ALGER HORATIO JR.

ONLY AN IRISH BOY; OR, ANDY BURKE'S FORTUNES

Horatio Alger

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Alger H.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I ANDY BURKE

"John, saddle my horse, and bring him around to the door."

The speaker was a boy of fifteen, handsomely dressed, and, to judge from his air and tone, a person of considerable consequence, in his own opinion, at least. The person addressed was employed in the stable of his father, Colonel Anthony Preston, and so inferior in social condition that Master Godfrey always addressed him in imperious tones.

John looked up and answered, respectfully:

"Master Godfrey, your horse is sick of the disease, and your father left orders that he wasn't to go out on no account."

"It's my horse," said Godfrey; "I intend to take him out."

"Maybe it's yours, but your father paid for him."

"None of your impudence, John," answered Godfrey, angrily. "Am I master, or are you, I should like to know!"

"Neither, I'm thinking," said John, with a twinkle in his eye. "It's your father that's the master."

"I'm master of the horse, anyway, so saddle him at once."

"The colonel would blame me," objected John.

"If you don't, I'll report you and get you dismissed."

"I'll take the risk, Master Godfrey," said the servant, good-humoredly. "The colonel won't be so unreasonable as to send me away for obeying his own orders."

Here John was right, and Godfrey knew it, and this vexed him the more. He had an inordinate opinion of himself and his own consequence, and felt humiliated at being disobeyed by a servant, without being able to punish him for his audacity. This feeling was increased by the presence of a third party, who was standing just outside the fence.

As this third party is our hero, I must take a separate paragraph to describe him. He was about the age of Godfrey, possibly a little shorter and stouter. He had a freckled face, full of good humor, but at the same time resolute and determined. He appeared to be one who had a will of his own, but not inclined to interfere with others, though ready to stand up for his own rights. In dress he compared very unfavorably with the young aristocrat, who was biting his lips with vexation. In fact, though he is my hero, his dress was far from heroic. He had no vest, and his coat was ragged, as well as his pants. He had on a pair of shoes two or three times too large for him. They had not been made to order, but had been given him by a gentleman of nearly double his size, and fitted him too much. He wore a straw hat, for it was summer, but the brim was semi-detached, and a part of his brown hair found its way through it.

Now Godfrey was just in the mood for picking a quarrel with somebody, and as there was no excuse for quarreling any further with John, he was rather glad to pitch into the young stranger.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in his usual imperious tone, and with a contraction of the brow.

"Only an Irish boy!" answered the other, with a droll look and a slight brogue.

"Then what business have you leaning against my fence?" again demanded Godfrey, imperiously.

"Shure, I didn't know it was your fence."

"Then you know now. Quit leaning against it."

"Why should I, now? I don't hurt it, do I?"

"No matter—I told you to go away. We don't want any beggars here."

"Shure, I don't see any," said the other boy, demurely.

"What are you but a beggar?"

"Shure, I'm a gintleman of indepindent fortune."

"You look like it," said Godfrey, disdainfully. "Where do you keep it?"

"Here!" said the Irish boy, tapping a bundle which he carried over his shoulder, wrapped in a red cotton handkerchief, with a stick thrust through beneath the knot.

"What's your name?"

"Andy Burke. What's yours?"

"I don't feel under any obligations to answer your questions," said Godfrey, haughtily.

"Don't you? Then what made you ask me?"

"That's different. You are only an Irish boy."

"And who are you?"

"I am the only son of Colonel Anthony Preston," returned Godfrey, impressively.

"Are you, now? I thought you was a royal duke, or maybe Queen Victoria's oldest boy."

"Fellow, you are becoming impertinent."

"Faith, I didn't mean it. You look so proud and gintale that it's jist a mistake I made."

"You knew that we had no dukes in America," said Godfrey, suspiciously.

"If we had, now, you'd be one of them," said Andy.

"Why? What makes you say so?"

"You're jist the picture of the Earl of Barleycorn's ildest son that I saw before I left Ireland."

Godfrey possessed so large a share of ridiculous pride that he felt pleased with the compliment, though he was not clear about its sincerity.

"Where do you live?" he asked, with a slight lowering of his tone.

"Where do I live? Shure, I don't live anywhere now, but I'm going to live in the village. My mother came here a month ago."

"Why didn't you come with her?"

"I was workin' with a farmer, but the work gave out and I came home.

Maybe I'll find work here."

"I think I know where your mother lives," said John, who had heard the conversation. "She lives up the road a mile or so, in a little house with two rooms. It's where old Jake Barlow used to live."

"Thank you, sir. I guess I'll be goin', then, as my mother'll be expectin' me. Do you know if she's well?" and a look of anxiety came over the boy's honest, good-natured face.

The question was addressed to John, but of this Godfrey was not quite sure. He thought the inquiry was made of him, and his pride was touched.

"What should I know of your mother, you beggar?" he said, with a sneer. "I don't associate with such low people."

"Do you mane my mother?" said Andy, quickly, and he, too, looked angry and threatening.

"Yes, I do. What are you going to do about it?" demanded Godfrey.

"You'd better take it back," said Andy, his good-humored face now dark with passion.

"Do you think I am afraid of such a beggar as you?" sneered Godfrey.

"You appear to forget that you are speaking to a gentleman."

"Shure, I didn't know it," returned Andy, hotly. "You're no gentleman if you insult my mother, and if you'll come out here for a minute I'll give you a bating."

"John," said Godfrey, angrily, "will you drive that beggar away?"

Now, John's sympathies were rather with Andy than with his young master. He had no great admiration for Godfrey, having witnessed during the year he had been in his father's employ too much of the boy's arrogance and selfishness to feel much attachment for him. Had he taken any part in the present quarrel, he would have preferred espousing the cause of the Irish boy; but that would not have been polite, and he therefore determined to preserve his neutrality.

"That ain't my business, Master Godfrey," he said. "You must fight your own battles."

"Go away from here," said Godfrey, imperiously advancing toward that part of the fence against which Andy Burke was leaning.

"Will you take back what you said agin' my mother?"

"No, I won't."

"Then you're a blackguard, if you are a rich man's son."

The blood rushed to Godfrey's face on the instant. This was a palpable insult. What! he, a rich man's son, the only son and heir of Colonel Anthony Preston, with his broad acres and ample bank account—he to be called a blackguard by a low Irish boy. His passion got the better of him, and he ran through the gate, his eyes flashing fire, bent on exterminating his impudent adversary.

CHAPTER II A SKIRMISH

Andy Burke was not the boy to run away from an opponent of his own size and age. Neither did he propose to submit quietly to the thrashing which Godfrey designed to give him. He dropped his stick and bundle, and squared off scientifically at his aristocratic foe.

Godfrey paused an instant before him.

"I'm going to give you a thrashing," he said; "the worst thrashing you ever had."

"Are you, now?" asked Andy, undismayed. "Come on, thin; I'm ready for you."

"You're an impudent young ruffian."

"So are you."

Godfrey's aristocratic blood boiled at this retort, and he struck out at Andy, but the latter knew what was coming, and, swift as a flash, warded it off, and fetched Godfrey a blow full upon his nose, which started the blood. Now, the pain and the sight of the blood combined filled him with added fury, and he attempted to seize Andy around the waist and throw him. But here again he was foiled. The young Irish boy evaded his grasp, and, seizing him in turn, by an adroit movement of the foot, tripped him up. Godfrey fell heavily on his back.

