

ALDRICH THOMAS BAILEY

THE STORY OF A BAD BOY

Thomas Aldrich

The Story of a Bad Boy

«Public Domain»

Aldrich T.

The Story of a Bad Boy / T. Aldrich — «Public Domain»,

© Aldrich T.

© Public Domain

Содержание

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter One—In Which I Introduce Myself | 5 |
| Chapter Two—In Which I Entertain Peculiar Views | 7 |
| Chapter Three—On Board the Typhoon | 9 |
| Chapter Four—Rivermouth | 12 |
| Chapter Five—The Nutter House and the Nutter Family | 16 |
| Chapter Six—Lights and Shadows | 20 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 26 |

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Story of a Bad Boy

Chapter One—In Which I Introduce Myself

This is the story of a bad boy. Well, not such a very bad, but a pretty bad boy; and I ought to know, for I am, or rather I was, that boy myself.

Lest the title should mislead the reader, I hasten to assure him here that I have no dark confessions to make. I call my story the story of a bad boy, partly to distinguish myself from those faultless young gentlemen who generally figure in narratives of this kind, and partly because I really was not a cherub. I may truthfully say I was an amiable, impulsive lad, blessed with fine digestive powers, and no hypocrite. I didn't want to be an angel and with the angels stand; I didn't think the missionary tracts presented to me by the Rev. Wibird Hawkins were half so nice as Robinson Crusoe; and I didn't send my little pocket-money to the natives of the Feejee Islands, but spent it royally in peppermint-drops and taffy candy. In short, I was a real human boy, such as you may meet anywhere in New England, and no more like the impossible boy in a storybook than a sound orange is like one that has been sucked dry. But let us begin at the beginning.

Whenever a new scholar came to our school, I used to confront him at recess with the following words: "My name's Tom Bailey; what's your name?" If the name struck me favorably, I shook hands with the new pupil cordially; but if it didn't, I would turn on my heel, for I was particular on this point. Such names as Higgins, Wiggins, and Spriggins were deadly affronts to my ear; while Langdon, Wallace, Blake, and the like, were passwords to my confidence and esteem.

Ah me! some of those dear fellows are rather elderly boys by this time—lawyers, merchants, sea-captains, soldiers, authors, what not? Phil Adams (a special good name that Adams) is consul at Shanghai, where I picture him to myself with his head closely shaved—he never had too much hair—and a long pigtail banging down behind. He is married, I hear; and I hope he and she that was Miss Wang Wang are very happy together, sitting cross-legged over their diminutive cups of tea in a skyblue tower hung with bells. It is so I think of him; to me he is henceforth a jewelled mandarin, talking nothing but broken China. Whitcomb is a judge, sedate and wise, with spectacles balanced on the bridge of that remarkable nose which, in former days, was so plentifully sprinkled with freckles that the boys christened him Pepper Whitcomb. Just to think of little Pepper Whitcomb being a judge! What would he do to me now, I wonder, if I were to sing out "Pepper!" some day in court? Fred Langdon is in California, in the native-wine business—he used to make the best licorice-water I ever tasted! Binny Wallace sleeps in the Old South Burying-Ground; and Jack Harris, too, is dead—Harris, who commanded us boys, of old, in the famous snow-ball battles of Slatter's Hill. Was it yesterday I saw him at the head of his regiment on its way to join the shattered Army of the Potomac? Not yesterday, but six years ago. It was at the battle of the Seven Pines. Gallant Jack Harris, that never drew rein until he had dashed into the Rebel battery! So they found him—lying across the enemy's guns.

How we have parted, and wandered, and married, and died! I wonder what has become of all the boys who went to the Temple Grammar School at Rivermouth when I was a youngster? "All, all are gone, the old familiar faces!"

It is with no ungentle hand I summon them back, for a moment, from that Past which has closed upon them and upon me. How pleasantly they live again in my memory! Happy, magical Past, in whose fairy atmosphere even Conway, mine ancient foe, stands forth transfigured, with a sort of dreamy glory encircling his bright red hair!

With the old school formula I commence these sketches of my boyhood. My name is Tom Bailey; what is yours, gentle reader? I take for granted it is neither Wiggins nor Spriggins, and that we shall get on famously together, and be capital friends forever.

Chapter Two—In Which I Entertain Peculiar Views

I was born at Rivermouth, but, before I had a chance to become very well acquainted with that pretty New England town, my parents removed to New Orleans, where my father invested his money so securely in the banking business that he was never able to get any of it out again. But of this hereafter.

I was only eighteen months old at the time of the removal, and it didn't make much difference to me where I was, because I was so small; but several years later, when my father proposed to take me North to be educated, I had my own peculiar views on the subject. I instantly kicked over the little Negro boy who happened to be standing by me at the moment, and, stamping my foot violently on the floor of the piazza, declared that I would not be taken away to live among a lot of Yankees!

You see I was what is called "a Northern man with Southern principles." I had no recollection of New England: my earliest memories were connected with the South, with Aunt Chloe, my old Negro nurse, and with the great ill-kept garden in the centre of which stood our house—a whitewashed stone house it was, with wide verandas—shut out from the street by lines of orange, fig, and magnolia trees. I knew I was born at the North, but hoped nobody would find it out. I looked upon the misfortune as something so shrouded by time and distance that maybe nobody remembered it. I never told my schoolmates I was a Yankee, because they talked about the Yankees in such a scornful way it made me feel that it was quite a disgrace not to be born in Louisiana, or at least in one of the Border States. And this impression was strengthened by Aunt Chloe, who said, "dar wasn't no gentl'men in the Norf no way," and on one occasion terrified me beyond measure by declaring that, "if any of dem mean whites tried to git her away from marster, she was jes'gwine to knock 'em on de head wid a gourd!"

The way this poor creature's eyes flashed, and the tragic air with which she struck at an imaginary "mean white," are among the most vivid things in my memory of those days.

To be frank, my idea of the North was about as accurate as that entertained by the well-educated Englishmen of the present day concerning America. I supposed the inhabitants were divided into two classes—Indians and white people; that the Indians occasionally dashed down on New York, and scalped any woman or child (giving the preference to children) whom they caught lingering in the outskirts after nightfall; that the white men were either hunters or schoolmasters, and that it was winter pretty much all the year round. The prevailing style of architecture I took to be log-cabins.

With this delightful picture of Northern civilization in my eye, the reader will easily understand my terror at the bare thought of being transported to Rivermouth to school, and possibly will forgive me for kicking over little black Sam, and otherwise misconducting myself, when my father announced his determination to me. As for kicking little Sam—I always did that, more or less gently, when anything went wrong with me.

My father was greatly perplexed and troubled by this unusually violent outbreak, and especially by the real consternation which he saw written in every line of my countenance. As little black Sam picked himself up, my father took my hand in his and led me thoughtfully to the library.

I can see him now as he leaned back in the bamboo chair and questioned me. He appeared strangely agitated on learning the nature of my objections to going North, and proceeded at once to knock down all my pine log houses, and scatter all the Indian tribes with which I had populated the greater portion of the Eastern and Middle States.

"Who on earth, Tom, has filled your brain with such silly stories?" asked my father, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Aunt Chloe, sir; she told me."

"And you really thought your grandfather wore a blanket embroidered with beads, and ornamented his leggins with the scalps of his enemies?"

"Well, sir, I didn't think that exactly."

“Didn’t think that exactly? Tom, you will be the death of me.”

He hid his face in his handkerchief, and, when he looked up, he seemed to have been suffering acutely. I was deeply moved myself, though I did not clearly understand what I had said or done to cause him to feel so badly. Perhaps I had hurt his feelings by thinking it even possible that Grandfather Nutter was an Indian warrior.

My father devoted that evening and several subsequent evenings to giving me a clear and succinct account of New England; its early struggles, its progress, and its present condition—faint and confused glimmerings of all which I had obtained at school, where history had never been a favorite pursuit of mine.

