

ALGER

HORATIO JR.

DO AND DARE — A BRAVE
BOY'S FIGHT FOR
FORTUNE

Horatio Alger
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Boy's Fight for Fortune**

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Do and Dare — a Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune:

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Horatio Alger, Jr.

Do and Dare — a Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune

CHAPTER I. THE POST OFFICE AT WAYNEBORO

“If we could only keep the post office, mother, we should be all right,” said Herbert Carr, as he and his mother sat together in the little sitting room of the plain cottage which the two had occupied ever since he was a boy of five.

“Yes, Herbert, but I am afraid there won't be much chance of it.”

“Who would want to take it from you, mother?”

“Men are selfish, Herbert, and there is no office, however small, that is not sought after.”

“What was the income last year?” inquired Herbert.

Mrs. Carr referred to a blank book lying on the table in which the post-office accounts were kept, and answered:

“Three hundred and ninety-eight dollars and fifty cents.”

“I shouldn't think that would be much of an inducement to an able-bodied man, who could work at any business.”

“Your father was glad to have it.”

“Yes, mother, but he had lost an arm in the war, and could not engage in any business that required both hands.”

“That is true, Herbert, but I am afraid there will be more than one who will be willing to relieve me of the duties. Old Mrs. Allen called at the office to-day, and told me she understood that there was a movement on foot to have Ebenezer Graham appointed.”

“Squire Walsingham’s nephew?”

“Yes; it is understood that the squire will throw his influence into the scale, and that will probably decide the matter.”

“Then it’s very mean of Squire Walsingham,” said Herbert, indignantly. “He knows that you depend on the office for a living.”

“Most men are selfish, my dear Herbert.”

“But he was an old schoolfellow of father’s, and it was as his substitute that father went to the war where he was wounded.”

“True, Herbert, but I am afraid that consideration won’t weigh much with John Walsingham.”

“I have a great mind to go and see him, mother. Have you any objections?”

“I have no objections, but I am afraid it will do no good.”

“Mr. Graham ought to be ashamed, with the profits of his store, to want the post office also. His store alone pays him handsomely.”

“Mr. Graham is fond of money. He means to be a rich man.”

“That is true enough. He is about the meanest man in town.”

A few words are needed in explanation, though the conversation explains itself pretty well.

Herbert's father, returning from the war with the loss of an arm, was fortunate enough to receive the appointment of postmaster, and thus earn a small, but, with strict economy, adequate income, until a fever terminated his earthly career at middle age. Mr. Graham was a rival applicant for the office, but Mr. Carr's services in the war were thought to give him superior claims, and he secured it. During the month that had elapsed since his death, Mrs. Carr had carried on the post office under a temporary appointment. She was a woman of good business capacity, and already familiar with the duties of the office, having assisted her husband, especially during his sickness, when nearly the whole work devolved upon her. Most of the village people were in favor of having her retained, but the local influence of Squire Walsingham and his nephew was so great that a petition in favor of the latter secured numerous signatures, and was already on file at the department in Washington, and backed by the congressman of the district, who was a political friend of the squire. Mrs. Carr was not aware that the movement for her displacement had gone so far.

It was already nine o'clock when Herbert's conversation with his mother ended, and he resolved to defer his call upon Squire Walsingham till the next morning.

About nine o'clock in the forenoon our young hero rang the

bell of the village magnate, and with but little delay was ushered into his presence.

Squire Walsingham was a tall, portly man of fifty, sleek and evidently on excellent terms with himself. Indeed, he was but five years older than his nephew, Ebenezer Graham, and looked the younger of the two, despite the relationship. If he had been a United States Senator he could not have been more dignified in his deportment, or esteemed himself of greater consequence. He was a selfish man, but he was free from the mean traits that characterized his nephew.

“You are the Carr boy,” said the squire, pompously, looking over his spectacles at Herbert, as he entered the door.

“My name is Herbert Carr,” said Herbert, shortly. “You have known me all my life.”

“Certainly,” said the squire, a little ruffled at the failure of his grand manner to impose upon his young visitor. “Did I not call you the Carr boy?”

Herbert did not fancy being called the Carr boy, but he was there to ask a favor, and he thought it prudent not to show his dissatisfaction. He resolved to come to the point at once.

“I have called, Squire Walsingham,” he commenced, “to ask if you will use your influence to have my mother retained in charge of the post office.”

“Ahem!” said the squire, somewhat embarrassed. “I am not in charge of the post-office department.”

“No, sir, I am aware of that; but the postmaster general will

be influenced by the recommendations of people in the village.”

“Very true!” said the squire, complacently. “Very true, and very proper. I do not pretend to say that my recommendation would not weigh with the authorities at Washington. Indeed, the member from our district is a personal friend of mine.”

“You know how we are situated,” continued Herbert, who thought it best to state his case as briefly as possible. “Father was unable to save anything, and we have no money ahead. If mother can keep the post office, we shall get along nicely, but if she loses it, we shall have a hard time.”

“I am surprised that in your father’s long tenure of office he did not save something,” said the squire, in a tone which indicated not only surprise but reproof.

“There was not much chance to save on a salary of four hundred dollars a year,” said Herbert, soberly, “after supporting a family of three.”

“Ahem!” said the squire, sagely; “where there’s a will there’s a way. Improvidence is the great fault of the lower classes.”

“We don’t belong to the lower classes,” said Herbert, flushing with indignation.

Squire Walmsgham was secretly ambitious of representing his district some day in Congress, and he felt that he had made a mistake. It won’t do for an aspirant to office to speak of the lower classes, and the squire hastened to repair his error.

“That was not the term I intended to imply,” he condescended to explain. “I meant to say that improvidence is the prevailing

fault of those whose income is small.”

“We haven’t had much chance to be improvident!” said Herbert “We have had to spend all our income, but we are not in debt—that is, we have no debts that we are unable to pay.”

“That is well,” said Squire Walsingham, “but, my young constituent—I mean my young friend—I apprehend that you do not take a right view of public office. It is not designed to support a privileged class in luxury.”

“Luxury, on four hundred a year!” replied Herbert.

“I am speaking in general terms,” said the squire, hastily. “I mean to say that I cannot recommend a person to office simply because he or she needs the income.”

“No, sir, I know that; but my mother understands the duties of the office, and no complaint has been made that she does not make a good postmaster.”

“Possibly,” said the squire, non-committally; “but I am opposed upon principle to conferring offices upon women. Men are more efficient, and better qualified to discharge responsible duties.”

“Then, sir,” said Herbert, his heart sinking, “I am to understand that you do not favor the appointment of my mother?”

“I should be glad to hear that your mother was doing well,” said the squire, “but I cannot conscientiously favor the appointment of a woman to be postmaster of Wayneboro.”

“That means that he prefers the appointment should go to his

nephew,” thought Herbert.