Andy withdrew a little, and did not offer to hold him down, as Godfrey would have been sure to do under similar circumstances. "Have you got enough?" he asked.

"That wasn't fair," exclaimed Godfrey, jumping up hastily, deeply mortified because he had been worsted in the presence of John, who, sooth to say, rather enjoyed his young master's overthrow.

He rushed impetuously at Andy, but he was blinded by his own impetuosity, and his adversary, who kept cool and self-possessed, had, of course, the advantage. So the engagement terminated as before—Godfrey was stretched once more on the sidewalk. He was about to renew the assault, however, when there was an interruption. This interruption came in the form of Colonel Preston himself, who was returning from a business meeting of citizens interested in establishing a savings bank in the village.

"What's all this, Godfrey?" he called out, in a commanding tone.

Godfrey knew that when his father spoke he must obey, and he therefore desisted from the contemplated attack. He looked up at his father and said, sulkily:

"I was punishing this Irish boy for his impertinence."

John grinned a little at this way of putting it, and his father said:

"It looked very much as if he were punishing you."

"I didn't get fair hold," said Godfrey, sulkily.

"So he was impertinent, was he? What did he say?"

"He said I was no gentleman."

Andy Burke listened attentively to what was said, but didn't attempt to justify himself as yet.

"I have sometimes had suspicions of that myself," said his father, quietly.

Though Godfrey was an only son, his father was sensible enough to be fully aware of his faults. If he was indulged, it was his mother, not his father, that was in fault. Colonel Preston was a fair and just man, and had sensible views about home discipline; but he was overruled by his wife, whose character may be judged from the fact that her son closely resembled her. She was vain, haughty, and proud of putting on airs. She considered herself quite the finest lady in the village, but condescended to associate with the wives of the minister, the doctor, and a few of the richer inhabitants, but even with them she took care to show that she regarded herself superior to them all. She was, therefore, unpopular, as was her son among his companions. However, these two stood by each other, and Mrs. Preston was sure to defend Godfrey in all he did, and complained because his father did not do the same.

"I didn't think you'd turn against me, and let a low boy insult me," complained Godfrey.

"Why do you call him low?"

"Because he's only an Irish boy."

"Some of our most distinguished men have been Irish boys or of Irish descent. I don't think you have proved your point."

"He's a beggar."

"I'm not a beggar," exclaimed Andy, speaking for the first time. "I never begged a penny in all my life."

"Look at his rags," said Godfrey, scornfully.

"You would be in rags, too, if you had to buy your own clothes. I think I should respect you very much more under the circumstances," returned his father.

"The colonel's a-givin' it to him," thought John, with a grin.

"'Twon't do the young master any harm."

"What is your name?" inquired Colonel Preston, turning now to our hero, as his son seemed to have no more to say.

"Andy Burke."

"Do you live here?"

"I've just come to town, sir. My mother lives here."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know, sir, just. He knows," pointing out John.

"I calcerlate his mother lives in old Jake Barlow's house," said John.

"Oh, the Widow Burke. Yes, I know. I believe Mrs. Preston employs her sometimes. Well, Andy, if that's your name, how is it that I catch you fighting with my son? That is not very creditable, unless you have good cause."

"He called my mother a low woman," said Andy, "and then he run up and hit me."

"Did you do that, Godfrey?"

"He was putting on too many airs. He talked as if he was my equal."

"He appears to be more than your equal in strength," said his father.

"Well, was that all?"

"It was about all."

"Then I think he did perfectly right, and I hope you'll profit by the lesson you have received."

"He is a gentleman," thought Andy. "He ain't hard on a boy because he's poor."

Colonel Preston went into the house, but Godfrey lingered behind a moment. He wanted to have a parting shot at his adversary. He could fight with words, if not with blows.

"Look here!" he said, imperiously; "don't let me see you round here again."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to see you."

"Then you can look the other way," said Andy, independently.

"This is my house."

"I thought it was your father's."

"That's the same thing. You'd better stay at home with your mother."

"Thank you," said Andy; "you're very kind. May I come along the road sometimes?"

"If you do, walk on the other side."

Andy laughed. He was no longer provoked, but amused.

"Then, by the same token, you'd better not come by my mother's house," he said, good-humoredly.

"I don't want to come near your miserable shanty," said Godfrey, disdainfully.

"You may come, if you keep on the other side of the road," said Andy, slyly.

Godfrey was getting disgusted; for in the war of words, as well as of blows, his ragged opponent seemed to be getting the better of him. He turned on his heel and entered the house. He was sure of

one who would sympathize with him in his dislike and contempt for Andy—this was, of course, his mother. Besides, he had another idea. He knew that Mrs. Burke had been employed by his mother, occasionally, to assist in the house. It occurred to him that it would be a fine piece of revenge to induce her to dispense hereafter with the poor woman's services. Bent on accomplishing this creditable retaliation, he left his young opponent master of the field.

"I must be goin'," said Andy, as he picked up his bundle and suspended it from his stick. "Will I find the house where my mother lives, easy?"

The question was, of course, addressed to John, who had just turned to go to the stable.

"You can't miss it," answered John. "It's a mile up the road, stands a little way back. There's a few hills of potatoes in the front yard. How long since you saw your mother?"

"It's three months."

"Does she know you are coming to-day?"

"No. I would have wrote to her, but my fingers isn't very ready with the pen."

"Nor mine either," said John. "I'd rather take a licking any time than write a letter. Come round and see us some time."

"The boy'll lick me," said Andy, laughing.

"I guess you can manage him."

Andy smiled, for it was his own conviction, also. With his bundle on his shoulder he trudged on, light of heart, for he was about to see his mother and sister, both of whom he warmly loved.

CHAPTER III ANDY AND HIS MOTHER

The house in which the Widow Burke and her daughter lived was a very humble one. It had not been painted for many years, and the original coat had worn off, leaving it dark and time-stained. But when Mrs. Burke came to town, a short time before, it was the only dwelling she could hire that was held at a rent within her means. So she and Mary, who was now eleven years old, had moved in their scanty furniture and made it look as much like a home as possible.

Mrs. Burke had not always been as poor as now. She was the daughter of an Irish tradesman, and had received quite a good education. In due time she married a small farmer, who was considered to be in fair circumstances, but there came a bad year, and misfortunes of various kinds came together. The last and heaviest of all was fever, which prostrated her husband on a bed of sickness. Though his wife watched over him night and day with all the devotion of love, it was all of no avail. He died, and she found herself left with about a hundred pounds—after his debts were paid. She was advised to go to America with her two children, and did so. That was five years before. They had lived in various places—but the little sum she had left over, after the passage of the three was paid, had long since melted away, and she was forced to get a living as she could.

Since she had come to Crampton, leaving Andy at work for a farmer in the place where they had last lived, she had obtained what sewing she could from the families in the village, and had besides obtained a chance to help about the ironing at Colonel Preston's. Washing was too hard for her, for her strength was not great.

At the time of our introduction she was engaged in making a shirt, one of half a dozen which she had engaged to make for Dr. Plympton, the village doctor. She had no idea that Andy was so near, having heard nothing of his having left his place, but it was of him she was speaking.

"I wish I could see Andy," she sighed, looking up from her work.

"So do I, mother."

"The sight of him would do my eyes good, he's such a lively lad, Andy is—always in good spirits."

"Shure, he's got a good heart, mother dear. It wouldn't be so lonely like if he was here."

