ALGER HORATIO JR.

TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD: A STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE

Horatio Alger

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCES THE CRUMPS

IT was drawing towards the close of the last day of the year. A few hours more, and 1836 would be no more.

It was a cold day. There was no snow on the ground, but it was frozen into stiff ridges, making it uncomfortable to walk upon. The sun had been out all day, but there was little heat or comfort in its bright, but frosty beams.

The winter is a hard season for the poor. It multiplies their necessities, while, in general, it limits their means and opportunities of earning. The winter of 1836-37 was far from being an exception to this rule. It was worse than usual, on account of the general stagnation of business.

In an humble tenement, located on what was then the outskirts of New York, though to-day a granite warehouse stands on the spot, lived Timothy Crump, an industrious cooper. His family consisted of a wife and one child, a boy of twelve, whose

baptismal name was John, though invariably addressed, by his companions, as Jack.

There was another member of the household who would be highly offended if she were not introduced, in due form, to the reader. This was Miss Rachel Crump, maiden sister of Uncle Tim, as he was usually designated.

Miss Rachel was not much like her brother, for while the latter was a good-hearted, cheerful easy man, who was inclined to view the world in its sunniest aspect, Rachel was cynical, and given to misanthropy. Poor Rachel, let us not be too hard upon thy infirmities. Could we lift the veil that hides the secrets of that virgin heart, it might be, perchance, that we should find a hidden cause, far back in the days when thy cheeks were rounder and thine eyes brighter, and thine aspect not quite so frosty. Ah, faithless Harry Fletcher! thou hadst some hand in that peevishness and repining which make Rachel Crump, and all about her, uncomfortable. Lured away by a prettier face, you left her to pass through life, unblessed by that love which every female heart craves, and for which no kindred love will compensate. It was your faithlessness that left her to walk, with repining spirit, the flinty path of the old maid.

Yes; it must be said—Rachel Crump was an old maid; not from choice, but hard necessity. And so, one by one, she closed up the avenues of her heart, and clothed herself with complaining, as with a garment. Being unblessed with earthly means, she had accepted the hearty invitation of her brother, and

become an inmate of his family, where she paid her board by little services about the house, and obtained sufficient needle-work to replenish her wardrobe as often as there was occasion. Forty-five years had now rolled over her head, leaving clearer traces of their presence, doubtless, than if her spirit had been more cheerful; so that Rachel, whose strongly marked features never could have been handsome, was now undeniably homely.

Mrs. Crump, fortunately for her husband's peace, did not in the least resemble her sister-in-law. Her disposition was cheerful, and she had frequent occasion to remonstrate with her upon the dark view she took of life. Had her temper been different, it is very easy to see that she would have been continually quarrelling with Rachel; but, happily, she was one of those women with whom it is impossible to quarrel. With her broad mantle of charity, she was always seeking to cover up and extenuate the defects of her sister-in-law, though she could not help acknowledging their existence.

It had been a hard winter for the cooper. For a month he had been unable to obtain work of any kind, and for the two months previous he had worked scarcely more than half the time. Unfortunately for him, his expenses for a few years back had kept such even pace with his income, that he had no reserved fund to fall back upon in such a time as this. That was no fault of his. Both he and his wife had been economical enough, but there are a great many things included in family expenses—rent, fuel, provisions, food, clothing, and a long list of sundries, besides;

and all these had cost money, of which desirable article Uncle Tim's trade furnished not a very large supply.

So it happened that, as tradesmen were slow to trust, they had been obliged to part with a sofa to defray the expenses of the month of December. This article was selected because it was best convertible into cash,—being wanted by a neighbor,—besides being about the only article of luxury, if it could be called such, in possession of the family. As such it had been hardly used, being reserved for state occasions; yet hardly had it left (sic) the the house, when Aunt Rachel began to show signs of extreme lowness of spirits, and bewailed its loss as a privation of a personal comfort.

"Life's full of disappointments," she groaned. "Our paths is continually beset by 'em. There's that sofa! It's so pleasant to have one in the house when a body's sick. But there, it's gone, and if I happen to get down, as most likely I shall, for I've got a bad feeling in my stummick this very minute, I shall have to go up-stairs, and most likely catch my death of cold, and that will be the end of me."

"Not so bad as that, I hope," said Mrs. Crump, cheerfully. "You know, when you was sick last, you didn't want to use the sofa—you said it didn't lay comfortable. Besides, I hope, before you are sick again we may be able to buy it back again."

Aunt Rachel shook her head despondingly.

"There ain't any use in hoping that," said she. "Timothy's got so much behindhand that he won't be able to get up again; I know

he won't."

"But if he manages to get steady work soon, he will."

"No, he won't. I'm sure he won't. There won't be any work before spring, and most likely not then."

"You are too desponding, Aunt Rachel."

"Enough to make me so. If you had only taken my advice, we shouldn't have come to this."

"I don't know what advice you refer to, Rachel."

"No, I don't expect you do. You didn't pay no attention to it. That's the reason."

"But if you'll repeat it, perhaps we can profit by it yet," said Mrs. Crump, with imperturbable good humor.

"I told you you ought to be layin' up something ag'in a rainy day. But that's always the way. Folks think when times is good it's always a goin' to be so, but I knew better."

"I don't see how we could have been more economical," said Mrs. Crump, mildly.

"There's a hundred ways. Poor folks like us ought not to expect to have meat so often. It's frightful to think what the butcher's bill must have been the last six months."

Inconsistent Rachel! Only the day before she had made herself very uncomfortable because there was no meat for dinner, and said she couldn't live without it. Mrs. Crump might have reminded her of this, but the good woman was too kind to make the retort. She contented herself with saying that they must try to do better in future.

"That's always the way," muttered Rachel. "Shut the stable door when the horse is stolen. Folks never learn from experience till it's too late to be of any use. I don't see what the world was made for, for my part. Everything goes topsy-turvy, and all sorts of ways except the right way. I sometimes think 'taint much use livin'."

