Horatio Alger Jr.

Ben, the Luggage Boy: or, Among the Wharves

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Содержание

Alger Horatio, Jr.
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TO

ANNIE,

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED

In Tender Remembrance

BY HER

AFFECTIONATE BROTHER

PREFACE

In presenting "Ben, the Luggage Boy," to the public, as the fifth of the Ragged Dick Series, the author desires to say that it is in all essential points a true history; the particulars of the story having been communicated to him, by Ben himself, nearly two years since. In particular, the circumstances attending the boy's running away from home, and adopting the life of a street boy, are in strict accordance with Ben's own statement. While some of the street incidents are borrowed from the writer's own observation, those who are really familiar with the different phases which street life assumes in New York, will readily recognize their fidelity. The chapter entitled "The Room under the Wharf" will recall to many readers of the daily journals a paragraph which made its appearance within two years. The writer cannot close without expressing anew his thanks for the large share of favor which has been accorded to the volumes of the present series, and takes this opportunity of saying that, in their preparation, invention has played but a subordinate part. For his delineations of character and choice of incidents, he has been mainly indebted to his own observation, aided by valuable communications and suggestions from those who have been brought into familiar acquaintance with the class whose mode of life he has sought to describe.

New York, April 5, 1876.

CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCES BEN, THE LUGGAGE BOY

"How much yer made this mornin', Ben?"

"Nary red," answered Ben, composedly.

"Had yer breakfast?"

"Only an apple. That's all I've eaten since yesterday. It's most time for the train to be in from Philadelphy. I'm layin' round for a job."

The first speaker was a short, freckled-faced boy, whose box strapped to his back identified him at once as a street boot-black. His hair was red, his fingers defaced by stains of blacking, and his clothing constructed on the most approved system of ventilation. He appeared to be about twelve years old.

The boy whom he addressed as Ben was taller, and looked older. He was probably not far from sixteen. His face and hands, though browned by exposure to wind and weather, were several shades cleaner than those of his companion. His face, too, was of a less common type. It was easy to see that, if he had been well dressed, he might readily have been taken for a gentleman's son. But in his present attire there was little chance of this mistake being made. His pants, marked by a green stripe, small around the waist and very broad at the hips, had evidently once

belonged to a Bowery swell; for the Bowery has its swells as well as Broadway, its more aristocratic neighbor. The vest had been discarded as a needless luxury, its place being partially supplied by a shirt of thick red flannel. This was covered by a frock-coat, which might once have belonged to a member of the Fat Men's Association, being aldermanic in its proportions. Now it was fallen from its high estate, its nap and original gloss had long departed, and it was frayed and torn in many places. But among the street-boys dress is not much regarded, and Ben never thought of apologizing for the defects of his wardrobe. We shall learn in time what were his faults and what his virtues, for I can assure my readers that street boys do have virtues sometimes, and when they are thoroughly convinced that a questioner feels an interest in them will drop the "chaff" in which they commonly indulge, and talk seriously and feelingly of their faults and hardships. Some do this for a purpose, no doubt, and the verdant stranger is liable to be taken in by assumed virtue, and waste sympathy on those who do not deserve it. But there are also many boys who have good tendencies and aspirations, and only need to be encouraged and placed under right influences to develop into worthy and respectable men.

The conversation recorded above took place at the foot of Cortlandt Street, opposite the ferry wharf. It was nearly time for the train, and there was the usual scene of confusion. Express wagons, hacks, boys, laborers, were gathering, presenting a confusing medley to the eye of one unaccustomed to the

spectacle.

Ben was a luggage boy, his occupation being to wait at the piers for the arrival of steamboats, or at the railway stations, on the chance of getting a carpet-bag or valise to carry. His business was a precarious one. Sometimes he was lucky, sometimes unlucky. When he was flush, he treated himself to a "square meal," and finished up the day at Tony Pastor's, or the Old Bowery, where from his seat in the pit he indulged in independent criticism of the acting, as he leaned back in his seat and munched peanuts, throwing the shells about carelessly.

It is not surprising that the street-boys like the Old Bowery, and are willing to stint their stomachs, or run the risk of a night in the streets, for the sake of the warm room and the glittering illusions of the stage, introducing them for the time being to the society of nobles and ladies of high birth, and enabling them to forget for a time the hardships of their own lot, while they follow with rapt interest the fortunes of Lord Frederic Montressor or the Lady Imogene Delacour. Strange as it may seem, the street Arab has a decided fancy for these pictures of aristocracy, and never suspects their want of fidelity. When the play ends, and Lord Frederic comes to his own, having foiled all the schemes of his crafty and unprincipled enemies, no one rejoices more than the ragged boy who has sat through the evening an interested spectator of the play, and in his pleasure at the successful denouement, he almost forgets that he will probably find the Newsboys' Lodging House closed for the night,

and be compelled to take up with such sleeping accommodations as the street may provide.

Ben crossed the street, taking a straight course, without paying especial attention to the mud, which caused other pedestrians to pick their way. To the condition of his shoes he was supremely indifferent. Stockings he did not wear. They are luxuries in which few street boys indulge.

He had not long to wait. The boat bumped against the wharf, and directly a crowd of passengers poured through the open gates in a continuous stream.

Ben looked sharply around him to judge who would be likely to employ him. His attention was drawn to an elderly lady, with a large carpet-bag swelled almost to bursting. She was looking about her in a bewildered manner.

"Carry your bag, ma'am?" he said, at the same time motioning towards it.

"Who be you?" asked the old lady, suspiciously.

"I'm a baggage-smasher," said Ben.

"Then I don't want you," answered the old lady, clinging to her bag as if she feared it would be wrested from her. "I'm surprised that the law allows sich things. You might be in a better business, young man, than smashing baggage."

"That's where you're right, old lady," said Ben.

"Bankin' would pay better, if I only had the money to start on."

"Are you much acquainted in New York?" asked the old lady.

"Yes," said Ben; "I know the mayor 'n' aldermen, 'n' all the

principal men. A. T. Stooart's my intimate friend, and I dine with Vanderbilt every Sunday when I aint engaged at Astor's."

"Do you wear them clo'es when you visit your fine friends?" asked the old lady, shrewdly.

"No," said Ben. "Them are my every-day clo'es. I've got some velvet clo'es to home, embroidered with gold."

"I believe you are telling fibs," said the old lady. "What I want to know is, if you know my darter, Mrs. John Jones; her first name is Seraphiny. She lives on Bleecker Street, and her husband, who is a nice man, though his head is bald on top, keeps a grocery store."

"Of course I do," said Ben. "It was only yesterday that she told me her mother was comin' to see her. I might have knowed you was she."

"How would you have knowed?"

"Cause she told me just how you looked."

"Did she? How did she say I looked?"