"I would send for him if there was anything to do, Mary; but we are so poor that we must all of us stay where we can get work."

"When do you go to Colonel Preston's, mother? Is it to-morrow?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I'm always lonely when you are away."

"Perhaps you would come with me, Mary, dear. Mrs. Preston wouldn't object, I'm thinkin'."

"If Andy was at home I wouldn't feel so lonely."

While she was speaking Andy himself had crept under the window, and heard her words. He was planning a surprise, but waited for the last moment to announce himself. He waited to hear what reply his mother would say.

"I think we'll see him soon, Mary, dear."

"What makes you say so, mother?"

"I don't know. I've got a feeling in my bones that we'll soon meet.

The blessed saints grant that it may be so."

"Your bones are right this time, mother," said a merry voice.

And Andy, popping up from his stooping position, showed himself at the window.

There was a simultaneous scream from Mary and her mother.

"Is it you, Andy?" exclaimed Mary.

"It isn't nobody else," said Andy, rather ungrammatically.

"Come in, Andy, my darling—come in, and tell me if you are well," said his mother, dropping the shirt on which she was at work, and rising to her feet.

"I'll be with you in a jiffy," said Andy.

And, with a light leap, he cleared the window sill, and stood in the presence of his mother and sister, who vied with each other in hugging the returned prodigal.

"You'll choke me, Sister Mary," said Andy, good-humoredly. "Maybe you think I'm your beau."

"Don't speak to her of beaux, and she only eleven years old," said his mother. "But you haven't told us why you came."

"Faith, mother, it was because the work gave out, and I thought I'd pack my trunk and come and see you and Mary. That's all."

"We are glad to see you, Andy, dear, but," continued his mother, taking a survey of her son's appearance for the first time, "you're lookin' like a beggar, with your clothes all in rags."

Andy laughed.

"Faith, it's about so, mother. There was no one to mend 'em for me, and I'm more used to the hoe than the needle."

"I will sew up some of the holes when you're gone to bed, Andy. Are you sure you're well, lad?"

"Well, mother? Jist wait till you see me atin', mother. You'll think I've got a healthy appetite."

"I never thought, Andy. The poor lad must be hungry. Mary, see what there is in the closet."

"There's nothing but some bread, mother," said Mary.

Indeed bread and potatoes were the main living of the mother and daughter, adopted because they were cheap. They seldom ventured on the extravagance of meat, and that was one reason, doubtless, for Mrs. Burke's want of strength and sometimes feeling faint and dizzy while working at her needle.

"Is there no meat in the house, Mary?"

"Not a bit, mother."

"Then go and see if there's an egg outside."

The widow kept a few hens, having a henhouse in one corner of the back yard. The eggs she usually sold, but Andy was at home now, and needed something hearty, so they must be more extravagant than usual.

Mary went out, and quickly returned with a couple of eggs.

"Here they are, mother, two of them. The black hen was settin' on them, but I drove her away, and you can hear her cackling. Shure, Andy needs them more than she does."

"Will you have them boiled or fried, Andy?" asked his mother.

"Any way, mother. I'm hungry enough to ate 'em raw. It's hungry work walkin' ten miles wid a bundle on your back, let alone the fightin'."

"Fighting!" exclaimed Mrs. Burke, pausing in drawing out the table.

"Fightin', Andy?" chimed in Mary, in chorus.

"Yes, mother," said Andy.

"And who did you fight with?" asked the widow, anxiously.

"With a boy that feels as big as a king; maybe bigger."

"What's his name?"

"I heard his father call him Godfrey."

"What, Godfrey Preston?" exclaimed Mrs. Burke in something like consternation.

"Yes, that's the name. He lives in a big house a mile up the road."

"What made you fight with him, Andy?" inquired his mother, anxiously.

"He began it."

"What could he have against you? He didn't know you."

"He thought as I only was an Irish boy he could insult me, and call me names, but I was too much for him."

"I hope you didn't hurt him?"

"I throwed him twice, mother, but then his father came up and that put a stop to the fight."

"And what did his father say?"

"He took my part, mother, when he found out how it was, and scolded his son. Shure, he's a gentleman."

"Yes, Colonel Preston is a gentleman."

"And that's where he isn't like his son, I'm thinkin'."

"No. Godfrey isn't like his father. It's his mother he favors."

"Faith, and I don't call it favoring," said Andy. Is the old lady as ugly and big-feelin' as the son?"

"She's rather a hard woman, Andy. I go up to work there one day every week."

"Do you, mother?" said Andy, not wholly pleased to hear that his mother was employed by the mother of his young enemy.

"Yes, Andy."

"What is it you do?"

"I help about the ironing. To-morrow's my day for going there."

"I wish you could stay at home, and not go out to work, mother," said Andy, soberly. "You don't look strong, mother, dear. I'm afraid you're not well."

"Oh, yes, Andy, I am quite well. I shall be better, too, now that you are at home. I missed you very much. It seemed lonely without you."

"I must find out some way to earn money, mother," said Andy. "I'm young and strong, and I ought to support you."

"You can help me, Andy," said Mrs. Burke, cheerfully.

She took up the shirt and resumed her sewing.

"I'm afraid you're too steady at the work, mother," said Andy.

"I shall be ironing to-morrow. It's a change from sewing, Andy. Mary, it's time to take off the eggs."

Andy was soon partaking of the frugal meal set before him. He enjoyed it, simple as it was, and left not a particle of the egg or a crumb of the bread.

CHAPTER IV MRS. PRESTON

Whenever Godfrey Preston had any difficulty with his father, he always went to his mother, and from her, right or wrong, he was sure to obtain sympathy. So in the present instance, failing to receive from his father that moral support to which he deemed himself entitled, on entering the house he sought out his mother.

Mrs. Preston, who was rather a spare lady, with thin lips and a sharp, hatchet-like face, was in her own room. She looked up as Godfrey entered.

"Well, Godfrey, what's the matter?" she asked, seeing on her son's face an unmistakable expression of discontent.

"Matter enough, mother. Father's always against me."

"I know it. He appears to forget that you are his son. What is it now?"

"He came up just as I was thrashing a boy down in the yard."

"What boy?"

"Nobody you know, mother. It was only an Irish boy."

"What was your reason for punishing him?" asked Mrs. Preston, adopting Godfrey's version of the affair.

"He was impudent to me. He was leaning against the fence, and I ordered him away. He was a ragged boy, with a bundle on a stick. Of course, when he wouldn't move, I went out and thrashed him."

"Was your father there?"

"He came up in the midst of it, and, instead of taking my part, he took the part of the Irish boy."

"I don't see how Mr. Preston can be so unfair," said his wife. "It is his duty to stand by his family."

"I felt ashamed to have him scold me before the impudent boy. Of course, he enjoyed it, and I suppose he will think he can be impudent to me again."

"No doubt. I will speak to your father about it. He really shouldn't be so inconsiderate. But what is that stain on your coat, Godfrey? I should think you had been down on your back on the ground."

"Oh," said Godfrey, rather embarrassed, "I happened to slip as I was wrestling with the fellow, and fell on my back. However, I was up again directly and gave it to him, I can tell you. If father hadn't stopped me I'd have laid him out," he continued, in a swaggering tone.

It will be seen that Godfrey did not always confine himself to the truth. Indeed, he found it rather hard at all times to admit either that he had been in the wrong or had been worsted. Even if his mother sometimes suspected that his accounts were a trifle distorted, she forbore to question their accuracy. Mother and son had a sort of tacit compact by which they stood by each other, and made common cause against Colonel Preston.

