ALGER HORATIO JR.

THE TELEGRAPH BOY

Horatio Alger
The Telegraph Boy

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The Telegraph Boy:

Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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PREFACE

The "Telegraph Boy" completes the series of sketches of street-life in New York inaugurated eleven years since by the publication of "Ragged Dick." The author has reason to feel gratified by the warm reception accorded by the public to these pictures of humble life in the great metropolis. He is even more gratified by the assurance that his labors have awakened a philanthropic interest in the children whose struggles and privations he has endeavored faithfully to describe. He feels it his duty to state that there is no way in which these waifs can more effectually be assisted than by contributing to the funds of "The Children's Aid Society," whose wise and comprehensive plans for the benefit of their young wards have already been crowned with abundant success.

The class of boys described in the present volume was called into existence only a few years since, but they are already so numerous that one can scarcely ride down town by any conveyance without having one for a fellow-passenger. Most of them reside with their parents and have comfortable homes, but a few, like the hero of this story, are wholly dependent on their own

exertions for a livelihood. The variety of errands on which they are employed, and their curious experiences, are by no means exaggerated in the present story. In its preparation the author has been assisted by an excellent sketch published perhaps a year since in the "New York Tribune."

Horatio Alger, Jr.
New York, Sept. 1, 1879.

CHAPTER I.
A YOUNG CARPET-BAGGER

"Twenty-five cents to begin the world with!" reflected Frank Kavanagh, drawing from his vest-pocket two ten-cent pieces of currency and a nickel. "That isn't much, but it will have to do."

The speaker, a boy of fifteen, was sitting on a bench in City-Hall Park. He was apparently about fifteen years old, with a face not handsome, but frank and good-humored, and an expression indicating an energetic and hopeful temperament. A small bundle, rolled up in a handkerchief, contained his surplus wardrobe. He had that day arrived in New York by a boat from Hartford, and meant to stay in the city if he could make a living.

Next to him sat a man of thirty-five, shabbily dressed, who clearly was not a member of any temperance society, if an inflamed countenance and red nose may be trusted. Frank Kavanagh's display of money attracted his attention, for, small as was the boy's capital, it was greater than his own.

"Been long in the city, Johnny?" he inquired.

"I only arrived to-day," answered Frank. "My name isn't Johnny, though."

"It's immaterial. Johnny is a generic term," said the stranger. "I suppose you have come here to make your fortune."

"I shall be satisfied with a living to begin with," said Frank.

"Where did you come from?"

"A few miles from Hartford."

"Got any relations there?"

"Yes,—an uncle and aunt."

"I suppose you were sorry to leave them."

"Not much. Uncle is a pretty good man, but he's fond of money, and aunt is about as mean as they make 'em. They got tired of supporting me, and gave me money enough to get to New York."

"I suppose you have some left," said the stranger, persuasively.

"Twenty-five cents," answered Frank, laughing. "That isn't a very big capital to start on, is it?"

"Is that all you've got?" asked the shabbily dressed stranger, in a tone of disappointment.

"Every cent."

"I wish I had ten dollars to give you," said the stranger, thoughtfully.

"Thank you, sir; I wish you had," said Frank, his eyes resting on the dilapidated attire of his benevolent companion. Judging from that, he was not surprised that ten dollars exceeded the charitable fund of the philanthropist.

"My operations in Wall street have not been fortunate of late," resumed the stranger; "and I am in consequence hard up."

"Do you do business in Wall street?" asked Frank, rather surprised.

"Sometimes," was the reply. "I have lost heavily of late in Erie

and Pacific Mail, but it is only temporary. I shall soon be on my feet again."

"I hope so, sir," said Frank, politely.

"My career has been a chequered one," continued the stranger. "I, too, as a mere boy, came up from the country to make my fortune. I embarked in trade, and was for a time successful. I resigned to get time to write a play,—a comedy in five acts."

Frank regarded his companion with heightened respect. He was a boy of good education, and the author of a play in his eyes was a man of genius.

"Was it played?" he inquired.

"No; Wallack said it had too many difficult characters for his company, and the rest of the managers kept putting me off, while they were producing inferior plays. The American public will never know what they have lost. But, enough of this. Sometime I will read you the 'Mother-in-law,' if you like. Have you had dinner?"

"No," answered Frank. "Do you know where I can dine cheap?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered the stranger. "Once I boarded at the Astor House, but now I am forced, by dire necessity, to frequent cheap restaurants. Follow me."

"What is your name, sir?" asked Frank, as he rose from the bench.

"Montagu Percy," was the reply. "Sorry I haven't my card-

case with me, or I would hand you my address. I think you said your name was not Johnny."

"My name is Frank Kavanagh."

"A very good name. 'What's in a name?' as Shakespeare says."

As the oddly assorted pair crossed the street, and walked down Nassau street, they attracted the attention of some of the Arabs who were lounging about Printing-House square.

"I say, country, is that your long-lost uncle?" asked a boot-black.

"No, it isn't," answered Frank, shortly.

Though he was willing to avail himself of Mr. Percy's guidance, he was not ambitious of being regarded as his nephew.

"Heed not their ribald scoffs," said Montagu Percy, loftily. "Their words pass by me 'like the idle wind,' which I regard not."

"Who painted your nose, mister?" asked another boy, of course addressing Frank's companion.

"I will hand you over to the next policeman," exclaimed Percy, angrily.

"Look out he don't haul you in, instead," retorted the boy.

Montagu Percy made a motion to pursue his tormentors, but desisted.

"They are beneath contempt," he said. "It is ever the lot of genius to be railed at by the ignorant and ignoble. They referred to my nose being red, but mistook the cause. It is a cutaneous eruption,—the result of erysipelas."

