ALGER HORATIO JR.

CAST UPON THE BREAKERS

Horatio Alger
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Cast Upon the Breakers:

Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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CHAPTER I
A FAITHLESS GUARDIAN

"Well, good by, Rodney! I leave school tomorrow. I am going to learn a trade."

"I am sorry to part with you, David. Couldn't you stay another term?"

"No: my uncle says I must be earning my living, and I have a chance to learn the carpenter's trade."

"Where are you going?"

"To Duffield, some twenty miles away. I wish I were in your shoes. You have no money cares, and can go on quietly and complete your education."

"I don't know how I am situated, David. I only know that my guardian pays my expenses at this boarding school."

"Yes, you are a star boarder, and have the nicest room in the institution. I am only a poor day scholar. Still I feel thankful that I have been allowed to remain as long as I have. Who is your guardian?"

"A Mr. Benjamin Fielding, of New York."

"Is he a business man?"

"I believe so."

"Do you know how much you will inherit when you come of age?" asked David, after a short pause.

"I haven't an idea."

"It seems to me your guardian ought to have told you."

"I scarcely know my guardian. Five years ago I spent a week at his home. I don't remember much about it except that he lives in a handsome house, and has plenty of servants. Since then, as you know, I have passed most of my time here, except that in the summer I was allowed to board at the Catskills or any country place I might select."

"Yes, and I remember one year you took me with you and paid all my expenses. I shall never forget your kindness, and how much I enjoyed that summer."

Rodney Ropes smiled, and his smile made his usually grave face look very attractive.

"My dear David," he said, "it was all selfishness on my part. I knew I should enjoy myself much better with a companion."

"You may call that selfishness, Rodney, but it is a kind of selfishness that makes me your devoted friend. How long do you think you shall remain at school?"

"I don't know. My guardian has never told me his plans for me. I wish he would."

"I shall miss you, Rodney, but we will correspond, won't we?"

"Surely. You know I shall always feel interested in you and

your welfare."

David was a plain boy of humble parentage, and would probably be a hard working mechanic. In fact he was looking for nothing better.

But Rodney Ropes looked to be of genteel blood, and had the air of one who had been brought up a gentleman. But different as they were in social position the two boys had always been devoted friends.

The boarding school of which Rodney was, as his friend expressed himself, a star pupil, was situated about fifty miles from the city of New York. It was under the charge of Dr. Sampson, a tall, thin man of fair scholarship, keenly alive to his own interest, who showed partiality for his richer pupils, and whenever he had occasion to censure bore most heavily upon boys like David Hull, who was poor.

Rodney occupied alone the finest room in the school. There was a great contrast between his comfortable quarters and the extremely plain dormitories occupied by less favored pupils.

In the case of some boys the favoritism of the teacher would have led them to put on airs, and made them unpopular with their school fellows. But Rodney had too noble a nature to be influenced by such considerations. He enjoyed his comfortable room, but treated his school fellows with a frank cordiality that made him a general favorite.

After David left his room Rodney sat down to prepare a lesson in Cicero, when he was interrupted by the entrance through the

half open door of a younger boy.

"Rodney," he said, "the doctor would like to see you in his office."

"Very well, Brauner, I will go down at once."

He put aside his book and went down to the office of Dr. Sampson on the first floor.

The doctor was sitting at his desk. He turned slightly as Rodney entered.

"Take a seat, Ropes," he said curtly.

His tone was so different from his usual cordiality that Rodney was somewhat surprised.

"Am I in disgrace?" he asked himself. "Dr. Sampson doesn't seem as friendly as usual."

After a brief interval Dr. Sampson wheeled round in his office chair.

"I have a letter for you from your guardian, Ropes," he said. "Here it is. Do me the favor to read it here."

With some wonder Rodney took the letter and read as follows:

DEAR RODNEY—I have bad news to communicate. As you know, I was left by your father in charge of you and your fortune. I have never told you the amount, but I will say now that it was about fifty thousand dollars. Until two years since I kept it intact but then began a series of reverses in which my own fortune was swallowed up. In the hope of relieving myself I regret to say that I was tempted to use your money. That went also, and now of the whole sum there remains but enough to pay the balance of

your school bills, leaving you penniless. How much I regret this I cannot tell you. I shall leave New York at once. I do not care at present to say where I shall go, but I shall try to make good the loss, and eventually restore to you your lost fortune. I may be successful or I may not. I shall do my best and I hope in time to have better news to communicate.

One thing I am glad to say. I have a casket containing your mother's jewels. These are intact. I shall send you the casket by express, knowing that you will wish to keep them out of regard for your mother's memory. In case you are reduced to the necessity of pawning or selling them, I am sure that your mother, could she be consulted, would advise you to do so. This would be better than to have you suffer from want.

There is nothing further for me to write except to repeat my regret, and renew my promise to make up your lost fortune if I shall ever to able to do so. Your Guardian, BENJAMIN FIELDING.

Rodney read this like one dazed. In an instant he was reduced from the position of a favorite of fortune to a needy boy, with his living to make.

He could not help recalling what had passed between his friend David and himself earlier in the day. Now he was as poor as David—poorer, in fact for David had a chance to learn a trade that would yield him a living, while he was utterly without resources, except in having an unusually good education.

"Well," said Dr. Sampson, "have you read your letter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your guardian wrote to me also. This is his letter," and he placed the brief epistle in Rodney's hands.

DR. SAMPSON—I have written my ward, Rodney Ropes, an important letter which he will show you. The news which it contains will make it necessary for him to leave school. I inclose a check for one hundred and twenty five dollars. Keep whatever is due you, and give him the balance. BENJAMIN FIELDING.

"I have read the letter, but I don't know what it means," said Dr. Sampson. "Can you throw any light upon it?"

"Here is my letter, doctor. You can read it for yourself."

Dr. Sampson's face changed as he read Rodney's letter. It changed and hardened, and his expression became quite different from that to which Rodney had been accustomed.

"This is a bad business, Ropes," said the doctor in a hard tone.

He had always said Rodney before.

"Yes, sir."

"That was a handsome fortune which your father left you."

"Yes, sir. I never knew before how much it amounted to."

"You only learn when you have lost it. Mr. Fielding has treated you shamefully."

"Yes, sir, I suppose he has, but he says he will try to make it up to me in the future."

"Pish! that is all humbug. Even if he is favored by fortune you will never get back a cent."

"I think I shall, sir."

"You are young. You do not know the iniquities of business men. I do."

"I prefer to hope for the best."

"Just as you please."

"Have you anything more to say to me?"

"Only that I will figure up your account and see how much money is to come to you out of the check your guardian has sent. You can stay here till Monday; then you will find it best to make new arrangements."

"Very well, sir."

Rodney left the room, realizing that Dr. Sampson's feelings had been changed by his pupil's reverse of fortune.

It was the way of the world, but it was not a pleasant way, and Rodney felt depressed.

CHAPTER II
THE CASKET OF JEWELS

It was not till the latter part of the afternoon that the casket arrived. Rodney was occupied with a recitation, and it was only in the evening that he got an opportunity to open it. There was a pearl necklace, very handsome, a pair of bracelets, two gold chains, some minor articles of jewelry and a gold ring.

A locket attracted Rodney's notice, and he opened it. It contained the pictures of his father and mother.

His father he could barely remember, his mother died before he was old enough to have her image impressed upon his memory. He examined the locket and his heart was saddened. He felt how different his life would have been had his parents lived.

He had never before realized the sorrow of being alone in the world. Misfortune had come upon him, and so far as he knew he had not a friend. Even Dr. Sampson, who had been paid so much money on his account, and who had always professed so great friendship for him, had turned cold.

As he was standing with the locket in his hand there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" he called out.

The door opened and a stout, coarse looking boy, dressed in an expensive manner, entered.

"Good evening, John," said Rodney, but not cordially.