“If my mother were not competent to discharge the duties,” he said, his face showing his disappointment in spite of himself, “I would not ask your influence, notwithstanding you were a schoolmate of father’s, and he lost his arm while acting as your substitute.”

“I have already said that I wish your mother well,” said the squire, coloring, “and in any other way I am ready to help her and you. Indeed, I may be able to secure you a situation.”

“Where, sir?”

“Mr. Graham needs a boy in his store, and I think he will take you on my recommendation.”

“Is Tom Tripp going away?” asked Herbert.

“The Tripp boy is unsatisfactory, so Mr. Graham tells me.”

Herbert knew something of what it would be to be employed by Mr. Graham. Tom Tripp worked early and late for a dollar and a half per week, without board, for a hard and suspicious taskmaster, who was continually finding fault with him. But for sheer necessity, he would have left Mr. Graham’s store long ago. He had confided the unpleasantness of his position to Herbert more than once, and enlisted his sympathy and indignation. Herbert felt that he would not like to work for Mr. Graham at any price, more especially as it seemed likely that the storekeeper was likely to deprive his mother of her office and income.

“I should not like to work for Mr. Graham, sir,” he said.

“It appears to me that you are very particular, young man,”

said Squire Walsingham.

“I would be willing to work for you, sir, but not for him.”

“Ahem!” said the squire, somewhat mollified, “I will think of your case.”

Herbert left the house, feeling that his mother’s removal was only a matter of time.

CHAPTER II.

HERBERT'S CHANCE

Herbert left the house of Squire Walsingham in a sober frame of mind. He saw clearly that his mother would not long remain in office, and without her official income they would find it hard to get along. To be sure, she received a pension of eight dollars a month, in consideration of her husband's services in the war, but eight dollars would not go far towards supporting their family, small as it was. There were other means of earning a living, to be sure, but Wayneboro was an agricultural town mainly, and unless he hired out on a farm there seemed no way open to him, while the little sewing his mother might be able to procure would probably pay her less than a dollar a week.

The blow fell sooner than he expected. In the course of the next week Mrs. Carr was notified that Ebenezer Graham had been appointed her successor, and she was directed to turn over the papers and property of the office to him.

She received the official notification by the afternoon mail, and in the evening she was favored by a call from her successor.

Ebenezer Graham was a small man, with insignificant, mean-looking features, including a pair of weazel-like eyes and a turn-up nose. It did not require a skillful physiognomist to read his character in his face. Meanness was stamped upon it in

unmistakable characters.

“Good-evening, Mr. Graham,” said the widow, gravely.

“Good-evening, ma’am,” said the storekeeper. “I’ve called to see you, Mrs. Carr, about the post office, I presume you have heard—”

“I have heard that you are to be my successor.”

“Just so. As long as your husband was alive, I didn’t want to step into his shoes.”

“But you are willing to step into mine,” said Mrs. Carr, smiling faintly.

“Just so—that is, the gov’ment appear to think a man ought to be in charge of so responsible a position.”

“I shall be glad if you manage the office better than I have done.”

“You see, ma’am, it stands to reason that a man is better fitted for business than a woman,” said Ebenezer Graham, in a smooth tone for he wanted to get over this rather awkward business as easily as possible. “Women, you know, was made to adorn the domestic circles, et cetera.”

“Adorning the domestic circle won’t give me a living,” said Mrs. Carr, with some bitterness, for she knew that but for the grasping spirit of the man before her she would have been allowed to retain her office.

“I was comin’ to that,” said the new postmaster. “Of course, I appreciate your position as a widder, without much means, and I’m going to make you an offer; that is, your boy, Herbert.”

Herbert looked up from a book he was reading, and listened with interest to hear the benevolent intentions of the new postmaster.

“I am ready to give him a place in my store,” proceeded Ebenezer. “I always keep a boy, and thinks I to myself, the wages I give will help along the widder Carr. You see, I like to combine business with consideration for my feller creeters.”

Mrs. Carr smiled faintly, for in spite of her serious strait she could not help being amused at the notion of Ebenezer Graham’s philanthropy.

“What’s going to become of Tom Tripp?” asked Herbert, abruptly.

“Thomas Tripp isn’t exactly the kind of boy I want in my store,” said Mr. Graham. “He’s a harum-scarum sort of boy, and likes to shirk his work. Then I suspect he stops to play on the way when I send him on errands. Yesterday he was five minutes longer than he need to have been in goin’ to Sam Dunning’s to carry some groceries. Thomas doesn’t seem to appreciate his privileges in bein’ connected with a business like mine.”

Tom Tripp was hardly to blame for not recognizing his good luck in occupying a position where he received a dollar and a half a week for fourteen hours daily work, with half a dozen scoldings thrown in.

“How do you know I will suit you any better than Tom?” asked Herbert, who did not think it necessary to thank Mr. Graham for the proffered engagement until he learned just what was expected

of him, and what his pay was to be.

“You’re a different sort of a boy,” said Ebenezer, with an attempt at a pleasant smile. “You’ve been brought up different. I’ve heard you’re a smart, capable boy, that isn’t afraid of work.”

“No, sir, I am not, if I am fairly paid for my work.”

The new postmaster’s jaw fell, and he looked uneasy, for he always grudged the money he paid out, even the paltry dollar and a half which went to poor Tom.

“I always calkerlate to pay fair wages,” he said; “but I ain’t rich, and I can’t afford to fling away money.”

“How much do you pay Tom Tripp?” asked Herbert.

He knew, but he wanted to draw Mr. Graham out.

“I pay Thomas a dollar and fifty cents a week,” answered the storekeeper, in a tone which indicated that he regarded this, on the whole, as rather a munificent sum.

“And he works from seven in the morning till nine o’clock at night,” proceeded Herbert.

“Them are the hours,” said Ebenezer, who knew better how to make money than to speak grammatically.

“It makes a pretty long day,” observed Mrs. Carr.

“So it does, ma’am, but it’s no longer than I work myself.”

“You get paid rather better, I presume.”

“Of course, ma’am, as I am the proprietor.”

“I couldn’t think of working for any such sum,” said Herbert, decidedly.

Mr. Graham looked disturbed, for he had reasons for desiring

to secure Herbert, who was familiar with the routine of post-office work.

“Well,” he said, “I might be able to offer you a leetle more, as you know how to tend the post office. That’s worth somethin’! I’ll give you—lemme see—twenty-five cents more; that is, a dollar and seventy-five cents a week.”

Herbert and his mother exchanged glances. They hardly knew whether to feel more amused or disgusted at their visitor’s meanness.

“Mr. Graham,” said Herbert, “if you wish to secure my services, you will have to pay me three dollars a week.”

The storekeeper held up both hands in dismay.

“Three dollars a week for a boy!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, sir; I will come for a short time for that sum, till you get used to the management of the post office, but I shall feel justified in leaving you when I can do better.”

“You must think I am made of money,” said Ebenezer hastily.

“I think you can afford to pay me that salary.”