"Oh, you'll feel better by and by, Rachel. Hark, there's Jack, isn't it?"

"Anybody might know by the noise who it is," pursued Rachel, in the same general tone that had marked her conversation hitherto. "He always comes *stomping* along as if he was paid for makin' a noise. Anybody ought to have a cast-iron head that lives anywhere in his hearing."

Her cheerful remarks were here broken in upon by the sudden entrance of Jack, who, in his eagerness, slammed the door behind him, unheeding his mother's quiet admonition not to make a noise.

"Look there!" said he, displaying a quarter of a dollar.

"How did you get it?" asked his mother.

"Holding horses," answered Jack.

"Here, take it, mother. I warrant you'll find a use for it."

"It comes in good time," said Mrs. Crump. "We're out of flour, and I had no money to buy any. Before you take off your boots, Jack, why can't you run over to the store, and get half a dozen pounds?"

"You see the Lord hasn't quite forgotten us," remarked his

mother, as Jack started on his errand.

"What's a quarter of a dollar?" said Rachel, gloomily. "Will it carry us through the winter?"

"It will carry us through to-night, and perhaps Timothy will have work to-morrow. Hark, that's his step."

CHAPTER II. THE EVENTS OF AN EVENING

AT this moment the outer door opened, and Timothy Crump entered, not with the quick elastic step of one who brings good tidings, but slowly and deliberately, with a quiet gravity of demeanor, in which his wife could read only too well that he had failed in his efforts to procure work.

His wife, reading all these things in his manner, had the delicacy to forbear intruding upon him questions to which she saw that he could give no satisfactory answers.

Not so Aunt Rachel.

"I needn't ask," she began, "whether you got work, Timothy. I knew beforehand you wouldn't. There ain't no use in tryin'. The times is awful dull, and, mark my words, they'll be wuss before they're better. We mayn't live to see 'em. I don't expect we shall. Folks can't live without money, and when that's gone we shall have to starve."

"Not so bad as that, Rachel," said the cooper, trying to look cheerful; "don't talk about starving till the time comes. Anyhow," glancing at the table on which was spread a good plain meal, "we needn't talk about starving till to-morrow, with that before us. Where's Jack?"

"Gone after some flour," replied his wife.

"On credit?" asked the cooper.

"No, he's got the money to pay for a few pounds," said Mrs. Crump, smiling, with an air of mystery.

"Where did it come from?" asked Timothy, who was puzzled, as his wife anticipated. "I didn't know you had any money in the house."

"No more we had, but he earned it himself, holding horses, this afternoon."

"Come, that's good," said the cooper, cheerfully, "We ain't so bad off as we might be, you see, Rachel."

The latter shook her head with the air of a martyr.

At this moment Jack returned, and the family sat down to supper.

"You haven't told us," said Mrs. Crump, seeing her husband's cheerfulness in a measure restored, "what Mr. Blodgett said about the chances for employment."

"Not much that was encouraging," answered Timothy. "He isn't at all sure how soon it will be best to commence work; perhaps not before spring."

"Didn't I tell you so?" commented Rachel, with sepulchral sadness.

Even Mr. Crump could not help looking sober.

"I suppose, Timothy, you haven't formed any plans," she said.

"No, I haven't had time. I must try to get something else to do."

"What, for instance?"

"Anything by which I can earn a little, I don't care if it's only sawing wood. We shall have to get along as economically as we can; cut our coat according to our cloth."

"Oh, you'll be able to earn something, and we can live *very* plain," said Mrs. Crump, affecting a cheerfulness greater than she felt.

"Pity you hadn't done it sooner," was the comforting suggestion of Rachel.

"Mustn't cry over spilt milk," said the cooper, good-humoredly. "Perhaps we might have lived a *leetle* more economically, but I don't think we've been extravagant."

"Besides, I can earn something, father," said Jack, hopefully. "You know I did this afternoon."

"So you can," said Mrs. Crump, brightly.

"There ain't horses to hold every day," said Rachel, apparently fearing that the family might become too cheerful, when, like herself, it was their duty to become profoundly gloomy.

"You're always trying' to discourage people," said Jack, discontentedly.

Rachel took instant umbrage at these words.

"I'm sure," said she; mournfully, "I don't want to make you unhappy. If you can find anything to be cheerful about when you're on the verge of starvation, I hope you'll enjoy yourselves, and not mind me. I'm a poor dependent creetur, and I feel to know I'm a burden."

"Now, Rachel, that's all foolishness," said Uncle Tim. "You

don't feel anything of the kind."

"Perhaps others can tell how I feel, better than I can myself," answered his sister, knitting rapidly. "If it hadn't been for me, I know you'd have been able to lay up money, and have something to carry you through the winter. It's hard to be a burden upon your relations, and bring a brother's family to poverty."

"Don't talk of being a burden, Rachel," said Mrs. Crump. "You've been a great help to me in many ways. That pair of stockings now you're knitting for Jack—that's a help, for I couldn't have got time for them myself."

"I don't expect," said Aunt Rachel, in the same sunny manner, "that I shall be able to do it long. From the pains I have in my hands sometimes, I expect I'm going to lose the use of 'em soon, and be as useless as old Mrs. Sprague, who for the last ten years of her life had to sit with her hands folded in her lap. But I wouldn't stay to be a burden. I'd go to the poor-house first, but perhaps," with the look of a martyr, "they wouldn't want me there, because I should be discouragin' 'em too much."

Poor Jack, who had so unwittingly raised this storm, winced under the words, which he knew were directed at him.

"Then why," said he, half in extenuation, "why don't you try to look pleasant and cheerful? Why won't you be jolly, as Tom Piper's aunt is?"

"I dare say I ain't pleasant," said Aunt Rachel, "as my own nephew tells me so. There is some folks that can be cheerful when their house is a burnin' down before their eyes, and I've heard

of one young man that laughed at his aunt's funeral," directing a severe glance at Jack; "but I'm not one of that kind. I think, with the Scriptures, that there's a time to weep."

