Henty George Alfred

Captain Bayley's Heir: A Tale of the Gold Fields of California

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
WESTMINSTER! WESTMINSTER!

A CRIPPLE boy was sitting in a box on four low wheels, in a little room in a small street in Westminster; his age was some fifteen or sixteen years; his face was clear-cut and intelligent, and was altogether free from the expression either of discontent or of shrinking sadness so often seen in the face of those afflicted. Had he been sitting on a chair at a table, indeed, he would have been remarked as a handsome and well-grown young fellow; his shoulders were broad, his arms powerful, and his head erect. He had not been born a cripple, but had been disabled for life, when a tiny child, by a cart passing over his legs above the knees. He was talking to a lad a year or so younger than himself, while a strong, hearty-looking woman, somewhat past middle age, stood at a wash-tub.

"What is all that noise about?" the cripple exclaimed, as an

uproar was heard in the street at some little distance from the house.

"Drink, as usual, I suppose," the woman said.

The younger lad ran to the door.

"No, mother; it's them scholars a-coming back from cricket. Ain't there a fight jist!"

The cripple wheeled his box to the door, and then taking a pair of crutches which rested in hooks at its side when not wanted, swung himself from the box, and propped himself in the doorway so as to command a view down the street.

It was indeed a serious fight. A party of Westminster boys, on their way back from their cricket-ground in St. Vincent's Square, had been attacked by the "skies." The quarrel was an old standing one, but had broken out afresh from a thrashing which one of the older lads had administered on the previous day to a young chimney-sweep about his own age, who had taken possession of the cricket-ball when it had been knocked into the roadway, and had, with much strong language, refused to throw it back when requested.

The friends of the sweep determined to retaliate upon the following day, and gathered so threateningly round the gate that, instead of the boys coming home in twos and threes, as was their wont, when playtime expired, they returned in a body. They were some forty in number, and varied in age from the little fags of the Under School, ten or twelve years old, to brawny muscular young fellows of seventeen or eighteen, senior Queen's Scholars,

or Sixth Form town boys. The Queen's Scholars were in their caps and gowns, the town boys were in ordinary attire, a few only having flannel cricketing trousers.

On first leaving the field they were assailed only by volleys of abuse; but as they made their way down the street their assailants grew bolder, and from words proceeded to blows, and soon a desperate fight was raging. In point of numbers the "skies" were vastly superior, and many of them were grown men; but the knowledge of boxing which almost every Westminster boy in those days possessed, and the activity and quickness of hitting of the boys, went far to equalise the odds.

Pride in their school, too, would have rendered it impossible for any to show the white feather on such an occasion as this, and with the younger boys as far as possible in their centre, the seniors faced their opponents manfully. Even the lads of but thirteen and fourteen years old were not idle. Taking from the fags the bats which several of the latter were carrying, they joined in the conflict, not striking at their opponents' heads, but occasionally aiding their seniors, when attacked by three or four at once, by swinging blows on their assailant's shins.

Man after man among the crowd had gone down before the blows straight from the shoulder of the boys, and many had retired from the contest with faces which would for many days bear marks of the fight; but their places were speedily filled up, and the numbers of the assailants grew stronger every minute.

"How well they fight!" the cripple exclaimed. "Splendid! isn't

it, mother? But there are too many against them. Run, Evan, quick, down to Dean's Yard; you are sure to find some of them playing at racquets in the Little Yard, tell them that the boys coming home from cricket have been attacked, and that unless help comes they will be terribly knocked about."

Evan dashed off at full speed. Dean's Yard was but a few minutes' run distant. He dashed through the little archway into the yard, down the side, and then in at another archway into Little Dean's Yard, where some elder boys were playing at racquets. A fag was picking up the balls, and two or three others were standing at the top of the steps of the two boarding-houses.

"If you please, sir," Evan said, running up to one of the racquet-players, "there is just a row going on; they are all pitching into the scholars on their way back from Vincent Square, and if you don't send help they will get it nicely, though they are all fighting like bricks."

"Here, all of you," the lad he addressed shouted to the others; "our fellows are attacked by the 'skies' on their way back from fields. Run up College, James; the fellows from the water have come back." Then he turned to the boys on the steps, "Bring all the fellows out quick; the 'skies' are attacking us on the way back from the fields. Don't let them wait a moment."

It was lucky that the boys who had been on the water in the two eights, the six, and the fours, had returned, or at that hour there would have been few in the boarding-houses or up College. Ere a minute had elapsed these, with a few others who had been

kept off field and water from indisposition, or other causes, came pouring out at the summons – a body some thirty strong, of whom fully half were big boys. They dashed out of the gate in a body, and made their way to the scene of the conflict. They were but just in time; the compact group of the boys had been broken up, and every one now was fighting for himself.

They had made but little progress towards the school since Evan had started, and the fight was now raging opposite his house. The cripple was almost crying with excitement and at his own inability to join in the fight going on. His sympathies were wholly with "the boys," towards whose side he was attached by the disparity of their numbers compared to those of their opponents, and by the coolness and resolution with which they fought.

"Just look at those two, mother – those two fighting back to back. Isn't it grand! There! there is another one down; that is the fifth I have counted. Don't they fight cool and steady? and they almost look smiling, though the odds against them are ten to one. O mother, if I could but go to help them!"

Mrs. Holl herself was not without sharing his excitement. Several times she made sorties from her doorstep, and seized more than one hulking fellow in the act of pummelling a youngster half his size, and shook him with a vigour which showed that constant exercise at the wash-tub had strengthened her arms.

"Yer ought to be ashamed of yerselves, yer ought; a whole

crowd of yer pitching into a handful o' boys."

But her remonstrances were unheeded in the din, – which, however, was raised entirely by the assailants, the boys fighting silently, save when an occasional shout of "Hurrah, Westminster!" was raised. Presently Evan dashed through the crowd up to the door.

"Are they coming, Evan?" the cripple asked eagerly.

"Yes, 'Arry; they will be 'ere in a jiffy."

A half-minute later, and with shouts of "Westminster! Westminster!" the reinforcement came tearing up the street.

Their arrival in an instant changed the face of things. The "skies" for a moment or two resisted; but the muscles of the eight – hardened by the training which had lately given them victory over Eton in their annual race – stood them in good stead, and the hard hitting of the "water" soon beat back the lately triumphant assailants of "cricket." The united band took the offensive, and in two or three minutes the "skies" were in full flight.

"We were just in time, Norris," one of the new-comers said to the tall lad in cricketing flannels whose straight hitting had particularly attracted the admiration of Harry Holl.

"Only just," the other said, smiling; "it was a hot thing, and a pretty sight we shall look up School to-morrow. I shall have two thundering black eyes, and my mouth won't look pretty for a fortnight; and, by the look of them, most of the others have fared worse. It's the biggest fight we have had for years. But I don't think the 'skies' will interfere with us again for some time,

for every mark we've got they've got ten. Won't there be a row in School to-morrow when Litter sees that half the Sixth can't see out of their eyes."

Not for many years had the lessons at Westminster been so badly prepared as they were upon the following morning – indeed, with the exception of the half and home-boarders, few of whom had shared in the fight, not a single boy, from the Under School to the Sixth, had done an exercise or prepared a lesson. Study indeed had been out of the question, for all were too excited and too busy talking over the details of the battle to be able to give the slightest attention to their work.

Many were the tales of feats of individual prowess; but all who had taken part agreed that none had so distinguished themselves as Frank Norris, a Sixth Form town boy, and captain of the eight – who, for a wonder had for once been up at fields – and Fred Barkley, a senior in the Sixth. But, grievous and general as was the breakdown in lessons next day, no impositions were set; the boarding-house masters, Richards and Sargent, had of course heard all about it at tea-time, as had Johns, who did not himself keep a boarding-house, but resided at Carr's, the boarding-house down by the great gate.

These, therefore, were prepared for the state of things, and contented themselves by ordering the forms under their charge to set to work with their dictionaries and write out the lessons they should have prepared. The Sixth did not get off so easily. Dr. Litter, in his lofty solitude as head-master, had heard nothing

of what had passed; nor was it until the Sixth took their places in the library and began to construe that his attention was called to the fact that something unusual had happened. But the sudden hesitation and blundering of the first "put on," and the inability of those next to him to correct him, were too marked to be passed over, and he raised his gold-rimmed eye-glasses to his eyes and looked round.

Dr. Litter was a man standing some six feet two in height, stately in manner, somewhat sarcastic in speech, – a very prodigy in classical learning, and joint author of the great treatise *On the Uses of the Greek Particle*. Searchingly he looked from face to face round the library.

"I cannot," he said, with a curl of his upper lip, and the cold and somewhat nasal tone which set every nerve in a boy's body twitching when he heard it raised in reproof, "I really cannot congratulate you on your appearance. I thought that the Sixth Form of Westminster was composed of gentlemen, but it seems to me now as if it consisted of a number of singularly disreputable-looking prize-fighters. What does all this mean, Williams?" he asked, addressing the captain; "your face appears to have met with better usage than some of the others."

"It means, sir," Williams said, "that as the party from fields were coming back yesterday evening, they were attacked by the 'skies,' – I mean by the roughs – and got terribly knocked about. When the news came to us I was up College, and the fellows had just come back from the water, so of course we all sallied out

to rescue them."

"Did it not occur to you, Williams, that there is a body called the police, whose duty it is to interfere in disgraceful uproars of this sort?"

"If we had waited for the police, sir," Williams said, "half the School would not have been fit to take their places in form again before the end of the term."

"It does not appear to me," Dr. Litter said, "that a great many of them are fit to take their places at present. I can scarcely see Norris's eyes; and I suppose that boy is Barkley, as he sits in the place that he usually occupies, otherwise, I should not have recognised him; and Smart, Robertson, and Barker and Barret are nearly as bad. I suppose you feel satisfied with yourselves, boys, and consider that this sort of thing is creditable to you; to my mind it is simply disgraceful. There! I don't want to hear any more at present; I suppose the whole School is in the same state. Those of you who can see had better go back to School and prepare your Demosthenes; those who cannot had best go back to their boarding-houses, or up College, and let the doctor be sent for to see if anything can be done for you."

The doctor had indeed already been sent for, for some seven or eight of the younger boys had been so seriously knocked about and kicked that they were unable to leave their beds. For the rest a doctor could do nothing. Fights were not uncommon at Westminster in those days, but the number of orders for beef-steaks which the nearest butcher had received on the previous

evening had fairly astonished him. Indeed, had it not been for the prompt application of these to their faces, very few of the party from the fields would have been able to find their way up School unless they had been led by their comrades.

At Westminster there was an hour's school before breakfast, and when nine o'clock struck, and the boys poured out, Dr. Litter and his under-masters held council together.

"This is a disgraceful business!" Dr. Litter said, looking, as was his wont, at some distant object far over the heads of the others.

There was a general murmur of assent.

"The boys do not seem to have been much to blame," Mr. Richards suggested in the cheerful tone habitual to him. "From what I can hear it seems to have been a planned thing; the people gathered round the gates before they left the fields and attacked them without any provocation."

"There must have been some provocation somewhere, Mr. Richards, if not yesterday, then the day before, or the day before that," Dr. Litter said, twirling his eye-glass by the ribbon. "A whole host of people do not gather to assault forty or fifty boys without provocation. This sort of thing must not occur again. I do not see that I can punish one boy without punishing the whole School; but, at any rate, for the next week fields must be stopped. I shall write to the Commissioner of Police, asking that when they again go to Vincent Square some policemen may be put on duty, not of course to accompany them, but to interfere at once if they

see any signs of a repetition of this business. I shall request that, should there be any fighting, those not belonging to the School who commit an assault may be taken before a magistrate; my own boys I can punish myself. Are any of the boys seriously injured, do you think?"

"I hope not, sir," Mr. Richards said; "there are three or four in my house, and there are ten at Mr. Sargent's, and two at Carr's, who have gone on the sick list. I sent for the doctor, and he may have seen them by this time; they all seemed to have been knocked down and kicked."

"There are four of the juniors at College in the infirmary," Mr. Wire, who was in special charge of the Queen's Scholars, put in. "I had not heard about it last night, and was in ignorance of what had taken place until the list of those who had gone into the infirmary was put into my hands, and then I heard from Williams what had taken place."

"It is very unpleasant," Dr. Litter said, in a weary tone of voice – as if boys were a problem far more difficult to be mastered than any that the Greek authors afforded him – "that one cannot trust boys to keep out of mischief for an hour. Of course with small boys this sort of thing is to be expected; but that young fellows like Williams and the other seniors, and the Sixth town boys, who are on the eve of going up to the Universities, should so far forget themselves is very surprising."

"But even at the University, Doctor Litter," Mr. Richards said, with a passing thought of his own experience, "town and gown

rows take place."

"All the worse," Dr. Litter replied, "all the worse. Of course there are wild young men at the Universities." Dr. Litter himself, it is scarcely necessary to say, had never been wild, the study of the Greek particles had absorbed all his thoughts. "Why," he continued, "young men should condescend to take part in disgraceful affrays of this kind passes my understanding. Mr. Wire, you will inform Williams that for the rest of the week no boy is to go to fields."

So saying, he strode off in the direction of his own door, next to the archway, for the conversation had taken place at the foot of the steps leading into School from Little Dean's Yard. There was some grumbling when the head-master's decision was known; but it was, nevertheless, felt that it was a wise one, and that it was better to allow the feelings to calm down before again going through Westminster between Dean's Yard and the field, for not even the most daring would have cared for a repetition of the struggle.

Several inquiries were made as to the lad who had brought the news of the fight, and so enabled the reinforcements to arrive in time; and had he been discovered a handsome subscription would have been got up to reward his timely service, but no one knew anything about him.

The following week, when cricket was resumed, no molestation was offered. The better part of the working-classes who inhabited the neighbourhood were indeed strongly in favour

of the "boys," and liked to see their bright young faces as they passed home from their cricket; the pluck too with which they had fought was highly appreciated, and so strong a feeling was expressed against the attack made upon them, that the rough element deemed it better to abstain from further interruption, especially as there were three or four extra police put upon the beat at the hours when the "boys" went to and from Vincent Square.

It was, however, some time before the "great fight" ceased to be a subject of conversation among the boys. At five minutes to ten on the morning when Dr. Litter had put a stop to fields, two of the younger boys – who were as usual, just before school-time, standing in the archway leading into Little Dean's Yard to warn the School of the issuing out of the head-master – were talking of the fight of the evening before; both had been present, having been fagging out at cricket for their masters.