Next to himself, John Bundy, who was the son of a wealthy saloon keeper in the city of New York, had been a favorite with Dr. Sampson.

If there was anything Dr. Sampson bowed down to and respected it was wealth, and Mr. Bundy, senior, was reputed to be worth a considerable fortune.

In Rodney's mood John Bundy was about the last person whom he wanted to see.

"Ha!" said John, espying the open casket, "where did you get all that jewelry?"

"It contains my mother's jewels," said Rodney gravely.

"You never showed it to me before."

"I never had it before. It came to me by express this afternoon."

"It must be worth a good pile of money," said John, his eyes gleaming with cupidity.

"I suppose it is."

"Have you any idea what it is worth?"

"I have no thought about it."

"What are you going to do with it? It won't be of use to you, especially the diamond earrings," he added, with a coarse laugh.

"No," answered Rodney shortly.

"My eyes, wouldn't my mother like to own all this jewelry. She's fond of ornament, but pa won't buy them for her."

Rodney did not answer.

"I say, Ropes, I mustn't forget my errand. Will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"Lend me five dollars till the first of next month. My allowance comes due then. Now I haven't but a quarter left."

"What makes you apply to me, Bundy?"

"Because you always have money. I don't suppose you are worth as much as my father, but you have more money for yourself than I have."

"I have had, perhaps, but I haven't now."

"Why, what's up? What has happened?"

"I have lost my fortune."

John whistled. This was his way of expressing amazement.

"Why, what have you been doing? How could you lose your fortune?"

"My guardian has lost it for me. That amount to the same thing."

"When did you hear that?"

"This morning."

"Is that true? Are you really a poor boy?"

"Yes."

John Bundy was astonished, but on the whole he was not saddened. In the estimation of the school Rodney had always ranked higher than he, and been looked upon as the star pupil in point of wealth.

Now that he was dethroned John himself would take his place.

This would be gratifying, though just at present, and till the beginning of the next month, he would be distressed for ready money.

"Well, that's a stunner!" he said. "How do you feel about it? Shall you stay in school?"

"No; I can't afford it. I must get to work."

"Isn't there anything left—not a cent?"

"There may be a few dollars."

"And then," said Bundy with a sudden thought, "there is this casket of jewelry. You can sell it for a good deal of money."

"I don't mean to sell it."

"Then you're a fool; that's all I've got to say."

"I don't suppose you will understand my feeling in the matter, but these articles belonged to my mother. They are all I have to remind me of her. I do not mean to sell them unless it is absolutely necessary."

"I would sell them quicker'n a wink," said Bundy. "What's the good of keeping them?"

"We won't discuss the matter," said Rodney coldly.

"Do you mind my telling the other boys about your losing your money?"

"No; it will be known tomorrow at any rate; there is no advantage in concealing it."

A heavy step was heard outside. It stopped before the door.

"I must be getting," said Bundy, "or I'll get into trouble."

It was against the rule at the school for boys to make calls upon

each other in the evening unless permission were given.

John Bundy opened the door suddenly, and to his dismay found himself facing the rigid figure of Dr. Sampson, the principal.

"How do you happen to be here, Bundy?" asked the doctor sternly.

"Please, sir, I was sympathizing with Ropes on his losing his money," said Bundy with ready wit.

"Very well! I will excuse you this time."

"I'm awful sorry for you, Ropes," said Bundy effusively.

"Thank you," responded Rodney.

"You can go now," said the principal. "I have a little business with Master Ropes."

"All right, sir. Good night."

"Good night."

"Won't you sit down, Dr. Sampson?" said Rodney politely, and he took the casket from the chair.

"Yes, I wish to have five minutes' conversation with you. So these are the jewels, are they?"

"Yes, sir."

"They seem to be quite valuable," went on the doctor, lifting the pearl necklace and poising it in his fingers. "It will be well for you to have them appraised by a jeweler."

"It would, sir, if I wished to sell them, but I mean to keep them as they are."

"I would hardly advise it. You will need the money. Probably

you do not know how near penniless you are."

"No, sir; I don't know."

"Your guardian, as you are aware, sent me a check for one hundred and twenty five dollars. I have figured up how much of this sum is due to me, and I find it to be one hundred and thirteen dollars and thirty seven cents."

"Yes, sir," said Rodney indifferently.

"This leaves for you only eleven dollars and sixty three cents. You follow me, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any money saved up from your allowance?"

"A few dollars only, sir."

"Ahem! that is a pity. You will need all you can raise. But of course you did not anticipate what has occurred?"

"No, sir."

"I will throw off the thirty seven cents," said the principal magnanimously, "and give you back twelve dollars."

"I would rather pay you the whole amount of your bill," said Rodney.

"Ahem! Well perhaps that would be more business-like. So you don't wish to part with any of the jewelry, Ropes?"

"No, sir."

"I thought, perhaps, by way of helping you, I would take the earrings, and perhaps the necklace, off your hands and present them to Mrs. Sampson."

Rodney shuddered with aversion at the idea of these

precious articles, which had once belonged to his mother, being transferred to the stout and coarse featured consort of the principal.

"I think I would rather keep them," he replied.

"Oh well, just as you please," said Dr. Sampson with a shade of disappointment for he had no idea of paying more than half what the articles were worth. "If the time comes when you wish to dispose of them let me know."

Rodney nodded, but did not answer in words.

"Of course, Ropes," went on the doctor in a perfunctory way, "I am very sorry for you. I shall miss you, and, if I could afford it, I would tell you to stay without charge. But I am a poor man."

"Yes," said Rodney hastily, "I understand. I thank you for your words but would not under any circumstances accept such a favor at your hands."

"I am afraid you are proud, Ropes. Pride is—ahem—a wrong feeling."

"Perhaps so, Dr. Sampson, but I wish to earn my own living without being indebted to any one."

"Perhaps you are right, Ropes. I dare say I should feel so myself. When do you propose leaving us?"

"Some time tomorrow, sir."

"I shall feel sad to have you go. You have been here so long that you seem to me like a son. But we must submit to the dispensations of Providence—" and Dr. Sampson blew a vigorous blast upon his red silk handkerchief. "I will give you the

balance due in the morning."

"Very well, sir."

Rodney was glad to be left alone. He had no faith in Dr. Sampson's sympathy. The doctor had the reputation of being worth from thirty to forty thousand dollars, and his assumption of being a poor man Rodney knew to be a sham.

He went to bed early, for tomorrow was to be the beginning of a new life for him.

CHAPTER III
A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

When it was generally known in the school that Rodney was to leave because he had lost his property much sympathy was felt and expressed for him.

Though he had received more than ordinary attention from the principal on account of his pecuniary position and expectations, this had not impaired his popularity. He never put on any airs and was on as cordial relations with the poorest student as with the richest.

"I'm awfully sorry you're going, Rodney," said more than one. "Is it really true that you have lost your property?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Do you feel bad about it?"

"I feel sorry, but not discouraged."

"I say, Rodney," said Ernest Rayner, in a low voice, calling Rodney aside, "are you very short of money?"

"I haven't much left, Ernest."

"Because I received five dollars last week as a birthday present. I haven't spent any of it. You can have it as well as not."

Rodney was much moved. "My dear Ernest," he said, putting his arm caressingly around the neck of the smaller boy, "you are a true friend. I won't forget your generous offer, though I don't

need to accept it."

"But are you sure you have money enough?" asked Ernest.

"Yes, I have enough for the present. By the time I need more I shall have earned it."

There was one boy, already introduced, John Bundy, who did not share in the general feeling of sympathy for Rodney. This was John Bundy.

He felt that Rodney's departure would leave him the star pupil and give him the chief social position in school. As to scholarship he was not ambitious to stand high in that.

"I say, Ropes," he said complacently, "I'm to have your room after you're gone."

"I congratulate you," returned Rodney. "It is an excellent room."