"Don't you know the boy? Doesn't he live in the neighborhood?" asked Mrs. Preston, after a pause.

"He's just come into the town, but I'll tell you who he is. He's the son of that woman that comes to work for you once a week."

"Mrs. Burke?"

"Yes; he told me that his name was Andy Burke."

"He ought to know his place too well to be impudent to one in your position."

"So I think."

"I shall speak to Mrs. Burke about her son's bad behavior."

"I wish you'd discharge her. That's a good way to punish the boy."

"I shouldn't object to doing that, Godfrey, but Mrs. Burke is a capital hand at ironing shirts. Yours and your father's never looked so nice as they have since she has been here."

Godfrey looked a little discontented. Being essentially mean, he thought it would be an excellent plan to strike the son through the mother.

"You might threaten her, mother, a little. Tell her to make her boy behave himself, or you'll discharge her."

"I will certainly speak to her on the subject, Godfrey."

At the table Mrs. Preston introduced the subject of Godfrey's wrongs.

"I am surprised, Mr. Preston, that you took part against Godfrey when he was rudely assaulted this morning."

"I thought Godfrey in the wrong, my dear. That was my reason."

"You generally appear to think your own son in the wrong. You are ready to take part with any stranger against him," said Mrs. Preston, in a complaining manner.

"I don't think you are quite right just there," said her husband, good-humoredly. "I must say, however, that Godfrey generally is in the wrong."

"You are very unjust to him."

"I don't mean to be. I would be glad to praise him, but he is so overbearing to those whom he considers his inferiors, that I am frequently ashamed of his manner of treating others."

"The boy has some reason to feel proud. He must maintain his position."

"What is his position?"

"I don't think you need to ask. As our son he is entitled to a degree of consideration."

"He will receive consideration enough if he deserves it, but this is a republic, and all are supposed to be on an equality."

Mrs. Preston tossed her head.

"That's well enough to say, but don't you consider yourself above a man that goes round sawing wood for a living?"

"At any rate I would treat him with courtesy. Because I am richer, and have a better education, it is no reason why I should treat him with contempt."

"Then I don't share your sentiments," said Mrs. Preston. "I am thankful that I know my position better. I mean to uphold the dignity of the family, and I hope my son will do the same."

Colonel Preston shrugged his shoulders as his wife swept from the room. He knew of old her sentiments on this subject, and he was aware that she was not likely to become a convert to his more democratic ideas.

"I am afraid she will spoil Godfrey," he thought. "The boy is getting intolerable. I am glad this Irish boy gave him a lesson. He seems a fine-spirited lad. I will help him if I can."

"Ellen," said Mrs. Preston the next morning, "when Mrs. Burke comes let me know."

"Yes, ma'am."

"She's come," announced Ellen, half an hour later.

Mrs. Preston rose from her seat and went into the laundry.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Preston," said Mrs. Burke.

"Good-morning," returned the other, stiffly. "Mrs. Burke, I hear that your son behaved very badly to my Godfrey yesterday."

"It isn't like Andy, ma'am," said the mother, quietly. "He's a good, well-behaved lad."

"Godfrey tells me that he made a brutal assault upon him, quite forgetting his superior position."

"Are you sure Master Godfrey didn't strike him first?" asked the mother.

"Even if he had, your son shouldn't have struck back."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Burke, her eyes flashing with spirit, meek as she generally was.

"Because it was improper," said Mrs. Preston, decisively.

"I don't see that, ma'am. Andy isn't the boy to stand still and be struck."

"Do I understand," said Mrs. Preston, in a freezing tone, "that you uphold your son in his atrocious conduct?"

"Yes, ma'am. I stand up for Andy, for he's a good boy, and if he struck Master Godfrey it was because he was struck first."

"That is enough," said Mrs. Preston, angrily. "I shall not require your services after to-day, Mrs. Burke."

"Just as you like, ma'am," said Mrs. Burke, with quiet pride, but she thought, with a sinking heart, of the gap which this would make in her scanty income.

CHAPTER V A PROFITABLE JOB

After finishing her work at Colonel Preston's Mrs. Burke went home. She did not see Mrs. Preston again, for the latter sent her the money for her services by Ellen.

"Mrs. Preston says you're not to come next week," said Ellen.

"She told me so herself this morning. She is angry because I took the part of my boy against Master Godfrey."

"Godfrey's the hatefulest boy I ever see," said Ellen, whose grammar was a little defective. "He's always putting on airs."

"He struck my Andy, and Andy struck him back."

"I'm glad he did," said Ellen, emphatically. "I hope he'll do it again."

"I don't want the boys to fight. Andy's a peaceable lad; and he'll be quiet if he's let alone. But he's just like his poor father, and he won't let anybody trample on him."

"That's where he's right," said Ellen. "I'm sorry you're not coming again, Mrs. Burke."

"So am I, Ellen, for I need the money, but I'll stand by my boy."

"You iron real beautiful. I've heard Mrs. Preston say so often. She won't get nobody that'll suit her so well."

"If you hear of anybody else that wants help, Ellen, will you send them to me?"

This Ellen faithfully promised, and Mrs. Burke went home, sorry to have lost her engagement, but not sorry to have stood up for Andy, of whom she was proud.

Andy was at home when she returned. He had found enough to do at home to occupy him so far. The next day he meant to go out in search of employment. When his mother got back she found him cutting some brush which he had obtained from the neighboring woods.

"There, mother," he said, pointing to a considerable pile, "you'll have enough sticks to last you a good while."

"Thank you, Andy, dear. That'll save Mary and me a good deal of trouble."

There was nothing in her words, but something in her tone, which led Andy to ask:

"What's the matter, mother? Has anything happened?"

"I've got through working for Mrs. Preston, Andy."

"Got through? For to-day, you mean?"

"No; I'm not going to work there again."

"Why not?"

"She complained of you, Andy."

"What did she say, mother?" asked our hero, listening with attention.

"She said you ought not to have struck Godfrey."

"Did you tell her he struck me first?"

"Yes, I did."

"And what did she say, thin?"

"She said that you ought not to have struck him back."

"And what did you say, mother?"

"I said my Andy wasn't the boy to stand still and let anybody beat him."

"Good for you, mother! Bully for you! That's where you hit the nail on the head. And what did the ould lady say then?"

"She told me I needn't come there again to work."

"I'm glad you're not goin', mother. I don't want you to work for the likes of her. Let her do her own ironin', the ould spalpeen!"

In general, Andy's speech was tolerably clear of the brogue, but whenever he became a little excited, as at present, it was more marked. He was more angry at the slight to his mother than he

would have been at anything, however contemptuous, said to himself. He had that chivalrous feeling of respect for his mother which every boy of his age ought to have, more especially if that mother is a widow.

"But, Andy, I'm very sorry for the money I'll lose."

"How much is it, mother?"

"Seventy-five cents."

"I'll make it up, mother."

"I know you will if you can, Andy; but work is hard to get, and the pay is small."

"You might go back and tell Mrs. Preston that I'm a dirty spalpeen, and maybe she'd take you back, mother."

"I wouldn't slander my own boy like that if she'd take me back twenty times."

"That's the way to talk, mother," said Andy, well pleased. "Don't you be afeared—we'll get along somehow. More by token, here's three dollars I brought home with me yisterday."

