ALGER HORATIO JR.

CHESTER RAND; OR, THE NEW PATH TO FORTUNE

Horatio Alger

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Chester Rand; or, The New Path to Fortune:

Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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CHAPTER I.
SILAS TRIPP

Probably the best known citizen of Wyncombe, a small town nestling among the Pennsylvania mountains, was Silas Tripp. He kept the village store, occasionally entertained travelers, having three spare rooms, was town treasurer, and conspicuous in other local offices.

The store was in the center of the village, nearly opposite the principal church—there were two—and here it was that the townspeople gathered to hear and discuss the news.

Silas Tripp had one assistant, a stout, pleasant-looking boy of fifteen, who looked attractive, despite his well-worn suit. Chester Rand was the son of a widow, who lived in a tiny cottage about fifty rods west of the Presbyterian church, of which, by the way, Silas Tripp was senior deacon, for he was a leader in religious as well as secular affairs.

Chester's father had died of pneumonia about four years

before the story commences, leaving his widow the cottage and about two hundred and fifty dollars. This sum little by little had melted, and a month previous the last dollar had been spent for the winter's supply of coal.

Mrs. Rand had earned a small income by plain sewing and binding shoes for a shoe shop in the village, but to her dismay the announcement had just been made that the shop would close through the winter on account of the increased price of leather and overproduction during the year.

"What shall we do, Chester?" she asked, in alarm, when the news came. "We can't live on your salary, and I get very little sewing to do."

"No, mother," said Chester, his own face reflecting her anxiety; "we can't live on three dollars a week."

"I have been earning two dollars by binding shoes," said Mrs. Rand. "It has been hard enough to live on five dollars a week, but I don't know how we can manage on three."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, mother. I'll ask Mr. Tripp to raise my pay to four dollars a week."

"But will he do it? He is a very close man, and always pleading poverty."

"But I happen to know that he has ten thousand dollars invested in Pennsylvania Railroad stock. I overheard him saying so to Mr. Gardner."

"Ten thousand dollars! It seems a fortune!" sighed Mrs. Rand. "Why do some people have so much and others so little?"

"It beats me, mother. But I don't think either of us would exchange places with Silas Tripp with all his money. By the way, mother, Mr. Tripp is a widower. Why don't you set your cap for him?"

Mrs. Rand smiled, as her imagination conjured up the weazened and wrinkled face of the village storekeeper, with his gray hair standing up straight on his head like a natural pompadour.

"If you want Mr. Tripp for a stepfather," she said, "I will see what I can do to ingratiate myself with him."

"No, a thousand times no!" replied Chester, with a shudder. "I'd rather live on one meal a day than have you marry him."

"I agree with you, Chester. We will live for each other, and hope for something to turn up."

"I hope the first thing to turn up will be an increase of salary. To-morrow is New Year's Day, and it will be a good time to ask."

Accordingly, that evening, just as the store was about to close, Chester gathered up courage and said: "Mr. Tripp."

"Well, that's my name," said Silas, looking over his iron-bowed spectacles.

"To-morrow is New Year's Day."

"What if 'tis? I reckon I knew that without your tellin' me."

"I came here last New Year's Day. I've been here a year."

"What if you have?"

"And I thought perhaps you might be willing to raise my salary to four dollars a week," continued Chester, hurriedly.

"Oho, that's what you're after, is it?" said Silas, grimly. "You think I'm made of money, I reckon. Now, don't you?"

"No, I don't; but, Mr. Tripp, mother and I find it very hard to get along, really we do. She won't have any more shoes to bind for three months to come, on account of the shoe shop's closing."

"It's going to hurt me, too," said Silas, with a frown. "When one business suspends it affects all the rest. I'll have mighty hard work to make both ends meet."

This struck Chester as ludicrous, but he did not feel inclined to laugh. Here was Silas Tripp gathering in trade from the entire village and getting not a little in addition from outlying towns, complaining that he would find it hard to make both ends meet, though everyone said that he did not spend one-third of his income. On the whole, things did not look very encouraging.

"Perhaps," he said, nervously, "you would raise me to three dollars and a half?"

"What is the boy thinkin' of? You must think I'm made of money. Why, three dollars is han'some pay for what little you do."

"Why, I work fourteen hours a day," retorted Chester.

"I'm afraid you're gettin' lazy. Boys shouldn't complain of their work. The fact is, Chester, I feel as if I was payin' you too much."

"Too much! Three dollars a week too much!"

"Too much, considerin' the state of business, and yourself bein' a boy. I've been meanin' to tell you that I've got a chance

to get a cheaper boy."

"Who is it?" asked Chester, in dismay.

"It's Abel Wood. Abel Wood is every mite as big and strong as you are, and he come round last evenin' and said he'd work for two dollars and a quarter a week."

"I couldn't work for that," said Chester.

"I don't mind bein' generous, considerin' you've been working for me more than a year. I'll give you two dollars and a half. That's twenty-five cents more'n the Wood boy is willin' to take."

"Abel Wood doesn't know anything about store work."

"I'll soon learn him. Sitooated as I am, I feel that I must look after every penny," and Mr. Tripp's face looked meaner and more weazened than ever as he fixed his small, bead-like eyes on his boy clerk.

"Then I guess I'll have to leave you, Mr. Tripp," said Chester, with a deep feeling of disgust and dismay.

"Do just as you like," said his employer. "You're onreasonable to expect to get high pay when business is dull."

"High pay!" repeated Chester, bitterly. "Three dollars a week!"

"It's what I call high pay. When I was a boy, I only earned two dollars a week."

"Money would go further when you were a boy."

"Yes, it did. Boys wasn't so extravagant in them days."

"I don't believe you were ever extravagant, Mr. Tripp," said Chester, with a tinge of sarcasm which his employer didn't

detect.

"No, I wasn't. I don't want to brag, but I never spent a cent foolishly. Do you know how much money I spent the first three months I was at work?"

"A dollar?" guessed Chester.

"A dollar!" repeated Mr. Tripp, in a tone of disapproval. "No, I only spent thirty-seven cents."

"Then I don't wonder you got rich," said Chester, with a curl of the lip.

"I ain't rich," said Silas Tripp, cautiously. "Who told you I was?"

"Everybody says so."

"Then everybody is wrong. I'm a leetle 'forehanded, that's all."

"I've heard people say you could afford to give up work and live on the interest of your money."

Silas Tripp held up his hands as if astounded.

"'Tain't so," he said, sharply. "If I gave up business, I'd soon be in the poorhouse. Well, what do you say? Will you stay along and work for two dollars and a half a week?"

"I couldn't do it," said Chester, troubled.

"All right! It's jest as you say. Your week ends to-morrow night. If you see Abel Wood, you can tell him I want to see him."

"I will," answered Chester, bitterly.

As he walked home he felt very despondent. Wouldn't it have been better, he asked himself, to accept reduced wages than to give up his job? It would have been hard enough to attempt living

on two dollars and a half a week, but that was better than no income at all. And yet, it looked so mean in Silas Tripp to present such an alternative, when he was abundantly able to give him the increase he asked for.

"I must tell mother and see what she thinks about it," he said to himself.

CHAPTER II.
OUT OF WORK

Chester had a talk with his mother that evening. She felt indignant at Silas Tripp's meanness, but advised Chester to remain in the store for the present.

"I'd rather work anywhere else for two dollars," said Chester, bitterly.

It would be humiliating enough to accept the reduction, but he felt that duty to his mother required the sacrifice. He started on his way to the store in the morning, prepared to notify Mr. Tripp that he would remain, but he found that it was too late. Just before he reached the store, he met Abel Wood, a loose-jointed, towheaded boy, with a stout body and extraordinarily long legs, who greeted him with a grin.

"I'm goin' to work in your place Monday mornin'," he said.

"Has Mr. Tripp spoken to you?" asked Chester, his heart sinking.

"Yes, he said you was goin' to leave. What's up?"

"Mr. Tripp cut down my wages," said Chester. "I couldn't work for two dollars and a half."

"He's only goin' to give me two and a quarter."

"You can afford to work for that. Your father's got steady work."

"Yes, but all the same I'll ask for more in a few weeks. Where are you goin' to work?"

