MUNROE KIRK

CAB AND CABOOSE: THE STORY OF A RAILROAD BOY

Kirk Munroe

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Содержание

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July 31st, 1913.

TO THE PUBLIC:—

In the execution of its purpose to give educational value and moral worth to the recreational activities of the boyhood of America, the leaders of the Boy Scout Movement quickly learned that to effectively carry out its program, the boy must be influenced not only in his out-of-door life but also in the diversions of his other leisure moments. It is at such times that the boy is captured by the tales of daring enterprises and adventurous good times. What now is needful is not that his taste should be thwarted but trained. There should constantly be presented to him the books the boy likes best, yet always the books that will be best for the boy. As a matter of fact, however, the boy's taste is being constantly vitiated and exploited by the great mass of cheap juvenile literature.

To help anxiously concerned parents and educators to meet this grave peril, the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America has been organized. EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY is the result of their labors. All the books chosen have been approved by them. The Commission is composed of the

following members: George F. Bowerman, Librarian, Public Library of the District of Columbia, Washington, D. C.; Harrison W. Graver, Librarian, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pa.; Claude G. Leland, Superintendent, Bureau of Libraries, Board of Education, New York City; Edward F. Stevens, Librarian, Pratt Institute Free Library, Brooklyn, New York; together with the Editorial Board of our Movement, William D. Murray, George D. Pratt and Frank Presbrey, with Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian, as Secretary.

"DO A GOOD TURN DAILY."

In selecting the books, the Commission has chosen only such as are of interest to boys, the first twenty-five being either works of fiction or stirring stories of adventurous experiences. In later lists, books of a more serious sort will be included. It is hoped that as many as twenty-five may be added to the Library each year.

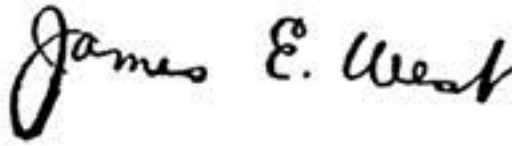
Thanks are due the several publishers who have helped to inaugurate this new department of our work. Without their co-operation in making available for popular priced editions some of the best books ever published for boys, the promotion of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY would have been impossible.

We wish, too, to express our heartiest gratitude to the Library Commission, who, without compensation, have placed their vast experience and immense resources at the service of our

Movement.

The Commission invites suggestions as to future books to be included in the Library. Librarians, teachers, parents, and all others interested in welfare work for boys, can render a unique service by forwarding to National Headquarters lists of such books as in their judgment would be suitable for EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY.

Signed



Chief Scout Executive.

CHAPTER I.
"RAILROAD BLAKE."

"Go it, Rod! You've got to go! One more spurt and you'll have him! There you are over the line! On time! On railroad time! Three cheers for Railroad Blake, fellows! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah, and a tigah! Good for you, Rod Blake! the cup is yours. It was the prettiest race ever seen on the Euston track, and 'Cider' got so badly left that he cut off and went to the dressing-room without finishing. Billy Bliss was a good second, though, and you only beat him by a length."

Amid a thousand such cries as these, from the throats of the excited boys and a furious waving of hats, handkerchiefs, and ribbon-decked parasols from the grand stand, the greatest bicycling event of the year so far as Euston was concerned, was finished, and Rodman Blake was declared winner of the Railroad Cup. It was the handsomest thing of the kind ever seen in that part of the country, and had been presented to the Steel Wheel Club of Euston by President Vanderveer of the great New York and Western Railroad, who made his summer home at that place. The race for this trophy was the principal event at the annual meet of the club, which always took place on the first Wednesday of September. If any member won it three years in succession it was to be his to keep, and every winner was entitled to have his

name engraved on it.

Snyder Appleby or "Cider Apples" as the boys, with their love for nicknames, sometimes called him, had won it two years in succession, and was confident of doing the same thing this year. He had just obtained, through President Vanderveer, a position in the office of the Railroad Company, and only waited to ride this last race for the "Railroad Cup," as it was called in honor of its donor, before going to the city and entering upon his new duties.

Now to be beaten so badly, and by that young upstart, for so he called Rod Blake, was a mortification almost too great to be borne. As Snyder left the track without finishing the last race and made his way to the dressing-room under the grand stand, he ground his teeth, and vowed to get even with his victorious rival yet. The cheers and yells of delight with which the fellows were hailing the victor, made him feel his defeat all the more bitterly, and seek the more eagerly for some plan for that victor's humiliation.

Snyder Appleby was generally considered by the boys as one of the meanest fellows in Euston, and that is the reason why they called him "Cider Apples"; for those, as everybody knows, are most always the very poorest of the picking. So the name seemed to be appropriate, as well as a happy parody on that to which he was really entitled. He was the son, or rather the adopted son, of Major Arms Appleby, who, next to President Vanderveer, was the richest man in Euston, and lived in the great, rambling stone

mansion that had been in his family for generations.

The Major, who was a bachelor, was also one of the kindest-hearted, most generous, and most obstinate of men. He loved to do good deeds; but he loved to do them in his own way, and his way was certain to be the one that was contrary to the advice of everybody else. Thus it happened that he determined to adopt the year-old baby boy who was left on his doorstep one stormy night, a little more than sixteen years before this story opens. He was not fond of babies, nor did he care to have children about him. Simply because everybody advised him to send this one to the county house, where it might be cared for by the proper authorities, he declared he would do nothing of the kind; but would adopt the little waif and bring him up as his own son.

As the boy grew, and developed many undesirable traits of character, Major Appleby was too kind-hearted to see them, and too obstinate to be warned against them.

"Don't tell me," he would say, "I know more about the boy than anybody else, and am fully capable of forming my opinion concerning him."

Thus Snyder Appleby, as he was called, because the name "Snyder" was found marked on the basket in which he had been left at the Major's door, grew up with the fixed idea that if he only pleased his adopted father he might act about as he chose with everybody else. Now he was nearly eighteen years of age, big and strong, with a face that, but for its coarseness, would have been called handsome. He was fond of display, did everything for

effect, was intolerably lazy, had no idea of the word punctuality, and never kept an engagement unless he felt inclined to do so. He always had plenty of pocket money which he spent lavishly, and was not without a certain degree of popularity among the other boys of Euston. He had subscribed more largely than anybody else to the Steel Wheel Club upon its formation, and had thus succeeded in having himself elected its captain.

As he was older and stronger than any of the other members who took up racing, and as he always rode the lightest and best wheel that money could procure, he had, without much hard work, easily maintained a lead in the racing field, and had come to consider himself as invincible. He regarded himself as such a sure winner of this last race for the Railroad Cup, that he had not taken the trouble to go into training for it. He would not even give up his cigarette smoking, a habit that he had acquired because he considered it fashionable and manly. Now he was beaten, disgracefully, and that by a boy nearly two years younger than himself. It was too much, and he determined to find some excuse for his defeat, that should at the same time remove the disgrace from him, and place it upon other shoulders.