"Yes, I s'pose it'll make you feel bad. Where are you going?"

"I hope you will enjoy it as much as I have done."

"Oh yes, I guess there's no doubt of that. I'm going to get pa to send me some nice pictures to hang on the wall. When you come back here on a visit you'll see how nice it looks."

"I think it will be a good while before I come here on a visit."

"Yes. I s'pose it'll make you feel bad. Where are you going?"

"To the City of New York."

"You'll have to live in a small hall bedroom there."

"Why will I?"

"Because you are poor, and it costs a good deal of money to live in New York. It'll be a great come down."

"It will indeed, but if I can earn enough to support me in plain style I won't complain. I suppose you'll call and see me when you come to New York?"

"Perhaps so, if you don't live in a tenement house. Pa objects to my going to tenement houses. There's no knowing what disease there may be in them."

"It is well to be prudent," said Rodney, smiling.

It did not trouble him much to think he was not likely to receive a call from his quondan schoolmate.

"Here is the balance of your money, Ropes," said Dr. Sampson, drawing a small roll of bills from his pocket, later in the day. "I am quite willing to give you the odd thirty seven cents."

"Thank you, doctor, but I shan't need it."

"You are poorly provided. Now I would pay you a good sum for some of your mother's jewelry, as I told you last evening."

"Thank you," said Rodney hastily, "but I don't care to sell at present."

"Let me know when you are ready to dispose of the necklace."

Here the depot carriage appeared in the street outside and Rodney with his gripsack in one hand and the precious casket in the other, climbed to a seat beside the driver.

His trunk he left behind, promising to send for it when he had found a new boarding place.

There was a chorus of good byes. Rodney waved his handkerchief in general farewell, and the carriage started for the depot.

"Be you goin' for good?" asked Joel, the driver, who knew Rodney well and felt friendly to him.

"Yes, Joel."

"It's kind of sudden, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What makes you go?"

"Bad news, Joel."

"Be any of your folks dead?"

"It is not death. I haven't any 'folks.' I'm alone in the world. It's because I've lost my property and am too poor to remain in school."

"That's too bad," said the driver in a tone of sympathy. "Where are you goin'?"

"To the city."

"Are you goin' to work?"

"Yes, I shall have to."

"If you was a little older you might get a chance to drive a street car, but I s'pose you're too young."

"Yes, I don't think they would take me."

"I've thought sometimes I should like such a chance myself," said Joel. "I've got tired of the country. I should like to live in the city where there's theaters, and shows, and such like. Do you know what the drivers on street cars get?"

"No, I never heard."

"I wish you'd find out and let me know. You can send the letter to Joel Phipps, Groveton. Then find out if it's easy to get such

a chance."

"I will. I shall be glad to oblige you."

"You always was obligin', Rodney. I've asked Jack Bundy to do it—you know his folks live in the city—but he never would. He's a mighty disagreeable boy. He never liked you."

"Didn't he?"

"No, I surmise he was jealous of you. He used to say you put on so many airs it made him sick."

"I don't think any of the other boys would say that."

"No, but they could say it of him. Do you think his father is rich?"

"I have always heard that he was."

"I hope he's better about paying his debt than Jack. I lent him twenty five cents a year ago and I never could get it back."

The distance from the school to the station was a mile. Joel fetched the carriage round with a sweep and then jumped off, opened the door, and then helped the passengers to disembark, if that word is allowable.

"How soon does the train start, Joel?" asked Rodney.

"In about five minutes."

"Then I had better purchase my ticket without delay."

"Don't forget to ask about horse car drivers!"

"No, I won't. I should like to have you come to New York. I know no one there, and I should feel glad to see a familiar face."

The train came up in time, and Rodney was one of half a dozen passengers who entered the cars.

He obtained a place next to a stout man dressed in a pepper and salt suit.

"Is this seat engaged?" asked Rodney.

"Yes—to you," and his fellow passenger laughed.

Rodney laughed too, for he saw that the remark was meant to be jocose.

He put his gripsack on the floor at his feet, but held the casket in his lap. He did not like to run any risk with that.

"Are you a drummer?" asked the stout man, with a glance at the casket.

"No, sir."

"I thought you might be, and that THAT might contain your samples."

"No, sir. That is private property."

He had thought of telling what it contained, but checked himself. He knew nothing of his companion, and was not sure how far it might be safe to trust a stranger.

"I used to be a drummer myself—in the jewelry line—" continued his companion, "and I carried a box just like that."

"Ah, indeed! Then you are not in that business now?"

"No, I got tired of it. I deal in quite a different article now."

"Indeed?"

"Suburban lot."

"You don't happen to have any of them with you?"

The stout man roared with laughter, giving Rodney the impression that he had said a very witty thing.

"That's a good one," he remarked, "the best I've heard for a long time. No, I haven't any of the lots with me, but I've got a circular. Just cast your eye over that," and he drew a large and showy prospectus from his pocket.

"If you should be looking for a good investment," he continued, "you can't do any better than buy a lot at Morton Park. It is only eighteen miles from the city and is rapidly building up. You can buy lot on easy installments, and I will myself pick one out for you that is almost sure to double in value in a year or two."

"Thank you," said Rodney, "but I shall have to invest my money, if I get any, in a different way."

"As what for instance?"

"In board and lodging."

"Good. That is even more necessary than real estate."

"How long have you been in the business, sir?"

"About six months."

"And how does it pay?"

"Very well, if you know how to talk."

"I should think you might do well, then."

"Thank you. I appreciate the compliment. What business are you going into, that is, if you are going to the city?"

"I am going to the city, but I have no idea yet what I shall do."

"Perhaps you may like to become an agent for our lots. I shall be ready to employ you as sub agent if you feel disposed."

"Thank you, sir. If you will give me your card, I may call upon you."

The short man drew from his card case a business card. It bore the name

ADIN WOODS. ROYAL BUILDING. NASSAU ST. Morton Park Lots.

"Come to see me at any time," he said, "and we will talk the matter over."

Here the train boy came along and Rodney bought a copy of Puck, while the agent resumed the perusal of a copy of a magazine. For an hour the cars ran smoothly. Then there was a sudden shock causing all the passengers to start to their feet.

"We're off the track!" shouted an excitable person in front of Rodney.

The instinct of self preservation is perhaps stronger than any other. Rodney and his seat mate both jumped to their feet and hurried to the door of the car, not knowing what was in store for them.

But fortunately the train had not been going rapidly. It was approaching a station and was "slowing up." So, though it had really run off the track, there was not likely to be any injury to the passengers.

"We are safe," said Adin Woods. "The only harm done is the delay. I hope that won't be long. Suppose we go back to our seat." They returned to the seat which they had jointly occupied.

Then Rodney made an alarming discovery. "My casket!" he exclaimed. "Where is it?"

"What did you do with it?"

“Left it on the seat.”

“It may have fallen to the floor.”

Rodney searched for it in feverish excitement, but his search was vain. THE CASKET HAD DISAPPEARED!

CHAPTER IV
IN PURSUIT OF A THIEF

"Were the contents of the casket valuable?" asked the land agent.

"Yes; it contained my mother's jewels, all the more valuable because she is dead," replied Rodney.

"Were they of much intrinsic worth?"

"They must be worth several hundred dollars at least."

"Then they must be found," said Adin Woods energetically. "They have evidently been taken by some passenger during the five minutes we were away from our seat."

"Were you inquiring about the casket?" asked a lady sitting opposite.

"Yes, madam. Can you give any information about it?"

"Just after you left your seat the man that sat behind you rose and reaching over for it went to the rear end of the car and got out."

"I wish you had stopped him, madam."

"He was so cool about it that I thought he might be a friend of the young gentleman."

"I didn't know him. He must have been a thief."

"What was his appearance, madam?" asked the lot agent.

"He was a thin, dark complexioned man, with side whiskers

coming half way down his cheeks."