"I don't know yet," answered Chester, sadly.

"It's awful hard to get a place in Wyncombe."

"I suppose it is. I hope something will turn up."

He tried to speak hopefully, but there was very little hope in his heart.

He went about his work in a mechanical way, but neglected nothing. When the time came for the store to close, Silas Tripp took three dollars from the drawer and handed it to him, saying: "There's your wages, Chester. I expect it's the last I'll pay you."

"Yes, sir, I suppose so."

"I don't know how I'll like the Wood boy. He hain't no experience."

"He'll get it, sir."

"If you want to stay for two and a quarter—the same I'm going to give him—I'll tell him I've changed my mind."

"No, sir; it wouldn't be right to put him off now. I guess I'll get something else to do."

He turned and left the store, walking with a slower step than usual. His heart was heavy, for he felt that, poorly as they lived hitherto, they must live more poorly still in the days to come. He reached home at last, and put the three dollars in his mother's hands.

"I don't know when I shall have any more money to give you, mother," he said.

"It looks dark, Chester, but the Lord reigns. He will still be our friend."

There was something in these simple words that cheered Chester, and a weight seemed lifted from his heart. He felt that they were not quite friendless, and that there was still One, kinder and more powerful than any earthly friend, to whom they could look for help.

When Monday morning came he rose at the usual hour and breakfasted.

"I'll go out and take a walk, mother," he said. "Perhaps I may find some work somewhere."

Almost unconsciously, he took the familiar way to the store, and paused at a little distance from it. He saw Abel come out with some packages to carry to a customer. It pained him to see another boy in his place, and he turned away with a sigh.

During the night four or five inches of snow had fallen. This gave him an idea. As he came to the house of the Misses Cleveland, two maiden sisters who lived in a small cottage set back fifty feet from the road, he opened the gate and went up to the front door.

Miss Jane Cleveland opened it for him.

"Good-morning, Chester," she said.

"Good-morning, Miss Cleveland. I thought you might want to get a path shoveled to the gate."

"So I would; Hannah tried to do it last time it snowed, but she caught an awful cold. But ain't you working up at the store?"

"Not now. Mr. Tripp cut down my wages, and I left."

"Do tell. Have you got another place?"

"Not just yet. I thought I'd do any little jobs that came along till I got one."

"That's right. What'll you charge to shovel a path?"

Chester hesitated.

"Fifteen cents," he answered, at last.

"I'll give you ten. Money's skerce."

Chester reflected that he could probably do the job in half an hour, and he accepted. It cheered him to think he was earning something, however small.

He worked with a will, and in twenty-five minutes the work was done.

"You're spry," said Jane Cleveland, when he brought the shovel to the door. "It took Hannah twice as long, and she didn't do it as well."

"It isn't the kind of work for ladies," replied Chester.

"Wait till I fetch the money."

Miss Cleveland went into the house, and returned with a nickel and four pennies.

"I'm reely ashamed," she said. "I'll have to owe you a cent. But here's a mince pie I've just baked. Take it home to your ma. Maybe it'll come handy. I'll try to think of the other cent next time you come along."

"Don't trouble yourself about it, Miss Cleveland. The pie is worth a good deal more than the cent. Mother'll be very much

obliged to you."

"She's very welcome, I'm sure," said the kindly spinster. "I hope you'll get work soon, Chester."

"Thank you."

Chester made his way homeward, as he did not care to carry the pie about with him. His mother looked at him in surprise as he entered the house.

"What have you there, Chester?" she asked.

"A pie from Miss Cleveland."

"But how came she to give you a pie?"

"I shoveled a path for her, and she gave me a pie and ten cents—no, nine. So you see, mother, I've earned something this week."

"I take it as a good omen. A willing hand will generally find work to do."

"How are you off for wood, mother?"

"There is some left, Chester."

"I'll go out in the yard and work at the wood pile till dinner time. Then this afternoon I will go out again and see if I can find some more paths to shovel."

But Chester was not destined to earn any more money that day. As a general thing, the village people shoveled their own paths, and would regard hiring such work done as sinful extravagance. Chester did, however, find some work to do. About half-past three he met Abel Wood tugging a large basket, filled with groceries, to the minister's house. He had set it down, and

was resting his tired arms when Chester came along.

"Give me a lift with this basket, Chester, that's a good fellow," said Abel.

Chester lifted it.

"Yes, it is heavy," he said.

"The minister's got some company," went on Abel, "and he's given an extra large order."

"How do you like working in the store, Abel?"

"It's hard work, harder than I thought."

"But remember what a magnificent salary you will get," said Chester, with a smile.

"It ain't half enough. Say, Chester, old Tripp is rich, ain't he?"

"I should call myself rich if I had his money."

"He's a miserly old hunks, then, to give me such small pay."

"Don't let him hear you say so."

"I'll take care of that. Come, you'll help me, won't you?"

"Yes," answered Chester, good-naturedly; "I might as well, as I have nothing else to do."

Between the two the basket was easily carried. In a short time they had reached the minister's house. They took the basket around to the side door, just as Mr. Morris, the minister, came out, accompanied by a young man, who was evidently a stranger in the village, as Chester did not remember having seen him before.

"Chester," said the minister, kindly, "how does it happen that you have an assistant to-day?"

"I am the assistant, Mr. Morris. Abel is Mr. Tripp's new boy."

"Indeed, I am surprised to hear that. When did you leave the store?"

"Last Saturday night."

"Have you another place?"

"Not yet."

"Are you at leisure this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then perhaps you will walk around with my friend, Mr. Conrad, and show him the village. I was going with him, but I have some writing to do, and you will do just as well."

"I shall be very happy to go with Mr. Conrad," said Chester, politely.

"And I shall be very glad to have you," said the young man, with a pleasant smile.

"Come back to supper, Chester," said the minister; "that is, if your mother can spare you."

"Thank you, sir. I suppose you will be able to carry back the empty basket, Abel," added Chester, as his successor emerged from the side door, relieved of his burden.

"I guess so," answered Abel, with a grin.

"I was never in Wyncombe before," began Mr. Conrad, "though I am a second cousin of your minister, Mr. Morris. I have to go away to-morrow morning, and wish to see a little of the town while I am here."

"Where do you live, Mr. Conrad?"

"In the city of New York."

"Are you a minister, too?"

"Oh, no!" laughed the young man. "I am in a very different business. I am an artist—in a small way. I make sketches for books and magazines."

"And does that pay?"

"Fairly well. I earn a comfortable living."

"I didn't know one could get money for making pictures. I like to draw, myself."

"I will see what you can do this evening; that is, if you accept my cousin's invitation."

Before the walk was over Chester had become much interested in his new friend. He listened eagerly to his stories of the great city, and felt that life must be much better worth living there than in Wyncombe.

CHAPTER III.
A NOTEWORTHY EVENING

Chester enjoyed his supper. Mr. Morris, though a minister, had none of the starched dignity that many of his profession think it necessary to assume. He was kindly and genial, with a pleasant humor that made him agreeable company for the young as well as the old. Mr. Conrad spoke much of New York and his experiences there, and Chester listened to him eagerly.

"You have never been to New York, Chester?" said the young artist.

"No, sir, but I have read about it—and dreamed about it. Sometime I hope to go there."

"I think that is the dream of every country boy. Well, it is the country boys that make the most successful men."

"How do you account for that, Herbert?" asked the minister.

"Generally they have been brought up to work, and work more earnestly than the city boys."

When the supper table was cleared, Mr. Conrad took from his valise two or three of the latest issues of *Puck*, *Judge* and *Life*. He handed them to Chester, who looked over them eagerly.

"Do you ever contribute to these papers, Mr. Conrad?" he asked.

"Yes; here is a sketch in *Judge*, and another in *Life*, which I

furnished."

"And do you get good pay for them?"

"I received ten dollars for each."

Chester's eyes opened with surprise.

"Why," he said, "they are small. It couldn't have taken you long to draw them."

"Probably half an hour for each one."

"And you received ten dollars each?"

"Yes, but don't gauge such work by the time it takes. It is the idea that is of value. The execution is a minor matter."

Chester looked thoughtful.

"I should like to be an artist," he said, after a pause.