I was no longer unwilling to go North; on the contrary, the proposed journey to a new world full of wonders kept me awake nights. I promised myself all sorts of fun and adventures, though I was not entirely at rest in my mind touching the savages, and secretly resolved to go on board the ship—the journey was to be made by sea—with a certain little brass pistol in my trousers-pocket, in case of any difficulty with the tribes when we landed at Boston.

I couldn’t get the Indian out of my head. Only a short time previously the Cherokees—or was it the Camanches?—had been removed from their hunting-grounds in Arkansas; and in the wilds of the Southwest the red men were still a source of terror to the border settlers. “Trouble with the Indians” was the staple news from Florida published in the New Orleans papers. We were constantly hearing of travellers being attacked and murdered in the interior of that State. If these things were done in Florida, why not in Massachusetts?

Yet long before the sailing day arrived I was eager to be off. My impatience was increased by the fact that my father had purchased for me a fine little Mustang pony, and shipped it to Rivermouth a fortnight previous to the date set for our own departure—for both my parents were to accompany me. The pony (which nearly kicked me out of bed one night in a dream), and my father’s promise that he and my mother would come to Rivermouth every other summer, completely resigned me to the situation. The pony’s name was Gitana, which is the Spanish for gypsy; so I always called her—she was a lady pony—Gypsy.

At length the time came to leave the vine-covered mansion among the orange-trees, to say goodbye to little black Sam (I am convinced he was heartily glad to get rid of me), and to part with simple Aunt Chloe, who, in the confusion of her grief, kissed an eyelash into my eye, and then buried her face in the bright bandana turban which she had mounted that morning in honor of our departure.

I fancy them standing by the open garden gate; the tears are rolling down Aunt Chloe’s cheeks; Sam’s six front teeth are glistening like pearls; I wave my hand to him manfully then I call out “goodby” in a muffled voice to Aunt Chloe; they and the old home fade away. I am never to see them again!

Chapter Three—On Board the Typhoon

I do not remember much about the voyage to Boston, for after the first few hours at sea I was dreadfully unwell.

The name of our ship was the “A No. 1, fast-sailing packet Typhoon.” I learned afterwards that she sailed fast only in the newspaper advertisements. My father owned one quarter of the Typhoon, and that is why we happened to go in her. I tried to guess which quarter of the ship he owned, and finally concluded it must be the hind quarter—the cabin, in which we had the cosiest of state-rooms, with one round window in the roof, and two shelves or boxes nailed up against the wall to sleep in.

There was a good deal of confusion on deck while we were getting under way. The captain shouted orders (to which nobody seemed to pay any attention) through a battered tin trumpet, and grew so red in the face that he reminded me of a scooped-out pumpkin with a lighted candle inside. He swore right and left at the sailors without the slightest regard for their feelings. They didn’t mind it a bit, however, but went on singing—

“Heave ho!
With the rum below,
And hurrah for the Spanish Main O!”

I will not be positive about “the Spanish Main,” but it was hurrah for something O. I considered them very jolly fellows, and so indeed they were. One weather-beaten tar in particular struck my fancy—a thick-set, jovial man, about fifty years of age, with twinkling blue eyes and a fringe of gray hair circling his head like a crown. As he took off his tarpaulin I observed that the top of his head was quite smooth and flat, as if somebody had sat down on him when he was very young.

There was something noticeably hearty in this man’s bronzed face, a heartiness that seemed to extend to his loosely knotted neckerchief. But what completely won my good-will was a picture of enviable loveliness painted on his left arm. It was the head of a woman with the body of a fish. Her flowing hair was of livid green, and she held a pink comb in one hand. I never saw anything so beautiful. I determined to know that man. I think I would have given my brass pistol to have had such a picture painted on my arm.

While I stood admiring this work of art, a fat wheezy steamtug, with the word AJAX in staring black letters on the paddlebox, came puffing up alongside the Typhoon. It was ridiculously small and conceited, compared with our stately ship. I speculated as to what it was going to do. In a few minutes we were lashed to the little monster, which gave a snort and a shriek, and commenced backing us out from the levee (wharf) with the greatest ease.

I once saw an ant running away with a piece of cheese eight or ten times larger than itself. I could not help thinking of it, when I found the chubby, smoky-nosed tug-boat towing the Typhoon out into the Mississippi River.

In the middle of the stream we swung round, the current caught us, and away we flew like a great winged bird. Only it didn’t seem as if we were moving. The shore, with the countless steamboats, the tangled rigging of the ships, and the long lines of warehouses, appeared to be gliding away from us.

It was grand sport to stand on the quarter-deck and watch all this. Before long there was nothing to be seen on other side but stretches of low swampy land, covered with stunted cypress trees, from which drooped delicate streamers of Spanish moss—a fine place for alligators and Congo snakes. Here and there we passed a yellow sand-bar, and here and there a snag lifted its nose out of the water like a shark.

“This is your last chance to see the city, To see the city, Tom,” said my father, as we swept round a bend of the river.

I turned and looked. New Orleans was just a colorless mass of something in the distance, and the dome of the St. Charles Hotel, upon which the sun shimmered for a moment, was no bigger than the top of old Aunt Chloe's thimble.

What do I remember next? The gray sky and the fretful blue waters of the Gulf. The steam-tug had long since let slip her hawsers and gone panting away with a derisive scream, as much as to say, "I've done my duty, now look out for yourself, old Typhoon!"

The ship seemed quite proud of being left to take care of itself, and, with its huge white sails bulged out, strutted off like a vain turkey. I had been standing by my father near the wheel-house all this while, observing things with that nicety of perception which belongs only to children; but now the dew began falling, and we went below to have supper.

The fresh fruit and milk, and the slices of cold chicken, looked very nice; yet somehow I had no appetite. There was a general smell of tar about everything. Then the ship gave sudden lurches that made it a matter of uncertainty whether one was going to put his fork to his mouth or into his eye. The tumblers and wineglasses, stuck in a rack over the table, kept clinking and clinking; and the cabin lamp, suspended by four gilt chains from the ceiling, swayed to and fro crazily. Now the floor seemed to rise, and now it seemed to sink under one's feet like a feather-bed.

There were not more than a dozen passengers on board, including ourselves; and all of these, excepting a bald-headed old gentleman—a retired sea-captain—disappeared into their staterooms at an early hour of the evening.

After supper was cleared away, my father and the elderly gentleman, whose name was Captain Truck, played at checkers; and I amused myself for a while by watching the trouble they had in keeping the men in the proper places. Just at the most exciting point of the game, the ship would careen, and down would go the white checkers pell-mell among the black. Then my father laughed, but Captain Truck would grow very angry, and vow that he would have won the game in a move or two more, if the confounded old chicken-coop—that's what he called the ship—hadn't lunched.

"I—I think I will go to bed now, please," I said, laying my hand on my father's knee, and feeling exceedingly queer.

It was high time, for the Typhoon was plunging about in the most alarming fashion. I was speedily tucked away in the upper berth, where I felt a trifle more easy at first. My clothes were placed on a narrow shelf at my feet, and it was a great comfort to me to know that my pistol was so handy, for I made no doubt we should fall in with Pirates before many hours. This is the last thing I remember with any distinctness. At midnight, as I was afterwards told, we were struck by a gale which never left us until we came in sight of the Massachusetts coast.

For days and days I had no sensible idea of what was going on around me. That we were being hurled somewhere upside-down, and that I didn't like it, was about all I knew. I have, indeed, a vague impression that my father used to climb up to the berth and call me his "Ancient Mariner," bidding me cheer up. But the Ancient Mariner was far from cheering up, if I recollect rightly; and I don't believe that venerable navigator would have cared much if it had been announced to him, through a speaking-trumpet, that "a low, black, suspicious craft, with raking masts, was rapidly bearing down upon us!"

In fact, one morning, I thought that such was the case, for bang! went the big cannon I had noticed in the bow of the ship when we came on board, and which had suggested to me the idea of Pirates. Bang! went the gun again in a few seconds. I made a feeble effort to get at my trousers-pocket! But the Typhoon was only saluting Cape Cod—the first land sighted by vessels approaching the coast from a southerly direction.