Rodman Ray Blake, or R. R. Blake as he signed his name, and "Railroad Blake" as the boys often called him, was Major Appleby's nephew, and the son of his only sister. She had married an impecunious young artist against her brother's wish, on which account he had declined ever to see her again. When she died, after two years of poverty-stricken widowhood, she left a loving,

forgiving letter for her brother, and in it committed her darling boy to his charge. If she had not done this, but had trusted to his generous impulses, all would have gone well, and the events that serve to make up this story would never have taken place. As it was, the Major, feeling that the boy was forced upon him, was greatly aggrieved. That the lad should bear a remarkable resemblance to his handsome artist father also irritated him. As a result, while he really became very fond of the boy, and was never unkind to him, he treated him with an assumed indifference that was keenly felt by the loving, high-spirited lad. As for Snyder Appleby, he was jealous of Rodman from the very first; and when, only a short time before the race meeting of the Steel Wheel Club, the latter was almost unanimously elected to his place as captain, this feeling was greatly increased.

CHAPTER II.
A RACE FOR THE RAILROAD CUP

Young Blake had now been in Euston two years, and was, among the boys, decidedly the most popular fellow in the place. He was a slightly-built chap; but with muscles like steel wires, and possessed of wonderful agility and powers of endurance. He excelled in all athletic sports, was a capital boxer, and at the same time found little difficulty in maintaining a good rank in his classes. He had taken to bicycling from the very first, and quickly became an expert rider, though he had never gone in for racing. It was therefore a great surprise, even to his friends, when, on the very day before the race meeting, he entered his name for the event that was to result in the winning or losing of the Railroad Cup. It would not have been so much of a surprise had anybody known of his conversation, a few weeks before, with Eltje Vanderveer, the railroad president's only daughter. She was a few months younger than Rod, and ever since he had jumped into the river to save her pet kitten from drowning, they had been fast friends.

So, when in talking of the approaching meeting, Eltje had said, "How I wish you were a racer, and could win our cup, Rod," the boy instantly made up his mind to try for it. He only answered, "Do you? Well, perhaps I may go in for that sort of thing some

time."

Then he began training, so secretly that nobody but Dan, a stable boy on his uncle's place and Rod's most ardent admirer, was aware of it; but with such steady determination that on the eventful day of the great race his physical condition was very nearly perfect.

He was on hand at the race track bright and early; for, as captain of the club, Rod had a great deal to do in seeing that everything went smoothly, and in starting on time the dozen events that preceded the race for the Railroad Cup, which came last on the programme.

While these earlier events were being run off Snyder Appleby, faultlessly attired, sat in the grand stand beside his adopted father, and directly behind President Vanderveer and his pretty daughter, to whom he tried to render himself especially agreeable. He listened respectfully to the Major's stories, made amusing comments on the racers for Eltje's benefit, and laughed heartily at the puns that her father was given to making.

"But how about your own race, Mr. Appleby?" asked Eltje. "Don't you feel any anxiety concerning it? It is to be the hardest one of all, isn't it?"

Immensely flattered at being addressed as Mister Appleby, Snyder replied carelessly, "Oh, yes! of course I am most anxious to win it, especially as you are here to see it run; but I don't anticipate much difficulty. Bliss is a hard man to beat; but I have done it before, and I guess I can do it again."

"Then you don't think Rodman has any chance of winning?"

"Well, hardly. You see this is his first race, and experience goes a long way in such affairs. Still, he rides well, and it wouldn't surprise me to see him make a good third at the finish."

Eltje smiled as she answered, "Perhaps he will finish third; but it would surprise me greatly to see him do so."

This pretty girl, with the Dutch name, had such faith in her friend Rod, that she did not believe he would ever be third, or even second, where he had once made up his mind to be first.

Failing to catch her real meaning, Snyder replied: "Of course he may not do as well as that; but he ought to. As captain of the club he ought to sustain the honor of his position, you know. If he doesn't feel able to take at least third place in a five-starter race, he should either resign, or keep out of the racing field altogether. Now I must leave you; for I see I am wanted. You'll wish me good luck, won't you?"

"Yes," answered Eltje mischievously, "I wish you all the luck you deserve."

Forced to be content with this answer, but wondering if there was any hidden meaning in it, Snyder left the grand stand, and strolled leisurely around to the dressing-room, lighting a cigarette as he went.

"Hurry up!" shouted Rod, who was the soul of punctuality and was particularly anxious that all the events of this, his first race meeting, should be started on time. "Hurry up. Our race will be called in five minutes, and you've barely time to dress for it."

"Where's my wheel?" asked Snyder, glancing over the dozen or more machines stacked at one side of the room, but without seeing his own.

"I haven't seen it," answered Rod, "but I supposed you had left it in some safe place."

"So I did. I left it in the club house, where there would be no chance of anybody tampering with it; for I've heard of such things happening, but I ordered Dan to have it down here in time for the race."

"Do you mean to insinuate—" began Rod hotly; but controlling himself, he continued more calmly, "I didn't know that you had given Dan any orders, and I sent him over to the house on an errand a few minutes ago. Never mind, though, I'll go for your machine myself, and have it here by the time you are dressed."

Without waiting for a reply, the young captain started off on a run, while his adopted cousin began leisurely to undress, and get into his racing costume. By the time he was ready, Rod had returned leading the beautiful machine, which he had not ridden for fear lest some accident might happen to it.

Then the race was called, and a pistol shot sent the five young athletes bending low over their handle-bars spinning down the course. They all wore the club colors of scarlet and white; but from Rod's bicycle fluttered the bit of blue ribbon that Dan had been sent to the young captain's room to get, and which he had hastily knotted to the handle-bar of his machine just

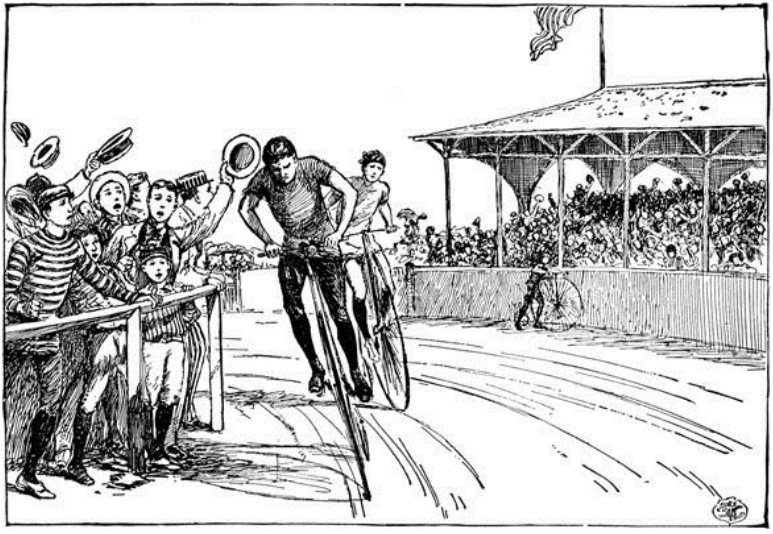
before starting. Eltje Vanderveer smiled and flushed slightly as she noticed it, and then all her attention was concentrated upon the varying fortunes of the flying wheelmen.