"Won't you give me a specimen of your work? You have seen mine."

"I have not done any comic work, but I think I could."

"Here is a piece of drawing paper. Now, let me see what you can do."

Chester leaned his head on his hand and began to think. He was in search of an idea. The young artist watched him with interest. At last his face brightened up. He seized the pencil, and began to draw rapidly. In twenty minutes he handed the paper to Mr. Conrad.

The latter looked at it in amazement.

"Why, you are an artist," he said. "I had no idea you were capable of such work."

"I am glad you like it," said Chester, much pleased.

"How long have you been drawing?"

"Ever since I can remember. I used to make pictures in school on my slate. Some of them got me into trouble with the teacher."

"I can imagine it, if you caricatured him. Did you ever take lessons?"

"No; there was no one in Wyncombe to teach me. But I got hold of a drawing book once, and that helped me."

"Do you know what I am going to do with this sketch of yours?"

Chester looked an inquiry.

"I will take it to New York with me, and see if I can dispose of it."

"I am afraid it won't be of much use, Mr. Conrad. I am only a boy."

"If a sketch is good, it doesn't matter how old or young an artist is."

"I should like very much to get something for it. Even fifty cents would be acceptable."

"You hold your talent cheap, Chester," said Mr. Conrad, with a smile. "I shall certainly ask more than that for it, as I don't approve of cheapening artistic labor."

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly.

When Chester rose to go, Mr. Conrad said:

"Take these papers, Chester. You can study them at your leisure, and if any happy thoughts or brilliant ideas come to you, dash them off and send them to me. I might do something with

them."

"Thank you, sir. What is your address?"

"Number one ninety-nine West Thirty-fourth Street. Well, good-by. I am glad to have met you. Sometime you may be an artist."

Chester flushed with pride, and a new hope rose in his breast. He had always enjoyed drawing, but no one had ever encouraged him in it. Even his mother thought of it only as a pleasant diversion for him. As to its bringing him in money, the idea had never occurred to him.

It seemed wonderful, indeed, that a little sketch, the work of half an hour, should bring ten dollars. Why compare with this the hours of toil in a grocery store—seventy, at least—which had been necessary to earn the small sum of three dollars. For the first time Chester began to understand the difference between manual and intelligent labor.

It was ten o'clock when Chester left the minister's house—a late hour in Wyncombe—and he had nearly reached his own modest home before he met anyone. Then he overtook a man of perhaps thirty, thinly clad and shivering in the bitter, wintry wind. He was a stranger, evidently, for Chester knew everyone in the village, and he was tempted to look back. The young man, encouraged perhaps by this evidence of interest, spoke, hurriedly:

"Do you know," he asked, "where I can get a bed for the night?"

"Mr. Tripp has a few rooms that he lets to strangers. He is the storekeeper."

The young man laughed, but there was no merriment in the laugh.

"Oh, yes. I know Silas Tripp," he said.

"Then you have been in Wyncombe before?"

"I never lived here, but I know Silas Tripp better than I want to. He is my uncle."

"Your uncle!" exclaimed Chester, in surprise.

"Yes, I am his sister's son. My name is Walter Bruce."

"Then I should think your uncle's house was the place for you."

"I have no money to pay for a bed."

"But, if you are a relation–"

"That makes no difference to Silas Tripp. He has no love for poor relations. You don't know him very well."

"I ought to, for I have worked for him in the store for a year."

"I didn't see you in there this evening."

"I left him last Saturday evening. There is another boy there now."

"Why did you leave him?"

"Because he wanted to cut down my wages from three dollars to two dollars and a quarter."

"Just like uncle Silas. I see you know him."

"Have you seen him since you came to Wyncombe?"

"I was in the store this evening."

"Did you make yourself known to him?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he invite you to spend the night in the house?"

"Not he. He saw by my dress that I was poor, and gave me a lecture on my shiftless ways."

"Still he might have taken care of you for one night."

"He wouldn't. He told me he washed his hands of me."

Chester looked sober. He was shocked by Silas Tripp's want of humanity.

"You asked me where you could find a bed," he said. "Come home with me, and I can promise you shelter for one night, at least."

"Thank you, boy," said Bruce, grasping Chester's hand. "You have a heart. But—perhaps your parents might object."

"I have no father. My mother is always ready to do a kind act."

"Then I will accept your kind offer. I feared I should have to stay out all night."

"And without an overcoat," said Chester, compassionately.

"Yes, I had to part with my overcoat long since. I could not afford such a luxury. I suppose you understand!"

"You sold it?"

"No, I pawned it. I didn't get much for it—only three dollars, but it would be as easy for me to take the church and move it across the street as to redeem it."

"You appear to have been unfortunate."

"Yes. Fortune and I are at odds. Yet I ought to have some money."

"How's that?"

"When my mother died uncle Silas acted as executor of her estate. It was always supposed that she had some money—probably from two to three thousand dollars—but when uncle Silas rendered in his account it had dwindled to one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Of course that didn't last me long."

"Do you think that he acted wrongfully?" asked Chester, startled.

"Do I think so? I have no doubt of it. You know money is his god."

"Yet to cheat his own nephew would be so base."

"Is there anything too base for such a man to do to get money?"

The young man spoke bitterly.

By this time they had reached Chester's home. His mother was still up. She looked up in surprise at her son's companion.

"Mother," said Chester, "this is Mr. Bruce. Do you think we can give him a bed?"

"Why, certainly," replied Mrs. Rand, cordially. "Have you had supper, sir?"

"I wouldn't like to trouble you, ma'am."

"It will be no trouble. I can make some tea in five minutes. Chester, take out the bread and butter and cold meat from the closet."

So before he went to bed the homeless wayfarer was provided with a warm meal, and the world seemed brighter and more cheerful to him.

CHAPTER IV.
A DYING GIFT

In the morning Walter Bruce came down to breakfast looking pale and sick. He had taken a severe cold from scanty clothing and exposure to the winter weather.

"You have a hard cough, Mr. Bruce," said Mrs. Rand, in a tone of sympathy.

"Yes, madam; my lungs were always sensitive."

When breakfast was over he took his hat and prepared to go.

"I thank you very much for your kind hospitality," he began. Then he was attacked by a fit of coughing.

"Where are you going. Mr. Bruce?" asked Chester.

"I don't know," he answered, despondently. "I came to Wyncombe to see my uncle Silas, but he will have nothing to say to me."

Chester and his mother exchanged looks. The same thought was in the mind of each.

"Stay with us a day or two," said Mrs. Rand. "You are not fit to travel. You need rest and care."

"But I shall be giving you a great deal of trouble."

"We shall not consider it such," said Mrs. Rand.

"Then I will accept your kind offer, for indeed I am very unwell."

Before the end of the day the young man was obliged to go to bed, and a doctor was summoned. Bruce was pronounced to have a low fever, and to be quite unfit to travel.

Mrs. Rand and Chester began to feel anxious. Their hearts were filled with pity for the young man, but how could they bear the expense which this sickness would entail upon them?

"Silas Tripp is his uncle," said Mrs. Rand. "He ought to contribute the expense of his sickness."

"I will go and see him," said Chester. So he selected a time when business would be slack in the store, and called in. He found Mr. Trip in a peevish mood.

"How are you, Chester?" he said. "I wish you was back."

"Why, Mr. Tripp? You've got Abel Wood in my place."

"He ain't of much account," grumbled Silas. "What do you think he done this mornin'?"

"I don't know, sir."

"He smashed two dozen eggs, and eggs twenty-two cents a dozen. But I'll take it out of his salary. He's dreadful awkward, that boy!"

"Poor Abel!" thought Chester. "I am afraid he won't have much salary coming to him at the end of the week."

"You never broke no eggs while you was here, Chester."

"No; I don't think I did."

"You'd ought to have stayed."

"I couldn't stay on the salary you offered. But, Mr. Tripp, I've come here on business."

"Hey? What about?"

"Your nephew, Walter Bruce, is staying at our house."

"Is he?" returned Silas Tripp, indifferently.

"And he is sick."

"I don't feel no interest in him," said Silas, doggedly.

"Are you willing to pay his expenses? He has no money."

"No, I ain't," snarled Silas. "Ef you take him you take him at your own risk."