The vessel had ceased to roll, and my sea-sickness passed away as rapidly as it came. I was all right now, "only a little shaky in my timbers and a little blue about the gills," as Captain Truck remarked to my mother, who, like myself, had been confined to the state-room during the passage.

At Cape Cod the wind parted company with us without saying as much as “Excuse me”; so we were nearly two days in making the run which in favorable weather is usually accomplished in seven hours. That’s what the pilot said.

I was able to go about the ship now, and I lost no time in cultivating the acquaintance of the sailor with the green-haired lady on his arm. I found him in the forecastle—a sort of cellar in the front part of the vessel. He was an agreeable sailor, as I had expected, and we became the best of friends in five minutes.

He had been all over the world two or three times, and knew no end of stories. According to his own account, he must have been shipwrecked at least twice a year ever since his birth. He had served under Decatur when that gallant officer peppered the Algerines and made them promise not to sell their prisoners of war into slavery; he had worked a gun at the bombardment of Vera Cruz in the Mexican War, and he had been on Alexander Selkirk’s Island more than once. There were very few things he hadn’t done in a seafaring way.

“I suppose, sir,” I remarked, “that your name isn’t Typhoon?”

“Why, Lord love ye, lad, my name’s Benjamin Watson, of Nantucket. But I’m a true blue Typhoon,” he added, which increased my respect for him; I don’t know why, and I didn’t know then whether Typhoon was the name of a vegetable or a profession.

Not wishing to be outdone in frankness, I disclosed to him that my name was Tom Bailey, upon which he said he was very glad to hear it.

When we got more intimate, I discovered that Sailor Ben, as he wished me to call him, was a perfect walking picturebook. He had two anchors, a star, and a frigate in full sail on his right arm; a pair of lovely blue hands clasped on his breast, and I’ve no doubt that other parts of his body were illustrated in the same agreeable manner. I imagine he was fond of drawings, and took this means of gratifying his artistic taste. It was certainly very ingenious and convenient. A portfolio might be misplaced, or dropped overboard; but Sailor Ben had his pictures wherever he went, just as that eminent person in the poem,

“With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes”—was accompanied by music on all occasions.

The two bands on his breast, he informed me, were a tribute to the memory of a dead messmate from whom he had parted years ago—and surely a more touching tribute was never engraved on a tombstone. This caused me to think of my parting with old Aunt Chloe, and I told him I should take it as a great favor indeed if he would paint a pink hand and a black hand on my chest. He said the colors were pricked into the skin with needles, and that the operation was somewhat painful. I assured him, in an off-hand manner, that I didn’t mind pain, and begged him to set to work at once.

The simple-hearted fellow, who was probably not a little vain of his skill, took me into the forecastle, and was on the point of complying with my request, when my father happened to own the gangway—a circumstance that rather interfered with the decorative art.

I didn’t have another opportunity of conferring alone with Sailor Ben, for the next morning, bright and early, we came in sight of the cupola of the Boston State House.

Chapter Four—Rivermouth

It was a beautiful May morning when the Typhoon hauled up at Long Wharf. Whether the Indians were not early risers, or whether they were away just then on a war-path, I couldn't determine; but they did not appear in any great force—in fact, did not appear at all.

In the remarkable geography which I never hurt myself with studying at New Orleans, was a picture representing the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth. The Pilgrim Fathers, in rather odd hats and coats, are seen approaching the savages; the savages, in no coats or hats to speak of, are evidently undecided whether to shake hands with the Pilgrim Fathers or to make one grand rush and scalp the entire party. Now this scene had so stamped itself on my mind, that, in spite of all my father had said, I was prepared for some such greeting from the aborigines. Nevertheless, I was not sorry to have my expectations unfulfilled. By the way, speaking of the Pilgrim Fathers, I often used to wonder why there was no mention made of the Pilgrim Mothers.

While our trunks were being hoisted from the hold of the ship, I mounted on the roof of the cabin, and took a critical view of Boston. As we came up the harbor, I had noticed that the houses were huddled together on an immense bill, at the top of which was a large building, the State House, towering proudly above the rest, like an amiable mother-hen surrounded by her brood of many-colored chickens. A closer inspection did not impress me very favorably. The city was not nearly so imposing as New Orleans, which stretches out for miles and miles, in the shape of a crescent, along the banks of the majestic river.

I soon grew tired of looking at the masses of houses, rising above one another in irregular tiers, and was glad my father did not propose to remain long in Boston. As I leaned over the rail in this mood, a measly-looking little boy with no shoes said that if I would come down on the wharf he'd lick me for two cents—not an exorbitant price. But I didn't go down. I climbed into the rigging, and stared at him. This, as I was rejoiced to observe, so exasperated him that he stood on his head on a pile of boards, in order to pacify himself.

The first train for Rivermouth left at noon. After a late breakfast on board the Typhoon, our trunks were piled upon a baggage-wagon, and ourselves stowed away in a coach, which must have turned at least one hundred corners before it set us down at the railway station.

In less time than it takes to tell it, we were shooting across the country at a fearful rate—now clattering over a bridge, now screaming through a tunnel; here we cut a flourishing village in two, like a knife, and here we dived into the shadow of a pine forest. Sometimes we glided along the edge of the ocean, and could see the sails of ships twinkling like bits of silver against the horizon; sometimes we dashed across rocky pasture-lands where stupid-eyed cattle were loafing. It was fun to scare lazy-looking cows that lay round in groups under the newly budded trees near the railroad track.

We did not pause at any of the little brown stations on the route (they looked just like overgrown black-walnut clocks), though at every one of them a man popped out as if he were worked by machinery, and waved a red flag, and appeared as though he would like to have us stop. But we were an express train, and made no stoppages, excepting once or twice to give the engine a drink. It is strange how the memory clings to some things. It is over twenty years since I took that first ride to Rivermouth, and yet, oddly enough, I remember as if it were yesterday, that, as we passed slowly through the village of Hampton, we saw two boys fighting behind a red barn. There was also a shaggy yellow dog, who looked as if he had commenced to unravel, barking himself all up into a knot with excitement. We had only a hurried glimpse of the battle—long enough, however, to see that the combatants were equally matched and very much in earnest. I am ashamed to say how many times since I have speculated as to which boy got licked. Maybe both the small rascals are dead now (not in consequence of the set-to, let us hope), or maybe they are married, and have pugnacious urchins of their own; yet to this day I sometimes find myself wondering how that fight turned out.

We had been riding perhaps two hours and a half, when we shot by a tall factory with a chimney resembling a church steeple; then the locomotive gave a scream, the engineer rang his bell, and we plunged into the twilight of a long wooden building, open at both ends. Here we stopped, and the conductor, thrusting his head in at the car door, cried out, "Passengers for Rivermouth!"

At last we had reached our journey's end. On the platform my father shook hands with a straight, brisk old gentleman whose face was very serene and rosy. He had on a white hat and a long swallow-tailed coat, the collar of which came clear up above his ears. He didn't look unlike a Pilgrim Father. This, of course, was Grandfather Nutter, at whose house I was born. My mother kissed him a great many times; and I was glad to see him myself, though I naturally did not feel very intimate with a person whom I had not seen since I was eighteen months old.

While we were getting into the double-seated wagon which Grandfather Nutter had provided, I took the opportunity of asking after the health of the pony. The pony had arrived all right ten days before, and was in the stable at home, quite anxious to see me.

As we drove through the quiet old town, I thought Rivermouth the prettiest place in the world; and I think so still. The streets are long and wide, shaded by gigantic American elms, whose drooping branches, interlacing here and there, span the avenues with arches graceful enough to be the handiwork of fairies. Many of the houses have small flower-gardens in front, gay in the season with china-asters, and are substantially built, with massive chimney-stacks and protruding eaves. A beautiful river goes rippling by the town, and, after turning and twisting among a lot of tiny islands, empties itself into the sea.

