Henty George Alfred

Sturdy and Strong: or, How George Andrews Made His Way

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Sturdy and Strong; Or, How George Andrews Made His Way:

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Henty G. A. George Alfred Sturdy and Strong; Or, How George Andrews Made His Way

PREFACE

Whatever may be said as to distinction of classes in England, it is certain that in no country in the world is the upward path more open to those who brace themselves to climb it than in our own. The proportion of those who remain absolutely stationary is comparatively small. We are all living on a hillside, and we must either go up or down. It is easier to descend than to ascend; but he who fixes his eyes upwards, nerves himself for the climb, and determines with all his might and power to win his way towards the top, is sure to find himself at the end of his day at a far higher level than when he started upon his journey. It may be said, and sometimes foolishly is said, that luck is everything; but in nineteen cases out of twenty what is called luck is simply a combination of opportunity, and of the readiness and quickness to turn that opportunity to advantage. The voyager must take every advantage of wind, tide, and current, if he would make

a favorable journey; and for success in life it is necessary not only to be earnest, steadfast, and true, but to have the faculty of turning every opportunity to the best advantage; just as a climber utilizes every tuft of grass, every little shrub, every projecting rock, as a hold for his hands or feet. George Andrews had what may be called luck – that is, he had opportunities and took advantage of them, and his rise in life was consequently far more rapid than if he had let them pass without grasping them; but in any case his steadiness, perseverance, and determination to get on would assuredly have made their way in the long run. If similar qualities and similar determinations are yours, you need not despair of similar success in life.

G. A. Henty.

CHAPTER I.
ALONE

"You heard what he said, George?"

"Oh, mother, mother!"

"Don't sob so, my boy; he is right. I have seen it coming a long time, and, hard as it seems, it will be better. There is no disgrace in it. I have tried my best, and if my health had not broken down we might have managed, but you see it was not to be. I shall not mind it, dear; it is really only for your sake that I care about it at all."

The boy had ceased sobbing, and sat now with a white set face.

"Mother, it will break my heart to think that I cannot keep you from this. If we could only have managed for a year or two I could have earned more then; but to think of you – you in the workhouse!"

"In a workhouse infirmary, my boy," his mother said gently. "You see it is not as if it were from any fault of ours. We have done our best. You and I have managed for two years; but what with my health and my eyes breaking down we can do so no longer. I hope it will not be for long, dear. You see I shall have rest and quiet, and I hope I shall soon be able to be out again."

"Not soon, mother. The doctor said you ought not to use your eyes for months."

"Even months pass quickly, George, when one has hope. I have felt this coming so long that I shall be easier and happier now it has come. After all, what is a workhouse infirmary but a hospital, and it would not seem so very dreadful to you my going into a hospital; the difference is only in name; both are, after all, charities, but the one is kept up out of subscriptions, the other from the rates."

His mother's words conveyed but little comfort to George Andrews. He had just come in from his work, and had heard what the parish doctor had told his mother.

"I can do nothing for you here, Mrs. Andrews. You must have rest and quiet for your eyes, and not only that, but you must have strengthening food. It is no use my blinking the truth. It is painful for you, I know. I can well understand that; but I see no other way. If you refuse to go I won't answer for your life."

"I will go, doctor," she had answered quietly. "I know that it will be best. It will be a blow to my boy, but I see no other way."

"If you don't want your boy to be alone in the world, ma'am, you will do as I advise you. I will go round in the morning and get you the order of admission, and as I shall be driving out that way I will, if you like, take you myself."

"Thank you, doctor; you are very good. Yes, I will be ready in the morning, and I thank you for your offer."

"Very well, then, that's settled," the doctor said briskly. "At ten o'clock I will be here."

Although a little rough in manner, Dr. Jeffries was a kind-

hearted and humane man.

"Poor woman," he said to himself as he went downstairs, "it is hard for her. It is easy to see that she is a lady, and a thorough lady too; but what can I do for her! I might get her a little temporary help, but that would be of no use-she is completely broken down with anxiety and insufficient food, and unless her eyes have a long holiday she will lose her sight. No, there's nothing else for it, but it is hard."

It was hard. Mrs. Andrews was, as the doctor said, a lady. She had lost both her parents while she was at school. She had no near relations, and as she was sixteen when her mother died she had remained at school finishing her education and teaching the younger children. Then she had obtained a situation as governess in a gentleman's family, and two years afterwards had married a young barrister who was a frequent visitor at the house.

Mr. Andrews was looked upon as a rising man, and for the first seven or eight years of her marriage his wife's life had been a very happy one. Then her husband was prostrated by a fever which he caught in one of the midland towns while on circuit, and although he partially recovered he was never himself again. His power of work seemed to be lost; a languor which he could not overcome took possession of him. A troublesome cough ere long attacked him, and two years later Mrs. Andrews was a widow, and her boy, then nine years old, an orphan.

During the last two years of his life Mr. Andrews had earned but little in his profession. The comfortable house which he

occupied had been given up, and they had removed to one much smaller. But in spite of this, debts mounted up, and when, after his death, the remaining furniture was sold and everything settled, there remained only about two hundred pounds. Mrs. Andrews tried to get some pupils among her late husband's friends, but during the last two years she had lost sight of many of these, and now met with but poor success among the others. She was a quiet and retiring woman, and shrank from continuous solicitations, and at the end of three years she found her little store exhausted.

Hitherto she had kept George at school, but could no longer do so, and, giving up her lodging in Brompton, went down to Croydon, where someone had told her that they thought she would have a better chance of obtaining pupils, but the cards which some of the tradesmen allowed her to put in the window led to no result, and finding this to be the case she applied at one of the milliner's for work. This she obtained, and for a year supported herself and her boy by needlework.

