothes. Certainly such boots and clothes are apt to render people clumsy in their movements, and the difference of walk which you observe between men of different classes arises very

greatly from the clumsy heavy boots which working-men must wear."

"But what does it matter, mother?" George urged, for it seemed to him that it would be rather a trouble to change his clothes every day. "These little things don't make any real difference to a man."

"Not any vital difference, George, but a real difference for all that. Manners make the man, you know; that is, they influence strangers and people who only know him in connection with business. If two men apply together for a place the chances are strongly in favour of the man with the best manners getting it. Besides, my boy, I think the observance of little courtesies of this kind make home pleasanter and brighter. You see I always change my dress before tea, and I am sure you prefer my sitting down to the table tidy and neat with a fresh collar and cuffs to my taking my place in my working dress with odds and ends of threads and litter clinging to it."

"Of course I do, mother, and I see what

you mean now. Certainly I will change my things in future. You don't mind, do you, Bill?"

Bill would not have minded in the least any amount of trouble by which he could give the slightest satisfaction to Mrs. Andrews, who had now a place in his affections closely approximating to that which George occupied.

During the summer months the programme for the evening was not carried out as arranged, for at the end of April Mrs. Andrews herself declared that there must be a change.

"The evenings are getting light enough now for a walk after tea, boys, and you must therefore cut short our reading and studies till the days close in again in the autumn. It would do you good to get out in the air a bit."

"But will you come with us, mother?"

"No, George. Sometimes as evenings get longer we may make little excursions together: go across the river to Greenwich and spend two or three hours in the park, or

take a steamer and go up the river to Kew; but as a general thing you had better take your rambles together. I have my front garden to look after, the vegetables are your work, you know, and if I like I can go out and do my shopping while you are away."

So the boys took to going out walks, which got longer and longer as the evenings drew out, and when they were not disposed for a long ramble they would go down to a disused wharf and sit there and watch the barges drifting down the river or tacking backwards and forwards, if there was a wind, with their great brown and yellow sails hauled tautly in, and the great steamers dropping quietly down the river, and the little busy tugs dragging great ships after them. There was an endless source of amusement in wondering from what ports the various craft had come or what was their destination."

"What seems most wonderful to me, George," Bill said one day; "when one looks at them big steamers—"

"Those," George corrected.

"Thank ye—at those big steamers, is to think that they can be tossed about, and the sea go over them as one reads about, just the same way as the wave they make when they goes down—"

"Go down, Bill."

"Thank ye—go down the river, tosses the little boats about; it don't seem possible that water can toss itself about so high as that, does it?"

"It does seem extraordinary, Bill; we know that it is so because there are constantly wrecks; but looking at the water it does not seem possible that it should rise up into waves large enough to knock one of those great steamers in pieces. Some day, Bill, not this year, of course, because the house isn't finished, but next year, I hope we shall be able all of us to go down for a trip to the sea. I have seen it stuck up you can go to Margate and back for three or four shillings; and though Bob Grimstone says that isn't regular sea, it would be enough to show us something of what it's like."

The garden occupied a good deal of the boys' time. Bill's long experience in the market had given him an interest in vegetables, and he was always ready for an hour's work in the garden after tea. The results of much labour and plenty of manure were not unsatisfactory, and Mrs. Andrews was delighted with her regular supply of fresh vegetables. Bill's anticipation, however, of the amount that could be grown in a limited space were by no means fulfilled, and seeing the small amount which could be daily gathered, and recalling the countless piled-up waggons which he had been accustomed to see in Covent Garden, he was continually expressing his astonishment at the enormous quantity of ground which must be employed in keeping up the supply of the market.

They did not that year get the trip to Margate; but in the autumn, after the great work of furnishing was finished, they did get several long jaunts, once out to Epping Forest on an omnibus, once in a steamer up to Kew, and several times across to Green-

wich Park. Mrs. Andrews found it a very happy summer, free from the wear of anxiety, which, more even than the work, had brought on her long illness. She grew stronger and better than she had ever expected to be again, and those who had only known the pale harassed-looking needle-woman of Croydon would not have recognized her now; indeed, as George said sometimes, his mother looked younger and younger every day. She had married very young, and was still scarcely five-and-thirty, and although she laughed and said that George was a foolish boy when he said that people always took her for his sister, she really looked some years younger than she was. Her step had regained its elasticity, and there was a ring of gladness and happiness in her voice which was very attractive, and even strangers sometimes looked round as they passed the bright pleasant-looking woman chatting gaily with the two healthy good-looking young fellows.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE.

IN August the annual outing, or, as it was called the bean-feast, at the works took place. Usually the men went in vans down into Epping Forest; but this year it was determined that a steamer should be engaged to take the whole party with their wives and families down to Gravesend. They were to make an early start, and on arriving there all were to do as they pleased until they assembled to dine in a pavilion at one of the hotels. After this they were to go to the gardens and amuse themselves there until the steamer started in the evening. The party embarked at Blackwall at ten o'clock in the morning. George and Bill got together up in the bow of the steamer, and were delighted with their voyage down, their only regret being that Mrs. Andrews had declined to accompany them, saying that she would far rather go with them alone than with so large a party.

"What shall we do, Bill?" George said

when they landed. "We are not to dine till two, so we have two good hours before us. I vote we hire a boat and go out. It will be ten times as jolly here as up in that crowded river by London."

This was said in reference to various short rows which they had had in boats belonging to barges which had been sometimes lent them for half an hour of an evening by a good-natured bargeman as they hung about the wharves.

"I suppose you can row, young chaps," the waterman whom they hired the boat of said.

"Oh, yes, we can row!" George replied with the confidence of youth.

"Mind the tide is running out strong," the waterman said.

"All right, we will mind," George answered, scarce heeding his words; and getting out the oars they pushed off.

For some little time they rowed among the anchored vessels, both being especially filled with delight at the yachts moored opposite the club-houses. These were new craft to them, and the beauty and neatness of everything struck them with surprise and admi-

ration. Tide had only turned a short time before they got into their boat, and while keeping near the shore they had no difficulty in rowing against it.

Presently they determined to have a look at a fine East Indiaman moored well out in the stream a short distance below Gravesend. They ceased rowing when they approached her, and sat idly on their oars talking over the distant voyage on which she was probably about to start, and the country she might visit. George was telling his companion the ports she would touch if her destination was China, and absorbed in their conversation they paid no attention to anything else, until George gave a sudden exclamation.

"Good gracious, Bill! Why, the ship is ever so far behind. It is two miles, I should think, from the town. We must set to work or we sha'n't be back in time for dinner."

The boys' knowledge of the navigation of the Thames was not sufficient to tell them that to row against tide it is necessary to keep close inshore, and turning the boat's head they set to work to row back in the

middle of the river. Their knowledge of rowing was but slight, and the mere operation of their oars took up all their attention. They rowed away till their hands burned and the perspiration ran down their faces.

After half an hour of this George looked round, thinking that he ought to be near to the vessel by this time. He uttered an exclamation of surprise and dismay. Neither the ship nor Gravesend were visible. Their puny efforts had availed nothing against the sweeping tide. They had already, without knowing it, swept round the turn in the river, and were now entering Sea reach.

"My goodness, Bill! what are we to do? Just look at that buoy; we are going past it as fast as a horse could trot. Look what a width the river is. What on earth are we to do?"

"I have no idea," Bill replied. "Where shall we go to if we go on like this?"

"Right out to sea, I should think," George said. "I do not know how far it is; but the river seems to get wider and wider in front."

"Perhaps," Bill suggested, "the tide will turn again and take us back."

"Not it," George said. "It was against us, you know, all the way down, and could only have turned a little while before we got in the boat. Look at that line of barges sailing down on the right-hand side. I vote we pull to them and ask the men what we had better do. Anyhow we could row to the land and get out there and wait till tide turns. It turned at about eleven, so that it will turn again somewhere about five. The steamer is not to start till eight, so we shall be back in plenty of time to catch it. We shall lose the dinner and the fun in the gardens, but that can't be helped."

"That don't make no odds," Bill said cheerfully; "this is a regular 'venture, this is; but I say, sha'n't we have to pay a lot for the boat?"

"Yes," George assented mournfully; "but perhaps the man will let us off cheap when he sees we couldn't help it. He looked a good-tempered sort of chap. Come, let us set to work. Every minute it is taking us further away."

They set steadily to work. The boat was a large and heavy one, and their progress was by no means rapid.

"How thick it's getting!" George exclaimed suddenly.

"Ain't it just!" Bill assented. "My eye, George, I can't see the barges!"

Unobserved by them a fog had been steadily creeping up the river. They were just at its edge when they made the discovery. Another two minutes and it rolled thickly over them, and they could not see ten yards away. They looked at each other in silent bewilderment.

"What's to be done, George?" Bill said at length in awe-struck tones.

"I don't know, Bill; I haven't an idea. It's no use rowing, that I see, for we don't know which way the boat's head is pointing."

"Well, it can't be helped," Bill said philosophically. "I am going to have a pipe. Oh, I say, ain't my hands blistered!"

"All right, you can have your pipe, Bill, but keep your oar in your hand to be ready to row."

"What for?" Bill demanded. "I thought you said it warn't no use rowing?"

"No more it is, Bill; but we must look out for those big buoys. If the tide were to sweep us against one of them we should

capsize to a certainty. That must have been a big steamer," he went on, as the boat rolled suddenly. "It's lucky we were pretty well over towards the side of the river, before the fog came on. Listen—there's another. I can hear the beat of her engines. I have an idea, Bill!" he exclaimed suddenly. "We know the steamers were passing to the left of us when the fog came on. If we listen to their whistles and the sound of their paddles, and then row to the right, we shall get to the bank at last."

"Yes, that's a good idea," Bill agreed, laying down the pipe he had just lighted. "There's a whistle over there."