It was a five-mile race, and therefore a test of endurance rather than of strength or skill. There were two laps to the mile, and for seven of these Snyder Appleby held an easy lead. His name was heard above all others in the cheering that greeted each passing of the grand stand, though the others were encouraged to stick to him and not give it up yet. That two of them had no intention of giving it up, was shown at the end of the eighth lap, when the three leading wheels whirled past the grand stand so nearly abreast that no advantage could be claimed for either one.

Now the cheering was tremendous; but the names of Rod Blake and Billy Bliss were tossed from mouth to mouth equally with that of Snyder Appleby. At the end of nine laps the champion of two years had fallen hopelessly behind. His face wore a distressed look, and his breath came in painful gasps. Cigarettes had done their work with him, and his wind was gone. The two leaders were still abreast; but Rod had obtained the inside position, and if he could keep up the pace the race was his.

Eltje Vanderveer's face was pale, and her hands were clinched with the intense excitement of the moment. Was her champion to win after all? Was her bit of blue ribbon to be borne triumphantly to the front? Inch by inch it creeps into a lead. Now they are coming down the home stretch. The speed of that last spurt is wonderful. Nothing like it has ever been seen at the wind-up of a

five-mile race on the Euston track. Looking at them, head on, it is for a few seconds hard to tell which is leading. Then a solitary shout for Rod Blake is heard. In another moment it has swelled into a perfect roar of cheering, and there is a tempest of tossing hats, handkerchiefs, and parasols.



ROD BLAKE WINS BY A LENGTH.—(*PAGE 15*.)

Rod Blake has won by a length, Billy Bliss is second, Snyder Appleby was such a bad third that he has gone to the dressing-room without finishing, and the others are nowhere.

The speed of the winning wheels cannot be checked at once, and as they go shooting on past the stand, the exhausted riders

are seen to reel in their saddles. They would have fallen but for the willing hands outstretched to receive them. Dan is the first to reach the side of his adored young master, and as the boy drops into his arms, the faithful fellow says:

"You've won it, Mister Rod! You've won it fair and square; but you want to look out for Mister Snyder. I heerd him a-saying bad things about you when he passed me on that last lap, and I'm afeard he means some kind of mischief."

CHAPTER III.
A CRUEL ACCUSATION

The attention of the spectators, including the club members, was so entirely given to the finish of the famous race for the Railroad Cup, that, for a few minutes Snyder Appleby was the sole occupant of the dressing-room. When a group of the fellows, forming a sort of triumphal escort to the victors, noisily entered it, they found him standing by his machine. It was supported by two rests placed under its handle bars, and he was gazing curiously at the big wheel, which he was slowly spinning with one hand.

"Hello, 'Cider'!" cried the first of the new-comers, "what's up? Anything the matter with your wheel?"

"I believe there is," answered the ex-captain, in such a peculiar tone of voice that it at once arrested attention. "I don't know what is wrong, and I wouldn't make an examination until some of you fellows came in. In a case like this I believe in having plenty of witnesses and doing everything openly."

"What do you mean?" asked one of the group, whose noisy entrance was now succeeded by a startled silence.

"Turn that wheel and you'll see what I mean," replied Snyder.

"Why, it turns as hard as though it were running on plain bearing that had never been oiled!" exclaimed the member who

had undertaken to turn the wheel as requested.

"That's just it, and I don't think it's very surprising that I failed to win the race with a wheel in that condition, do you?"

"Indeed I do not. The only surprising thing is that you held the lead so long as you did, and managed to come in third. I know I couldn't have run a single lap if I'd been on that wheel. What's the matter with it? Wasn't it all right when you started?"

"I thought it was," replied Snyder, "but I soon found that something was wrong, and before I left the track it was all I could do to move it. Now, I want you fellows to find out what the matter is."

A few moments of animated discussion followed, while several of the fellows made a careful examination of the bicycle.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed one; "what's in this oil cup? It looks as though it were choked with black sand."

"It's emery powder!" cried another, extracting a few grains of the black, oil-soaked stuff on the point of a knife blade. "No wonder your wheel won't turn. How on earth did it get there?"

"That is what I would like to find out," answered the owner of the machine. "It certainly was not there when I left the club house; for I had just gone over every part and assured myself that it was in perfect order. Since then but two persons have touched it, and I am one of them. I don't think it likely that anybody will charge me with having done this thing, seeing that my sole interest was to win the race, and that if I so nearly succeeded with my wheel in this condition, I could easily have done so had

it been all right. Nothing could be more painful to me than to bring a charge against one who lives under the same roof that I do; but you all know who had the greatest interest in having me lose this race. I think you all know, too, that he is the only person besides myself who handled my wheel immediately before it. The one whom I trusted to bring it here in safety was sent off by this person on some frivolous errand at the last moment. Then, neglecting other and important duties, he volunteered to get the machine himself. He was gone before I had a chance to decline his offer. That is all I have to say upon this most unpleasant subject, and I should not have said so much had not my own reputation, both as a racing man and a gentleman, been at stake. Now I place the whole affair in the hands of the club, satisfied that they will do me justice."

Rod Blake, seated on a camp-stool, with a heavy "sweater" thrown over his shoulders, and slowly recovering from the exhaustion of the race, had observed and listened to all this with a pained curiosity. He could not believe any member of the club guilty of such a cowardly act. When Snyder began to charge him with having committed it, his face became deadly pale, and he gazed at his adopted cousin with an expression akin to terror. As the latter finished, the young captain sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Snyder Appleby, how dare you bring such an accusation against me? You know I am incapable of doing such a thing! Your wheel was in perfect condition when I delivered it to you,

and you know it was."

"I can easily believe that the fellow who would perform the act would be equally ready to lie out of it," replied Snyder.

"Do you mean that I lie?"

"That is about the size of it."

This was more than the hot-tempered young athlete could bear; and almost before the words were out of Snyder's mouth, a blow delivered with all the nervous force of Rodman's right arm sent him staggering back. It would have laid him on the floor, had not several of the fellows caught him in their arms.

He was furious with rage, and would have sprung at Rodman had he not been restrained. As it was, he hissed through his clinched teeth, "I'll make you suffer for this yet, see if I don't."