"I wonder which would lick, Norris or Barkley. What a splendid fight it would be!"

"You will never see that, Fairlie, for they are cousins and great friends. It would be a big fight, and I expect it would be a draw. I know who I should shout for."

"Oh, of course, we should all be for Norris, he is such a jolly fellow; there is no one in the School I would so readily fag for. Instead of saying, 'Here, you fellow, come and pick up balls,' or, 'Take my bat up to fields,' he says, 'I say, young Fairlie, I wish you would come and pick up balls for a bit, and in a quarter of

an hour you can call some other Under School boy to take your place,' just as if it were a favour, instead of his having the right to put one on if he pleased. I should like to be his fag: and he never allows any bullying up at Richards'. I wish we had him at Sargent's."

"Yes, and Barkley is quite a different sort of fellow. I don't know that he is a bully, but somehow he seems to have a disagreeable way with him, a cold, nasty, hard sort of way; he walks along as if he never noticed the existence of an Under School boy, while Norris always has a pleasant nod for a fellow."

"Here's Litter."

At this moment a door in the wall under the archway opened, and the head-master appeared. As he came out the five or six small boys standing round raised a tremendous shout of "Litter's coming." A shout so loud that it was heard not only in College and the boarding-houses in Little Dean's Yard, but at Carr's across by the archway, and even at Sutcliffe's shop outside the Yard, where some of the boys were purchasing sweets for consumption in school. A fag at the door of each of the boarding-houses took up the cry, and the boys at once came pouring out.

The Doctor, as if unconscious of the din raised round him, walked slowly along half-way to the door of the School; here he was joined by the other masters, and they stood chatting in a group for about two minutes, giving ample time for the boys to go up School, though those from Carr's, having much further to go, had to run for it, and not unfrequently had to rush past the

masters as the latter mounted the wide stone steps leading up to the School.

The School was a great hall, which gave one the idea that it was almost coeval with the abbey to which it was attached, although it was not built until some hundreds of years later. The walls were massive, and of great height, and were covered from top to bottom with the painted names of old boys, some of which had been there, as was shown by the dates under them, close upon a hundred years. The roof was supported on great beams, and both in its proportions and style the School was a copy in small of the great hall of Westminster.

At the furthermost end from the door was a semicircular alcove, known as the "Shell," which gave its name to the form sitting there. On both sides ran rows of benches and narrow desks, three deep, raised one above the other. On the left hand on entering was the Under School, and, standing on the floor in front of it, was the arm-chair of Mr. Wire. Next came the monitor's desk, at which the captain and two monitors sat. In an open drawer in front of the table were laid the rods, which were not unfrequently called into requisition. Extending up to the end were the seats of the Sixth. The "Upper Shell" occupied the alcove; the "Under Shell" were next to them, on the further benches on the right-hand side. Mr. Richards presided over the "Shell." Mr. Sargent took the Upper and Under Fifth, who came next to them, and "Johnny," as Mr. Johns was called, looked after the two Fourths, who occupied benches on the right hand of the

door.

By the time the masters entered the School all the boys were in their places. The doors were at once shut, then the masters knelt on one knee in a line, one behind the other, in order of seniority, and the Junior Queen's Scholar whose turn it was knelt in front of them, and in a loud tone read the Lord's Prayer in Latin. Then the masters proceeded to their places, and school began, the names of all who came in late being taken down to be punished with impositions.

So large and lofty was the hall, that the voices were lost in its space, and the forms were able to work without disturbing each other any more than if they had been in separate rooms. The Sixth only were heard apart, retiring into the library with the Doctor. His seat, when in school, was at a table in the centre of the hall, near the upper end.

Thus Westminster differed widely from the great modern schools, with their separate class-rooms and lecture-rooms. Discipline was not very strict. When a master was hearing one of the forms under him the other was supposed to be preparing its next lessons, but a buzz of quiet talk went on steadily. Occasionally, once or twice a week perhaps, a boy would be seen to go up from one of the lower forms with a note in his hand to the head-master; then there was an instant pause in the talking.

Dr. Litter would rise from his seat, and a monitor at once brought him a rod. These instruments of punishment were about three feet six inches long; they were formed of birch twigs, very

tightly bound together, and about the thickness of the handle of a bat; beyond this handle some ten or twelve twigs extended for about eighteen inches. The Doctor seldom made any remark beyond giving the order, "Hold out your hand."

The unfortunate to be punished held out his arm at a level with his shoulder, back uppermost. Raising his arm so that the rod fell almost straight behind his back, Dr. Litter would bring it down, stroke after stroke, with a passionless and mechanical air, but with a sweeping force which did its work thoroughly. Four cuts was the normal number, but if it was the third time a boy had been sent up during the term he would get six. But four sufficed to swell the back of the hand, and cover it with narrow weals and bruises. It was of course a point of honour that no sound should be uttered during punishment. When it was over the Doctor would throw the broken rod scornfully upon the ground and return to his seat. The Junior then carried it away and placed a fresh one upon the desk.

The rods were treated with a sort of reverence, for no Junior Queen's Scholar ever went up or down school for any purpose without first going over to the monitor's table and lightly touching the rod as he passed.

Such was school at Westminster forty years since, and it has but little changed to the present day.

CHAPTER II.
A COLD SWIM

IT is winter. Christmas is close at hand, and promises to be a bitterly cold one. The ice has formed smooth and black across the Serpentine, and a number of people are walking along by its banks, looking forward to some grand skating if the frost does but hold two days longer. The sky is blue, and the sun shining brightly; the wind is fresh and keen; it is just the day when people well-clad, well-fed, and in strong health, feel their blood dancing more freely than usual through their veins, and experience an unusual exhilaration of spirits. Merry laughter often rises from the groups on the bank, and the air rings with the sharp sound made by pieces of ice sent skimming by mischievous boys over the glassy surface, to the disgust of skaters, who foresee future falls as the result of these fragments should a slight thaw freeze them to the surface.

Among those walking by the edge of the ice were Frank Norris and Fred Barkley; with them was a bright-faced girl of some fourteen years old. Alice Hardy was cousin to both the young fellows, and was a ward of their uncle, Captain Bayley, an old and very wealthy retired officer of the East India Company's Service. His fortune had not been acquired in India, but had descended to him from his father, of whom he had

been the youngest son. His elder brothers had died off one by one, all unmarried or childless, and soon after he obtained his commission he was recalled home to take his place as the next heir to his father's estates; then he had married.

Soon after he succeeded to the property his wife died, leaving him a little girl, who was called Ella after her. Captain Bayley was hot and passionate. His daughter grew up fiery and proud. Her father was passionately fond of her; but just when she reached the age of twenty, and had taken her place as one of the leading belles of Worcestershire, she disappeared suddenly from the circle of her acquaintances. What had happened no one ever knew. That there had been some terrible quarrel was certain. It was understood that Captain Bayley wished no questions to be asked. Her disappearance was a nine days' wonder in Worcestershire. Some said she had turned Roman Catholic and gone into a convent; others that she must have eloped, although with whom no one could guess. But at last the subject died out, until two years later Captain Bayley and his household appeared in mourning, and it was briefly announced that his daughter was dead.

Captain Bayley went about as before, peppery, kind-hearted, perhaps a little harder and more cynical than before, but a very popular personage in Worcestershire. Those who knew him best thought him the most altered, and said that although he appeared to bear the blow lightly he felt deeply at heart the death of his daughter. His nearest heirs now were his two nephews, Frank Norris and Barkley, sons of his married sisters. Alice Hardy bore

no relation to him. For some years speculation had been rife as to which of his two nephews he would select as his heir.

Two years before this story begins Alice Hardy's father and mother had both died of typhoid fever, leaving Captain Bayley as guardian to their daughter. Somewhat to the surprise of his friends, the old officer not only accepted the trust, but had Alice installed at his house, there to be educated by a governess instead of being sent to school. But although in a short time she came to be regarded as the daughter of the house, no one thought that Captain Bayley would make her his heiress, as she had inherited a considerable fortune from her father; and the two lads at Westminster were still regarded as rivals for the heirship.

Captain Bayley had never been on good terms with either of his brothers-in-law; both had been merchants in the city, and the old officer considered that his sisters had made mesalliances in marrying them. Frank's father and mother had died within a few months of each other, when he was about twelve years old; Captain Bayley's house had since been his home. Fred was often invited to stay with his uncle down in Worcestershire, and his London house in Eaton Square was always open to him. Frank had never counted on the probability of his uncle leaving him any money. Certainly he never for a moment built castles in the air founded upon the chance of the inheritance. His father had been an easy-going and somewhat careless man, and would sometimes laugh with the boy in speaking of his future and predicting what he would do if he were come into old Bayley's estates. None

of the Captain's intimates could – had they been asked – have declared a preference for the chances of either lad. Fred was certainly the cleverest. He had gone into college head of his year, and would have been Captain, had not one of those of the year before him, who had got into College under age, elected to stay a year longer at school, and therefore by right became Captain, while Fred had to be content with the honours of head monitor. Frank, on the other hand, had failed to get into College at all, and had remained a town boy.

Although it could not be said of Fred that in any open way he laid himself out to gain his uncle's favour, he was yet decidedly more attentive than was Frank, and would give up any other engagement he might have if Captain Bayley invited him to stay the Saturday and Sunday in Eaton Square, while Frank went carelessly his own way. And while there was nothing in the smallest degree servile in Fred's manner – for this indeed Captain Bayley would have instantly noticed and resented – there was just that slight deference which a young fellow should exhibit in conversation with an elder, while Frank, on the other hand, carelessly expressed his own opinion and ideas, which often differed very widely from those of the old officer.

Captain Bayley's own manner evinced no shade of partiality for one nephew over the other; and although Alice had a sort of faint suspicion that Frank, who was certainly her own favourite, was also that of her uncle, she could have given no reason for her belief.

In person the cousins were remarkably dissimilar. Frank was two inches the tallest, and had a still greater advantage in width. It was clear that he would grow into a big man, but his figure was at present loose and unformed; he had dark brown hair, with a slight wave, and would hardly have been called good-looking, were it not for his open, fearless expression and merry smile.

Fred's figure, although less strongly built, was far more formed, and it was probable that years would effect but little change in it. There was a sinew and wire in his frame which would have told an athlete of great latent strength in the slight figure. His hair was light, his features clear and sharply cut, and the face a decidedly intellectual one. His manner was somewhat cold and restrained, but pleasant and courteous to men older than himself; both young fellows carried themselves well, with a certain ease of bearing, and that nameless air of command which distinguish most young men who have passed through the upper forms of a great public school.

Both lads had their circle of friends and admirers at school, but Frank's was by far the largest. He was indeed universally popular, which was far from being the case with his cousin. Upon the other hand, while Frank seemed to be a sort of common property of the School, it was somehow esteemed by those in Barkley's set a special distinction to be admitted to his friendship.

But the party of three young people have been left long enough walking by the edge of the Serpentine. Presently they saw a knot of people gathered ahead; the number increased as others ran up.

"What's up, I wonder?" Frank said. "Look out there on the ice, Alice. You see that hole; there is something moving – there's a dog's head, I declare. Poor brute! it has run out after a stick, I suppose, and the ice has given under it."

"Poor little thing!" Alice exclaimed pitifully, "can't it get out? Do you think it will be drowned, Frank? Can nothing be done for it?"

"The best thing you can do, Alice," Fred replied, as Frank stood looking at the dog, who tried several times, but in vain, to scramble out, the ice each time breaking with its weight, "will be to turn and walk away; there is no use standing here harrowing your feelings by watching that poor little brute drown."

"Can nothing be done, Frank?" Alice again asked, paying no heed to Fred's suggestion.

"That is just what I am thinking," Frank replied. "You stop here, Alice, with Fred. I will go on and see what they are doing."

"Can't I go with you, Frank?"

"You had better stop here," Frank replied; "the crowd is getting thick there, and they are a roughish lot. Besides, you will not be able to see over their heads, and can do no good; so just do as I bid you."

The girl remained obediently with her cousin Fred, while Frank went off at a run towards the group.

"Frank orders you about just as if you were his fag," Fred said, with a smile which had in it something of a sneer.

"I don't mind," the girl said staunchly, "it's Frank's way, and

I like it; – at any rate one always knows what Frank means, and he always means well."

"That is as much as to say, Alice, that you don't always understand what I mean, and that I don't always mean well," Fred Barkley said in a quiet tone, but with a little flush of anger in his usually somewhat pale cheeks.

"No, I don't know that I mean that," Alice said carelessly; "but I do not always understand what you mean, though I always understand what you say."

"I should have thought that was the same thing," Fred replied.

"Should you?" Alice rejoined. "Well I shouldn't, that's all."

As Frank Norris approached the group he began to unbutton his collar and waistcoat.

"It will be a beastly cold swim," he grumbled to himself, "but I can't see the poor little brute drowned, and drowned he certainly will be if no one goes in for him. It's no distance to swim, and I should think one could wade to within twenty yards of him; but it certainly will be horribly cold." And he gave a shiver of anticipation as he looked at the smooth frozen surface.

With some little difficulty Frank pushed his way through to the centre of the group by the water's side. A little girl, poorly dressed, was standing crying bitterly; a cripple boy in a box upon wheels was trying to pacify her, while another who had taken off his coat and waistcoat, and laid them in the lap of the cripple, was unlacing his boots.

"Are you going in, young un?" Frank said, as he joined them.

"Yes, sir; I am going in for Flossy. She belongs to this little girl, who is one of our neighbours."

"Can you swim well?" Frank asked, "for the water will be bitterly cold."

"Yes," the boy answered confidently, "I goes regularly for a swim above Vauxhall Bridge in the summer, and keeps on until the water gets too cold. I can do that fast enough. I suppose the ice will break right enough," and he looked up inquiringly at Frank.

"Yes, it will break with your weight easily enough; you will have to raise yourself a little so as to break it before you. You will have to put some weight on, for it is nearly half an inch thick; I expect there is a thin place where the dog has fallen in – a spring underneath, most likely, so a mere skin has formed.

"Look here, young un, I was going in if you hadn't. I shall get my boots ready to kick off now, so don't you be frightened if you get numbed with the cold, or a touch of cramp; just sing out and I will be with you in a minute."