"She said you was most ninety, and – "

"It isn't true," said the old lady, indignantly. "I'm only seventy-three, and everybody says I'm wonderful young-lookin' for my years. I don't believe Seraphiny told you so."

"She might have said you looked as if you was most ninety."

"You're a sassy boy!" said the owner of the carpet-bag, indignantly. "I don't see how I'm going to get up to Seraphiny's," she continued, complainingly. "They'd ought to have come down to meet me. How much will you charge to carry my carpet-bag,

and show me the way to my darter's?"

"Fifty cents," said Ben.

"Fifty cents!" repeated the old lady, aghast. "I didn't think you'd charge more'n ten."

"I have to," said Ben. "Board's high in New York."

"How much would they charge me in a carriage? Here you, sir," addressing a hackman, "what'll you charge to carry me to my darter's house, Mrs. John Jones, in Bleecker Street?"

"What's the number?"

"I think it's a hundred and sixty-three."

"A dollar and a half."

"A dollar 'n' a half? Couldn't you do it for less?"

"Carry your bag, sir?" asked Ben, of a gentleman passing.

The gentleman shook his head.

He made one or two other proposals, which being in like manner unsuccessful, he returned to the old lady, who, having by this time got through her negotiations with the hackman, whom she had vainly striven to beat down to seventy-five cents, was in a more favorable mood to accept Ben's services.

"Can't you take less than fifty cents?" she asked.

"No," said Ben, decidedly.

"I'll give you forty."

"Couldn't do it," said Ben, who felt sure of gaining his point now.

"Well, I suppose I shall be obleeged to hire you," said the old lady with a sigh. "Seraphiny ought to have sent down to meet me.

I didn't tell her I was comin' to-day; but she might have thought I'd come, bein' so pleasant. Here, you boy, you may take the bag, and mind you don't run away with it. There aint nothin' in it but some of my clo'es."

"I don't want none of your clo'es," said Ben. "My wife's bigger'n you, and they wouldn't fit her."

"Massy sakes! you aint married, be you?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"I don't believe it. You're not old enough. But I'm glad you don't want the clo'es. They wouldn't be of no use to you. Just you take the bag, and I'll foller on behind."

"I want my pay first."

"I aint got the change. My darter Seraphiny will pay you when we get to her house."

"That don't go down," said Ben, decidedly. "Payment in advance; that's the way I do business."

"You'll get your pay; don't you be afraid."

"I know I shall; but I want it now."

"You won't run away after I've paid you, will you?"

"In course not. That aint my style."

The old lady took out her purse, and drew therefrom forty-seven cents. She protested that she had not a cent more. Ben pardoned the deficiency, feeling that he would, notwithstanding, be well paid for his time.

"All right," said he, magnanimously. "I don't mind the three cents. It aint any object to a man of my income. Take my hand,

old lady, and we'll go across the street."

"I'm afraid of bein' run over," said she, hesitatingly.

"What's the odds if you be?" said Ben. "The city'll have to pay you damages."

"But if I got killed, that wouldn't do me any good," remarked the old lady, sensibly.

"Then the money'd go to your friends," said Ben, consolingly.

"Do you think I will be run over?" asked the old lady, anxiously.

"In course you won't. I'll take care of you. They wouldn't dare to run over me," said Ben, confidently.

Somewhat reassured by this remark, the old lady submitted to Ben's guidance, and was piloted across the street in safety.

"I wouldn't live in New York for a heap of money. It would be as much as my life is worth," she remarked. "How far is Bleecker Street?"

"About two miles."

"I almost wish I'd rid. But a dollar and a half is a sight to pay."

"You'd have to pay more than that."

"That's all the man asked."

"I know," said Ben; "but when he'd got you there, he'd have charged you five dollars."

"I wouldn't have paid it."

"Yes, you would," said Ben.

"He couldn't make me."

"If you didn't pay, he'd have locked you in, and driven you off

to the river, and dumped you in."

"Do they ever do such things?" asked the old lady, startled.

"In course they do. Only last week a beautiful young lady was served that way, 'cause she wouldn't pay what the hackman wanted."

"And what was done to him?"

"Nothin'," said Ben. "The police is in league with 'em, and get their share of the money."

"Why, you don't say so! What a wicked place New York is, to be sure!"

"Of course it is. It's so wicked I'm goin' to the country myself as soon as I get money enough to buy a farm."

"Have you got much money saved up?" asked the old lady, interested.

"Four thousand six hundred and seventy-seven dollars and fifty-five cents. I don't count this money you give me, 'cause I'm goin' to spend it."

"You didn't make it all carryin' carpet-bags," said the old lady, incredulously.

"No, I made most of it spekilatin' in real estate," said Ben.

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do."

"You've got most enough to buy a farm a'ready."

"I aint goin' to buy till I can buy a good one."

"What's the name of this street?"

"West Broadway."

They were really upon West Broadway by this time, that being as direct a line as any to Bleecker Street.

"You see that store," said Ben.

"Yes; what's the matter of it?"

"I don't own it *now*," said Ben. "I sold it, cos the tenants didn't pay their rent reg'lar."

"I should think you'd dress better if you've got so much money," said the old lady, not unnaturally.

"What's the use of wearin' nice clo'es round among the wharves?" said Ben.

"There's suthin in that. I tell my darter Jane – she lives in the country – that it's no use dressin' up the children to go to school, – they're sure to get their clo'es tore and dirty afore they get home."

So Ben beguiled the way with wonderful stories, with which he played upon the old lady's credulity. Of course it was wrong; but a street education is not very likely to inspire its pupils with a reverence for truth; and Ben had been knocking about the streets of New York, most of the time among the wharves, for six years. His street education had commenced at the age of ten. He had adopted it of his own free will. Even now there was a comfortable home waiting for him; there were parents who supposed him dead, and who would have found a difficulty in recognizing him under his present circumstances. In the next chapter a light will be thrown upon his past history, and the reader will learn how his street life began.

CHAPTER II.
HOW BEN COMMENCED HIS STREET LIFE

One pleasant morning, six years before the date at which this story commences, a small coasting-vessel drew up at a North River pier in the lower part of the city. It was loaded with freight, but there was at least one passenger on board. A boy of ten, dressed in a neat jacket and pants of gray-mixed cloth, stood on deck, watching with interest the busy city which they had just reached.

"Well, bub, here we are," said the captain as he passed. "I suppose you know your way home."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you going on shore now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, good luck to you, my lad. If you are ever down this way, when I'm in port, I shall be glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir; good-by."

"Good-by."

Ben clambered over the side, and stepped upon the wharf. In the great city he knew no one, and he was an utter stranger to the streets, never before having visited it. He was about to begin life for himself at the age of ten. He had voluntarily undertaken to

support himself, leaving behind him a comfortable home, where he had been well cared for. I must explain how this came about.