Andy pulled out from his pocket six silver half-dollars, and offered them to his mother.

"Where did you get them, Andy?" she asked, in surprise.

"Where did I get them? One way and another, by overwork. We won't starve while them last, will we?"

Andy's cheerful tone had its effect upon his mother.

"Perhaps you're right, Andy," she said, smiling. "At any rate we won't cry till it's time."

"To-morrow I'll go out and see if I can find work."

"Suppose you don't find it, Andy?" suggested his sister.

"Then I'll take in washing," said Andy, laughing. "It's an iligant washer I'd make, wouldn't I now?"

"Nobody'd hire you more than once, Andy."

By and by they had supper. If they had been alone they would have got along on bread and tea; but "Andy needs meat, for he's a growing boy," said his mother.

And so Mary was dispatched to the butcher's for a pound and a half of beefsteak, which made the meal considerably more attractive. Mrs. Burke felt that it was extravagant, particularly just as her income was diminished, but she couldn't bear to stint Andy. At first she was not going to eat, herself, meaning to save a part for Andy's breakfast; but our hero found her out, and declared he wouldn't eat a bit if his mother did not eat, too. So she was forced to take her share, and it did her good, for no one can keep up a decent share of strength on bread and tea alone.

The next morning Andy went out in search of work. He had no very definite idea where to go, or to whom to apply, but he concluded to put in an application anywhere he could.

He paused in front of the house of Deacon Jones, a hard-fisted old farmer, whose reputation for parsimony was well known throughout the village, but of this Andy, being a newcomer, was ignorant.

"Wouldn't you like to hire a good strong boy?" he asked, entering the yard.

The deacon looked up.

"Ever worked on a farm?"

"Yes."

"Can you milk?"

"Yes."

"Where did you work?"

"In Carver."

"What's your name?"

"Andy Burke."

"Where do you live?"

"With my mother, Mrs. Burke, a little way down the road."

"I know—the Widder Burke."

"Have you got any work for me?"

"Wait a minute, I'll see."

The deacon brought out an old scythe from the barn, and felt of the edge. There was not much danger in so doing, for it was as dull as a hoe.

"This scythe needs sharpening," he said. "Come and turn the grindstone."

"Well, here's a job, anyhow," thought Andy. "Wonder what he'll give me."

He sat down and began to turn the grindstone. The deacon bore on heavily, and this made it hard turning. His arms ached, and the perspiration stood on his brow. It was certainly pretty hard work, but then he must be prepared for that, and after all he was earning money for his mother. Still the time did seem long. The scythe was so intolerably dull that it took a long time to make any impression upon it.

"Kinder hard turnin', ain't it?" said the deacon.

"Yes," said Andy.

"This scythe ain't been sharpened for ever so long. It's as dull as a hoe."

However, time and patience work wonders, and at length the deacon, after a careful inspection of the blade of the scythe, released Andy from his toil of an hour and a half, with the remark:

"I reckon that'll do."

He put the scythe in its place and came out.

Andy lingered respectfully for the remuneration of his labor.

"He ought to give me a quarter," he thought. But the deacon showed no disposition to pay him, and Andy became impatient.

"I guess I'll be goin'," he said.

"All right. I ain't got anything more for you to do," said the deacon.

"I'll take my pay now," said Andy, desperately.

"Pay? What for?" inquired the deacon, innocently.

"For turning the grindstone."

"You don't mean ter say you expect anything for that?" said the deacon in a tone of surprise.

"Yes I do," said Andy. "I can't work an hour and a half for nothing."

"I didn't expect to pay for such a trifle," said the old man, fumbling in his pocket.

Finally he brought out two cents, one of the kind popularly known as bung-towns, which are not generally recognized as true currency.

"There," said he in an injured tone. "I'll pay you, though I didn't think you'd charge anything for any little help like that."

Andy looked at the proffered compensation with mingled astonishment and disgust.

"Never mind," he said. "You can keep it. You need it more'n I do, I'm thinkin'!"

"Don't you want it?" asked the deacon, surprised.

"No, I don't. I'm a poor boy, but I don't work an hour and a half for two cents, one of 'em bad. I'd rather take no pay at all."

"That's a cur'us boy," said the deacon, slowly sliding the pennies back into his pocket. "I calc'late he expected more just for a little job like that. Does he think I'm made of money?"

As Andy went out of the yard, the idea dawned upon the deacon that he had saved two cents, and his face was luminous with satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI THE TWO OLD MAIDS

"He's the meanest man I ever saw," thought Andy. "Does he think I work on nothing a year, and find myself? Divil a bit of work will I do for him agin, if I know it." But better luck was in store for Andy. Quarter of a mile farther on, in a two-story house, old-fashioned but neat, lived two maiden ladies of very uncertain age, Misses Priscilla and Sophia Grant. I am not aware that any relationship existed between them and our distinguished ex-President. Nevertheless, they were of very respectable family and connections, and of independent property, owning bank stock which brought them in an annual income of about twelve hundred dollars, in addition to the house they occupied, and half a dozen acres of land thereunto pertaining. Now, this was not a colossal fortune, but in a country place like Crampton it made them ladies of large property.

Priscilla was the elder of the two, and general manager. Sophia contented herself with being the echo of her stronger-minded sister, and was very apt to assent to her remarks, either by repeating them, or by saying: "Just so." She was a mild, inoffensive creature, but very charitable and amiable, and so little given to opposition that there was always the greatest harmony between them. They kept a gardener and out-of-door servant of all work, who cultivated the land, sawed and split their wood, ran of errands, and made himself generally useful. He had one drawback, unfortunately. He would occasionally indulge to excess in certain fiery alcoholic compounds sold at the village tavern, and, as natural consequence, get drunk. He had usually the good sense to keep out of the way while under the influence of liquor, and hitherto the good ladies had borne with and retained him in their employ.

But a crisis had arrived. That morning he had come for orders while inebriated, and in his drunken folly had actually gone so far as to call Miss Priscilla darling and offer to kiss her.

Miss Priscilla was, of course, horrified, and so expressed herself.

"Law, Sophia," she said, "I came near fainting away. The idea of his offering to kiss me."

"Just so," said Sophia.

"So presuming."

"Just so."

"Of course, I couldn't think of employing him any longer."

"Couldn't think of it."

"He might have asked to kiss me again."

"Just so."

"Or you!"

"Just so," said Sophia, in some excitement of manner.

"The neighbors would talk."

"Just so."

"So I told him that I was very sorry, but it would be necessary for him to find work somewhere else."

"But who will do our work?" inquired Sophia, with a rare, original suggestion.

"We must get somebody else."

"So we must," acquiesced Sophia, as if she had suddenly received light on a very dark subject.

"But I don't know who we can get."

"Just so."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Priscilla answered it in person. They kept no domestic servant, only a gardener.

"I've brought the load of wood you ordered, ma'am," said the teamster.

"Where shall I put it?"

"In the backyard. John—no, John has left us. I will show you, myself."

She put on a cape-bonnet and indicated the place in the yard where she wanted the wood dumped.

Then she returned to the house.

"It's very awkward that John should have acted so," she said, in a tone of annoyance. "I don't know who is to saw and split that wood."

"We couldn't do it," said Sophia, with another original suggestion.

"Of course not. That would be perfectly absurd."

"Just so."

"I don't believe there is enough wood sawed and split to last through the day."

"We must have some split."