The cripple looked with pleasure up into Frank's face.

"It is very good of you, sir, for you don't know the dog as Evan does. Ah! I know your face, sir," he broke off, "I saw you in the fight down by our place at Westminster, when Evan ran up and fetched some more of your chaps – and just in time they were too."

"Oh! was it your brother who brought that news?" Frank said quickly; "then I owe him one, and if I go in to fetch him out we shall be only quits."

Evan had by this time entered the water, breaking the ice before him as he went.

"My eye, ain't it cold!" he said, half-turning round, "seems to nip one's legs up regular. All right, Flossy," he shouted to the dog, as he continued his way out, in answer to a pitiful whine of the struggling animal.

For the first few paces Evan's progress was easy enough; but when he got so deep that he could no longer break the ice with his foot his difficulties began, and it was only by flinging himself down upon it that he was able to break it. A few yards further on the water was up to his chin. He was now breaking the ice by trying to climb upon it. Frank was watching him closely, and noticed that he no longer proceeded about his work deliberately, but with a hurried and jerky action, as if he felt his strength failing him. Frank pulled off his coat and waistcoat, and handed them to the cripple, kicked off his boots, and stood in readiness to plunge in.

The crowd had at first cheered the lad as he made his way from the shore; some still uttered shouts of encouragement, others saw that he was getting exhausted, and called to him to return. Suddenly the boy seemed to lose his power altogether, held on to the edge of the ice, and cast a despairing look towards the shore. Then gradually his head disappeared under the water; but Frank was already half-way towards him. A few strides had taken him through the shallow water, and he swam with vigorous strokes through the floating fragments to the end of the line of

broken water; then he too disappeared for a moment. A dead silence reigned through the crowd; but when two heads appeared above the water together, a ringing cheer broke out. Carrying his senseless companion, Frank swam back to shore.

"Take off his wet clothes," he said, as he handed his burden to some of the men. "Wrap him up in my coat and his own, and then run with him up to the Humane Society's House, they will bring him round in no time; it is cold, not drowning."

Then he looked again across the water. The little dog was swimming feebly now, its nose scarcely above the surface. It had given a plaintive cry of despair as it saw those who had approached so near turn back, for there were but some five yards between the spot where the boy's strength had failed and the circle which it had broken in its efforts to climb out.

"I can't be colder than I am," Frank said to himself, "so here goes."

Accordingly he again dashed into the water and swam to the end of the narrow passage; a few vigorous strokes broke the intervening barrier of ice. He seized the little dog, put it on the ice, and with a push sent it sliding towards the shore, and then turned and swam back again.

It was only just where the dog had fallen in that the ice was too weak to bear its weight, and, after lying for two or three minutes utterly exhausted, it scrambled to its feet and made its way to the bank, where it was soon wrapped in the apron of its delighted mistress.

Frank, on reaching the shore, was scarcely able to stand, so benumbed were his legs by the cold. His cousins had made their way through the crowd to the spot.

"O Frank," Alice exclaimed, "what a mad thing for you to do. Oh! I am so pleased you did it – but oh, you do look cold! What will you do?"

"I am all right, Alice," Frank said, as cheerfully as his chattering teeth would allow him to speak. "You go home with Fred; I shall get a hot bath and have my clothes dried at the receiving-house, and shall be as right as a trivet in half an hour. There, good-bye!"

Frank walked stiffly at first, but was presently able to break into a run, which he kept up until he reached the establishment of the Royal Humane Society. His first question, as he entered, was for the boy.

"He will do, sir," the attendant answered, "we popped him at once into a hot bath we had ready, and he has opened his eyes, and is able to speak; we have just got him into bed between warm blankets, and now it's your turn."

In another minute Frank was in the bath from which the boy had just been taken, for there was no time to prepare another. For the first minute or two he felt an intense pain as the blood flowed back into his chilled limbs, then a delightful sensation of warmth and comfort stole over him; a glass of hot brandy and water completed his cure, and a few minutes later he felt that he was fast going off to sleep in the warm blankets between which

he was laid.

Before the crowd whom the incident on the Serpentine had gathered broke up, one or two of those present went among the rest and collected a subscription for the lad who had gone in after the dog. Nearly two pounds were collected in silver and coppers, and handed over to the cripple to give to his brother. Fred Barkley dropped in five shillings, and Alice Hardy the same sum. Then after walking to the receiving-house, and hearing that Frank and the lad had both recovered from the effects of the cold, and would probably be all right after a few hours' sleep, they returned home, Alice in a high state of excitement over the adventure which she had witnessed, Fred silent and gloomy.

He accompanied Alice to Eaton Square, and was present when she related to her uncle the story of the lad going in to rescue the dog, and of Frank going in to rescue the boy, and of his afterwards returning to set free the dog. Upon the way home he had appeared to Alice to take the matter exceedingly quietly, but he now, somewhat to her surprise, appeared almost as enthusiastic as herself, and spoke in terms of high admiration of Frank's conduct. Captain Bayley, as was usually the case with him, took a view of the matter entirely opposed to that of the speakers.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he said. "You call that a gallant action? I call it a foolish boy's trick. What right has Frank to risk getting rheumatic fever, and being laid up as a cripple for life, merely to save a dog?"

"But he went in to save a boy, uncle," Alice said indignantly.

"Pooh, pooh!" the old officer exclaimed, "the boy would never have gone in if he hadn't encouraged him. That makes the case all the worse. Frank not only risking catching rheumatism himself, but he risked the life of that boy by encouraging him to do such a foolish action. It was a hair-brained business altogether, sir; and I am glad you had the wisdom, Fred, to keep out of it. The idea of two lives being risked to save that of a wretched cur is too absurd; if you had offered the girl who owned it five shillings to buy another it would have been more sensible."

"I don't believe you mean what you say a bit, Uncle Harry," Alice exclaimed indignantly. "I believe if you had been there, and had heard that poor little dog's cries as we did, you would have gone in yourself. I am sure I would if I had been a man."

"I always observe, my dear," Captain Bayley said sarcastically, "that women would do wonderful things if they had only been born men. Nature appears to be always making mistakes by putting the dauntless and heroic spirits into female bodies, and *vice versa*."

"I don't like you when you talk like that, Uncle Harry – that is, I shouldn't like you if I thought you meant it; but you only talk so out of contradiction. If I had said I thought Frank was very foolish for having gone into the water, you would have taken the opposite side directly."

"You are an impudent puss, Miss Alice," her uncle retorted, "and I shall have to tell Miss Lancaster that unless she can keep

you in better order I shall have to send you to school. You appear to have been born without the bump of veneration."

"I would venerate you ever so much, Uncle Harry," the girl replied, laughing, "if you would always be good and reasonable; but I cannot venerate you when you are contrary and disagreeable, and say things you don't mean."

As Fred Barkley walked home, he wondered again and again to himself whether Captain Bayley had meant what he said, and whether this act of Frank's would raise him in his opinion or the contrary; but he flattered himself that, at any rate, no harm had been done, for his own advocacy of his cousin could not but have placed him in the most favourable light.

Fred Barkley was shrewd, but his power of reading character was, as yet, by no means perfect, and his uncle's changing moods baffled the power of analysis. He would not have been pleased had he known that at that very moment the old officer was walking up and down his library, muttering to himself, "I would give a good deal if there were a glass window at that boy Fred's heart, that I could see what it is really made of. His head is strong enough; nature has given him a fair share of brains, but, unless I am greatly mistaken, there is a very grievous deficiency in his allowance of heart.

"I don't believe the boy ever spoke spontaneously from the time he learned to talk, but that every word he says is weighed before it passes through his lips, and its effect calculated; whereas Frank never thinks at all, but just blurts out the words which

come to hand. It is curious how much more Alice takes to him than to Fred, for he bullies her and orders her about as if she were one of his fags, while Fred is as courteous and polite to her as if she were a young Countess. I suppose it is instinct, for children's opinions about people are seldom far wrong. I thought when I brought Alice here that she would help me to settle the problem."

Frank and Evan Holl woke at about the same time, after sleeping for some hours; their clothes had been dried for them, and they at once began to dress.

"How do you feel now, young un?" was Frank's first inquiry as they sat up in their beds.

"I dunno how I feels," Evan replied. "I hardly knows where I am, or how I got here, though I do seem to remember something about this 'ere place too. Oh yes!" he exclaimed suddenly, "I was trying to fetch out poor little Flossy, and the ice would not break, and I got colder and colder, and then I don't seem to remember any more except somehow that I was here with people standing round me, and I swallowed something hot and went off to sleep. Ah yes! you were the gentleman as said you would come in after me if I sang out."

"And I did come in," Frank said smilingly, "and only just in time I was, for you did not sing out, but went right down without a word. It was lucky you did not get under the ice."

"And Flossy," the boy said suddenly, "did she go down too?"

"No," Frank answered, "I went in again and got her out, after I had brought you back to shore."

"Well, you are a brick!" the boy said, "a regular downright un, and no mistake. I wonder how Harry got back; it would be a job for him to wheel hisself all the way back to Westminster."

"Oh, I expect he got some one to help him," Frank said; "and the little girl would be able to help shove him along."

"Yes, she would," Evan replied, "she can shove him by herself along a pavement, and I expect that he and she atween them would be able to get along. Lor! how them things of yours have shrunk, to be sure."

"They have, a bit," Frank said, looking down at his trousers, which were half-way up to his knees; "but it don't matter much, it's getting dark now, and I can take a cab when I get out of the Park. Your clothes don't seem to have suffered so much, they seem plenty large enough for you now."

"Yes," Evan said, with a satisfied air, "and a good job too; mother always will have my clothes so big, cos of my growing. She always seems to think one will grow sudden into a man afore one's things wear out."

Frank and the lad walked together as far as Albert Gate; here they separated, Frank taking a cab home, while Evan, whistling a popular air in a high key, took his way to Westminster. On arriving home he was greeted with enthusiasm by Harry, but Mrs. Holl was not inclined to view his adventure favourably.

"It's all very well to care for dogs, Evan, and I ain't a-saying as Carrie Hill's dog ain't a nice little critter; but when it comes to getting into the freezing water arter it, I don't hold to it no way.

Then you might have gone and got drowned – and you would have got drowned too, Harry tells me, if that young gent hadn't been and gone after you; and then this blessed minute I should have been breaking my heart about you, and you down underneath the ice in the bottom of the Serpentine. There ain't no reason in it, my boy. Harry here thinks different about it, and will have it that I ought to be proud of yer; but he ain't a mother, and so can't understand a mother's feelings – and your clothes pretty nigh spoilt too, I'll be bound."

"Well, mother, if they are," Harry said cheerfully, "Evan can buy some more. Here, Evan; here are thirty-eight shillings and ninepence halfpenny, and it's all your own."

"Crikey!" Evan gasped, looking in astonishment at the pile of money in Harry's lap. "Why, where did all that 'ere money come from?"

"That was collected in the crowd, Evan, after you were carried away, and they gave it to me to give to you. I did not quite like your taking money for doing such a thing, but of course as it was given for you I had nothing to say to it."

Evan burst into a wild dance expressive of delight. He had none of his brother's scruples in respect to the money.

"My eye!" he exclaimed at last, "thirty-eight bob and some coppers to do just as I likes with. I am a rich man, I am; I shall have to get some 'igh collars and come the swell. I suppose it won't run to a carriage and pair, mother, or to a welvet gownd for you, – that would be splendatious. Just fancy, mother, a gownd

all over welvet, and just the same colour as the sodgers' coats. My eye! won't that be grand?"

"And a nice sight I should look in it," Mrs. Holl said, laughing at the thought of herself in scarlet robes. "When dad comes home we will talk over with him what's the best way of laying out this money. It's yours to do as you likes with, but I ain't a-going to have it fooled away, so don't you make any mistake about that."

CHAPTER III.
A CRIPPLE BOY

JOHN HOLL returned from work a few minutes after Evan came in. John Holl was a dustman. A short, broadly-built man, with his shoulders bowed somewhat from carrying heavy baskets up area steps. His looks were homely, and his attire far from clean; but John was a good husband and father, and the great proportion of the many twopences he daily received as douceurs for discharging his duties were brought home to his wife, as was all the weekly money, instead of being exchanged for liquor at the public-house.

Sarah Holl added to the family income by going out charring. She was a big woman, with a rough voice, and slipshod in walk; her hands were red and hard from much scrubbing and polishing, and she was considered generally by the servants in the establishments at which she worked to be a low person. But Sarah's heart was in the right place; her children loved her, and her husband regarded her as a treasure.

It was not until John Holl had changed his dirt-stained clothes, and had freshened himself up with a copious wash, had put on a pair of list slippers of Sarah's manufacture in place of his heavy boots, and had seated himself by the fire with his long pipe alight, while Sarah bustled about getting the tea, that he was informed of

the important events which had taken place; for John, like many more distinguished men, had his idiosyncrasies, and one of these was that he hated to be, as he called it, "hustled," before he had tidied up. John was not quick of comprehension, and could not give due weight to what was said to him while engaged in the important work of changing; therefore all pieces of family news were reserved until he had taken his seat and his pipe was fully alight. Then Mrs. Holl began —

"What do you think, John, Evan 'as been a-doing to-day?"

John gave a grunt, to signify that he would prefer hearing the facts to wasting his brain-power in random guesses.

"Why, he has been in the Serpentine, and was nigh drowned, and had to be taken to the 'Mane Society and put into a hot bath, and all his clothes shrunk that much as you never seed."

"I thought the ice weren't strong enough to bear," John said, taking his pipe from his mouth; "one of my mates tells me as he heard a chap going along with skates say as it weren't strong enough on the Serpentine to hold a cat."

"No more it ain't, John; but Carrie Hill's little dog run on and fell through, and nothing would do but that Evan must go out and risk his life to fetch it out. And a nice business he made of it; when he got close out to the dog down he went hisself, and would have been drowned as sure as fate if a young gent as was a-standing there hadn't swam out and brought him in. And I think you ought to speak to him, John, for such venturesome ways; he don't mind my speaking no more than the wind a-blowing."

John Holl smoked his pipe in silence for some time, looking solemnly into the fire; the number of facts and ideas presented suddenly to him were too great to be instantly taken in and grappled with.

"And how do you feel now, Evan?" he said at last; "cold right through the bones?"