Immediately after delivering the blow, Rod turned, without a word, and began putting on his clothes. The fellows watched him in silence. A minute later he was dressed, and stood in the doorway. Here he turned and said:

"I am going home, fellows, and I shall wait there just one hour for an assurance that you have faith in me, and do not believe a word of this horrible charge. If such a message, sent by the whole club, reaches me within that time, I will undertake to prove my innocence. If it does not come, then I cease, not only to be your captain, but a member of the club."

CHAPTER IV.
STARTING INTO THE WORLD

As Rod finished speaking he left the room and walked away. He had hardly disappeared, and the fellows were still looking at each other in a bewildered fashion, when a message was sent in. It was that President Vanderveer, who was distributing the prizes for the several races out in front of the grand stand, was ready to present the Railroad Cup to Rodman Blake, and wanted him to come and receive it. Then somebody went out and whispered to the President. Excusing himself for a moment to the throng of spectators, he visited the dressing-room, where he heard the whole story. It was hurriedly told; but he comprehended enough of it to know that the cup could not, at that moment, be presented to anybody. So he went back, and with a very sober face, told the people that owing to circumstances which he was not at liberty to explain just then, it was impossible to award the Railroad Cup at that meeting.

The crowd slowly melted away; but before they left, everybody had heard one version or another of the story told to President Vanderveer in the dressing-room. Some believed Rod to be innocent of the charge brought against him, and some believed him guilty. Almost all of them said it was a pity that such races could not be won and lost honestly, and there must be some fire

where there was so much smoke; and they told each other how they had noticed from the very first that something was wrong with Snyder Appleby's wheel.

Major Appleby heard the story, first from President Vanderveer, and afterwards from his adopted son, who confirmed it by displaying the side of his face which was swollen and bruised from Rodman's blow. Fully believing what Snyder told him, the Major became very angry. He declared that no such disgrace had ever before been brought to his house, and that the boy who was the cause of it could no longer be sheltered by his roof. In vain did people talk to him, and urge him to reflect before he acted. He had decided upon his course, and the more they advised him, the more determined he became not to be moved from it.

While he was thus storming and fuming outside the dressing-room, the members of the wheel club were holding a meeting behind its closed door. Did they believe Rodman Blake guilty of the act charged against him or did they not? The debate was a long and exciting one; but the question was finally decided in his favor. They did not believe him capable of doing anything so mean. They would make a thorough investigation of the affair, and aid him by every means in their power to prove his innocence.

This was the purport of the message sent to the young captain by the club secretary, Billy Bliss; but it was sent too late. The members had taken no note of time in the heat of their

discussion, and the hour named by Rodman had already elapsed before Billy Bliss started on his errand. The fellows did not think a few minutes more or less would make any difference, though they urged the secretary to hurry and deliver his message as quickly as possible. A few minutes however did make all the difference in the world to Rod Blake. With him an hour meant exactly sixty minutes; and when Billy Bliss reached Major Appleby's house the boy whom he sought was nowhere to be found.

Major Appleby and his adopted son walked home together, the former full of wrath at what he believed to be the disgraceful action of his nephew, and the latter secretly rejoicing at it. On reaching the house, the Major went at once to Rodman's room where he found the boy gazing from the window, with a hard, defiant, expression on his face. He was longing for a single loving word; for a mother's sympathetic ear into which he might pour his griefs; but his pride was prepared to withstand any harshness, as well as to resent the faintest suspicion of injustice.

"Well, sir," began the Major, "what have you to say for yourself? and how do you explain this disgraceful affair?"

"I cannot explain it, Uncle; but–"

"That will do, sir. If you cannot explain it, I want to hear nothing further. What I do want, however, is that you shall so arrange your future plans that you may no longer be dependent on my roof for shelter. Here is sufficient money for your immediate needs. As my sister's child you have a certain claim on me. This

I shall be willing to honor to the extent of providing you against want, whenever you have settled upon your mode of life, and choose to favor me with your future address. The sooner you can decide upon your course of action the better." Thus saying the kind-hearted, impetuous, and wrong-headed old Major laid a roll of bills on the table, and left the room.

Fifteen minutes later, or five minutes before Billy Bliss reached the house, Rod Blake also left the room. The roll of bills lay untouched where his uncle had placed it, and he carried only his M. I. P. or bicycle travelling bag, containing the pictures of his parents, a change of underclothing, and a few trifles that were absolutely his own. He passed out of the house by a side door, and was seen but by one person as he plunged into the twilight shadows of the park. Thus, through the gathering darkness, the poor boy, proud, high-spirited, and, as he thought, friendless, set forth alone, to fight his battle with the world.

CHAPTER V.
CHOOSING A CAREER

As Rod Blake, heavy-hearted, and weary, both mentally and physically from his recent struggles, left his uncle's house, he felt utterly reckless, and paid no heed to the direction his footsteps were taking. His one idea was to get away as quickly, and as far as possible, from those who had treated him so cruelly. "If only the fellows had stood by me," he thought, "I might have stayed and fought it out. But to have them go back on me, and take Snyder's word in preference to mine, is too much."

Had the poor boy but known that Billy Bliss was even then hastening to bear a message of good-will and confidence in him from the "fellows" how greatly his burden of trial would have been lightened. But he did not know, and so he pushed blindly on, suffering as much from his own hasty and ill-considered course of action, as from the more deliberate cruelty of his adopted cousin. At length he came to the brow of a steep slope leading down to the railroad, the very one of which Eltje's father was president. The railroad had always possessed a fascination for him, and he had often sat on this bank watching the passing trains, wondering at their speed, and speculating as to their destinations. He had frequently thought he should like to lead the life of a railroad man, and had been pleased when the fellows

called him “Railroad Blake” on account of his initials. Now, this idea presented itself to him again more strongly than ever.

An express train thundered by. The ruddy glow from the furnace door of its locomotive, which was opened at that moment, revealed the engineman seated in the cab, with one hand on the throttle lever, and peering steadily ahead through the gathering gloom. What a glorious life he led! So full of excitement and constant change. What a power he controlled. How easy it was for him to fly from whatever was unpleasant or trying. As these thoughts flashed through the boy’s mind, the red lights at the rear of the train seemed to blink pleasantly at him, and invite him to follow them.

“I will,” he cried, springing to his feet. “I will follow wherever they may lead me. Why should I not be a railroad man as well as another? They have all been boys and all had to begin some time.”

At this moment he was startled by a sound of a voice close beside him saying, “Supper is ready, Mister Rod.” It was Dan the stable boy; and, as Rodman asked him, almost angrily, how he dared follow him without orders, and what he was spying out his movements for, he replied humbly: “I ain’t a-spying on you, Mister Rod, and I only followed you to tell you supper was ready, ’cause I thought maybe you didn’t know it.”

“Well, I didn’t and it makes no difference whether I did or not,” said Rod. “I have left my uncle’s house for good and all, Dan, and there are no more suppers in it for me.”