"And you say he got out of the rear end of the car?"

"Yes, sir."

"He won't get on the train again," said the agent turning to Rodney. "He thinks the casket valuable enough to pay him for the interruption of his journey."

"What shall I do then?" asked Rodney, feeling helpless and at a loss which way to turn.

"Follow him," said the agent briefly. "He will probably stop over in the village a day and resume his journey tomorrow."

"Even if I found him I am afraid I shouldn't know how to deal with him."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stop over with you and help you make it hot for him. I've had a spite against thieves ever since I had a valuable overcoat stolen in one of my journeys."

"I shall feel very much obliged to you, Mr. Woods, but won't it interfere with your business?"

"Not materially. If we succeed in overhauling the rascal I shall feel sufficiently repaid for the small interruption. But come on, we can't afford to linger here while he is carrying off the plunder."

"I don't know how I can repay you, Mr. Woods," said Rodney gratefully.

"You can buy a lot of me when you get rich enough."

"I will certainly do so, though I am afraid it will be a long time first."

"You don't know what good fortune may be in store for you. Did you notice, madam, in which direction the thief went?"

"Yes, I was looking out of the window. He went over the road to the left."

"That leads to the village. You will see, Mr. Ropes, that I was right about his plans."

"Don't call me Mr. Ropes. Call me Rodney."

"I will. It don't seem natural to dub a boy Mr. Now, Rodney, follow me."

The two passengers set out on the road that led to the village. They could see the latter easily, for it was not more than a mile away.

"He will be surprised to think we have 'struck his trail' so quick," said the agent.

"Where shall we go first?"

"To the hotel if there is one."

"The village seems small."

"Yes, there are only a few hundred inhabitant probably. It is not a place where a traveler would be likely to interrupt his journey unless he had a special object in doing so, like our dishonest friend. However, I think we shall be able to balk his little game."

Ten minutes' walk brought them to the village. Looking about they saw a small hotel just across the way from a neat white chapel.

"Follow me," said the agent.

They went into the public room in which there was a small office.

The book of arrivals was open, and Adin Woods went forward and examined it. Silently he pointed to a name evidently just written, for the ink was scarcely dry. This was the name: Louis Wheeler, Philadelphia.

"This may or may not be his real name," said Mr. Woods in a low voice.

"Do you wish to register, gentlemen?" asked the clerk.

"We will take dinner, and if we decide to stay will register later. By the way, I recognize this name, but it may not be the man I suppose."

"Yes, the gentleman just registered."

"Would you mind describing him?"

"He was a tall, dark man as near as I can remember."

"And he carried a small casket in his hand?"

"Yes, and a gripsack."

"Oh yes," said the agent his face lighting up with satisfaction. "It is the man I mean—where is he now?"

"In his room."

"Did he say how long he intended to stay?"

"No, sir. He said nothing about his plans."

"Did he seem specially careful about the casket?"

"Yes, sir. He carried that in his hands, but let the servant carry up the gripsack."

"My friend," said the agent in an impressive tone, "I am going

to surprise you."

The country clerk looked all curiosity.

"Is it about Mr. Wheeler?" he asked.

"Yes, the man is a thief. He stole the casket, which contains valuable jewelry, from my young friend here. We are here to demand a return of the property or to arrest him. Is there a policeman within call?"

"I can summon a constable."

"Do so, but don't breathe a word of what I have told you."

The clerk called a boy in from the street and gave him instructions in a low voice. He went at once on his errand, and in ten minutes a stout broad shouldered man made his appearance.

"This gentleman sent for you, Mr. Barlow," said the clerk.

"What can I do for you?" asked the constable.

"Help me to recover stolen property."

"That I will do with pleasure if you will tell me what you want me to do."

Adin Woods held a brief conference with the constable, then he led the way up stairs, followed immediately by Rodney, while the constable kept a little behind.

"His room is No. 9," said the bell boy.

The agent paused before the door of No. 9, and knocked.

"Come in!" said a voice.

The agent opened the door, and entered, accompanied by Rodney. A glance showed that the occupant answered the description given by the lady in the car.

Louis Wheeler changed color, for he recognized both the agent and Rodney.

"What is your business?" he asked in a tone which he tried to make indifferent.

"That," answered Woods, pointing to the jewel casket on the bureau.

It looked to him as if Wheeler, if that was his name, had been trying to open it.

"I don't understand."

"Then I will try to make things clear to you. You have, doubtless by accident" he emphasized the last word, "taken from the car a casket belonging to my young friend here."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Wheeler with brazen hardihood. "That casket belongs to me."

"Indeed. What does it contain?"

"I fail to see how that is any of your business," returned Wheeler, determined, if possible, to bluff off his visitors.

"I admire your cheek, sir. I really do. But I am too old a traveler to be taken in by such tricks. I propose to have that casket."

"Well, sir, you are the most impudent thief and burglar I ever met. You break into a gentleman's room, and undertake to carry off his private property. Unless you go out at once, I will have you arrested."

"That you can do very readily, for I have an officer within call."

Louis Wheeler changed color. He began to see that the situation was getting serious.

"There is a great mistake here," he said.

"I agree with you."

The agent went to the door, and called "Constable Barlow."

The constable promptly presented himself.

"Do you want me, sir?" he asked.

"That depends on this gentleman here. If he will peacefully restore to my young friend here yonder jewel casket I am willing to let him go. Otherwise—" and he glanced at Wheeler significantly.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake," admitted the thief. "I had a casket exactly like this. Possibly I have taken the wrong one."

"I have the key to the casket here," said Rodney, "and I can tell you without opening it what it contains."

"What did yours contain?" asked the agent.

"Jewelry," answered Wheeler shortly.

"What articles?"

"Never mind. I am inclined to think this casket belongs to the boy."

"Rodney, you can take it and Mr. Wheeler will probably find his where he left it."

No objection was made, and the discomfited thief was left a prey to mortification and disappointment.

Rodney handed a dollar to the constable which that worthy official received with thanks, and he and the agent resumed their

journey by an afternoon train. They saw nothing further of Louis Wheeler who sent for dinner to be served in his room.

CHAPTER V
A YOUNG FINANCIAL WRECK

"You have been very fortunate in recovering your jewels," said the agent.

"I owe it to you," replied Rodney gratefully.

"Well, perhaps so. If I have rendered you a service I am very glad."

"And I am very glad to have found so good a friend. I hope you will let me pay for your ticket to New York."

"It won't be necessary. The interruption of our journey won't invalidate the ticket we have."

An hour later they reached New York.

"What are your plans, Rodney?" asked Adin Woods, who by this time had become quite intimate with his young companion.

"I shall call on my guardian, and perhaps he may give me some advice as to what I do. Where would you advise me to go—to a hotel?"

"No; it will be too expensive. I know of a plain boarding house on West Fourteenth Street where you can be accommodated with lodging and two meals—breakfast and supper, or dinner as we call it here—for a dollar a day."

"I shall be glad to go there, for the present, at least. I haven't much money, and must find something to do as soon as possible."

"We will both go there, and if you don't object we will take a room together. That will give us a larger apartment. Mrs. Marcy is an old acquaintance of mine, and will give you a welcome."

Rodney was glad to accept his companion's proposal. They proceeded at once to the boarding house, and fortunately found a good room vacant on the third floor. Mr. Woods went out in the evening to make a call, but Rodney was glad to go to bed at nine o'clock.

The next morning after breakfast Rodney consulted his companion as to what he should do with the casket.

"Do you want to raise money on it?" asked the agent.

"No; I shall not do this unless I am obliged to."

"Have you any idea as to the value of the jewels?"

"No."

"Then I will take you first to a jeweler in Maiden Lane, a friend of mine, who will appraise them. Afterwards I advise you to deposit the casket at a storage warehouse, or get Tiffany to keep it for you."

"I will do as you suggest."