"Yes, and another the other way," George said, puzzled. "Why, how can that be! Oh, I suppose one is coming up the river and one down, but it's awfully confusing."

It was so, but by dint of listening intently the boys gained some idea of the proper direction; but they could only row a few strokes at a time, being obliged to stop continually to listen for fresh guidance.

Fortunately for them the fog lay low on the water, and the upper spars of the

steamers were above it, and men placed there were able to direct those on deck as to their course. Had it not been for this the steamers must all have anchored. As it was they proceeded slowly and cautiously on their way, whistling freely to warn any small craft, that might be hidden in the fog, of their coming.

Half an hour's rowing and the boys gave a simultaneous exclamation. The boat had quietly grounded on the edge of a mud flat. They could not see the bank, and had no idea how far distant it was. Bill at once offered to get overboard and reconnoitre, but George would not hear of it.

"You might not be able to find your way back, Bill, or you might sink in the mud and not be able to get out again. No, we won't separate; and, look here, we must keep the boat afloat just at the edge of the mud. If we were to get left here we should not float again till tide comes up to us, and that wouldn't be till about two hours before high tide, and it won't be high, you know, until twelve o'clock at night."

"I wish this fog would clear off!" Bill said, looking round at the wall of white vapour

which surrounded them. "It regular confuses a chap. I say, I expect they are just sitting down to dinner at present. I feel awfully hungry."

"It's no use thinking about that, Bill. We shall be a good deal more hungry before we are done; but I am so glad we have found the land and stopped going out to sea that I don't mind being hungry."

"But I say, George, if this fog keeps on how are we to find our way back to Gravesend?"

"The only way will be, Bill, to keep quite close to the edge of the mud—just as close as the boat will swim. That way, you know, we must come to Gravesend at last."

"So we must. I didn't think of that. You have got a good head, George, you have. I should never have thought about the way to find the bank if it hadn't been for you, and might have gone on floating and floating till we was starved."

"This fog can't last for ever, Bill."

"No, but I have known them last a week in London."

"Yes, but not in August, Bill."

"No, not in August," Bill assented; "but you see these here fogs may last just as long down here in August as they do in London in November."

"I don't think so, Bill. Anyhow it doesn't matter to us; we have got the land for a guide, and I hope we shall be back in Gravesend before it's quite dark."

"But if we don't, George?"

"Well, if we don't we must run her ashore before it gets too dark, and wait till it is morning. We shall be all right if we keep quite cool and use our senses. If we had something to eat I shouldn't mind a bit, except that mother will be getting anxious about us. It's a regular adventure, and we shall have something to talk about for a long time. Look out, Bill, we must push her further off—she's getting aground!"

For an hour they sat and chatted.

"Hullo! what's that?" Bill exclaimed at last. "That's the rattle of a chain. I expect it's a barge anchoring somewhere near. Listen; I can hear voices. I vote we hollo."

George lifted up his voice in a lusty shout. The shout was repeated not very far off, and

was followed by the shout of "Who are you?"

"We have drifted down from Gravesend and lost our way," George shouted back. "We will come on board if you will let us."

"All right!" the voice replied; "I will go on shouting and you row to my voice."

It was but a hundred yards, and then a voice close at hand said sharply:

"Row bow hard or you will be across the chain."

Bill rowed hard, and George, looking round, saw that they were close to the bows of a barge. Half a dozen more strokes and they were alongside. Bill seized a hand-rope and sprang on to the barge, and the boat was soon towing astern.

"Well, young men, however did you manage to get here?" one of the bargemen asked. "It's lucky for you you weren't taken out to sea with the tide."

George related the history of their voyage and how they had managed to reach the shore.

"Well, you are good plucked uns anyhow," the man said; "ain't they, Jack? Most

chaps your age would just have sat in the boat and howled, and a good many longshore men too. You have done the best thing you could under the circumstances."

"Where are we?" George asked.

"You are on board the *Sarah and Jane* topsail barge, that's where you are, about three parts down Sea reach. We know our way pretty well even in a fog, but we agreed it was no use trying to find the Swashway with it as thick as this, so we brought up."

"Where is the Swashway?" George asked.

"The Swashway is a sort of channel the barges go when they are making for Sheerness. It's well buoyed out and easy enough to follow with the help of Sheerness lights on a dark night; but these fogs are worse than anything. It ain't no use groping about for the buoy when you can't see ten yards ahead, and you might find yourself high and dry on the mud and have to wait till next tide. Mayhap this fog will clear off before evening, and we shall be able to work in; and now I expect you two young uns would like some grub. Come below."

The two boys joyfully followed into the

little cabin, and were soon satisfying their hunger on bread and cold meat. The bargee drew a jug of water from the breaker and placed it before them.

"The fire has gone out," he said, "or I would give yer a cup of tea—that's our tipple; we don't keep spirits on board the *Sarah and Jane*. I like a drop on shore, but it ain't stuff to have on a barge, where you wants your senses handy at all times. And now what are you thinking of doing?" he asked when the boys had finished.

"What we had made up our minds to do was to lie where we were at the edge of the mud till tide turned, and then to keep as close to the shore as we could until we got back to Gravesend. The steamer we came by does not go back till late, and we thought we should be back by that time."

"No, you wouldn't," the man said. "Out in the middle of the stream you would be back in two hours easy, but not close inshore. The tide don't help you much there, and half your time you are in eddies and back-currents. No, you wouldn't be back in Gravesend by eight noway."

"Then what would you advise us to do?"

"Well, just at present I won't give no advice at all. We will see how things are going after a bit. Now let's take a look round."

So saying he climbed the ladder to the deck, followed by the boys. The white fog still shut the boat in like a curtain.

"What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Don't know," the other replied. "Thought just now there was a puff of air coming down the river. I wish it would, or we sha'n't make Sheerness to-night, much less Rochester. Yes, that's a puff sure enough. You are in luck, young uns. Like enough in half an hour there will be a brisk wind blowing, driving all this fog out to sea before it."

Another and another puff came, and tiny ripples swept across the oil-like face of the water.

"It's acoming sure enough," the bargemen said. "I'd bet a pot of beer as the fog will have lifted in a quarter of an hour."

Stronger and stronger came the puffs of wind. The fog seemed as if stirred by an invisible hand. It was no longer a dull

uniform whitish-gray; dark shadows seemed to flit across it, and sometimes the view of the water extended here and there.

"There's the shore!" Bill exclaimed suddenly, but ere George could turn round to look it was gone again.

"I shall have the anchor up directly, lads. Now I tell you what will be the best thing for you if the wind holds, as I expect it will. We shall be at Sheerness in little over an hour—that will make it four o'clock," he added, consulting his watch, "and the young flood will be coming up soon afterwards, and I shall go up with the first of it to Rochester. We shall get there maybe somewhere about seven o'clock. Now the best thing I can do for you is to tow that ere boat up to Rochester with me, and you can get a train there that will take you up to town in goodish time."

"You are very kind," George said; "but what are we to do about the boat?"

"I shall be going back to-morrow night, or more likely next morning, and I will take her along and hand her over to her rightful owner at Gravesend."

"James Kitson."

"Yes, I know him."

"But how about paying for it?" George said. "I am afraid he will expect a great deal of money, for it has been away all the time, and we have only got six shillings between us."

"You will want that to get up to town. Never mind about the boat. I will put that square for you. I will tell Kitson as how you have been shipwrecked, and he will think himself precious lucky in getting the boat without being damaged. If I take the trouble to tow it up to Rochester and back, he needn't grumble about getting no fare."

"I would rather pay something," George said; "though, you see, we can't afford to pay much."

"Well, then, you send him a post-office order for five bob. I will tell him you are going to send him that, and he will thank his stars he has got so well out of it. If you had drifted out to sea, as he expects you have by this time, and the boat didn't get smashed by a steamer, you would likely enough have been taken off by one of them;

but the captain wouldn't have troubled himself about that old tub. I looks upon Kitson as being in luck this job, so don't you worry about him. There, the mist's driving off fast. We will up with the kedge."

The boys lent a hand at the windlass, and the anchor was soon hanging from the bow. Then the brail of the mainsail was loosed, and the great sail shaken out. The foresail was hoisted, and in a few minutes the *Sarah and Jane* was running before a brisk wind down Sea reach.

The fog had rolled off now, and it was clear astern, though a thick bank still hung over the river ahead, but this was rapidly melting away; and the bargeman, who told them his name was Will Atkins, pointed out a large building low down on the water ahead.

"That's Sheerness Fort," he said. "You can lend Jack a hand to get up the topsail. The wind is rising every minute, and we shall soon be bowling along hand over hand."

Both ahead and astern of them were a line of barges, which had, like the *Sarah and Jane*, anchored when the fog was thickest,

and were, like her, making their way to Sheerness. The wind was blowing briskly now, and the barge made her way through the water at a rate which surprised the boys.

"I had no idea that barges sailed so fast," George said.

"There are not many craft can beat them," Atkins replied. "With a breeze so strong that they can only just carry their topsails, they will hold their own with pretty nigh anything afloat. There are mighty few yachts can keep alongside us when we are doing our best."

As Atkins had predicted, in little over an hour they brought up just inside the mouth of the Medway, and dropped the anchor to wait till the tide turned to help them up to Rochester. At six o'clock they were again under weigh. The wind had fortunately veered round somewhat to the north of west, and they were able for the most part to lay their course, so that soon after seven they were abreast of the dockyard, and a few minutes later dropped anchor off Rochester.

"Jump into the boat, boys," the good-natured bargeman said; "I will put you

ashore at once. There is the station close to the end of the bridge."

With many very hearty thanks for his kindness the lads jumped ashore and hurried up to the station. They found that there would be a train in half an hour, and by nine o'clock they arrived in town.

Before they had landed the bargeman had scrawled on a piece of paper, "Your boat was picked up by the *Sarah and Jane*. Will bring her back on return trip. No damage done. William Atkins." This he had handed to the boys, and they now got an envelope and directed it to "James Kitson, Waterman, Gravesend," and posted it, and then set out to walk home.