"No, father; I am as warm as need be; and what do you think? I have got thirty-eight bob and some coppers which they 'scribed for me."

"Did they, now?" John Holl said. Then after taking in this new fact, and turning it over in different lights, he said to his wife, "Well, Sarah, it seems to me that if the people who saw our Evan go into the water subscribed well-nigh upon two pounds for the boy, they must have thought that what he did warn't a thing for him to be jawed for, but a brave, good-hearted sort of action; and I ain't no manner of doubt, Sarah, that that's just what you think it yerself, only you are a bit scared over the thought that he might have been drowned, which is natural and woman-like. It seems to me as Evan has done a wery honourable kind o' action. I know as I should have liked to have done it myself, though I holds that a man can't have too much of hot water and plenty of soap in it, cold water allus giving me the shivers, and being no good for getting out dirt – not where its ground in pretty thick. I suppose it's cos of this that I didn't larn to swim. Evan, my boy, your father feels proud of yer, and so does your mother – as proud as a peacock – though she don't think it's right to say so."

Whereupon Mrs. Holl, finding to her great inward satisfaction that the paternal sanction and approval had been given to Evan's adventure, felt no longer constrained to keep up a semblance of disapproval, but embraced him with great heartiness, and then wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. Then came the great point of the disposal of Evan's fortune. His first proposal was to hand it over to his father as a contribution towards the general expenses, but this John Holl peremptorily refused.

"It's your money, boy, to do as you like with; it's earned in a honourable way, and a way to be proud of. You are to do with it just what you likes; it were best not to spend it foolish, but if you are disposed to spend it foolish, you do so."

"There are such lots of things I should like to buy," Evan said. "I should like to buy mother a new Sunday bonnet, and I should like to get you a pound of bacca; and Winnie wants a new pair of boots and stockings, and there's lots of things I should like to get for Harry, and some warm gloves for Sue, and – and no end of things."

"Two pounds," John Holl said, "is a nice little lump of money, Evan; but when you gets as old as I am you will know as two pounds don't go wery far. My advice to you is this, whatever you get yer sure a while afterwards to want something else, and to wish as you had bought that instead; that's human nature, and it's the same with men, women, and boys – at least that's my 'sperience, and mother will tell you the same. My advice is, give that money to mother to keep for you, say for a month. Well then,

every day you can settle fresh what you mean to buy, and that will be most as good as buying it; perhaps towards the end of the month you will have settled yer mind on to something which really seems to you better than all the others: that's my advice."

"And capital good advice too, father," Harry said.

And thus the approval of the two authorities of the family having been obtained, the matter was considered as settled.

"And who was the young gent as went in and fetched you out, Evan?" John Holl asked, when the important business of tea was concluded, and he again settled himself to his pipe. "He must have been a good sort; I should like to shake hands with that chap."

"He told me as his name were Frank Norris," Evan replied; "he is one of the scholars we see going along to Vincent Square; I knew him again directly. He was one of those chaps as fought so well the day they got attacked going back to the School. A fine-looking chap he is too, with a pleasant face, and a nice sort of way about him. No nonsense, you know; he talked just pleasant and nice, as Harry might talk to me, just as if he was a sort of pal, and not a swell no-how."

"I should like to shake hands with him," John Holl repeated; "he saved your life, that's sure enough" – for by this time Harry had related the full details of the affair. "I think, Sarah, as it would be only right and proper, come Sunday, for you and I to go round to that young fellow's house and tell him how we feels about it. If it had been a chap of our own station in life I suppose

there ain't nothing we wouldn't do for him, if we saw our way to it; and though I don't see as it's likely as we can do nothing for this young fellow, the least as we can do is to go and tell him what we thinks about it. Did he tell you where he lived, Evan?"

"No, father. He didn't say where he lived; but he writ down in a pocket-book my name and where we lived, and said as how he would look in one of these days and see that I was none the worse for my ducking."

"Well, I hopes as how he will," John said, "but if he don't come soon, we must find him out. I expect his name or his father's name would be down in a 'Rectory, and the name ain't so common a one as there would be likely to be a great many on them living about here; but if there was fifty I would call on them all till I found the right one. I shan't be easy in my mind, not till I have shaken that young chap's hand and told him what I thinks on it. And I am sure your mother feels the same as I do. And now, Harry, take out that fiddle of yours and let's have a tune; my pipe allus seems to draw better and sweeter while you are playing."

One of the children – there were eight in all in the room – fetched Harry's fiddle from the wall. It was a cheap, common instrument, but even far better judges of music than the Holls would have been able to discern, in spite of its cracked and harsh tone, that the lad who was playing it had a genius for music. It is true that the airs which he was playing, those which the street boys of the day whistled as they walked by, were not of a nature to display his powers. Harry could play other and very

different kinds of music; for whenever Evan earned a sixpence by holding a horse, or doing any other odd job, a penny or twopence were sure to go in the purchase of a sheet of music for Harry at the cheap bookstalls. Harry had learned the notes from a secondhand book of instructions which John Holl had bought for him one Saturday night, when the weather had been particularly hot, and people in their desire to get their dust-bins emptied were more liberal than usual. But of an evening, when John was at home, Harry always played popular airs, as his father and family were unable to appreciate the deeper and better music. This he reserved for the time when the children were at school, and mother was either charring or was at the wash-tub.

Sarah used to wonder silently at the sounds which seemed to her to have no particular air, such as she could beat time to with her foot as she worked; but in her heart she appreciated them; they made her feel as if she was in church, and sometimes she would draw her apron across her eyes, wondering all the time what there was in the tones of the fiddle which should make her cry.

Three or four days later, when Harry, as usual, was playing on his violin, and Mrs. Holl was washing, there was a knock at the door.

"Drat it!" Mrs. Holl muttered, "who's a-coming bothering now, just when I am busy?"

"If no one is to come except when you are not busy," Harry laughed, as Mrs. Holl moved towards the door, wiping the lather

from her arms and hands, "we shan't have many visitors, for as far as I can see you are always busy.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as Mrs. Holl opened the door, and he saw who was standing without, "it's the gentleman who got Evan out of the water."

"Mrs. Holl?" Frank asked interrogatively, and then, catching sight of Harry, he at once walked across to him and shook him by the hand.

"I hope I am not intruding, Mrs. Holl, but I promised your son to look in and see how he was; and as I had to come down to the School to-day for a book I wanted for my holiday task, I thought it would be a good opportunity to fulfil my promise."

"It is no intrusion, sir, and I am sure I am heartily glad to see yer, and thank ye for coming," Mrs. Holl said, as she dusted an already spotless chair and placed it for her visitor. "My John does nothing every evening but talk of how he wishes he could see you, to tell you how beholden he and me feels to you for having brought our Evan to land just as he was being drowned."

"No thanks are required indeed, Mrs. Holl," Frank said cheerfully, "it was a sort of partnership affair. You see I was going in after the dog, only Evan, who was a sort of friend of the family, had first claim; so we agreed that he should try first and do all the hard work of breaking the ice, and then, if the cold was too much for him, I was to go out and fetch him in and finish the job myself. So you see it was a mutual arrangement, and no particular thanks due to any one. But your son is a plucky

young fellow, Mrs. Holl, and he behaved most gallantly. I find too, from what your son here tells me, that I owe him one for having fetched help up from the School when we were getting the worst of it just opposite your house here. Well, in the first place, how is he? None the worse, I hope, for the cold."

"Not at all, sir. He is out to-day with a friend of ours as 'as got a barrow, and lives in the next street, but who is that hoarse with the cold that he can't speak out of a whisper; so he offered Evan sixpence to go along with him to do the shouting, and a nice shouting he will make; his voice goes through and through my head when he is only a-talking with his brothers and sisters here, and if anything can bring them to the windows it will be his voice. He offered to come round here with the barrow afore they started off this morning, but says I, 'No, Evan; I have a good name in the street, I hope, and don't wish to be dighted as a nuisance to the neighbourhood, nor to have my neighbours accusing me of a-being the cause of fits in their children.'"

"I don't suppose that it would be as bad as that, Mrs. Holl," Frank said, laughing. "However, if his voice is as loud and clear as that, it is evident that he is not much the worse for his cold bath. I came round partly to see him, partly to know if I could do anything for him; he seems a sharp lad, and I am sure he is as honest as he is plucky. As a beginning, my uncle says he could come into the house as a sort of errand-boy, and to help the footman, until he can hear of some better position for him among his friends."

"I am sure you are very good, sir," Mrs. Holl said gratefully; "I will mention it to his father, and he – But I doubt whether Evan's steady enough for a place yet, he is allus getting into mischief; there never was such a boy for scrapes; if all my eight were like him I should go clean mad afore the week was out. When he is in the house, as long as he is talking or singing I can go on with my work, but the moment that he is quiet I have to drop what I am a-doing on and look arter him, for he is sure to be up to some mischief or other."

"No, no, mother," Harry put in, laughing; "you are giving Evan a worse character than he deserves. He is up to fun, as is only natural with one who has got the free use of his limbs, but he never does any real harm."

"No, I don't say that he does real harm, 'Arry," Mrs. Holl replied, "but I do say as at present he is too full of boyish tricks to be of any good in a place, and we should be a-having him back here a week arter he went, and that would be a nice show of gratitude to this gentleman for his kindness."

"I don't suppose he is as bad as you make out, Mrs. Holl; and no doubt he would tame down after a time, just as other boys do. Perhaps a place in a warehouse would be more suitable for him at first.

"And it was you who were playing as I came in," he went on, noticing the violin; "I was wondering who was playing so well. How jolly it must be to play! I wish I could, but I should never have patience to learn. Who taught you?"

"I picked it up myself, sir," Harry replied, "from a book father bought me. You see I have plenty of time on my hands; I don't get out much, except just along the street, for I can't very well get across crossings by myself. The wheels go well enough on a level, but I cannot push them up a curb-stone. But what with reading and fiddling the days pass quickly enough, especially when mother is at home; she is out two or three days a week, and then the time seems rather long."

"I should think so," Frank said; "I should go mad if I were laid up entirely. I am awfully sorry for you. If you are fond of books I shall be glad to let you have some; I have got no end of them, and there they stand on my shelf unopened from year's end to year's end. What sort of books do you like best? Sea stories, or Indians, or what?"

"I should like any story-books, sir," Harry replied, his eyes brightening up with pleasure; "I have read a few which father has picked up for me at the bookstalls, and I have gone through and through them until I could almost say them by heart. And then tales of travel and history, – oh, I love history! to read what people did hundreds of years ago, and how nations grew up step by step, just like children, it is splendid!"

"I am afraid," Frank said, with a laugh, "that I don't care so much for history as you do. Names are hard enough to remember, but dates are awful; I would rather do the toughest bit of construing than have a page of Greek history to get up. Well, I will certainly look you up some books on history and some

travels, and will send you some of Marryat's stories. I suppose you do not care for schoolbooks; I have got a barrow-load that I shall never want again."

"Oh yes, sir," Harry said eagerly, "I think I should like those best of all. Have you a Virgil, sir? I do like Virgil, and all that story about the siege of Troy. I only had it for a fortnight. Father bought it for me, and then one of the little ones managed somehow to take it out and lose it; she ran out with it for a bit of fun, and we suppose sat down on a doorstep and forgot it."

"But, bless me," Frank exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you read Virgil in Latin! You are a rum fellow. How on earth did you learn it?"

"I have taught myself, sir," Harry said. "Father is awfully good, and often picks up books for me at old bookstalls. Of course sometimes he gets things I can't make out. But he got twelve once for a shilling, and there was a Latin Grammar and Dictionary among them; and when I had learned the Grammar, it was very easy with the Dictionary to make out the sense of some of the Latin books. But of course I often come across things that I don't understand. I think sometimes if some one would explain them to me once or twice, so that I could really understand how the rules in the Grammar are applied, I could get on faster."

"Well, you are a rum fellow!" Frank exclaimed again. "I wish I liked learning as you do, for though I am in the Sixth at Westminster, I own that I look upon the classics as a nuisance. Well, now, look here; I have got an hour at present with nothing

special to do, so if you like we will have a go at it together. What have you got here?" and he walked across to a shelf on which were a number of books. "Oh! here is a Cæsar; suppose we take that; it's easy enough generally, but there are some stiffish bits now and then. Let's start off from the beginning, and perhaps I may be able to make things clear for you a bit."

In spite of Mrs. Holl's protestations that Harry ought not to trouble the gentleman, the two lads were soon deep in their Cæsar. Frank found, to his surprise, that the cripple boy had a wonderful knack of grasping the sense of passages, but that never having been regularly taught to construe, he was unable to apply the rules of grammar which he had learned. Frank taught him how to do this, how to take a sentence to pieces, how to parse it word by word, and to see how each word depended upon the others, so that even if absolutely in ignorance of the meaning of any one word in a sentence, he could nevertheless parse them unerringly in the order in which they would be rendered in English – could determine the value of each, and their bearing upon one another.

This was quite a revelation to Harry; his face flushed with eagerness and excitement, and so interested were both lads in their work, that the hour was far exceeded before the lesson came to an end by Mrs. Holl interfering bodily in the matter by carrying off the Dictionary, and declaring that it was a shame that Harry should give so much trouble.

"It is no trouble at all, Mrs. Holl," Frank said, laughing. "You

see one is accustomed a little to teaching, as one often gives one's fag, or any other little chap who asks, a construe, or explains his lesson to him. But I can tell you that there are precious few of them who take it all in as quickly as your son does. Now that I have made myself at home, I will come in sometimes when school begins again, if you will let me, for half an hour and read with Harry. But I don't think he will want any help long. Still, it may help to show him the regular way of getting at things. And now I must hurry off. You will ask Evan to think over what I have said. Here is my address. I wrote it down in case I should find no one in. If he makes up his mind about it before I come again, he had better call on me there; the best time would be between nine and eleven in the morning; I have always finished breakfast by nine, and I have put off my holiday task so long, that I must stick at it regularly two hours a day till school begins again, so he will be pretty sure to find me between nine and eleven. Will you tell your husband not to worry himself about seeing me? I don't want to be thanked, for it was, as I told you, a sort of partnership business between your boy and me."

"Now I call that a downright nice sort of young chap," Mrs. Holl said, as their visitor departed, "good-hearted and good-natured, without no sort of nonsense. He just sits himself down and makes himself at home as if he was one of the family, and I was able to go on with my washing just as if he hadn't been here."