Ben had a pleasant face, and would be considered good-looking. But there was a flash in his eye, when aroused, which showed that he had a quick temper, and there was an expression of firmness, unusual to one so young, which might have been read by an experienced physiognomist. He was quick-tempered, proud, and probably obstinate. Yet with these qualities he was pleasant in his manners, and had a sense of humor, which made him a favorite among his companions.

His father was a coal-dealer in a town a few miles distant from Philadelphia, of a hasty temper like Ben himself. A week before he had punished Ben severely for a fault which he had not committed. The boy's pride revolted at the injustice, and, young as he was, he resolved to run away. I suppose there are few boys who do not form this resolution at some time or other in their lives; but as a general thing it amounts to nothing. With Ben it was different. His was a strong nature, whether for good or for evil, and when he decided to do anything he was not easily moved from his resolve. He forgot, in the present case, that, though he had been unjustly punished, the injustice was not intentional on the part of his father, who had been under a wrong impression respecting him. But right or wrong, Ben made up his mind to run away; and he did so. It was two or three days before a good opportunity presented itself. Then, with a couple of shirts and collars rolled up in a small bundle, he made his

escape to Philadelphia, and after roaming about the streets for several hours he made his way to the wharves, where he found a vessel bound for New York. Representing to the captain that he lived in New York, and had no money to pay his passage home, that officer, who was a good-natured man, agreed to carry him for nothing.

The voyage was now over, and Ben landed, as we have said, an utter stranger, with very indefinite ideas as to how he was to make his living. He had told the captain that he knew his way home, for having falsely represented that he lived in New York, he was in a manner compelled to this additional falsehood. Still, in spite of his friendless condition, his spirits were very good. The sun shone brightly; all looked animated and cheerful. Ben saw numbers of men at work about him, and he thought, "It will be a pity if I cannot make a living."

He did not care to linger about the wharf, for the captain might be led to doubt his story. Accordingly he crossed the street, and at a venture turned up a street facing the wharf.

Ben did not know much about New York, even by report. But he had heard of Broadway, – as who has not? – and this was about all he did know. When, therefore, he had gone a short distance, he ventured to ask a boot-black, whom he encountered at the corner of the next block, "Can you tell me the shortest way to Broadway?"

"Follow your nose, Johnny," was the reply.

"My name isn't Johnny," replied Ben, rather indignant at the

familiarity. He had not learned that, in New York, Johnny is the generic name for boy, where the specific name is unknown.

"Aint it though?" returned the boot-black "What's the price of turnips out where you live?"

"I'll make your nose turn up if you aint careful," retorted Ben, wrathfully.

"You'll do," said the boot-black, favorably impressed by Ben's pluck. "Just go straight ahead, and you'll come to Broadway. I'm going that way, and you can come along with me if you want to."

"Thank you," said Ben, appeased by the boy's changed manner.

"Are you going to stay here?" inquired his new acquaintance.

"Yes," said Ben; "I'm going to live here."

"Where do your friends live?"

"I haven't got any friends in New York," said Ben, with a little hesitation.

"Over in Brooklyn, or Jersey, maybe?"

"No, I don't know anybody this way."

"Whew!" whistled the other. "How you goin' to live?"

"I expect to earn my living," said Ben, in a tone of importance.

"Father and mother dead?"

"No, they're alive."

"I s'pose they're poor?"

"No, they're not; they're well off."

The boot-black looked puzzled.

"Why didn't you stay at home then? Wouldn't they let you?"

"Of course they would. The fact is, I've run away."

"Maybe they'd adopt me instead of you."

"I don't think they would," said Ben, laughing.

"I wish somebody with lots of cash would adopt me, and make a gentleman of me. It would be a good sight better'n blackin' boots."

"Do you make much money that way?" inquired Ben.

"Pleasant days like this, sometimes I make a dollar, but when it rains there aint much doin'."

"How much have you made this morning?" asked Ben, with interest.

"Sixty cents."

"Sixty cents, and it isn't more than ten o'clock. That's doing pretty well."

"'Taint so good in the afternoon. Most every body gets their boots blacked in the mornin'. What are you goin' to do?"

"I don't know," said Ben.

"Goin' to black boots? I'll show you how," said the other, generously overlooking all considerations of possible rivalry.

"I don't think I should like that very well," said Ben, slowly.

Having been brought up in a comfortable home, he had a prejudice in favor of clean hands and unsoiled clothes, – a prejudice of which his street life speedily cured him.

"I think I should rather sell papers, or go into a store," said Ben.

"You can't make so much money sellin' papers," said his new

acquaintance. "Then you might get 'stuck'".

"What's that?" inquired Ben, innocently.

"Don't you know?" asked the boot-black, wonderingly. "Why, it's when you've got more papers than you can sell. That's what takes off the profits. I was a newsboy once; but it's too hard work for the money. There aint no chance of gettin' stuck on my business."

"It's rather a dirty business," said Ben, venturing to state his main objection, at the risk of offending. But Jerry Collins, for that was his name, was not very sensitive on this score.

"What's the odds?" he said, indifferently. "A feller gets used to it."

Ben looked at Jerry's begrimed hands, and clothes liberally marked with spots of blacking, and he felt that he was not quite ready to get used to appearing in public in this way. He was yet young in his street life. The time came when he ceased to be so particular.

"Where do you board?" asked Ben, after a little pause.

Jerry Collins stared at the questioner as if he suspected that a joke was intended. But Ben's serious face assured him that he was in earnest.

"You're jolly green," he remarked, sententiously.

"Look here," said Ben, with spirit, "I'll give you a licking if you say that again."

It may be considered rather singular that Jerry, Instead of resenting this threat, was led by it to regard Ben with favor.

"I didn't mean anything," he said, by way of apology. "You're a trump, and you'll get over it when you've been in the city a week."

"What made you call me green?" asked Ben.

"Did you think I boarded up to the Fifth Avenue?" asked Jerry.

"What's that, – a hotel?"

"Yes, it's one of the big hotels, where they eat off gold plates."

"No, I don't suppose you board there," said Ben, laughing; "but I suppose there are cheaper boarding-places. Where do you sleep?"

"Sometimes in wagons, or in door-ways, on the docks, or anywhere where I get a chance."

"Don't you get cold sleeping out-doors?" asked Ben.

"Oh, I'm used to it," said Jerry. "When it's cold I go to the Lodging House."

"What's that?"

Jerry explained that there was a Newsboys' Lodging House, where a bed could be obtained for six cents a night.

"That's cheap," said Ben.

"'Taint so cheap as sleepin' out-doors," returned the boot-black.