"Is it?" asked Frank, rather mystified.

"I am not a drinking man—that is, I indulge myself but rarely. But here we are."

So saying he plunged down some steps into a basement, Frank following him. Our hero found himself in a dirty apartment, provided with a bar, over which was a placard, inscribed:—

"FREE LUNCH."

"How much money have you got, Frank?" inquired Montagu Percy.

"Twenty-five cents."

"Lunch at this establishment is free," said Montagu; "but you are expected to order some drink. What will you have?"

"I don't care for any drink except a glass of water."

"All right; I will order for you, as the rules of the establishment require it; but I will drink your glass myself. Eat whatever you like."

Frank took a sandwich from a plate on the counter and ate it with relish, for he was hungry. Meanwhile his companion emptied the two glasses, and ordered another.

"Can you pay for these drinks?" asked the bar-tender, suspiciously.

"Sir, I never order what I cannot pay for."

"I don't know about that. You've been in here and taken lunch more than once without drinking anything."

"It may be so. I will make up for it now. Another glass, please."

"First pay for what you have already drunk."

"Frank, hand me your money," said Montagu.

Frank incautiously handed him his small stock of money, which he saw instantly transferred to the bar-tender.

"That is right, I believe," said Montagu Percy.

The bar-keeper nodded, and Percy, transferring his attention to the free lunch, stowed away a large amount.

Frank observed with some uneasiness the transfer of his entire cash capital to the bar-tender; but concluded that Mr. Percy would refund a part after they went out. As they reached the street he broached the subject.

"I didn't agree to pay for both dinners," he said, uneasily.

"Of course not. It will be my treat next time. That will be fair, won't it?"

"But I would rather you would give me back a part of my money. I may not see you again."

"I will be in the Park to-morrow at one o'clock."

"Give me back ten cents, then," said Frank, uneasily. "That was all the money I had."

"I am really sorry, but I haven't a penny about me. I'll make it right to-morrow. Good-day, my young friend. Be virtuous and you will be happy."

Frank looked after the shabby figure ruefully. He felt that he had been taken in and done for. His small capital had vanished, and he was adrift in the streets of a strange city without a penny.

CHAPTER II.
DICK RAFFERTY

"I've been a fool," said Frank to himself, in genuine mortification, as he realized how easily he had permitted himself to be duped. "I ought to have stayed in the country."

Even a small sum of money imparts to its possessor a feeling of independence, but one who is quite penniless feels helpless and apprehensive. Frank was unable even to purchase an apple from the snuffy old apple-woman who presided over the stand near by.

"What am I going to do?" he asked himself, soberly.

"What has become of your uncle?" asked a boot-black.

Looking up, Frank recognized one of those who had saluted Percy and himself on their way to the restaurant.

"He isn't my uncle," he replied, rather resentfully.

"You never saw him before, did you?" continued the boy.

"No, I didn't."

"That's what I thought."

There was something significant in the young Arab's tone, which led Frank to inquire, "Do you know him?"

"Yes, he's a dead-beat."

"A what?"

"A dead-beat. Don't you understand English?"

"He told me that he did business on Wall street."

The boot-black shrieked with laughter.

"He do business on Wall street!" he repeated. "You're jolly green, you are!"

Frank was inclined to be angry, but he had the good sense to see that his new friend was right. So he said good-humoredly, "I suppose I am. You see I am not used to the city."

"It's just such fellows as you he gets hold of," continued the boot-black. "Didn't he make you treat?"

"I may as well confess it," thought Frank. "This boy may help me with advice."

"Yes," he said aloud. "I hadn't but twenty-five cents, and he made me spend it all. I haven't a cent left."

"Whew!" ejaculated the other boy. "You're beginnin' business on a small capital."

"That's so," said Frank. "Do you know any way I can earn money?"

Dick Rafferty was a good-natured boy, although rough, and now that Frank had appealed to him for advice he felt willing to help him, if he could.

"What can you do?" he asked, in a business-like tone. "Have you ever worked?"

"Yes," answered Frank.

"What can you do?"

"I can milk cows, hoe corn and potatoes, ride horse to plough, and—"

"Hold up!" said Dick. "All them things aint goin' to do you no good in New York. People don't keep cows as a reg'lar thing here."

"Of course I know that."

"And there aint much room for plantin' corn and potatoes. Maybe you could get a job over in Jersey."

"I'd rather stay in New York. I can do something here."

"Can you black boots, or sell papers?"

"I can learn."

"You need money to set up in either of them lines," said Dick Rafferty.

"Would twenty-five cents have been enough?" asked Frank.

"You could have bought some evening papers with that."

"I wish somebody would lend me some money," said Frank; "I'd pay it back as soon as I'd sold my papers. I was a fool to let that fellow swindle me."

"That's so," assented Dick; "but it's no good thinkin' of that now. I'd lend you the money myself, if I had it; but I've run out my account at the Park Bank, and can't spare the money just at present."

"How long have you been in business?" asked Frank.

"Ever since I was eight years old; and I'm goin' on fifteen now."

"You went to work early."

"Yes, I had to. Father and mother both died, and I was left to take care of myself."

"You took care of yourself when you were only eight years old?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Yes."

"Then I ought to make a living, for I am fifteen,—a year older than you are now."

"Oh, you'll get along when you get started," said Dick, encouragingly. "There's lots of things to do."

"Is there anything to do that doesn't require any capital?" inquired Frank, anxiously.

"Yes, you can smash baggage."

"Will people pay for that?" asked Frank, with a smile.

"Of course they will. You jest hang round the ferries and steamboat landin's, and when a chap comes by with a valise or carpet-bag, you jest offer to carry it, that's all."