The harbor is so fine that the largest ships can sail directly up to the wharves and drop anchor. Only they don't. Years ago it was a famous seaport. Princely fortunes were made in the West India trade; and in 1812, when we were at war with Great Britain, any number of privateers were fitted out at Rivermouth to prey upon the merchant vessels of the enemy. Certain people grew suddenly and mysteriously rich. A great many of "the first families" of today do not care to trace their pedigree back to the time when their grandsires owned shares in the *Matilda Jane*, twenty-four guns. Well, well!

Few ships come to Rivermouth now. Commerce drifted into other ports. The phantom fleet sailed off one day, and never came back again. The crazy old warehouses are empty; and barnacles and eel-grass cling to the piles of the crumbling wharves, where the sunshine lies lovingly, bringing out the faint spicy odor that haunts the place—the ghost of the old dead West India trade! During our ride from the station, I was struck, of course, only by the general neatness of the houses and the beauty of the elm-trees lining the streets. I describe Rivermouth now as I came to know it afterwards.

Rivermouth is a very ancient town. In my day there existed a tradition among the boys that it was here Christopher Columbus made his first landing on this continent. I remember having the exact spot pointed out to me by Pepper Whitcomb! One thing is certain, Captain John Smith, who afterwards, according to the legend, married Pocahontas—whereby he got Powhatan for a father-in-law—explored the river in 1614, and was much charmed by the beauty of Rivermouth, which at that time was covered with wild strawberry-vines.

Rivermouth figures prominently in all the colonial histories. Every other house in the place has its tradition more or less grim and entertaining. If ghosts could flourish anywhere, there are certain streets in Rivermouth that would be full of them. I don't know of a town with so many old houses. Let us linger, for a moment, in front of the one which the Oldest Inhabitant is always sure to point out to the curious stranger.

It is a square wooden edifice, with gambrel roof and deep-set window-frames. Over the windows and doors there used to be heavy carvings—oak-leaves and acorns, and angels' heads with wings spreading from the ears, oddly jumbled together; but these ornaments and other outward signs of grandeur have long since disappeared. A peculiar interest attaches itself to this house, not because of its age, for it has not been standing quite a century; nor on account of its architecture, which is

not striking—but because of the illustrious men who at various periods have occupied its spacious chambers.

In 1770 it was an aristocratic hotel. At the left side of the entrance stood a high post, from which swung the sign of the Earl of Halifax. The landlord was a stanch loyalist—that is to say, he believed in the king, and when the overtaxed colonies determined to throw off the British yoke, the adherents to the Crown held private meetings in one of the back rooms of the tavern. This irritated the rebels, as they were called; and one night they made an attack on the Earl of Halifax, tore down the signboard, broke in the window-sashes, and gave the landlord hardly time to make himself invisible over a fence in the rear.

For several months the shattered tavern remained deserted. At last the exiled innkeeper, on promising to do better, was allowed to return; a new sign, bearing the name of William Pitt, the friend of America, swung proudly from the door-post, and the patriots were appeased. Here it was that the mail-coach from Boston twice a week, for many a year, set down its load of travelers and gossip. For some of the details in this sketch, I am indebted to a recently published chronicle of those times.

It is 1782. The French fleet is lying in the harbor of Rivermouth, and eight of the principal officers, in white uniforms trimmed with gold lace, have taken up their quarters at the sign of the William Pitt. Who is this young and handsome officer now entering the door of the tavern? It is no less a personage than the Marquis Lafayette, who has come all the way from Providence to visit the French gentlemen boarding there. What a gallant-looking cavalier he is, with his quick eyes and coal black hair! Forty years later he visited the spot again; his locks were gray and his step was feeble, but his heart held its young love for Liberty.

Who is this finely dressed traveler alighting from his coach-and-four, attended by servants in livery? Do you know that sounding name, written in big valorous letters on the Declaration of Independence—written as if by the hand of a giant? Can you not see it now? JOHN HANCOCK. This is he.

Three young men, with their valet, are standing on the doorstep of the William Pitt, bowing politely, and inquiring in the most courteous terms in the world if they can be accommodated. It is the time of the French Revolution, and these are three sons of the Duke of Orleans—Louis Philippe and his two brothers. Louis Philippe never forgot his visit to Rivermouth. Years afterwards, when he was seated on the throne of France, he asked an American lady, who chanced to be at his court, if the pleasant old mansion were still standing.

But a greater and a better man than the king of the French has honored this roof. Here, in 1789, came George Washington, the President of the United States, to pay his final complimentary visit to the State dignitaries. The wainscoted chamber where he slept, and the dining-hall where he entertained his guests, have a certain dignity and sanctity which even the present Irish tenants cannot wholly destroy.

During the period of my reign at Rivermouth, an ancient lady, Dame Jocelyn by name, lived in one of the upper rooms of this notable building. She was a dashing young belle at the time of Washington's first visit to the town, and must have been exceedingly coquettish and pretty, judging from a certain portrait on ivory still in the possession of the family. According to Dame Jocelyn, George Washington flirted with her just a little bit—in what a stately and highly finished manner can be imagined.

There was a mirror with a deep filigreed frame hanging over the mantel-piece in this room. The glass was cracked and the quicksilver rubbed off or discolored in many places. When it reflected your face you had the singular pleasure of not recognizing yourself. It gave your features the appearance of having been run through a mince-meat machine. But what rendered the looking-glass a thing of enchantment to me was a faded green feather, tipped with scarlet, which drooped from the top of the tarnished gilt mouldings. This feather Washington took from the plume of his three-cornered hat, and presented with his own hand to the worshipful Mistress Jocelyn the day he left Rivermouth

forever. I wish I could describe the mincing genteel air, and the ill-concealed self-complacency, with which the dear old lady related the incident.

Many a Saturday afternoon have I climbed up the rickety staircase to that dingy room, which always had a flavor of snuff about it, to sit on a stiff-backed chair and listen for hours together to Dame Jocelyn's stories of the olden time. How she would prattle! She was bedridden—poor creature!—and had not been out of the chamber for fourteen years. Meanwhile the world had shot ahead of Dame Jocelyn. The changes that had taken place under her very nose were unknown to this faded, crooning old gentlewoman, whom the eighteenth century had neglected to take away with the rest of its odd traps. She had no patience with newfangled notions. The old ways and the old times were good enough for her. She had never seen a steam engine, though she had heard “the dratted thing” screech in the distance. In her day, when gentlefolk traveled, they went in their own coaches. She didn't see how respectable people could bring themselves down to “riding in a car with rag-tag and bobtail and Lord-knows-who.” Poor old aristocrat The landlord charged her no rent for the room, and the neighbors took turns in supplying her with meals. Towards the close of her life—she lived to be ninety-nine—she grew very fretful and capricious about her food. If she didn't chance to fancy what was sent her, she had no hesitation in sending it back to the giver with “Miss Jocelyn's respectful compliments.”

But I have been gossiping too long—and yet not too long if I have impressed upon the reader an idea of what a rusty, delightful old town it was to which I had come to spend the next three or four years of my boyhood.

A drive of twenty minutes from the station brought us to the door-step of Grandfather Nutter's house. What kind of house it was, and what sort of people lived in it, shall be told in another chapter.

Chapter Five—The Nutter House and the Nutter Family

The Nutter House—all the more prominent dwellings in Rivermouth are named after somebody; for instance, there is the Walford House, the Venner House, the Trefethen House, etc., though it by no means follows that they are inhabited by the people whose names they bear—the Nutter House, to resume, has been in our family nearly a hundred years, and is an honor to the builder (an ancestor of ours, I believe), supposing durability to be a merit. If our ancestor was a carpenter, he knew his trade. I wish I knew mine as well. Such timber and such workmanship don't often come together in houses built nowadays.