For twenty minutes the new postmaster tried to beat down his prospective clerk, but Herbert was obstinate, and Ebenezer rather ruefully promised to give him his price, chiefly because it was absolutely necessary that he should engage some one who was more familiar with the post-office work than he was. Herbert agreed to go to work the next morning.

CHAPTER III. A PRODIGAL SON

Herbert did not look forward with very joyful anticipations to the new engagement he had formed. He knew very well that he should not like Ebenezer Graham as an employer, but it was necessary that he should earn something, for the income was now but two dollars a week. He was sorry, too, to displace Tom Tripp, but upon this point his uneasiness was soon removed, for Tom dropped in just after Mr. Graham had left the house, and informed Herbert that he was to go to work the next day for a farmer in the neighborhood, at a dollar and a half per week, and board besides.

“I am glad to hear it, Tom,” said Herbert, heartily. “I didn’t want to feel that I was depriving you of employment.”

“You are welcome to my place in the store,” said Tom. “I’m glad to give it up. Mr. Graham seemed to think I was made of iron, and I could work like a machine, without getting tired. I hope he pays you more than a dollar and a half a week.”

“He has agreed to pay me three dollars,” said Herbert.

Tom whistled in genuine amazement.

“What! has the old man lost his senses?” he exclaimed. “He must be crazy to offer such wages as that.”

“He didn’t offer them. I told him I wouldn’t come for less.”

“I don’t see how he came to pay such a price.”

“Because he wanted me to take care of the post office. I know

all about it, and he doesn't."

"As soon as he learns, he will reduce your wages."

"Then I shall leave him."

"Well, I hope you'll like store work better than I do."

The next two or three days were spent in removing the post office to one corner of Eben-ezer Graham's store. The removal was superintended by Herbert, who was not interfered with to any extent by his employer, nor required to do much work in the store. Our hero was agreeably surprised, and began to think he should get along better than he anticipated.

At the end of the first week the storekeeper, while they were closing the shutters, said: "I expect, Herbert, you'd just as lieves take your pay in groceries and goods from the store?"

"No, sir," answered Herbert, "I prefer to be paid in money, and to pay for such goods as we buy."

"I don't see what odds it makes to you," said Ebenezer. "It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Then if it comes to the same thing," retorted Herbert, "why do you want to pay me in goods?"

"Ahem! It saves trouble. I'll just charge everything you buy, and give you the balance Saturday night."

"I should prefer the money, Mr. Graham," said Herbert, firmly.

So the storekeeper, considerably against his will, drew three dollars in bills from the drawer and handed them to his young clerk.

“It’s a good deal of money, Herbert,” he said, “for a boy. There ain’t many men would pay you such a good salary.”

“I earn every cent of it, Mr. Graham,” said Herbert, whose views on the salary question differed essentially from those of his employer.

The next morning Mr. Graham received a letter which evidently disturbed him. Before referring to its contents, it is necessary to explain that he had one son, nineteen years of age, who had gone to Boston two years previous, to take a place in a dry-goods store on Washington Street. Ebenezer Graham, Jr., or Eben, as he was generally called, was, in some respects, like his father. He had the same features, and was quite as mean, so far as others were concerned, but willing to spend money for his own selfish pleasures. He was fond of playing pool, and cards, and had contracted a dangerous fondness for whisky, which consumed all the money he could spare from necessary expenses, and even more, so that, as will presently appear, he failed to meet his board bills regularly. Eben had served an apprenticeship in his father’s store, having been, in fact, Tom Tripp’s predecessor; he tired of his father’s strict discipline, and the small pay out of which he was required to purchase his clothes, and went to Boston to seek a wider sphere.

To do Eben justice, it must be admitted that he had good business capacity, and if he had been able, like his father, to exercise self-denial, and make money-getting his chief enjoyment, he would no doubt have become a rich man in time.

As it was, whenever he could make his companions pay for his pleasures, he did so.

I now come to the letter which had brought disquietude to the storekeeper.

It ran thus:

“DEAR SIR: I understand that you are the father of Mr. Eben Graham, who has been a boarder at my house for the last six months. I regret to trouble you, but he is now owing me six weeks board, and I cannot get a cent out of him, though he knows I am a poor widow, dependent on my board money for my rent and house expenses. As he is a minor, the law makes you responsible for his bills, and, though I dislike to trouble you, I am obliged, in justice to myself, to ask you to settle his board bill, which I inclose.

“You will do me a great favor if you will send me the amount—thirty dollars—within a week, as my rent is coming due.

“Yours respectfully, SUSAN JONES.”

The feelings of a man like Ebenezer Graham can be imagined when he read this unpleasant missive.

“Thirty dollars!” he groaned. “What can the graceless boy be thinking of, to fool away his money, and leave his bills to be settled by me. If this keeps on, I shall be ruined! It’s too bad, when I am slaving here, for Eben to waste my substance on riotous living. I’ve a great mind to disown him. Let him go his own way, and fetch up in the poorhouse, if he chooses.”

But it is not easy for a man to cast off an only son, even though

he is as poorly supplied with natural affections as Ebenezer Graham. Besides, Eben's mother interceded for him, and the father, in bitterness of spirit, was about to mail a registered letter to Mrs. Jones, when the cause of his anguish suddenly made his appearance in the store.

"How are you, father?" he said, nonchalantly, taking a cigar from his mouth. "Didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"What brings you here, Eben?" asked Mr. Graham, uneasily.

"Well, the cars brought me to Stockton, and I've walked the rest of the way."

"I've heard of you," said his father, frowning. "I got a letter last night from Mrs. Jones."

"She said she was going to write," said Eben, shrugging his shoulders.

"How came it," said his father, his voice trembling with anger, "that you haven't paid your board bill for six weeks?"

"I didn't have the money," said Eben, with a composure which was positively aggravating to his father.

"And why didn't you have the money? Your wages are ample to pay all your expenses."

"It costs more money to live in Boston than you think for, father."

"Don't you get ten dollars a week, sir? At your age I got only seven, and saved two dollars a week."

"You didn't live in Boston, father."

"I didn't smoke cigars," said his father, angrily, as he fixed his

eye on the one his son was smoking. “How much did you pay for that miserable weed?”

“You’re mistaken, father. It’s a very good article. I paid eight dollars a hundred.”

“Eight dollars a hundred!” gasped Mr. Graham. “No wonder you can’t pay your board bill—I can’t afford to spend my money on cigars.”

“Oh, yes, you can, father, if you choose. Why, you’re a rich man.”

“A rich man!” repeated Mr. Graham, nervously. “It would take a rich man to pay your bills. But you haven’t told me why you have come home.”

“I lost my situation, father—some meddlesome fellow told my employer that I occasionally played a game of pool, and my tailor came to the store and dunned me; so old Boggs gave me a long lecture and my walking papers, and here I am.”