Maiden Lane is a street largely devoted to jewelers, wholesale and retail. Rodney followed Mr. Woods into a store about midway between Broadway and Nassau Street. A pleasant looking man of middle age greeted the agent cordially.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "Do you wish to buy a diamond ring for the future Mrs. Woods?"

"Not much. I would like to have you appraise some jewelry

belonging to my young friend here."

The casket was opened, and the jeweler examined the contents admiringly.

"This is choice jewelry," he said. "Does your friend wish to sell?"

"Not at present," answered Rodney.

"When you do give me a call. I will treat you fairly. You wish me to appraise these articles?"

"Yes, sir, if you will."

"It will take me perhaps fifteen minutes."

The jeweler retired to the back part of the store with the casket.

In about a quarter of an hour he returned.

"Of course I can't give exact figures," he said, "but I value the jewelry at about twelve hundred dollars."

Rodney looked surprised.

"I didn't think it so valuable," he said.

"I don't mean that you could sell it for so much, but if you wish to dispose of it I will venture to give you eleven hundred."

"Thank you. If I decide to sell I will certainly come to you."

"Now," said the agent, "I advise you on the whole to store the casket with Tiffany."

"Shall I have to pay storage in advance?" asked Rodney anxiously.

"I think not. The value of the jewels will be a sufficient guarantee that storage will be paid."

Rodney accompanied Adin Woods to the great jewelry store on the corner of Fifteenth Street and Union Square, and soon transacted his business.

"Now, you won't have any anxiety as to the safety of the casket," said the agent. "Your friend of the train will find it difficult to get hold of the jewels. Now I shall have to leave you, as I have some business to attend to. We will meet at supper."

Rodney decided to call at the office of his late guardian, Benjamin Fielding. It was in the lower part of the city.

On his way down town he purchased a copy of a morning paper. Almost the first article he glanced at proved to be of especial interest to him. It was headed—

SKIPPED TO CANADA

Rumors have been rife for some time affecting the business standing of Mr. Benjamin Fielding, the well known commission merchant. Yesterday it was discovered that he had left the city, but where he has gone is unknown. It is believed that he is very deeply involved, and seeing no way out of his embarrassment has skipped to Canada, or perhaps taken passage to Europe. Probably his creditors will appoint a committee to look into his affairs and report what can be done.

LATER—An open letter has been found in Mr. Fielding's desk, addressed to his creditors. It expresses regret for their losses, and promises, if his life is spared, and fortune favors him, to do all in his power to make them good. No one doubts Mr. Fielding's integrity, and regrets are expressed that he did not

remain in the city and help unravel the tangle in which his affairs are involved. He is a man of ability, and as he is still in the prime of life, it may be that he will be able to redeem his promises and pay his debts in full, if sufficient time is given him.

"I can get no help or advice from Mr. Fielding," thought Rodney. "I am thrown upon my own resources, and must fight the battle of life as well as I can alone."

He got out in front of the Astor House. As he left the car he soiled his shoes with the mud so characteristic of New York streets.

"Shine your boots?" asked a young Arab, glancing with a business eye at Rodney's spattered shoes.

Rodney accepted his offer, not so much because he thought the blacking would last, as for the opportunity of questioning the free and independent young citizen who was doing, what he hoped to do, that is, making a living for himself.

"Is business good with you?" asked Rodney. "It ought to be with the street in this condition."

"Yes; me and de Street Commissioner is in league together. He makes business good for me."

"And do you pay him a commission?" asked Rodney smiling.

"I can't tell no official secrets. It might be bad for me."

"You are an original genius."

"Am I? I hope you ain't callin' me names."

"Oh no. I am only paying you a compliment. What is your name?"

"Mike Flynn."

"Were do you live, Mike?"

"At the Lodge."

"I suppose you mean at the Newsboys' 'Lodge?'"

"Yes."

"How much do you have to pay there?"

"Six cents for lodgin', and six cents for supper and breakfast."

"That is, six cents for each."

"Yes; you ain't comin' to live there, are you?" asked Mike.

"I don't know—I may have to."

"You're jokin'."

"What makes you think I am joking?"

"Because you're a swell. Look at them clo'es!"

"I have a good suit of clothes, to be sure, but I haven't much money. You are better off than I am."

"How's that?" asked Mike incredulously.

"You've got work to do, and I am earning nothing."

"If you've got money enough to buy a box and brush, you can go in with me."

"I don't think I should like it, Mike. It would spoil my clothes, and I am afraid I wouldn't have money enough to buy others."

"I keep my dress suit at home—the one I wear to parties."

"Haven't you got any father or mother, Mike? How does it happen that you are living in New York alone?"

"My farder is dead, and me mudder, she married a man wot ain't no good. He'd bate me till I couldn't stand it. So I just run

away."

"Where does your mother live?"

"In Albany."

"Some time when you earn money enough you can ask her to come here and live with you."

"They don't take women at the Lodge."

"No, I suppose not," said Rodney, smiling.

"Besides she's got two little girls by her new husband, and she wouldn't want to leave them."

By this time the shine was completed, and Rodney paid Mike.

"If I ever come to the Lodge, I'll ask for you," he said.

"Where do you live now?"

"I'm just staying at a place on Fourteenth Street, but I can't afford to stay there long, for they charge a dollar a day."

"Geewholliker, that would bust me, and make me a financial wreck as the papers say."

"How did you lose your fortune and get reduced to blacking boots?" asked Rodney jocosely.

"I got scooped out of it in Wall Street," answered Mike. "Jay Gould cleaned me out."

"And I suppose now he has added your fortune to his."

"You've hit it boss."

"Well, good day, Mike, I'll see you again some day–"

"All right! I'm in my office all de mornin'."

CHAPTER VI
AN IMPUDENT ADVENTURER

While Rodney was talking with Mike Flynn he was an object of attention to a man who stood near the corner of Barclay Street, and was ostensibly looking in at the window of the drug store. As Rodney turned away he recognized him at once as his enterprising fellow traveler who had taken possession of the casket of jewels.

He did not care to keep up an acquaintance with him, and started to cross the street. But the other came forward smiling, and with a nod said: "I believe you are the young man I met yesterday in the cars and afterwards at Kentville?"

"Yes, sir."

"I just wanted to tell you that I had got back my jewel box, the one for which I mistook yours."

"Indeed!" said Rodney, who did not believe a word the fellow said.

"Quite an amusing mistake, I made."

"It might have proved serious to me."

"Very true, as I shouldn't have known where to find you to restore your property."

"I don't think that would have troubled you much," thought Rodney. "Where did you find your box?" he asked.

"In the car. That is, the conductor picked it up and left it at the depot for me. Where are you staying here in the city? At the Astor House?"

"No, I have found a boarding house on West Fourteenth Street."

"If it is a good place, I should like to go there. What is the number?"

"I can't recall it, though I could find it," answered Rodney with reserve, for he had no wish to have his railroad acquaintance in the house.

"Is the gentleman who was traveling with you there also?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is a very pleasant gentleman, though he misjudged me. Ha, ha! my friends will be very much amused when I tell them that I was taken for a thief. Why, I venture to say that my box is more valuable than yours."

"Very likely," said Rodney coldly. "Good morning."

"Good morning. I hope we may meet again."

Rodney nodded, but he could not in sincerity echo the wish.

He was now confronted by a serious problem. He had less than ten dollars in his pocketbook, and this would soon be swallowed up by the necessary expenses of life in a large city. What would he do when that was gone?

It was clear that he must go to work as soon as possible. If his guardian had remained in the city, probably through his influence a situation might have been secured. Now nothing was to be

looked for in that quarter.

He bought a morning paper and looked over the Want Column. He found two places within a short distance of the Astor House, and called at each. One was in a railroad office.

"My boy," said the manager, a pleasant looking man, "the place was taken hours since. You don't seem to get up very early in the morning."

"I could get up at any hour that was necessary," replied Rodney, "but I have only just made up my mind to apply for a position."