"Doesn't it say there's a time to laugh, also?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"When I see anything to laugh about, I'm ready to laugh," said Aunt Rachel; "but human nature ain't to be forced. I can't see anything to laugh at now, and perhaps you won't by and by."

It was evidently of no use to attempt a confutation of this, and the subject dropped.

The tea-things were cleared away by Mrs. Crump, who afterwards sat down to her sewing. Aunt Rachel continued to knit in grim silence, while Jack seated himself on a three-legged stool near his aunt, and began to whittle out a boat after a model lent him by Tom Piper, a young gentleman whose aunt has already been referred to.

The cooper took out his spectacles, wiped them carefully with his handkerchief, and as carefully adjusted them to his nose. He then took down from the mantel-piece one of the few books belonging to his library,—"Captain Cook's Travels,"—and began to read, for the tenth time it might be, the record of the gallant sailor's circumnavigations.

The plain little room presented a picture of peaceful tranquillity, but it proved to be only the calm which precedes a storm.

The storm in question, I regret to say, was brought about by the

luckless Jack. As has been said, he was engaged in constructing a boat, the particular operation he was now intent upon being the excavation or hollowing out. Now three-legged stools are not the most secure seats in the world. That, I think, no one can doubt who has any practical acquaintance with them. Jack was working quite vigorously, the block from which the boat was to be fashioned being held firmly between his knees. His knife having got wedged in the wood, he made an unusual effort to draw it out, in which he lost his balance, and disturbed the equilibrium of his stool, which, with his load, tumbled over backwards. Now it very unfortunately happened that Aunt Rachel sat close behind, and the treacherous stool came down with considerable force upon her foot.

A piercing shriek was heard, and Aunt Rachel, lifting her foot, clung to it convulsively, while an expression of pain distorted her features.

At the sound, the cooper hastily removed his spectacles, and letting "Captain Cook" fall to the floor, started up in great dismay —Mrs. Crump likewise dropped her sewing, and jumped to her feet in alarm.

It did not take long to see how matters stood.

"Hurt ye much, Rachel?" inquired Timothy.

"It's about killed me," groaned the afflicted maiden. "Oh, I shall have to have my foot cut off, or be a cripple anyway." Then turning upon Jack, fiercely, "you careless, wicked, ungrateful boy, that I've been wearin' myself out knittin' for. I'm almost sure

you did it a purpose. You won't be satisfied till you've got me out of the world, and then—then, perhaps–" here Rachel began to whimper, "perhaps you'll get Tom Piper's aunt to knit your stockings."

"I didn't mean to, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, penitently, eyeing his aunt, who was rocking to and fro in her chair. "Besides, I hurt myself like thunder," rubbing vigorously the lower part of the dorsal-region.

"Served you right," said his aunt, still clasping her foot.

"Sha'n't I get something for you to put on it?" asked Mrs. Crump of (sic) her-sister-in-law.

This Rachel steadily refused, and after a few more postures, (sic) indicating a great amount of anguish, limped out of the room, and ascended the stairs to her own apartment.

CHAPTER III. THE LANDLORD'S VISIT

SOON after Rachel's departure Jack, also, was seized with a sleepy fit, and postponing the construction of his boat to a more favorable opportunity, took a candle and followed his aunt's example.

The cooper and his wife were now left alone.

"Now that Rachel and Jack have gone to bed, Mary," he commenced, hesitatingly, "I don't mind saying that I am a little troubled in mind about one thing."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Crump, anxiously.

"It's just this, I don't anticipate being stinted for food. I know we shall get along some way; but there's another expense which I am afraid of."

"Is it the rent?" inquired his wife, apprehensively.

"That's it. The quarter's rent, twenty dollars, comes due to-morrow, and I've got less than a dollar to meet it."

"Won't Mr. Colman wait?"

"I'm afraid not. You know what sort of a man he is, Mary. There ain't much feeling about him. He cares more for money than anything else."

"Perhaps you are doing him injustice."

"I am afraid not. Did you never hear how he treated the

Underhills?"

"How was it?"

"Underhill was laid up with a rheumatic fever for three months. The consequence was, that, when quarter-day came round, he was in about the same situation with ourselves,—a little worse even, for his wife was sick, also. But though Colman was aware of the circumstances, he had no pity; but turned them out without ceremony."

"Is it possible?" asked Mrs. Crump, uneasily.

"And there's no reason for his being more lenient with us. I can't but feel anxious about to-morrow, Mary."

At this moment, verifying an old adage which will perhaps occur to the reader, who should knock but Mr. Colman himself?

Both the cooper and his wife had an instinctive foreboding as to the meaning of his visit.

He came in, rubbing his hands in a social way, as was his custom. No one, to look at him, would have suspected the hardness of heart that lay veiled under his velvety softness of manner.

"Good evening, Mr. Crump," said he, affably, "I trust you and your worthy wife are in good health."

"That blessing, at least, is continued to us," said the cooper, gravely.

"And how comfortable you're looking too, eh! It makes an old bachelor, like me, feel lonesome when he contrasts his own solitary room with such a scene of comfort as this. You've got

a comfortable home, and dog-cheap, too. All my other tenants are grumbling to think you don't have to pay any more for such superior accommodations. I've about made up my mind that I must ask you twenty-five dollars a quarter, hereafter."

All this was said very pleasantly, but the pill was none the less bitter.

"It seems to me, Mr. Colman," remarked the cooper soberly, "you have chosen rather a singular time for raising the rent."

"Why singular, my good sir?" inquired the landlord, urbanely.

"You know of course, that this is a time of general business depression; my own trade in particular has suffered greatly. For a month past, I have not been able to find any work."

Colman's face lost something of its graciousness.

"And I fear I sha'n't be able to pay my quarter's rent to-morrow."