"Of course. But I really don't know of anyone in the neighborhood that we could get."

"John."

"John has gone away. You know why."

"Perhaps he wouldn't kiss us if we told him not to," suggested Sophia.

"I am afraid you are a goose," said Priscilla, composedly.

"Just so," slipped out of Sophia's mouth from force of habit, but her sister was so used to hearing it that she took no particular notice of it on the present occasion.

It was just at this time that Andy, released from his severe and unrequited labor for Deacon Jones, came by. He saw the wood being unloaded in the back yard, and an idea struck him.

"Maybe I can get the chance of sawin' and splittin' that wood. I'll try, anyway. I wonder who lives there?"

He immediately opened the front gate, and marching up to the front door, knocked vigorously.

"There's somebody at the door," said Sophia.

"Perhaps it's John come back," said Priscilla. "I am afraid of going to open it. He might want to kiss me again."

"I'll go," said Sophia, rising with unwonted alacrity.

"He might want to kiss you."

"I'll tell him not to."

"We'll both go," said Priscilla, decisively.

Accordingly, the two sisters, for mutual protection, both went to the door, and opened it guardedly. Their courage returned when they saw that it was only a boy.

"What do you want?" asked Priscilla.

"Just so," chimed in Sophia.

"You've got a load of wood in the back yard," commenced Andy.

"Just so," said Sophia.

"Do you want it sawed and split?"

"Just so," answered the younger sister, brightening up.

"Can you do it?" inquired Priscilla.

"Try me and see," answered Andy.

"You're not a man."

"Just so," chimed in her sister.

"Faith, and I soon will be," said Andy. "I can saw and split wood as well as any man you ever saw."

"What is your name?"

"Andy Burke."

"Are you a—Hibernian?" inquired Priscilla.

"I don't know what you mane by that same," said Andy, perplexed.

"To what nation do you belong?"

"Oh, that's what you want, ma'am. I'm only an Irish boy."

"And you say your name is Burke?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are you related to Burke, the great orator? He was an Irishman, I believe."

"Just so," said Sophia.

"He was my great-grandfather, ma'am," answered Andy, who had never heard of the eminent orator, but thought the claim would improve his chances of obtaining the job of sawing and splitting wood.

"Your great-grandfather!" exclaimed Priscilla, in astonishment.

"Really, this is most extraordinary. And you are poor?"

"If I wasn't I wouldn't be goin' round sawin' wood, ma'am."

"Just so," said Sophia.

"To think that the grandson of the great Burke should come to us for employment," said Priscilla, who was in some respects easily taken in. "I think we must hire him, Sophia."

"Just so."

"Perhaps he could take John's place altogether."

"Just so."

"I must find out whether he understands gardening."

"Just so."

Andy stood by, waiting patiently for the decision, and hoping that it might be favorable. Of course, it was wrong for him to tell a lie, but he thought his engagement depended upon it, and, although a very good boy in the main, he was not altogether perfect, as my readers are destined to find out.

CHAPTER VII ANDY OBTAINS A PLACE

"Do you understand the care of a garden?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Yes," answered Andy, promptly.

"Then you are used to agricultural labor?"

"I've been workin' on a farm all summer."

"Our man has just left us, and we must hire somebody else."

"Just so," chimed in Sophia.

"And if you are competent–"

"Just so."

"Try me," said Andy.

"I really think we'd better, Sophia," said Priscilla, turning to her sister.

"Just so."

"We'll try you for a week. What compensation do you require?"

"Is it wages you mane?"

Of course, Sophia was the speaker.

"How much did you give the man you had before me?" asked Andy, shrewdly.

"Twenty-five dollars a month and board."

"That'll suit me," said Andy, audaciously.

At the farmer's for whom he had been working he had received board and a dollar a week.

"But you are a boy. Men folks get more than boys."

"I'll do as much work as he did any day," said Andy, stoutly.

"I really don't know what to say. I think we'll give you five dollars the first week, and then we will decide about the future."

"Just so," said Sophia.

"I'm to eat here?" inquired Andy.

"Yes, you will make your home here. We will put you in John's room."

"When shall I begin?"

"We shall need some wood split at once."

"All right, ma'am; but it's dinner time. I'll just go home and get a bite to keep up my strength."

"You can have your dinner here. It will be ready in half an hour."

"Just so."

"All right," said Andy; "I'm agreeable."

"Do you live in the village?"

"I do now. My mother lives up the road a bit."

"Very well. Go and split some wood, and we'll call you in to dinner.

You'll find the ax and the saw in the shed."

Andy found the articles referred to, and straight-way went to work. He was really a "smart boy to work," as the phrase is, and he went to work with a will. He was greatly elated at having secured so profitable a job. He meant to give satisfaction, so as to keep it. Five dollars a week and board seemed to him a magnificent income, and compared very favorably with his wages at Farmer Belknap's, where he had been working all summer.

"It's lucky I came here," he said to himself, as he plied the saw energetically; "but what queer old ladies they are, especially the one that's always sayin' 'just so.' If I'd tell her I'd got fifty-seven grand-children I'll bet she'd say, 'Just so.'"

Miss Sophia was looking out of the back window to see how their new "man" worked. Occasionally Priscilla, as she was setting the table, glanced out of the window in passing.

"He takes hold as if he knew how," she observed.

"Just so," responded her sister.

"I think he works faster than John."

"Just so."

"It's very strange that he should be the great-grandson of the great Burke."

"Just so."

"And that he should be sawing wood for us, too."

"Just so."

"I think we must be kind to him, sister."

"Just so. He won't try to kiss you, Priscilla," said Sophia, with a sudden thought.

"You are a goose, sister," said Priscilla.

"Just so," assented the other, from force of habit.

In due time dinner was ready, and Andy was summoned from the woodpile. He was in nowise sorry for the summons. He had a hearty appetite at all times, and just now it was increased by his unrequited labor in turning the grindstone for Deacon Jones, as well as by the half-hour he had spent at his new task.

The Misses Grant did their own work, as I have before observed. They were excellent cooks, and the dinner now upon the table, though plain, was very savory and inviting. Andy's eyes fairly danced with satisfaction as they rested on the roast beef and vegetables, which emitted an odor of a highly satisfactory character. At the farmer's where he had last worked, the table had been plentifully supplied, but the cooking was very rudimentary.

"Sit down, Andrew," said Miss Priscilla. "I think that is your name."

"They call me 'Andy,' ma'am."

"That means Andrew. Shall I give you some meat?"

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Will you have it rare or well done?"

"Well done, ma'am. I have it rare enough, anyhow."

"Sophia, Andrew has made a joke," said Priscilla, with a decorous smile.

"Just so, Priscilla," and Sophia smiled also.

"I suppose your family has been reduced to poverty, Andrew, or you would not be seeking employment of this character?"

"True for you, ma'am," said Andy, with his mouth full.

"How was your family property lost?"

"Faith, ma'am, by speculation," said Andy, hazarding a guess.

"That is very sad. Sophia, we must never speculate."

"Just so, Priscilla."

"Or we might lose all our money."

"And have to saw wood for a living," said Sophia, with another brilliant idea.

Andy was so amused at the picture thus suggested that he came near choking, but recovered himself, after a violent attack of coughing.

"I am afraid, Sophia, we should scarcely make a living in that way," said Priscilla, with a smile.

"Just so," acquiesced her sister.

"How long have you been in this country, Andrew?"

"Six years, ma'am."