From the time when George left school she had gone on teaching him his lessons; but on the day when he was thirteen years old he declared that he would no longer submit to his mother working for both of them, and, setting out, called at shop after shop inquiring if they wanted an errand-boy. He succeeded at last in getting a place at a grocer's where he was to receive three shillings a week and his meals, going home to sleep at night in the closet-like little attic adjoining the one room which his

mother could now afford.

For a while they were more comfortable than they had been for some time; now that his mother had no longer George to feed, her earnings and the three shillings he brought home every Saturday night enabled them to live in comparative ease, and on Sunday something like a feast was always prepared. But six months later Mrs. Andrews felt her eyesight failing, the lids became inflamed, and a dull aching pain settled in the eyeballs. Soon she could only work for a short time together, her earnings became smaller and smaller, and her employers presently told her that she kept the work so long in hand that they could no longer employ her. There was now only George's three shillings a week to rely upon, and this was swallowed up by the rent. In despair she had applied to the parish doctor about her eyes. For a fortnight he attended her, and at the end of that time had peremptorily given the order of which she had told her son.

To her it was a relief; she had seen that it must come. Piece by piece every article of clothing she possessed, save those she wore, had been pawned for food, and every resource was now exhausted. She was worn out with the struggle, and the certainty of rest and food overcame her repugnance to the house. For George's sake too, much as she knew he would feel her having to accept such a refuge, she was glad that the struggle was at an end. The lad had for the last six months suffered greatly for her sake. Every meal to which he sat down at his employer's seemed to choke him as he contrasted it with the fare to which she was

reduced, although, as far as possible, she had concealed from him how sore was her strait.

George cried himself to sleep that night, and he could scarce speak when he said good-by to his mother in the morning, for he could not tell when he should see her again.

"You will stop where you are, my boy, will you not?"

"I cannot promise, mother. I don't know yet what I shall do; but please don't ask me to promise anything. You must let me do what I think best. I have got to make a home for you when you are cured. I am fourteen now, and am as strong as most boys of my age. I ought to be able to earn a shilling a day somehow, and with seven shillings a week, mother, and you just working a little, you know, so as not to hurt your eyes, we ought to be able to do. Don't you bother about me, mother. I want to try anyhow what I can do till you come out. When you do, then I will do whatever you tell me; that's fair, isn't it?"

Mrs. Andrews would have remonstrated, but he said:

"Well, mother, you see at the worst I can get a year's character from Dutton, so that if I can't get anything else to do I can get the same sort of place again, and as I am a year older than I was when he took me, and can tie up parcels neatly now, I ought to get a little more anyhow. You see I shall be safe enough, and though I have never grumbled, you know, mother – have I? – I think I would rather do anything than be a grocer's boy. I would rather, when I grow up, be a bricklayer's laborer, or a plowman, or do any what I call man's work, than be pottering about behind a

counter, with a white apron on, weighing out sugar and currants."

"I can't blame you, George," Mrs. Andrews said with a sigh. "It's natural, my boy. If I get my eyesight and my health again, when you grow up to be a man we will lay by a little money, and you and I will go out together to one of the colonies. It will be easier to rise again there than here, and with hard work both of us might surely hope to get on. There must be plenty of villages in Australia and Canada where I could do well with teaching, and you could get work in whatever way you may be inclined to. So, my boy, let us set that before us. It will be something to hope for and work for, and will cheer us to go through whatever may betide us up to that time."

"Yes, mother," George said. "It will be comfort indeed to have something to look forward to. Nothing can comfort me much to-day; but if anything could it would be some such plan as that."

The last words he said to his mother as, blinded with tears, he kissed her before starting to work, were:

"I shall think of our plan every day, and look forward to that more than anything else in the world – next to your coming to me again."

At ten o'clock Dr. Jeffries drove up to Mrs. Andrews' humble lodging in a brougham instead of his ordinary gig, having borrowed the carriage from one of the few of his patients who kept such a vehicle, on purpose to take Mrs. Andrews, for she was so weak and worn that he was sure she would not be able to sit upright in a gig for the three miles that had to be traversed.

He managed in the course of his rounds to pass the workhouse again in the afternoon, and brought George, before he left work, a line written in pencil on a leaf torn from his pocketbook:

"My darling, I am very comfortable. Everything is clean and nice, and the doctor and people kind. Do not fret about me. – Your loving mother."

Although George's expressed resolution of leaving his present situation, and seeking to earn his living in some other way, caused Mrs. Andrews much anxiety, she had not sought strongly to dissuade him from it. No doubt it would be wiser for him to stay in his present situation, where he was well treated and well fed, and it certainly seemed improbable to her that he would be able to get a better living elsewhere. Still she could not blame him for wishing at least to try. She herself shared to some extent his prejudice against the work in which he was employed. There is no disgrace in honest work; but she felt that she would rather see him engaged in hard manual labor than as a shop boy. At any rate, as he said, if he failed he could come back again to Croydon, and, with a year's character from his present employer, would probably be able to obtain a situation similar to that which he now held. She was somewhat comforted, too, by a few words the doctor had said to her during their drive.

"I think you are fortunate in your son, Mrs. Andrews. He seems to me a fine steady boy. If I can, in any way, do him a good turn while you are away from him, I will."

George remained for another month in his situation, for he

knew that it would never do to start on his undertaking penniless. At the end of that time, having saved up ten shillings, and having given notice to his employer, he left the shop for the last time, and started to walk to London. It was not until he began to enter the crowded streets that he felt the full magnitude of his undertaking. To be alone in London, a solitary atom in the busy mass of humanity, is a trying situation even for a man; to a boy of fourteen it is terrible. Buying a penny roll, George sat down to eat it in one of the niches of a bridge over the river, and then kneeling up watched the barges and steamers passing below him.