"Is that what you call smashing baggage?"

"Of course. What did you think it was?"

Frank evaded answering, not caring to display his country ignorance.

"Do you think I can get a chance to do that?" he asked.

"You can try it and see."

"I came in by the Hartford boat myself, to-day," said Frank. "If I'd thought of it, I would have begun at once."

"Only you wouldn't have knowed the way anywhere, and if a gentleman asked you to carry his valise to any hotel you'd have had to ask where it was."

"So I should," Frank admitted.

"I'll show you round a little, if you want me to," said Dick. "I shan't have anything to do for an hour or two."

"I wish you would."

So the two boys walked about in the lower part of the city, Dick pointing out hotels, public buildings, and prominent streets. Frank had a retentive memory, and stored away the information carefully. Penniless as he was, he was excited and exhilarated by the scene of activity in which he was moving, and was glad he was going to live in it, or to attempt doing so.

"When I am used to it I shall like it much better than the country," he said to Dick. "Don't you?"

"I don't know about that," was the reply. "Sometimes I think I'll go West;—a lot of boys that I know have gone there."

"Won't it take a good deal of money to go?" asked Frank.

"Oh, there's a society that pays boys' expenses, and finds 'em nice homes with the farmers. Tom Harrison, one of my friends, went out six weeks ago, and he writes me that it's bully. He's gone to some town in Kansas."

"That's a good way off."

"I wouldn't mind that. I'd like ridin' in the cars."

"It would be something new to you; but I've lived in the country all my life, I'd rather stay here awhile."

"It's just the way a feller feels," said Dick philosophically. "I've bummed around so much I'd like a good, stiddy home, with three square meals a day and a good bed to sleep on."

"Can't you get that here?" asked Frank.

"Not stiddy. Sometimes I don't get but one square meal a day."

Frank became thoughtful. Life in the city seemed more precarious and less desirable than he anticipated.

"Well, I must go to work again," said Dick, after a while.

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" asked Frank.

"I don't know whether I'd better sleep at the Astor House or Fifth avenue," said Dick.

Frank looked perplexed.

"You don't mean that, do you?" he asked.

"Of course I don't. You're too fresh. Don't get mad," he continued good-naturedly, seeing the flush on Frank's cheek. "You'll know as much about the city as I do before long. I shall go to the Newsboys' Lodgin' House, where I can sleep for six cents."

"I wish I had six cents," said Frank. "If I could only get work I'd soon earn it. You can't think of anything for me to do, can you?"

Dick's face lighted up.

"Yes," he said, "I can get you a job, though it aint a very good one. I wonder I didn't think of it before."

"What is it?" asked Frank, anxiously.

"It's to go round with a blind man, solicitin' contributions."

"You mean begging?"

"Yes; you lead him into stores and countin' rooms, and he asks for money."

"I don't like it much," said Frank, slowly, "but I must do something. After all, it'll be he that's begging, not I."

"I'll take you right round where he lives," said Dick. "Maybe he'll go out this evenin'. His other boy give him the slip, and he hasn' got a new one yet."

CHAPTER III.
FRANK FINDS AN EMPLOYER

A stone's throw from Centre street stands a tall tenement-house, sheltering anywhere from forty to fifty families in squalid wretchedness. The rent which each family pays would procure a neat house in a country town, with perhaps a little land beside; but the city has a mysterious fascination for the poorer classes, and year after year many who might make the change herd together in contracted and noisome quarters, when they might have their share of light and space in country neighborhoods.

It was in front of this tenement-house that Dick halted, and plunged into a dark entrance, admonishing Frank to follow. Up creaking and dilapidated staircases to the fourth floor the boys went.

"Here we are," said Dick, panting a little from the rapidity of his ascent, and began a vigorous tattoo on a door to the left.

"Is this where the blind gentleman lives?" asked Frank, looking around him dubiously.

"He isn't much of a gentleman to look at," said Dick, laughing. "Do you hear him?"

Frank heard a hoarse growl from the inside, which might have been "Come in." At any rate, Dick chose so to interpret it, and opened the door.

The boys found themselves in a scantily furnished room, with a close, disagreeable smell pervading the atmosphere. In the corner was a low bedstead, on which lay a tall man, with a long, gray beard, and a disagreeable, almost repulsive, countenance. He turned his eyes, which, contrary to Frank's expectations, were wide open, full upon his visitors.

"What do you want?" he asked querulously. "I was asleep, and you have waked me up."

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Mills," said Dick; "but I come on business."

"What business can you have with me?" demanded the blind man. "Who are you?"

"I am Dick Rafferty. I black boots in the Park," replied Dick.

"Well, I haven't got any money to pay for blacking boots."

"I didn't expect you had. I hear your boy has left you."

"Yes, the young rascal! He's given me the slip. I expect he's robbed me too; but I can't tell, for I'm blind."

"Do you want a new boy?"

"Yes; but I can't pay much. I'm very poor. I don't think the place will suit you."

"Nor I either," said Dick, frankly. "I'd rather make a living outside. But I've got a boy with me who has just come to the city, and is out of business. I guess he'll engage with you."

"What's his name? Let him speak for himself."

"My name is Frank Kavanagh," said our hero, in a clear, distinct voice.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Do you know what your duties will be?"

"Yes; Dick has told me."

"I told him you'd want him to go round on a collecting tour with you every day," said Dick.

"That isn't all. You'll have to buy my groceries and all I need."

"I can do that," said Frank, cheerfully, reflecting that this would be much more agreeable than accompanying the old man round the streets.

"Are you honest?" queried the blind man, sharply.