"It's not been the sort of day we expected," George said; "but it's been good fun, hasn't it?"

"Grand!" Bill agreed. "But I didn't think so when we were in the middle of that fog listening to them whistles and trying to find out the way. I didn't say much, George, but I felt downright funky."

"I didn't like it either, Bill. There was such a horribly lonely feeling, lost in the fog

there; but it was all right as soon as we touched the mouth, and got an idea where we were. I was worrying most about mother getting anxious if we did not get back to-night, and a little about what we should have to pay for the boat. It was lucky that bargeman took the matter in his hands for us. I expect we should have had to pay over a pound. He was an awfully good fellow, wasn't he?"

"I should just think he was," Bill said. "He was a good un, and no mistake. It ain't cost us so very much either considering."

"That it hasn't, Bill. Two and threepence apiece railway fare, that's four and sixpence, and five bob we are to send down for the boat, nine shillings and sixpence. Well, we should have paid two shillings for the boat anyhow, and I expect we should have spent another shilling apiece in things at the gardens, perhaps more; that would make four shillings anyhow, so we have only spent about five shillings more than we calculated. And haven't we got a lot to talk about! It's been a regular adventure."

"It has," Bill said doubtfully; "but I don't think I want many more of them kind of adventures. It's all right now, you know, but it wasn't jolly at the time. I always thought as adventures was jolly; but that didn't seem to me to have no jolliness about it, not when we was out there. It's all very well to hear tell of shipwrecks and fights with savages, but I expect there ain't no larks about it at the time. I suppose you will send that five bob off to-morrow, and get it off your mind?"

"No. Atkins said we had better not send it for another three or four days. The man will have got his boat back all right then, and the five bob would come upon him unexpectedly. He was going to tell Kitson that he had arranged with us that was what we were to pay, as we couldn't afford more; but he will never expect to get it, so when it comes he will be only too glad to receive it."

They were met at the door of the house by Bob Grimstone, who was just coming out.

"Why, what have you boys been up to?" he said angrily. "I have been wondering

all day what has become of you, and the missis has done nothing but worry and fidget. It's regular spoilt the day. What have you been up to? I haven't seen you since we got ashore at Gravesend, and I have just come round to ask your mother if she has heard of you."

"I am very sorry, Bob, but it wasn't our fault, at least it was not altogether our fault. We went for a row, and the tide took us down, and then the fog came on and we got lost."

"I expected better of you," Grimstone said angrily. "Foggy indeed! I've been anxious and worried all day. I did think as you warn't like other boys, but could be trusted, and then you go and play such a prank as this. Well, go in; your mother is in a nice taking about you."

"My dear mother," George said as he ran in, "I am so sorry you have been uneasy about us, awfully sorry; but really it hasn't been our fault altogether."

"Never mind that now, George," Mrs. Andrews said, throwing her arms round his neck. "Fortunately I did not know any-

thing about it till Mr. Grimstone came in a few minutes ago. I had been expecting you in for some little time, but I supposed the steamer was late, and I was not at all uneasy till Mr. Grimstone came in and said that he had not seen either of you since the steamer got to Gravesend, and that you had not come back with the rest. Is Bill with you?"

"Yes, mother; he is at the door talking to Bob."

"Ask Mr. Grimstone to come in again," Mrs. Andrews said. "He has been most kind, and he had promised to go down to Gravesend by the first train in the morning if you did not come home to-night, and to make inquiries about you there. He tried to cheer me up by saying that as you were together nothing could very well happen to you, and that probably you had only got into some boyish scrape—perhaps, he suggested, only gone out into the country and had helped yourselves to some apples, and had so got locked up."

Bob, however, would not come in again, but went off saying he would hear all about it in the morning, but would go off to tell

his wife at once that they had returned safely, for "that she was in such a worry as never was."

Hearing that the boys had had nothing to eat since two o'clock, Mrs. Andrews at once laid the table for supper; and when they had finished it, listened to George's account of their adventure.

"You had a very narrow escape, boys," she said when they had finished. "You might have been swept out to sea, or run down by a steamer in the fog. I hope to-night that you will neither of you forget to thank God for his protection through the danger you have run; and I do hope, my dear boys, that you will be more careful in future."

The next evening, after work was over, George went in to Bob Grimstone's and told them all that had happened. When the story was told, Bob agreed that after all it was not altogether their fault, and that, indeed, they had, in some respects, justified his opinion of them. Mrs. Grimstone, however, was not so easily pacified. They had come back, she said; but it was more than likely that they wouldn't have come back at

all, but might have been drifting out far from sea, perhaps cutting each other's throats and eating each other alive, which was, as the good woman said, what she had heard happened when boats were lost at sea.

Two days later they sent off the money to the waterman, and received in reply a letter from him saying that the boat had been brought safely back by the *Sarah and Jane* and that he was glad to get the five shillings.

"Bill Atkins told me as you said you would send it; but knowing what boys is, I say fair as I didn't expect to see the colour of your money. It ain't everyone as would have paid up when they got safe away, and I consider as you have behaved handsome."

They had heard from Atkins of the wharf off which the *Sarah and Jane* might generally be found moored, between her cruises, and after one or two ineffectual attempts they one day found the barge there when they rowed up to the spot. She had but just returned from a trip to Rochester and Bill Atkins was still on board. He was very glad to see the boys, but they had great difficulty in persuading him to accept a pound

of tobacco which their mother had sent off to him with her compliments as a token of gratitude for his kindness to them.

"Well, young chaps, I didn't look for nothing of the sort, but seeing as your mother has got it for me it wouldn't be manners to say no. Well, look here, any time as you are disposed for a sail down to Rochester and back you're free of the *Sarah and Jane*, and heartily glad shall I be to have you with me."

The boys thanked him for the offer, but said that as they were still at work there was but small chance of their being able to accept it, but that they should be glad to come and have a chat with him sometimes when he was in the Pool.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRE!

ONE Saturday evening early in October the boys had been for a long walk down among the marshes. They had told Mrs. Andrews they would be late, and

it was past eight o'clock when they came along past the works.

"We sha'n't get home at this hour again for some time, I expect," George said, "for they say that we are going to begin to work overtime on Monday, and that the orders are so heavy that it will very likely have to be kept up all through the winter."

"I am glad it didn't begin earlier," Bill replied; "it would have been horrid if we had lost all our walks while the weather was fine. How dark the place looks now it's shut up, and how quiet and still it is after the rattle we are accustomed to."

"Stop a moment," George said, putting his hand on his arm.

"What is it, George?"

"I don't know. It seemed to me, for a moment, as if I saw the big stack clearly and then it was dark again."

"How could that be, George?"

"I don't know; it looked to me as if it was a reflection of light from one of the windows at the back there. There it is again."

"Yes, I saw it," Bill agreed. "What can it be?"

"I don't know, Bill; let's run round to the back. There might be—it's awful to think of—but there might be a fire."

The boys ran down a narrow lane by the side of the works on to a piece of waste ground behind.

"Look, Bill, look at the glare in the moulding-room. There must be fire. Here, help to put this bit of old timber against the wall."

The piece of wood was placed into position, the two lads climbed up it on to the wall, and dropped into the yard within. Just as they did so there was a clatter of falling glass, followed by a glare of light as a body of flame burst out from one of the windows.

"Let's ring the dinner-bell, Bill, that will call people's attention, and then we must do the best we can."

They ran along until they reached the front gate, and then, seizing the bell-rope, rang it violently.

In a minute or two there was a clatter of feet outside, and shouts of "What's the matter?"

"There is a fire in the moulding-room,"

George shouted; "run for the engines someone and break the gate open. Now come on Bill."

The two boys ran towards that part of the building where the flames had been seen, broke a window, and climbed in. There was an almost stifling smell of burning wood and at a door at the end of the planing-room they could see a light flame flickering through the cracks of the door leading into the moulding-room, which was next to it.

"Quick, Bill, screw that leather pipe on to the hydrant. We must stop it from getting through here till the engines come."

The hydrant communicated with the great tank at the top of the building, and as soon as the hose was screwed on and Bill stood with the nozzle directed towards the burning door, George turned the cock and volumes of water flew out.

The first result seemed disastrous. The door was already nearly burnt through, and, as the powerful jet flew against it, it seemed to crumble away and a mass of flame darted out from the moulding-room. The joists and timbers supporting the floor above the plan-

ing-room would have caught at once, but the boys deluged them with water, as also the framework of the door, and then, throwing the stream of water into the blazing workshop, they kept down the flames near the door. The smoke was stifling.

"We shall be choked, George," Bill gasped.

"Lie down, Bill. I have heard the air is always better near the ground."

This they found to be the case, and they were still able to direct the jet of water. But three or four minutes had elapsed when the outer door of the planing-house was unlocked and Bob Grimstone and several other men rushed in, but were at once driven back by the smoke. George had recognized Grimstone's voice, and shouted:

"This way, Bob, the fire hasn't got through yet. Come and lend a hand, for it's gaining on us in spite of the water. You can breathe if you kneel down."

Grimstone, with two or three of the men, crawled in and joined the boys.

"What! is it you, George? How on earth did you get here?" Bob exclaimed.

"We saw a light as we were passing, and

got in from behind. When we saw what it was we rang the alarm-bell, and then came on here to do what we could till help came."

"You are good plucked, you are," Grimstone said admiringly; "but I am afraid it's not much good."

"You take the hose, Bob, and keep the rafters drenched there. Bill and I will crawl forward and clear the shavings out of the way if we can. They have caught half a dozen times already."

The two boys crawled forward and although the heat was tremendous they managed to clear away the shavings for a considerable distance. The smoke and heat were so great that they were obliged to crawl back into the outer air, where for a while they lay almost insensible. There were crowds of men in the yard now, but most of them were round at the back, powerless to aid at present, and only watching the flames as they roared through the whole of the windows of the moulding-room.