"I was afeard so! I was afeard so, Mister Rod," exclaimed the boy with a real distress in his voice, "an' to tell the truth that's why I came after you. I couldn't a-bear to have you go without saying good-by, and I thought maybe, perhaps, you'd let me go along with you. Please do, Mister Rod. I'll work for you and serve you faithfully, an' I'd a heap rather go on a tramp, or any place along with you, than stay here without you. Please, Mister Rod."

"No, Dan, it would be impossible to take you with me," said Rodman, who was deeply touched by this proof of his humble friend's loyalty. "It will be all I can do to find work for myself; but I'm grateful to you all the same for showing that you still think well of me. It's a great thing, I can tell you, for a fellow in my position to know that he leaves even one friend behind him when he is forced to go away from his only home."

"You leaves a-plenty of them—a-plenty!" interrupted the stable boy eagerly. "I heerd Miss Eltje telling her father that it was right down cruel not to give you the cup, an' that you couldn't do a thing, such as they said, any more than she could, or he could himself. An' her father said no more did he believe you could, an' you'd come out of it all right yet. Miss Eltje was right up an' down mad about it, she was. Oh, I tell you, Mister Rod, you've got a-plenty of friends; an' if you'll only stay you'll find 'em jest a-swarmin'."

At this Rodman laughed outright, and said: "Dan, you are a fine fellow, and you have done me good already. Now what I want you to do is just to stay here and discover some more friends for

me. I will manage to let you know what I am doing; but you must not tell anybody a word about me, nor where I am, nor anything. Now good-by, and mind, don't say a word about having seen me, unless Miss Eltje should happen to ask you. If she should, you might say that I shall always remember her, and be grateful to her for believing in me. Good-by."

With this Rod plunged down the steep bank to the railroad track, and disappeared in the darkness. He went in the direction of the next station to Euston, about five miles away, as he did not wish to be recognized when he made the attempt to secure a ride on some train to New York. It was to be an attempt only; for he had not a cent of money in his pockets, and had no idea of how he should obtain the coveted ride. In addition to being penniless, he was hungry, and his hunger was increased tenfold by the knowledge that he had no means of satisfying it. Still he was a boy with unlimited confidence in himself. He always had fallen on his feet; and, though this was the worse fix in which he had ever found himself, he had faith that he would come out of it all right somehow. His heart was already so much lighter since he had learned from Dan that some of his friends, and especially Eltje Vanderveer, still believed in him, that his situation did not seem half so desperate as it had an hour before.

Rod was already enough of a railroad man to know that, as he was going east, he must walk on the west bound track. By so doing he would be able to see trains bound west, while they were still at some distance from him, and would be in no danger from

those bound east and overtaking him.

When he was about half a mile from the little station, toward which he was walking, he heard the long-drawn, far-away whistle of a locomotive. Was it ahead of him or behind? On account of the bewildering echoes he could not tell. To settle the question he kneeled down, and placed his ear against one of rails of the west bound track. It was cold and silent. Then he tried the east bound track in the same way. This rail seemed to tingle with life, and a faint, humming sound came from it. It was a perfect railroad telephone, and it informed the listener as plainly as words could have told him, that a train was approaching from the west.

He stopped to note its approach. In a few minutes the rails of the east bound track began to quiver with light from the powerful reflector in front of its locomotive. Then they stretched away toward the oncoming train in gleaming bands of indefinite length, while the dazzling light seemed to cut a bright pathway between walls of solid blackness for the use of the advancing monster. As the bewildering glare passed him, Rod saw that the train was a long, heavy-laden freight, and that some of its cars contained cattle. He stood motionless as it rushed past him, shaking the solid earth with its ponderous weight, and he drew a decided breath of relief at the sight of the blinking red eyes on the rear platform of its caboose. How he wished he was in that caboose, riding comfortably toward New York, instead of plodding wearily along on foot, with nothing but uncertainties ahead of him.

CHAPTER VI.
SMILER, THE RAILROAD DOG

As Rod stood gazing at the receding train he noticed a human figure step from the lighted interior of the caboose, through the open doorway, to the platform, apparently kick at something, and almost instantly return into the car. At the same time the boy fancied he heard a sharp cry of pain; but was not sure. As he resumed his tiresome walk, gazing longingly after the vanishing train lights, he saw another light, a white one that moved toward him with a swinging motion, close to the ground. While he was wondering what it was, he almost stumbled over a small animal that stood motionless on the track, directly in front of him. It was a dog. Now Rod dearly loved dogs, and seemed instinctively to know that this one was in some sort of trouble. As he stopped to pat it, the creature uttered a little whine, as though asking his sympathy and help. At the same time it licked his hand.

While he was kneeling beside the dog and trying to discover what its trouble was, the swinging white light approached so closely that he saw it to be a lantern, borne by a man who, in his other hand, carried a long-handled iron wrench. He was the track-walker of that section, who was obliged to inspect every foot of the eight miles of track under his charge, at least twice a day; and the wrench was for the tightening of any loose rail

joints that he might discover.

"Hello!" exclaimed this individual as he came before the little group, and held his lantern so as to get a good view of them. "What's the matter here?"

"I have just found this dog," replied Rod, "and he seems to be in pain. If you will please hold your light a little closer perhaps I can see what has happened to him."

The man did as requested, and Rod uttered an exclamation of pleasure as the light fell full upon the dog; for it was the finest specimen of a bull terrier he had ever seen. It was white and brindled, its chest was of unusual breadth, and its square jaws indicated a tenacity of purpose that nothing short of death itself could overcome. Now one of its legs was evidently hurt, and it had an ugly cut under the left ear, from which blood was flowing. Its eyes expressed an almost human intelligence; and, as it looked up at Rod and tried to lick his face, it seemed to say, "I know you will be my friend, and I trust you to help me." About its neck was a leathern collar, bearing a silver plate, on which was inscribed: "Be kind to me, for I am Smiler the Railroad Dog."

"I know this dog," exclaimed the track-walker, as he read these words, "and I reckon every railroad man in the country knows him; or at any rate has heard of him. He used to belong to Andrew Dean, who was killed when his engine went over the bank at Hager's two years ago. He thought the world of the dog, and it used to travel with him most always; only once in a while it would go visiting on some of the other engines. It was off that

way when Andrew got killed, and since then it has travelled all over the country, like as though it was hunting for its old master. The dog lives on trains and engines, and railroad men are always glad to see him. Some of them got up this collar for him a while ago. Why, Smiler, old dog, how did you come here in this fix? I never heard of you getting left or falling off a train before."

"I think he must have come from the freight that just passed us," said Rod, "and I shouldn't wonder," he added, suddenly recalling the strange movements of the figure he had seen appear for an instant at the caboose door, "if he was kicked off." Then he described the scene of which he had caught a glimpse as the freight train passed him.