Ebenezer Graham was sorely troubled, and, though he isn’t a favorite of mine, I confess, that in this matter he has my sincere sympathy.

CHAPTER IV. HERBERT LOSES HIS PLACE

Ebenezer Graham with some difficulty ascertained from Eben that he had other bills, amounting in the aggregate to forty-seven dollars. This added to the board bill, made a total of seventy-seven dollars. Mr. Graham's face elongated perceptibly.

"That is bad enough," he said; "but you have lost your income also, and that makes matters worse. Isn't there a chance of the firm taking you back?"

"No, sir," replied the prodigal. "You see, we had a flare up, and I expressed my opinion of them pretty plainly. They wouldn't take me back if I'd come for nothing."

"And they won't give you a recommendation, either?" said Ebenezer, with a half groan.

"No, sir; I should say not."

"So you have ruined your prospects so far as Boston is concerned," said his father, bitterly. "May I ask how you expect to get along?"

"I have a plan," said Eben, with cheerful confidence.

"What is it?"

"I would like to go to California. If I can't get any situation in San Francisco, I can go to the mines."

"Very fine, upon my word!" said his father, sarcastically. "And

how do you propose to get to California?"

"I can go either by steamer, across the isthmus, or over the Union Pacific road."

"That isn't what I mean. Where are you to get the money to pay your fare with?"

"I suppose you will supply that," said Eben.

"You do? Well, it strikes me you have some assurance," ejaculated Mr. Graham. "You expect me to advance hundreds of dollars, made by working early and late, to support a spendthrift son!"

"I'll pay you back as soon as I am able," said Eben, a little abashed.

"No doubt! You'd pay me in the same way you pay your board bills," said Ebenezer, who may be excused for the sneer. "I can invest my money to better advantage than upon you."

"Then, if you will not do that," said Eben, sullenly, "I will leave you to suggest a plan."

"There is only one plan I can think of, Eben. Go back to your old place in the store. I will dismiss the Carr boy, and you can attend to the post office, and do the store work."

"What, go back to tending a country grocery, after being a salesman in a city store!" exclaimed Eben, disdainfully.

"Yes, it seems the only thing you have left. It's your own fault that you are not still a salesman in the city."

Eben took the cigar from his mouth, and thought rapidly.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "if I agree to do this, what will

you pay me?”

“What will I pay you?”

“Yes, will you pay me ten dollars a week—the same as I got at Hanbury & Deane’s?”

“Ten dollars a week!” ejaculated Ebenezer, “I don’t get any more than that myself.”

“I guess there’s a little mistake in your calculations, father,” said Eben, significantly. “If you don’t make at least forty dollars a week, including the post office, then I am mistaken.”

“So you are—ridiculously mistaken!” said his father, sharply. “What you presume is entirely out of the question. You forget that you will be getting your board, and Tom Tripp only received a dollar and a half a week without board.”

“Is that all you pay to Herbert Carr?”

“I pay him a leetle more,” admitted Ebenezer.

“What will you give me?”

“I’ll give you your board and clothes,” said Ebenezer, “and that seems to be more than you made in Boston.”

“Are you in earnest?” asked Eben, in genuine dismay.

“Certainly. It isn’t a bad offer, either.”

“Do you suppose a young man like me can get along without money?”

“You ought to get along without money for the next two years, after the sums you’ve wasted in Boston. It will cripple me to pay your bills,” and the storekeeper groaned at the thought of the inroads the payment would make on his bank account.

“You’re poorer than I thought, if seventy-five dollars will cripple you,” said Eben, who knew his father’s circumstances too well to be moved by this representation.

“I shall be in the poorhouse before many years if I undertake to pay all your bills, Eben.”

After all, this was not, perhaps, an exaggeration, for a spendthrift son can get through a great deal of money.

“I can’t get along without money, father,” said Eben, decidedly. “How can I buy cigars, let alone other things?”

“I don’t want you to smoke cigars. You’ll be a great deal better off without them,” said his father, sharply.

“I understand; it’s necessary to my health,” said Eben, rather absurdly.

“You won’t smoke at my expense,” said Ebenezer, decidedly. “I don’t smoke myself, and I never knew any good come of it.”

“All the same, I must have some money. What will people say about a young man of my age not having a cent in his pocket? They think my father is very mean.”

“I’ll allow you fifty cents a week,” said Mr. Graham, after a pause.

“That won’t do! You seem to think I am only six or seven years old!”

Finally, after considerable haggling, Mr. Graham agreed to pay his son a dollar and a half a week, in cash, besides board and clothes. He reflected that he should be obliged to board and clothe his son at any rate, and should save a dollar and a half

from Herbert's wages.

"Well," he said, "when will you be ready to go to work?"

"I must have a few days to loaf, father. I have been hard at work for a long time, and need some rest."

"Then you can begin next Monday morning. I'll get Herbert to show you how to prepare the mail, so that you won't have any trouble about the post-office work."

"By the way, father, how do you happen to have the post office? I thought Mrs. Carr was to carry it on."

"So she did, for a time, but a woman ain't fit for a public position of that kind. So I applied for the position, and got it."

"What's Mrs. Carr going to do?"

"She's got her pension," said Ebenezer, shortly.

"Eight dollars a month, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"That ain't much to support a family."

"She'll have to do something else, then, I suppose."

"There isn't much to do in Wayneboro."

"That isn't my lookout. She can take in sewing, or washing," suggested Ebenezer, who did not trouble himself much about the care of his neighbors. "Besides there's Herbert—he can earn something."

"But I'm to take his place."

"Oh well, I ain't under any obligations to provide them a livin'. I've got enough to take care of myself and my family."

"You'd better have let her keep the post office," said Eben.

He was not less selfish than his father, but then his own interests were not concerned. He would not have scrupled, in his father's case, to do precisely the same.

"It's lucky I've got a little extra income," said Ebenezer, bitterly; "now I've got your bills to pay."

"I suppose I shall have to accept your offer, father," said Eben, "for the present; but I hope you'll think better of my California plan after a while. Why, there's a fellow I know went out there last year, went up to the mines, and now he's worth five thousand dollars!"

"Then he must be a very different sort of a person from you," retorted his father, sagaciously. "You would never succeed there, if you can't in Boston."

"I've never had a chance to try," grumbled Eben.

There was sound sense in what his father said. Failure at home is very likely to be followed by failure away from home. There have been cases that seemed to disprove my assertion, but in such cases failure has only been changed into success by earnest work. I say to my young readers, therefore, never give up a certainty at home to tempt the chances of success in a distant State, unless you are prepared for disappointment.

When the engagement had been made with Eben, Mr. Graham called Herbert to his presence.

"Herbert," said he, "I won't need you after Saturday night. My son is going into the store, and will do all I require. You can tell him how to prepare the mails, et cetera."

“Very well, sir,” answered Herbert. It was not wholly a surprise, but it was a disappointment, for he did not know how he could make three dollars a week in any other way, unless he left Wayneboro.