"You won't meet with any luck today. It is too late. Get up bright and early tomorrow morning, buy a paper, and make early application for any place that strikes you as desirable."

"Thank you, sir. I am sure your advice is good."

"If you had been the first to call here, I should have taken you. I like your appearance better than that of the boy I have selected."

"Thank you, sir."

"This boy may not prove satisfactory. Call in six days, just before his week expires, and if there is likely to be a vacancy I will let you know."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind."

"I always sympathize with boys. I have two boys of my own."

This conversation quite encouraged Rodney. It seemed to promise success in the future. If he had probably impressed one man, he might be equally fortunate with another.

It was about half past twelve when he passed through Nassau

Street.

All at once his arm was grasped, and a cheery voice said, "Where are you going, Rodney?"

"Mr. Woods!" he exclaimed, with pleased recognition.

"Yes, it's your old friend Woods."

"You are not the only railroad friend I have met this morning."

"Who was the other?"

"The gentleman who obligingly took care of my jewel box for a short time."

"You don't mean to say you have met him? Where did you come across him?"

"In front of the Astor House, almost two hours since."

"Did you speak to him?"

"He spoke to me. You will be glad to hear that he has recovered his own casket of jewels."

Adin Woods smiled.

"He must think you are easily imposed upon," he said, "to believe any such story. Anything more?"

"He said his friends would be very much surprised to hear that he had been suspected of theft."

"So he wanted to clear himself with you?"

"Yes; he asked where I was staying."

"I hope you didn't tell him."

"I only said I was at a boarding house on West Fourteenth Street, but didn't mention the number."

"He thinks you have the casket with you, and that he may get

possession of it. It is well that you stored it at Tiffany's."

"I think so. Now I have no anxiety about it. Do you think he will find out where we live?"

"Probably, as you gave him a clew. But, Rodney, it is about lunch time, and I confess I have an appetite. Come and lunch with me."

"But I am afraid, Mr. Woods, I shall not be able to return the compliment."

"There is no occasion for it. I feel in good humor this morning. I have sold one lot, and have hopes of disposing of another. The one lot pays me a commission of twenty dollars."

"I wish I could make twenty dollars in a week."

"Sometimes I only sell one lot in a week. It isn't like a regular business. It is precarious. Still, take the year through and I make a pretty good income. Come in here. We can get a good lunch here," and he led the way into a modest restaurant, not far from the site of the old post office, which will be remembered by those whose residence in New York dates back twenty years or more.

"Now we will have a nice lunch," said the agent. "I hope you can do justice to it."

"I generally can," responded Rodney, smiling. "I am seldom troubled with a poor appetite."

"Ditto for me. Now what have you been doing this morning?"

"Looking for a place."

"With what success?"

"Pretty good if I had only been earlier."

Rodney told the story of his application to the manager of the railroad office.

"You will know better next time. I think you'll succeed. I did. When I came to New York at the age of twenty two I had only fifty dollars. That small sum had to last me twelve weeks. You can judge that I didn't live on the fat of the land during that time. I couldn't often eat at Delmonico's. Even Beefsteak John's would have been too expensive for me. However, those old days are over."

The next day and the two following Rodney went about the city making application for positions, but every place seemed full.

On the third day Mr. Woods said, "I shall have to leave you for a week or more, Rodney."

"Where are you going?"

"To Philadelphia. There's a man there who is a capitalist and likes land investments. I am going to visit him, and hope to sell him several lots. He once lived in this city, so he won't object to New York investments."

"I hope you will succeed, Mr. Woods. I think if you are going away I had better give up the room, and find cheaper accommodations. I am getting near the end of my money."

"You are right. It is best to be prudent."

That evening Rodney found a room which he could rent for two dollars a week. He estimated that by economy he could get along for fifty cents a day for his eating, and that would be a

decided saving.

He was just leaving the house the next morning, gripsack in hand, when on the steps he met Louis Wheeler, his acquaintance of the train.

"Where are you going?" asked Wheeler.

"I am leaving this house. I have hired a room elsewhere."

Wheeler's countenance fell, and he looked dismayed.

"Why, I have just taken a room here for a week," he said.

"You will find it a good place."

"But—I wouldn't have come here if I hadn't thought I should have company."

"I ought to feel complimented."

Rodney was convinced that Wheeler had come in the hopes of stealing the casket of jewels a second time, and he felt amused at the fellow's discomfiture.

"You haven't got your jewel box with you?"

"No, I can take that another time."

"Then it's still in the house," thought Wheeler with satisfaction. "It won't be my fault if I don't get it in my hands. Well, good morning," he said. "Come around and call on me."

"Thank you!"

CHAPTER VII
AT THE NEWSBOY'S LODGING HOUSE

Within a week Rodney had spent all his money, with the exception of about fifty cents. He had made every effort to obtain a place, but without success.

Boys born and bred in New York have within my observation tried for months to secure a position in vain, so it is not surprising that Rodney who was a stranger proved equally unsuccessful.

Though naturally hopeful Rodney became despondent.

"There seems to be no place for me," he said to himself. "When I was at boarding school I had no idea how difficult it is for a boy to earn a living."

He had one resource. He could withdraw the box of jewels from Tiffany's, and sell some article that it contained. But this he had a great objection to doing. One thing was evident however, he must do something.

His friend, the lot agent, was out of town, and he hardly knew whom to advise with. At last Mike Flynn, the friendly bootblack, whose acquaintance he had made in front of the Astor House, occurred to him.

Mike, humble as he was, was better off than himself. Moreover he was a New York boy, and knew more about

"hustling" than Rodney did. So he sought out Mike in his "office."

"Good morning, Mike," said Rodney, as the bootblack was brushing off a customer.

"Oh, its you, Rodney," said Mike smiling with evident pleasure. "How you're gettin' on?"

"Not at all."

"That's bad. Can I help you? Just say the word, and I'll draw a check for you on the Park Bank."

"Is that where you keep your money?"

"It's one of my banks. You don't think I'd put all my spondulics in one bank, do you?"

"I won't trouble you to draw a check this morning. I only want to ask some advice."

"I've got plenty of that."

"I haven't been able to get anything to do, and I have only fifty cents left. I can't go on like that."

"That's so."

"I've got to give up my room on Fourteenth Street. I can't pay for it any longer. Do you think I could get in at the Lodge?"

"Yes. I'll introduce you to Mr. O'Connor."

"When shall I meet you?"

"At five o'clock. We'll be in time for supper."

"All right."

At five o'clock Mike accompanied Rodney to the large Newsboys' Lodging House on New Chambers Street. Mr.

O'Connor, the popular and efficient superintendent, now dead, looked in surprise at Mike's companion. He was a stout man with a kindly face, and Rodney felt that he would prove to be a friend.

"Mr. O'Connor, let me introduce me friend, Mr. Rodney Ropes," said Mike.

"Could you give me a lodging?" asked Rodney in an embarrassed tone.

"Yes; but I am surprised to see a boy of your appearance here."

"I am surprised to be here myself," admitted Rodney.

The superintendent fixed upon him a shrewd, but kindly glance.

"Have you run away from home?" he asked.

"No, sir. It is my home that has run away from me."

"Have you parents?"

"No, sir."

"Do you come from the country?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been living?"

"At a boarding school a few hours from New York."

"Why did you leave it?"

"Because my guardian sent me word that he had lost my fortune, and could no longer pay my bills."

"You have been unfortunate truly. What do you propose to do now?"

"Earn my living if I can. I have been in the city for about two weeks, and have applied at a good many places but in vain."

"Then you were right in coming here. Supper is ready, and although it is not what you are used to, it will satisfy hunger. Mike, you can take Rodney with you."

Within five minutes Rodney was standing at a long table with a bowl of coffee and a segment of bread before him. It wouldn't have been attractive to one brought up to good living, as was the case with him, but he was hungry.