"I'd like to meet the man who'd dare do such a thing," exclaimed the track-walker. "If I wouldn't kick him! He'd dance to a lively tune if any of us railroad chaps got hold of him, I can tell you. It must have been an accident, though; for nobody would hurt Smiler. Now I don't know exactly what to do. Smiler can't be left here, and I'm afraid he isn't able to walk very far. If I had time I'd carry him back to the freight. She's side-tracked only a quarter of a mile from here, waiting for Number 8 to pass. I'm due at Euston inside of an hour, and I don't dare waste any more time."

"I'll take him if you say so," answered Rod, who had been greatly interested in the dog's history. "I believe I can carry him that far."

"All right," replied the track-walker. "I wish you would. You'll

have to move lively though; for if Number 8 is on time, as she generally is, you haven't a moment to lose."

"I'll do my best," said the boy, and a moment later he was hurrying down the track with his M. I. P. bag strapped to his shoulders, and with the dog so strangely committed to his care, clasped tightly in his arms. At the same time the track-walker, with his swinging lantern, was making equally good speed in the opposite direction. As Rod rounded a curve, and sighted the lights of the waiting freight train, he heard the warning whistle of Number 8 behind him, and redoubled his exertions. He did not stop even as the fast express whirled past him, though he was nearly blinded by the eddying cloud of dust and cinders that trailed behind it. But, if Number 8 was on time, so was he. Though Smiler had grown heavy as lead in his aching arms, and though his breath was coming in panting gasps, he managed to climb on the rear platform of the caboose, just as the freight was pulling out. How glad he was at that moment of the three weeks training he had just gone through with. It had won him something, even if his name was not to be engraved on the railroad cup of the Steel Wheel Club.

As the boy stood in the rear doorway of the caboose, gazing doubtfully into its interior, a young fellow who looked like a tramp, and who had been lying on one of the cushioned lockers, or benches, that ran along the sides of the car, sprang to his feet with a startled exclamation. At the same moment Smiler drew back his upper lip so as to display a glistening row of teeth, and,

uttering a deep growl, tried to escape from Rod's arms.

"What are you doing in this car! and what do you mean by bringing that dog in here?" cried the fellow angrily, at the same time advancing with a threatening gesture. "Come, clear out of here or I'll put you out," he added. The better to defend himself, if he should be attacked, the boy dropped the dog; and, with another fierce growl, forgetful of his hurts, Smiler flew at the stranger's throat.

CHAPTER VII.
ROD, SMILER, AND THE TRAMP

"Help! Murder! Take off your dog!" yelled the young tramp, throwing up his arm to protect his face from Smiler's attack, and springing backward. In so doing he tripped and fell heavily to the floor, with the dog on top of him, growling savagely, and tearing at the ragged coat-sleeve in which his teeth were fastened. Fearful lest the dog might inflict some serious injury upon the fellow, Rodman rushed to his assistance. He had just seized hold of Smiler, when a kick from the struggling tramp sent his feet flying from under him, and he too pitched headlong. There ensued a scene which would have been comical enough to a spectator, but which was anything but funny to those who took part in it. Over and over they rolled, striking, biting, kicking, and struggling. The tramp was the first to regain his feet; but almost at the same instant Smiler escaped from Rod's embrace, and again flew at him. They had rolled over the caboose floor until they were close to its rear door; and now, with a yell of terror, the tramp darted through it, sprang from the moving train, and disappeared in the darkness, leaving a large piece of his trousers in the dog's mouth. Just then the forward door was opened, and two men with lanterns on their arms, entered the car.

They were Conductor Tobin, and rear-brakeman Joe, his

right-hand man, who had just finished switching their train back on the main track, and getting it again started on its way toward New York. At the sight of Rod, who was of course a perfect stranger to them, sitting on the floor, hatless, covered with dust, his clothing bearing many signs of the recent fray, and ruefully feeling of a lump on his forehead that was rapidly increasing in size, and of Smiler whose head was bloody, and who was still worrying the last fragment of clothing that the tramp's rags had yielded him, they stood for a moment in silent bewilderment.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" said Conductor Tobin at length.

"Me too," said Brakeman Joe, who believed in following the lead of his superior officer.

"May I inquire," asked Conductor Tobin, seating himself on a locker close to where Rod still sat on the floor, "May I inquire who you are? and where you came from? and how you got here? and what's happened to Smiler? and what's came of the fellow we left sleeping here a few minutes ago? and what's the meaning of all this business, anyway?"

"Yes, we'd like to know," said the Brakeman, taking a seat on the opposite locker, and regarding the boy with a curiosity that was not unmixed with suspicion. Owing to extensive dealings with tramps, Brakeman Joe was very apt to be suspicious of all persons who were dirty, and ragged, and had bumps on their foreheads.

"The trouble is," replied Rod, looking first at Conductor Tobin and then at Brakeman Joe, "that I don't know all about it myself.

Nobody does except the fellow who just left here in such a hurry, and Smiler, who can't tell."

Here the dog, hearing his name mentioned, dragged himself rather stiffly to the boy's side; for now that the excitement was over, his hurts began to be painful again, and licked his face.

SMILER DRIVES OFF THE TRAMP.—(*PAGE* 41.)

"Well, you must be one of the right sort, at any rate," said Conductor Tobin, noting this movement, "for Smiler is a dog that doesn't make friends except with them as are."

"He knows what's what, and who's who," added Brakeman

Joe, nodding his head. “Don’t you, Smiler, old dog?”

“My name,” continued the boy, “is R. R. Blake.”

“Railroad Blake?” interrupted Conductor Tobin inquiringly.

“Or ‘Runaway Blake’?” asked Brakeman Joe who, still somewhat suspicious, was studying the boy’s face and the M. I. P. bag attached to his shoulders.

“Both,” answered Rod, with a smile. “The boys where I live, or rather where I did live, often call me ‘Railroad Blake,’ and I am a runaway. That is, I was turned away first, and ran away afterwards.”

Then, as briefly as possible, he gave them the whole history of his adventures, beginning with the bicycle race, and ending with the disappearance of the young tramp through the rear door of the caboose in which they sat. Both men listened with the deepest attention, and without interrupting him save by occasional ejaculations, expressive of wonder and sympathy.

“Well, I’ll be blowed!” exclaimed Conductor Tobin, when he had finished; while Brakeman Joe, without a word, went to the rear door and examined the platform, with the hope, as he afterwards explained, of finding there the fellow who had kicked Smiler off the train, and of having a chance to serve him in the same way. Coming back with a disappointed air, he proceeded to light a fire in the little round caboose stove, and prepare a pot of coffee for supper, leaving Rodman’s case to be managed by Conductor Tobin as he thought best.