For a time Harry did not answer.

"So, that's a gentleman," he said at last, in a low voice, as if

thinking aloud; "I have never spoken to a gentleman before."

"Well, lad," Sarah Holl said, "there ain't much difference between the gentry and other sorts. I don't see very much of them myself in the houses I goes to, but I hears plenty about them from the servants' talk; and, judging from that, a great many of them 'as just as nasty and unpleasant ways as other people."

"I suppose," Harry said thoughtfully, "there can't be much difference in real nature between them and us; there must, of course, be good and bad among them; but there is more difference in their way of talking than I expected."

"Well, of course, Harry; they have had education, that accounts for it; just the same as you, who have educated yourself wonderful, talks different to John and me and the rest of us."

"Yes," Harry said; "but I am not talking about mistakes in grammar; it's the tone of voice, and the way of speaking that's so different. Now why should that be, mother?"

"I suppose a good deal of it," Mrs. Holl answered, "is because they are brought up in nusseries, and they can't run about the house, or holloa or shout to each other in the streets. D' ye see they are taught to speak quiet, and they hear their fathers and mothers, and people round them, speaking quiet. You dun't know, Harry, how still it is in some of them big houses, you seem half afraid to speak above a whisper."

"Yes, but I don't think he spoke lower than I do, mother, or than the rest of us. O mother!" he went on, after a while, "isn't he good? Just to think of his spending an hour and a half sitting

here, showing me how to construe. Why, I see the whole thing in a different way now; he has made clear all sorts of things that I could not understand; and he said he would come again too, and I am quite sure that when he says a thing he means to do it. I don't believe he could tell a lie if he tried. And is he not good-looking too?"

"He is a pleasant-looking young chap," Mrs. Holl replied, "but I should not call him anything out of the way. Now I should call you a better-looking chap than he is, Harry."

"O mother, what an idea!" Harry exclaimed, quite shocked at what seemed to him a most disrespectful comparison to his hero.

"It ain't no idea at all," Mrs. Holl rejoined stoutly; "any one with eyes in his head could see that if you was dressed the same as he is you would be a sight the best-looking chap of the two."

"Ah mother!" Harry said, laughing, "you remind me of an old saying I saw in a book the other day, 'A mother's geese are all swans.'"

"I am sure," Mrs. Holl said, in an aggrieved voice, "you ain't no goose, Harry, and if any one else said so I should give them a bit of my mind sharp enough."

Harry did not attempt to argue with her, but with a little laugh turned to his books again, and was soon deep in the mysteries of Cæsar.

The next day a carrier's cart stopped before Mrs. Holl's house, to the great amazement of the neighbourhood – for such an occurrence had not been known in the memory of the oldest

inhabitant in the street, and quite a crowd of children collected to witness the delivery of a square heavy box of considerable weight at the door.

Harry was almost beside himself with delight as he took out the treasures it contained; and as fully half were story-books, his delight was shared by the rest of the young Holls. It was evening when the cart arrived, and John was just enjoying his first pipe, and he once more uttered the sentiment he had expressed so often during the last four days, "I should like to shake that young chap by the hand."

CHAPTER IV.
AN ADOPTED CHILD

A FEW days after school had commenced Frank Norris called in again at the Holls'. It was a bright day, and Harry had gone out in his box, and Mrs. Holl was alone.

"Harry will be sorry he is out, sir," was her first greeting to Frank; "he has been looking forward to your coming again. You don't know, sir, how much good you have done him. The boy has generally wonderful good spirits, considering his condition; still, though he don't say nought, I can see sometimes that he isn't never quite happy except when he is working away with his books or playing on that fiddle of his.

"Evan has been and spent all the money as was given him that day at the Serpentine in buying a new fiddle for him. I don't see much in the thing myself, and it seems to me they must have cheated Evan altogether, for it ain't a new un, but an old, brown, dirty-looking thing, as looks as if it had been made nigh fifty years; and they goes and charges him thirty-eight shillings for it, and pretended to make a favour of it, while John only paid seven and sixpence for the one he had before, which was a beautiful new shiny one.

"However, Harry seems delighted with it, and says it's beautiful soft, and mellow. But what he means I don't know,

though I do allow it ain't so squeaky as the other; and sometimes when Harry is playing soft on it, it does sound beautiful. Still, thirty-eight shillings is a big price for an old thing like that."

"Old fiddles are always worth more than new ones, Mrs. Holl. Do you know there are some fiddles two or three hundred years old which could not be bought for less than three or four hundred pounds?"

"My gracious!" Mrs. Holl exclaimed, "three or four hundred pounds for such a thing as a fiddle. I calls it downright wicked."

"He is a wonderful boy that son of yours, Mrs. Holl," Frank said, changing the subject; "a regular genius I should call him. What a pity it is that he is a cripple!"

"Ay, that it is," Mrs. Holl agreed, "and he is a wonderful chap, is Harry. But he ain't no son of mine, Mr. Norris, though he don't know it himself, and I shouldn't like him to be told."

"Then what relation is he, Mrs. Holl, if it is not an impertinent question?"

"He ain't no sort of relation at all, sir," the woman answered.

"Then how came you to bring him up, Mrs. Holl?" Frank asked in surprise.

"Well, sir, it was a very simple matter. But if so be as you care to hear it, I will tell you just how it happened." And, leaning against the mantelpiece, with the red light of the fire thrown up into her face, Mrs. Holl went on very slowly, and speaking as though she almost saw what she was relating.

"Well, sir, it were an evening in April – a cold bitter day. I

was sitting here between light and dark, drinking my tea with John, who was just come home from work – John is my husband, you see, sir – when we heard a noise outside in the street. We went out to see what was the matter, and we found a poor young creature, with a baby in her arms, had fallen down in a faint like.

"She was a pretty young thing, sir; and though her dress was poor and torn, she looked as if she had not been always so. Some one says, 'Take them to the workhouse.' 'No!' says I – for my heart yearned towards the poor young thing – 'bring her in here; mayn't we, John?' says I. Well, sir, John did not say nothing, but he took the baby out of her arms and gave it to me, and then he upped and took the poor young creature – she were no great weight, sir – and carried her into the house, and laid her on the bed, as it might be by the window there.

"Well, sir, that bed she never left; she came round a little, and lived some days, but her mind were never rightly itself again. She would lay there, with her baby beside her, and sing songs to herself; I don't know what about, for it were some foreign language. She were very gentle and quiet like, but I don't think she ever knew where she was, or anything about it. She were very fond of baby, and would take it in her arms, and hush it, and talk to it. She faded and faded away, and the doctor said nothing could be done for her; it made my heart ache, sir, and if you will believe me, I would go upstairs and cry by the hour.

"The thought of the little baby troubled me too. I had lost my first little one, sir, and I could not a-bear the thought of the little

thing going to the workhouse. So one day I says to John, 'John, when that poor mother dies, for God's sake don't 'ee send the little baby to the workhouse; He has taken away our own little one, and may be He has sent this one for us to love in his place. Let us take him as our own.' John, he did not say nothing, but he up and gived me a great kiss, and said, 'Sairey, you're a good woman!' which of course, sir," Mrs. Holl put in apologetically, "is neither here nor there, for any mother would have done the same; but it's John's way when he's pleased. That very same night the baby's mother died."

Standing with her rough honest face lit up by the bright fire-glow she related it, simply, and as a matter of course, all unconscious of the good part she had taken in it, assuming no credit to herself, or seeing that she deserved any.

When she had finished there was a little silence. Frank passed his hand furtively across his eyes, and then shook Mrs. Holl warmly by the hand, saying, "Your husband was right, Mrs. Holl, you are a good woman."

Mrs. Holl looked completely amazed, and stammered out, "Lor' bless you, sir! there wasn't anything out of the way in what I did, and there's scores and scores would do the like. Having just lost my own little one, my heart went out to the poor little thing, and it seemed sent natural like, to fill up the place of the little angel who was gone from us. Bless your heart, sir, there weren't nothing out of the way in that, nothing at all, and we have never had cause to regret it. The boy's a good boy, and a clever boy,

and he is a comfort and a help to us; a better boy never lived. But we have always grieved sorely over the accident."

"Then he was not originally lame, Mrs. Holl?" Frank asked.

"Dear me! no, sir, not till he were six years old. It happened this way. I was laid up at the time – I was just confined of Mary, she is my eldest girl – and somehow Harry he went out in the street playing. I don't rightly know how it happened; but never shall I forget when they brought him in, and said that a cart had run over him. John, he was in – which was lucky, for I think I lost my head like, and went clean out of my mind for a bit, for I loved him just like my own. They did not think he would have lived at first, for the cart had gone over the lower part of his body and broke one of his thigh-bones, and the other leg up high. It was a light cart I have heard tell, or it must have killed him.

"He were in bed for months, and, if you will believe me, if ever there was a patient little angel on earth, it was surely Harry. He never complained, and his chief trouble was for my sake. At last he got well; but the doctors said he would never walk again, for they thought there was some damage done to his spine; and sure enough he never has walked. He is always cheerful, and keeps up wonderful, considering.

"He has always been given to reading. John made a shift to teach him his letters, and then the children of the neighbours, they lent him their schoolbooks, and taught him what they knew, and in a short time, bless you, sir, he knew more than them all! He would sit and read for hours together. He is wonderful clever,

Harry is."

"Well, Mrs. Holl," Frank said, rising, "I am very much obliged to you for your story; but I must be going now, or else I shall be late for school. Tell Harry I am sorry I missed him, and will look in again soon. Have you thought anything further of what I said about Evan?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you most kindly; but father thinks he had better wait another year or so, till he gets a bit older and steadier. As for them books as you was kind enough to send Harry, the boy must thank you hisself; except when he is playing on his fiddle he is always reading at them, and it is as much as I can do to get him outside the doors. He was never very fond of it, for he thinks people look at him; but since those books has come I have regular to take them away from him, put his cap on his head, and push him outside the door. He will be in a taking that he has missed you to-day."

"Well, good-bye, Mrs. Holl, I haven't a moment to lose," and Frank, putting on his hat, made off at a sharp run to school, only arriving just in time to say prayers.

Frank Norris, although a Sixth town boy, was not head of Richards', as Johnstone had been longer in that form, and was consequently senior to him. Johnstone was, however, small and slightly built, and cared little for rowing, cricket, or football. He had gained his place in the Sixth by sheer hard work rather than by talent. He was fussy and irritable, with a strong sense of the importance of his position as a Sixth town boy and head of

Richards'. Between him and Frank there was no cordiality, for it irritated him that the latter was upon all occasions appealed to, and his advice asked in everything relating to games, and all matters of dispute referred to him. Frank, on the other hand, although he at all times gave way to Johnstone in house matters, was constantly annoyed by his continual self-assertion and his irritation at trifles. They were the only two Sixth town boys at Richards', but there were three Upper 'Shells,' Harris, Travers, and James, and these ranked almost with the Sixth, for the great demarcation of the School was between the Upper and Under 'Shells,' the former having the right to fag.

Frank and Johnston had each a small room of their own; the three Upper "Shells" had a room together, but they used Frank's study almost as much as their own; one or other would generally come in to work with him in the evening, and it was here that councils were held as to house matters or knotty points connected with field or water.

"I wish Trafalgar Square wasn't out of bounds," Harris said one evening.

They had finished the work for the next day, and had gathered for a chat in Frank's room before turning into bed. Frank was sitting in a rickety arm-chair by the fire, Harris on the table, and the other two on the bed.

"Why do you wish so, Harris?" Frank said.

"Why, I should like to go up to see those rows they have pretty nearly every day. Thompson, the home boarder, told me he saw

a regular fight there yesterday evening between the police and the Chartists."

"Well, it's no use wishing, because bounds begin at the gate in Dean's Yard. I never could understand myself why we should be allowed to go the other way, down the slums, as far as we please, where there is every chance of getting into a row, while we are not allowed to walk quietly up Parliament Street; then we may go along the other way, by the new Houses of Parliament, to Westminster Bridge, and across the bridge to baths; but we may not go out from Dean's Yard and walk across in front of the Abbey to the Bridge. I expect when the rules were made there were no houses built beyond us, and there were fields extending back from the river, while the other way led up to the Court. But I should certainly like to go up and see one of those Chartist riots. However, I don't think it can be done; it would be setting a bad example to the young uns, and the chances are ten to one we should run against one of the masters."

"Hardly likely, I should think," Travers said; "it would be shocking bad luck to run against one of them in a crowd like that."

"Well, you see, Travers, we are so preciously conspicuous in these tail-coats; of course it's the custom, and I stick up for old customs; still, I do think it's a ridiculous thing that we should be obliged to wear tail-coats. Of course the jackets for the fellows under the Upper 'Shell' are all right, but one cannot go on wearing jackets higher than that; still, I do think they might let us wear

cutaways; tail-coats were all right when every one else wore tail-coats, but in our days it is absurd to wear a coat which nobody else wears except for an evening dress. You can tell a fellow a mile off as a Westminster boy by his coat."

"It has its advantages," James said. "Look how Johnstone would lose his importance without his tails, he would look like a plucked jay."

There was a general laugh.

"He is not a bad fellow," Frank replied, "though he does think a good deal of himself. Still, as no one else thinks anything of him, it is just as well he should fancy himself. But never mind that now. No, I don't think there is any chance of our getting to see the fun in Trafalgar Square. I should like to go to one of the halls where those fellows spout, and to get up and say something the other way. Of course one would have to go in a strong body, else there would not be much of us left when we got into the street again. I must have a chat with Perkins about it, he is sure to be up to all that kind of thing."

"Yes, but there would be the trouble of getting in after lock-up."

"Oh, I dare say we might get over that," Harris replied; "the fags would never peach."

"We won't tell them if we can help it," Frank said; "if we go in for any lark of that sort only one of our fags must know it. I can trust young Phillpot to hold his tongue. Well, I will chat it over with Perkins, and see what can be done."

Perkins was a retired prize-fighter who kept a public-house on Bank Side. In a large room attached to the house he gave sparring exhibitions twice a week, with the aid of other fellow-pugilists, and also gave private lessons in the art of self-defence. Bank Side was not out of bounds, but it was strictly against the rules for any boy to enter a public-house; nevertheless, a good many of the Westminster boys had learned boxing from this worthy. There was a private entrance behind the house into what Perkins called his "saloon," and the boys strove to consider that by using this they avoided an infringement of the rule. The fact of their taking lessons was unknown to the master, for indeed at Westminster the boys were at perfect liberty to do as they pleased out of school-time, providing that they did not go out of bounds.