He had eaten nothing since morning except an apple which he had bought at a street stand for a penny, and his stomach urgently craved a fresh supply of food.

Mike stood next to him. The young bootblack, who was used to nothing better, ate his portion with zest, and glanced askance at Rodney to see how he relished his supper. He was surprised to see that his more aristocratic companion seemed to enjoy it quite as much as himself.

"I didn't think you'd like it," he said.

"Anything tastes good when you're hungry, Mike."

"That's so."

"And I haven't eaten anything except an apple, since morning."

"Is dat so? Why didn't you tell me? I'd have stood treat at de Boss Tweed eatin' house."

"I had money, but I didn't dare to spend it. I was afraid of having nothing left."

When Rodney had eaten his supper he felt that he could have eaten more, but the craving was satisfied and he felt relieved.

He looked around him with some curiosity, for he had never been in such a motley gathering before. There were perhaps one hundred and fifty boys recruited from the street, to about all of whom except himself the term street Arab might be applied.

The majority of them had the shrewd and good humored Celtic face. Many of them were fun loving and even mischievous, but scarcely any were really bad.

Naturally Rodney, with his good clothes, attracted attention. The boys felt that he was not one of them, and they had a suspicion that he felt above them.

"Get on to de dude!" remarked one boy, who was loosely attired in a ragged shirt and tattered trousers.

"He means me, Mike," said Rodney with a smile.

"I say, Patsy Glenn, what do you mean by callin' me friend Rodney a dude?" demanded Mike angrily.

"Coz he's got a dandy suit on."

"What if he has? Wouldn't you wear one like it if you could!"

"You bet!"

"Then just let him alone! He's just got back from de inauguration."

"Where'd you pick him up, Mike?"

"Never mind! He's one of us. How much money have you got in your pocket Rodney?"

"Thirty two cents."

"He can't put on no frills wid dat money."

"That's so. I take it all back," and Patsy offered a begrimed

hand to Rodney, which the latter shook heartily with a pleasant smile.

That turned the tide in favor of Rodney, the boys gathered around him and he told his story in a few words.

"I used to be rich, boys," he said, "but my guardian spent all my money, and now I am as poor as any of you."

"You'd ought to have had me for your guardian, Rodney," observed Mike.

"I wish you had. You wouldn't have lost my money for me."

"True for you! I say so, boys, if we can find Rodney's guardian, what'll we do to him?"

"Give him de grand bounce," suggested Patsy.

"Drop him out of a high winder," said another.

"What's his name?"

"I don't care to tell you, boys. He's written me a letter, saying he will try to pay me back some day. I think he will. He isn't a bad man, but he has been unlucky."

Mike, at the request of Mr. O'Connor, showed Rodney a locker in which he could store such articles of clothing as he had with him. After that he felt more at home, and as if he were staying at a hotel though an humble one.

At eight o'clock some of the boys had already gone to bed, but Mike and Rodney were among those who remained up. Rodney noticed with what kindness yet fairness the superintendent managed his unruly flock. Unruly they might have been with a different man, but he had no trouble in keeping them within

bounds.

It was at this time that two strangers were announced, one a New York merchant named Goodnow, the other a tall, slender man with sandy whiskers of the mutton chop pattern.

"Good evening, Mr. Goodnow," said the superintendent, who recognized the merchant as a friend of the society.

"Good evening, Mr. O'Connor. I have brought my friend and correspondent Mr. Mulgrave, of London, to see some of your young Arabs."

"I shall be glad to give him all the opportunity he desires."

The Englishman looked curiously at the faces of the boys who in turn were examining him with equal interest.

"They are not unlike our boys of a similar grade, but seem sharper and more intelligent," he said. "But surely," pointing to Rodney, "that boy is not one of the—Arabs. Why, he looks like a young gentleman."

"He is a new comer. He only appeared tonight."

"He must have a history. May I speak with him?"

"By all means. Rodney, this gentleman would like to talk with you."

Rodney came forward with the ease of a boy who was accustomed to good society, and said: "I shall be very happy to speak with him."

CHAPTER VIII
RODNEY FINDS A PLACE

"Surely," said the Englishman, "you were not brought up in the street?"

"Oh, no," answered Rodney, "I was more fortunate."

"Then how does it happen that I find you here—among the needy boys of the city?"

"Because I am needy, too."

"But you were not always poor?"

"No; I inherited a moderate fortune from my father. It was only within a short time that I learned from my guardian that it was lost. I left the boarding school where I was being educated, and came to the city to try to make a living."

"But surely your guardian would try to provide for you?"

"He is no longer in the city."

"Who was he?" asked Otis Goodnow.

"Mr. Benjamin Fielding."

"Is it possible? Why, I lost three thousand dollars by him. He has treated you shamefully."

"It was not intentional, I am sure," said Rodney. "He was probably drawn into using my money by the hope of retrieving himself. He wrote me that he hoped at some time to make restitution."

"You speak of him generously, my lad," said Mr. Mulgrave. "Yet he has brought you to absolute poverty."

"Yes, sir, and I won't pretend that it is not a hard trial to me, but if I can get a chance to earn my own living, I will not complain."

"Goodnow, a word with you," said the Englishman, and he drew his friend aside. "Can't you make room for this boy in your establishment?"

Otis Goodnow hesitated. "At present there is no vacancy," he said.

"Make room for him, and draw upon me for his wages for the first six months."

"I will do so, but before the end of that time I am sure he will justify my paying him out of my own pocket."

There was a little further conference, and then the two gentlemen came up to where Rodney was standing with Mr. O'Connor.

"My boy," said Mr. Mulgrave, "my friend here will give you a place at five dollars a week. Will that satisfy you?"

Rodney's face flushed with pleasure.

"It will make me very happy," he said.

"Come round to my warehouse—here is my business card—tomorrow morning," said the merchant. "Ask to see me."

"At what time shall I call, sir?"

"At half past nine o'clock. That is for the first morning. When you get to work you will have to be there at eight."

"There will be no trouble about that, sir."

"Now it is my turn," said the Englishman. "Here are five dollars to keep you till your first week's wages come due. I dare say you will find them useful."

"Thank you very much, sir. I was almost out of money."

After the two gentlemen left the Lodging House Rodney looked at the card and found that his new place of employment was situated on Reade Street not far from Broadway.

"It's you that's in luck, Rodney," said his friend Mike. "Who'd think that a gentleman would come to the Lodging House to give you a place?"

"Yes, I am in luck, Mike, and now I'm going to make you a proposal."

"What is it?"

"Why can't we take a room together? It will be better than living here."

"Sure you wouldn't room with a poor boy like me?"

"Why shouldn't I? You are a good friend, and I should like your company. Besides I mean to help you get an education. I suppose you're not a first class scholar, Mike?"

"About fourth class, I guess, Rodney."

"Then you shall study with me. Then when you know a little more you may get a chance to get out of your present business, and get into a store."

"That will be bully!" said Mike with pleasure.

"Now we'd better go to bed; I must be up bright and early in the morning. We'll engage a room before I go to work."

There was no difficulty about rising early. It is one of the rules of the Lodging House for the boys to rise at six o'clock, and after a frugal breakfast of coffee and rolls they are expected to go out to their business whatever it may be. Mike and Rodney dispensed with the regulation breakfast and went out to a restaurant on Park Row where they fared better.

"Now where shall we go for a room?" asked Rodney.

"There's a feller I know has a good room on Bleecker Street," said Mike.

"How far is that?"

"A little more'n a mile."

"All right! Let us go and see."

Bleecker Street once stood in better repute than at present. It is said that A. T. Stewart once made his home there. Now it is given over to shops and cheap lodging houses.

Finally the boys found a room decently furnished, about ten feet square, of which the rental was two dollars and a half per week. Mike succeeded in beating down the lodging house keeper to two dollars, and at that figure they engaged it.