CHAPTER V. EBEN'S SCHEME

Saturday night came, and with it the end of Herbert's engagement in the post office.

He pocketed the three dollars which his employer grudgingly gave him, and set out on his way home.

"Wait a minute, Herbert," said Eben. "I'll walk with you."

Herbert didn't care much for Eben's company but he was too polite to say so. He waited therefore, till Eben appeared with hat and cane.

"I'm sorry to cut you out of your place, Herbert," said the young man.

"Thank you," answered Herbert.

"It isn't my fault, for I don't want to go into the store," proceeded Eben. "A fellow that's stood behind the counter in a city store is fit for something better, but it's the old man's fault."

Herbert made no comment, and Eben proceeded:

"Yes," said he, "it's the old man's fault. He's awfully stingy, you know that yourself."

Herbert did know it, but thought it would not be in good taste to say so.

"I suppose Wayneboro is rather dull for you after living in the city," he remarked.

"I should say so. This village is a dull hole, and yet father expects me to stay here cooped up in a little country store. I won't

stay here long, you may be sure of that.”

“Where will you go?”

“I don’t know yet. I want to go to California, but I can’t unless the old man comes down with the requisite amount of tin. You’ll soon have your situation back again. I won’t stand in your way.”

“I’m not very particular about going back,” said Herbert, “but I must find something to do.”

“Just so!” said Eben. “The place will do well enough for a boy like you, but I am a young man, and entitled to look higher. By the way, I’ve got something in view that may bring me in five thousand dollars within a month.”

Herbert stared at his companion in surprise, not knowing any short cut to wealth.

“Do you mean it?” he asked, incredulously.

“Yes,” said Eben.

“I suppose you don’t care to tell what it is?”

“Oh, I don’t mind—it’s a lottery.”

“Oh!” said Herbert, in a tone of disappointment.

“Yes,” answered Eben. “You may think lotteries are a fraud and all that, but I know a man in Boston who drew last month a prize of fifteen thousand dollars. The ticket only cost him a dollar. What do you say to that?”

“Such cases can’t be very common,” said Herbert, who had a good share of common sense.

“Not so uncommon as you think,” returned Eben, nodding. “I don’t mean to say that many draw prizes as large as that, but

there are other prizes of five thousand dollars, and one thousand, and so on. It would be very comfortable to draw a prize of even five hundred, wouldn't it now?"

Herbert admitted that it would.

"I'd send for a ticket by Monday morning's mail," continued Eben, "if I wasn't so hard up. The old man's mad because I ran into debt, and he won't give me a cent. Will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?" asked Herbert, cautiously.

"Lend me two dollars. You've got it, I know, because you were paid off to-night. I would send for two tickets, and agree to give you quarter of what I draw. Isn't that fair?"

"It may be," said Herbert, "but I haven't any money to lend."

"You have three dollars in your pocket at this moment."

"Yes, but it isn't mine. I must hand it to mother."

"And give up the chance of winning a prize. I'll promise to give you half of whatever I draw, besides paying back the money."

"Thank you, but I can't spare the money."

"You are getting as miserly as the old man," said Eben, with a forced laugh.

"Eben," said Herbert, seriously, "you don't seem to understand our position. Mother has lost the post office, and has but eight dollars a month income. I've earned three dollars this week, but next week I may earn nothing. You see, I can't afford to spend money for lottery tickets."

"Suppose by your caution you lose five hundred dollars.

Nothing risk, nothing gain!”

“I have no money to risk,” said Herbert, firmly.

“Oh, well, do as you please!” said Eben, evidently disappointed. “I thought I’d make you the offer, because I should like to see you win a big prize.”

“Thank you for your friendly intention,” said Herbert, “but I am afraid there are a good many more blanks than prizes. If there were not, it wouldn’t pay the lottery men to carry on the business.”

This was common sense, and I cannot forbear at this point to press it upon the attention of my young reader. Of all schemes of gaining wealth, about the most foolish is spending money for lottery tickets. It has been estimated by a sagacious writer that there is about as much likelihood of drawing a large prize in a lottery as of being struck by lightning and that, let us hope, is very small.

“I guess I won’t go any farther,” said Eben, abruptly, having become convinced that Herbert could not be prevailed upon to lend him money.

“Good-night, then,” said Herbert “Good-night.”

“Well, mother, I’m out of work,” said Herbert, as he entered the little sitting room, and threw down his week’s wages. Our young hero was of a cheerful temperament but he looked and felt sober when he said this.

“But for the Grahams we should have a comfortable living,” the boy proceeded. “First, the father took away the post office

from you, and now the son has robbed me of my place.”

“Don’t be discouraged, Herbert,” said his mother. “God will find us a way out of our troubles.”

Herbert had been trained to have a reverence for religion, and had faith in the providential care of his heavenly Father, and his mother’s words recalled his cheerfulness.

“You are right, mother,” he said, more hopefully. “I was feeling low-spirited to-night, but I won’t feel so any more. I don’t see how we are to live, but I won’t let it trouble me tonight.”

“Let us do our part, and leave the rest to God,” said Mrs. Carr. “He won’t support us in idleness, but I am sure that in some way relief will come if we are ready to help ourselves.”

“God helps them that help themselves,” repeated Herbert.

“Exactly so. To-morrow is Sunday, and we won’t let any worldly anxieties spoil that day for us. When Monday comes, we will think over what is best to be done.”

The next day Herbert and his mother attended church in neat apparel, and those who saw their cheerful faces were not likely to guess the serious condition of their affairs. They were not in debt, to be sure, but, unless employment came soon, they were likely to be ere long, for they had barely enough money ahead to last them two weeks.

Monday morning came, and brought its burden of care.

“I wish there was a factory in Wayneboro,” said Herbert. “I am told that boys of my age sometimes earn six or seven dollars a week.”

“I have heard so. Here there seems nothing, except working on a farm.”

“And the farmers expect boys to take their pay principally in board.”

“That is a consideration, but, if possible, I hope we shall not be separated at meals.”

“I will try other things first,” said Herbert. “How would you like some fish for dinner, mother? My time isn’t of any particular value, and I might as well go fishing.”

“Do so, Herbert. It will save our buying meat, which, indeed, we can hardly afford to do.”

Herbert felt that anything was better than idleness, so he took his pole from the shed, and, after digging a supply of bait, set out for the banks of the river half a mile away.

Through a grassy lane leading from the main street, he walked down to the river with the pole on his shoulder.

He was not destined to solitude, for under a tree whose branches hung over the river sat a young man, perhaps twenty-five years of age, with a book in his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

HERBERT'S GOOD LUCK

“Good-morning,” said the young man, pleasantly.

“Good-morning,” answered Herbert, politely.

He recognized the young man, though he had never seen him before, as a visitor from the city, who was boarding at the hotel, if the village tavern could be so designated. He seemed to be a studious young man, for he always had a book in his hand. He had a pleasant face, but was pale and slender, and was evidently in poor health.