"Indeed!" said the landlord coldly. "Perhaps you can make it up within two or three dollars?"

"I can't pay a dollar towards it," said the cooper. "It's the first time, in five years that I've lived here, that this thing has happened to me. I've always been prompt before."

"You should have economized as you found times growing harder," said Colman, harshly. "It is hardly honest to live in a house when you know you can't pay the rent."

"You sha'n't lose it Mr. Colman," said the cooper, earnestly. "No one ever yet lost anything by me. Only give me time, and I will pay you all."

The landlord shook his head.

"You ought to cut your coat according to your cloth," he responded. "Much as it will go against my feelings, under the circumstances I am compelled by a prudent regard to my own interests to warn you that, in case your rent is not ready to-morrow, I shall be obliged to trouble you to find another tenement; and furthermore, the rent of this will be raised five dollars a quarter."

"I can't pay it, Mr. Colman," said the cooper; "I may as well say that now; and it's no use my agreeing to pay more rent. I pay all I can afford now."

"Very well, you know the alternative. But it is a disagreeable subject. We won't talk of it now; I shall be round to-morrow morning. How's your excellent sister; as cheerful as ever?"

"Quite as much so as usual," answered the cooper, dryly.

"But there's one favor I should like to ask, if you will allow us to remain here a few days till I can look about me a little."

"I would with the greatest pleasure in the world," was the reply, "but there's another family very anxious to take the house, and they wish to come in immediately. Therefore I shall be obliged to ask you to move out to-morrow. In fact that is the very thing I came here this evening to speak about, as I thought you might not wish to pay the increased rent."

"We are much obliged to you," said the cooper, with a tinge of bitterness unusual to him. "If we are to be turned out of doors, it is pleasant to have a few hours' notice of it."

"Turned out of doors, my good friend! What disagreeable expressions you employ! It is merely a matter of business. I have an article to dispose of. There are two bidders; yourself and another person. The latter is willing to pay a larger sum. Of course I give him the preference. Don't you see how it is?"

"I believe I do," replied the cooper. "Of course, it's a regular proceeding; but you must excuse me if I think of it in another light, when I reflect that to-morrow at this time my family and myself may be without a shelter."

"My dear sir, positively you are looking on the dark side of things. It is actually sinful to distrust Providence as you seem to do. You're a little disappointed, that's all. Just take to-night to sleep on it, and I've no doubt you'll think better of it and of me. But positively I have stayed longer than I intended. Good night, my friends. I'll look in upon you in the morning. And by the by, as it is so near the time, allow me to wish you a Happy New Year."

The door closed upon the landlord, leaving behind two anxious hearts.

"It looks well in him to wish that," said the cooper, gloomily. "A great deal he is doing to make it so. I don't know how it seems to others, but for my part I never say them words to any one unless I really wish 'em well, and am willing to do something to make 'em so. I should feel as if I was a hypocrite if I acted anyways different."

Mary did not respond to this. In her own gentle heart she could not help feeling a silent repugnance, mingled, it may be, with a

shade of contempt, for the man who had just left them. It was an uncomfortable feeling, and she strove to get rid of it.

"Is there any tenement vacant in this neighborhood?" she asked.

"Yes, there's the one at the corner, belonging to Mr. Harrison."

"It is a better one than this."

"Yes, but Harrison only asks the same that we have been paying. He is not so exorbitant as Colman."

"Couldn't we get that?"

"I am afraid, if he knew that we had failed to pay our rent here, he would object."

"But he knows you are honest, and that nothing but the hard times would have brought you to such a pass."

"It may be, Mary. At any rate you have lightened my heart a little. I feel as if there was some hope left."

"We ought always to feel so, Timothy. There was one thing that Mr. Colman said that didn't sound so well, coming from his lips; but it's true, for all that."

"What do you mean, Mary?"

"I mean that about not distrusting Providence. Many a time have I been comforted by reading the verse, 'Never have I seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.' As long as we try to do what is right, Timothy, God will not suffer us to want."

"You are right, Mary. He is our ever-present help in time of need. Let us put away all anxious cares, fully confiding in his gracious promises."

They retired to rest thoughtfully, but not sadly.

The fire upon the hearth flickered, and died out at length. The last sands of the old year were running out, and the new morning ushered in its successor.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEW YEAR'S PRESENT

"HAPPY New Year!" was Jack's salutation to Aunt Rachel, as, with an unhappy expression of countenance, she entered the sitting-room.

"Happy, indeed!" she repeated, dismally. "There's great chance of its being so, I should think. We don't any of us know what the year may bring forth. We may all be dead before the next New Year."

"If that's the case," said Jack, "we'll be jolly as long as it lasts."

"I don't know what you mean by such a vulgar word," said Aunt Rachel, disdainfully. "I've heard of drunkards and such kind of people being jolly; but, thank Providence, I haven't got to that yet."

"If that was the only way to be jolly," said Jack, stoutly, "then I'd be a drunkard; I wouldn't carry round such a long face as you do, Aunt Rachel, for any money."

"It's enough to make all of us have long faces, when you are brazen enough to own that you mean to be a drunkard."

"I didn't say any such thing," said Jack, indignantly.

"Perhaps I have ears," remarked Aunt Rachel, sententiously, "and perhaps I have not. It's a new thing for a nephew to tell his aunt that she lies. They didn't use to allow such things when I was

young.—But the world's going to rack and ruin, and I shouldn't much wonder if the people are right that says it's comin' to an end."

Here Mrs. Crump happily interposed, by asking Jack to go round to the grocery, in the next street, and buy a pint of milk.

Jack took his cap and started, with alacrity, glad to leave the dismal presence of Aunt Rachel.

He had scarcely opened the door when he started back in surprise, exclaiming, "By hokey, if there isn't a basket on the steps!"

"A basket!" repeated Mrs. Crump, in surprise. "Can it be a New Year's present? Bring it in, Jack."