Imagine a low-studded structure, with a wide hall running through the middle. At your right hand, as you enter, stands a tall black mahogany clock, looking like an Egyptian mummy set up on end. On each side of the hall are doors (whose knobs, it must be confessed, do not turn very easily), opening into large rooms wainscoted and rich in wood-carvings about the mantel-pieces and cornices. The walls are covered with pictured paper, representing landscapes and sea-views. In the parlor, for example, this enlivening figure is repeated all over the room. A group of English peasants, wearing Italian hats, are dancing on a lawn that abruptly resolves itself into a sea-beach, upon which stands a flabby fisherman (nationality unknown), quietly hauling in what appears to be a small whale, and totally regardless of the dreadful naval combat going on just beyond the end of his fishing-rod. On the other side of the ships is the main-land again, with the same peasants dancing. Our ancestors were very worthy people, but their wall-papers were abominable.

There are neither grates nor stoves in these quaint chambers, but splendid open chimney-places, with room enough for the corpulent back-log to turn over comfortably on the polished andirons. A wide staircase leads from the hall to the second story, which is arranged much like the first. Over this is the garret. I needn't tell a New England boy what—a museum of curiosities is the garret of a well-regulated New England house of fifty or sixty years' standing. Here meet together, as if by some preconcerted arrangement, all the broken-down chairs of the household, all the spavined tables, all the seedy hats, all the intoxicated-looking boots, all the split walking-sticks that have retired from business, "weary with the march of life." The pots, the pans, the trunks, the bottles—who may hope to make an inventory of the numberless odds and ends collected in this bewildering lumber-room? But what a place it is to sit of an afternoon with the rain pattering on the roof! What a place in which to read *Gulliver's Travels*, or the famous adventures of Rinaldo Rinaldini!

My grandfather's house stood a little back from the main street, in the shadow of two handsome elms, whose overgrown boughs would dash themselves against the gables whenever the wind blew hard. In the rear was a pleasant garden, covering perhaps a quarter of an acre, full of plum-trees and gooseberry bushes. These trees were old settlers, and are all dead now, excepting one, which bears a purple plum as big as an egg. This tree, as I remark, is still standing, and a more beautiful tree to tumble out of never grew anywhere. In the northwestern corner of the garden were the stables and carriage-house opening upon a narrow lane. You may imagine that I made an early visit to that locality to inspect Gypsy. Indeed, I paid her a visit every half-hour during the first day of my arrival. At the twenty-fourth visit she trod on my foot rather heavily, as a reminder, probably, that I was wearing out my welcome. She was a knowing little pony, that Gypsy, and I shall have much to say of her in the course of these pages.

Gypsy's quarters were all that could be wished, but nothing among my new surroundings gave me more satisfaction than the cosey sleeping apartment that had been prepared for myself. It was the hall room over the front door.

I had never had a chamber all to myself before, and this one, about twice the size of our state-room on board the *Typhoon*, was a marvel of neatness and comfort. Pretty chintz curtains hung at the window, and a patch quilt of more colors than were in Joseph's coat covered the little truckle-

bed. The pattern of the wall-paper left nothing to be desired in that line. On a gray background were small bunches of leaves, unlike any that ever grew in this world; and on every other bunch perched a yellow-bird, pitted with crimson spots, as if it had just recovered from a severe attack of the small-pox. That no such bird ever existed did not detract from my admiration of each one. There were two hundred and sixty-eight of these birds in all, not counting those split in two where the paper was badly joined. I counted them once when I was laid up with a fine black eye, and falling asleep immediately dreamed that the whole flock suddenly took wing and flew out of the window. From that time I was never able to regard them as merely inanimate objects.

A wash-stand in the corner, a chest of carved mahogany drawers, a looking-glass in a filigreed frame, and a high-backed chair studded with brass nails like a coffin, constituted the furniture. Over the head of the bed were two oak shelves, holding perhaps a dozen books—among which were *Theodore*, or *The Peruvians*; *Robinson Crusoe*; an odd volume of *Tristram Shandy*; *Baxter's Saints' Rest*, and a fine English edition of the *Arabian Nights*, with six hundred wood-cuts by Harvey.

Shall I ever forget the hour when I first overhauled these books? I do not allude especially to *Baxter's Saints' Rest*, which is far from being a lively work for the young, but to the *Arabian Nights*, and particularly *Robinson Crusoe*. The thrill that ran into my fingers' ends then has not run out yet. Many a time did I steal up to this nest of a room, and, taking the dog's-eared volume from its shelf, glide off into an enchanted realm, where there were no lessons to get and no boys to smash my kite. In a lidless trunk in the garret I subsequently unearthed another motley collection of novels and romances, embracing the adventures of *Baron Trenck*, *Jack Sheppard*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and *Charlotte Temple*—all of which I fed upon like a bookworm.

I never come across a copy of any of those works without feeling a certain tenderness for the yellow-haired little rascal who used to lean above the magic pages hour after hour, religiously believing every word he read, and no more doubting the reality of *Sindbad the Sailor*, or the *Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance*, than he did the existence of his own grandfather.

Against the wall at the foot of the bed hung a single-barrel shot-gun—placed there by Grandfather Nutter, who knew what a boy loved, if ever a grandfather did. As the trigger of the gun had been accidentally twisted off, it was not, perhaps, the most dangerous weapon that could be placed in the hands of youth. In this maimed condition its “bump of destructiveness” was much less than that of my small brass pocket-pistol, which I at once proceeded to suspend from one of the nails supporting the fowling-piece, for my vagaries concerning the red man had been entirely dispelled.

Having introduced the reader to the Nutter House, a presentation to the Nutter family naturally follows. The family consisted of my grandfather; his sister, Miss Abigail Nutter; and Kitty Collins, the maid-of-all-work.

Grandfather Nutter was a hale, cheery old gentleman, as straight and as bald as an arrow. He had been a sailor in early life; that is to say, at the age of ten years he fled from the multiplication-table, and ran away to sea. A single voyage satisfied him. There never was but one of our family who didn't run away to sea, and this one died at his birth. My grandfather had also been a soldier—a captain of militia in 1812. If I owe the British nation anything, I owe thanks to that particular British soldier who put a musket-ball into the fleshy part of Captain Nutter's leg, causing that noble warrior a slight permanent limp, but offsetting the injury by furnishing him with the material for a story which the old gentleman was never weary of telling and I never weary of listening to. The story, in brief, was as follows.

At the breaking out of the war, an English frigate lay for several days off the coast near Rivermouth. A strong fort defended the harbor, and a regiment of minute-men, scattered at various points along-shore, stood ready to repel the boats, should the enemy try to effect a landing. Captain Nutter had charge of a slight earthwork just outside the mouth of the river. Late one thick night the sound of oars was heard; the sentinel tried to fire off his gun at half-cock, and couldn't, when Captain Nutter sprung upon the parapet in the pitch darkness, and shouted, “Boat ahoy!” A musket-

shot immediately embedded itself in the calf of his leg. The Captain tumbled into the fort and the boat, which had probably come in search of water, pulled back to the frigate.

This was my grandfather's only exploit during the war. That his prompt and bold conduct was instrumental in teaching the enemy the hopelessness of attempting to conquer such a people was among the firm beliefs of my boyhood.

At the time I came to Rivermouth my grandfather had retired from active pursuits, and was living at ease on his money, invested principally in shipping. He had been a widower many years; a maiden sister, the aforesaid Miss Abigail, managing his household. Miss Abigail also managed her brother, and her brother's servant, and the visitor at her brother's gate—not in a tyrannical spirit, but from a philanthropic desire to be useful to everybody. In person she was tall and angular; she had a gray complexion, gray eyes, gray eyebrows, and generally wore a gray dress. Her strongest weak point was a belief in the efficacy of "hot-drops" as a cure for all known diseases.

If there were ever two people who seemed to dislike each other, Miss Abigail and Kitty Collins were those people. If ever two people really loved each other, Miss Abigail and Kitty Collins were those people also. They were always either skirmishing or having a cup of tea lovingly together.

Miss Abigail was very fond of me, and so was Kitty; and in the course of their disagreements each let me into the private history of the other.