Men were hurrying past with buckets of water, and one of them seeing the condition of

the boys, dashed some over their heads and faces, and they presently staggered to their feet. It was now a quarter of an hour since they had first given the alarm, and they were just about to re-enter the planing-shop to rejoin Bill when they met him and his comrades coming out.

"All the water's gone," he said; "if the engines ain't here in a minute or two it will be too late."

But just at that moment there was a cheer outside, and immediately afterwards a fire-engine dashed through the gate. Grimstone ran up to the firemen as they leapt off.

"The great thing," he said, "is to prevent it spreading from that shop into this. We have been keeping it back till now, but the tank has just run dry."

While the other firemen were fitting the hose to the fire-plug just outside the gates one of them made his way into the planing-room to ascertain the exact position of affairs.

"Quick, lads," he said; "there's no time to be lost; the fire is making its way through. Another five minutes and we should have

been too late to save any of this block. Is there any communication through the upper floors?" he asked Grimstone.

"Yes, there is a door on each floor."

"Have you got any empty sacks about the place?"

"Yes, there is a pile of them in there."

The fireman gave instructions to one of his comrades, while he himself made his way into the planing-room with the hose; the other got out the sacks, and assisted by Grimstone and some of the hands drenched them with water, and then proceeding to the door on the first floor piled them against it.

"It is hot already," he said as he laid his hand upon it. "Now, do you men bring me buckets of water. Keep the sacks drenched till another engine comes up."

George and Bill, finding they could be of no more use, made their way out to the back and joined the crowd watching the flames, which had already spread to the first floor. They were, however, with the rest of the lookers-on, speedily turned out of the yard by the police, who, having now arrived in sufficient strength, proceeded at once to clear the premises of all

save a score or two of men who were engaged in assisting the firemen.

As the boys went out through the front gate another engine dashed up at full speed, dropping lighted cinders on its way.

"Hurray!" Bill said; "this is a steamer. I expect they will do now."

Then the boys made their way round again to the back, and by means of the pieces of timber established themselves on the wall, where they were soon joined by a number of others, and watched the struggle with the flames.

In half an hour six engines were on the spot; but even this force had no visible effect upon the flames in that portion of the building in which they had taken possession, and the firemen turned the whole of their efforts to prevent it from spreading. The party-wall dividing it from the main building was a very strong one; but so hot had it become that the floor boards touching it were over and over again in flames.

A score of men with saws and axes cut away the flooring adjoining the doors on the first and second stories. The planing-room

was fortunately not boarded. While a portion of the fire brigade worked unceasingly in preventing the spread of the flames in this direction, the rest turned their attention to the great wood piles, which were over and over again ignited by the fragments of burning wood.

Presently the roof fell in, and the flames shot up high into the air, but grand as the sight was, the boys did not wait any longer looking on. Their faces smarted severely from the heat to which they had been exposed; their hands had been a good deal burnt by the shavings; their hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes were singed, and the eyeballs ached with the glare.

"I will run home now, Bill; mother will likely enough hear of the fire, and as we said we should be back soon after eight she will be getting anxious."

"I will go and tell her it's all right; you stop and see the end of it here."

But this George would not hear of.

"Very well, then, I will go with you. I must get some grease or something to put on my face and hands; they are smarting awfully."

Mrs. Andrews gave an exclamation of surprise and alarm as the boys entered. The irritation of the wood smoke had so inflamed their eyes that they could scarcely see out of them, and their faces looked like pieces of raw beef.

"Whatever has happened, boys?" she exclaimed.

"There's a great fire at Penrose's, mother; it broke out just as we were passing, so we stopped to help for a bit, and then came home to tell you, thinking that you might be anxious."

"A fire at the works!" Mrs. Andrews exclaimed; "that is dreadful. Dreadful for Mr. Penrose, and for all of you who work there; more, perhaps, for you than for him, for no doubt he is insured, and you may be out of work for months. Thank God I have plenty of work, so I daresay we shall be able to tide it over."

"It is not all burned, mother; only the moulding-shop and the floors above it are on fire at present, and as there are six fire-engines at work, and they keep on arriving every minute, I hope they will save the rest; and

now, mother, what can we do to our faces and hands, they are smarting awfully?"

"Dear me, George, are you burnt? I thought you were only dreadfully hot."

"We feel hot, mother, just as if our faces were being roasted."

"I will get some oil, that will be the best thing," Mrs. Andrews said, hurrying away to the kitchen, and coming back with a piece of cotton-wool, and some olive-oil in a cup.

"You are burned, George. Why, child, your hair is all singed, and your eyebrows and eyelashes. Why, what have you been doing to yourselves? There could have been no occasion to put your heads into the flames like that. Why, your hands are worse still; they are quite blistered. I had better wrap them up in cotton-wool."

"It's the inside that's the worst, mother; perhaps if you put a bit of cotton-wool there and tie it round the back it will do; we can't go out with our hands all swaddled round like that. And now, please, directly you have done we want to go down again to see the fire. Just you go up to the road corner, mother. It's a grand sight, I can tell you."

"We will have tea first," Mrs. Andrews said decidedly; "everything has been ready except pouring the water in since eight o'clock, and it's a quarter past nine now. After we have done I will put on my bonnet and walk down with you as near as I can get. I am not going to lose you out of my sight again."

So after their meal they went down together, but could not get anywhere near the works, all the approaches now being guarded by the police. It was a grand sight, but the worst was over, and there was a general feeling of confidence in the crowd that it would spread no further. A dozen engines were at work now. Some of the firemen were on the roof, some on the stacks of timber, which looked red-hot from the deep glow from the fire. The flames were intermittent now, sometimes leaping up high above the shell of the burned-out buildings, then dying down again.

"Thank God it's no worse," Mrs. Andrews said fervently. "It would have been a bad winter for a great many down here if the fire had spread; as it is, not a quarter of the buildings are burned."

"No, nothing like that, mother; not above a tenth, I should say. It's lucky that there was a strong wall between that and the next shops, or it must all have gone. I have heard them say that part was added on five or six years ago, so that the wall at the end of the planing-shop was an outside wall before; that accounts for its being so thick."

After looking on for about half an hour they went back home. But neither of the boys got much sleep that night, the excitement they had gone through and the pain of their burns keeping them wide awake till nearly morning. As Mrs. Andrews heard no movement in their rooms—whereas they were usually up and about almost as early on Sundays as on other days, being unable to sleep after their usual hour for rising—she did not disturb them. George was the first to awake, and looking out of the window felt sure by the light that it was later than usual. He put his head out of the door and shouted:

"Bill, are you up?" There was no answer. "Mother, are you up; what o'clock is it?"

"Up! hours ago, George. Why, it's past eleven."

George gave an exclamation of astonishment and rushed into Bill's room. The latter had woke at his shout.

"It's past eleven, Bill, and mother has been up for hours;" and he dashed off again to his room to dress. It was but a few minutes before they came down-stairs just at the same moment.

"Why didn't you wake us, mother?"

"Because I thought it better to let you sleep on, George. I guessed that your burns had kept you awake for some time."

"That they did. I thought I was never going to get to sleep," George said; and Bill gave a similar account of himself. "Still, mother, a short night does no harm for once, and you haven't been able to get to church."

"It does not matter for once, George. What figures you both are!"

"We are figures," George said ruefully. "I hardly knew myself when I looked in the glass. My eyes are almost shut up, and the skin is peeling off my nose, and my hair is all rough and scrubby; and Bill looks as bad as I do. You are a figure, Bill!" and George burst into a fit of laughter.

"He's no worse than you, George; but come along, breakfast is waiting."

"You haven't waited breakfast for us, I hope, mother?"

"I made myself a cup of tea the first thing, boys, and had a slice of bread and butter, for I thought you might not be down for some time; but I am quite ready to join you; we have got fish. I put them down directly you called."

"Well, I am glad you are not starving, mother; and I am glad too you didn't have your regular breakfast. It would have been horrid to sit down on Sunday morning without you, when it's the only regular breakfast we get in the week."

Just as they had finished their meal there was a knock at the door. It was Bob Grimstone. Bill opened the door.

"Well, how are you to-day, lad? I thought I would just come round and see. You look pretty badly burned; and so do you, George," he added, as he followed Bill into the sitting-room.

"Good day, Mrs. Andrews."

"Good morning, Mr. Grimstone," Mrs.

Andrews said. Since her coming the Grimstones had several times come in on Sunday afternoon to Laburnum Villas. Mrs. Andrews would, indeed, have wished them to come in more frequently, for she felt much indebted to them for their kindness to George, and, moreover, liked them for themselves, for both were good specimens of their class.

"I see you were busy last night too, Mr. Grimstone; your face looks scorched; but you did not manage to get yourself burned as these silly boys did. What a blessing it is for us all that the fire did not spread!"

"Well, Mrs. Andrews, I don't think those two lads can have told you what they did, for if they had you would hardly call them silly boys."

Mrs. Andrews looked surprised.

"They told me they lent a hand to put out the fire—I think those were George's words—but they did not tell me anything else."

"They saved the building, ma'am. If it hadn't been for them there would not have been a stick or stone of Penrose's standing now; the shops and the wood piles would all have gone, and we should all have been idle

for six months to come; there is no doubt about that at all."

"Why, how was that, Mr. Grimstone? How was it they did more than anyone else?"

"In the first place they discovered it, ma'am, and rung the alarm-bell; it mightn't have been found out for another five minutes, and five minutes would have been enough for the fire. In the next place, when they had given the alarm they did the only thing that could have saved the place, they got into the planing-shop and turned on the hose there, and fought the fire from spreading through the door till we got in seven or eight minutes later. It was all we could do to stop it then; but if they hadn't done what they did the planing-shop would have been alight from end to end, and the floors above it too, before the first engine arrived, and then nothing could have saved the whole lot. I can tell you, Mrs. Andrews, that there isn't a man on the works, nor the wife of a man, who doesn't feel that they owe these two lads their living through the winter. I don't know what Mr. Penrose will say about it, but I know what we all feel."