Andy kept at work industriously. His appetite proved to be quite equal to the emergency, but his evident enjoyment of the dinner only gratified the ladies, who, though eccentric, were kind-hearted, and not in the least mean.

"What will I do, ma'am?" asked our hero.

"You may go on sawing wood."

So Andy resumed work, and worked faithfully during the afternoon. By this time there was a large pile of wood ready for the stove.

At half-past four Miss Priscilla appeared at the door.

"Andrew," she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you feel tired?"

"A little, ma'am."

"Does your mother know where you are?"

"No, ma'am."

"Would you like to go home and tell her?"

"Yes, ma'am, I would."

"You can go now or after supper, as you prefer."

"Then I'll go now."

"But remember, we want you to come back and sleep here. We do not feel safe without a man in the house."

Andy felt rather flattered at being referred to as a man.

"I'll be back any time you name, ma'am," he said.

"Then be here at nine o'clock."

"Very well, ma'am."

Andy put on his coat and hurried home. He wanted to tell his mother and Mary the good news about his engagement at such unexpected good wages.

Mrs. Burke looked up inquiringly as he entered the house.

"Where have you been, Andy?" she asked. "I thought I had lost you."

"You don't lose me so easy, mother. Shure, I've been at work."

"At work?"

"Yes—I've got a place."

"What, already? You are lucky, Andy."

"You'll think so, mother. How much do you think I get besides board, mind?"

"A dollar a week?"

"What do you say to three dollars?"

"You're a lucky boy, Andy. I'm glad for you."

"What do you say to five dollars a week, mother?" asked Andy, in exultation.

"You're jokin' now, Andy," said his sister. "I don't believe you've got a place at all."

"I have, thin, and it's five dollars a week I'm to get. Ask the ould maids I'm workin' for."

"The Miss Grants?"

"I expect so. They're mighty queer old ladies. One of 'm is always sayin' 'just so.'"

"That is Miss Sophia Grant."

"Just so," said Andy, mimicking her.

"You mustn't do that, Andy. Then it's them you're workin' for?"

"Yes, and they're mighty kind. I'm goin' back to sleep there to-night.

They want a man to purtect them."

Mary laughed.

"Do you call yourself a man, Andy? What could you do if a burglar tried to get in?"

"I'd give him what Paddy did the drum," said Andy.

"Supper is ready," announced his mother.

It was a cheerful meal. Andy had done much better than his mother expected, and it seemed likely that they would get along in spite of her being discharged by Mrs. Preston.

CHAPTER VIII THE MIDNIGHT ALARM

"It's time for me to be goin' back," said Andy, as the clock indicated twenty minutes to nine.

"I wish you could sleep at home, Andy," said his mother.

"They want me to purtect them," said our hero, with a little importance. "I'll pack my clothes in a handkerchief."

"I've got a little carpetbag," said his mother. "That looks more respectable. When you have earned enough money, you must have a new suit of clothes."

"How much will they cost, mother?"

"I think we can get a cheap suit for fifteen or twenty dollars. When you have got the money, we will call on the tailor and see."

"Shure, I'll feel like a gentleman with a suit like that."

"Mary, go and get the carpetbag. I've packed Andy's clothes all ready for him."

Mary soon reappeared with the carpetbag, and Andy set out on his return.

Presently, as the clock struck nine, he knocked at the door of the Misses Grant. The elder opened the door for him.

"You are punctual, Andrew," she said, approvingly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are those your clothes?" pointing to the bag he carried.

"What few I've got, ma'am. I'm goin' to buy some more when I've got money enough."

"That is right. We want you to look respectable."

"Just so," remarked Sophia, who felt that it was time for her to speak.

Then a brilliant idea seized her.

"If he was a girl, we could give him some of our dresses."

"But he isn't," said matter-of-fact Priscilla.

"Or if we were men," continued Sophia, with another brilliant idea.

"But we are not."

"Just so," assented her sister, now brought to the end of her suggestions.

By this time Andy was in the house, holding his cap in one hand, and his carpetbag in the other.

"Do you feel tired?" asked Priscilla.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then, perhaps you would like to go to bed?"

"I would, if it's just the same to you, ma'am."

"Very well, follow me, and I will show you your room. Sophia, perhaps you had better come, too."

They went up the front stairs. The house proper had two rooms on the lower floor, and the two chambers over them. But there was, besides, an extension behind, used as a kitchen, and over this was the room which had been used by John, the former servant.

"This is your room, Andrew," said Miss Priscilla. "Sophia, will you lift the latch?"

The door being opened, revealed a small chamber, with the ceiling partly sloping. There were two windows. It was very plainly furnished, but looked very comfortable. Andy glanced about him with a look of satisfaction. It was considerably more attractive than the bed in the attic which he had occupied at the house of the farmer for whom he had last worked.

"We've put the feather bed at the bottom, as it's summer," said Miss Priscilla.

"All right, ma'am."

"There's one thing you've forgotten, Priscilla," suggested Sophia.

"What is that?"

"The gun."

"Oh, yes. I am glad you reminded me of it. Andrew, can you fire off a gun?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Andrew, glibly.

He had never done it, but he had seen a gun fired, and always wanted to make a trial himself.

"As you are the only menfolks in the house, we should expect you to fire at any robbers that tried to enter the house."

"Do you expect any, ma'am?" asked Andy, eagerly.

"No; but some might come. Of course, we cannot fire guns—it would be improper, as we are ladies."

"Just so," interrupted Sophia.

"So we shall leave that to you. Do you think you would dare to?"

"Would I dare, is it?" asked Andy. "Shure, I'd be glad of the chance."

"I see you are brave. I'll show you the gun now."

She went to the closet in the corner of the room, and pointed out a big, unwieldy musket to Andy. It was in the corner.

"Is it loaded, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes; it has been loaded for a year or more. John never had occasion to use it, and I hope you won't. If any robber should come," added the kind-hearted spinster, "perhaps you had better only shoot him in the arm, and not kill him."

"Just as you say, ma'am."

"I believe that is all I have to say. Sophia, shall we go to our own room?"

"Just so."

So the two maidens withdrew, and Andy was left to his own reflections. He undressed himself quickly, and deposited himself in the bed, which proved to be very comfortable.

He went to bed, but there was one thing that prevented his going to sleep. This was the gun. He had never even had one in his hand, and now there was one at his absolute disposal. It made him feel a sense of his importance to feel that, upon him, young as he was, devolved the duty of defending the house and its occupants from burglary.

"And why not? Shure, I'm 'most a man," reflected Andy. "I can shoot off a gun as well as anybody. I wonder will robbers come to-night!" thought Andy.

He rather wished they would, so that he might have an excuse for firing the gun. However, of this there seemed very little chance, for had not Miss Priscilla said that it had been loaded for more than a year, and during all that time John had never had occasion to use it? This seemed rather discouraging.

"I wonder would they let me go out gunning with it?" thought Andy.

Somehow or other, he could not get his mind off the gun, and, after a lapse of an hour, he was as wide awake as ever.

Meanwhile, Priscilla and Sophia were both asleep, not being interested in the gun.

Finally it occurred to Andy that he would get up and look at the gun. He wanted to make sure that he understood how to fire it. It was important that he should do so, he reasoned to himself, for might not a burglar come that very night? Then, suppose he was unable to fire the gun, and in consequence of his ignorance, both he and the two ladies should be murdered in their beds. Of course, this was not to be thought of, so Andy got out of bed, and, finding a match, lit the candle and put it on the bureau, or chest of drawers, as they called it in the country.