This was true; but Ben thought he would rather pay the six cents than sleep out, if it were only for the damage likely to come to his clothes, which were yet clean and neat. Looking at Jerry's suit, however, he saw that this consideration would be likely to

have less weight with him. He began to understand that he had entered upon a very different life from the one he had hitherto led. He was not easily daunted, however.

"If he can stand it, I can," he said to himself.

CHAPTER III.
STREET SCENES

"Here's Broadway," said Jerry, suddenly.

They emerged from the side street on which they had been walking, and, turning the corner, found themselves in the great thoroughfare, a block or two above Trinity Church.

Ben surveyed the busy scenes that opened before him, with the eager interest of a country boy who saw them for the first time.

"What church is that?" he asked, pointing to the tall spire of the imposing church that faces Wall Street.

"That's Trinity Church."

"Do you go to church there?"

"I don't go anywhere else," said Jerry, equivocally. "What's the use of going to church?"

"I thought everybody went to church," said Ben, speaking from his experience in a country village "that is, most everybody," he corrected himself, as several persons occurred to his mind who were more punctual in their attendance at the liquor saloon than the church.

"If I'd got good clothes like you have I'd go once just to see what it's like; but I'd a good sight rather go to the old Bowery Theatre."

"But you ought not to say that," said Ben, a little startled.

"Why not?"

"Because it's better to go to church than to the theatre."

"Is it?" said Jerry. "Well, you can go if you want to. I'd give more for a stunnin' old play at the Bowery than fifty churches."

Ben began to suspect that Jerry was rather loose in his ideas on the subject of religion, but did not think it best to say so, for fear of giving offence, though in all probability Jerry's sensitiveness would not have been at all disturbed by such a charge.

During the last portion of the conversation they had been standing still at the street corner.

"I'm goin' to Nassau Street," said Jerry. "If you want to go up Broadway, that's the way."

Without waiting for an answer he darted across the street, threading his way among the numerous vehicles with a coolness and a success which amazed Ben, who momentarily expected to see him run over. He drew a long breath when he saw him safe on the other side, and bethought himself that he would not like to take a similar risk. He felt sorry to have Jerry leave him so abruptly. The boot-black had already imparted to him considerable information about New York, which he saw was likely to be of benefit to him. Besides, he felt that any society was better than solitude, and a sudden feeling of loneliness overpowered him, as he felt that among the crowd of persons that jostled him as he stood at the corner, there was not one who felt an interest in him, or even knew his name. It was very different in his native village, where he knew everybody, and everybody

had a friendly word for him. The thought did occur to him for a moment whether he had been wise in running away from home; but the thought of the unjust punishment came with it, and his expression became firmer and more resolute.

"I won't go home if I starve," he said proudly to himself; and armed with this new resolution he proceeded up Broadway.

His attention was soon drawn to the street merchants doing business on the sidewalk. Here was a vender of neckties, displaying a varied assortment of different colors, for "only twenty-five cents each." Next came a candy merchant with his stock in trade, divided up into irregular lumps, and labelled a penny apiece. They looked rather tempting, and Ben would have purchased, but he knew very well that his cash capital amounted to only twenty-five cents, which, considering that he was as yet without an income, was likely to be wanted for other purposes.

Next came a man with an assortment of knives, all of them open, and sticking into a large board, which was the only shop required by their proprietor. Ben stopped a moment to look at them. He had always had a fancy for knives, but was now without one. In fact he had sold a handsome knife, which he had received as a birthday present, for seventy-five cents, to raise money for his present expedition. Of this sum but twenty-five cents remained.

"Will you buy a knife to-day, young gentleman?" asked the vender, who was on the alert for customers.

"No, I guess not," said Ben.

"Here's a very nice one for only one dollar," said the street merchant, taking up a showy-looking knife with three blades. "Its the best of steel, warranted. You won't get another such knife for the price in the city."

It did look cheap certainly. Ben could not but allow that. He would like to have owned it, but circumstances forbade.

"No, I won't buy to-day," he said.

"Here, you shall have it for ninety-four cents," and the vender began to roll it up in a piece of paper. "You can't say it isn't cheap."

"Yes, it's cheap enough," said Ben, moving away, "but I haven't got the money with me."

This settled the matter, and the dealer reluctantly unrolled it, and replaced it among his stock.

"If you'll call round to-morrow, I'll save it for you till then," he said.

"All right," said Ben.

"I wonder," he thought, "whether he would be so anxious to sell, if he knew that I had run away from home, and had but twenty-five cents in the world?"

Ben's neat dress deceived the man, who naturally supposed him to belong to a city family well to do.

Our young hero walked on till he came to the Astor House. He stood on the steps a few minutes taking a view of what may be considered the liveliest and most animated part of New York. Nearly opposite was Barnum's American Museum, the site being

now occupied by the costly and elegant Herald Building and Park Bank. He looked across to the lower end of the City Hall Park, not yet diverted from its original purpose for the new Post Office building. He saw a procession of horse-cars in constant motion up and down Park Row. Everything seemed lively and animated; and again the thought came to Ben, "If there is employment for all these people, there must be something for me to do."

He crossed to the foot of the Park, and walked up on the Park Row side. Here again he saw a line of street merchants. Most conspicuous were the dealers in penny ballads, whose wares lined the railings, and were various enough to suit every taste. Here was an old woman, who might have gained a first prize for ugliness, presiding over an apple-stand.

"Take one, honey; it's only two cints," she said, observing that Ben's attention was drawn to a rosy-cheeked apple.

Ben was rather hungry, and reflecting that probably apples were as cheap as any other article of diet, he responded to the appeal by purchasing. It proved to be palatable, and he ate it with a good relish.

"Ice-cream, only a penny a glass," was the next announcement. The glasses, to be sure, were of very small size. Still ice-cream in any quantity for a penny seemed so ridiculously cheap that Ben, poor as he was, could not resist the temptation.

"I'll take a glass," he said.

A dab of ice-cream was deposited in a glass, and with a pewter spoon handed to Ben. He raised the spoon to his mouth, but

alas! the mixture was not quite so tempting to the taste as to the eye and the pocket. It might be ice-cream, but there was an indescribable flavor about it, only to be explained on the supposition that the ice had been frozen dish-water. Ben's taste had not been educated up to that point which would enable him to relish it. He laid it down with an involuntary contortion of the face.

"Give it to me, Johnny," he heard at his elbow.

Turning, he saw a small, dirty-faced boy of six, with bare feet and tattered attire, who was gazing with a look of greedy desire at the delicious mixture.

Ben handed him the glass and spoon, and stood by, looking at him with some curiosity as he disposed of the contents with a look of evident enjoyment.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's bully," said the young epicure.

If Ben had not been restricted by his narrow means, he would have purchased another glass for the urchin. It would have been a very cheap "treat." But our young adventurer reflected that he had but twenty-two cents left, and prudence forbade.