"Why, George," Mrs. Andrews said, while her eyes were filled with happy tears at the praises of her son, "why did you not tell me about it?"

"Why, mother, there was not anything to tell," George said, "and Bob has made a great fuss about nothing. As I told you, we saw a light as we came along, and when we went round behind and got on the wall we saw the place was on fire, so we rang the alarm-bell, and then turned on the hose till Bob and some more came to help us."

"It sounds very simple, Mrs. Andrews, but I can tell you it wasn't so. When we opened the door of the planing-shop it was so full of smoke that it didn't seem as if anyone could breathe there for a minute, and as we could see the glare of the flames at the other end we thought the place was gone. We should have gone out and waited for the engines if we hadn't heard the boys sing out that they were there; and even though we knelt down and crawled in, as they shouted to us to do, we were pretty nearly stifled. When we took the hose they crawled forward and got the shavings cleared away; that was how

they burned their hands, I expect; and I hear they tumbled down insensible when they got out. Now, ma'am, they may make light of it, but if ever two young chaps behaved like heroes they did, and you have got every right to be proud of them—I say of them, because, although Bill's no son of you s I know he is what you and your boy have made him. He was telling me about it one day."

"Will work go on to-morrow as usual, Bob?" George asked, in order to change the subject.

"In some of the shops it will, no doubt," Bob said; "but in our shop and the floors above it it will take a day or two to clear up. I saw the foreman just now, and he tells me that a strong gang of carpenters will be put on, for both the floors are burned away at the end of the wall and pretty near twenty feet of the roof are charred. Two surveyors are coming down this afternoon to examine the wall and say whether it is safe. The walls of the shops that are burned out must come down, of course. The surveyor says that if the wall at the end of the planing-room looks pretty strong they will build

up another wall against it as soon as it gets cool enough and the rubbish is cleared away for men to work; that will make a strong job of it, and there won't be any loss of time. Of course if the old one has to come down there can't be much work done in the shops till it's finished. The governor got down about ten o'clock last night. A messenger went up to him almost directly after the fire broke out, but he was out at dinner, and by the time he got down here all danger of it spreading was over. He had a talk with the foreman and arranged about the wall with him. He is as anxious as we are that there should be no delay, for there are some heavy orders in, and, of course, he doesn't want them taken anywhere else."

"Will you look at their hands, Mr. Grimstone. I don't know much about it, but they seem to me to be badly burned."

"That they are ma'am," Mr. Grimstone said when he had examined them, "pretty nigh raw. If I might give an opinion, I should say as the doctor had better see them; they are precious painful, ain't they, George?"

"They do feel as if they were on fire, Bob,

but I don't see any use in a doctor. I don't suppose he can do more than mother has."

"Perhaps not, George, but he had better see them for all that; he may give you some cooling lotion for them, and I can tell you burns on the hand are apt to be serious matters, for the muscles of the fingers may get stiffened. I have known two or three cases like that. You had better go at once to Dr. Maxwell, he always attends if there are any accidents at the works. You know the house, George, it is about half-way between this and the works."

"Yes, you had better go at once, boys," Mrs. Andrews said; "there, put on your hats and be off."

"I will walk with them. I must be off any way, for the missis will be waiting dinner for me."

"Are we to pay, mother?"

"No, not till you have done, George. I daresay you will have to have your hands dressed several times."

"There won't be any occasion to pay him, Mrs. Andrews. The firm always pays the doctor in case of accidents, and you may be

very sure that in this case they will be only too glad."

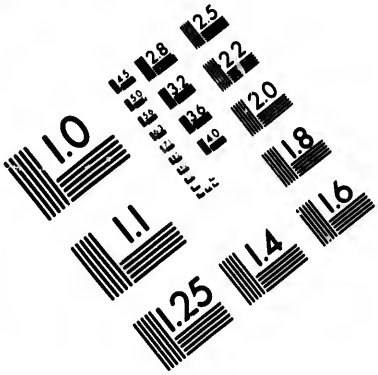
"Well, in any case, George," Mrs. Andrews said, "you can tell the doctor that you will pay when he says that you need not come to him again. If Mr. Penrose hears about it and chooses to pay, I should not think of refusing, as you have been burned in his service; but certainly I should not assume that he will do so."

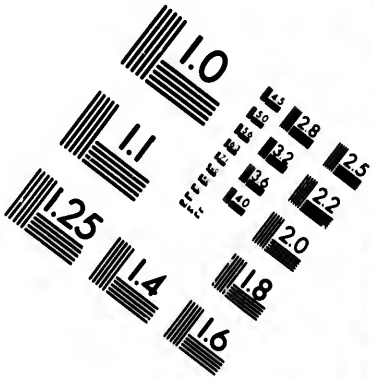
"Shall I go in with you, boys?" Bob asked when they reached the door. "I know the doctor; he attended me two years ago when I pretty nigh had my finger taken off by one of the cutters."

"Yes, please, Bob, I wish you would."

They were shown into the surgery, where the doctor soon joined them.

"I've brought these two young chaps for you to look at their hands, Dr. Maxwell. They got them burnt last night at the fire. Mrs. Andrews, the mother of this lad, wished me to say that she would pay the charges when you have done with them; but as if it hadn't been for them the works would have been burnt down as sure as you are standing





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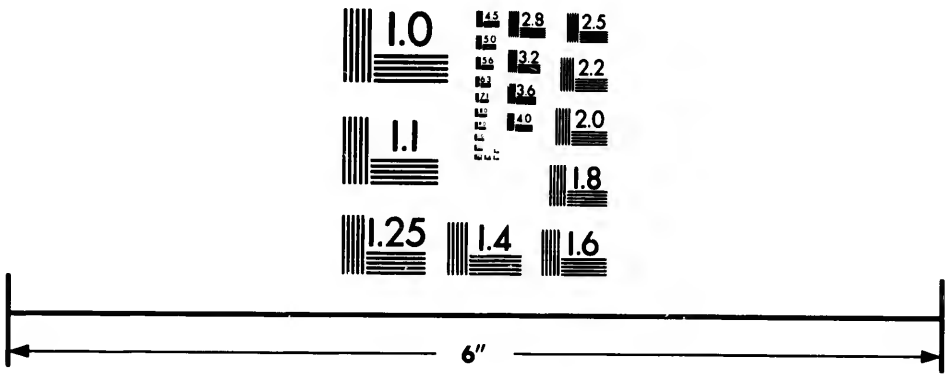

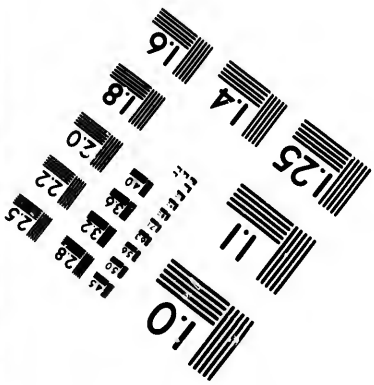

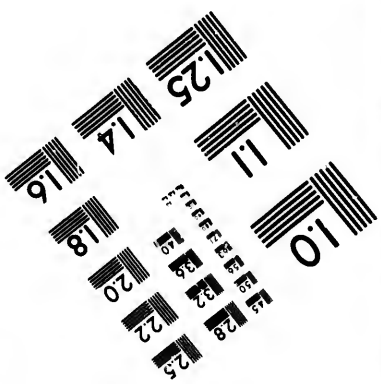

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there, I expect the firm will take the matter in their own hands."

"Yes, they are nasty burns," the doctor said, examining the boys' hands. "Can you open and shut them, boy?"

"I think I could if I tried, sir," George said, "but I shouldn't like to try, for if I move my fingers at all it hurts them awfully."

"I see you have had oil and cotton-wool on your hands."

"Yes."

"The best thing you can do, boys, is to put on some soothing poultices. Tell your mother to get some linseed and mix it with olive-oil. I will give you a bottle of laudanum. Let her put about twenty drops of that into the oil before she mixes it with the linseed. Every four or five hours change the poultices. I think you will find that will relieve the pain a good deal. I see your faces are scorched too. You can do nothing better than keep them moistened with sweet-oil. I should advise you to keep as quiet as possible for three or four days."

"But we shall want to get work, sir," George said.

"Nonsense! You will be very lucky if you can use your hands in another fortnight. I will send in the usual certificate to the works."

"Will you tell the foreman, Bob," George said when they left the doctor's, "how it is we can't come to work? You tell him we wanted to, and that we hope to come back as soon as our hands are all right; because, you see, the men and boys at the shops which have been burnt down will be all out of work, and it would be awful if we found our places filled up when we went to work again."

"Don't you be afraid, George; there is no fear of your being out of work after what you have done."

"Well, what did the doctor say?" was Mrs. Andrews' first question when they returned home.

"He didn't say much, mother, except that we must not think of going to work for a fortnight anyhow, and we are to have poultices made with linseed mixed with oil, and twenty drops of laudanum from this bottle, and it must be put on fresh every three or four hours. I am afraid it will be an awful trouble."

"The trouble won't matter," Mrs. Andrews said brightly. "Did he say you were to go to bed?"

"No, mother; but we were to keep as quiet as we could."

"Then in that case, George, I think you had better go to bed."

"No; I am sure we had better not," George said. "I should toss and fidget about there horridly. The best thing will be for us to sit here, and then we shall be all together. And if you talk to us, and perhaps read to us, we sha'n't feel it half so much. What are you going to do, mother?" he asked five minutes afterwards, as Mrs. Andrews came down with her bonnet on.

"I am going to get some linseed, George, of course. I haven't got any in the house."

"But it's Sunday, mother, and the shops will be shut."