"You wouldn't have us turn him into the street?" said Chester, indignantly.

"You can do as you like. It ain't no affair of mine. I s'pose he sent you here."

"No, he didn't; and I wouldn't have come if we had been better fixed. But we haven't enough money to live on ourselves."

"Then tell him to go away. I never wanted him to come to Wyncombe."

"It seems to me you ought to do something for your own nephew."

"I can't support all my relations, and I won't," said Silas, testily. "It ain't no use talkin'. Walter Bruce is shif'less and lazy, or he'd take care of himself. I ain't no call to keep him."

"Then you won't do anything for him? Even two dollars a week would help him very much."

"Two dollars a week!" ejaculated Silas. "You must think I am made of money. Why, two dollars a week would make a hundred and four dollars a year."

"That wouldn't be much for a man of your means, Mr. Tripp."

"You talk foolish, Chester. I have to work hard for a livin'. If I helped all my shif'less relations I'd end my days in the poorhouse."

"I don't think you'll go there from that cause," Chester could not help saying.

"I guess not. I ain't a fool. Let every tub stand on its own bottom, I say. But I won't be too hard. Here's twenty-five cents," and Silas took a battered quarter from the money drawer.

"Take it and use it careful."

"I think we will try to get along without it," said Chester, with a curl of the lip. "I'm afraid you can't afford it."

"Do just as you like," said Silas, putting back the money with a sigh of relief, "but don't say I didn't offer to do something for Walter."

"No; I will tell him how much you offered to give."

"That's a queer boy," said Mr. Tripp, as Chester left the store. "Seems to want me to pay all Walter Bruce's expenses. What made him come to Wyncombe to get sick? He'd better have stayed where he lived, and then he'd have had a claim to go to the poorhouse. He can't live on me, I tell him that. Them Rands are foolish to take him in. They're as poor as poverty themselves, and now they've taken in a man who ain't no claim on them. I expect they thought they'd get a good sum out of me for boardin' him. There's a great many onrasonable people in the world."

"I will go and see Mr. Morris, the minister," decided the

perplexed Chester. "He will tell me what to do."

Accordingly he called on the minister and unfolded the story to sympathetic ears.

"You did right, Chester," said Mr. Morris. "The poor fellow was fortunate to fall into your hands. But won't it be too much for your mother?"

"It's the expense I am thinking of, Mr. Morris. You know I have lost my situation, and mother has no shoes to bind."

"I can help you, Chester. A rich lady of my acquaintance sends me a hundred dollars every year to bestow in charity. I will devote a part of this to the young man whom you have so kindly taken in, say at the rate of eight dollars a week."

"That will make us feel easy," said Chester gratefully. "How much do you think his uncle offered me?"

"I am surprised that he should have offered anything."

"He handed me twenty-five cents, but I told him I thought we could get along without it."

"And you will. Silas Tripp has a small soul, hardly worth saving. He has made money his god, and serves his chosen deity faithfully."

"I wouldn't change places with him for all his wealth."

"Some day you may be as rich as he, but I hope, if you are, you will use your wealth better."

At the beginning of the third week Walter Bruce became suddenly worse. His constitution was fragile, and the disease had undermined his strength. The doctor looked grave.

"Do you think I shall pull through, doctor?" asked the young man.

"While there is life there is hope, Mr. Bruce."

"That means that the odds are against me?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say that you are right."

Walter Bruce looked thoughtful.

"I don't think I care much for life," he said. "I have had many disappointments, and I know that at the best I could never be strong and enjoy life as most of my age do—I am resigned."

"How old are you, Walter?" asked Chester.

"Twenty-nine. It is a short life."

"Is there anyone you would wish me to notify if the worst comes?"

"No, I have scarcely a relative—except Silas Tripp," he added, with a bitter smile.

"You have no property to dispose of by will?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," was the unexpected answer, "but I shall not make a will. A will may be contested. I will give it away during my life."

Chester and the doctor looked surprised. They thought the other might refer to a ring or some small article.

"I want everything to be legal," resumed Bruce. "Is there a lawyer in the village?"

"Yes, Lawyer Gardener."

"Send for him. I shall feel easier when I have attended to this last duty."

Within half an hour the lawyer was at his bedside.

"In the inside pocket of my coat," said Walter Bruce, "you will find a document. It is the deed of five lots in the town of Tacoma, in Washington Territory. I was out there last year, and having a little money, bought the lots for a song. They are worth very little now, but some time they may be of value."

"To whom do you wish to give them?" asked Mr. Gardner.

"To this boy," answered Bruce, looking affectionately toward Chester. "He and his have been my best friends."

"But your uncle—he is a relative!" suggested Chester.

"He has no claim upon me. Lawyer, make out a deed of gift of these lots to Chester Rand, and I will sign it."

The writing was completed, Bruce found strength to sign it, and then sank back exhausted. Two days later he died. Of course the eight dollars a week from the minister's fund ceased to be paid to the Rands. Chester had not succeeded in obtaining work. To be sure he had the five lots in Tacoma, but he who had formerly owned them had died a pauper. The outlook was very dark.

CHAPTER V.
CHESTER'S FIRST SUCCESS

Chester and his mother and a few friends attended the funeral of Walter Bruce. Silas Tripp was too busy at the store to pay this parting compliment to his nephew. He expressed himself plainly about the folly of the Rands in "runnin' into debt for a shif'less fellow" who had no claim upon them. "If they expect me to pay the funeral expenses they're mistaken," he added, positively. "I ain't no call to do it, and I won't do it."

But he was not asked to defray the expenses of the simple funeral. It was paid for out of the minister's charitable fund.

"Some time I will pay you back the money, Mr. Morris," said Chester. "I am Mr. Bruce's heir, and it is right that I should pay."

"Very well, Chester. If your bequest amounts to anything I will not object. I hope for your sake that the lots may become valuable."

"I don't expect it, Mr. Morris. Will you be kind enough to take care of the papers for me?"

"Certainly, Chester. I will keep them with my own papers."

At this time Tacoma contained only four hundred inhabitants. The Northern Pacific Railroad had not been completed, and there was no certainty when it would be. So Chester did not pay much attention or give much thought to his Western property,

but began to look round anxiously for something to do.

During the sickness of Walter Bruce he had given up his time to helping his mother and the care of the sick man. The money received from the minister enabled him to do this. Now the weekly income had ceased, and it became a serious question what he should do to bring in an income.

He had almost forgotten his meeting with Herbert Conrad, the young artist, when the day after the funeral he received a letter in an unknown hand, addressed to "Master Chester Rand, Wyncombe, New York."

As he opened it, his eyes opened wide with surprise and joy, when two five-dollar bills fluttered to the ground, for he had broken the seal in front of the post office.

He read the letter eagerly. It ran thus:

> "Dear Chester:—I am glad to say that I have sold your sketch for ten dollars to one of the papers I showed you at Wyncombe. If you have any others ready, send them along. Try to think up some bright, original idea, and illustrate it in your best style. Then send to me.
>
> "Your sincere friend, Herbert."

Chester hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels. It seems almost incredible that a sketch which he had dashed off in twenty minutes should bring in such a magnificent sum.

And for the first time it dawned upon him he was an artist. Fifty dollars gained in any other way would not have given him

so much satisfaction. Why, it was only three weeks that he had been out of a place, and he had received more than he would have been paid in that time by Mr. Tripp.

He decided to tell no one of his good luck but his mother and the minister. If he were fortunate enough to earn more, the neighbors might wonder as they pleased about the source of his supplies. The money came at the right time, for his mother needed some articles at the store. He concluded to get them on the way home.

Silas Tripp was weighing out some sugar for a customer when Chester entered. Silas eyed him sharply, and was rather surprised to find him cheerful and in good spirits.

"How's your mother this mornin', Chester?" asked the grocer.

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Tripp."

"Are you doin' anything yet?"

"There doesn't seem to be much work to do in Wyncombe," answered Chester, noncommittally.

"You was foolish to leave a stiddy job at the store."

"I couldn't afford to work for the money you offered me."

"Two dollars and a quarter is better than nothin'. I would have paid you two and a half. I like you better than that Wood boy. Is your mother workin'?"