It was brought in immediately, and the cover being lifted there appeared a female child, of apparently a year old. All uttered exclamations of surprise, each in itself characteristic.

"What a dear, innocent little thing!" said Mrs. Crump, with true maternal instinct.

"Ain't it a pretty 'un?" said Jack, admiringly.

"Poor thing!" said the cooper, compassionately.

"It's a world of iniquity!" remarked Rachel, lifting up her eyes, dismally. "There isn't any one you can trust. I didn't think a brother of mine would have such a sin brought to his door."

"Good heavens, Rachel!" said the honest cooper, in amazement, "what can you mean?"

"It isn't for me to explain," said Rachel, shaking her head; "only it's strange that it should have been brought to *this* house,

that's all I say."

"Perhaps it was meant for you, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, with thoughtless fun.

"Me!" exclaimed Rachel, rising to her feet, while her face betrayed the utmost horror at the suggestion. She fell back in her seat, and made a violent effort to faint.

"What have I said?" asked Jack, a little frightened at the effect of his words. "Aunt Rachel takes one up so."

"He didn't mean anything," said Mrs. Crump. "How could you suspect such a thing? But here's a letter. It looks as if there was something in it. Here, Timothy, it is directed to you."

Mr. Cooper opened the letter, and read as follows:—

"For reasons which it is unnecessary to state, the guardians of this child find it expedient to (sic) intrust it to others to be brought up. The good opinion which they have formed of you, has led them to select you for that charge. No further explanation is necessary, except that it is by no means their object to make this a service of charity. They therefore (sic) inclose a certificate of deposits on the Broadway Bank, of three hundred dollars, the same having been made in your name. Each year, while the child remains in your charge, the same sum will in like manner be placed to your credit at the same bank It may be as well to state, farther, that all attempts to fathom whatever of mystery may attach to this affair, will prove useless."

This letter was read in silent amazement.

The certificate of deposits, which had fallen to the floor, was

handed to Timothy by his wife.

Amazement was followed by a feeling of gratitude and relief.

"What could be more fortunate?" exclaimed Mrs. Crump. "Surely, Timothy, our faith has been rewarded."

"God has listened to our cry," said the cooper, devoutly; "and, in the hour of our need, He has remembered us."

"Isn't it prime?" said Jack, gleefully; "three hundred dollars! Ain't we rich, Aunt Rachel?"

"Like as not," observed Rachel, "the certificate isn't genuine. It doesn't look natural it should be. I've heard of counterfeits before. I shouldn't be surprised at all if Timothy got taken up for presenting it."

"I'll risk that," said Mr. Crump, who did not look very much depressed by this suggestion.

"Now you'll be able to pay the rent, Timothy," said Mrs. Crump, cheerfully.

"Yes; and it's the last quarter I shall pay to Mr. Colman, if I can help it."

"Why, where are you going?" inquired Jack.

"To the corner house belonging to Mr. Harrison, that is, if it is not already engaged. I think I will go and see about it at once. If Mr. Colman should come in while I am gone, tell him I will be back directly; I don't wish you to tell him of the change in our circumstances."

The cooper found Mr. Harrison at home.

"I called to inquire," commenced the cooper, "whether you

had let that house of yours on the corner of the street."

"Not as yet," was the reply.

"What rent do you ask?"

"Twenty dollars a quarter," said Mr. Harrison; "that I consider reasonable."

"It is satisfactory to me," was the cooper's reply, "and, if you have no objections to me as a tenant, I will engage it at once."

"Far from having any objections, Mr. Crump," was the courteous reply, "I shall be glad to secure so good a tenant. Will you go over and look at the house?"

"Not now, sir; I am somewhat in haste. When can we move in?"

"To-day, if you like."

His errand satisfactorily accomplished, the cooper returned home. Meanwhile the landlord had called.

He was a little surprised to find that Mrs. Crump, instead of looking depressed, looked cheerful, rather than otherwise.

"I was not aware you had a child so young," he remarked, looking at the baby.

"It isn't mine," said Mrs. Crump, briefly.

"The child of a neighbor, I suppose," thought Colman.

Meanwhile he scrutinized closely, without appearing to do so, the furniture in the room.

At this point Mr. Crump opened the outer door.

"Good-morning," said Colman, affably. "A fine morning."

"Quite so," answered his tenant, shortly.

"I have called, Mr. Crump, to know if you are ready with your quarter's rent."

"I think I told you, last night, how I was situated. Of course I am sorry–"

"So am I," said the landlord, "for I may be obliged to have recourse to unpleasant measures."

"You mean that we must leave the house!"

"Of course, you cannot expect to remain in it if you are unable to pay the rent. Of course," added Colman, making an inventory with his eyes, of the furniture, "you will leave behind a sufficient amount of furniture to cover your bill–"

"Surely, you would not deprive us of our furniture!"

"Is there any hardship in requiring payment of honest debts?"

"There are cases of that description. However, I will not put you to that trouble. I am ready to pay you your dues."

"You have the money?" said Colman, hastily.

"I have, and something over; as you will see by this document. Can you give me the two hundred and eighty dollars over?"

It would be difficult to picture the amazement of Colman. "Surely, you told me a different story last night," he said.

"Last night and this morning are different times. Then I could not pay you; now, luckily, I am able. If you cannot change this amount, and will accompany me to the bank, I will place the money in your hands."

"My dear sir, I am not at all in haste," said the landlord, with a return of his former affability. "Any time within a week will

do. I hope, by the way, you will continue to occupy this house."

"As I have already engaged Mr. Harrison's house, at the corner of the street, I shall be unable to remain. Besides, I do not want to interfere with the family who are so desirous of moving in."

Mr. Colman was silenced. He regretted, too late, the hasty course which had lost him a good tenant. The family referred to had no existence; and, it may be remarked, the house remained vacant for several months, when he was glad to rent it at the old price.