"I don't see how he can like the nasty stuff," he thought.

But the time was to come when Ben himself, grown less fastidious, would be able to relish food quite as uninviting.

Ben made his way across the Park to Broadway again. He felt that it was high time for him to be seeking employment. His ideas on this subject were not very well defined, but when he left

home he made up his mind that he would try to get a place in a store on Broadway. He supposed that, among the great number of stores, there would be a chance for him to get into some one. He expected to make enough to live in a comfortable boarding-house, and buy his clothes, though he supposed that would be about all. He expected to have to economize on spending money the first year, but the second year his wages would be raised, and then it would come easier. All this shows how very verdant and unpractical our young adventurer was, and what disappointment he was preparing for himself.

However, Ben's knowledge was to come by experience, and that before long.

Reaching Broadway, he walked up slowly on the west side, looking in at the shop-windows. In the lower part of this busy street are many wholesale houses, while the upper part is devoted principally to retail shops. Coming to a large warehouse for the sale of ready-made clothing, Ben thought he might as well begin there. In such a large place there must be a good deal to do.

He passed in and looked about him rather doubtfully. The counters, which were numerous, were filled high with ready-made garments. Ben saw no one as small as himself, and that led him to doubt whether his size might not be an objection.

"Well, sonny, what do you want?" asked a clerk.

"Don't you want to hire a boy?" asked our young adventurer, plunging into his business.

"I suppose you have had considerable experience in the

business?" said the clerk inclined to banter him a little.

"No, I haven't," said Ben, frankly.

"Indeed, I judged from your looks that you were a man of experience."

"If you don't want to hire me, I'll go," said Ben, independently.

"Well, young man, I'm afraid you'll have to go. The fact is, we should have to *higher* you before we could *hire* you;" and the clerk laughed at his witticism.

Ben naturally saw nothing to laugh at, but felt rather indignant. He stepped into the street, a little depressed at the result of his first application. But then, as he reflected, there were a great many other stores besides this, and he might have better luck next time. He walked on some distance, however, before trying again. Indeed, he had got above Bleecker Street, when his attention was arrested by a paper pasted inside of a shop-window, bearing the inscription: —

"CASH-BOYS WANTED."

Ben did not clearly understand what were the duties of a cash-boy, though he supposed they must have something to do with receiving money. Looking in through the glass door he saw boys as small as himself flitting about, and this gave him courage to enter and make an application for a place.

He entered, therefore, and walked up boldly to the first clerk he saw.

"Do you want a cash-boy?" he asked.

"Go up to that desk, Johnny," said the clerk, pointing to a desk about midway of the store. A stout gentleman stood behind it, writing something in a large book.

Ben went up, and repeated his inquiry. "Do you want a cash-boy?"

"How old are you?" asked the gentleman looking down at him.

"Ten years old."

"Have you ever been in a store?"

"No, sir."

"Do you live in the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"With your parents?"

"No, sir," said Ben, with hesitation.

"Who do you live with, then?"

"With nobody. I take care of myself."

"Humph!" The gentleman looked a little surprised, not at the idea of a boy of ten looking out for himself, for such cases are common enough in New York, but at the idea of such a well-dressed lad as Ben being in that situation.

"How long have you been your own man?" he inquired.

"I've only just begun," Ben admitted.

"Are your parents dead?"

"No, sir; they're alive."

"Then I advise you to go back to them. We don't receive any boys into our employment, who do not live with their parents."

The gentleman returned to his writing, and Ben saw that his case was hopeless. His disappointment was greater than before, for he liked the looks of the proprietor, if, as he judged, this was he. Besides, boys were wanted, and his size would be no objection, judging from the appearance of the other boys in the store. So he had been sanguine of success. Now he saw that there was an objection which he could not remove, and which would be very likely to stand in his way in other places.

CHAPTER IV.
A RESTAURANT ON FULTON STREET

Ben kept on his way, looking in at the shop windows as before. He had not yet given up the idea of getting a place in a store, though he began to see that his chances of success were rather small.

The next pause he came to was before a bookstore. Here, too, there was posted on the window: —

"BOY WANTED."

Ben entered. There were two or three persons behind the counter. The oldest, a man of forty, Ben decided to be the proprietor. He walked up to him, and said, "Do you want a boy?"

"Yes," said the gentleman. "We want a boy to run of errands, and deliver papers to customers. How old are you?"

"Ten years old."

"That is rather young."

"I'm pretty strong of my age," said Ben, speaking the truth here, for he was rather larger and stouter than most boys of ten.

"That is not important, as you will not have very heavy parcels

to carry. Are you well acquainted with the streets in this part of the city?"

This question was a poser, Ben thought. He was at first tempted to say yes, but decided to answer truthfully.

"No, sir," he answered.

"Do you live in the lower part of the city?"

"Yes, sir; that is, I'm going to live there."

"How long have you lived in the city?"

"I only arrived this morning," Ben confessed, reluctantly.

"Then I'm afraid you will not answer my purpose. We need a boy who is well acquainted with the city streets."

He was another disqualification. Ben left the store a little discouraged. He began to think that it would be harder work making a living than he had supposed. He would apply in two or three more stores, and, if unsuccessful, he must sell papers or black boots. Of the two he preferred selling papers. Blacking boots would soil his hands and his clothes, and, as it was possible that he might some day encounter some one from his native village, he did not like to have the report carried home that he had become a New York boot-black. He felt that his education and bringing up fitted him for something better than that. However, it was not necessary to decide this question until he had got through applying for a situation in a store.

He tried his luck again, and once was on the point of being engaged at three dollars per week, when a question as to his parents revealed the fact that he was without a guardian, and this

decided the question against him.

"It's of no use," said Ben, despondently. "I might as well go back."

So he turned, and retraced his steps down Broadway. By the time he got to the City Hall Park he was quite tired. Seeing some vacant seats inside, he went in and sat down, resting his bundle on the seat beside him. He saw quite a number of street boys within the inclosure, most of them boot-blacks. As a rule, they bore the marks of their occupation not only on their clothes, but on their faces and hands as well. Some, who were a little more careful than the rest, were provided with a small square strip of carpeting, on which they kneeled when engaged in "shining up" a customer's boots. This formed a very good protection for the knees of their pantaloons. Two were even more luxurious, having chairs in which they seated their customers. Where this extra accommodation was supplied, however, a fee of ten cents was demanded, while the boot-blacks in general asked but five.

"Black your boots?" asked one boy of Ben, observing that our young adventurer's shoes were soiled.

"Yes," said Ben, "if you'll do it for nothing."

"I'll black your eye for nothing," said the other.

"Thank you," said Ben, "I won't trouble you."

Ben was rather interested in a scene which he witnessed shortly afterwards. A young man, whose appearance indicated that he was from the country, was waylaid by the boys, and finally submitted his boots to an operator.