According to Kitty, it was not originally my grandfather's intention to have Miss Abigail at the head of his domestic establishment. She had swooped down on him (Kitty's own words), with a band-box in one hand and a faded blue cotton umbrella, still in existence, in the other. Clad in this singular garb—I do not remember that Kitty alluded to—any additional peculiarity of dress—Miss Abigail had made her appearance at the door of the Nutter House on the morning of my grandmother's funeral. The small amount of baggage which the lady brought with her would have led the superficial observer to infer that Miss Abigail's visit was limited to a few days. I run ahead of my story in saying she remained seventeen years! How much longer she would have remained can never be definitely known now, as she died at the expiration of that period.

Whether or not my grandfather was quite pleased by this unlooked-for addition to his family is a problem. He was very kind always to Miss Abigail, and seldom opposed her; though I think she must have tried his patience sometimes, especially when she interfered with Kitty.

Kitty Collins, or Mrs. Catherine, as she preferred to be called, was descended in a direct line from an extensive family of kings who formerly ruled over Ireland. In consequence of various calamities, among which the failure of the potato-crop may be mentioned, Miss Kitty Collins, in company with several hundred of her countrymen and countrywomen—also descended from kings—came over to America in an emigrant ship, in the year eighteen hundred and something.

I don't know what freak of fortune caused the royal exile to turn up at Rivermouth; but turn up she did, a few months after arriving in this country, and was hired by my grandmother to do "general housework" for the sum of four shillings and six-pence a week.

Kitty had been living about seven years in my grandfather's family when she unburdened her heart of a secret which had been weighing upon it all that time. It may be said of people, as it is said of nations, "Happy are they that have no history." Kitty had a history, and a pathetic one, I think.

On board the emigrant ship that brought her to America, she became acquainted with a sailor, who, being touched by Kitty's forlorn condition, was very good to her. Long before the end of the voyage, which had been tedious and perilous, she was heartbroken at the thought of separating from her kindly protector; but they were not to part just yet, for the sailor returned Kitty's affection, and the two were married on their arrival at port. Kitty's husband—she would never mention his name, but kept it locked in her bosom like some precious relic—had a considerable sum of money when the crew were paid off; and the young couple—for Kitty was young then—lived very happily in a lodging-house on South Street, near the docks. This was in New York.

The days flew by like hours, and the stocking in which the little bride kept the funds shrunk and shrunk, until at last there were only three or four dollars left in the toe of it. Then Kitty was troubled; for she knew her sailor would have to go to sea again unless he could get employment on shore. This he endeavored to do, but not with much success. One morning as usual he kissed her good day, and set out in search of work.

“Kissed me goodbye, and called me his little Irish lass,” sobbed Kitty, telling the story, “kissed me goodbye, and, Heaven help me, I niver set oi on him nor on the likes of him again!”

He never came back. Day after day dragged on, night after night, and then the weary weeks. What had become of him? Had he been murdered? Had he fallen into the docks? Had he—deserted her? No! She could not believe that; he was too brave and tender and true. She couldn’t believe that. He was dead, dead, or he’d come back to her.

Meanwhile the landlord of the lodging-house turned Kitty into the streets, now that “her man” was gone, and the payment of the rent doubtful. She got a place as a servant. The family she lived with shortly moved to Boston, and she accompanied them; then they went abroad, but Kitty would not leave America. Somehow she drifted to Rivermouth, and for seven long years never gave speech to her sorrow, until the kindness of strangers, who had become friends to her, unsealed the heroic lips.

Kitty’s story, you may be sure, made my grandparents treat her more kindly than ever. In time she grew to be regarded less as a servant than as a friend in the home circle, sharing its joys and sorrows—a faithful nurse, a willing slave, a happy spirit in spite of all. I fancy I hear her singing over her work in the kitchen, pausing from time to time to make some witty reply to Miss Abigail—for Kitty, like all her race, had a vein of unconscious humor. Her bright honest face comes to me out from the past, the light and life of the Nutter House when I was a boy at Rivermouth.

Chapter Six—Lights and Shadows

The first shadow that fell upon me in my new home was caused by the return of my parents to New Orleans. Their visit was cut short by business which required my father's presence in Natchez, where he was establishing a branch of the bankinghouse. When they had gone, a sense of loneliness such as I had never dreamed of filled my young breast. I crept away to the stable, and, throwing my arms about Gypsy's neck, sobbed aloud. She too had come from the sunny South, and was now a stranger in a strange land.

The little mare seemed to realize our situation, and gave me all the sympathy I could ask, repeatedly rubbing her soft nose over my face and lapping up my salt tears with evident relish.

When night came, I felt still more lonesome. My grandfather sat in his arm-chair the greater part of the evening, reading the Rivermouth Barnacle, the local newspaper. There was no gas in those days, and the Captain read by the aid of a small black-tin lamp, which he held in one hand. I observed that he had a habit of dropping off into a doze every three or four minutes, and I forgot my homesickness at intervals in watching him. Two or three times, to my vast amusement, he scorched the edges of the newspaper with the wick of the lamp; and at about half past eight o'clock I had the satisfactions—I am sorry to confess it was a satisfaction—of seeing the Rivermouth Barnacle in flames.

My grandfather leisurely extinguished the fire with his hands, and Miss Abigail, who sat near a low table, knitting by the light of an astral lamp, did not even look up. She was quite used to this catastrophe.

There was little or no conversation during the evening. In fact, I do not remember that anyone spoke at all, excepting once, when the Captain remarked, in a meditative manner, that my parents "must have reached New York by this time"; at which supposition I nearly strangled myself in attempting to intercept a sob.

The monotonous "click click" of Miss Abigail's needles made me nervous after a while, and finally drove me out of the sitting-room into the kitchen, where Kitty caused me to laugh by saying Miss Abigail thought that what I needed was "a good dose of hot-drops," a remedy she was forever ready to administer in all emergencies. If a boy broke his leg, or lost his mother, I believe Miss Abigail would have given him hot-drops.

Kitty laid herself out to be entertaining. She told me several funny Irish stories, and described some of the odd people living in the town; but, in the midst of her comicalities, the tears would involuntarily ooze out of my eyes, though I was not a lad much addicted to weeping. Then Kitty would put her arms around me, and tell me not to mind it—that it wasn't as if I had been left alone in a foreign land with no one to care for me, like a poor girl whom she had once known. I brightened up before long, and told Kitty all about the Typhoon and the old seaman, whose name I tried in vain to recall, and was obliged to fall back on plain Sailor Ben.

I was glad when ten o'clock came, the bedtime for young folks, and old folks too, at the Nutter House. Alone in the hallchamber I had my cry out, once for all, moistening the pillow to such an extent that I was obliged to turn it over to find a dry spot to go to sleep on.

My grandfather wisely concluded to put me to school at once. If I had been permitted to go mooning about the house and stables, I should have kept my discontent alive for months. The next morning, accordingly, he took me by the hand, and we set forth for the academy, which was located at the farther end of the town.

The Temple School was a two-story brick building, standing in the centre of a great square piece of land, surrounded by a high picket fence. There were three or four sickly trees, but no grass, in this enclosure, which had been worn smooth and hard by the tread of multitudinous feet. I noticed here and there small holes scooped in the ground, indicating that it was the season for marbles. A better playground for baseball couldn't have been devised.

On reaching the schoolhouse door, the Captain inquired for Mr. Grimshaw. The boy who answered our knock ushered us into a side-room, and in a few minutes—during which my eye took in forty-two caps hung on forty-two wooden pegs—Mr. Grimshaw made his appearance. He was a slender man, with white, fragile hands, and eyes that glanced half a dozen different ways at once—a habit probably acquired from watching the boys.

After a brief consultation, my grandfather patted me on the head and left me in charge of this gentleman, who seated himself in front of me and proceeded to sound the depth, or, more properly speaking, the shallowness, of my attainments. I suspect my historical information rather startled him. I recollect I gave him to understand that Richard III was the last king of England.