"She is doing a little sewing, but she had no time for that with a sick man in the house."

"I don't see what made you keep a man that was no kith or kin to you."

"Would you have had us put him into the street, Mr. Tripp?"

"I'd have laid the matter before the selec'-men, and got him into the poorhouse."

"Well, it is all over now, and I'm not sorry that we cared for the poor fellow. I would like six pounds of sugar and two of butter."

"You ain't goin' to run a bill, be you?" asked Silas, cautiously. "I can't afford to trust out any more."

"We don't owe you anything, do we, Mr. Tripp?"

"No; but I thought mebbe–"

"I will pay for the articles," said Chester, briefly.

When he tendered the five-dollar bill Silas Tripp looked amazed.

"Where did you get so much money?" he gasped.

"Isn't it a good bill?" asked Chester.

"Why, yes, but–"

"I think that is all you have a right to ask," said Chester, firmly. "It can't make any difference to you where it came from."

"I thought you were poor," said Mr. Tripp.

"So we are."

"But it seems strange that you should have so much money."

"Five dollars isn't much money, Mr. Tripp."

Then a sudden idea came to Silas Tripp, and he paused in weighing out the butter.

"Did my nephew leave any money?" he asked, sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Then I lay claim to it. I'm his only relation, and it is right that

I should have it."

"You shall have it if you will pay the expense of his illness."

"Humph! how much did he leave?"

"Thirty-seven cents."

Mr. Tripp looked discomfited.

"You can keep it," he said, magnanimously. "I don't lay no claim to it."

"Thank you," returned Chester, gravely.

"Then this five-dollar bill didn't come from him?"

"How could it? he hadn't as much money in the world."

"He was a shif'less man. 'A rolling stone gathers no moss,'" observed Mr. Tripp, in a moralizing tone.

"You haven't been a rolling stone, Mr. Tripp."

"No; I've stuck to the store year in and year out for thirty-five years. I ain't had more'n three days off in that time."

"If I had your money, Mr. Tripp, I'd go off and enjoy myself."

"What, and leave the store?" said Silas, aghast at the thought.

"You could hire some one to run it."

"I wouldn't find much left when I came back; No, I must stay at home and attend to business. Do your folks go to bed early, Chester?"

"Not before ten," answered Chester, in some surprise.

"Then I'll call this evenin' after the store is closed."

"Very well, sir. You'll find us up."

The idea had occurred to Mr. Tripp that Mrs. Rand must be very short of money, and might be induced to dispose of

her place at a largely reduced figure. It would be a good-paying investment for him, and he was not above taking advantage of a poor widow's necessities. Of course neither Mrs. Rand nor Chester had any idea of his motives or intentions, and they awaited his visit with considerable curiosity.

About fifteen minutes after nine a shuffling was heard at the door, there was a knock, and a minute later Chester admitted the thin and shriveled figure of Silas Tripp.

"Good-evening, Mr. Tripp," said Mrs. Rand, politely.

"Good-evenin', ma'am, I thought I'd call in and inquire how you were gettin' along."

"Thank you, Mr. Tripp, for the interest you show in our affairs. We are not doing very well, as you may imagine."

"So I surmised, ma'am. So I surmised."

"It can't be possible he is going to offer us a loan," thought Chester.

"You've got a tidy little place here, ma'am. It isn't mortgaged, I rec'on."

"No, Sir."

"Why don't you sell it? You need the money, and you might hire another house, or pay rent for this."

"Do you know of anyone that wants to buy it, Mr. Tripp?"

"Mebbe I'd buy it myself, jest to help you along," answered Silas, cautiously.

"How much would you be willing to give?" put in Chester.

"Well, I calculate—real estate's very low at present—three

hundred and fifty dollars would be a fair price."

Mrs. Rand looked amazed.

"Three hundred and fifty dollars!" she ejaculated. "Why, it is worth at least seven hundred."

"You couldn't get it, ma'am. That's a fancy price."

"What rent would you charge in case we sold it to you, Mr. Tripp," asked Chester.

"Well, say five dollars a month."

"About sixteen or seventeen per cent. on the purchase money."

"Well, I'd have to pay taxes and repairs," explained Tripp.

"I don't care to sell, Mr. Tripp," said Mrs. Rand, decisively.

"You may have to, ma'am."

"If we do we shall try to get somewhere near its real value."

"Just as you like, ma'am," said Silas, disappointed. "I'd pay you cash down."

"If I decide to sell on your terms I'll let you know," said Mrs. Rand.

"Oh, well, I ain't set upon it. I only wanted to do you a favor."

"We appreciate your kindness," said Mrs. Rand, dryly.

"Women don't know much about business," muttered Silas, as he plodded home, disappointed.

CHAPTER VI.
ROBERT RAMSAY

Mrs. Rand was as much amazed as Chester himself at his success as an artist.

"How long were you in making the drawing?" she asked.

"Twenty minutes."

"And you received ten dollars. It doesn't seem possible."

"I wish I could work twenty minutes every week at that rate," laughed Chester. "It would pay me better than working for Silas Tripp."

"Perhaps you can get some more work of the same kind?"

"I shall send two more sketches to Mr. Conrad in a day or two. I shall take pains and do my best."

Two days later Chester sent on the sketches, and then set about trying to find a job of some kind in the village. He heard of only one.

An elderly farmer, Job Dexter, offered him a dollar a week and board if he would work for him. He would have eight cows to milk morning and night, the care of the barn, and a multitude of "chores" to attend to.

"How much will you give me if I board at home, Mr. Dexter?" asked Chester.

"I must have you in the house. I can't have you trapesing home

when you ought to be at work."

"Then I don't think I can come, Mr. Dexter. A dollar a week wouldn't pay me."

"A dollar a week and board is good pay for a boy," said the farmer.

"It may be for some boys, but not for me."

Chester reflected that if he worked all day at the farmer's he could not do any artistic work, and so would lose much more than he made. The sketch sold by Mr. Conrad brought him in as much as he would receive in ten weeks from Farmer Dexter.

"Wyncombe people don't seem very liberal, mother," said Chester. "I thought Mr. Tripp pretty close, but Job Dexter beats him."

In the meantime he met Abel Wood carrying groceries to a family in the village.

"Have you got a place yet, Chester?" he asked.

"No; but I have a chance of one."

"Where?"

"At Farmer Dexter's."

"Don't you go! I worked for him once."

"How did you like it?"

"It almost killed me. I had to get up at half past four, work till seven in the evening, and all for a dollar a week and board."

"Was the board good?" inquired Chester, curiously.

"It was the poorest livin' I ever had. Mrs. Dexter don't know much about cookin'. We had baked beans for dinner three times

a week, because they were cheap, and what was left was put on for breakfast the next mornin'."

"I like baked beans."

"You wouldn't like them as Mrs. Dexter cooked them, and you wouldn't want them for six meals a week."

"No, I don't think I should," said Chester, smiling. "How do you get along with Silas Tripp?"

"He's always scoldin'; he says I am not half as smart as you."

"I am much obliged to Mr. Tripp for his favorable opinion, but he didn't think enough of me to give me decent pay."

"He's awful mean. He's talkin' of reducin' me to two dollars a week. He says business is very poor, and he isn't makin' any money."

"I wish you and I were making half as much as he."

"There's one thing I don't understand, Chester. You ain't workin', yet you seem to have money."

"How do you know I have?"

"Mr. Tripp says you came into the store three or four days ago and changed a five-dollar bill."

"Yes; Mr. Tripp seemed anxious to know where I got it."

"You didn't use to have five-dollar bills, Chester, when you were at work."

"This five-dollar bill dropped down the chimney one fine morning," said Chester, laughing.

"I wish one would drop down my chimney. But I must be gettin' along, or old Tripp will give me hail Columbia when I get

back."

About nine o'clock that evening, as Chester was returning from a lecture in the church, he was accosted by a rough-looking fellow having very much the appearance of a tramp, who seemed somewhat under the influence of liquor.

"I say, boss," said the tramp, "can't you give a poor man a quarter to help him along?"

"Are you out of work?" asked Chester, staying his step.

"Yes; times is hard and work is scarce. I haven't earned anything for a month."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Pittsburg," answered the tramp, with some hesitation.