"How much do you want?"

"Twenty-five cents," was the reply.

"Twenty-five cents!" exclaimed the customer, aghast. "You're jokin', aint you?"

"Reg'lar price, mister," was the reply.

"Why, I saw a boy blackin' boots down by the museum for ten cents."

"Maybe you did; but this is the City Hall Park. We're employed by the city, and we have to charge the reg'lar price."

"I wish I'd got my boots blacked down to the museum," said the victim, in a tone of disappointment, producing twenty-five cents, which was eagerly appropriated by the young extortioner.

"I say, Tommy, give us a treat, or we'll peach," said one of the boys.

Tom led the way to the ice-cream vender's establishment, where with reckless extravagance he ordered a penny ice-cream all round for the half-dozen boys in his company, even then making a handsome thing out of the extra pay he had obtained from his rustic patron.

By this time it was half-past two o'clock. So Ben learned from the City Hall clock. He was getting decidedly hungry. There were apple and cake stands just outside the railings, on which he could have regaled himself cheaply, but his appetite craved something more solid. There was a faint feeling, which nothing but meat could satisfy.

Ben had no idea how much a plate of meat would cost at a

restaurant. He had but twenty-two cents, and whatever he got must come within that limit. Still he hoped that something could be obtained for this sum.

Where to go, – that was the question.

"Can you tell me a good place to get some dinner?" he asked of a boy, standing near him.

"Down on Nassau Street or Fulton Street," was the reply.

"Where is Fulton Street?" asked Ben, catching the last name.

"I'm goin' that way. You can go with me if you want to."

Ben readily accepted the companionship proffered, and was led past the museum, the site of which, as I have said, is now occupied by the Herald Building.

Turning down Fulton Street, Ben soon saw a restaurant, with bills of fare displayed outside.

"That's a good place," said his guide.

"Thank you," said Ben.

He scanned the bill in advance, ascertaining to his satisfaction that he could obtain a plate of roast beef for fifteen cents, and a cup of coffee for five. This would make but twenty cents, leaving him a balance of two cents.

He opened the door and entered.

There was a long table running through the centre of the apartment, from the door to the rear. On each side, against the sides of the room, were small tables intended for four persons each. There were but few eating, as the busy time at down-town restaurants usually extends from twelve to half-past one, or two

o'clock, and it was now nearly three.

Ben entered and took a seat at one of the side tables, laying his bundle on a chair beside him.

A colored waiter came up, and stood awaiting his orders.

"Give me a plate of roast beef," said Ben.

"Yes, sir. Coffee or tea?"

"Coffee."

The waiter went to the lower end of the dining-room, and called out, "Roast beef."

After a brief delay, he returned with the article ordered, and a cup of coffee.

There were two potatoes with the meat, and a small piece of bread on the side of the plate. The coffee looked muddy, and not particularly inviting.

Ben was not accustomed to the ways of restaurants, and supposed that, as in shops, immediate payment was expected.

"Here's the money – twenty cents," he said, producing the sum named.

"Pay at the desk as you go out," said the waiter.

Ben looked up, and then for the first time noticed a man behind a counter in the front part of the room.

At the same time the waiter produced a green ticket, bearing "20 cents" printed upon it.

Ben now addressed himself with a hearty appetite to the dinner. The plate was dingy, and the meat neither very abundant nor very tender. Still it can hardly be expected that for fifteen

cents a large plate of sirloin can be furnished. Ben was not in a mood to be critical. At home he would have turned up his nose at such a repast, but hunger is very well adapted to cure one of fastidiousness. He ate rapidly, and felt that he had seldom eaten anything so good. He was sorry there was no more bread, the supply being exceedingly limited. As for the coffee he was able to drink it, though he did not enjoy it so well. It tasted as if there was not more than a teaspoonful of milk in the infusion, while the flavor of the beverage differed strangely from the coffee he had been accustomed to get at home.

"It isn't very good," thought Ben; and he could not help wishing he had a cup of the good coffee his mother used to make at home.

"Have anything more?" asked the waiter, coming up to the table.

Ben looked over the bill of fare, not that he expected to get anything for the two cents that still remained to him, but because he wanted to notice the prices of different articles. His eye rested rather longingly on "Apple Dumplings." He was very fond of this dish, and his appetite was so far from being satisfied that he felt that he could have easily disposed of a plate. But the price was ten cents, and of course it was entirely beyond his means.

"Nothing more," said he, and rose from his seat.

He went up to the counter and settled his bill, and went out again into the street. He felt more comfortable than he had done, as one is very apt to feel after a good dinner, and Ben's dinner

had been a good one, his appetite making up for any deficiency in the quality.

Where should he go now?

He was still tired, and did not care to wander about the streets. Besides, he had no particular place to go to. He therefore decided to walk back to the City Hall Park, and sit down on one of the benches. There would be something to see, and he was interested in watching the street boys, whose ranks he felt that he should very soon be compelled to join. His prospects did not look particularly bright, as he was not provided with means sufficient to pay for another meal. But the time had not yet come to trouble himself about that. When he got hungry again, he would probably realize his position a little more keenly.

CHAPTER V.
A BEER-GARDEN IN THE BOWERY

Ben sat down again in his old seat, and occupied himself once more in looking about him. After a while he became sleepy. Besides having taken a considerable walk, he had not slept much the night before. As no one occupied the bench but himself, he thought he might as well make himself comfortable. Accordingly he laid his bundle crosswise at one end, and laid back, using it for a pillow. The visor of his cap he brought down over his eyes, so as to shield them from the afternoon sun. The seat was hard, to be sure, but his recumbent position rested him. He did not mean to go to sleep, but gradually the sounds around him became an indistinct hum; even the noise and bustle of busy Broadway, but a few feet distant, failed to ward off sleep, and in a short time he was sleeping soundly.

Of course he could not sleep in so public a place without attracting attention. Two ragged boys espied him, and held a low conference together.

"What's he got in that bundle, Jim, do you think?" asked one.

"We'd better look and see."

They went up to the bench, and touched him, to make sure that he was fast asleep. The touch did not rouse him to consciousness.

"Just lift up his head, Mike, and I'll take the bundle," said the larger of the two boys.

This was done.

"Now, let him down softly."

So the bundle was removed, and poor Ben, wandering somewhere in the land of dreams, was none the wiser. His head, deprived of its former support, now rested on the hard bench. It was not so comfortable, but he was too tired to awake. So he slept on.

Meanwhile Jim and Mike opened the bundle.

"It's a couple of shirts," said Jim.

"Is that all?" asked Mike, disappointed.

"Well, that's better than nothin'."

"Give me one of 'em."

"It's just about your size. 'Taint big enough for me."

"Then give me the two of 'em."