This ordeal over, Mr. Grimshaw rose and bade me follow him. A door opened, and I stood in the blaze of forty-two pairs of upturned eyes. I was a cool hand for my age, but I lacked the boldness to face this battery without wincing. In a sort of dazed way I stumbled after Mr. Grimshaw down a narrow aisle between two rows of desks, and shyly took the seat pointed out to me.

The faint buzz that had floated over the school-room at our entrance died away, and the interrupted lessons were resumed. By degrees I recovered my coolness, and ventured to look around me.

The owners of the forty-two caps were seated at small green desks like the one assigned to me. The desks were arranged in six rows, with spaces between just wide enough to prevent the boys' whispering. A blackboard set into the wall extended clear across the end of the room; on a raised platform near the door stood the master's table; and directly in front of this was a recitation-bench capable of seating fifteen or twenty pupils. A pair of globes, tattooed with dragons and winged horses, occupied a shelf between two windows, which were so high from the floor that nothing but a giraffe could have looked out of them.

Having possessed myself of these details, I scrutinized my new acquaintances with unconcealed curiosity, instinctively selecting my friends and picking out my enemies—and in only two cases did I mistake my man.

A sallow boy with bright red hair, sitting in the fourth row, shook his fist at me furtively several times during the morning. I had a presentiment I should have trouble with that boy some day—a presentiment subsequently realized.

On my left was a chubby little fellow with a great many freckles (this was Pepper Whitcomb), who made some mysterious motions to me. I didn't understand them, but, as they were clearly of a pacific nature, I winked my eye at him. This appeared to be satisfactory, for he then went on with his studies. At recess he gave me the core of his apple, though there were several applicants for it.

Presently a boy in a loose olive-green jacket with two rows of brass buttons held up a folded paper behind his slate, intimating that it was intended for me. The paper was passed skillfully from desk to desk until it reached my hands. On opening the scrap, I found that it contained a small piece of molasses candy in an extremely humid state. This was certainly kind. I nodded my acknowledgments and hastily slipped the delicacy into my mouth. In a second I felt my tongue grow red-hot with cayenne pepper.

My face must have assumed a comical expression, for the boy in the olive-green jacket gave an hysterical laugh, for which he was instantly punished by Mr. Grimshaw. I swallowed the fiery candy, though it brought the water to my eyes, and managed to look so unconcerned that I was the only pupil in the form who escaped questioning as to the cause of Marden's misdemeanor. C. Marden was his name.

Nothing else occurred that morning to interrupt the exercises, excepting that a boy in the reading class threw us all into convulsions by calling Absalom A-bol'-som "Abolsom, O my son Abolsom!" I laughed as loud as anyone, but I am not so sure that I shouldn't have pronounced it Abolsom myself.

At recess several of the scholars came to my desk and shook hands with me, Mr. Grimshaw having previously introduced me to Phil Adams, charging him to see that I got into no trouble. My new acquaintances suggested that we should go to the playground. We were no sooner out-of-doors than the boy with the red hair thrust his way through the crowd and placed himself at my side.

“I say, youngster, if you’re comin’ to this school you’ve got to toe the mark.”

I didn’t see any mark to toe, and didn’t understand what he meant; but I replied politely, that, if it was the custom of the school, I should be happy to toe the mark, if he would point it out to me.

“I don’t want any of your sarse,” said the boy, scowling.

“Look here, Conway!” cried a clear voice from the other side of the playground. “You let young Bailey alone. He’s a stranger here, and might be afraid of you, and thrash you. Why do you always throw yourself in the way of getting thrashed?”

I turned to the speaker, who by this time had reached the spot where we stood. Conway slunk off, favoring me with a parting scowl of defiance. I gave my hand to the boy who had befriended me—his name was Jack Harris—and thanked him for his good-will.

“I tell you what it is, Bailey,” he said, returning my pressure good-naturedly, “you’ll have to fight Conway before the quarter ends, or you’ll have no rest. That fellow is always hankering after a licking, and of course you’ll give him one by and by; but what’s the use of hurrying up an unpleasant job? Let’s have some baseball. By the way, Bailey, you were a good kid not to let on to Grimshaw about the candy. Charley Marden would have caught it twice as heavy. He’s sorry he played the joke on you, and told me to tell you so. Hallo, Blake! Where are the bats?”

This was addressed to a handsome, frank-looking lad of about my own age, who was engaged just then in cutting his initials on the bark of a tree near the schoolhouse. Blake shut up his penknife and went off to get the bats.

During the game which ensued I made the acquaintance of Charley Marden, Binny Wallace, Pepper Whitcomb, Harry Blake, and Fred Langdon. These boys, none of them more than a year or two older than I (Binny Wallace was younger), were ever after my chosen comrades. Phil Adams and Jack Harris were considerably our seniors, and, though they always treated us “kids” very kindly, they generally went with another set. Of course, before long I knew all the Temple boys more or less intimately, but the five I have named were my constant companions.

My first day at the Temple Grammar School was on the whole satisfactory. I had made several warm friends and only two permanent enemies—Conway and his echo, Seth Rodgers; for these two always went together like a deranged stomach and a headache.

Before the end of the week I had my studies well in hand. I was a little ashamed at finding myself at the foot of the various classes, and secretly determined to deserve promotion. The school was an admirable one. I might make this part of my story more entertaining by picturing Mr. Grimshaw as a tyrant with a red nose and a large stick; but unfortunately for the purposes of sensational narrative, Mr. Grimshaw was a quiet, kindhearted gentleman. Though a rigid disciplinarian, he had a keen sense of justice, was a good reader of character, and the boys respected him. There were two other teachers—a French tutor and a writing-master, who visited the school twice a week. On Wednesdays and Saturdays we were dismissed at noon, and these half-holidays were the brightest epochs of my existence.

Daily contact with boys who had not been brought up as gently as I worked an immediate, and, in some respects, a beneficial change in my character. I had the nonsense taken out of me, as the saying is—some of the nonsense, at least. I became more manly and self-reliant. I discovered that the world was not created exclusively on my account. In New Orleans I labored under the delusion that it was. Having neither brother nor sister to give up to at home, and being, moreover, the largest pupil at school there, my will had seldom been opposed. At Rivermouth matters were different, and I was not long in adapting myself to the altered circumstances. Of course I got many severe rubs, often unconsciously given; but I had the sense to see that I was all the better for them.

My social relations with my new schoolfellows were the pleasantest possible. There was always some exciting excursion on foot—a ramble through the pine woods, a visit to the Devil's Pulpit, a high cliff in the neighborhood—or a surreptitious low on the river, involving an exploration of a group of diminutive islands, upon one of which we pitched a tent and played we were the Spanish sailors who got wrecked there years ago. But the endless pine forest that skirted the town was our favorite haunt. There was a great green pond hidden somewhere in its depths, inhabited by a monstrous colony of turtles. Harry Blake, who had an eccentric passion for carving his name on everything, never let a captured turtle slip through his fingers without leaving his mark engraved on its shell. He must have lettered about two thousand from first to last. We used to call them Harry Blake's sheep.

These turtles were of a discontented and migratory turn of mind, and we frequently encountered two or three of them on the cross-roads several miles from their ancestral mud. Unspeakable was our delight whenever we discovered one soberly walking off with Harry Blake's initials! I've no doubt there are, at this moment, fat ancient turtles wandering about that gummy woodland with H.B. neatly cut on their venerable backs.

It soon became a custom among my playmates to make our barn their rendezvous. Gypsy proved a strong attraction. Captain Nutter bought me a little two-wheeled cart, which she drew quite nicely, after kicking out the dasher and breaking the shafts once or twice. With our lunch-baskets and fishing-tackle stowed away under the seat, we used to start off early in the afternoon for the seashore, where there were countless marvels in the shape of shells, mosses, and kelp. Gypsy enjoyed the sport as keenly as any of us, even going so far, one day, as to trot down the beach into the sea where we were bathing. As she took the cart with her, our provisions were not much improved. I shall never forget how squash-pie tastes after being soused in the Atlantic Ocean. Soda-crackers dipped in salt water are palatable, but not squash-pie.