"What do you work at when you are employed?"

"I am a machinist. Is there any chance in that line here?"

"Not in Wyncombe."

"That's what I thought. How about that quarter?"

"I am out of work myself and quarters are scarce with me."

"That's what you all say! There's small show for a good, industrious man."

Chester thought to himself that if the stranger was a good, industrious man he was unfortunate in his appearance.

"I have sympathy for all who are out of work," he said. "Mother and I are poor. When I did work I only got three dollars a week."

"Where did you work?"

"In Mr. Tripp's store, in the center of the village."

"I know. It's a two-story building, ain't it, with a piazza?"

"Yes."

"Has the old fellow got money?"

"Oh, yes; Silas Tripp is rich."

"So? He didn't pay you much wages, though."

"No; he feels poor. I dare say he feels poorer than I do."

"Such men ought not to have money," growled the tramp. "They're keepin' it out of the hands of honest men. What sort of a lookin' man is this man Tripp? Is he as big as me?"

"Oh, no, he is a thin, dried-up, little man, who looks as if he hadn't had a full meal of victuals in his life."

"What time does he shut up shop?"

"About this time," answered Chester, rather puzzled by the tramp's persistence in asking questions.

"What's your name?"

"Chester Rand."

"Can't you give me a quarter? I'm awful hungry. I ain't had a bit to eat since yesterday."

"I have no money to give you, but if you will come to our house I'll give you some supper."

"Where do you live?"

"About five minutes' walk."

"Go ahead, then; I'm with you."

Mrs. Rand looked up with surprise when the door opened and Chester entered, followed by an ill-looking tramp, whose clothes were redolent of tobacco, and his breath of whisky.

"Mother," said Chester, "this man tells me that he hasn't had anything to eat since yesterday."

"No more I haven't," spoke up the tramp, in a hoarse voice.

"He asked for some money. I could not give him that, but I told him we would give him some supper."

"Of course we will," said Mrs. Rand, in a tone of sympathy. She did not admire the appearance of her late visitor, but her heart was alive to the appeal of a hungry man.

"Sit down, sir," she said, "and I'll make some hot tea, and that with some bread and butter and cold meat will refresh you."

"Thank you, ma'am, I ain't overpartial to tea, and my doctor tells me I need whisky. You don't happen to have any whisky in the house, do you?"

"This is a temperance house," said Chester, "we never keep whisky."

"Well, maybe I can get along with the tea," sighed the tramp, in evident disappointment.

"You look strong and healthy," observed Mrs. Rand.

"I ain't, ma'am. Looks is very deceiving. I've got a weakness here," and he touched the pit of his stomach, "that calls for strengthenin' drink. But I'll be glad of the victuals."

When the table was spread with an extemporized supper, the unsavory visitor sat down, and did full justice to it. He even drank the tea, though he made up a face and called it "slops."

"Where did you come from, sir?" asked Mrs. Rand.

"From Chicago, ma'am."

"Were you at work there? What is your business?"

"I'm a blacksmith, ma'am."

"I thought you were a machinist and came from Pittsburg," interrupted Chester, in surprise.

"I came here by way of Pittsburg," answered the tramp, coughing. "I am machinist, too."

"His stories don't seem to hang together," thought Chester.

After supper the tramp, who said his name was Robert Ramsay, took out his pipe and began to smoke. If it had not been a cold evening, Mrs. Rand, who disliked tobacco, would have asked him to smoke out of doors, but as it was she tolerated it.

Both Chester and his mother feared that their unwelcome visitor would ask to stay all night, and they would not have felt safe with him in the house, but about a quarter past ten he got up and said he must be moving.

"Good-night, and good luck to you!" said Chester.

"Same to you!" returned the tramp.

"I wonder where he's going," thought Chester.

But when the next morning came he heard news that answered this question.

CHAPTER VII.
SILAS TRIPP MAKES A DISCOVERY

When Silas Tripp went into his store the next day he was startled to find a window in the rear was partially open.

"How did that window come open, Abel?" he asked, as Abel Wood entered the store.

"I don't know, sir."

"It must have been you that opened it," said his employer, sternly.

"I didn't do it, Mr. Tripp, honest I didn't," declared Abel, earnestly.

"Then how did it come open, that's what I want to know?"

"I am sure I can't tell."

"Somebody might have come in during the night and robbed the store."

"So there might."

"It's very mysterious. Such things didn't happen when Chester was here."

Abel made no answer, but began to sweep out the store, his first morning duty.

When Silas spoke of the store being robbed he had no idea that such a robbing had taken place, but he went to the money

drawer and opened it to make sure all was safe.

Instantly there was a cry of dismay.

"Abel!" he exclaimed, "I've been robbed. There's a lot of money missing."

Abel stopped sweeping and turned pale.

"Is that so, Mr. Tripp?" he asked, faintly.

"Yes, there's—lemme see. There's been burglars here. Oh, this is terrible!"

"Who could have done it, Mr. Tripp?"

"I dunno, but the store was entered last night. I never shall feel safe again," groaned Silas.

"Didn't they leave no traces?"

"Ha! here's a handkerchief," said Mr. Tripp, taking the article from the top of a flour barrel, "and yes, by gracious, it's marked Chester Rand."

"You don't think he took the money?" ejaculated Abel, in open-eyed wonder.

"Of course it must have been him! He knew just where I kept the money, and he could find his way about in the dark, he knew the store so well."

"I didn't think Chester would do such a thing."

"That's how he came by his five-dollar bill. He came in bold as brass and paid me with my own money—the young rascal!"

"But how could he do it if the money was took last night? It was two or three days ago he paid you the five-dollar bill."

This was a poser, but Mr. Tripp was equal to the emergency.

"He must have robbed me before," he said.

"You haven't missed money before, have you?"

"Not to my knowledge, but he must have took it. Abel, I want you to go right over to the Widow Rand's and tell Chester I want to see him. I dunno but I'd better send the constable after him."

"Shall I carry him his handkerchief?"

"No, and don't tell him it's been found. I don't want to put him on his guard."

Abel put his broom behind the door and betook himself to the house of Mrs. Rand.

The widow herself opened the door.

"Is Chester at home?" asked Abel.

"Yes, he's eating his breakfast. Do you want to see him?"

"Well, Mr. Tripp wants to see him."

"Possibly he wants Chester to give him a little extra help," she thought.

"Won't you come in and take a cup of coffee while Chester is finishing his breakfast?" she said.

"Thank you, ma'am."

Abel was a boy who was always ready to eat and drink, and he accepted the invitation with alacrity.

"So Mr. Tripp wants to see me?" said Chester. "Do you know what it's about?"

"He'll tell you," answered Abel, evasively.

Chester was not specially interested or excited. He finished his breakfast in a leisurely manner, and then taking his hat, went out

with Abel. It occurred to him that Mr. Tripp might be intending to discharge Abel, and wished to see if he would return to his old place.

"So you don't know what he wants to see me about?" he asked.

"Well, I have an idea," answered Abel, in a mysterious tone.

"What is it, then?"

"Oh, I dassn't tell."

"Look here, Abel, I won't stir a step till you do tell me. You are acting very strangely."

"Well, somethin' terrible has happened," Abel ejaculated, in excited tones.

"What's it?"

"The store was robbed last night."

"The store was robbed?" repeated Chester. "What was taken?"

"Oh, lots and lots of money was taken from the drawer, and the window in the back of the store was left open."

"I'm sorry to hear it. I didn't know there was anybody in Wyncombe that would do such things. Does Mr. Tripp suspect anybody?"

"Yes, he does."

"Who is it?"

"He thinks you done it."

Chester stopped abruptly and looked amazed.

"Why, the man must be crazy! What on earth makes him think I would stoop to do such a thing?"

"'Cause your handkerchief was found on a flour barrel 'side

of the money drawer."

"My handkerchief! Who says it was my handkerchief?"

"Your name was on it—in one corner; I seed it myself."

Then a light dawned upon Chester. The tramp whom he and his mother had entertained the evening before, must have picked up his handkerchief, and left it in the store to divert suspicion from himself. The detective instinct was born within Chester, and now he felt impatient to have the investigation proceed.