"What'll you give?"

"I aint got no stamps. I'll pay you a quarter when I get it."

"That don't go down," said Jim, whose confidence in his confederate's honesty was not very great. Considering the transaction in which they were now engaged, it is not surprising that there should have been a mutual distrust. Being unable to make any bargain, Jim decided to take his share of the booty round to a second-hand clothes-dealer in Chatham Street. Here, after considerable higgling, he succeeded in selling the shirt for sixteen cents, which was less than his companion had offered.

However, it was cash down, and so was immediately available, – an important consideration in the present state of Jim's finances. "A bird in the hand," as he considered, "was worth two in the bush."

Jim immediately purchased a cigar with a portion of his dishonest gains, and, procuring a light, walked about in a state of high enjoyment, puffing away as coolly as a man of twice his years.

Meanwhile Ben continued to sleep, happily unconscious of the loss of his entire personal possessions. In his dreams he was at home once more, playing with his school companions. Let him sleep! He will waken soon enough to the hard realities of a street life, voluntarily undertaken, it is true, but none the less likely to bear heavily upon him.

He slept a long time. When he awoke it was six o'clock.

He sat upon his seat, and rubbed his eyes in momentary bewilderment. In his dreams he had been back again to his native village, and he could not at once recall his change of circumstances. But it all came back to him soon enough. He realized with a slight pang that he had a home no longer; that he was a penniless vagrant, for whom the hospitality of the streets alone was open. He did wish that he could sit down at the plentiful home table, and eat the well-cooked supper which was always provided; that is, if he could blot out one remembrance: when he thought of the unjust punishment that had driven him forth, his pride rose, and his determination became as stubborn as ever.

I do not defend Ben in this. He was clearly wrong. The best of parents may be unintentionally unjust at times, and this is far from affording an adequate excuse for a boy to leave home. But Ben had a great deal of pride, and I am only telling you how he felt.

Our young adventurer did not at first realize the loss which he had sustained. It was at least five minutes before he thought of his bundle at all. At length, chancing to look at the seat beside him, he missed it.

"Where can it be, I wonder?" he thought, perplexed.

He looked under the bench, thinking that perhaps it had rolled off. But it need not be said that it was not to be seen.

Ben was rather disturbed. It was all he had brought from home, and constituted his entire earthly possessions.

"It must have rolled off, and been picked up by somebody," he thought; but the explanation was not calculated to bring any satisfaction. "I did not think I should fall asleep."

It occurred to him that some of the boys near by might have seen it. So he went up to a group of boot-blacks near by, one of whom was Jim, who had actually been concerned in the robbery. The other boys knew nothing of the affair.

"I say, boys," said Ben, "have you seen anything of my bundle?"

"What bundle, Johnny?" said Jim, who was now smoking his second cigar.

"I had a small bundle tied up in a newspaper," said Ben. "I put

it under my head, and then fell asleep. Now I can't find it."

"Do you think we stole it?" said Jim, defiantly.

"Of course I don't," said Ben; "but I thought it might have slipped out, and you might have seen somebody pick it up."

"Haven't seen it, Johnny," said one of the other boys; "most likely it's stole."

"Do you think so?" asked Ben, anxiously.

"In course, you might expect it would be."

"I didn't mean to go to sleep."

"What was there in it?"

"There was two shirts."

"You've got a shirt on, aint you?"

"Yes," said Ben.

"That's all right, then. What does a feller want of a thousand shirts?"

"There's some difference between two shirts and a thousand," said Ben.

"What's the odds? I haven't got but one shirt. That's all I want. When it is wore out I'll buy a new one."

"What do you do when it gets dirty?" asked Ben, in some curiosity.

"Oh, I wash it once in two or three weeks," was the reply.

This was not exactly in accordance with Ben's ideas of neatness; but he saw that no satisfaction was likely to be obtained in this quarter, so he walked away rather depressed. It certainly hadn't been a lucky day, – this first day in the city. He had

been rejected in half-a-dozen stores in his applications for employment, had spent nearly all his money, and been robbed of all his clothing except what he wore.

Again Ben began to feel an appetite. He had eaten his dinner late, but it had consisted of a plate of meat only. His funds being now reduced to two cents, he was obliged to content himself with an apple, which did something towards appeasing his appetite.

Next Ben began to consider anxiously how he was to pass the night. Having no money to spend for lodging, there seemed nothing to do but to sleep out of doors. It was warm weather, and plenty of street boys did it. But to Ben it would be a new experience, and he regarded it with some dread. He wished he could meet with Jerry Collins, his acquaintance of the morning. From him he might obtain some information that would be of service in his present strait.

Three or four hours must elapse before it would be time to go to bed. Ben hardly knew how or where to pass them. He had become tired of the park; besides, he had got over a part of his fatigue, and felt able to walk about and explore the city. He turned at a venture up Chatham Street, and was soon interested in the sights of this peculiar thoroughfare, – the shops open to the street, with half their stock in trade exposed on the sidewalk, the importunities of the traders, and the appearance of the people whom he met. It seemed very lively and picturesque to Ben, and drew away his attention from his own awkward position.

He was asked to buy by some of the traders, being promised

wonderful bargains; but his penniless condition put him out of the reach of temptation.

So he wandered on until he came to the Bowery, a broad avenue, wider than Broadway, and lined by shops of a great variety, but of a grade inferior to those of its more aristocratic neighbor.

Here, also, the goods are liberally displayed on the sidewalk, and are generally labelled with low prices, which tempts many purchasers. The purchaser, however, must look carefully to the quality of the goods which he buys, or he will in many cases find the low price merely a snare and a delusion, and regret that he had not paid more liberally and bought a better article.

Later in the evening, on his return walk, Ben came to an establishment brilliant with light, from which proceeded strains of music. Looking in, he saw that it was filled with small tables, around which were seated men, women, and children. They had glasses before them from which they drank. This was a Lager Beer Hall or Garden, – an institution transplanted from Germany, and chiefly patronized by those of German birth or extraction. It seemed bright and cheerful, and our young adventurer thought it would be pleasant to go in, and spend an hour or two, listening to the music; but he was prevented by the consciousness that he had no money to spend, and might be considered an intruder.

While he was looking in wistfully, he was struck on the back; and turning, saw, to his surprise, the face of his only acquaintance

in New York, Jerry Collins, the boot-black.

"I am glad to see you," he said, eagerly offering his hand, without considering that Jerry's hand, unwashed during the day, was stained with blacking. He felt so glad to meet an acquaintance, however, that he would not have minded this, even if it had occurred to him.

"The same to you," said Jerry. "Are you going in?"

"I haven't got any money," said Ben, a little ashamed of the confession.

"Well, I have, and that'll do just as well."