Had it not been for his mother, his first thought, like that of most English boys thrown on the world, would have been to go to sea; but this idea he had from the first steadily set aside as out of the question. His plan was to obtain employment as a boy in some manufacturing work, for he thought that there, by steadiness and perseverance, he might make his way.

On one thing he was resolved. He would make his money last as long as possible. Three penny-worth of bread a day would, he calculated, be sufficient for his wants. As to sleeping, he thought he might manage to sleep anywhere; it was summer time and the nights were warm. He had no idea what the price of a bed would be, or how to set about getting a lodging. He did not care how roughly he lived so that he could but make his money last. The first few days he determined to look about him. Something might turn up. If it did not he would set about getting a place in earnest. He had crossed Waterloo Bridge, and, keeping straight

on, found himself in Covent Garden, where he was astonished and delighted at the quantities of fruit, vegetables, and flowers.

Although he twice set out in different directions to explore the streets, he each time returned to Covent Garden. There were many lads of his own age playing about there, and he thought that from them he might get some hints as to how to set about earning a living. They looked ragged and poor enough, but they might be able to tell him something – about sleeping, for instance. For although before starting the idea of sleeping anywhere had seemed natural enough, it looked more formidable now that he was face to face with it.

Going to a cook-shop in a street off the market he bought two slices of plum-pudding. He rather grudged the twopence which he paid; but he felt that it might be well laid out. Provided with the pudding he returned to the market, sat himself down on an empty basket, and began to eat slowly and leisurely.

In a short time he noticed a lad of about his own age watching him greedily.

He was far from being a respectable-looking boy. His clothes were ragged, and his toes could be seen through a hole in his boot. He wore neither hat nor cap, and his hair looked as if it had not been combed since the day of his birth. There was a sharp, pinched look on his face. But had he been washed and combed and decently clad he would not have been a bad-looking boy. At any rate George liked his face better than most he had seen in the market, and he longed for a talk with someone. So he held

out his other slice of pudding, and said:

"Have a bit?"

"Oh, yes!" the boy replied "Walker, eh?"

"No, I mean it, really. Will you have a bit?"

"No larks?" asked the boy.

"No; no larks. Here you are."

Feeling assured now that no trick was intended the boy approached, took without a word the pudding which George held out, and, seating himself on a basket close to him, took a great bite.

"Where do you live?" George asked, when the slice of pudding had half disappeared.

"Anywheres," the boy replied, waving his hand round.

"I mean, where do you sleep?"

The boy nodded, to intimate that his sleeping-place was included in the general description of his domicile.

"And no one interferes with you?" George inquired.

"The beaks, they moves you on when they ketches you; but ef yer get under a cart or in among the baskets you generally dodges 'em."

"And suppose you want to pay for a place to sleep, where do you go and how much do you pay?"

"Tuppence," the boy said; "or if yer want a first-rate, fourpence. Does yer want to find a crib?" he asked doubtfully, examining his companion.

"Well, yes," George said. "I want to find some quiet place

where I can sleep, cheap, you know."

"Out of work?" the boy inquired.

"Yes. I haven't got anything to do at present. I am looking for a place, you know."

"Don't know no one about?"

"No; I have just come in from Croydon."

The boy shook his head.

"Don't know nothing as would suit," he said. "Why, yer'd get them clothes and any money yet had walked off with the wery fust night."

"I should not get a room to myself, I suppose, even for fourpence?" George asked, making a rapid calculation that this would come to two and fourpence per week, as much as his mother had paid for a comparatively comfortable room in Croydon.

The boy opened his eyes in astonishment at his companion requiring a room for himself.

"Lor' bless yer, yer'd have a score of them with yer!"

"I don't care about a bed," George said. "Just some place to sleep in. Just some straw in any quiet corner."

This seemed more reasonable to the boy, and he thought the matter over.

"Well," he said at last, "I knows of a place where they puts up the hosses of the market carts. I knows a hostler there. Sometimes when it's wery cold he lets me sleep up in the loft. Aint it warm and comfortable just! I helps him with the hosses

sometimes, and that's why. I will ax him if yer likes."

George assented at once. His ideas as to the possibility of sleeping in the open air had vanished when he saw the surroundings, and a bed in a quiet loft seemed to him vastly better than sleeping in a room with twenty others.

"How do you live?" he asked the lad, "and what's your name?"

"They calls me the Shadder," the boy said rather proudly; "but my real name's Bill."

"Why do they call you the Shadow?" George asked.

"'Cause the bobbies finds it so hard to lay hands on me," Bill replied.

"But what do they want to lay hands on you for?" George asked.

"Why, for bagging things, in course," Bill replied calmly.

"Bagging things? Do you mean stealing?" George said, greatly shocked.

"Well, not regular prigging," the Shadow replied; "not wipes, yer know, nor tickers, nor them kind of things. I aint never prigged nothing of that kind."

"Well, what is it then you do – prig?" George asked, mystified.

"Apples or cabbages, or a bunch of radishes, onions sometimes, or 'taters. That aint regular prigging, you know."

"Well, it seems to me the same sort of thing," George said, after a pause.

"I tell yer it aint the same sort of thing at all," the Shadow said angrily. "Everyone as aint a fool knows that taters aint wipes, and

no one can't say as a apple and a ticker are the same."

"No, not the same," George agreed; "but you see one is just as much stealing as the other."

"No, it aint," the boy reasserted. "One is the same as money and t'other aint. I am hungry and I nips a apple off a stall. No one aint the worse for it. You don't suppose as they misses a apple here? Why, there's wagon-loads of 'em, and lots of 'em is rotten. Well, it aint no more if I takes one than if it was rotten. Is it now?"