Frank answered, with an indignant flush, "I never stole a cent in my life."

"I supposed you'd say that," retorted the blind man, with a sneer. "They all do; but a good many will steal for all that."

"If you're afraid I will, you needn't hire me," said Frank, independently.

"Of course I needn't," said Mills, sharply; "but I am not afraid. If you take any of my money I shall be sure to find it out, if I am blind."

"Don't mind him, Frank," said Dick, in a low voice.

"What's that?" asked the blind man, suspiciously. "What are you two whispering about?"

"I told Frank not to mind the way you spoke," said Dick.

"Your friend will lend you some, then."

"Not much," answered Dick, laughing. "I'm dead-broke.

Haven't you got any money, Mr. Mills?"

"I have a little," grumbled the blind man; "but this boy may take it, and never come back."

"If you think so," said Frank, proudly, "you'd better engage some other boy."

"No use; you're all alike. Wait a minute, and I'll give you some money."

He drew from his pocket a roll of scrip, and handed one to Frank.

"I don't think that will be enough," said Frank. "It's only five cents."

"Are you sure it isn't a quarter?" grumbled Mills.

"Yes, sir."

"What do you say,—you, Dick?"

"It's only five cents, sir."

"Is that twenty-five?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then take it, and mind you don't loiter."

"Yes, sir."

"And be sure to bring back the change."

"Of course I will," said Frank indignantly, resenting his employer's suspicion.

"What do you think of him, Frank?" asked Dick, as they descended the stairs.

"I don't like him at all, Dick," said Frank, decidedly. "I wish I could get something else to do."

"You can, after a while. As you have no capital you must take what you can get now."

"So I suppose; but I didn't come to the city for this."

"If you don't like it you can leave in a few days."

This Frank fully resolved to do at the first favorable opportunity.

Dick showed him where he could buy the articles he was commissioned to purchase; and Frank, after obtaining them, went back to the tenement-house.

Mills scrupulously demanded the change, and put it back into his pocket. Then he made Frank pour out the ale into a glass. This he drank with apparent zest, but offered none to Frank.

"Ale isn't good for boys," he said. "You can cut the bread, and eat two slices. Don't cut them too thick."

The blind man ate some of the bread himself, and then requested Frank to help him on with his coat and vest.

"I haven't taken any money to-day," he said "I must try to collect some, or I shall starve. It's a sad thing to be blind," he continued, his voice changing to a whine.

"You don't look blind," said Frank, thoughtfully. "Your eyes are open."

"What if they are?" said Mills, testily. "I cannot see. When I go out I close them, because the light hurts them."

Led by Frank, the blind man descended the stairs, and emerged into the street.

CHAPTER IV.
"PITY THE BLIND."

"Where shall I lead you?" asked Frank.

"To Broadway first. Do you know Broadway?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be careful when we cross the street, or you will have me run over."

"All right, sir."

"If any one asks you about me, say I am your uncle."

"But you are not."

"What difference does that make, you little fool?" said the blind man, roughly. "Are you ashamed to own me as your uncle?"

Frank felt obliged, out of politeness, to say "No;" but in his own mind he was not quite sure whether he would be willing to acknowledge any relationship to the disagreeable old man whom he was leading.

They reached Broadway, and entered a store devoted to gentlemen's furnishing goods.

"Charity for a poor blind man!" whined Mills, in the tone of a professional beggar.

"Look here, old fellow, you come in here too often," said a young salesman. "I gave you five cents yesterday."

"I didn't know it," said Mills. "I am a poor blind man. All

places are alike to me."

"Then your boy should know better. Nothing for you to-day."

Frank and his companion left the store.

In the next they were more fortunate. A nickel was bestowed upon the blind mendicant.

"How much is it?" asked Mills, when they were on the sidewalk.

"Five cents, sir."

"That's better than nothing, but we ought to do better. It takes a good many five-cent pieces to make a dollar. When you see a well-dressed lady coming along, tell me."

Frank felt almost as much ashamed as if he were himself begging, but he must do what was expected of him. Accordingly he very soon notified the blind man that a lady was close at hand.

"Lead me up to her, and say, Can you spare something for my poor, blind uncle?"

Frank complied in part, but instead of "poor, blind uncle" he said "poor, blind man." Mills scowled, as he found himself disobeyed.

"How long has he been blind?" asked the lady, sympathetically.

"For many years," whined Mills.

"Is this your boy?"

"Yes, ma'am; he is my young nephew, from the country."

"You are fortunate in having him to go about with you."

"Yes, ma'am; I don't know what I should do without him."

"Here is something for you, my good man," said the lady, and passed on.

"Thank you, ma'am. May Heaven bless you!"

"How much is it?" he asked quickly, when the lady was out of hearing.

"Two cents," answered Frank, suppressing with difficulty an inclination to laugh.

"The mean jade! I should like to wring her neck!" muttered Mills. "I thought it was a quarter, at least."

In the next store they did not meet a cordial reception.

"Clear out, you old humbug!" shouted the proprietor, who was in ill-humor. "You ought to be put in the penitentiary for begging about the streets."

"I pray to God that you may become blind yourself," said Mills, passionately.

"Out of my store, or I'll have you arrested, both of you!" said the angry tradesman. "Here, you boy, don't you bring that old fraud in this store again, if you know what's best for yourself."

There was nothing to do but to comply with this peremptory order.

"He's a beast!" snarled Mills; "I'd like to put his eyes out myself."

"You haven't got a very amiable temper," thought Frank. "I wouldn't like to be blind; but even if I were, I would try to be pleasanter."

Two young girls, passing by, noticed the blind man. They were

soft-hearted, and stopped to inquire how long he had been blind.