He took Ben by the arm, and they passed through a vestibule, and entered the main apartment, which was of large size. On one side, about half way down, was a large instrument some like an organ, from which the music proceeded. The tables were very well filled, Germans largely predominating among the guests.

"Sit down here," said Jerry.

They took seats at one of the tables. Opposite was a stout German and his wife, the latter holding a baby. Both had glasses of lager before them, and the baby was also offered a share by its mother; but, from the contortions of its face, did not appear to relish it.

"*Zwei Glass Lager*," said Jerry, to a passing attendant.

"Can you speak German?" asked Ben, surprised.

"Yaw," said Jerry; "my father was an Irishman, and my mother was a Dutchman."

Jerry's German, however, seemed to be limited, as he made

no further attempts to converse in that language.

The glasses were brought. Jerry drank his down at a draught, but Ben, who had never before tasted lager, could not at once become reconciled to its bitter taste.

"Don't you like it?" asked Jerry.

"Not very much," said Ben.

"Then I'll finish it for you;" and he suited the action to the word.

Besides the lager a few plain cakes were sold, but nothing more substantial. Evidently the beer was the great attraction. Ben could not help observing, with some surprise, that, though everybody was drinking, there was not the slightest disturbance, or want of decorum, or drunkenness. The music, which was furnished at intervals, was of very good quality, and was listened to with attention.

"I was goin' to Tony Pastor's to-night," said Jerry, "if I hadn't met you."

"What sort of a place is that?" asked Ben.

"Oh, it's a bully place – lots of fun. You must go there some time."

"I think I will," answered Ben, mentally adding, "if I ever have money enough."

Here the music struck up, and they stopped to listen to it. When this was over, Jerry proposed to go out. Ben would have been willing to stay longer; but he saw that his companion did not care so much for the music as himself, and he did not wish to lose

sight of him. To be alone in a great city, particularly under Ben's circumstances, is not very pleasant, and our young adventurer determined to stick to his new acquaintance, who, though rough in his manners, had yet seemed inclined to be friendly, and Ben felt sadly in need of a friend.

CHAPTER VI.
THE BURNING BALES

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" asked Ben, introducing a subject which had given him some anxiety.

"I don't know," said Jerry, carelessly. "I'll find a place somewhere."

"I'll go with you, if you'll let me," said Ben.

"In course I will."

"I haven't got any money."

"What's the odds? They don't charge nothin' at the hotel where I stop."

"What time do you go to bed?"

"Most any time. Do you feel sleepy?"

"Rather. I didn't sleep much last night."

"Well, we'll go and find a place now. How'd you like sleepin' on cotton-bales?"

"I think that would be comfortable."

"There's a pile of bales down on the pier, where the New Orleans steamers come in. Maybe we could get a chance there."

"All right. Where is it?"

"Pier 8, North River. It'll take us twenty minutes, or maybe half an hour, to go there."

"Let us go," said Ben.

He felt relieved at the idea of so comfortable a bed as a cotton-bale, and was anxious to get stowed away for the night.

The two boys struck across to Broadway, and followed that street down past Trinity Church, turning down the first street beyond. Rector Street, notwithstanding its clerical name, is far from an attractive street. Just in the rear of the great church, and extending down to the wharves, is a collection of miserable dwellings, occupied by tenants upon whom the near presence of the sanctuary appears to produce little impression of a salutary character. Ben looked about him in ill-concealed disgust. He neither fancied the neighborhood, nor the people whom he met. But the Island is very narrow just here, and he had not far to walk to West Street, which runs along the edge of Manhattan Island, and is lined with wharves. Jerry, of course, did not mind the surroundings. He was too well used to them to care.

They brought out opposite the pier.

"There it is," said Jerry.

Ben saw a pile of cotton-bales heaped up on the wharf in front. Just behind them was a gate, and over it the sign of the New Orleans Company.

"I should think somebody would steal the bales," said Ben. "Are they left out here all night?"

"There's a watchman round here somewhere," said Jerry. "He stays here all night to guard the bales."

"Will he let us sleep here?"

"I don't know," said Jerry. "We'll creep in, when he isn't

looking."

The watchman was sitting down, leaning his back against one of the bales. A short pipe was in his mouth, and he seemed to be enjoying his smoke. This was contrary to orders, for the cotton being combustible might easily catch fire; but this man, supposing that he would not be detected, indulged himself in the forbidden luxury.

"Now creep along softly," said Jerry.

The latter, being barefooted, had an advantage over Ben, but our young adventurer crept after him as softly as he could. Jerry found a bale screened from observation by the higher piles on each side, where he thought they could sleep unobserved. Following his lead, Ben stretched himself out upon it.

The watchman was too busily occupied with his pipe to detect any noise.

"Aint it comfortable?" whispered Jerry.

"Yes," said Ben, in the same low tone.

"I wouldn't ask for nothin' better," said Jerry.

Ben was not so sure about that; but then he had not slept out hundreds of nights, like Jerry, in old wagons, or on door-steps, or wherever else he could; so he had a different standard of comparison.

He could not immediately go to sleep. He was tired, it was true, but his mind was busy. It was only twelve hours since he had landed in the city, but it had been an eventful twelve hours. He understood his position a little better now, and how much he

had undertaken, in boldly leaving home at ten years of age, and taking upon himself the task of earning his living.

If he had known what was before him, would he have left home at all?

Ben was not sure about this. He did own to himself, however, that he was disappointed. The city had not proved the paradise he had expected. Instead of finding shopkeepers eager to secure his services, he had found himself uniformly rejected. He began to suspect that it was rather early to begin the world at ten years of age. Then again, though he was angry with his father, he had no cause of complaint against his mother. She had been uniformly kind and gentle, and he found it hard to keep back the tears when he thought how she would be distressed at his running away. He had not thought of that in the heat of his first anger, but he thought of it now. How would she feel if she knew where he was at this moment, resting on a cotton-bale, on a city wharf, penniless and without a friend in the great city, except the ragged boy who was already asleep at his side? She would feel badly, Ben knew that, and he half regretted having been so precipitate in his action. He could remedy it all, and relieve his mother's heart by going back. But here Ben's pride came in. To go back would be to acknowledge himself wrong; it would be a virtual confession of failure, and, moreover, knowing his father's sternness, he knew that he would be severely punished. Unfortunately for Ben, his father had a stern, unforgiving disposition, that never made allowances for the impulses of boyhood. He had never

condescended to study his own son, and the method of training he had adopted with him was in some respects very pernicious. His system hardened, instead of softening, and prejudiced Ben against what was right, maddening him with a sense of injustice, and so preventing his being influenced towards good. Of course, all this did not justify Ben in running away from home. The thought of his mother ought to have been sufficient to have kept him from any such step. But it was necessary to be stated, in order that my readers might better understand what sort of a boy Ben was.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.