George thought there was a difference, but he did not feel equal to explaining it.

"The policemen must think differently," he said at last, "else they wouldn't be always trying to catch you."

"Who cares for the bobbies?" Bill said contemptuously. "I don't; and I don't want no more jaw with you about it. If yer don't likes it, yer leaves it. I didn't ask for yer company, did I? So now then."

George had really taken a fancy to the boy, and moreover he saw that in the event of a quarrel his chance of finding a refuge for the night was small. In his sense of utter loneliness in the great city he was loath to break with the only acquaintance he had made.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Bill," he said; "only I was sorry to hear you say you took things. It seems to me you might get into trouble; and it would be better after all to work for a living."

"What sort of work?" Bill said derisively. "Who's agoing to give me work? Does yer think I have only got to walk into a

shop and ask for 'ployment? They wouldn't want to know nothing about my character, I suppose? nor where I had worked before? nor where my feyther lived? nor nothing? Oh, no, of course not! It's blooming easy to get work about here; only got to ax for it, that's all. Good wages and all found, that's your kind."

"I don't suppose it's easy," George said; "but it seems to me people could get something to do if they tried."

"Tried!" the boy said bitterly. "Do yer think we don't try! Why, we are always trying to earn a copper or two. Why, we begins at three o'clock in the morning when the market-carts come in, and we goes on till they comes out of that there theater at night, just trying to pick up a copper. Sometimes one does and sometimes one doesn't. It's a good day, I tell you, when we have made a tanner by the end of it. Don't tell me! And now as to this ere stable; yer means it?"

"Yes," George said; "certainly I mean it."

"Wery well then, you be here at this corner at nine o'clock. I will go before that and square it with Ned. That's the chap I was speaking of."

"I had better give you something to give him," George said. "Will a shilling do?"

"Yes, a bob will do for three or four nights. Are you going to trust me with it?"

"Of course I am," George replied. "I am sure you wouldn't be so mean as to do me out of it; besides, you told me that you never stole money and those sort of things."

"It aint everyone as would trust me with a bob for all that," Bill replied; "and yer are running a risk, yer know, and I tells yer if yer goes on with that sort of game yer'll get took in rarely afore yer've done. Well, hand it over. I aint a-going to bilk yer."

The Shadow spoke carelessly, but this proof of confidence on the part of his companion really touched him, and as he went off he said to himself, "He aint a bad sort, that chap, though he is so precious green. I must look arter him a bit and see he don't get into no mischief."

George, on his part, as he walked away down into the Strand again, felt that he had certainly run a risk in thus intrusting a tenth of his capital to his new acquaintance; but the boy's face and manner had attracted him, and he felt that, although the Shadow's notions of right and wrong might be of a confused nature, he meant to act straight toward him.

George passed the intervening hours before the time named for his meeting in Covent Garden in staring into the shop windows in the Strand, and in wondering at the constant stream of vehicles and foot passengers flowing steadily out westward. He was nearly knocked under the wheels of the vehicles a score of times from his ignorance as to the rule of the road, and at last he was so confused by the jostling and pushing that he was glad to turn down a side street and to sit down for a time on a doorstep.

When nine o'clock approached he went into a baker's shop and bought a loaf, which would, he thought, do for supper and breakfast for himself and his companion. Having further invested

threepence in cheese, he made his way up to the market.

The Shadow was standing at the corner whistling loudly.

"Oh, here yer be! That's all right; come along. I have squared Ned, and it's all right."

He led the way down two or three streets and then stopped at a gateway.

"You stop here," he said, "and I will see as there aint no one but Ned about."

He returned in a minute.

"It's all clear! Ned, he's a-rubbing down a hoss; he won't take no notice of yer as yer pass. He don't want to see yer, yer know, 'cause in case anyone comed and found yer up there he could swear he never saw yer go in, and didn't know nothing about yer. I will go with yer to the door, and then yer will see a ladder in the corner; if yer whip up that yer'll find it all right up there."

"But you are coming too, aint you?" George asked.

"Oh, no, I aint a-coming. Yer don't want a chap like me up there. I might pick yer pocket, yer know; besides I aint your sort."

"Oh, nonsense!" George said. "I should like to have you with me, Bill; I should really. Besides, what's the difference between us? We have both got to work for ourselves and make our way in the world."

"There's a lot of difference. Yer don't talk the way as I do; yer have been brought up different. Don't tell me."

"I may have been brought up differently, Bill. I have been fortunate there; but now, you see, I have got to get my living in

the best way I can, and if I have had a better education than you have, you know ever so much more about London and how to get your living than I do, so that makes us quits."

"Oh, wery well," Bill said; "it's all the same to this child. So if yer aint too proud, here goes."

He led the way down a stable yard, past several doors, showing the empty stalls which would be all filled when the market carts arrived. At the last door on the right he stopped. George looked in. At the further end a man was rubbing down a horse by the faint light of a lantern, the rest of the stable was in darkness.

"This way," Bill whispered.

Keeping close behind him, George entered the stable. The boy stopped in the corner.

"Here's the ladder. I will go up fust and give yer a hand when yer gets to the top."

George stood quiet until his companion had mounted, and then ascended the ladder, which was fixed against the wall. Presently a voice whispered in his ear:

"Give us your hand. Mind how yer puts your foot."

In a minute he was standing in the loft. His companion drew him along in the darkness, and in a few steps arrived at a pile of hay.

"There yer are," Bill said in a low voice; "yer 'ave only to make yourself comfortable there. Now mind you don't fall down one of the holes into the mangers."

"I wish we had a little light," George said, as he ensconced

himself in the hay.