"Before you were born, my pretty maid," said Mills, sighing.

"I have an aunt who is blind," said one of the girls; "but she is not poor, like you."

"I am very poor," whined Mills; "I have not money enough to pay my rent, and I may be turned out into the street."

"How sad!" said the young girl, in a tone of deep sympathy. "I have not much money, but I will give you all I have."

"May God bless you, and spare your eyes!" said Mills, as he closed his hand upon the money.

"How much is it?" he asked as before, when they had passed on.

"Twenty-five cents," said Frank.

"That is better," said Mills, in a tone of satisfaction.

For some time afterwards all applications were refused; in some cases, roughly.

"Why don't you work?" asked one man, bluntly.

"What can I do?" asked Mills.

"That's your lookout. Some blind men work. I suppose you would rather get your living by begging."

"I would work my fingers to the bone if I could only see," whined Mills.

"So you say; but I don't believe it. At any rate, that boy of yours can see. Why don't you set him to work?"

"He has to take care of me."

"I would work if I could get anything to do," said Frank.

As he spoke, he felt his hand pressed forcibly by his companion, who did not relish his answer.

"I cannot spare him," he whined. "He has to do everything for me."

When they were again in the street, Mills demanded, roughly, "What did you mean by saying that?"

"What, sir?"

"That you wanted to go to work."

"Because it is true."

"You are at work; you are working for me," said Mills.

"I would rather work in a store, or an office, or sell papers."

"That wouldn't do me any good. Don't speak in that way again."

The two were out about a couple of hours, and very tiresome Frank found it. Then Mills indicated a desire to go home, and they went back to the room in the old tenement-house. Mills threw himself down on the bed in the corner, and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Now, boy, count the money we have collected," he said.

"There's ninety-three cents," Frank announced.

"If I had known it was so near a dollar we would have stayed a little longer. Now, get me my pipe."

"Where is it, sir?"

"In the cupboard. Fill it with tobacco, and light it."

"Are you not afraid of setting the bedding on fire, sir?"

"Mind your own business. If I choose to set it on fire, I will,"

snarled Mills.

"Very well, sir; I thought I'd mention it."

"You have mentioned it, and you needn't do it again."

"What a sweet temper you've got!" thought Frank.

He sat down on a broken chair, and, having nothing else to do, watched his employer. "He looks very much as if he could see," thought Frank; for Mills now had his eyes wide open.

"What are you staring at me for, boy?" demanded his employer, rather unexpectedly.

"What makes you think I am staring at you, sir?" was Frank's natural question. "I thought you couldn't see."

"No more I can, but I can tell when one is staring at me. It makes me creep all over."

"Then I'll look somewhere else."

"Would you like to do some work, as you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then take twenty-five cents, and buy some evening papers and sell them; but mind you bring the money to me."

"Yes, sir," said Frank, with alacrity.

Anything he thought would be better than sitting in that dull room with so disagreeable a companion.

"Mind you don't run off with the money," said the blind man, sharply. "If you do I'll have you put in the Tombs."

"I don't mean to run away with the money," retorted Frank, indignantly.

"And when you've sold the papers, come home."

"Yes, sir."

With a feeling of relief, Frank descended the stairs and directed his steps to the Park, meaning to ask Dick Rafferty's advice about the proper way to start in business as a newsboy.

CHAPTER V.
FRANK THROWS UP HIS SITUATION

Frank found his friend on Park Row, and made known his errand.

"So old Mills wants you to sell papers for his benefit, does he?"

"Yes, but I'd rather do it than to stay with him."

"How much has he agreed to pay you?"

"That isn't settled yet."

"You'd better bring him to the point, or he won't pay you anything except board and lodging, and mighty mean both of them will be."

"I won't say anything about it the first day," said Frank. "What papers shall I buy?"

"It's rather late. You'd better try for Telegrams."

Frank did so, and succeeded in selling half a dozen, yielding a profit of six cents. It was not a brilliant beginning, but he was late in the field, and most had purchased their evening papers. His papers sold, Frank went home and announced the result.

"Umph!" muttered the blind man. "Give me the money."

"Here it is, sir."

"Have you given me all?" sharply demanded Mills.

"Of course I have," said Frank, indignantly.

"Don't you be impudent, or I will give you a flogging," said the blind man, roughly.

"I am not used to be talked to in that way," said Frank, independently.

"You've always had your own way, I suppose," snarled Mills.

"No, I haven't; but I have been treated kindly."

"You are only a boy, and I won't allow you to talk back to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"Then take care to remember."

"You've got a sweet disposition," thought Frank. "I won't stay with you any longer than I am obliged to."

Several days passed without bringing any incidents worth recording. Frank took a daily walk with the blind man, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. These walks were very distasteful to him. The companion of a beggar, he felt as if he himself were begging. He liked better the time he spent in selling papers, though he reaped no benefit himself. In fact, his wages were poor enough. Thus far his fare had consisted of dry bread with an occasional bun. He was a healthy, vigorous boy, and he felt the need of meat, or some other hearty food, and ventured to intimate as much to his employer.

"So you want meat, do you?" snarled Mills.

"Yes, sir; I haven't tasted any for a week."

"Perhaps you'd like to take your meals at Delmonico's?" sneered the blind man.

Frank was so new to the city that this well-known name did not convey any special idea to him, and he answered "Yes."

"That's what I thought!" exclaimed Mills, angrily. "You want to eat me out of house and home."

"No, I don't; I only want enough food to keep up my strength."

"Well, you are getting it. I give you all I can afford."

Frank was inclined to doubt this. He estimated that what he ate did not cost his employer over six or eight cents a day, and he generally earned for him twenty to thirty cents on the sale of papers, besides helping him to collect about a dollar daily from those who pitied his blindness.