"I shall get it at the chemist's, George. They will always supply things that are needed even on Sunday. People are ill on Sunday as well as any other day, you know. I sha'n't be gone more than a quarter of an hour. You must keep very quiet till I come back."

The boys found a good deal of relief from the effect of the poultices, and were very much better after a good night's rest. At ten o'clock the next morning, as Mrs. Andrews was sitting at her work, with the boys both on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, there was a knock at the door. It was a loud double knock, quite unlike the ordinary summons of the baker's boy, who was the only regular caller. The boys jumped up in surprise.

"Who can that be, mother?"

"We shall soon see," Mrs. Andrews said quietly.

She was not surprised, on opening the door, to see a gentleman standing there, whom, by the description the boys had given of him, she guessed to be their employer. A little girl was standing by his side.

"Is this Mrs. Andrews'?" the gentleman asked.

"I am Mrs. Andrews," the lady answered quietly.

"My name is Penrose. I have called with my daughter to inquire after the two lads—one of them your son, I believe—who so

gallantly saved my place from being burned down on Saturday evening. I only heard about it late yesterday evening, when I came down to arrange about some matters with the foreman. He did not know the facts of the case on Saturday night, but had learned them yesterday, and there can be no doubt whatever, from what he says, that had it not been for the presence of mind and bravery of these two lads nothing could have saved the entire works and all the wood piles from destruction. I told my daughter this morning, and she insisted on coming down with me. You know she is already indebted to your son for saving a locket which we both greatly valued."

"Will you walk in, sir?" and Mrs. Andrews showed them into the sitting-room.

Mr. Penrose had been somewhat surprised by Mrs. Andrews' manner, although the foreman, in telling him of the boys' conduct, had also stated what he knew about them.

"They are out-of-the-way sort of boys, sir," he said. "There was quite a talk about them in the shops in the spring. They lodged with Grimstone, and it seems that after they had been here at work five months

Andrews' mother, who had been ill, was coming to them, and they got Grimstone to take a house for them, and it turned out that ever since they had been at work here they had been putting by half their wages to furnish a place for her, so they must have lived on about five shillings a week each and got clothes for themselves out of it. Now, sir, boys as would do that ain't ordinary boys, and there was quite a talk among the men about it. I hear from Grimstone that Mrs. Andrews is a superior sort of person, he says quite a lady. She does work, I believe, for some London shop."

Mr. Penrose, therefore, was prepared to find the boys in a more comfortable abode than usual, and their mother what the foreman called a superior sort of woman; but he perceived at once by her address that Grimstone's estimate had been a correct one, and that she was indeed a lady. The prettiness of the little sitting-room, with its comfortable furniture, its snowy curtains and pretty belongings, heightened this feeling.

"I have come to see you, boys," he said, "and to tell you how indebted I feel to you

for your exertions on Saturday. There is no doubt that had it not been for you the place would have been entirely burned. It was fully insured, but it would have been a serious matter for me, as I should have lost four or five months' work, and it would have been still more serious for the men to have been thrown out of employment at this time of the year, so we all feel very much indebted to you. I hope you are not much burned."

"Oh no, sir! our hands are burned a bit, but they will be all right in a few days. Bill and I are very glad, sir, that we happened to be passing, and were able to give the alarm and do something to stop the flames till the others came up; but we don't feel that it was anything out of the way. It was just a piece of fun and excitement to us."

"They didn't say anything about it, Mr. Penrose, when they came home, and it was only when one of the men came in next day to ask after them that I heard that they had really been of use."

"It is all very well to say so, lads," Mr. Penrose replied; "but there is no doubt you

showed a great deal of courage, as well as presence of mind, and you may be sure that I shall not forget it. And now, Mrs. Andrews," he said, turning round to her, "I feel rather in a false position. I came round to see the lads, who, when I last saw them, were not in very flourishing circumstances, and I was going to make them a present for the service they had done me, and my daughter has brought them a basket with some wine, jelly, and other things such as are good for sick boys. Finding them as I find them, in your care and in such a home, you see I feel a difficulty about it altogether."

"Thank you, sir," Mrs. Andrews said, "for the kindness of your intention; but my boys —for although one is in no way related to me I feel towards him as if he were my own —would not like to take money for doing their duty towards their employer."

"No, indeed!" George and Bill exclaimed simultaneously.

"As you see, sir, thanks to the work you were good enough to give the boys and to my needle,"—and she glanced towards the articles on the table—"we are very com-

fortable; but I am sure the boys will be very glad to accept the things which your daughter has been so kind as to bring down for them, and will feel very much obliged for her thoughtfulness."

"That is right," Mr. Penrose said, relieved. "Nelly, you may as well leave the basket as it is. I am sure you don't want to carry it back again?"

"No, papa," Nelly said; and indeed even the empty basket would have been more than the child could well have carried. It had come on the top of the carriage to the railway-station, and a porter had accompanied Mr. Penrose with it to Laburnum Villas.

"You would have hardly known your young friend. Would you, Nelly?"

"I don't think I should," she said, shaking her head. "He looks dreadfully burned, and his hair is all funny and frizzled."

"It will soon grow again," George said smiling. "The doctor says our faces will be all right when the skin is peeled off. Thank you very much, Miss Penrose, for all the nice things. It was a fortunate day indeed for us when I caught that boy stealing your locket."

"And it was a fortunate day for us too," Mr. Penrose responded.

"Now, Mrs. Andrews, we will say good-bye. You will not mind my calling again to see how the boys are getting on?"

"It will be very kind of you, sir, and we shall be glad to see you," Mrs. Andrews replied; "but I hope in a few days they will both be out of the doctor's hands."

"I can't shake hands with you," Mr. Penrose said, patting the boys on the shoulder, "but I hope next time I see you to be able to do so. Good morning, Mrs. Andrews."

CHAPTER VII.

SAVED!

"NOW let us have a look at the basket, mother," George said as Mrs. Andrews returned into the room after seeing her two visitors off. "It's very kind of him, isn't it? and I am glad he didn't offer us money; that would have been horrid, wouldn't it?"

"I am glad he did not too, George. Mr. Penrose is evidently a gentleman of delicacy and refinement of feeling, and he saw that he would give pain if he did so."

"You see it too, don't you, Bill?" George asked. "You know you thought I was a fool not to take money when he offered it for getting back the locket; but you see it in the same way now, don't you?"

"Yes; I shouldn't have liked to take money," Bill said. "I sees—"

"See," Mrs. Andrews corrected.

"Thank you. I see things different—differently," he corrected himself, seeing that George was about to speak, "to what I did then."

"Now, mother," George said, "let us open the basket; it's almost as big as a clothes-basket, isn't it?"

The cover was lifted and the contents, which had after much thought been settled by Nelly herself, were disclosed. There were two bottles of port-wine, a large mould of jelly, a great cake, two dozen oranges, some apples, a box of preserved fruit, some almonds and raisins, two packets of Everton toffee, a

dozen mince-pies, and four pots of black-currant jelly, on the cover of one of which was written in a sprawling hand, "Two tea-spoonfuls stirred up in a tumbler of water for a drink at night."

"This will make a grand feast, mother; what a jolly collection, isn't it? I think Miss Penrose must have chosen it herself, don't you?"

"It certainly looks like it, George," Mrs. Andrews replied smiling. "I do not think any grown-up person would have chosen mince-pies and toffee as appropriate for sick boys."

"Yes; but she must have known we were not badly burned, mother; and besides, you see she put in currant-jelly to make drinks, and there are the oranges too. I vote that we have an orange and some toffee at once, Bill."

"I have tasted oranges," Bill said, "lots of them in the market, but I never tasted toffee."

"It's first-rate, I can tell you."

"Why, they look like bits of tin," Bill said as the packet was opened.

George burst into a laugh.

"That's tin-foil, that's only to wrap it up; you peel that off, Bill, and you will find the toffee inside."

"Now, mother, you have a glass of wine and a piece of cake."

"I will have a piece of cake, George; but I am not going to open the wine. We will put that by in case of illness or of any very extraordinary occasion."

"I am glad the other things won't keep, mother, or I expect you would be wanting to put them all away. Is'nt this toffee good, Bill?"

"First-rate," Bill agreed. "What is it made of?"

"Sugar and butter melted together over the fire."

"You are like two children," Mrs. Andrews laughed, "instead of boys getting on for sixteen years old. Now I must clear this table again and get to work; I promised these four bonnets should be sent in to-morrow morning, and there's lots to be done to them yet."

It was three weeks before the boys were able to go to work again. The foreman came

round on Saturdays with their wages. Mr. Penrose called again; this time they were out, but he chatted for some time with Mrs. Andrews.

"I don't wish to pry into your affairs, Mrs. Andrews," he said, after asking about the boys; "but I have a motive for asking if your son has, as I suppose he has, from his way of speaking, had a fair education."

"He was at school up to the age of twelve," Mrs. Andrews said quietly; "circumstances at that time obliged me to remove him; but I have since done what I could myself towards continuing his education, and he still works regularly of an evening."

"Why I ask, Mrs. Andrews, was that I should like in time to place him in the counting-house. I say in time, because I think it will be better for him for the next two or three years to continue to work in the shops. I will have him moved from shop to shop so as to learn thoroughly the various branches of the business. That is what I should do had I a son of my own to bring into the business. It will make him more valuable afterwards, and fit him to take a good position either in

my shops or in any similar business should an opening occur."

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir," Mrs. Andrews said gratefully; "though I say it myself, a better boy never lived."

"I am sure he is by what I have heard of him, and I shall be only too glad, after the service he has rendered me, to do everything in my power to push him forward. His friend, I hear, has not had the same advantages. At the time I first saw him he looked a regular young arab."