CHAPTER V. A LUCKY RESCUE

THE opportune arrival of the child inaugurated a season of comparative prosperity in the home of Timothy Crump. To persons accustomed to live in their frugal way, three hundred dollars seemed a fortune. Nor, as might have happened in some cases, did this unexpected windfall tempt the cooper or his wife to extravagances.

"Let us save something against a rainy day," said Mrs. Crump.

"We can, if I get work soon," answered her husband. "This little one will add but little to our expenses, and there is no reason why we should not save up at least half of it."

"There's no knowing when you will get work, Timothy," said Rachel, in her usual cheerful way; "it isn't well to crow before you're out of the woods."

"Very true, Rachel. It isn't your failing to look too much at the sunny side of the picture."

"I'm ready to look at it when I can see it anywhere," said his sister, in the same enlivening way.

"Don't you see it in the unexpected good fortune which came with this child?" asked Timothy.

"I've no doubt it seems bright enough, now," said Rachel, gloomily, "but a young child's a great deal of trouble."

"Do you speak from experience, Aunt Rachel?" inquired Jack, demurely.

"Yes;" said his aunt, slowly; "if all babies were as cross as you were when you were an infant, three hundred dollars wouldn't begin to pay for the trouble of having one round."

Mr. Crump and his wife laughed at this sally at Jack's expense, but the latter had his wits about him sufficiently to answer, "I've always heard, Aunt Rachel, that the crosser a child is the pleasanter he will grow up. What a very pleasant baby you must have been!"

"Jack!" said his mother, reprovingly; but his father, who looked upon it as a good joke, remarked, good-humoredly, "He's got you there, Rachel."

The latter, however, took it as a serious matter, and observed that, when she was young, children were not allowed to speak so to their elders. "But, I don't know as I can blame 'em much," she continued, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "when their own parents encourage 'em in it."

Timothy was warned, by experience, that silence was his best (sic) defence. Since anything he might say would only be likely to make matters worse.

Aunt Rachel sank into a fit of deep despondency, and did not say another word till dinner time. She sat down to the table with a profound sigh, as if there was little in life worth living for. Notwithstanding this, it was observed that she had a good appetite. Indeed, Rachel seemed to thrive on her gloomy views of life and human nature. She was, it must be acknowledged, perfectly consistent in all her conduct, as far as this peculiarity

was concerned. Whenever she took up a newspaper, she always looked first to the space appropriated to deaths, and next in order to the column of accidents, casualties, etc., and her spirits were visibly exhilarated when she encountered a familiar name in either list.

Mr. Crump continued to look out for work, but it was with a more cheerful spirit. He did not now feel as if the comfort of his family depended absolutely upon his immediate success. Used economically, the money he had by him would last nine months, and during that time it was impossible that he should not find something to do. It was this sense of security—of possessing something upon which he could fall back—that enabled him to keep up good heart. It is too generally the case that people are content to live as if they were sure of constantly retaining their health and never losing their employment. When a reverse does come they are at once plunged into discouragement, and feel that something must be done immediately. There is only one way to fend off such an embarrassment, and that is to resolve, whatever may be the amount of the income, to lay aside some part to serve as a reliance in time of trouble. A little economy—though it involves privation—will be well repaid by the feeling of security thus engendered.

Mr. Crump was not compelled to remain inactive as long as he feared. Not that his line of business revived,—that still remained depressed,—but another path was opened to him for a time.

Returning home late one evening, the cooper saw a man steal

out from a doorway, and assault a gentleman whose dress and general appearance indicated probable wealth. Seizing him by the throat, the villain effectually prevented him from calling the police, and was engaged in rifling his pockets when the cooper arrived at the scene. A sudden blow on the side of the head admonished the robber that he had more than one to deal with.

"Leave this man instantly," said the cooper, sternly, "or I will deliver you into the hands of the police."

The villain hesitated, but fear prevailed, and springing to his feet, he hastily made off under cover of the darkness.

"I hope you have received no injury," said Timothy, respectfully, turning towards the stranger he had rescued.

"No, my worthy friend, thanks to your timely assistance. The rascal nearly succeeded, however."

"I hope you have lost nothing, sir."

"Nothing, fortunately. You can form an idea of the value of your interference, when I say that I have fifteen hundred dollars with me, all of which I should undoubtedly have lost."

"I am glad," said the cooper, "that I was able to do you such essential service. It was by the merest chance that I came this way."

"Will you add to my indebtedness by accompanying me with that trusty club of yours? I have some little distance yet to go, and the amount of money I have with me makes me feel desirous of taking every possible precaution."

"Willingly," said the cooper.

"But I am forgetting," said the gentleman, "that you yourself will be obliged to return alone."

"I do not carry enough money to make me fear an attack," said Mr. Crump, laughing. "Money brings care I have always heard, and now I realize it."

"Yet most people are willing to take their chance of that," said the merchant.

"You are right, sir, nor can I call myself an exception. Still I should be satisfied with the certainty of constant employment."

"I hope you have that, at least."

"I have had until recently."

"Then, at present, you are unemployed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your business?"

"That of a cooper."

"I must see what I can do for you. Can you call at my office to-morrow, say at twelve o'clock?"

"I shall be glad to do so, sir."

"I believe I have a card with me. Yes, here is one. And this is my house. Thank you for your company, my good friend. I shall see you to-morrow."

They stood before a handsome dwelling-house, from whose windows, draped by heavy crimson curtains, a soft light proceeded. The cooper could hear the ringing of childish voices welcoming home their father, whose life, unknown to them, had been in such peril, and he could not but be grateful to Providence

that he had been the means of frustrating the designs of the villain who would have robbed him, and perhaps done him farther injury.

He determined to say nothing to his wife of the night's adventure until after his meeting appointed for the next day. Then if any advantage accrued to him from it, he would tell the whole at once.

When he reached home, Mrs. Crump was sewing beside the fire. Aunt Rachel sat with her hands folded in her lap, with an air of martyr-like resignation to the woes of life.