"I will give you some light in a minute," Bill said, as he left his side, and directly afterwards a door opened and the light of a gaslight in the yard streamed in.

"That's where they pitches the hay in," Bill said as he rejoined him. "I shuts it up afore I goes to sleep, 'cause the master he comes out sometimes when the carts comes in, and there would be a blooming row if he saw it open; but we are all right now."

"That's much nicer," George said. "Now here's a loaf I brought with me. We will cut it in half and put by a half for the morning, and eat the other half between us now, and I have got some cheese here too."

"That's tiptop!" the boy said. "Yer're a good sort, I could see that, and I am pretty empty, I am, for I aint had nothing except that bit of duff yer gave me since morning, and I only had a crust then. 'Cept for running against you I aint been lucky to-day. Couldn't get a job nohows, and it aint for want of trying neither."

For some minutes the boys ate in silence. George had given much the largest portion to his companion, for he himself was too dead tired to be very hungry. When he had finished, he said:

"Look here, Bill; we will talk in the morning. I am so dead beat I can scarcely keep my eyes open, so I will just say my prayers and go off to sleep."

"Say your prayers!" Bill said in astonishment. "Do yer mean to say as yer says prayers!"

"Of course I do," George replied; "don't you?"

"Never said one in my life," Bill said decidedly; "don't know how, don't see as it would do no good ef I did."

"It would do good, Bill," George said. "I hope some day you will think differently, and I will teach you some you will like."

"I don't want to know none," Bill said positively. "A missionary chap, he came and prayed with an old woman I lodged with once. I could not make head nor tail of it, and she died just the same, so you see what good did it do her?"

But George was too tired to enter upon a theological argument. He was already half asleep, and Bill's voice sounded a long way off.

"Good-night," he muttered; "I will talk to you in the morning," and in another minute he was fast asleep.

Bill took an armful of hay and shook it lightly over his companion; then he closed the door of the loft and threw himself on the hay, and was soon also sound asleep. When George woke in the morning the daylight was streaming in through the cracks of the door. His companion was gone. He heard the voices of several men in the yard, while a steady champing noise and an occasional shout or the sound of a scraping on the stones told him the stalls below were all full now.

George felt that he had better remain where he was. Bill had told him the evening before that the horses and carts generally set out again at about nine o'clock, and he thought he had better wait till they had gone before he slipped down below. Closing his eyes he was very soon off to sleep again. When he woke, Bill was

sitting by his side looking at him.

"Well, you are a oner to sleep," the boy said. "Why, it's nigh ten o'clock, and it's time for us to be moving. Ned will be going off in a few minutes, and the stables will be locked up till the evening."

"Is there time to eat our bread and cheese?" George asked.

"No, we had better eat it when we get down to the market; come along."

George at once rose, shook the hay off his clothes, and descended the ladder, Bill leading the way. There was no one in the stable, and the yard was also empty. On reaching the market they sat down on two empty baskets, and at once began to eat their bread and cheese.

CHAPTER II.
TWO FRIENDS

"I did wake before, Bill," George said after he had eaten a few mouthfuls; "but you were out."

"Yes, I turned out as soon as the carts began to come in," Bill said, "and a wery good morning I have had. One old chap gave me twopence for looking arter his hoss and cart while he went into the market with his flowers. But the best move was just now. A chap as was driving off with flowers, one of them swell West-end shops, I expect, by the look of the trap, let his rug fall. He didn't see it till I ran after him with it, then he gave me a tanner; that was something like. Have yer finished yer bread and cheese?"

"Yes," George said, "and I could manage a drink of water if I could get one."

"There's a fountain handy," Bill said; "but you come along with me, I am agoing to stand two cups of coffee if yer aint too proud to take it;" and he looked doubtfully at his companion.

"I am not at all too proud," George said, for he saw that the slightest hesitation would hurt his companion's feelings.

"It aint fust-rate coffee," Bill said, as with a brightened look on his face he turned and led the way to a little coffee-stall; "but it's hot and sweet, and yer can't expect more nor that for a penny."

George found the coffee really better than he had expected,

and Bill was evidently very much gratified at his expression of approval.

"Now," he said, when they had both finished, "for a draw of 'baccy," and he produced a short clay pipe. "Don't yer smoke?"

"No, I haven't begun yet."

"Ah! ye don't know what a comfort a pipe is," Bill said. "Why, when yer are cold and hungry and down on your luck a pipe is a wonderful thing, and so cheap; why, a ounce of 'baccy will fill yer thirty pipes if yer don't squeeze it in too hard. Well, an ounce of 'baccy costs threepence halfpenny, so, as I makes out, yer gets eight pipes for a penny; and now," he went on when he had filled and lit his pipe, "let's know what's yer game."

"You mean what am I going to do?" George asked.

Bill nodded.

"I want to get employment in some sort of works. I have been an errand-boy in a grocer's for more than a year, and I have got a written character from my master in my pocket; but I don't like the sort of thing; I would rather work with my own hands. There are plenty of works where they employ boys, and you know one might get on as one gets older. The first thing is to find out whereabouts works of that sort are."

"There are lots of works at the East End, I have heard tell," Bill said; "and then there's Clerkenwell and King's Cross, they aint so far off, and there are works there, all sorts of works, I should say; but I don't know nuffin' about that sort of work. The only work as I have done is holding hosses and carrying plants into

the market, and sometimes when I have done pretty well I goes down and lays out what I got in *Echoes*, or *Globes*, or *Evening Standards*; that pays yer, that does, for if yer can sell them all yer will get a bob for eight penn'orth of papers, that gives yer fourpence for an hour's work, and I calls that blooming good, and can't yer get a tuck-out for a bob! Oh, no, I should think not! Well, what shall it be? I knows the way out to Whitechapel and to Clerkenwell, so whichever yer likes I can show yer."