"Come on, Abel," he said, "I want to see about this matter."

"Well, you needn't walk so plaguy fast, wouldn't if I was you."

"Why not?"

"'Cause you'll probably have to go to jail. I'll tell you what I'd do."

"Well?"

"I'd hook it."

"You mean run away?"

"Yes."

"That's the last thing I'd do. Mr. Tripp would have a right to think I was guilty in that case."

"Well, ain't you?"

"Abel Wood, I have a great mind to give you a licking. Don't you know me any better than that?"

"Then why did you leave the handkerchief on the flour barrel?"

"That'll come out in due time."

They were near the store where Mr. Tripp was impatiently

waiting for their appearance. He did not anticipate Abel's staying to breakfast, and his suspicions were excited.

"I'll bet Chester Rand has left town with the money," he groaned. "Oh, it's awful to have your hard earnin's carried off so sudden. I'll send Chester to jail unless he returns it—every cent of it."

Here Abel entered the store, followed by Chester.

CHAPTER VIII.
A SCENE IN THE GROCERY STORE

"So you've come, have you, you young thief?" said Silas, sternly, as Chester entered the store. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No, I'm not," Chester answered, boldly. "I've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"Oh, you hardened young villain. Give me the money right off, or I'll send you to jail."

"I hear from Abel that the store was robbed last night, and I suppose from what you say that you suspect me."

"So I do."

"Then you are mistaken. I spent all last night at home as my mother can testify."

"Then how came your handkerchief here?" demanded Silas, triumphantly, holding up the article.

"It must have been brought here."

"Oho, you admit that, do you? I didn't know but you'd say it came here itself."

"No, I don't think it did."

"I thought you'd own up arter a while."

"I own up to nothing."

"Isn't the handkerchief yours?"

"Yes."

"Then you stay here while Abel goes for the constable. You've got to be punished for such doin's. But I'll give ye one chance. Give me back the money you took—thirty-seven dollars and sixty cents—and I'll forgive ye, and won't have you sent to jail."

"That is a very kind offer, Mr. Tripp, and if I had taken the money I would accept it, and thank you. But I didn't take it."

"Go for the constable, Abel, and mind you hurry. You just stay where you are, Chester Rand. Don't you go for to run away."

Chester smiled. He felt that he had the key to the mystery, but he chose to defer throwing light upon it.

"On the way, Abel," said Chester, "please call at our house and ask my mother to come to the store."

"All right, Chester."

The constable was the first to arrive.

"What's wanted, Silas?" he asked, for in country villages neighbors are very apt to call one another by their Christian names.

"There's been robbery and burglary, Mr. Boody," responded Mr. Tripp. "My store was robbed last night of thirty-seven dollars and sixty cents."

"Sho, Silas, how you talk!"

"It's true, and there stands the thief!"

"I am sitting, Mr. Tripp," said Chester smiling.

"See how he brazens it out! What a hardened young villain

he is!"

"Come, Silas, you must be crazy," expostulated the constable, who felt very friendly to Chester. "Chester wouldn't no more steal from you than I would."

"I thought so myself, but when I found his handkerchief, marked with his name, on a flour barrel, I was convinced."

"Is that so, Chester?"

"Yes, the handkerchief is mine."

"It wasn't here last night," proceeded Silas, "and it was here this morning. It stands to reason that it couldn't have walked here itself, and so of course it was brought here."

By this time two other villagers entered the store.

"What do you say to that, Chester?" said the constable, beginning to be shaken in his conviction of Chester's innocence.

"I agree with Mr. Tripp. It must have been brought here."

At this moment, Mrs. Rand and the minister whom she had met on the way, entered the store.

"Glad to see you, widder," said Silas Tripp, grimly. "I hope you ain't a-goin' to stand up for your son in his didoes."

"I shall certainly stand by Chester, Mr. Tripp. What is the trouble?"

"Only that he came into my store in the silent watches of last night," answered Silas, sarcastically, "and made off with thirty-seven dollars and sixty cents."

"It's a falsehood, whoever says it," exclaimed Mrs. Rand, hotly.

"I supposed you'd stand up for him," sneered Silas.

"And for a very good reason. During the silent watches of last night, as you express it, Chester was at home and in bed to my certain knowledge."

"While his handkerchief walked over here and robbed the store," suggested Silas Tripp, with withering sarcasm, as he held up the telltale evidence of Chester's dishonesty.

"Was this handkerchief found in the store?" asked Mrs. Rand, in surprise.

"Yes, ma'am, it was, and I calculate you'll find it hard to get over that evidence."

Mrs. Rand's face lighted up with a sudden conviction.

"I think I can explain it," she said, quietly.

"Oh, you can, can you? Maybe you can tell who took the money."

"I think I can."

All eyes were turned upon her in eager expectation.

"A tramp called at our house last evening," she said, "at about half-past nine, and I gave him a meal, as he professed to be hungry and penniless. It was some minutes after ten when he left the house. He must have picked up Chester's handkerchief, and left it in your store after robbing the money drawer."

"That's all very fine," said Silas, incredulously, "but I don't know as there was any tramp. Nobody saw him but you."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Tripp," said the minister, "but I saw him about half-past ten walking in the direction of your store. I

was returning from visiting a sick parishioner when I met a man roughly dressed and of middle height, walking up the street. He was smoking a pipe."

"He lighted it before leaving our house," said Mrs. Rand.

"How did he know about my store?" demanded Silas, incredulously.

"He was asking questions about you while he was eating his supper."

Silas Tripp was forced to confess, though reluctantly, that the case against Chester was falling to the ground. But he did not like to give up.

"I'd like to know where Chester got the money he's been flauntin' round the last week," he said.

"Probably he stole it from your store last night," said the constable, with good-natured sarcasm.

"That ain't answerin' the question."

"I don't propose to answer the question," said Chester, firmly. "Where I got my money is no concern of Mr. Tripp, as long as I don't get it from him."

"Have I got to lose the money?" asked Silas, in a tragical tone. "It's very hard on a poor man."

All present smiled, for Silas was one of the richest men in the village.

"We might take up a contribution for you, Silas," said the constable, jocosely.

"Oh, it's all very well for you to joke about it, considerin' you

didn't lose it."

At this moment Abel Wood, who had been sweeping the piazza, entered the store in excitement.

"I say, there's the tramp now," he exclaimed.

"Where? Where?" asked one and another.

"Out in the street. Constable Perkins has got him."

"Call him in," said the minister.

A moment later, Constable Perkins came in, escorting the tramp, who was evidently under the influence of strong potations, and had difficulty in holding himself up.

"Where am I?" hiccoughed Ramsay.

"Where did you find him, Mr. Perkins?" asked Rev. Mr. Morris.

"Just outside of Farmer Dexter's barn. He was lying on the ground, with a jug of whisky at his side."

"It was my jug," said Silas. "He must have taken it from the store. I didn't miss it before. He must have took it away with him."

"There warn't much whisky left in the jug. He must have absorbed most of it."

Now Mr. Tripp's indignation was turned against this new individual.

"Where is my money, you villain?" he demanded, hotly.

"Whaz-zer matter?" hiccoughed Ramsay.

"You came into my store last night and stole some money."

"Is zis zer store? It was jolly fun," and the inebriate laughed.

"Yes, it is. Where is the money you took?"

"Spent it for whisky."

"No, you didn't. You found the whisky here."

Ramsay made no reply.

"He must have the money about him," suggested the minister. "You'd better search his pockets, Mr. Perkins."

The constable thrust his hand into the pocket of his helpless charge, and drew out a roll of bills.

Silas Tripp uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Give it to me," he said. "It's my money."

The bills were counted and all were there.

Not one was missing. Part of the silver could not be found. It had probably slipped from his pocket, for he had no opportunity of spending any.

Mr. Tripp was so pleased to recover his bills that he neglected to complain of the silver coins that were missing. But still he felt incensed against the thief.

"You'll suffer for this," he said, sternly, eying the tramp over his glasses.

"Who says I will?"

"I say so. You'll have to go to jail."

"I'm a 'spectable man," hiccoughed the tramp. "I'm an honest man. I ain't done nothin'."

"Why did you take my handkerchief last night?" asked Chester.