"So he was, sir; but he is a fine young fellow. He was very kind to my boy when he was alone in London, and gave up his former life to be with him. George taught him to read before I came here, and he has worked hard ever since. No one could be nicer in the house than he is, and had I been his own mother he could not be more dutiful or anxious to please. Indeed I may say that I am indebted for my home here as much to him as to my own boy."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mrs. Andrews, for of course I should wish to do something for him too. At anyrate I will

give him, like your son, every opportunity of learning the business, and he will in time be fit for a position of foreman of a shop—by no means a bad one for a lad who has had such a beginning as he has had. After that, of course, it must depend upon himself. I think, if you will allow me to suggest, it would be as well that you should not tell them the nature of our conversation. Of course it is for you to decide; but, however steady boys they are, it might make them a little less able to get on well with their associates in a shop if they know that they are going to be advanced."

"I don't think it would make any difference to them, sir; but at the same time I do think it would be as well not to tell them."

One day Bill was out by himself as the men were coming out of the shop, and he stopped to speak to Bob Grimstone.

"Oh! I am glad to find you without George," Bob said; "'cause I want to talk to you. Look here! the men in all the shops have made a subscription to give you and George a present. Everyone feels that it's your doing that we have not got to idle all

this winter, and when someone started the idea there wasn't a man in the two shops that didn't agree with him. I am the treasurer, I am, and it's come to just thirty pounds. Now I don't know what you two boys would like, whether you would like it in money, or whether you would like it in something else, so I thought I would ask you first. I thought you would know what George would like, seeing what friends you are, and then you know it would come as a surprise to him. Now what do you say?"

"It's very kind of you," Bill said. "I am sure George would like anything better than money, and so should I."

"Well, you think it over, Bill, and let me know in a day or two. We were thinking of a watch for each of you, with an inscription, saying it was presented to you by your shopmates for having saved the factory, and so kept them at work for months just at the beginning of winter. That's what seemed to me that you would like; but if there is anything you would like better just you say so. You come down here to-morrow or next day, when you have thought it over, and give me

an answer. Of course you can consult George if you think best."

Bill met Bob Grimstone on the following day.

"I have thought it over," he said, "and I know what George and me would like better than any possible thing you could get."

"Well, what is it, Bill?"

"Well, what we have set our minds on, and what we were going to save up our money to get, was a piano for George's mother. I heard her say that we could get a very nice one for about thirty pounds, and it would be splendid if you were all to give it her."

"Very well, Bill, then a piano it shall be. I know a chap as works at Kirkman's, and I expect he will be able to give us a good one for the money."

Accordingly on the Saturday afternoon before the boys were going to work again, Mrs. Andrews and George were astonished at seeing a cart stop before the house, and the foreman, Bob Grimstone, and four other men coming up to the door.

Bill ran and opened the door, and the men

entered. He had been apprised of the time that they might be expected, and at once showed them in.

"Mrs. Andrews," the foreman said, "I and my mates here are a deputation from the hands employed in the shop, and we have come to offer you a little sort of testimonial of what we feel we owe your son and Bill Smith for putting out the fire and saving the shops. If it hadn't been for them it would have been a bad winter for us all. So after thinking it over and finding out what form of testimonial the lads would like best, we have got you a piano, which we hope you may live long to play on and enjoy. We had proposed to give them a watch each; but we found that they would rather that it took the form of a piano."

"Oh, how good and kind of you all!" Mrs. Andrews said, much affected. "I shall indeed be proud of your gift, both for itself and for the kind feeling towards my boys which it expresses."

"Then, ma'am, with your permission we will just bring it in;" and the deputation retired to assist with the piano.

"Oh, boys, how could you do it without telling me!" Mrs. Andrews exclaimed.

George had hitherto stood speechless with surprise.

"But I didn't know anything about it, mother. I don't know what they mean by saying that we would rather have it than watches. Of course we would, a hundred times; but I don't know how they knew it."

"Then it must have been your kind thought, Bill."

"It wasn't no kind thought, Mrs. Andrews, but they spoke to me about it, and I knew that a piano was what we should like better than anything else, and I didn't say anything about it, because Bob Grimstone thought that it would be nicer to be a surprise to George as well as to you."

"You are right, old boy," George said, shaking Bill by the hand; "why, there never was such a good idea; it is splendid, mother, isn't it?"

The men now appeared at the door with the piano. This was at once placed in the position which had long ago been decided upon as the best place for the piano when it

should come. Mrs. Andrews opened it, and there on the front was a silver plate with the inscription:

"To Mrs. Andrews from the Employes at Messrs. Penrose & Co., in token of their gratitude to George Andrews and William Smith for their courage and presence of mind, by which the factory was saved from being destroyed by fire on Saturday the 23rd of October, 1857."

The tears which stood in Mrs. Andrews' eyes rendered it difficult for her to read the inscription.

"I thank you indeed," she said. "Now perhaps you would like to hear its tones." So saying she sat down and played "Home, Sweet Home." "It has a charming touch," she said as she rose, "and, you see, the air was an appropriate one, for your gift will serve to make home even sweeter than before. Give, please, my grateful thanks, and those of my boys, to all who have subscribed."

The inhabitants of No. 8 Laburnum Villas had long been a subject of considerable discussion and interest to their neighbours, for the appearance of the boys as they came

home of an evening in their working clothes seemed altogether incongruous with that of their mother and with the neatness and prettiness of the villa, and was, indeed, considered derogatory to the respectability of Laburnum Villas in general. Upon this evening they were still further mystified at hearing the notes of a female voice of great power and sweetness, accompanied by a piano, played evidently by an accomplished musician, issuing from the house. As to the boys, they thought that, next only to that of the homecoming of Mrs. Andrews, never was such a happy evening spent in the world.

I do not think that in all London there was a household that enjoyed that winter more than did the inmates of No. 8 Laburnum Villas. Their total earnings were about thirty-five shillings a week, much less than that of many a mechanic, but ample for them not only to live, but to live in comfort and even refinement. No stranger, who had looked into the pretty drawing-room in the evening, would have dreamt that the lady at the piano worked as a milliner for her living, or that the lads were boys in a manufactory.

When spring came they began to plan various trips and excursions which could be taken on bank holidays or during the long summer evenings, when an event happened which, for a time, cut short all their plans. The word had been passed round the shops the first thing in the morning that Mr. Penrose was coming down with a party of ladies and gentlemen to go over the works, and that things were to be made as tidy as possible.

Accordingly there was a general clearing up, and vast quantities of shavings and sawdust were swept up from the floors, although when the machines had run again for a few hours no one would have thought that a broom had been seen in the place for weeks.

George was now in a shop where a number of machines were at work grooving, mortising, and performing other work to prepare the wood for builders' purposes. The party arrived just as work had recommenced after dinner.

There were ten or twelve gentlemen and as many ladies. Nelly Penrose, with two girls about her own age, accompanied the party. They stopped for a time in each shop while Mr. Penrose explained the nature of

the work and the various points of the machinery.

They had passed through most of the other rooms before they entered that in which George was engaged, and the young girls, taking but little interest in the details of the machinery, wandered somewhat away from the rest of the party, chatting among themselves. George had his eye upon them, and was wishing that Mr. Penrose would turn round and speak to them, for they were moving about carelessly and not paying sufficient heed to the machinery.

Suddenly he threw down his work and darted forward with a shout; but he was too late, a revolving band had caught Nelly Penrose's dress. In an instant she was dragged forward and in another moment would have been whirled into the middle of the machinery.

There was a violent scream, followed by a sudden crash and a harsh grating sound, and then the whole of the machinery on that side of the room came to a stand-still. For a moment no one knew what had happened. Mr. Penrose and some of his friends rushed

forward to raise Nelly Her hand was held fast between the band and the pulley, and the band had to be cut to relieve it.

"What an escape! what an escape!" Mr. Penrose murmured, as he lifted her. "Another second and nothing could have saved her. But what stopped the machinery?" and for the first time he looked round the shop. There was a little group of men a few yards away, and, having handed Nelly, who was crying bitterly, for her hand was much bruised, to one of the ladies, he stepped towards them. The foreman came forward to meet them.

"I think, sir, you had better get the ladies out of the shop. I am afraid young Andrews is badly hurt."

"How is it? What is the matter?" Mr. Penrose asked.

"I think, sir, he saw the danger your daughter was in, and shoved his foot in between two of the cog-wheels."

"You don't say so!" Mr. Penrose exclaimed, as he pushed forward among the men.

Two of them were supporting George Andrews, who, as pale as death, lay in their arms. One of his feet was jammed in between

two of the cog-wheels. He was scarcely conscious.

"Good Heavens," Mr. Penrose exclaimed in a low tone, "his foot must be completely crushed! Have you thrown off the driving-belt, Williams?"

"Yes, sir, I did that first thing."

"That's right; now work away for your lives, lads." This was said to two men who had already seized spanners and were unscrewing the bolts of the bearings in order to enable the upper shafting to be lifted and the cog-wheel removed. Then Mr. Penrose returned to his friends.

"Pray leave the shop," he said, "and go down into the office. There's been a bad accident; a noble young fellow has sacrificed himself to save Nelly's life, and is, I fear, terribly hurt. Williams, send off a man instantly for the surgeon. Let him jump into one of the cabs he will find waiting at the gate, and tell the man to drive as hard as he can go. If Dr. Maxwell is not at home let him fetch some one else."

George had indeed sacrificed himself to save Nelly Penrose. When he saw the band

catch her dress he had looked round for an instant for something with which to stop the machinery, but there was nothing at hand, and without an instant's hesitation he had thrust his foot between the cog-wheels. He had on very heavy, thickly-nailed working boots, and the iron-bound sole threw the cogs out of gear and bent the shaft, thereby stopping the machinery. George felt a dull, sickening pain, which seemed to numb and paralyse him all over, and he remembered little more until, on the shafting being removed, his foot was extricated and he was laid gently down on a heap of shavings. The first thing when he was conscious was that some one was pouring some liquid, which half-choked him, down his throat.