The rules enforcing attendance at fields or water, of abstaining from entering public-houses, and generally of conducting themselves as gentlemen, were left to what may be called their own police, the senior Queen's Scholars and the Sixth Form town boys, and these kept a far more rigorous hand over the younger boys than the masters could possibly have done. A vigorous thrashing was the punishment for shirking fields, or for any action regarded as caddish; and it was therefore only the Upper 'Shells' and Sixth, who, being free from the operation of the law as to fields and water, were able to frequent Perkins's establishment.

Of those who went there, most of them did so for the genuine purpose of learning boxing; but a few used the place for the

purpose of smoking and drinking. But these did so at hours when there was no chance of finding Perkins at work with his pupils, for public feeling would not have tolerated, even in an upper form boy, anything that would have been looked upon as such bad form.

The next morning, after breakfast, Frank walked down to "The Black Dog." He was one of Perkins's best pupils, and the latter had more than once been heard to express his regret that Frank had not been born in a lower class of life.

"He's got the making of a champion in him," the ex-pugilist would say regretfully; "in another five years, when he has got his full height and filled out, I warrant he will fight twelve stone; look how quick he is on his pins; and I tell you I have all my work to do now to guard my head, he hits like lightning, and once or twice has fairly knocked me off my pins. I'd back him now for fifty pounds against any novice in England; and as for pluck, I have never seen him wince, hit him as hard as you will he always comes up smiling. Barkley, he is a good boxer too, but he ain't got temper, sir; he gets nasty if he has a sharp counter; and though he keeps cool enough, there is an ugly look about his face which tells its tale. He would never keep his temper, and I doubt if he's real game at bottom. I knows my customers, and have never hit him as I hit Norris; I don't want to lose a pupil as pays fair and square, and I know I should mighty soon lose him if I were to let out at him sharp. No, there is bad blood in that chap somewhere."

"Well, Master Norris, and what do you want at this time of

the morning?" he said, as Frank, after entering the saloon, rang a bell which sounded in the bar and summoned him to the saloon. "Not a lesson at this time of the day, surely?"

"Not exactly, Perkins, considering I am due at ten o'clock, and therefore have only five minutes to stay. I just dropped in to ask you about something on which you can perhaps advise us."

"Fire away, Master Norris; anything I can do for you you knows as I will."

"I was thinking, Perkins, that it would be a great lark to go up to one of those halls where those Chartist fellows meet, and to hear their speeches."

"I don't see that there would be any lark in it," Perkins replied, "unless you meant getting up a row."

"I don't know that I exactly meant to get up a row; but if there was a row, so much the more lark."

"Well, sir, if I might give my advice, I don't think, if I was you, I would do it in school-time. Your hands can guard your face pretty tidy, I grant you, but the chances is as you would not get out of such a row as that would be without being marked. I knows of a place over the other side of the water, not far from the New Cut, where they meet. Bill Lowe, him as comes here to spar twice a week, yer know, he goes there; he takes up with them Chartist notions, which I don't hold with no ways. I don't see nothing in them seven pints as would do anything for the ring; and that being so, let it alone, says I. However, Master Norris, since you have a fancy that way I will talk the matter over with

him, and then if you really makes up your mind you would like to go, I will get four or five of my lads as can use their mawleys, and we will go in a body.

"Then if there should be a row, I reckon we can fight our way out. There ain't much in them chaps, tailors and shoemakers, and the like; they are always great hands for jaw, them tailors and shoemakers, but I never seed one as I would put five pound on in a twelve-foot ring. Poor undersized creatures, for the most part, but beggars for jaw; but there are some rough uns with 'em, and yer might get badly marked before yer got out."

But Frank's mind was now bent upon it.

"It will be a lark, Perkins, anyhow; things have been rather slow at School lately, and three or four of us have set our minds on it. So if you let me know what evening will suit you, we will be here."

Four evenings later Frank Norris, with the other three boys, slipped out after prayers were over, and started on their expedition. Frank's fag closed the door noiselessly behind them and rebolted it; he had strict orders to take his place at an upper window at eleven o'clock and watch for their return. If when they made their appearance the house was quiet and the lights out, he was to slip down and let them in; if not, they were to go away again and return an hour later. All four boys were in thick pea-jackets, and wore rough caps which they had bought for the purpose.

When they reached Perkins's public-house, the prize-fighter

surveyed them closely.

"Ye will pass in a crowd," he said; "but keep your caps well down over yer faces. Now mind, young gents, if there's a row comes over this 'ere business, I ain't to blame in the matter."

"All right, Perkins, but there will be no row."

Being joined by Bill Lowe and three other boxers, they set out together for the New Cut; past the New Houses of Parliament – still in the hands of the builders – over Westminster Bridge, past the flaring lights in front of Astley's, and into the New Cut.

Here, as usual, business was brisk; the public-houses were doing a roaring trade. Rows of costermongers' carts lined the road on either side, and the hoarse shouts of the vendors of fruit, vegetables, and shell-fish, mingled with the Babel of voices from the throng of people who loitered about the street, which was regarded as the promenade of the neighbourhood. Sounds of musical instruments and a loud chorus came from the upper windows of many of the public-houses and from the low music-halls known by the name of "penny gaffs."

It was in front of one of these that the party stopped. Unlike the others, no row of flaring lights burned over the entrance, no posters with huge letters and sensational headings invited the public to enter; one solitary lamp hung over the door, which was kept closed; men were passing in, however, after exchanging a word with one of those stationed at the door.

"It's a private sort of affair," Perkins said; "none ain't supposed to go but those as is in the swim. They pretend to be mighty

afraid of the peelers; but, Lor' bless you! the police don't trouble about them. When these chaps gets to making rows in the street, and to kicking up a rumpus, then they will have something to say about it sharp enough; but as long as they merely spout and argue among themselves, the peelers lets them go on. Well, young gents, here we goes."

Bill Lowe advanced first; he was known to the doorkeeper, and the words "All right, mate, friends of mine," were sufficient. He stood aside, and the party entered. Passing through a passage, they were in a hall some fifty feet long by half as wide; the walls had originally been painted blue, with wreaths of flowers along the top, but these and the roof were so discoloured by smoke and dirt, that the whole were reduced to a dingy brown. At the end at which they entered was a gallery extending some fifteen feet into the room, at the other end was a raised platform, with a drop curtain. The latter was now raised, and displayed a table with half a dozen chairs. The chairman for the evening was seated in the centre of the table. He was a young man with a pale face, eyes bloodshot from many nights spent in the reeking atmosphere of the room, and tumbled hair, which looked as if weeks had passed since it had made the acquaintance of a brush. He had just risen as the party entered; the room, which was fairly filled with men, rang with the applause which had greeted the speaker who had sat down.

"Fellow-workmen," said the chairman – ("I wonder what you work at," Frank muttered below his breath; "nothing that

requires washing, anyhow.") – "Fellow-workmen, your cheers are evidence how deeply you have been moved by the noble words of my friend Mr. Duggins, and how your blood boils at the hideous slavery to which we are condemned by a tyrannical aristocracy. You will now be addressed by my eloquent friend Mr. Simpkins, boot-closer."

Mr. Simpkins rose. He was a short, round-shouldered man, made still shorter by the bend which he had acquired by the operation of boot-closing; his eyes were small, and sunken in his head; his nose wide and flat, as if in his early youth he had fallen on the edge of a pewter pot, and he too had the appearance of regarding water with as deep an aversion as he viewed the aristocracy.

"Fellow-workmen," he began, "or rather I should say fellow-slaves," – this sentiment was received with a roar of applause, – "the time is approaching when our chains will be broken, when the bloodstained power known as the British Constitution will be rent and trampled under foot, when the myrmidons of power will flee before an uprisen people. They know it, these oppressors of ours; they tremble in their palaces and mansions, where they feast upon the wealth drained from the blood of the people. They know that the day is at hand, and that the millions whose labour has created the wealth of this country are about to reclaim their own."

A roar of applause went up as the speaker paused and mopped his forehead with a red handkerchief. But the applause was

suddenly stilled by the sound of the emphatic "Bosh!" which Frank shouted at the top of his voice. Every one turned round, and shouts arose of "Who is that?" "Down with him!" "Turn him out!" "Knock him down!" The orator seized the occasion.

"A spy of the tottering government has intruded upon the deliberations of this assembly, but I tell him I fear him not."

"Never mind, out he goes," one of the men shouted, and all began to press upon the little group standing at the back of the room, and from one of whom the objectionable word had evidently come.

"We are in for a row, Mr. Norris, and no mistake," Perkins said; "the sooner we gets out of this the better."

But this was not so easily done; the crowd had already interposed between them and the door.

"Now stand back," Perkins said, "and let us out. We ain't no spies, and we don't want to hurt any one. Some of you may know me: I am Perkins of the Black Dog, over at Westminster, so you had best leave us alone."

The greater part of those present, however, had imbibed sufficient to render them valorous, and a rush was made upon the party.

Their reception was a warm one; the five prize-fighters struck out right and left, while Frank and his schoolfellows ably seconded them. A tall red-haired fellow who had singled out Frank, was met by a blow which knocked him off his feet, and he fell backward as if shot. Their vigorous blows drove the leading

assailants back, and in spite of their numbers the crowd of angry men recoiled before their handful of opponents.

"Come on," Perkins said, "make for the door; they are breaking up the chairs, and we shall have it hot in a few minutes."

Keeping together, they fought their way, in spite of all opposition, to the door, Perkins leading, while Bill Lowe brought up the rear. They were soon in the open air.

"Now," Perkins exclaimed, "you hook it, gents, as fast as you can; me and Bill will keep the door for a minute." The boys dashed off, and after making at full speed into the Westminster Bridge Road, slackened their pace, and walked quietly back to Dean's Yard. They were in high glee over their adventure, which all agreed had been a splendid lark, and was the more satisfactory as all had escaped without any mark which would testify against them. It was still early, and they had for two hours to walk the streets until the whistle of the fag at the window told them that all were in bed and quiet, and they might safely make their entry. This was effected without noise; the bolts were slipped into their places again, and with their shoes in their hands, the party went noiselessly up to their rooms.

CHAPTER V.
A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION

TWO days later, as Frank was about to start for the cricket-field, a small boy, whom he recognised as a son of Perkins, stopped him.

"Father wants to speak to you perticular, Mr. Norris."

"All right, young un, I will go round there at once."

Wondering what Perkins could have to say to him, Frank took his way to the public-house.

"What is it, Perkins?" he asked the prize-fighter as the latter let him into his private parlour.

"Well sir, there's a rumpus over this business as we had the other night."

"How a rumpus, Perkins?"

"Well, sir, there was a tall red-haired chap – leastways I hear as he's tall and red-headed, and is a tailor by trade; his name is Suggs. It seems as how he got knocked down in the scrummage, and was so bad that the police, who came up after you left, took him to hospital; they brought him round all right, but it seems as how the bridge of his nose was broke, and it will be flat to his face for the rest of his life. Now I fancy that's a piece of your handiwork, Mr. Norris; I saw jist such a chap as that go down when you hit him, and I thought to myself at the time what a

onener it was."

"Yes, I did knock down just such a fellow," Frank said, "and I am sorry I hit him so hard; I was afraid at the time that I hurt him."

"You should not let out from the shoulder in that sort of way, Mr. Norris," the pugilist said, shaking his head; "you hit like the kick of a horse, and you never know what mayn't come of them sort of blows. No, sir; half-armed hitting is the thing for a general row; it hurts just as much, and is just as good for closing up an eye, but it don't do no general damage, so to speak. Now, sir, there's a row over the business. In course I holds my tongue; but they says as four of the party was young uns, and they guessed as they was gents. Now they puts things together, and have found out as I gives lessons to some of you Westminster gents, and they guesses as some of you was with me. Now, as I tells them, what can they do? They was the first to begin it, and we was only standing on self-defence, that's the way I puts it. No magistrate would look at the charge for a minute. It stands to reason that nine men did not attack four or five hundred. They must have been attacking us, that's clear to any one; and if it was me I should not care the snap of a finger about it – that's what I tells the red-haired tailor when he came here with two of his pals this morning. 'We has as much right to our opinions as you have; you attacks us,' says I, 'and we gives you pepper, that's all about it.' 'His beauty's spoilt for life,' says one of his mates. 'He never had no beauty to spoil,' says I, 'by the look of 'im,' so we got

to words. 'They was Westminster boys,' says he. 'That's all you knows about it,' says I. 'I will go to their masters,' says he, 'and report the case, and show him my nose,' says he. 'You have got no case to report,' says I, 'and no nose to show.' 'We will see about that,' says he; 'I ain't going to be made an object for the rest of my life for nothing.'

"So we goes on arguing; but at last he lets out that if I bring him a 'tenner' in the course of the week he will shut up. I ain't allowed of course, Mr. Norris, that any of you young gents had a hand in the fray, quite the contrary; but he has got it into his head that it is so, and he has made up his mind that he will go to the master. I don't think it likely that they could spot you, for they could hardly have got a fair look at your faces."

"No," Frank said, "I don't suppose they would recognise any of us; but the first thing Litter would do would be to ask us if any of us were concerned in the affair. It's a beastly nuisance, for just now I happen to be completely cleaned out, and I am sure I do not know where I could get ten pounds from."

"If it had been any other time I could have helped you, Mr. Norris, but I paid my brewers only last night, and I ain't got two quid in the house; but I might manage to get it for you by the end of the week, if there ain't no other way. But my advice to you would be, let the red-haired man go to the master; if you keep your own counsel, no one can swear it out against you."

"No, I won't do that, Perkins," Frank said, "it's known in the house; besides, if I am asked I must say it's me. Thank you for

your offer. I will see you again in a day or two."

Frank walked back to his boarding-house, moody and dejected. Harris was in his room working. Frank told him what had happened.

"This is a bad business indeed," Harris said. "By Jove! if it comes out, Litter would expel the four of us. What is to be done? I am sure I don't know."

"I don't see where I am to get ten pounds; I have only got fifteen shillings now."