"I've brought you home a paper, Aunt Rachel," said the cooper, cheerfully. "You may find something interesting in it."

"I sha'n't be able to read it this evening," said Rachel, mournfully. "My eyes have troubled me lately. I feel that it is more than probable that I am growing blind. But I trust I shall not live to be a burden to you. Your prospects are dark enough without that."

"Don't trouble yourself with any fears of that sort, Rachel," said the cooper, cheerily. "I think I know what will enable you to use your eyes as well as ever."

"What?" asked Rachel, with melancholy curiosity.

"A pair of spectacles," said her brother, incautiously.

"Spectacles!" retorted Rachel, indignantly. "It will be a good many years before I am old enough to wear spectacles. I didn't expect to be insulted by my own brother. But it's one of my trials."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Rachel," said the cooper, perplexed.

"Good night," said Rachel, rising and taking a small lamp from the table.

"Come, Rachel, don't go yet. It is early."

"After what you have said to me, Timothy, my self-respect will not permit me to stay."

Rachel swept out of the room with something more than her customary melancholy.

"I wish Rachel war'n't quite so contrary," said the cooper. "She turns upon a body so sudden, it's hard to know how to take her. How's the little girl, Mary?"

"She's been asleep ever since six o'clock."

"I hope you don't find her very much trouble. That all comes upon you, while we have the benefit of the money."

"I don't think of that, Timothy. She is a sweet child, and I love her almost as much as if she were my own. As for Jack, he perfectly idolizes her."

"And how does Aunt Rachel look upon her?"

"I am afraid she will never be a favorite with Rachel."

"Rachel never took to children much. It isn't her way. Now, Mary, while you are sewing, I will read you the news."

CHAPTER VI. WHAT THE ENVELOPE CONTAINED

THE card which had been handed to Timothy Crump contained the name of Thomas Merriam,–Wall Street. Punctually at twelve, the cooper reported himself at the counting-room, and received a cordial welcome from the merchant.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I will come to business at once, as I am particularly engaged this morning. Is there any way in which I can serve you?"

"Not unless you can procure me a situation, sir."

"I think you told me you were a cooper."

"Yes sir."

"Does this yield you a good support?"

"In good times it pays me two dollars a day. Lately it has been depressed, and for a time paid me but a dollar and a half."

"When do you anticipate its revival?"

"That is uncertain. It may be some months first."

"And, in the mean time, you are willing to undertake some other employment?"

"Yes, sir. I have no objection to any honest employment."

Mr. Merriam reflected a moment.

"Just at present," he said, "I have nothing to offer except the post of porter. If that will suit you, you can enter upon the duties

to-morrow."

"I shall be very glad to take it, sir. Anything is better than idleness."

"Your compensation shall be the same that you have been accustomed to earn by your trade,—two dollars a day."

"I only received that in the best times," said Timothy, conscientiously.

"Your services will be worth it. I will expect you, then, to-morrow morning at eight. You are married, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I am blessed with a good wife."

"I am glad of that. Stay a moment."

The merchant went to his desk, and presently returned with a scaled envelope.

"Give that to your wife," he said.

The interview terminated, and the cooper went home, quite elated by his success. His present engagement would enable him to bridge over the dull time, and save him from incurring debt, of which he had a just horror.

"Just in time," said Mrs. Crump. "We've got an apple-pudding to-day."

"You haven't forgotten what I like, Mary."

"There's no knowing how long you will be able to afford puddings," said Aunt Rachel. "To my mind it's extravagant to have meat and pudding both, when a month hence you may be in the poor-house."

"Then," said Jack, "I wouldn't eat any."

"Oh, if you grudge me the little I eat," said his aunt, in severe sorrow, "I will go without."

"Tut, Rachel, nobody grudges you anything here," said her brother, "and as to the poor-house, I've got some good news to tell you that will put that thought out of your heads."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Crump, looking up brightly.

"I have found employment."

"Not at your trade?"

"No, but at something else, which will pay equally well, till trade revives."

Here he told the story of the chance by which he was enabled to serve Mr. Merriam, and of the engagement to which it had led.

"You are, indeed, fortunate," said Mrs. Crump. "Two dollars a day, and we've got nearly the whole of the money that came with this dear child. How rich we shall be!"

"Well, Rachel, where are your congratulations?" asked the cooper of his sister, who, in subdued sorrow, was eating her second slice of pudding.

"I don't see anything so very fortunate in being engaged as a porter," said Rachel, lugubriously. "I heard of a porter, once, who had a great box fall upon him and crush him; and another, who committed suicide."

The cooper laughed.

"So, Rachel, you conclude that one or the other is the inevitable lot of all who are engaged in this business."

"It is always well to be prepared for the worst," said Rachel,

oracularly.

"But not to be always looking for it," said her brother.

"It'll come, whether you look for it or not," returned his sister, sententiously.

"Then, suppose we spend no thoughts upon it, since, according to your admission, it's sure to come either way."

Rachel pursued her knitting, in severe melancholy.

"Won't you have another piece of pudding, Timothy?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"I don't care if I do, Mary, it's so good," said the cooper, passing his plate. "Seems to me it's the best pudding you ever made."

"You've got a good appetite, that is all," said Mrs. Crump, modestly.

"By the way, Mary," said the cooper, with a sudden thought, "I quite forgot that I have something for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, from Mr. Merriam."

"But he don't know me," said Mrs. Crump, in surprise.

"At any rate, he asked me if I were married, and then handed me this envelope for you. I am not quite sure whether I ought to allow gentlemen to write letters to my wife."

Mrs. Crump opened the envelope with considerable curiosity, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, as a bank-note fluttered to the carpet.

"By gracious, mother," said Jack, springing to get it, "you're

in luck. It's a hundred dollar bill."

"So it is, I declare," said Mrs. Crump, joyfully. "But, Timothy, it isn't mine. It belongs to you."