The latter told the boy that the young tramp, as they called

him, was billed through to New York, to look after some cattle that were on the train; but that he was a worthless, ugly fellow, who had not paid the slightest attention to them, and whose only object in accepting the job was evidently to obtain a free ride in the caboose. Smiler, whom he had been delighted to find on the train when it was turned over to him, had taken a great dislike to the fellow from the first. He had growled and shown his teeth whenever the tramp moved about the car, and several times the latter had threatened to teach him better manners. When he and Brakeman Joe went to the forward end of the train, to make ready for side-tracking it, they left the dog sitting on the rear platform of the caboose, and the tramp apparently asleep, as Rod had found him, on one of the lockers. He must have taken advantage of their absence to deal the dog the cruel kick that cut his ear, and landed him, stunned and bruised, on the track where he had been discovered.

"I'm glad he's gone," concluded Conductor Tobin, "for if he hadn't left, we would have fired him for what he did to Smiler. We won't have that dog hurt on this road, not if we know it. It won't hurt him to have to walk to New York, and I don't care if he never gets there. What worries me, though, is who'll look after those cattle, and go down to the stock-yard with them, now that he's gone."

"Why couldn't I do it?" asked Rod eagerly. "I'd be glad to."

"You!" said Conductor Tobin incredulously. "Why, you look like too much of a gentleman to be handling cattle."

"I hope I am a gentleman," answered the boy with a smile; "but I am a very poverty-stricken one just at present, and if I can earn a ride to the city, just by looking after some cattle, I don't know why I shouldn't do that as well as anything else. What I would like to do though, most of all things, is to live up to my nickname, and become a railroad man."

"You would, would you?" said Conductor Tobin. Then, as though he were propounding a conundrum, he asked: "Do you know the difference between a railroad man and a chap who wants to be one?"

"I don't know that I do," answered the boy.

"Well, the difference is, that the latter gets what he deserves, and the former deserves what he gets. What I mean is, that almost anybody who is willing to take whatever job is offered him can get a position on a railroad; but before he gets promoted he will have to deserve it several times over. In other words, it takes more honesty, steadiness, faithfulness, hard work, and brains to work your way up in railroad life than in any other business that I know of. However, at present, you are only going along with me as stockman, in which position I am glad to have you, so we won't stop now to discuss railroading. Let's see what Joe has got for supper, for I'm hungry and I shouldn't be surprised if you were."

Indeed Rod was hungry, and just at that moment the word supper was the most welcome of the whole English language. First, though, he went to the wash-basin that he noticed at the forward end of the car. There he bathed his face and hands,

brushed his hair, restored his clothing to something like order, and altogether made himself so presentable, that Conductor Tobin laughed when he saw him, and declared that he looked less like a stockman than ever.

How good that supper, taken from the mammoth lunch pails of the train crew, tasted, and what delicious coffee came steaming out of the smoke-blackened pot that Brakeman Joe lifted so carefully from the stove! To be sure it had to be taken without milk, but there was plenty of sugar, and when Rod passed his tin cup for a second helping, the coffee maker's face fairly beamed with gratified pride.

After these three and Smiler had finished their supper, Conductor Tobin lighted his pipe, and, climbing up into the cupola of the caboose, stretched himself comfortably on the cushioned seat arranged there for his especial accommodation. From here, through the windows ahead, behind, and on both sides of the cupola, he had an unobstructed view out into the night. Brakeman Joe went out over the tops of the cars to call in the other two brakeman of the train, and keep watch for them, while they went into the caboose and ate their supper. They looked curiously at Rod as they entered the car; but were too well used to seeing strangers riding there to ask any questions. They both spoke to Smiler though, and he wagged his tail as though recognizing old friends.

The dog could not go to them and jump up to be petted because Rod was attending to his wounds. He carefully bathed

the cut under the left ear, from which considerable blood had flowed, and drew its edges together with some sticking plaster, of which he always carried a small quantity in his M. I. P. bag. Then, finding one of the dog's fore shoulders strained and swollen, he soaked it for some time in water as hot as the animal could bear. After arranging a comfortable bed in one corner of the car, he finally persuaded Smiler to lie there quietly, though not until he had submitted to a grateful licking of his face and hands.

Next the boy turned his attention to the supper dishes, and had them very nearly washed and wiped when Brakeman Joe returned, greatly to that stalwart fellow's surprise and delight; for Joe hated to wash dishes. By this time Rod had been nearly two hours on the train, and was so thoroughly tired that he concluded to lie down and rest until he should be wanted for something else. He did not mean to even close his eyes, but within three minutes he was fast asleep. All through the night he slept, while the long freight train, stopping only now and then for water, or to allow some faster train to pass it, rumbled heavily along toward the great city.

He could not at first realize where he was, when, in the gray of the next morning, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Conductor Tobin's voice said: "Come, my young stockman, here we are at the end of our run, and it is time for you to be looking after your cattle." A quick dash of cold water on his head and face cleared the boy's faculties in an instant. Then Conductor Tobin pointed out the two stock cars full of cattle that were being uncoupled

from the rest of the train, and bade him go with them to the stock-yard. There he was to see that the cattle were well watered and safely secured in the pen that would be assigned to them. Rod was also told that he might leave his bag in the caboose and come back, after he was through with his work, for a bit of breakfast with Brakeman Joe, who lived at the other end of the division, and always made the car his home when at this end. As for himself, Conductor Tobin said he must bid the boy good-by, as he lived a short distance out on the road, and must hurry to catch the train that would take him home. He would be back, ready to start out again with the through freight, that evening, and hoped Rod would come and tell him what luck he had in obtaining a position. Then rough but kind-hearted Conductor Tobin left the boy, never for a moment imagining that he was absolutely penniless and without friends in that part of the country, or in the great city across the river.

For the next two hours Rod worked hard and faithfully with the cattle committed to his charge, and then, anticipating with a keen appetite a share of Brakeman Joe's breakfast, he returned to where he had left the caboose. It was not there, nor could he find a trace of it. He saw plenty of other cabooses looking just like it, but none of them was the one he wanted.

He inquired of a busy switch-tender where it could be found, and the man asked him its number. He had not noticed. What was the number of the train with which it came in? Rod had no idea. The number of the locomotive that drew it then? The boy

did not know that either.

"Well," said the man impatiently, "you don't seem to know much of anything, and I'd advise you to learn what it is you want to find out before you bother busy folks with questions."

So the poor fellow was left standing alone and bewildered in the great, busy freight-yard, friendless and hungry. He had lost even the few treasures contained in his M. I. P. bag, and never had life seemed darker or more hopeless. For some moments he could not think what to do, or which way to turn.

CHAPTER VIII.
EARNING A BREAKFAST

If Rod Blake had only known the number of the caboose for which he was searching, he could easily have learned what had happened to it. Soon after he left it, while it was being switched on to a siding, one of its draw-bars became broken, and it had been sent to the repair shop, a mile or so away, to be put in condition for going out again that night. He had not thought of looking at its number, though; for he had yet to learn that on a railroad everything goes by numbers instead of by names. A few years ago all locomotives bore names, such as "Flying Cloud," "North Wind," etc., or were called after prominent men; but now they are simply numbered. It is the same with cars, except sleepers, drawing-rooms, and a few mail cars. Trains are also numbered, odd numbers being given to west or south bound, and even numbers to east or north bound trains. Thus, while a passenger says he is going out by the Chicago Limited, the Pacific Express, or the Fitchburg Local, the railroad man would say that he was going on No. 1, 3, or 5, as the case might be. The sections, from three to eight miles long, into which every road is divided, are numbered, as are all its bridges. Even the stations are numbered, and so are the tracks.