"If Clerkenwell's the nearest we may as well try that first," George said, "and I shall be much obliged to you for showing the way."

The two boys spent the whole day in going from workshop to workshop for employment; but the answers to his application were unvarying: either he was too young or there was no place vacant. George took the disappointment quietly, for he had made up his mind that he would have difficulty in getting a place; but Bill became quite angry on behalf of his companion.

"This is worse nor the market," he said. "A chap can pick up a few coppers there, and here we have been a-tramping about all day and aint done nothing."

Day after day George set out on his quest, but all was without success. He and Bill still slept in the loft, and after the first day he took to getting up at the same time as his companion, and going out with him to try and pick up a few pence from the men with the market-carts. Every other morning they were able to lie later, as there were only regular marketdays three mornings a week.

On market mornings he found that he earned more than Bill, his better clothes giving him an advantage, as the men were more willing to trust their carts and rugs to the care of a quiet, respectable-looking boy than to that of the arabs who frequented the Garden. But all that was earned was laid out in common between the two boys, and George found himself seldom obliged to draw above a few pence on his private stock. He had by this time told the Shadow exactly how much money he had, and the boy, seeing the difficulty that George found in getting work, was most averse to the store being trenched upon, and always gave his vote against the smallest addition to their ordinary fare of bread and cheese being purchased, except from their earnings of the day. This George felt was the more creditable on Bill's part, inasmuch as the latter had, in deference to his prejudices, abstained from the petty thefts of fruit with which before he had seasoned his dry crusts.

George had learned now what Bill knew of his history, which was little enough. He supposed he had had a father, but he knew nothing of him; whether he had died, or whether he had cut away and left mother, Bill had no idea. His mother he remembered well, though she had died when he was, as he said, a little chap. He spoke of her always in a hushed voice, and in a tone of reverence, as a superior being.

"We was poor, you know," he said to George, "and I know mother was often short of grub, but she was just kind. I don't never remember her whacking me; always spoke soft and low

like; she was good, she was. She used to pray, you know, and what I remember most is as the night afore she was took away to a hospital she says, 'Try and live honest, Bill; it will be hard, but try, my boy. Don't you take to stealing, however poor you may be;' and I aint," Bill said earnestly over and over again. "When I has seed any chap going along with a ticker handy, which I could have boned and got away among the carts as safe as ninepence, or when I has seed a woman with her purse a-sticking out of them outside pockets, and I aint had a penny to bless myself with, and perhaps nothing to eat all day, I have felt it hard not to make a grab; but I just thought of what she said, and I aint done it. As I told yer, I have often nabbed things off the stalls or out of the baskets or carts. It didn't seem to me as that was stealing, but as you says it is, I aint going to do so no more. Now look yer here, George; they tells me as the parsons says as when people die and they are good they goes up there, yer know."

George nodded, for there was a question in his companion's tone.

"Then, of course," Bill went on, "she is up there. Now it aint likely as ever I should see her again, 'cause, you know, there aint nothing good about me; but if she was to come my way, wherever I might be, and was to say to me, 'Bill, have you been a-stealing?' do yer think she would feel very bad about them 'ere apples and things?"

"No, Bill, I am sure she would not. You see you didn't quite know that was stealing, and you kept from stealing the things that

you thought she spoke of, and now that you see it is wrong taking even little things you are not going to take them any more."

"That I won't, so help me bob!" the boy said; "not if I never gets another apple between my teeth."

"That's right, Bill. You see you ought to do it, not only to please your mother, but to please God. That's what my mother has told me over and over again."

"Has she now?" Bill said with great interest, "and did you use to prig apples and sichlike sometimes?"

"No," George said, "not that sort of thing; but she was talking of things in general. Of doing things that were wrong, such as telling lies and deceiving, and that sort of thing."

"And your mother thinks as God knows all about it?"

George nodded.

"And that he don't like it, eh, when things is done bad?"

George nodded again.

"Lor', what a time he must have of it!" Bill said in solemn wonder. "Why, I heard a woman say last week as six children was enough to worrit anyone into the grave; and just to think of all of us!" and Bill waved his arm in a comprehensive way and repeated, "What a time he must have of it!"

For a time the boys sat silent in their loft, Bill wondering over the problem that had presented itself to him, and George trying to find some appropriate explanation in reply to the difficulty Bill had started. At last he said:

"I am afraid, Bill, that I can't explain all this to you, for I am

not accustomed to talk about such things. My mother talks to me sometimes, and of course I went to church regularly; but that's different from my talking about it; but you know what we have got to do is to try and please God, and love him because he loves us."

"That's whear it is," Bill said; "that's what I've heard fellows say beats 'em. If he loves a chap like me how is it he don't do something for him? why don't he get you a place, for instance? You aint been a-prigging apples or a-putting him out. That's what I wants to know."

"Yes, Bill, but as I have heard my mother say, it would be very hard to understand if this world were the only one; but you see we are only here a little time, and after that there's on and on and on, right up without any end, and what does it matter if we are poor or unhappy in this little time if we are going to be ever so happy afterwards? This is only a sort of little trial to see how we behave, as it were, and if we do the best we can, even though that best is very little, then you see we get a tremendous reward. For instance, you would not think a man was unkind who kept you five minutes holding his horse on a cold day, if he were going to give you enough to get you clothes and good lodging for the rest of your life."

"No, I should think not," Bill said fervently; "so it's like that, is it?"

George nodded. "Like that, only more."

"My eye!" Bill murmured to himself, lost in astonishment at

this new view of things.