"No, Mary, it shall be yours. I'll put it in the Savings Bank for you."

"Merriam's a trump, and no mistake," said Jack. "By the way, father, when you see him again, won't you just insinuate that you have a son? Ain't we in luck, Aunt Rachel?"

"'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,'" said Rachel.

"I never knew Aunt Rachel to be jolly but once," said Jack, under his breath; "and that was at a funeral."

CHAPTER VII. EIGHT YEARS. IDA'S PROGRESS

EIGHT years slipped by, unmarked by any important event. The Crumps were still prosperous in an humble way. The cooper had been able to obtain work most of the time, and this, with the annual remittance for little Ida, had enabled the family not only to live in comfort, but even to save up one hundred and fifty dollars a year. They might even have saved more, living as frugally as they were accustomed to do, but there was one point upon which none of them would consent to be economical. The little Ida must have everything she wanted. Timothy brought home daily some little delicacy for her, which none of the rest thought of sharing. While Mrs. Crump, far enough from vanity, always dressed with exceeding plainness, Ida's attire was always rich and tasteful. She would sometimes ask, "Mother, why don't you buy yourself some of the pretty things you get for me?"

Mrs. Crump would answer, smiling, "Oh, I'm an old woman, Ida. Plain things are best for me."

"No, I'm sure you're not old, mother. You don't wear a cap."

But Mrs. Crump would always playfully evade the child's questions.

Had Ida been an ordinary child, all this petting would have had an injurious effect upon her mind. But, fortunately she had

that rare simplicity, young as she was, which lifted her above the dangers to which many might have been subjected. Instead of being made vain, she only felt grateful for the many kindnesses bestowed upon her by her father and mother and brother Jack, as she was wont to call them. Indeed, it had not been thought best to let her know that such was not the relation in which they really stood to her.

There was one point, more important than dress, in which Ida profited by the indulgence of her friends.

"Wife," the cooper was wont to say, "Ida is a sacred charge in our hands. If we allow her to grow up ignorant, or afford her only ordinary advantages, we shall not fulfil our duty. We have the means, through Providence, to give her some of those advantages which she would enjoy if she remained in that sphere to which her parents, doubtless, belong. Let no unwise parsimony, on our part, withhold them from her."

"You are right, Timothy," said Mrs. Crump; "right, as you always are. Follow the dictates of your own heart, and fear not that I shall disapprove."

Accordingly Ida was, from the first, sent to a carefully-selected private school, where she had the advantage of good associates, and where her progress was astonishingly rapid.

She early displayed a remarkable taste for drawing. As soon as this was discovered, her foster parents took care that she should have abundant opportunity for cultivating it. A private master was secured, who gave her daily lessons, and boasted everywhere

of his charming little pupil, whose progress, as he assured her friends, exceeded anything he had ever before known.

Nothing could exceed the cooper's gratification when, on his birthday, Ida presented him with a beautifully-drawn sketch of his wife's placid and benevolent face.

"When did you do it, Ida?" he asked, after earnest expressions of admiration.

"I did it in odd minutes," she said; "in the evening."

"But how could you do it without any one of us knowing what you were about?"

"I had a picture before me, and you thought I was copying it, but whenever I could do it without being noticed, I looked up at mother as she sat at her sewing, and so, after awhile, I made this picture."

"And a fine one it is," said Timothy, admiringly.

Mrs. Crump insisted that Ida had flattered her, but this the child would not admit. "I couldn't make it look as good as you, mother," she said. "I tried to, but somehow I couldn't succeed as well as I wanted to."

"You wouldn't have that difficulty with Aunt Rachel," said Jack, roguishly.

Ida, with difficulty, suppressed a laugh.

"I see," said Aunt Rachel, with severe resignation, "that you've taken to ridiculing your poor aunt again. But it's what I expect. I don't never expect any consideration in this house. I was born to be a martyr, and I expect I shall fulfil my destiny. If my own

relations laugh at me, of course I can't expect anything better from other folks. But I sha'n't be long in the way. I've had a cough for some time past, and I expect I'm in a consumption."

"You make too much of a little thing, Rachel," said the cooper. "I don't think Jack meant anything."

"I'm sure, what I said was complimentary," said Jack.

Rachel shook her head incredulously.

"Yes it was. Ask Ida. Why won't you draw Aunt Rachel, Ida? I think she'd make a capital picture."

"So I will," said Ida, hesitatingly, "if she will let me."

"Now, Aunt Rachel, there's a chance for you," said Jack. "I advise you to improve it. When it's finished, it can be hung up at the Art Rooms, and who knows but you may secure a husband by it?"

"I wouldn't marry," said his aunt, firmly compressing her lips, "not if anybody'd go down on their knees to me."

"Now I am sure, Aunt Rachel, that's cruel in you."

"There ain't any man that I'd trust my happiness to."

"She hasn't any to trust," observed Jack, *sotto voce*.

"They're all deceivers," pursued Rachel, "the best of 'em. You can't believe what one of 'em says. It would be a great deal better if people never married at all."

"Then where would the world be a hundred years hence?" suggested her nephew.

"Come to an end, most likely," said Aunt Rachel; "and I don't know but that would be the best thing. It's growing more and

more wicked every day."

It will be seen that no great change has come over Miss Rachel Crump during the years that have intervened. She takes the same disheartening view of human nature and the world's prospects, as ever. Nevertheless, her own hold upon the world seems as strong as ever. Her appetite continues remarkably good, and although she frequently expresses herself to the effect that there is little use in living, probably she would be as unwilling to leave the world as any one. I am not sure that she does not derive as much enjoyment from her melancholy as other people from their cheerfulness. Unfortunately, her peculiar way of enjoying herself is calculated to have rather a depressing influence upon the spirits of those with whom she comes in contact—always excepting Jack, who has a lively sense of the ludicrous, and never enjoys himself better than in bantering his aunt.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.