He mentioned his grievance to his friend, Dick Rafferty.

"I'll tell you what to do," said Dick.

"I wish you would."

"Keep some of the money you make by selling papers, and buy a square meal at an eatin' house."

"I don't like to do that; it wouldn't be honest."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"I am carrying on the business for Mr. Mills. He supplies the capital."

"Then you'd better carry it on for yourself."

"I wish I could."

"Why don't you?"

"I haven't any money."

"Has he paid you any wages?"

"No."

"Then make him."

Frank thought this a good suggestion. He had been with Mills a week, and it seemed fair enough that he should receive some pay besides a wretched bed and a little dry bread. Accordingly, returning to the room, he broached the subject.

"What do you want wages for?" demanded Mills, displeased.

"I think I earn them," said Frank, boldly.

"You get board and lodging. You are better off than a good many boys."

"I shall want some clothes, some time," said Frank.

"Perhaps you'd like to have me pay you a dollar a day," said Mills.

"I know you can't afford to pay me that. I will be satisfied if you will pay me ten cents a day," replied Frank.

Frank reflected that, though this was a very small sum, in ten days it would give him a dollar, and then he would feel justified in setting up a business on his own account, as a newsboy. He anxiously awaited an answer.

"I will think of it," said the blind man evasively, and Frank did not venture to say more.

The next day, when Mills, led by Frank, was on his round, the two entered a cigar-store. Frank was much surprised when the cigar-vender handed him a fifty-cent currency note. He thought there was some mistake.

"Thank you, sir," he said; "but did you mean to give me fifty cents?"

"Yes," said the cigar-vender, laughing; "but I wouldn't have done it, if it had been good."

"Isn't it good?"

"No, it's a counterfeit, and a pretty bad one. I might pass it, but it would cost me too much time and trouble."

Frank was confounded. He mechanically handed the money to Mills, but did not again thank the giver. When they returned to the tenement-house, Mills requested Frank to go to the baker's for a loaf of bread.

"Yes, sir."

"Here is the money."

"But that is the counterfeit note," said Frank, scrutinizing the bill given him.

"What if it is?" demanded Mills, sharply.

"It won't pass."

"Yes, it will, if you are sharp."

"Do you want me to pass counterfeit money, Mr. Mills?"

"Yes, I do; I took it, and I mean to get rid of it."

"But you didn't give anything for it."

"That's neither here nor there. Take it, and offer it to the baker. If he won't take it, go to another baker with it."

"I would rather not do it," said Frank, firmly.

"Rather not!" exclaimed Mills, angrily. "Do you pretend to dictate to me?"

"No, I don't, but I don't mean to pass any counterfeit money for you or any other man," said Frank, with spirit.

Mills half rose, with a threatening gesture, but thought better of it.

"You're a fool," said he. "I suppose you are afraid of being arrested; but you have only to say that I gave it to you, and that I am blind, and couldn't tell it from good money."

"But you know that it is bad money, Mr. Mills."

"What if I do? No one can prove it. Take the money, and come back as quick as you can."

"You must excuse me," said Frank, quietly, but firmly.

"Do you refuse to do as I bid you?" demanded Mills, furiously.

"I refuse to pass counterfeit money."

"Then, by Heaven, I'll flog you!"

Mills rose and advanced directly towards Frank, with his eyes wide open. Fortunately our hero was near the door, and, quickly opening it, darted from the room, pursued by Mills, his face flaming with wrath. It flashed upon Frank that no blind man could have done this. He decided that the man was a humbug, and could see a little, at all events. His blindness was no doubt assumed to enable him to appeal more effectively to the sympathizing public. This revelation disgusted Frank. He could not respect a man who lived by fraud. Counterfeit or no counterfeit, he decided to withdraw at once and forever from the service of Mr. Mills.

His employer gave up the pursuit before he reached the street. Frank found himself on the sidewalk, free and emancipated, no richer than when he entered the service of the blind man, except

in experience.

"I haven't got a cent," he said to himself, "but I'll get along somehow."

CHAPTER VI.
FRANK GETS A JOB

Though Frank was penniless he was not cast down. He was tolerably familiar with the lower part of the city, and had greater reliance on himself than he had a week ago. If he had only had capital to the extent of fifty cents he would have felt quite at ease, for this would have set him up as a newsboy.

"I wonder if I could borrow fifty cents of Dick Rafferty," considered Frank. "I'll try, at any rate."

He ran across Dick in City-Hall Park. That young gentleman was engaged in pitching pennies with a brother professional.

"I say, Dick, I want to speak to you a minute," said Frank.

"All right! Go ahead!"

"I've lost my place."

Dick whistled.

"Got sacked, have you?" he asked.

"Yes; but I might have stayed."

"Why didn't you?"

"Mills wanted me to pass a counterfeit note, and I wouldn't."

"Was it a bad-looking one?"

"Yes."

"Then you're right. You might have got nabbed."

"That wasn't the reason I refused. If I had been sure there'd

have been no trouble I wouldn't have done it."

"Why not?" asked Dick, who did not understand our hero's scruples.

"Because it's wrong."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess you belong to the church," he said.

"No, I don't; what makes you think so?"

"Oh, 'cause you're so mighty particular. I wouldn't mind passing it if I was sure I wouldn't be cotched."

"I think it's almost as bad as stealing to buy bread, or anything else, and give what isn't worth anything for it. You might as well give a piece of newspaper."

Though Frank was unquestionably right he did not succeed in making a convert of Dick Rafferty. Dick was a pretty good boy, considering the sort of training he had had; but passing bad money did not seem to him objectionable, unless "a fellow was cotched," as he expressed it.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" asked Dick, after a pause.