There was a good deal of wet weather during those first six weeks at Rivermouth, and we set ourselves at work to find some indoor amusement for our half-holidays. It was all very well for Amadis de Gaul and Don Quixote not to mind the rain; they had iron overcoats, and were not, from all we can learn, subject to croup and the guidance of their grandfathers. Our case was different.

"Now, boys, what shall we do?" I asked, addressing a thoughtful conclave of seven, assembled in our barn one dismal rainy afternoon.

"Let's have a theatre," suggested Binny Wallace.

The very thing! But where? The loft of the stable was ready to burst with hay provided for Gypsy, but the long room over the carriage-house was unoccupied. The place of all places! My managerial eye saw at a glance its capabilities for a theatre. I had been to the play a great many times in New Orleans, and was wise in matters pertaining to the drama. So here, in due time, was set up some extraordinary scenery of my own painting. The curtain, I recollect, though it worked smoothly enough on other occasions, invariably hitched during the performances; and it often required the united energies of the Prince of Denmark, the King, and the Grave-digger, with an occasional band from "the fair Ophelia" (Pepper Whitcomb in a low-necked dress), to hoist that bit of green cambric.

The theatre, however, was a success, as far as it went. I retired from the business with no fewer than fifteen hundred pins, after deducting the headless, the pointless, and the crooked pins with which our doorkeeper frequently got "stuck." From first to last we took in a great deal of this counterfeit money. The price of admission to the "Rivermouth Theatre" was twenty pins. I played all the principal parts myself—not that I was a finer actor than the other boys, but because I owned the establishment.

At the tenth representation, my dramatic career was brought to a close by an unfortunate circumstance. We were playing the drama of "William Tell, the Hero of Switzerland." Of course I was William Tell, in spite of Fred Langdon, who wanted to act that character himself. I wouldn't let him, so he withdrew from the company, taking the only bow and arrow we had. I made a cross-bow out of a piece of whalebone, and did very well without him. We had reached that exciting scene where Gessler, the Austrian tyrant, commands Tell to shoot the apple from his son's head. Pepper

Whitcomb, who played all the juvenile and women parts, was my son. To guard against mischance, a piece of pasteboard was fastened by a handkerchief over the upper portion of Whitcomb's face, while the arrow to be used was sewed up in a strip of flannel. I was a capital marksman, and the big apple, only two yards distant, turned its russet cheek fairly towards me.

I can see poor little Pepper now, as he stood without flinching, waiting for me to perform my great feat. I raised the crossbow amid the breathless silence of the crowded audience consisting of seven boys and three girls, exclusive of Kitty Collins, who insisted on paying her way in with a clothes-pin. I raised the cross-bow, I repeat. Twang! went the whipcord; but, alas! instead of hitting the apple, the arrow flew right into Pepper Whitcomb's mouth, which happened to be open at the time, and destroyed my aim.

I shall never be able to banish that awful moment from my memory. Pepper's roar, expressive of astonishment, indignation, and pain, is still ringing in my ears. I looked upon him as a corpse, and, glancing not far into the dreary future, pictured myself led forth to execution in the presence of the very same spectators then assembled.

Luckily poor Pepper was not seriously hurt; but Grandfather Nutter, appearing in the midst of the confusion (attracted by the howls of young Tell), issued an injunction against all theatricals thereafter, and the place was closed; not, however, without a farewell speech from me, in which I said that this would have been the proudest moment of my life if I hadn't hit Pepper Whitcomb in the mouth. Whereupon the audience (assisted, I am glad to state, by Pepper) cried "Hear! Hear!" I then attributed the accident to Pepper himself, whose mouth, being open at the instant I fired, acted upon the arrow much after the fashion of a whirlpool, and drew in the fatal shaft. I was about to explain how a comparatively small maelstrom could suck in the largest ship, when the curtain fell of its own accord, amid the shouts of the audience.

This was my last appearance on any stage. It was some time, though, before I heard the end of the William Tell business. Malicious little boys who had not been allowed to buy tickets to my theatre used to cry out after me in the street,

"Who killed Cock Robin?"
'I,' said the sparrer,
'With my bow and arrer,
I killed Cock Robin!'"

The sarcasm of this verse was more than I could stand. And it made Pepper Whitcomb pretty mad to be called Cock Robin, I can tell you!

So the days glided on, with fewer clouds and more sunshine than fall to the lot of most boys. Conway was certainly a cloud. Within school-bounds he seldom ventured to be aggressive; but whenever we met about town he never failed to brush against me, or pull my cap over my eyes, or drive me distracted by inquiring after my family in New Orleans, always alluding to them as highly respectable colored people.

Jack Harris was right when he said Conway would give me no rest until I fought him. I felt it was ordained ages before our birth that we should meet on this planet and fight. With the view of not running counter to destiny, I quietly prepared myself for the impending conflict. The scene of my dramatic triumphs was turned into a gymnasium for this purpose, though I did not openly avow the fact to the boys. By persistently standing on my head, raising heavy weights, and going hand over hand up a ladder, I developed my muscle until my little body was as tough as a hickory knot and as supple as tripe. I also took occasional lessons in the noble art of self-defence, under the tuition of Phil Adams.

I brooded over the matter until the idea of fighting Conway became a part of me. I fought him in imagination during school-hours; I dreamed of fighting with him at night, when he would suddenly expand into a giant twelve feet high, and then as suddenly shrink into a pygmy so small that I couldn't

hit him. In this latter shape he would get into my hair, or pop into my waistcoat-pocket, treating me with as little ceremony as the Liliputians showed Captain Lemuel Gulliver—all of which was not pleasant, to be sure. On the whole, Conway was a cloud.

And then I had a cloud at home. It was not Grandfather Nutter, nor Miss Abigail, nor Kitty Collins, though they all helped to compose it. It was a vague, funereal, impalpable something which no amount of gymnastic training would enable me to knock over. It was Sunday. If ever I have a boy to bring up in the way he should go, I intend to make Sunday a cheerful day to him. Sunday was not a cheerful day at the Nutter House. You shall judge for yourself.

It is Sunday morning. I should premise by saying that the deep gloom which has settled over everything set in like a heavy fog early on Saturday evening.

At seven o'clock my grandfather comes smilelessly downstairs. He is dressed in black, and looks as if he had lost all his friends during the night. Miss Abigail, also in black, looks as if she were prepared to bury them, and not indisposed to enjoy the ceremony. Even Kitty Collins has caught the contagious gloom, as I perceive when she brings in the coffee-urn—a solemn and sculpturesque urn at any time, but monumental now—and sets it down in front of Miss Abigail. Miss Abigail gazes at the urn as if it held the ashes of her ancestors, instead of a generous quantity of fine old Java coffee. The meal progresses in silence.

Our parlor is by no means thrown open every day. It is open this June morning, and is pervaded by a strong smell of centretable. The furniture of the room, and the little China ornaments on the mantel-piece, have a constrained, unfamiliar look. My grandfather sits in a mahogany chair, reading a large Bible covered with green baize. Miss Abigail occupies one end of the sofa, and has her hands crossed stiffly in her lap. I sit in the corner, crushed. Robinson Crusoe and Gil Blas are in close confinement. Baron Trenck, who managed to escape from the fortress of Clatz, can't for the life of him get out of our sitting-room closet. Even the Rivermouth Barnacle is suppressed until Monday. Genial converse, harmless books, smiles, lightsome hearts, all are banished. If I want to read anything, I can read Baxter's Saints' Rest. I would die first. So I sit there kicking my heels, thinking about New Orleans, and watching a morbid blue-bottle fly that attempts to commit suicide by butting his head against the window-pane. Listen!—no, yes—it is—it is the robins singing in the garden—the grateful, joyous robins singing away like mad, just as if it wasn't Sunday. Their audacity tickles me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.