"When will you come?" asked Mrs. McCarty.

"Right off," said Mike.

"I'll need a little time to put it in order."

"Me and my partner will be at our business till six o'clock," returned Mike.

"You can send in your trunks during the day if you like."

"My trunk is at the Windsor Hotel," said Mike. "I've lent it to

a friend for a few days."

Mrs. McCarty looked at Mike with a puzzled expression. She was one of those women who are slow to comprehend a joke, and she could not quite make it seem natural that her new lodger, who was in rather neglige costume, should be a guest at a fashionable hotel.

"I will leave my valise," said Rodney, "and will send for my trunk. It is in the country."

Mike looked at him, not feeling quite certain whether he was in earnest, but Rodney was perfectly serious.

"You're better off than me," said Mike, when they reached the street. "If I had a trunk I wouldn't have anything to put into it."

"I'll see if I can't rig you out, Mike. I've got a good many clothes, bought when I was rich. You and I are about the same size. I'll give you a suit of clothes to wear on Sundays."

"Will you?" exclaimed Mike, his face showing pleasure. "I'd like to see how I look in good clo'es. I never wore any yet. It wouldn't do no good in my business."

"You won't want to wear them when at work. But wouldn't you like to change your business?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever tried?"

"What'd be the use of tryin'? They'd know I was a bootblack in these clo'es."

"When you wear a better suit you can go round and try your luck."

"I'd like to," said Mike wistfully. "I don't want you to tell at the store that you room with a bootblack."

"It isn't that I think of, Mike. I want you to do better. I'm going to make a man of you."

"I hope you are. Sometimes I've thought I'd have to be a bootblack always. When do you think you'll get the clo'es?"

"I shall write to the principal of the boarding school at once, asking him to forward my trunk by express. I want to economize a little this week, and shall have to pay the express charges."

"I'll pay up my part of the rent, Rodney, a quarter a day."

Rodney had advanced the whole sum, as Mike was not in funds.

"If you can't pay a dollar a week I will pay a little more than half."

"There ain't no need. I'll pay my half and be glad to have a nice room."

"I've got three or four pictures at the school, and some books. I'll send for them later on, and we'll fix up the room."

"Will you? We'll have a reg'lar bang up place. I tell you that'll be better than livin' at the Lodge."

"Still that seems a very neat place. It is lucky for poor boys that they can get lodging so cheap."

"But it isn't like havin' a room of your own, Rodney. I say, when we're all fixed I'll ask some of me friends to come in some evenin' and take a look at us. They'll be s'prised."

"Certainly, Mike. I shall be glad to see any of your friends."

It may seem strange that Rodney, carefully as he had been brought up, should have made a companion of Mike, but he recognized in the warm hearted Irish boy, illiterate as he was, sterling qualities, and he felt desirous of helping to educate him. He knew that he could always depend on his devoted friendship, and looked forward with pleasure to their more intimate companionship.

After selecting their room and making arrangements to take possession of it, the boys went down town. Rodney stepped into the reading room at the Astor House and wrote the following letter to Dr. Sampson:

DR. PLINY SAMPSON:

DEAR SIR—Will you be kind enough to send my trunk by express to No. 312 Bleecker Street? I have taken a room there, and that will be my home for the present. I have obtained a position in a wholesale house on Reade Street, and hope I may give satisfaction. Will you remember me with best wishes to all the boys? I don't expect to have so easy or pleasant a time as I had at school, but I hope to get on, and some time—perhaps in the summer—to make you a short visit.

Yours truly, RODNEY ROPES.

CHAPTER IX
THE FIRST DAY AT WORK

A little before half past nine Rodney paused in front of a large five story building on Reade Street occupied by Otis Goodnow.

He entered and found the first floor occupied by quite a large number of clerks and salesmen, and well filled with goods.

"Well, young fellow, what can I do for you?" asked a dapper looking clerk.

"I would like to see Mr. Goodnow."

"He's reading his letters. He won't see you."

Rodney was provoked.

"Do you decide who is to see him?" he asked.

"You're impudent, young feller."

"Am I? Perhaps you will allow Mr. Goodnow to see me, as long as he told me to call here this morning."

"That's a different thing," returned the other in a different tone. "If you're sure about that you can go to the office in the back part of the room."

Rodney followed directions and found himself at the entrance of a room which had been partitioned off for the use of the head of the firm.

Mr. Goodnow was seated at a desk with his back to him, and was employed in opening letters. Without turning round he said,

"Sit down and I will attend to you in a few minutes."

Rodney seated himself on a chair near the door. In about ten minutes Mr. Goodnow turned around.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Perhaps you remember telling me to call at half past nine. You saw me at the Newsboys' Lodging House."

"Ah, yes, I remember. I promised my friend Mulgrave that I would give you a place. What can you do? Are you a good writer?"

"Shall I give you a specimen of my handwriting?"

"Yes; sit down at that desk."

It was a desk adjoining his own.

Rodney seated himself and wrote in a firm, clear, neat hand:

"I will endeavor to give satisfaction, if you are kind enough to give me a place in your establishment."

Then he passed over the paper to the merchant.

"Ah, very good!" said Mr. Goodnow approvingly. "You won't be expected to do any writing yet but I like to take into my store those who are qualified for promotion."

He rang a little bell on his desk.

A boy about two years older than Rodney answered the summons.

"Send Mr. James here," said the merchant.

Mr. James, a sandy complexioned man, partially bald, made his appearance.

"Mr. James," said the merchant, "I have taken this boy into

my employ. I don't know if one is needed, but it is at the request of a friend. You can send him on errands, or employ him in any other way."

"Very well, sir. I can find something for him to do today at any rate, as young Johnson hasn't shown up."

"Very well. Whats your name, my lad?"

"Rodney Ropes."

"Make a note of his name, Mr. James, and enter it in the books. You may go with Mr. James, and put yourself at his disposal."

Rodney followed the subordinate, who was the head of one of the departments, to the second floor. Here Mr. James had a desk.

"Wait a minute," he said, "and I will give you a memorandum of places to call at."

In five minutes a memorandum containing a list of three places was given to Rodney, with brief instructions as to what he was to do at each. They were places not far away, and fortunately Rodney had a general idea as to where they were.

In his search for positions he had made a study of the lower part of the city which now stood him in good stead.

As he walked towards the door he attracted the attention of the young clerk with whom he had just spoken.

"Well, did you see Mr. Goodnow?" asked the young man, stroking a sickly looking mustache.

"Yes."

"Has he taken you into the firm?"

"Not yet, but he has given me a place."

The clerk whistled.

"So you are one of us?" he said.

"Yes," answered Rodney with a smile.

"Then you ought to know the rules of the house."

"You can tell me later on, but now I am going out on an errand."

In about an hour Rodney returned. He had been detained at two of the places where he called.

"Do you remember what I said?" asked the young clerk as he passed.

"Yes."

"The first rule of the establishment is for a new hand to treat ME on his first day."

"That's pretty good for you," said Rodney, laughing; "I shall have to wait till my pay is raised."

About the middle of the afternoon, as Rodney was helping to unpack a crate of goods, the older boy whom he had already seen in the office below, walked up to him and said, "Is your name Ropes?"

"Yes."

"You are wanted in Mr. Goodnow's office."

Rodney went down stairs, feeling a little nervous. Had he done wrong, and was he to be reprimanded?

He could think of nothing deserving censure. So far as he knew he had attended faithfully to all the duties required of him.

As he entered the office, he saw that Mr. Goodnow had a visitor, whose face looked familiar to him. He recalled it immediately as the face of the English gentleman who had visited the Lodging House the day previous with his employer.

"So I find you at work?" he said, offering his hand with a smile.

"Yes, sir," answered Rodney gratefully, "thanks to you."

"How do you think you will like it?"

"Very much, sir. It is so much better than going around the street with nothing to do."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.