After that there were few evenings when, before they nestled themselves down in the hay, the boys did not talk on this subject. At first George felt awkward and nervous in speaking of it, for like the generality of English boys, however earnest their convictions may be, he was shy of speaking what he felt; but his companion's eagerness to know more of this, to him, new story encouraged him to speak, and having in his bundle a small Bible which his mother had given him, he took to reading to Bill a chapter or two in the mornings when they had not to go out to the early market.

It is true that Bill's questions frequently puzzled him. The boy saw things in a light so wholly different from that in which he himself had been accustomed to regard them that he found a great difficulty in replying to them.

George wrote a letter to his mother, telling her exactly what he was doing, for he knew that if he only said that he had not yet succeeded in getting work she would be very anxious about him, and although he had nothing satisfactory to tell her, at least he could tell her that he had sufficient to eat and as much comfort as he cared for. Twice he received replies from her, directed to him at a little coffee-house, which, when they had had luck, the boys occasionally patronized. As time went on without his succeeding in obtaining employment George's hopes fell, and at last he said to his mate; "I will try for another fortnight, Bill, and if at the end of that time I don't get anything to do I shall go back to Croydon

again."

"But yer can earn yer living here!" Bill remonstrated.

"I can earn enough to prevent me from starving, but that is all, Bill. I came up to London in hopes of getting something to do by which I might some day make my way up; if I were to stop here like this I should be going down, and a nice sight I should be to mother if, when she gets well enough to come out of the infirmary, I were to go back all in rags."

"What sort of a place is Croydon?" Bill asked. "Is there any chance of picking up a living there? 'cause I tells yer fair, if yer goes off I goes with yer. I aint a-thinking of living with yer, George; but we might see each other sometime, mightn't we? Yer wouldn't mind that?"

"Mind it! certainly not, Bill! You have been a good friend to me, and I should be sorry to think of you all alone here."

"Oh, blow being a good friend to yer!" Bill replied. "I aint done nothing except put yer in the way of getting a sleeping-place, and as it's given me one too I have had the best of that job. It's been good of yer to take up with a chap like me as don't know how to read or write or nothing, and as aint no good anyway. But you will let me go with yer to Croydon, won't yer?"

"Certainly I will, Bill; but you won't be able to see much of me. I shall have to get a place like the last. The man I was with said he would take me back again if I wanted to come, and you know I am all day in the shop or going out with parcels, and of course you would have to be busy too at something."

"What sort of thing do yer think, George? I can hold a hoss, but that aint much for a living. One may go for days without getting a chance."

"I should say, Bill, that your best chance would be to try and get work either in a brickfield or with a market-gardener. At any rate we should be able to get a talk for half an hour in the evening. I was always done at nine o'clock, and if we were both in work we could take a room together."

Bill shook his head.

"That would be wery nice, but I couldn't have it, George. I knows as I aint fit company for yer, and if yer was with a shop-keeping bloke he would think yer was going to run off with the money if he knew yer kept company with a chap like me. No, the 'greement must be as yer goes yer ways and I goes mine; but I hopes as yer will find suffin to do up here, not 'cause as I wouldn't like to go down to this place of yourn, but because yer have set yer heart on getting work here."

A week later the two boys were out late in Covent Garden trying to earn a few pence by fetching up cabs and carriages for people coming out from a concert in the floral hall. George had just succeeded in earning threepence, and had returned to the entrance to the hall, and was watching the people come out, and trying to get another job. Presently a gentleman, with a girl of some nine or ten years old, came out and took their place on the footpath.

"Can I call you a carriage, sir?" George asked.

"No, thank you, lad, a man has gone for it."

George fell back and stood watching the girl, who was in a white dress, with a little hood trimmed with swansdown over her head.

Presently his eye fell on something on which the light glittered as it hung from her neck. Just as he was looking a hand reached over her shoulder, there was a jerk, and a sudden cry from the child, then a boy dived into the crowd, and at the same moment George dashed after him. There was a cry of "Stop, thief!" and several hands made a grab at George as he dived through the crowd; but he slipped through them and was soon in the roadway.

Some twenty yards ahead of him he saw the boy running. He turned up Bow Street and then dashed down an alley. He did not know that he was followed until suddenly George sprang upon his back, and the two fell with a crash, the young thief undermost. George seized his right hand, and kneeling upon him, twisted it behind his back and forced him to open his fingers, the boy, taken by surprise, and not knowing who was his assailant, making but slight resistance.

George seized the gold locket and dashed back at full speed into the market, and was soon in the thick of the crowd round the entrance. The gentleman was standing talking to a policeman, who was taking a note of the description of the lost trinket. The girl was standing by crying.

"Here is your locket," George said, putting it into her hand. "I saw the boy take it, and have got it from him."

"Oh, papa! papa!" the girl cried. "Here is my locket again."

"Why, where did you get it from?" her father asked in astonishment.

"This boy has just given it to me," she replied. "He says he took it from the boy who stole it."

"Which boy, Nellie? Which is the boy who brought it back?"

The girl looked round, but George was gone.

"Why didn't you stop him, my dear?" her father said. "Of course I should wish to thank and reward him, for the locket was a very valuable one, and the more so to us from its having belonged to your mother. Did you notice the boy, policeman?"

"No, sir, I did not see him at all."

"Was he a poor boy, Nellie?"

"Not a very, very poor boy, father," the girl replied. "At least I don't think so; but I only looked at his face. He didn't speak like a poor boy at all."

"Would you know him again?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I should. He was a good-looking boy with a nice face."

"Well, I am very sorry he has gone away, my dear. Evidently he does not want a reward, but at any rate I should have liked to thank him. Are you always on this beat, policeman?"

"I am on night duty, sir, while the concerts are on."