"I have only seven and sixpence," Harris said. "I have paid Shotten's bill for last term this week, and I know that Travers and James have not much more than I have. We might get something on our watches; but they are all silver, and I don't suppose we could get more than a pound apiece for them. But still that's something, and with our united silver would make up six pounds."

"I could get a pound or two from my cousin," Frank said; "Fred always seems to be well supplied with money."

"Because he never spends any," Harris said. "I am mistaken if Barkley will lend you anything."

"Oh, he will lend it if he's got it." But Harris turned out to be right. After the next school Frank laid the case before his cousin, who listened in silence to the story.

"I am very sorry, Frank," he said when he had finished, "but I am entirely out of money at present."

"I thought you always had money," Frank said shortly.

"Not always," Fred replied quietly. "As you know, I am fond of books, and last week I paid my bill for that edition of Shakespeare that you were admiring."

Fred Barkley had indeed a library of books of which he was very proud, and which was worth more than all those belonging to the rest of the boys up College together. Frank was too proud to suggest that his cousin could, if he chose, easily raise the amount required on a few of his favourites, and left the room without saying a word.

Fred Barkley did not continue the work upon which he was engaged after his cousin had left the room, but sat looking fixedly at the papers before him.

"This is a grand opportunity," he muttered to himself, "and I should be a fool if I let it slip. The question is, how is it best to be managed. I should be an idiot indeed if I cannot put a spoke into Master Frank's wheel somehow."

The next day the Sixth Form, as usual, went into the library to do their construing. Dr. Litter, according to his usual custom, walked up and down hearing them and asking questions, the form sitting at their desks, which ran round the room. The Doctor was a fidgety man, and was always either twirling his watch-chain or eye-glass, or rattling the keys, knife, and other articles in his trousers pockets. Being perfectly conscious of the habit, he often emptied the contents of his pocket on to the table before starting to walk about the room, and this he did on the present occasion.

As often happened, he was called from the room in the course

of the lesson, and, ordering the boys to get up twenty additional lines of their Greek play in his absence, he left the room and did not return for half an hour. While he was away the boys moved freely about, some to consult each other's lexicons, others to chat. When Dr. Litter returned the lesson was finished, and the boys went back to the great schoolroom.

On the following morning Frank Norris received a letter. On his opening it he found, to his astonishment, that it contained only a bank-note for ten pounds, with the words "From a friend." Frank was simply astounded.

Who on earth could have sent him the exact sum of which he stood in need? He at once told his three friends what had occurred, and they were as much astonished as himself. All agreed that it was a perfect Godsend, though how any one could have got to know of his necessity for ten pounds at this special time none could imagine, as this was, as far as they were aware, known only to themselves and Fred Barkley. Frank at once concluded that his cousin must have sent him the money, and immediately sent up College and asked him to come to his room. Fred soon came up, and Frank at once proceeded to thank him for his gift. Fred, however, appeared as surprised as himself, and disclaimed any knowledge whatever of the note.

"I told you, Frank," he said reproachfully, "that I had no money. Do you think that if I had it I would not have given it to you at once, instead of sending it in that roundabout manner? Do you know the handwriting? that may afford you some clue."

"No," Frank said; "the name and address, as well as the words within, are done in printing characters, so that it is impossible to say who wrote them. Well, it is an extraordinary business, and I can only say that I am extremely thankful to the good fairy who has got me out of the scrape."

Frank felt indeed relieved. He felt sure that the head-master would consider such an escapade by boys of the Sixth Form an unforgivable crime, and that expulsion would follow discovery; and knowing the hot temper of his uncle, he feared that the latter would view the matter in the most serious light. It was therefore with a light heart that he went across to the Black Dog and placed the note in the hands of Perkins, merely saying that he was glad to say that he had been able to get the money to satisfy the red-haired tailor for his loss of beauty.

"It goes agin my heart to give it to him, Mr. Norris; but in course if you decide not to face it out there's nothing for it. I am glad you have got the money together."

A week later one of the monitors informed Frank that the head-master wished to see him in the library. Wondering at this unusual order, Frank at once repaired there. Dr. Litter was sitting at his table, and he raised his eyes gravely as Frank entered.

"Norris," he said, "I have been shocked at what has happened more than at anything which has occurred to me during my head-mastership of Westminster. I may tell you that everything is discovered. Now I leave it to you to make a full and frank confession."

Frank was thunderstruck. So in some way his breaking out of bounds had become known to the headmaster. The tailor must have turned traitor and peached after having received his money.

For a minute he stood silent and confounded, while Dr. Litter looked at him gravely.

"I acknowledge, sir," Frank began, "that I broke out of bounds to go to a Chartist meeting, and that I got into a row there. I am very sorry now, but I really meant no harm by it; it was a foolish lark."

"And is that all you have to confess?" Dr. Litter said quietly.

"Yes, sir," Frank said in surprise, "I don't know that there's anything else for me to say."

"You have not come to the most serious part of it yet," the Doctor said.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," Frank said, more and more astonished.

"You hurt him, and very seriously."

"Yes, sir, I broke a man's nose in the fight, but I did it in self-defence."

"And you paid him ten pounds to prevent his coming to me," the Doctor said.

"I acknowledge that I did so, but I don't see there was any harm in that."

"And where did you get the ten pounds from?" the Doctor asked slowly.

"It was sent to me in an envelope," Frank replied.

"And who sent it to you?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Norris," the Doctor said sternly, "you stole that note from my table."

Frank stepped back as if struck, the blood left his face, and he stood deadly pale.

"Stole it!" he repeated, in a low, wondering tone.

"Yes," the Doctor repeated, "stole it from my table when I left the room."

"It is a lie!" Frank exclaimed, in a burst of passion; "it is a lie, sir, whoever said it."

Without replying to the outburst, the Doctor touched a bell which stood on the table, and a junior waiting outside entered.

"Tell Mr. Wire and Mr. Richards I wish to speak to them."

Not a word was spoken in the library until the under-masters entered. A thousand thoughts passed rapidly through Frank's brain. He was bewildered, and almost stupefied by this sudden charge, and yet he felt how difficult it would be to clear himself from it. The under-master and Frank's house-master entered.

"I have sent for you, gentlemen, on a most painful business," Dr. Litter said. "I mentioned to you, Mr. Wire, a week since, that I had lost a ten-pound note. I placed it on the table here, during the morning lesson, with my keys and pencil. I was called out of the room for half an hour. When school was over I put the things back in my pocket, but it was not until the afternoon that I missed the note. Thinking it over, I could not recall taking it up with the

other things from the table; but of this I could not be positively certain. As I told you, I could not for a moment believe that any of the boys of my form could have taken it, and I could only suppose that I had dropped it between the School and my house.

"As it happened, I had only got the note the day before from my bankers, and had therefore no difficulty in obtaining the number. I gave notice at the Bank of England at once that the note had been lost, and requested them to obtain the name and address of the presenter, should it be brought in. It was presented yesterday by a man who, after being questioned, said he was a tailor, living in Bermondsey. As I was determined to follow the matter up, I saw the Superintendent of Police, and a policeman was sent across to him. The man said that he had been seriously injured by one of my boys at a low meeting held at some place in the New Cut, and that the ten pounds had been given him as compensation, he having threatened to come and complain to me.

"He was ignorant of the name of the boy, but he had received the note from a prize-fighter named Perkins, who keeps a low public-house down at Millbank. I sent a note to the man, requesting him to be good enough to call upon me this morning early. He did so. I told him that I had heard that he had paid to that man ten pounds as compensation for an injury which he had received from one of my boys, and I asked him from whom he had received it.

"He told me that nothing whatever would have induced him

to tell; but as he knew the young gent would himself confess the instant the question was put, for he had told him he should do so did it come to my ears, there was no motive in his keeping silence, and it was Mr. Norris who had given it to him. On inquiry I find that the meeting in question was held between half-past nine and eleven; therefore, to have been present, Norris must have broken out of bounds and got into the boarding-house at night.

"This, in itself, would be a very grave offence, but it is as nothing by the side of the other. I am most reluctantly obliged to admit that I can come to but one conclusion: Norris, having broken bounds, and got into a disgraceful fray, was afraid that the matter would come to my ears. It was absolutely necessary for him to procure ten pounds to buy the silence of this man; my own very culpable carelessness, which I most deeply regret, left the note on the table, and the temptation was too much for him.

"I have questioned him how he got it. If he had said that he had picked it up in the yard, and, not knowing to whom it belonged, had very improperly, without making inquiry, devoted it to the purpose of silencing this man, I should have gladly believed him – for hitherto he has stood high in my estimation, and I should certainly have considered him incapable of an act of theft. But he tells me that it was sent to him in an envelope, by whom he does not know; and this absurd story is, to my mind, a clear proof that he must have stolen it from the table."

The two masters had at first looked at Frank with incredulous surprise, but as the narrative continued and the proofs appeared

to accumulate, the expression changed, and they regarded him with horror, not unmixed with pity. For a minute there was silence, then Mr. Richards said: —

"Strong as the proofs seem to be, sir, I can hardly believe in the possibility of Norris having behaved in this way. He has always been a particularly straightforward, honest, and honourable lad; there is not a boy in the house of whom I would so absolutely have disbelieved this tale. That he did send this note to the man there can, by his own confession, be no doubt, but I still cannot believe that he stole it. Come now, Norris, you have got into a terrible scrape, but don't make matters worse; tell us frankly the truth about it."

"I have told the truth," Frank said, in a low and unnatural voice. "I received the note in an envelope; here it is, sir, with, as you see, only the words 'From a friend.' I showed it when I had got it to Harris, Travers, James, and Barkley, and had not the remotest idea who it came from."

"To whom had you mentioned the need you had of ten pounds?" Mr. Wire asked.

"No one knew it except those four and Perkins, not a soul."

The three masters looked even more grave. The four boys were sent for one by one, and were asked if they had mentioned to any one the need which Frank had of ten pounds; but all declared they had spoken to no one on the subject.

"He showed you the envelope containing the note he received; what did you think about it?"

"It seemed a curious thing, sir," Harris said, "but none of us could account for it."

"I am accused," Frank said, in a harsh voice, "of having stolen that note from Dr. Litter's table."

For the moment the four boys stood in silent astonishment.

"Nonsense, Frank," Harris burst out impetuously, "we know you better than that, old fellow; if an angel from heaven came down and told me you were a thief I would not believe him," and Harris seized his friend's hand and wrung it warmly, an example followed by his three companions.

Hitherto Frank's face had been hard and set, but he broke down now, and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"You can go now," Dr. Litter said, and when the door closed upon them he continued: "I would give much, very much, Norris, to be able to believe in your innocence; but I cannot see a possibility of it; the evidence to my mind is overwhelming. I acquit you of any idea of deliberate theft. You were pressed and afraid of exposure, and the temptation offered by the note was too strong for you; you thought you saw a way of escape, and to account to your comrades for the possession of the money, you put it in an envelope and posted it, directed to yourself. Even now, if you will confess the truth, I will send you home privately, and avoid public expulsion and disgrace in consideration of the good character you have always hitherto borne; if not, I must at once lay the whole facts before your uncle and guardian, and to-morrow you will be publicly expelled."

"I have nothing to say, sir," Frank said quietly; "overwhelming as the proof appears against me, I have spoken the simple truth, and I swear that I never saw that note until I took it from the envelope."

"Go to your room, sir!" Dr. Litter said, with indignation, "this continued denial is almost worse than the offence."

Without a word Frank rose and left the library.

"This is indeed a shocking business," Mr. Wire said, as he followed Dr. Litter to the schoolroom.

"I cannot credit it," Mr. Richards put in; "I know him so well, that, absolutely conclusive as I allow the evidence to be, I still hesitate to believe him to be guilty."

After school was over Fred Barkley ran up to his cousin's room.

"My dear Frank," he exclaimed, "we are ordered not to communicate with you, but I could not help running in to tell you that every one believes you to be innocent."

"I hardly know whether I believe it myself," Frank said bitterly. "But you can do something for me, Fred; I have written a line to my uncle, will you post it for me at once?"

"Certainly," Fred replied; "but there is some one coming upstairs, so I must be off." He took the letter and was gone. It contained only a few words: —

"My dear Uncle, – If you believe me innocent of this hideous charge, which I swear to you I am not guilty of, send me one line by hand when you get this. As long as I know that you have faith

in me I can face it out."

The afternoon passed slowly to the prisoner. His uncle would get the letter between three and four, and he might have an answer half an hour afterwards. Hour after hour passed, and, except the servant who brought up his tea, no one came near him. He reasoned to himself that his uncle might be out. At eight o'clock he heard a noise on the stairs; a number of feet approached his room, and then the door opened, and the whole of the boys in the boarding-house poured in.

"Norris, old fellow," Harris said, "we could stop away no longer, and in spite of orders we have come to see you. I beg to tell you in the name of the whole house, and I may say the whole School, that not a boy here believes you to be guilty. How the note came into your hands we don't know and we don't care, but we are certain you did not take it."

"No! no!" was shouted in a chorus.

"So keep up your spirits, old fellow," Harris said, "it will come right sooner or later."

For some time Frank was unable to speak.

"Thank you all," he said at last, in a choking voice, "it is a consolation to me indeed to know that my old friends still believe in me; but, till my innocence is proved, I shall never be able to look the world in the face again."

"Come, boys, this will not do," a voice at the door said; "Harris, you elder boys ought to set a better example to the younger ones. I told you that the Doctor's orders were positive

that no one was to communicate with Norris."

"I can't help it, sir," Harris said; "we all felt we couldn't go to bed to-night without telling Norris that we knew he was innocent."

"Well, well, you must go downstairs now," – not unkindly; "you must not stay a minute longer." There was a chorus of "Good night, Norris!" "Good night, old fellow!" "Keep up your pluck!" and various other encouraging expressions, and the party filed out of the door; Mr. Richards waited to see the last out, and then left Frank to his thoughts.

Not till ten o'clock did Frank give up all hope of hearing from his uncle, then he felt he had been condemned.

"All my school-fellows acquit me, and my uncle, who should know me better than any of them, condemns me. I wonder what Alice said. I don't believe she would believe me guilty if all the world told her."

At this moment the door opened quietly again, and Fred Barkley entered. Frank leapt to his feet to see if he was the bearer of a letter.