"I guess I can get a living by selling papers."

"You can get as good a livin' as old Mills gave you. You'll get a better bed at the lodgin'-house than that heap of rags you laid on up there."

"But there's one trouble," continued Frank, "I haven't any money to start on. Can you lend me fifty cents?"

"Fifty cents!" repeated Dick. "What do you take me for? If I

was connected with Vanderbuilt or Astor I might set you up in business, but now I can't."

"Twenty-five cents will do," said Frank.

"Look here, Frank," said Dick, plunging his hands into his pocket, and drawing therefrom three pennies and a nickel, "do you see them?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's all the money I've got."

"I am afraid you have been extravagant, Dick," said Frank, in disappointment.

"Last night I went to Tony Pastor's, and when I got through I went into a saloon and got an ice-cream and a cigar. You couldn't expect a feller to be very rich after that. I say, I'll lend you five cents if you want it."

"No, thank you, Dick. I'll wait till you are richer."

"I tell you what, Frank, I'll save up my money, and by day after to-morrow I guess I can set you up."

"Thank you, Dick. If I don't have the money by that time myself I'll accept your offer."

There was no other boy with whom Frank felt sufficiently well acquainted to request a loan, and he walked away, feeling rather disappointed. It was certainly provoking to think that nothing but the lack of a small sum stood between him and remunerative employment. Once started he determined not to spend quite all his earnings, but to improve upon his friend Dick's practice, and, if possible, get a little ahead.

When guiding the blind man he often walked up Broadway, and mechanically he took the same direction, walking slowly along, occasionally stopping to look in at a shop-window.

As he was sauntering along he found himself behind two gentlemen,—one an old man, who wore gold spectacles; the other, a stout, pleasant-looking man, of middle age. Frank would not have noticed them particularly but for a sudden start and exclamation from the elder of the two gentlemen.

"I declare, Thompson," he said, "I've left my umbrella down-town."

"Where do you think you left it?"

"In Peckham's office; that is, I think I left it there."

"Oh, well, he'll save it for you."

"I don't know about that. Some visitor may carry it away."

"Never mind, Mr. Bowen. You are rich enough to afford a new one."

"It isn't the value of the article, Thompson," said his friend, in some emotion. "That umbrella was brought me from Paris by my son John, who died. It is as a souvenir of him that I regard and value it. I would not lose it for a hundred dollars, nay, five hundred."

"If you value it so much, sir, suppose we turn round and go back for it."

Frank had listened to this conversation, and an idea struck him. Pressing forward, he said respectfully, "Let me go for it, sir. I will get it, and bring it to your house."

The two gentlemen fixed their eyes upon the bright, eager face of the petitioner.

"Who are you, my boy?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"I am a poor boy, in want of work," answered our hero promptly.

"What is your name?"

"Frank Kavanagh."

"Where do you live?"

"I am trying to live in the city, sir."

"What have you been doing?"

"Leading a blind man, sir."

"Not a very pleasant employment, I should judge," said Thompson, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, have you lost that job?"

"Yes, sir."

"So the blind man turned you off, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your services were unsatisfactory, I suppose?"

"He wanted me to pass counterfeit money for him, and I refused."

"If that is true, it is to your credit."

"It is true, sir," said Frank, quietly.

"Come, Mr. Bowen, what do you say,—shall we accept this boy's services? It will save you time and trouble."

"If I were sure he could be trusted," said Bowen, hesitating. "He might pawn the umbrella. It is a valuable one."

"I hope, sir, you won't think so badly of me as that," said Frank, with feeling. "If I were willing to steal anything, it would not be a gift from your dead son."

"I'll trust you, my boy," said the old gentleman quickly. "Your tone convinces me that you may be relied upon."

"Thank you, sir."

The old gentleman drew a card from his pocket, containing his name and address, and on the reverse side wrote the name of the friend at whose office he felt sure the umbrella had been left, with a brief note directing that it be handed to the bearer.

"All right, sir."

"Stop a moment, my boy. Have you got money to ride?"

"No, sir."

"Here, take this, and go down at once in the next stage. The sooner you get there the better."

Frank followed directions. He stopped the next stage, and got on board. As he passed the City-Hall Park, Dick Rafferty espied him. Frank nodded to him.

"How did he get money enough to ride in a 'bus?" Dick asked himself in much wonderment. "A few minutes ago he wanted to borrow some money of me, and now he's spending ten cents for a ride. Maybe he's found a pocket-book."

Frank kept on his way, and got out at Wall street. He found Mr. Peckham's office, and on presenting the card, much to his delight, the umbrella was handed him.

"Mr. Bowen was afraid to trust me with it over night," said

Mr. Peckham, with a smile.

"He thought some visitor might carry it off," said Frank.

"Not unlikely. Umbrellas are considered common property."

Frank hailed another stage, and started on his way up-town. There was no elevated railway then, and this was the readiest conveyance, as Mr. Bowen lived on Madison avenue.

CHAPTER VII.
AN INVITATION TO DINNER

"Mr. Bowen must be a rich man," thought Frank, as he paused on the steps of a fine brown-stone mansion, corresponding to the number on his card.

He rang the bell, and asked, "Is Mr. Bowen at home?"

"Yes, but he is in his chamber. I don't think he will see you."

"I think he will," said Frank, who thought the servant was taking too much upon herself, "as I come by his appointment."

"I suppose you can come into the hall," said the servant, reluctantly. "Is your business important?"

"You may tell him that the boy he sent for his umbrella has brought it. He was afraid he had lost it."

"He sets great store by that umbrella," said the girl, in a different tone. "I'll go and tell him."