“I see you are going to try your luck at fishing,” said the young man.

“Yes, sir; I have nothing else to do, and that brings me here.”

“I, too, have nothing else to do; but I judge from your appearance that you have not the same reason for being idle.”

“What is that, sir?”

“Poor health.”

“No, sir; I have never been troubled in that way.”

“You are fortunate. Health is a blessing not to be overestimated. It is better than money.”

“I suppose it is, sir; but at present I think I should value a little money.”

“Are you in want of it?” asked the young man, earnestly.

“Yes, sir; I have just lost my place in the post office.”

“I think I have seen you in the post office.”

“Yes, sir; my mother had charge of the office till two weeks since, when it was transferred to Mr. Graham. He employed me to attend to the duties, and serve the customers in the store, till Saturday night, when I was succeeded by his son, who had just returned from the city.”

“Your mother is a widow, is she not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I know where you live; I have had it pointed out to me. Your father served in the war, did he not?”

“Yes, sir; and the injuries he received hastened his death.”

The young man looked thoughtful. Then he said: “How much did Mr. Graham pay you for your services?”

“Three dollars a week.”

“That was not—excuse the question—all you and your mother had to depend upon, was it?”

“Not quite; mother receives a pension of eight dollars per month.”

“Five dollars a week altogether—that is very little.”

“It is only two dollars now, sir.”

“True; but you have health and strength, and those will bring money. In one respect you are more fortunate than I. You have a mother—I have neither father nor mother.”

“I’m sorry for you, sir.”

“Thank you; anyone is to be pitied who has lost his parents.

Now, as I have asked about your affairs, it is only fair that I should tell you about myself. To begin with, I am rich. Don't look envious, for there is something to counterbalance. I am of feeble constitution, and the doctors say that my lungs are affected. I have studied law, but the state of my health has obliged me to give up, for the present at least, the practice of my profession."

"But if you are rich you do not need to practice," said Herbert, who may be excused for still thinking his companion's lot a happy one.

"No, I do not need to practice my profession, so far as the earning of money is concerned; but I want something to occupy my mind. The doctors say I ought to take considerable out-door exercise; but I suppose my physical condition makes me indolent, for my chief exercise has been, thus far, to wander to the banks of the river and read under the trees."

"That isn't very severe exercise," said Herbert, smiling.

"No; still it keeps me out in the open air, and that is something. Now tell me, what are your plans?"

"My hope is to find something to do that will enable me to help mother; but there doesn't seem much chance of finding anything in Wayneboro. Do you think I could get a place in the city?"

"You might; but even if you did, you would find it difficult to earn your own living, and there would be no chance of your helping your mother."

Herbert, though naturally sanguine and hopeful, looked sober. Just then he had a bite, and drew out a good-sized pickerel.

This gave a new direction to his thoughts, and he exclaimed, triumphantly:

“Look at this pickerel! He must weigh over two pounds.”

“All of that,” said the young man, rising and examining the fish with interest. “Let me use your pole, and see what luck I have.”

“Certainly.”

The young man, some ten minutes later, succeeded in catching a smaller pickerel, perhaps half the size of Herbert's.

“That will do for me,” he said, “though it doesn't come up to your catch.”

For two hours Herbert and his friend alternately used the pole, and the result was quite a handsome lot of fish.

“You have more fish than you want,” said the young man. “You had better bring what you don't want to the hotel. I heard the landlord say he would like to buy some.”

“That would suit me,” said Herbert. “If he wants fish, I want money.”

“Come along with me, then. Really, I don't know when I have passed a forenoon so pleasantly. Usually I get tired of my own company, and the day seems long to me. I believe I see my way clear to a better way of spending my time. You say you want a place. How would you like me for an employer?”

“I am sure I should like you, but you are not in any business.”

“No,” said the young man, smiling; “or, rather, my business is the pursuit of health and pleasure just now. In that I think you

can help me.”

“I shall be very glad to, if I can, Mr.—”

“My name is George Melville. Let me explain my idea to you. I want your company to relieve my solitude. In your company I shall have enterprise enough to go hunting and fishing, and follow out in good faith my doctor’s directions. What do you say?”

Herbert smiled.

“I would like that better than being in the post office,” he said. “It would seem like being paid for having a good time.”

“How much would you consider your services worth?” asked Mr. Melville.

“I am content to leave that to you,” said Herbert.

“Suppose we say six dollars a week, then?”

“Six dollars a week!” exclaimed Herbert, amazed.

“Isn’t that enough?” asked Melville, smiling.

“It is more than I can earn. Mr. Graham thought he was over-paying me with three dollars a week.”

“You will find me a different man from Mr. Graham, Herbert. I am aware that six dollars is larger pay than is generally given to boys of your age. But I can afford to pay it, and I have no doubt you will find the money useful.”

“It will quite set us on our feet again, Mr. Melville,” said Herbert, earnestly. “You are very generous.”

“Oh, you don’t know what a hard taskmaster you may find me,” said the young man, playfully. “By the way, I consider that you have already entered upon your duties. To-day is the first

day. Now come to the hotel with me, and see what you can get for the fish. I happen to know that two of the guests, a lady and her daughter, are anxious for a good fish dinner and, as there is no market here, I think the landlord will be glad to buy from you.”

Mr. Melville was right. Mr. Barton, the landlord, purchased the fish that Herbert had to sell, for sixty cents, which he promptly paid.

“Don’t that pay you for your morning’s work?” asked Melville.

“I don’t know but the money ought to go to you, Mr. Melville,” said Herbert, “as I am now in your employ. Besides, you caught a part of them.”

“I waive all claim to compensation,” said the young man, “though it would be a novel sensation to receive money for services rendered. What will you say, Herbert, when I tell you that I never earned a dollar in my life?”

Herbert looked incredulous.

“It is really true,” said George Melville, “my life has been passed at school and college, and I have never had occasion to work for money.”

“You are in luck, then.”

“I don’t know that; I think those who work for the money they receive are happy. Tell me, now, don’t you feel more satisfaction in the sixty cents you have just been paid because you have earned it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I thought so. The happiest men are those who are usefully

employed. Don't forget that, and never sigh for the opportunity to lead an idle life. But I suppose your dinner is ready. You may go home, and come back at three o'clock."

"Very well, sir."

Herbert made good time going home. He was eager to tell his mother the good news of his engagement.

CHAPTER VII. EBEN GROWS ENVIOUS

“Well, mother,” said Herbert, as he entered the house, “I have brought you enough fish for dinner.”

“I waited to see what luck you would have, Herbert, and therefore have not got dinner ready. You will have to wait a little while.”

“I shall be all the hungrier, mother,” said Herbert.

Mrs. Carr could not help noticing the beaming look on her son’s face.

“You look as if you had received a legacy, Herbert,” she said. Herbert laughed.