The tramp laughed.

"Good joke, wasn't it? So they'd think it was you."

"It came near being a bad joke for me. Do you think I robbed your store now, Mr. Tripp?"

To this question Silas Tripp did not find it convenient to make an answer. He was one of those men—very numerous they are, too—who dislike to own themselves mistaken.

"It seems to me, Mr. Tripp," said the minister, "that you owe an apology to our young friend here for your false suspicions."

"Anybody'd suspect him when they found his handkerchief," growled Silas.

"But now you know he was not concerned in the robbery you should make reparation."

"I don't know where he got his money," said Silas. "There's suthin' very mysterious about that five-dollar bill."

"I've got another, Mr. Tripp," said Chester, smiling.

"Like as not. Where'd you get it?"

"I don't feel obliged to tell."

"It looks bad, that's all I've got to say," said the storekeeper.

"I think, Mr. Tripp, you need not borrow any trouble on that score," interposed the minister. "I know where Chester's money comes from, and I can assure you that it is honestly earned, more so than that which you receive from the whisky you sell."

Silas Tripp was a little afraid of the minister, who was very plain-spoken, and turned away muttering.

The crowd dispersed, some following Constable Perkins, who took his prisoner to the lockup.

CHAPTER IX.
NEW PLANS FOR CHESTER

Two days later Chester found another letter from Mr. Conrad at the post office. In it were two bills—a ten and a five.

Mr. Conrad wrote:

"I have disposed of your two sketches to the same paper. The publisher offered me fifteen dollars for the two, and I thought it best to accept. Have you ever thought of coming to New York to live? You would be more favorably placed for disposing of your sketches, and would find more subjects in a large city than in a small village. The fear is that, if you continue to live in Wyncombe, you will exhaust your invention.

"There is one objection, the precarious nature of the business. You might sometimes go a month, perhaps, without selling a sketch, and meanwhile your expenses would go on. I think, however, that I have found a way of obviating this objection. I have a friend—Mr. Bushnell—who is in the real estate business, and he will take you into his office on my recommendation. He will pay you five dollars a week if he finds you satisfactory. This will afford you a steady income, which you can supplement by your art work. If you decide to accept my suggestion come to New York next Saturday, and you can stay with me over Sunday, and go to work on Monday morning.

"Your sincere friend,
"Herbert Conrad."

Chester read this letter in a tumult of excitement. The great city had always had a fascination for him, and he had hoped, without much expectation of the hope being realized, that he might one day find employment there. Now the opportunity had come, but could he accept it? The question arose, How would his mother get along in his absence? She would be almost entirely without income. Could he send her enough from the city to help her along?

He went to his mother and showed her the letter.

"Fifteen dollars!" she exclaimed. "Why, that is fine, Chester. I shall begin to be proud of you. Indeed, I am proud of you now."

"I can hardly realize it myself, mother. I won't get too much elated, for it may not last. What do you think of Mr. Conrad's proposal?"

"To go to New York?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Rand's countenance fell.

"I don't see how I can spare you, Chester," she said, soberly.

"If there were any chance of making a living in Wyncombe, it would be different."

"You might go back to Mr. Tripp's store."

"After he had charged me with stealing? No, mother, I will never serve Silas Tripp again."

"There might be some other chance."

"But there isn't, mother. By the way, I heard at the post office that the shoe manufactory will open again in three weeks."

"That's good news. I shall have some more binding to do."

"And I can send you something every week from New York."

"But I will be so lonely, Chester, with no one else in the house."

"That is true, mother."

"But I won't let that stand in the way. You may have prospects in New York. You have none here."

"And, as Mr. Conrad says, I am likely to run out of subjects for sketches."

"I think I shall have to give my consent, then."

"Thank you, mother," said Chester, joyfully. "I will do what I can to pay you for the sacrifice you are making."

Just then the doorbell rang.

"It is Mr. Gardener, the lawyer," said Chester, looking from the window.

A moment later he admitted the lawyer.

"Well, Chester," said Mr. Gardener, pleasantly, "have you disposed of your lots in Tacoma yet?"

"No, Mr. Gardener. In fact, I had almost forgotten about them."

"Sometime they may prove valuable."

"I wish it might be soon."

"I fancy you will have to wait a few years. By the time you are twenty-one you may come into a competence."

"I won't think of it till then."

"That's right. Work as if you had nothing to look forward to."

"You don't want to take me into your office and make a lawyer of me, Mr. Gardener, do you?"

"Law in Wyncombe does not offer any inducements. If I depended on my law business, I should fare poorly, but thanks to a frugal and industrious father, I have a fair income outside of my earnings. Mrs. Rand, my visit this morning is to you. How would you like to take a boarder?"

Chester and his mother looked surprised.

"Who is it, Mr. Gardener?"

"I have a cousin, a lady of forty, who thinks of settling down in Wyncombe. She thinks country air will be more favorable to her health than the city."

"Probably she is used to better accommodations than she would find here."

"My cousin will be satisfied with a modest home."

"We have but two chambers, mine and Chester's."

"But you know, mother, I am going to New York to work."

"That's true; your room will be vacant."

Mr. Gardener looked surprised.

"Isn't this something new," he asked, "about you going to New York, I mean?"

"Yes, sir; that letter from Mr. Conrad will explain all."

Mr. Gardener read the letter attentively.

"I think the plan a good one," he said. "You will find that you

will work better in a great city. Then, if my cousin comes, your mother will not be so lonesome."

"It is the very thing," said Chester, enthusiastically.

"What is your cousin's name, Mr. Gardener?" asked the widow.

"Miss Jane Dolby. She is a spinster, and at her age there is not much chance of her changing her condition. Shall I write her that you will receive her?"

"Yes; I shall be glad to do so."

"And, as Miss Dolby is a business woman, she will expect me to tell her your terms."

"Will four dollars a week be too much?" asked Mrs. Rand, in a tone of hesitation.

"Four dollars, my dear madam!"

"Do you consider it too much? I am afraid I could not afford to say less."

"I consider it too little. My cousin is a woman of means. I will tell her your terms are eight dollars a week including washing."

"But will she be willing to pay so much?"

"She pays twelve dollars a week in the city, and could afford to pay more. She is not mean, but is always willing to pay a good price."

"I can manage very comfortably on that sum," said Mrs. Rand, brightening up. "I hope I shall be able to make your cousin comfortable."

"I am sure of it. Miss Dolby is a very sociable lady, and if you

are willing to hear her talk she will be content."

"She will keep me from feeling lonesome."

When Mr. Gardener left the house, Chester said: "All things seem to be working in aid of my plans, mother, I feel much more comfortable now that you will have company."

"Besides, Chester, you will not need to send me any money. The money Miss Dolby pays me will be sufficient to defray the expenses of the table, and I shall still have some time for binding shoes."

"Then I hope I may be able to save some money."

During the afternoon Chester went to the store to buy groceries. Mr. Tripp himself filled the order. He seemed disposed to be friendly.

"Your money holds out well, Chester," he said, as he made change for a two-dollar bill.

"Yes, Mr. Tripp."

"I can't understand it, for my part. Your mother must be a good manager."

"Yes, Mr. Tripp, she is."

"You'd orter come back to work for me, Chester."

"But you have got a boy already."

"The Wood boy ain't worth shucks. He ain't got no push, and he's allus forgettin' his errands. If you'll come next Monday I'll pay you two dollars and a half a week. That's pooty good for these times."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Tripp, but I am going to

work somewhere else."

"Where?" asked Silas, in great surprise.

"In New York," answered Chester, proudly.

"You don't say! How'd you get it?"

"Mr. Conrad, an artist, a friend of the minister, got it for me."

"Is your mother willin' to have you go?"

"She will miss me, but she thinks it will be for my advantage."

"How's she goin' to live? It will take all you can earn to pay your own way in a big city. In fact, I don't believe you can do it."

"I'll try, Mr. Tripp."

Chester did not care to mention the new boarder that was expected, as he thought it probable that Mr. Tripp, who always looked out for his own interests, would try to induce Miss Dolby to board with him. As Mr. Tripp had the reputation of keeping a very poor table, he had never succeeded in retaining a boarder over four weeks.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.