Mr. Bowen came downstairs almost immediately. There was a look of extreme gratification upon his face.

"Bless my soul, how quick you were!" he exclaimed. "Why, I've only been home a few minutes. Did you find the umbrella at Mr. Peckham's office?"

"Yes, sir; it had been found, and taken care of."

"Did Peckham say anything?"

"He said you were probably afraid to trust it with him over

night, but he smiled when he said it."

"Peckham will have his joke, but he is an excellent man. My boy, I am much indebted to you."

"I was very glad to do the errand, sir," said Frank.

"I think you said you were poor," said the old man, thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir. When I met you I hadn't a cent in the world."

"Haven't you any way to make a living?"

"Yes, sir. I could sell papers if I had enough money to set me up in business."

"Does it require a large capital?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Frank, smiling, "unless you consider fifty cents a large sum."

"Fifty cents!" repeated the old gentleman, in surprise. "You don't mean to say that this small sum would set you up in business?"

"Yes, sir; I could buy a small stock of papers, and buy more with what I received for them."

"To be sure. I didn't think of that."

Mr. Bowen was not a man of business. He had an ample income, and his tastes were literary and artistic. He knew more of books than of men, and more of his study than of the world.

"Well, my boy," he said after a pause, "how much do I owe you for doing this errand?"

"I leave that to you, sir. Whatever you think right will satisfy me."

"Let me see, you want fifty cents to buy papers, and you will require something to pay for your bed."

"Fifty cents in all will be enough, sir."

"I think I had better give you a dollar," said the old gentleman, opening his pocket-book.

Frank's eyes sparkled. A dollar would do him a great deal of good; with a dollar he would feel quite independent.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "It is more than I earned, but it will be very acceptable."

He put on his hat, and was about to leave the house, when Mr. Bowen suddenly said, "Oh, I think you'd better stay to dinner. It will be on the table directly. My niece is away, and if you don't stay I shall be alone."

Frank did not know what to say. He was rather abashed by the invitation, but, as the old gentleman was to be alone, it did not seem so formidable.

"I am afraid I don't look fit," he said.

"You can go upstairs and wash your face and hands. You'll find a clothes-brush there also. I'll ring for Susan to show you the way."

He rang the bell, and the girl who had admitted Frank made her appearance.

"Susan," said her master, "you may show this young gentlemen into the back chamber on the third floor, and see that he is supplied with towels and all he needs. And you may lay an extra plate; he will dine with me."

Susan stared first at Mr. Bowen, and then at Frank, but did not venture to make any remark.

"This way, young man," she said, and ascended the front stairs, Frank following her closely.

She led the way into a handsomely furnished chamber, ejaculating, "Well, I never!"

"I hope you'll find things to your satisfaction, sir," she said, dryly. "If we'd known you were coming, we'd have made particular preparations for you."

"Oh, I think this will do," said Frank, smiling for he thought it a good joke.

"I am glad you think it'll do," continued Susan. "Things mayn't be as nice as you're accustomed to at home."

"Not quite," said Frank, good-humoredly; "but I shan't complain."

"That's very kind and considerate of you, I'm sure," said Susan, tossing her head. "Well, I never did!"

"Nor I either, Susan," said Frank, laughing. "I am a poor boy, and I am not used to this way of living; so if you'll be kind enough to give me any hints, so I may behave properly at the table, I'll be very much obliged to you."

This frank acknowledgment quite appeased Susan, and she readily complied with our hero's request.

"But I must be going downstairs, or dinner will be late," she said, hurriedly. "You can come down when you hear the bell ring."

Frank had been well brought up, though not in the city, and he was aware that perfect neatness was one of the first characteristics of a gentleman. He therefore scrubbed his face and hands till they fairly shone, and brushed his clothes with great care. Even then they certainly did look rather shabby, and there was a small hole in the elbow of his coat; but, on the whole, he looked quite passable when he entered the dining-room.

"Take that seat, my boy," said his host.

Frank sat down and tried to look as if he was used to it.

"Take this soup to Mr. Kavanagh," said Mr. Bowen, in a dignified tone.

Frank started and smiled slightly, feeling more and more that it was an excellent joke.

"I wonder what Dick Rafferty would say if he could see me now," passed through his mind.

He acquitted himself very creditably, however, and certainly displayed an excellent appetite, much to the satisfaction of his hospitable host.

After dinner was over, Mr. Bowen detained him and began to talk of his dead son, telling anecdotes of his boyhood, to which Frank listened with respectful attention, for the father's devotion was touching.

"I think my boy looked a little like you," said the old gentleman. "What do you think, Susan?"

"Not a mite, sir," answered Susan, promptly.

"When he was a boy, I mean."

"I didn't know him when he was a boy, Mr. Bowen."

"No, to be sure not."

"But Mr. John was dark-complected, and this boy is light, and Mr. John's hair was black, and his is brown."

"I suppose I am mistaken," sighed the old man; "but there was something in the boy's face that reminded me of John."

"A little more, and he'll want to adopt him," thought Susan. "That wouldn't do nohow, though he does really seem like a decent sort of a boy."

At eight o'clock Frank rose, and wished Mr. Bowen good-night.

"Come and see me again, my boy," said the old gentleman, kindly. "You have been a good deal of company for me to-night."

"I am glad of it, sir."

"I think you might find something better to do than selling papers."

"I wish I could, sir."

"Come and dine with me again this day week, and I may have something to tell you."

"Thank you, sir."

Feeling in his pocket to see that his dollar was safe, Frank set out to walk down-town, repairing to the lodging-house, where he met Dick, and astonished that young man by the recital of his adventures.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.