“There it is,” he said, displaying the sixty cents he had received from the landlord.

“There are ten cents more than I should have received for a whole day’s work at the store,” he said.

“Where did you get it, Herbert?”

“I sold a mess of fish to Mr. Barton, of the hotel.”

“You must have had good luck in fishing,” said his mother, looking pleased.

“I had help, mother. Mr. Melville, the young man from the city, who boards at the hotel, helped me fish.”

“Well, Herbert, you have made a good beginning. I couldn’t

help feeling a little depressed when you left me this morning, reflecting that we had but my pension to depend upon. It seemed so unlucky that Eben Graham should have come home just at this time to deprive you of your place in the store.”

“It was a piece of good luck for me, mother.”

“I don’t see how,” said Mrs. Carr, naturally puzzled.

“Because I have a better situation already.”

Then Herbert, who had been saving the best news for the last, told his mother of his engagement as Mr. Melville’s companion, and the handsome compensation he was to receive.

“Six dollars a week!” repeated his mother. “That is indeed generous. Herbert, we did well to trust in Providence.”

“Yes, mother; and we have not trusted in vain.”

After dinner Herbert did some chores for his mother, and then went to the hotel to meet his new employer. He found him occupying a large and pleasant room on the second floor. The table near the window was covered with books, and there were some thirty or forty volumes arranged on shelves.

“I always bring books with me, Herbert,” said the young man. “I am very fond of reading, and hitherto I have occupied too much time, perhaps, in that way—too much, because it has interfered with necessary exercise. Hereafter I shall devote my forenoon to some kind of outdoor exercise in your company, and in the afternoon you can read to me, or we can converse.”

“Shall I read to you now, Mr. Melville?” asked Herbert.

“Yes; here is a recent magazine. I will select an article for you

to read. It will rest my eyes, and besides it is pleasanter to have a companion than to read one's self."

The article was one that interested Herbert as well as Mr. Melville, and he was surprised when he had finished to find that it was nearly five o'clock.

"Didn't the reading tire you, Herbert?" asked Melville.

"No, sir; not at all."

"It is evident that your lungs are stronger than mine."

At five o'clock Melville dismissed his young companion.

"Do you wish me to come this evening?" asked Herbert.

"Oh, no. I wouldn't think of taking up your evenings."

"At the post office I had to stay till eight o'clock."

"Probably it was necessary there; I won't task you so much."

"When shall I come to-morrow?"

"At nine o'clock."

"That isn't very early," said Herbert, smiling.

"No, I don't get up very early. My health won't allow me to cultivate early rising. I shall not be through breakfast much before nine."

"I see you don't mean to overwork me, Mr. Melville."

"No, for it would involve overworking myself."

"I shall certainly have an easy time," thought Herbert, as he walked homeward.

He reflected with satisfaction that he was being paid at the rate of a dollar a day, which was quite beyond anything he had ever before earned. Indeed, to-day he had earned sixty cents besides.

The sum received for the fish.

After supper Herbert went to the store to purchase some articles for his mother. He was waited on by Mr. Graham in person. As the articles called for would amount to nearly one dollar, the storekeeper said, cautiously: "Of course, you are prepared to pay cash?"

"Certainly, sir," returned Herbert.

"I mentioned it because I knew your income was small," said Ebenezer, apologetically.

"It is more than it was last week," said Herbert, rather enjoying the prospect of surprising the storekeeper.

"Why, you ain't found anything to do, have you?" asked Mr. Graham, his face indicating curiosity.

"Yes, sir; I am engaged as companion by Mr. Melville, who is staying at the hotel."

"I don't know what he wants of a companion," said the storekeeper, with that disposition to criticise the affairs of his neighbors often found in country places.

"He thinks he needs one," answered Herbert.

"And how much does he pay you now?" queried Ebenezer.

"Six dollars a week."

"You don't mean it!" ejaculated the storekeeper. "Why, the man must be crazy!"

"I don't think he is," said Herbert, smiling.

"Got plenty of money, I take it?" continued Ebenezer, who had a good share of curiosity.

“Yes; he tells me he is rich.”

“How much money has he got?”

“He didn’t tell me that.”

“Well, I declare! You’re lucky, that’s a fact!”

There was an interested listener to this conversation in the person of Eben, who had been in the store all day, taking Herbert’s place. As we know, the position by no means suited the young man. He had been employed in a store in Boston, and to come back to a small country grocery might certainly be considered a descent. Besides, the small compensation allowed him was far from satisfying Eben.

He was even more dissatisfied when he learned how fortunate Herbert was. To be selected as a companion by a rich young man was just what he would have liked himself, and he flattered himself that he should make a more desirable companion than a mere boy like Herbert.

As our hero was leaving the store, Eben called him back.

“What was that you were telling father about going round with a young man from the city?” he asked.

Herbert repeated it.

“And he pays you six dollars a week?” asked Eben, enviously.

“Yes; of course, I shouldn’t have asked so much, but he fixed the price himself.”

“You think he is very rich?” said Eben, thoughtfully.

“Yes, I think so.”

“What a splendid chance it would be for me!” thought Eben.

“If I could get intimate with a man like that, he might set me up in business some day; perhaps take me to Europe, or round the world!” “How much of the time do you expect to be with this Mr. Melville?” he asked.

Herbert answered the question.

“Does he seem like a man easy to get along with?”

“Very much so.”

Eben inwardly decided that, if he could, he would oust Herbert from his desirable place, and substitute himself. It was a very mean thought, but Eben inherited meanness from his father.

“Herbert,” he said, “will you do me a favor?”

“What is it?” asked our hero.

“Will you take my place in the store this evening? I am not feeling well, and want to take a walk.”

“Yes,” answered Herbert, “as soon as I have run home to tell mother where I am.”

“That’s a good fellow. You shan’t lose anything by it. I’ll give you ten cents.”

“You needn’t pay me anything, Eben. I’ll do it as a favor.”

“You’re a trump, Herbert. Come back as soon as you can.”

When Eben was released from the store, he went over to the hotel, and inquired for Mr. Melville, leaving his unsuspecting young substitute in the post office.

CHAPTER VIII.

EBEN'S ASSURANCE

“A young man wishes to see you, Mr. Melville,” said the servant.

George Melville looked up in some surprise from his book, and said: “You may show him up.”

“It must be Herbert,” he thought.

But when the door was opened, and the visitor shown in, Mr. Melville found it was an older person than Herbert. Eben, for it was he, distorted his mean features into what he regarded as a pleasant smile, and, without waiting to receive a welcome, came forward with extended hand.

“I believe you are Mr. Melville,” he said, inquiringly.

“Yes, that is my name,” said Melville, looking puzzled; “I don't remember you. Have I met you before?”

“You saw me in father's store, very likely,” said Eben. “I am Eben Graham, son of Ebenezer Graham, the postmaster.”