When he opened his eyes, Mr. Penrose, kneeling beside him, was supporting his head, while on the other side knelt Bill Smith, the tears streaming down his cheeks and struggling to suppress his sobs.

"What is it, Bill? What's the matter?" Then the remembrance of what had passed flashed upon him.

"Is she safe; was I in time?"

"Quite safe, my dear boy. Thank God, your noble sacrifice was not in vain," Mr. Penrose answered with quivering lips, for he too had the greatest difficulty in restraining his emotion.

"Am I badly hurt, sir?" George asked after a pause, "because, if so, will you please send home for mother? I don't feel in any pain, but I feel strange and weak."

"It is your foot, my boy. I fear that it is badly crushed, but otherwise you are unhurt. Your boot threw the machinery out of gear."

In ten minutes the doctor arrived. He had already been informed of the nature of the accident.

"Is it any use trying to cut the boot off?" Mr. Penrose asked in a low voice as Dr. Maxwell stooped over George's leg.

"Not the slightest," the doctor answered in the same tone. "The foot is crushed to a pulp. It must come off at the ankle. Nothing can save it. He had better be taken home at once. You had best send to Guy's and get an operating surgeon for him. I would rather it were done by someone whose hand is more used than mine to this sort of work."

"I am a governor of Guy's," Mr. Penrose said, "and will send off at once for one of their best men. You are not afraid of the case, I hope, Dr. Maxwell?"

"Not of the local injury," Dr. Maxwell replied; "but the shock to the system of such a smash is very severe. However, he has youth, strength, and a good constitution, so we must hope for the best. The chances are all in his favour."

"We are thinking of taking you home, my boy," he went on, speaking aloud to George. "Are you in any great pain?"

"I am not in any pain, sir; only I feel awfully cold, and, please, will someone go on before and tell mother. Bill had better not go; he would frighten her to death and make her think it was much worse than it is."

"I will go myself," Mr. Penrose replied. "I will prepare her for your coming."

"Drink some more of this brandy," the doctor said; "that will warm you and give you strength for your journey."

There was a stretcher always kept at the works in case of emergency, and George was

placed on this and covered with some rugs. Four of the men raised it on to their shoulders and set out, Mr. Penrose at once driving on to prepare Mrs. Andrews.

Bill followed the procession heart-broken. When it neared home he fell behind and wandered away, not being able to bring himself to witness the grief of Mrs. Andrews. For hours he wandered about, sitting down in waste places and crying as if his heart would break. "If it had been me it wouldn't have mattered," he kept on exclaiming; "wouldn't have mattered a bit. It wouldn't have been no odds one way or the other. There, we have always been together in the shops till this week, and now when we get separated this is what comes of it. Here am I, walking about all right, and George all crushed up, and his mother breaking her heart. Why, I would rather a hundred times that they had smashed me up all over than have gone and hurt George like that."

It was dark before he made his way back, and, entering at the backdoor, took off his boots, and was about to creep up stairs when Mrs. Andrews came out of the kitchen.

"Oh, Mrs. Andrews!" he exclaimed, and the tears again burst from him.

"Do not cry, Bill; George is in God's hands, and the doctors have every hope that he will recover. They are up stairs with him now, with a nurse whom Mr. Penrose has fetched down from the hospital. He will have to lose his foot, poor boy," she added with a sob that she could not repress, "but we should feel very thankful that it is no worse after such an accident as that. The doctor says that his thick boots saved him. If it hadn't been for that his whole leg would have been drawn into the machinery, and then nothing could have saved him. Now I must go up stairs, as I only came down for some hot water."

"May I go up to him, Mrs. Andrews?"

"I think, my boy, you had better stop down here for the present for both your sakes. I will let you know when you can go up to him."

So Bill crouched before the fire and waited. He heard movements up stairs and wondered what they were doing and why they didn't keep quiet, and when he would be allowed

to go up. Once or twice the nurse came down for hot water, but Bill did not speak to her; but in half an hour Mrs. Andrews herself returned, looking, Bill thought, even paler than before.

"I have just slipped down to tell you, my boy, that it's all over. They gave him chloroform, and have taken his foot off."

"And didn't it hurt it awful?" Bill asked in an awed voice.

"Not in the least. He knew nothing about it, and the first thing he asked when he came to was when they were going to begin. They will be going away directly, and then you can come up and sit quietly in his room if you like. The doctors say he will probably drop asleep."

Bill was obliged to go outside again and wrestle with himself before he felt that he was fit to go up into George's room. It was a long struggle, and had George caught his muttered remonstrances to himself he would have felt that Bill had suffered a bad relapse into his former method of talking. It came out in jerks between his sobs.

"Come, none of that now. Ain't yer

ashamed of yerself, a-howling and a-blubbering like a gal! Call yerself a man!—you are a babby, that's what you are. Now, dry up, and let's have no more of it."

But it was a long time before he again mastered himself; then he went to the scullery and held his head under the tap till the water took away his breath, then polished his face till it shone, and then went and sat quietly down till Mrs. Andrews came in and told him that he could go up stairs to George. He went up to the bedside and took George's hand, but he could not trust himself to speak.

"Well, Bill, old boy," George said cheerily, but in a somewhat lower voice than usual, "this is a sudden go, isn't it?"

Bill nodded. He was still speechless.

"Don't you take it to heart, Bill," George said, feeling that the lad was shaking from head to foot. "It won't make much odds, you know. I shall soon be about again all right. I expect they will be able to put on an artificial foot, and I shall be stumping about as well as ever, though I shouldn't be much good at a race."

"I wish it had been me," Bill broke out

"I would have jammed my head in between them wheels cheerful, that I would, rather than you should have gone and done it."

"Fortunately there was no time," George said with a smile. "Don't you fret yourself, Bill; one can get on well enough without a foot, and it didn't hurt me a bit coming off. No, nor the squeeze either, not regular hurting; it was just a sort of scrunch and then I didn't feel anything more. Why, I have often hurt myself ten times as much at play and thought nothing of it. I expect it looked much worse to you than it felt to me."

"We will talk of it another time," Bill said huskily. "Your mother said I wasn't to talk, and I wasn't to let you talk, but just to sit down here quiet, and you are to try to go off to sleep." So saying he sat down by the bedside. George asked one or two more questions, but Bill only shook his head. Presently George closed his eyes, and a short time afterwards his quiet regular breathing showed that he was asleep.

The next six weeks passed pleasantly enough to George. Every day hampers containing flowers and various niceties in the

way of food were sent down by Mr. Penrose, and that gentleman himself very frequently called in for a chat with him. As soon as the wound had healed an instrument-maker came down from town to measure him for an artificial foot, but before he was able to wear this he could get about on crutches.

The first day that he was down-stairs Mr. Penrose brought Nelly down to see him. The child looked pale and awed as he came in.

"My little girl has asked me to thank you for her, George," Mr. Penrose said as she advanced timidly and placed her hand in his. "I have not said much to you about my own feelings and I won't say much about hers; but you can understand what we both feel. Why, my boy, it was a good Providence, indeed, which threw you in my way. I thought so when you saved the mill from destruction. I feel it tenfold more now that you have saved my child. The ways of God are, indeed, strange. Who would have thought that all this could have sprung from that boy snatching the locket from Helen as we came out of the theatre! And now about the future, George. I owe you a

great debt, infinitely greater than I can ever repay; but what I can do I will. In the future I shall regard you as my son, and I hope that you will look to me as to a father. I have been talking to your mother, and she says that she thinks your tastes lie altogether in the direction of engineering. Is that so?"

"Yes sir. I have often thought I would rather be an engineer than anything, but I don't like—"

"Never mind what you like and what you don't like," Mr. Penrose said quietly. "You belong to me now, you know, and must do as you are told. What I propose is this, that you shall go to a good school for another three years, and I will then apprentice you to a first-class engineer, either mechanical or civil as you may then prefer, and when you have learned your business I will take good care that you are pushed on. What do you say to that?"

"I think it is too much altogether," George said.

"Never mind about that," Mr. Penrose said, "that is my business. If that is the only objection we can imagine it settled. There is

another thing. I know how attached you are to your friend Bill, and I am indebted to him too for the part he played at the fire, so I propose, if he is willing, to put him to a good middle-class school for a bit. In the course of a couple of years he will get a sufficient education to get on fairly with, and then I propose, according as you may choose to be a civil or mechanical engineer, to place him with a mason or smith; then by the time that you are ready to start in business he will be ready to take a place under you, so that you may again work together."

"Oh, thank you, sir," George exclaimed, even more pleased at the news relating to Bill than at his own good fortune, great as was the delight which the prospect opened by Mr. Penrose's offer caused him.

As soon as George could be moved, Mr. Penrose sent him with his mother and Bill down to the sea-side. Here George rapidly regained strength, and when, after a stay there of two months, he returned to town, he was able to walk so well with his artificial foot that his loss would not have been noticed by a stranger.

The arrangements settled by Mr. Penrose were all in due time carried out. George went for three years to a good school, and was then apprenticed to one of the leading civil engineers. With him he remained five years and then went out for him to survey a railroad about to be constructed in Brazil, and remained there as one of the staff who superintended its construction. Bill, who was now a clever young mason, accompanied him, and through George's interest with the contractor obtained the sub-contract for the masonry of some of the bridges and culverts.

This was ten years ago, and George Andrews is now one of the most rising engineers of the day, and whatever business he undertakes his friend Bill is still his right-hand man. Mr. Penrose has been in all respects as good as his word, and has been ready to assist George with his personal influence in all his undertakings, and in all respects has treated him as a son, while Nelly has regarded him with the affection of a sister.

Both George and Bill have been married some years, and Mrs. Andrews the elder is

one of the proudest and happiest of mothers. She still lives with her son at the earnest request of his wife, who was often left alone during George's frequent absence abroad on professional duties. As for Bill he has not even yet got over his wonder at his own good fortune, and ever blesses the day when he first met George in Covent Garden.

THE END.

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