Then he stepped softly to the closet and took out the gun.

"Murder! how heavy it is!" thought Andy. "I didn't think it was half as heavy. There must be a pound of bullets inside. Now," he said to himself, "suppose a big thafe was to poke his dirty head in at the winder and say, 'Give me all your money, or I'll break your head'—I'd put up with the gun and point at him this way."

Here Andy brought the gun into position with some difficulty and put his finger near the trigger.

"And I'd say," continued Andy, rehearsing his part, "'Jump down, you thafe, or I'll put a bullet through your head.'"

At that unlucky moment his finger accidentally pulled the trigger, and instantly there was a tremendous report, the noise being increased by the shattering of the window panes by the bullet.

Probably the charge was too heavy, for the gun "kicked," and Andy, to his astonishment, found himself lying flat on his back on the floor, with the gun lying beside him.

"Oh, murder!" ejaculated the bewildered boy, "is it dead I am? Shure, the divil's in the gun. What will the ould wimmen say? They'll think it's bloody burglars gettin' into the house. Shure, I'll slip on my pants, for they'll be coming to see what's happened."

He picked himself up, and slipped on his pants. He had scarcely got them on when the trembling voice of Miss Priscilla was heard at the door.

CHAPTER IX WHAT FOLLOWED

The report of the gun, as may be supposed, had aroused both the ladies from their sleep.

"Did you hear it?" ejaculated Miss Priscilla, clutching her sister by the arm.

"Just so," muttered Sophia, in bewilderment. "It's the gun."

"Burglars!" exclaimed Sophia, in alarm.

"I am afraid so. What shall we do?"

"Run away," suggested Sophia.

"No, we must not leave the boy to be murdered."

"Perhaps he has shot them?" said Sophia, with a gleam of hope.

"At any rate, it is our duty to go and see what has happened."

"I'm afraid," whimpered Sophia, covering up her head.

"Then you can stay here," said the more courageous Priscilla. "I will go."

"And leave me alone?"

"I must."

"I'll go too, then," said Sophia, her teeth chattering with fear.

So they crept out of bed, and throwing shawls over their shoulders, advanced into the entry, trembling with excitement and fear.

"If we should find Andy weltering in his gore?" suggested Priscilla.

"Don't say such horrid things, or I shall scream," said her sister.

Then came the tremulous knock mentioned at the close of the last chapter.

Andy opened the door in person, and met the gaze of the two Miss Grants, Sophia almost ready to drop with fright.

"Do you see any gore, Priscilla?" she asked, tremulously.

"Are you hurt, Andrew?" asked the elder sister.

"No, ma'am."

"Did you fire the gun?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What made you? Did any burglars try to get in?"

"Not exactly, ma'am," said Andy; "but I thought there might be some."

"Did you see any?"

"Not exactly," said Andy, a little embarrassed; "but I heard a noise."

"Just so," said Sophia.

"Why didn't you wait till they appeared at the window, Andrew?"

"Because, ma'am, they would fire at me first. I wanted to scare 'em away."

"Perhaps you were right. You don't see any traces of them outside, do you?"

"You can look for yourself, ma'am."

The two ladies went to the window, which as already explained, had suffered from the discharge, and peered out timidly, but, of course, saw no burglars.

"Are you sure there were any burglars, Andrew?" asked Priscilla.

"No, ma'am, I couldn't swear to it."

"Well, no harm has been done."

"Except breakin' the winder, ma'am."

"Never mind; we will have that mended to-morrow."

"Were you afraid, Andrew?" asked Miss Sophia.

"Not a bit," answered Andy, valiantly. "I ain't afraid of burglars, as long as I have a gun. I'm a match for 'em."

"How brave he is!" exclaimed the timid lady. "We might have been killed in our beds. I'm glad we hired him, Priscilla."

"As there is nothing more to do, we had better go to bed."

"Just so."

"That's a bully way to get out of a scrape," said Andy to himself, as the ladies filed out of his chamber. "I expected they'd scold me. Plague take the old gun—it kicks as bad as a mule. Oh, Andy, you're a lucky boy to get off so well."

The next day Andy obtained permission to take out the gun in the afternoon when his chores were done.

"I want to get used to it, ma'am," he said. "It kicked last night."

"Dear me, did it?" asked Sophia. "I didn't know guns kicked. What do they kick with? They haven't got any legs."

Andy explained as well as he could what he meant by the gun's kicking, and said it was because it had not been used for a good while, and needed to be taken out.

"It needs exercise, just like horses, ma'am," he said.

"That is singular, Andrew," said Priscilla.

"Just so," observed her sister.

"It's a fact, ma'am," said Andy. "It gets skittish, just like horses—but if I take it out sometimes, it'll be all right."

"Very well, you may take it, only be careful."

"Oh, I'll be careful, ma'am," said Andy, with alacrity.

"Now, I'll have some fun," he said to himself.

He found a supply of powder and some shot in the closet, and proceeded to appropriate them.

"Come back in time for supper, Andrew," said Miss Priscilla.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm always on hand at meal times," answered our hero.

"That's because he's hungry," said Sophia, brilliantly.

"You're right, ma'am," said Andy; "my stomach always tells me when it's supper time."

"It's as good as a watch," said Priscilla, smiling.

"And a good deal cheaper," observed Sophia, with another brilliant idea.

Andy started up the road with his gun over his shoulder. It was his intention after going a little distance to strike into the fields, and make for some woods not far away, where he thought there would be a good chance for birds or squirrels. He hadn't gone many steps before he encountered Godfrey Preston, his antagonist of three days previous.

Now, Godfrey hadn't seen or heard anything of Andy since that day. He had learned from his mother with great satisfaction that she had discharged Mrs. Burke from her employment, as this, he imagined, would trouble Andy. But of Andy himself he knew nothing, and was not aware that he had already secured a place. When he saw our hero coming along, his curiosity led him to stop and find out, if he could, where he was going with the gun he carried on his shoulder, and where he obtained it. So he looked intently at Andy, waiting for him to speak, but Andy preferred to leave that to him.

"Whose gun is that?" asked Godfrey, in the tone of one who was entitled to ask the question.

"Shure, it belongs to the owner," said Andy, with a smile.

"Of course, I know that," said Godfrey, impatiently. "I'm not quite a fool."

"Not quite," repeated Andy, emphasizing the last word in a way which made Godfrey color.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"What do I mane? It was only your words I repeated."

"Then, don't trouble yourself to repeat them—do you hear?"

"Thank you; I won't."

"You didn't tell me whose gun that is."

"No, I didn't."

"Very likely you stole it," said Godfrey, provoked.

"Maybe you'll go and tell the owner."

"How can I when you haven't told me whose it is?"

"No more I did," said Andy with apparent innocence.

"Where are you going with it?"

"Goin' out shootin'."

"So I supposed."

"Did you, now? Then what made you ask?" returned Andy.

"You are an impudent fellow," said Godfrey, provoked.

"I never am impudent to gentlemen," said Andy, pointedly.

"Do you mean to say that I am not a gentleman?" demanded the other, angrily.

"Suit yourself," said Andy, coolly.

"You're only an Irish boy."

"Shure, I knew that before. Why can't you tell me some news? I'm an Irish boy and I'm proud of the same. I'll never go back on ould Ireland."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.