All this Rodman discovered afterwards; but he did not know

it then, and so he was only bewildered by the switchman's questions. For a few minutes he stood irresolute, though keeping a sharp lookout for the hurrying switch engines, and moving cars that, singly or in trains, were flying in all directions about him, apparently without any reason or method. Finally he decided to follow out his original plan of going to the superintendent's office and asking for employment. By inquiry he found that it was located over the passenger station, nearly a mile away from where he stood. When he reached the station, and inquired for the person of whom he was in search, he was laughed at, and told that the "super" never came to his office at that time of day, nor until two or three hours later. So, feeling faint for want of breakfast, as well as tired and somewhat discouraged, the boy sat down in the great bustling waiting-room of the station.

At one side of the room was a lunch-counter, from which the odor of newly-made coffee was wafted to him in the most tantalizing manner. What wouldn't he give for a cup at that moment? But there was no use in thinking of such things; and so he resolutely turned his back upon the steaming urn, and the tempting pile of eatables by which it was surrounded. In watching the endless streams of passengers steadily ebbing and flowing past him, he almost forgot the emptiness of his stomach. Where could they all be going to, or coming from? Did people always travel in such overwhelming numbers, that it seemed as though the whole world were on the move, or was this some special occasion? He thought the latter must be the case, and wondered

what the occasion was. Then there were the babies and children! How they swarmed about him! He soon found that he could keep pretty busy, and win many a grateful smile from anxious mothers, by capturing and picking up little toddlers who would persist in running about and falling down right in the way of hurrying passengers. He also kept an eye on the old ladies, who were so flustered and bewildered, and asked such meaningless questions of everybody, that he wondered how they were ever to reach their destinations in safety.

One of these deposited a perfect avalanche of little bags, packages, and umbrellas on the seat beside him. Several of them fell to the floor, and Rod was good-naturedly picking them up when he was startled by the sound of a clear, girlish voice that he knew as well as he knew his own, directly behind him. He turned, with a quickly beating heart, and saw Eltje Vanderveer. She was walking between her father and Snyder Appleby. They had already passed without seeing him, and had evidently just arrived by an early morning train from Euston.

Rod's first impulse was to run after them; and, starting to do so, he was only a step behind them when he heard Snyder say: "He must have money, because he refused a hundred dollars that the Major offered him. At any rate we'll hear from him soon enough if he gets hard up or into trouble. He isn't the kind of a–"

But Rod had already turned away, and what he wasn't, in Snyder's opinion, he never knew.

He had hardly resumed his seat, when there was a merry jingle

on the floor beside him, and a quantity of silver coins began to roll in all directions. The nervous old lady of the bags and bundles had dropped her purse, and now she stood gazing at her scattered wealth, the very image of despair.

"Never mind, ma'am," said Rod, cheerily, as he began to capture the truant coins. "I'll have them all picked up in a moment." It took several minutes of searching here and there, under the seats, and in all sorts of out-of-the-way hiding places, before all the bits of silver were recovered, and handed to their owner.

She drew a great sigh of relief as she counted her money and found that none was lost. Then, beaming at the boy through her spectacles, she said: "Well, thee is an honest lad; and, if thee'll look after my bags while I get my ticket, and then help me to the train, I'll give thee a quarter."

Rod was on the point of saying, politely: "I shall be most happy to do anything I can for you, ma'am; but I couldn't think of accepting pay for it," when the thought of his position flashed over him. A quarter would buy him a breakfast, and it would be honorably earned too. Would it not be absolutely wrong to refuse it under the circumstances? Thus thinking, he touched his cap, and said: "Certainly I will do all I can to help you, ma'am, and will be glad of the chance to earn a quarter."

When the old lady had procured her ticket, and Rod had received the first bit of money he had ever earned in his life by helping her to a comfortable seat in the right car, she would have

detained and questioned him, but for her fear that he might be carried off. So she bade him hurry from the car as quickly as possible, though it still lacked nearly ten minutes of the time of starting.

The hungry boy knew well enough where he wanted to go, and what he wanted to do, now. In about three seconds after leaving the car he was seated at the railroad lunch-counter, with a cup of coffee, two hard-boiled eggs, and a big hot roll before him. He could easily have disposed of twice as much; but prudently determined to save some of his money for another meal, which he realized, with a sigh, would be demanded by his vigorous appetite before the day was over.

To his dismay, when he asked the young woman behind the counter how much he owed for what he had eaten, she answered, "Twenty-five cents, please." He thought there must be some mistake, and asked her if there was not; but she answered: "Not at all. Ten cents for coffee, ten for eggs, and five for the roll." With this she swept Rod's solitary quarter into the money-drawer, and turned to wait on another customer.

"Well, it costs something to live," thought the boy, ruefully, as he walked away from the counter. "At that rate I could easily have eaten a dollar's worth of breakfast, and I certainly sha'n't choose this for my boarding place, whatever happens."

CHAPTER IX.
GAINING A FOOTHOLD

Though he could have eaten more, Rod felt decidedly better for the meal so unexpectedly secured, and made up his mind that now was the time to see the superintendent and ask for employment. So he made his way to that gentleman's office, where he was met by a small boy, who told him that the superintendent had been there a few minutes before, but had gone away with President Vanderveer.

"When will he be back?" asked Rod.

"Not till he gets ready," was the reply; "but the best time to catch him is about five o'clock."

For the next six hours poor Rod wandered about the station and the railroad yard, with nothing to do and nobody to speak to, feeling about as lonely and uncomfortable as it is possible for a healthy and naturally light-hearted boy to feel. He strolled into the station twenty times to study the slow moving hands of its big clock, and never had the hours appeared to drag along so wearily. When not thus engaged he haunted the freight yard, mounting the steps of every caboose he saw, in the hope of recognizing it. At length, to his great joy, shortly before five o'clock he saw, through a window set in the door of one of these, the well-remembered interior in which he had spent the preceding night.

He could not be mistaken, for there lay his own M. I. P. bag on one of the lockers. But the car was empty, and its doors were locked. Carefully observing its number, which was 18, and determined to return to it as quickly as possible, Rod directed his steps once more in the direction of the superintendent's office.

The same boy whom he had seen in the morning greeted him with an aggravating grin, and said: "You're too late. The 'super' was here half an hour ago; but he's left, and gone out over the road. Perhaps he won't be back for a week."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.