“Indeed! That accounts for your face looking familiar. You resemble your father very closely.”

“I'm a chip off the old block with modern improvements,” said Eben, smirking. “Father's always lived in the country, and he ain't very stylish. I've been employed in Boston for a couple of years past, and got a little city polish.”

“You don’t show much of it,” thought Melville, but he refrained from saying so.

“So you have come home to assist your father,” he said, politely.

“Well, no, not exactly,” answered Eben, “I feel that a country store isn’t my sphere.”

“Then you propose to go back to the city?”

“Probably I shall do so eventually, but I may stay here in Wayneboro a while if I can make satisfactory arrangements. I assure you that it was not my wish to take Herbert Carr’s place.”

“Herbert told me that you had assumed his duties.”

“It is only ad interim. I assure you, it is only ad interim. I am quite ready to give back the place to Herbert, who is better suited to it than I.”

“I wonder what the fellow is driving at,” thought Melville. Eben did not long leave him in doubt.

“Herbert tells me that he has made an engagement with you,” continued Eben, desiring to come to his business as soon as possible.

“Yes, we have made a mutual arrangement.”

“Of course, it is very nice for him; and so I told him.”

“I think I am quite as much a gainer by it as he is,” said Melville.

“Herbert was right. He is easily suited,” said Eben, to himself.

“Of course,” Eben added, clearing his throat, “Herbert isn’t so much of a companion to you as if he were a few years older.”

“I don’t know that; it seems to me that he is a very pleasant companion, young as he is.”

“To be sure, Herbert is a nice boy, and father was glad to help him along by giving him a place, with a larger salary than he ever paid before.”

“What is he driving at?” thought Melville.

“To come to the point, Mr. Melville,” said Eben, “I have made bold to call upon you to suggest a little difference in your arrangements.”

“Indeed!” said Melville, coldly. Though he had no idea what his singular visitor was about to propose, it struck him emphatically that Eben was interfering in an unwarrantable manner with his affairs.

“You see,” continued Eben, “I’m a good deal nearer your age than Herbert, and I’ve had the advantage of residing in the city, which Herbert hasn’t, and naturally should be more company to you. Then, again, Herbert could do the work in the post office and store, which I am doing, nearly as well as I can. I’ll undertake to get father to give him back his place, and then I shall be happy to make an arrangement with you to go hunting and fishing, or anything else that you choose. I am sure I should enjoy your company, Mr. Melville,” concluded Eben, rubbing his hands complacently and surveying George Melville with an insinuating smile.

“You have certainly taken considerable trouble to arrange this matter for me,” said Melville, with a sarcasm which Eben did

not detect.

“Oh, no trouble at all!” said Eben, cheerfully. “You see, the idea came into my head when Herbert told me of his arrangements with you, and I thought I’d come and see you about it.”

“Did you mention it to Herbert?” asked George Melville, with some curiosity.

“Well, no, I didn’t. I didn’t know how Herbert would look at it. I got Herbert to take my place in the store while I ran over to see you about the matter. By the way, though I am some years older than Herbert, I shan’t ask more than you pay him. In fact, I am willing to leave the pay to your liberality.”

“You are very considerate!” said Melville, hardly knowing whether to be amused or provoked by the cool assurance of his visitor.

“Oh, not at all!” returned Eben, complacently. “I guess I’ve fetched him!” he reflected, looking at Mr. Melville through his small, half-closed eyes.

“You have certainly surprised me very much, Mr. Graham,” said Melville, “by the nature of your suggestion. I won’t take into consideration the question whether you have thought more of your own pleasure or mine. So far as the latter is concerned, you have made a mistake in supposing that Herbert’s youth is any drawback to his qualification as a companion. Indeed, his youth and cheerful temperament make him more attractive in my eyes. I hope, Mr. Graham, you will excuse me for saying that he suits

me better than you possibly could.”

Eben’s countenance fell, and he looked quite discomfited and mortified.

“I didn’t suppose a raw, country boy would be likely to suit a gentleman of taste, who has resided in the city,” he said, with asperity.

“Then you will have a chance to correct your impression,” said Melville, with a slight smile.

“Then you don’t care to accept my offer?” said Eben, regretfully.

“Thank you, no. If you will excuse me for suggesting it, Mr. Graham, it would have been more considerate for you to have apprised Herbert of your object in asking him to take your place this evening. Probably he had no idea that you meant to supersede him with me.”

Eben tossed his head.

“You mustn’t think, Mr. Melville,” he said, “that I was after the extra pay. Six dollars doesn’t seem much to me. I was earning ten dollars a week in Boston, and if I had stayed, should probably have been raised to twelve.”

“So that you were really consenting to a sacrifice in offering to enter my employment at six dollars a week?”

“Just so!”

“Then I am all the more convinced that I have decided for the best in retaining Herbert. I do not wish to interfere with your prospects in the city.”

“Oh, as for that,” said Eben, judging that he had gone too far, “I don’t care to go back to the city just yet. I’ve been confined pretty steadily, and a few weeks in the country, hunting and fishing, will do me good.”

George Melville bowed, but said nothing.

Eben felt that he had no excuse for staying longer, and reluctantly rose.

“If you should think better of what I’ve proposed,” he said, “you can let me know.”

“I will do so,” said Melville.

“He’s rather a queer young man,” muttered Eben, as he descended the stairs. “It’s funny that he should prefer a country boy like Herbert to a young man like me who’s seen life, and got some city polish—at the same price, too! He don’t seem to see his own interest. I’m sorry, for it would have been a good deal more interesting to me, going round with him a few hours a day, than tending store for father. There’s one thing sure, I won’t do it long. I’m fitted for a higher position than that, I hope.”

“For downright impudence and cool assurance, I think that young man will bear off the palm,” thought George Melville, as his unwelcome visitor left the room. “Herbert is in no danger from him. It would probably surprise him if he knew that I should consider his company as an intolerable bore. I will tell Herbert to-morrow the good turn his friend has tried to do him.”

CHAPTER IX. THE SOLITARY FARMHOUSE

If Eben had been sensitive, the cool reception which he met with at the hands of Mr. Melville would have disturbed him. As it was, he felt angry and disappointed, and desirous of “coming up with” Herbert, as he expressed it, though it was hard to see in what way the boy had injured him. It did not seem quite clear at present how he was to punish Herbert, but he only waited for an occasion.

When Herbert learned, the next morning, from Mr. Melville, in what manner Eben had tried to undermine him, and deprive him of his situation, he was naturally indignant.

“I didn’t think Eben Graham could be so mean,” he exclaimed.

“It was certainly a mean thing to do, Herbert,” said George Melville; “but you can afford to treat young Graham with contempt, as he has been unable to do you any injury.”

“What shall we do this morning, Mr. Melville?” asked Herbert.

“I should like a row on the river,” said Melville. “Do you know of any boat we can have?”

“Walter Ingalls has a boat; I think we can hire that.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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