Fred shook his head in answer to the unasked question. "I have slipped out of College to see you, Frank, and Richards has given me leave to come up. I have no news, I only came to see what you were going to do."

"You posted the letter to my uncle, Fred?" he asked.

"Yes, at once," he replied.

Frank was silent.

"What do you mean to do?" Fred went on.

"Do?" Frank asked, "what do you mean?"

"Why, I suppose you don't mean to stop here until to-morrow."

"I don't know," Frank replied, "I had not thought about it."

"I shouldn't, if I were in your place. It would be a fearful business; there hasn't been a boy expelled from Westminster for the last thirty years. I shouldn't stop for it if I were you."

"But what am I to do? where am I to go?" said Frank listlessly.

"Do?" said Fred, "why, go abroad to be sure. I should go out to California, or Australia, or somewhere, and in time this will be all forgotten. Perhaps it will turn out who sent that money. It is not as if facing it out would do any good, for you can prove nothing. Every one who knows you believes you innocent."

"Uncle Harry doesn't," Frank said bitterly, "or he would have sent an answer to my letter."

"Ah! well, you know what he is," Fred said, "how passionate and hasty he is; but after a time he will think as we all do, never fear. Look here, I thought that you would want some money, so have been round to Ginger's and have sold all my books. The old beggar would not give me more than twenty pounds for them, though I have paid him more than double that, besides what I have bought from others. However, here are the twenty pounds at your service, if you like to take them."

Frank remained irresolute for a moment; then the thought of the terrible scene in the schoolroom, and of the tones in which

the Doctor would pronounce his expulsion, overcame him.

"I may as well go before as after, for I could not go home after that. Thank you, Fred, with all my heart; I will take your money and advice, and if I get a rich man I will pay you again. Are the fellows in bed?"

"Yes," Fred replied, "and Richards is in his study, so you can go down with me and slip out easy enough."

"Tell the others," Frank said, "that I went because I could not face the scene to-morrow, and that I hope some day to return and prove my innocence."

Without another word he opened his drawers, packed some clothes in a small portmanteau, put on his pea-jacket and the low cap he had worn in his unfortunate expedition to the New Cut; then he stole softly downstairs with Fred, and sallied out into the night air.

CHAPTER VI.
AT NEW ORLEANS

FRANK NORRIS took his way eastward after leaving Westminster. He slept at a small hotel in the city, and at daybreak walked on to the docks. He was careless where he went, so that it was out of England; but he was determined, if possible, to work his passage, so as to leave the sum of money in his pocket untouched until he got to his destination. He went on board a number of ships and asked the captains if they wanted hands, but on his acknowledgment that he had never been at sea, none of them would ship him for the outward voyage only. At last he paused before a fine ship, the *Mississippi;* a printed placard on the wharf beside her mentioned that the well-known and favourite clipper would sail for New Orleans on that day. He walked on board and went up to the captain, who was talking to the first mate, while the latter was superintending the getting of cargo on board.

"Do you want a hand, sir?"

"Well, that depends," the captain said; "I am still two or three hands short, but they have promised to send me them this morning. Are you a sailor?"

"No, sir; but I can row and sail an open boat, and am ready to make myself useful. I want to work my passage out."

"You look an active young fellow," the captain said, "but I don't care about taking a landsman only for the voyage out; I should have to ship another hand in your place at New Orleans, and probably have to pay more wages there than I could get one for here. Still, likely enough, they may send me down at the last moment two or three hands who know no more about it than you do, and may not be half so willing to learn as I should judge you to be. What do you say, Ephraim; shall we take him?"

"He looks a likely sort," the mate said.

"Very well then, it's agreed; you can take off your coat and fall to work at once; I will send down word to the office that I have shipped you." Frank stripped off his coat and waistcoat, and stowed them, with his portmanteau, out of the way, and then set to work with a will, the whiteness of his shirt, and his general appearance, exciting some jeering comments among the other men at work; but the activity and strength which he showed soon astonished and silenced them.

By one o'clock the last bale of cargo was stowed, and the hatches put on. The landsmen who had been employed went on shore, and Frank went forward to the forecastle, with the men, to dinner.

"Not the sort of grub you have been accustomed to, lad," one of the men said.

"I have eaten worse," Frank said carelessly, "and don't care if I never eat better. How long do you suppose we shall be before we get to New Orleans?"

"It all depends upon the wind," the sailor answered, "may be a month, may be three. Are you going to leave us there?"

"Yes," Frank said, "I am only working my passage out."

"It's a roughish place is New Orleans," the sailor said; "the sort of place where you want to have a knife or pistol ready at hand. Lor', I have seen some rum doings there; it's a word and a blow, I can tell ye."

"Ah! well," Frank laughed, "I suppose I shall do as well as the rest."

The voice of the mate was now heard calling to all hands to prepare to cast off. The men had hurried through their dinner, for they knew that the time allowed them would be short, and began casting off hawsers, coiling down ropes, and preparing for a start. The bell was ringing, and the friends of the passengers were saying good-bye. The capstan was manned, and the vessel moved slowly away from the quay.

Five minutes later she was at the dock gates; these swung open, and the vessel slowly made her way through them, and was soon in the river.

As the men ran aloft to loosen the sails, Frank placed himself next to the sailor who had spoken to him at dinner, and followed him up the shrouds, and, imitating his actions, he was soon out on the yard hauling away with the others. When the sails were all set he returned below.

"Wall done, youngster," the mate said; "I reckon you are about as spry for a green hand as any I have come across; I had my eye

on you, and you'll do. You go on like that, and you will make a first-rate hand afore long."

There was plenty of work to do as they went down the river. The sails had to be braced round as the wind took them on different sides in the winding reaches; the decks were sluiced down, to get rid of the first coat of dirt which they had acquired in the docks; ropes had to be coiled and tidied up, and the many articles lying loosely about the deck to be put in their places and lashed in readiness for sea work. The tide met them just as it was getting dark, and as the wind dropped, and was not sufficiently strong to carry the ship against it, the anchor was dropped a few miles below Gravesend.

The men were divided into two watches, but all were told that, with the exception of two stationed as an anchor watch, they could turn in till tide turned. Frank threw himself at once into the bunk which had been allotted to him. He had not closed an eye the night before, and was worn out by emotion and fatigue, and scarcely had he lain down than he was sound asleep. He had been placed in the starboard watch, and slept till he was roughly shaken at four o'clock in the morning.

"Get up, mate, your watch is called."

Frank leapt out and made his way on deck. The vessel had been now three hours under weigh. She had passed the Nore, whose light shone brightly over the stern.

"The wind is freshening a bit," one of the men said, "we shall be out round the Foreland by dinner-time."

The voyage was an uneventful one; Frank escaped the first fight in which new-comers generally have to take part before they settle down in their new sphere. He was thoroughly good-tempered, and fully a match for any of his messmates in chaff, and he soon became a favourite in the fo'castle. He was always ready to take his share of the work, and was soon as much at home on the yards as the rest. The change and the newness of the life were very good for him; he was never alone, and had no time to think or brood over his troubles, and he was almost sorry when the end of the voyage approached.

"Not a lively-looking shore," the mate said to him as he leaned against the bulwark, looking at the low banks of the river a few miles below New Orleans. "No, even an American may confess that there ain't much beauty about this river. It's a great river, and a mighty useful one, but it ain't beautiful. Now, what are you thinking of doing when you get ashore?"

"I was thinking to begin by getting employment on board a boat of some sort. What I shall do afterwards of course I do not know; but if I can earn my living on the water for a few months, till I have time to look round and see what is best to be done, I shall be well satisfied. I have got a few pounds, but I don't want to touch them; they will come in useful if I want to move, or to buy a horse, or anything of that sort."

"You will do," the mate said. "You have shown yourself a right-down sharp fellow on board this ship, and I expect you will make your way whatever you try a hand at. I have taken a fancy

to you, and should be glad to do you a good turn if I can. I have been in and out of this port for some years, and know Orleans pretty tidy, and I can tell you that there ain't a port on this side of the water or the other where a fellow can be put out of the way more promptly than here; there are parts of New Orleans which, I tell you, are a sort of hell on earth.

"There are places you couldn't go into without some one picking a quarrel with you afore you have been in there two minutes, and a quarrel here means knives out afore you have time to think. On the other hand, Orleans is a place where a steady industrious fellow, with his head screwed on right, has a good chance of getting on. The trade up the river is immense, and will be far greater than it is now; and there's pretty well a continent to the west, with openings of all sorts, land and cattle, houses and mining, and trade with Mexico. But I don't see as you can do better than to follow out your own idea.

"I know a score of men here who own boats trading up the river, and the first time I go ashore I will take you with me and put you in good hands. The rate of pay ain't high, for it's looked on as easy work; still, a few months at it will open your eyes and put you into the ways of the country, and, once at home, I tell you there's money to be made on the river, heaps of it, and when it's seen that you are steady, and willing, and 'cute, you will find plenty who will give you a helping hand. There's no greater place for loafers than New Orleans, and a chap who will really work will soon make his mark."

Frank warmly thanked the mate for his offer. The moment the ship cast anchor off the town a crowd of negroes came on board and unloaded her, and the crew had comparatively little to do; the three or four passengers who had come out in her went on shore at once, but it was not until the third afternoon after her arrival that the mate was able to leave the ship.

"Now, lad," he said to Frank, "jump into the boat along with me, and I will see if I can't put you into the groove."

Keeping along the wharves for some distance, the mate presently entered a small wooden office, telling Frank to wait outside.

On entering he accosted the only occupant of the place, a man of some forty years of age, who was dressed entirely in white, and was sitting smoking a huge cigar, with his chair tilted back and his feet on the table.

"How are you, Ephraim?" he said, as the mate entered. "I saw your ship had arrived. Had a good voyage?"

"First-class," the mate replied; "not very fast, but quiet and comfortable," and he took a cigar from an open box on the table and lighted it. "I haven't come round for a talk with you now, I have only just come ashore for the first time; but I wanted to speak to you about a young chap as came out with us. He has worked his passage out, and is about the smartest young fellow I ever shipped, and has the makings of a first-class seaman in him, but he doesn't care about stopping at sea. He's of good family in the old country, as one can easily see. I expect he has got into

some scrape, and has had to make a bolt of it; however, that's no business of mine. He's as strong as a horse, and as active as a squirrel; he can handle an oar and sail a boat. I didn't like the thought of his landing here and getting into bad hands, so I thought I would come straight to you. He said what he wanted to do was to work on the river, for a few months at any rate, until he got to know the place. Now I know you have a dozen tugs and a score of barges, and I thought you might set him on at once. He would make a good second hand on one of your large boats. If it's but to oblige me, I wish you would put him on board one with a sober, steady chap of a decent kind; as soon as he gets to know the work and the river, I will guarantee that he will be fit to take charge himself."

"That's easy enough done, Ephraim," the trader replied, "all except finding the sober and steady decent man to put him under. However, I will do my best. Have you got him here?"

"Yes, he is outside," Ephraim said; and rising, he went to the door and called Frank in. "This is the hand I was speaking to you about, Mr. Willcox."

"Well, young man," the trader said, "I hear you want a berth on board a tug or flat. Which would you rather have?"

"I would prefer to be on a flat, – at any rate for a time, sir," Frank said; "I am a pretty good hand at sailing or rowing, but I don't know anything about steamboats."

"There's not much to learn in that," the trader said; "the work is simply to keep the decks clean, to help to load and unload at

each landing-place, and to pole off in shallows. However, I will put you on board a flat. The wages to begin with will be twenty dollars a month and your keep, if that will suit you."

"That will do, sir, very well," Frank said. "When shall I come to work?"

"If you come here this time to-morrow you can go aboard at once. One of the flats will go up the first thing in the morning."

"Thank you, sir, I will be here. I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Alderson, for your kind recommendation of me."

"I am glad to have put you into a berth," the mate said. "Now I should recommend you to get on board again soon."

Frank strolled about the wharves for an hour or two, and then went on board. Before going on shore the following day, the captain gave him a certificate, saying that he had sailed in the *Mississippi*, and was a good, willing, and reliable hand.

"You may not intend to go to sea again, but if you should, this will get you a better berth than if you had applied as a landsman. I am very pleased with your conduct on board the ship, and I am only sorry you are leaving us. I think it's a pity you don't stick to it, for it is clear that you are well educated, and would be able to pass as a mate as soon as you had been the requisite time at sea. However, you can fall back on that if you don't get on as well as you expect on shore."

The mate said good-bye to him warmly.

"Your employer is one of the very best in the place," said he. "You must not suppose he is in a small way because you see him

in that little office: he is one of the largest tug and flat owners in New Orleans. He keeps his eye on his men, and will push you forward if he sees you deserve it. He has the name of having the best of captains on the river, and of being one of the best and most liberal of employers. But you must not expect much in flat life, you will find the men rough as well as the work."

"I shan't mind that," Frank said cheerfully; "our own bargemen on the Thames are not the most polished of men."

"And, lad," the mate added, "I should advise you to hand over any money you may have with you to Mr. Willcox; the less money you have in your pockets the better. You have no occasion for it on the river, and there are loafers hanging about at every landing who would think nothing of knocking a man on the head if they thought he had got fifty dollars in his pocket."

Frank promised to take his advice, and, with a hearty farewell to the mate, and a cordial one to his late shipmates, he put his portmanteau in the boat and was rowed ashore.

"Oh, here you are," Mr. Willcox said, as he entered; "just give a call to that man you see outside."

Before doing so, Frank handed over his twenty sovereigns to the trader, asking him to keep them for him, and then went to the door. On a log close by a tall, gaunt man was sitting smoking a short pipe. Frank asked him to step in.

"Hiram," the trader said, "this is the young Britisher who is going as your second hand. I have good accounts of him as a sailor, so you won't have to teach him that part of the business.

Of course he is new to the river and its ways."

"I will put him through," the man said, "and will teach him as much as I knows myself if he cares to learn."

"There is no one knows the river better, Hiram; and, as you know, I would have given you the command of a steamer long ago if you would have taken it."

"No, sir," the man said emphatically, "not for Hiram Little. I have been on board a flat all my days, and am not going to be hurried along in one of them puffing things. They have their uses, I am ready enough to allow, when the current is swift and the wind light; I am glad enough of a cast now and then, but to be always in a bustle and flurry is more than I could stand. Come along, youngster, with your sack; the boat is a quarter of a mile down."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.