"At any rate, I dare say you know the constables who are about here in the daytime. I wish you would mention the fact to them, and ask them if they get any clew to the boy who has rendered

me this service, to let me know. Here is a card with my name and address."

After restoring the locket George made his way to the entrance to the stables, where he generally met Bill after the theater had closed and there was no farther chance of earning money. It was not till half an hour later that the boy came running up.

"I have got eightpence," he said. "That is something like luck. I got three jobs. One stood me fourpence, the other two gave me tuppence each. What do yer say? Shall we have a cup of coffee afore we turns in?"

"I think we had better not, Bill. I have got sixpence. We will put that by, with the sixpence we saved the other day, for the hostler. We haven't given him anything for some time. Your eightpence will get us a good breakfast in the morning."

When they had comfortably nestled themselves in the hay George told his companion how he had rescued and restored the locket.

"And he didn't give yer nuffin! I never heerd tell of such a scaly trick as that. I should ha' said it ought to have been good for a bob anyway."

"I did not wait to see, Bill. Directly I had given the little girl her locket I bolted."

"Well, that were soft. Why couldn't yer have waited to have seen what the bloke meant to give yer?"

"I did not want to be paid for such a thing as that," George

replied. "I don't mind being paid when I have done a job for anyone; but this was different altogether."

Bill meditated for a minute or two.

"I can't see no difference, nohow," he said at last. "Yer did him a good turn, and got the thing back. I dare say it were worth five bob."

"A good deal more than that, Bill."

"More nor that! Well, then, he ought to have come down handsome. Didn't yer run like winking, and didn't yer jump on the chap's back and knock him down, and didn't yer run back again? And warn't there a chance, ef one of the bobbies had got hold of yer collar and found it in yer hand, of yer being had up for stealing it? And then yer walks off and don't give him a chance of giving yer nuffin. My eye, but yer are a flat!"

"I don't suppose you will quite understand, Bill. But when people do a thing to oblige somebody, and not as a piece of regular work, they don't expect to be paid. I shouldn't have liked it if they had offered me money for such a thing."

"Well, ef yer says so, no doubt it's right," Bill rejoined; "but it seems a rum sort of notion to me. When people loses things they expects to pay to get 'em back. Why, don't yer see outside the p'lice station, and in the shop winders, papers offering so much for giving back things as is lost. I can't read 'em myself, yer know; but chaps have read 'em to me. Why, I've heerd of as much as five quid being offered for watches and sichlike as was lost by ladies coming out of theayters, and I have often thought what a

turn of luck it would be to light on one of 'em. And now yer says as I oughtn't to take the money ef I found it."

"No, I don't say that, Bill. If you found a thing and saw a reward offered, and you wanted the money, you would have good right to take it. But, you see, in this case I saw how sorry the girl was at losing her locket, and I went after it to please her, and I was quite content that I got it back for her."

Bill tried again to think the matter over in his mind, but he was getting warm and sleepy, and in a few minutes was sound off.

Two or three days later the lads had, to their great satisfaction, obtained a job. Walnuts were just coming in, and the boys were engaged to take off the green shucks. Bill was particularly pleased, for he had never before been taken on for such a job, and he considered it a sort of promotion. Five or six women were also employed, and as the group were standing round some great baskets Bill suddenly nudged his friend:

"I say, my eye, aint that little gal pretty?"

George looked up from his work and at once recognized the girl to whom he had restored the locket. Her eye fell on him at the same moment.

"There, papa!" she exclaimed. "I told you if you brought me down to the market I felt sure I should know the boy again if I saw him. That's him, the one looking down into the basket. But he knew me again, for I saw him look surprised when he noticed me."

The gentleman made his way through the women to George.

"My lad, are you the boy who restored the locket to my daughter three evenings ago?"

"Yes, sir," George said, coloring as he looked up. "I was standing close by when the boy took it, so I gave chase and brought it back, and that's all."

"You were off again in such a hurry that we hadn't time to thank you. Just come across to my daughter. I suppose you can leave your work for a minute?"

"Yes, sir. We are working by the job," George said, and looking rather shamefaced he followed the gentleman to the sidewalk.

"This is your boy, as you call him, Nellie."

"I was sure I should know him again," the child said, "though I only saw him for a moment. We are very much obliged to you, boy, papa and me, because it had been mamma's locket, and we should have been very sorry to have lost it."

"I am glad I was able to get it back for you," George said; "but I don't want to be thanked for doing it; and I don't want to be paid either, thank you, sir," he said, flushing as the gentleman put his hand into his pocket.

"No! and why not?" the gentleman said in surprise. "You have done me a great service, and there is no reason why I should not pay you for it. If I had lost it I would gladly have paid a reward to get it back."

"Thank you, sir," George said quietly; "but all the same I would rather not be paid for a little thing like that."

"You are a strange fellow," the gentleman said again. "One does not expect to find a boy in the market here refusing money when he has earned it."

"I should not refuse it if I had earned it," George said; "but I don't call getting back a locket for a young lady who has lost it earning money."

"How do you live, lad? You don't speak like a boy who has been brought up in the market here."

"I have only been here three months," George said. "I came up to London to look for work, but could not get any. Most days I go about looking for it, and do what odd jobs I can get when there's a chance."

"What sort of work do you want? Have you been accustomed to any work? Perhaps I could help you."

"I have been a year as an errand-boy," George answered; "but I didn't like it, and I thought I would rather get some sort of work that I could work at when I got to be a man instead of sticking in a shop."

"Did you run away from home, then?" the gentleman asked.

"No, sir. My mother was ill and went into an infirmary, and so as I was alone I thought I would come to London and try to get the sort of work I liked; but I have tried almost all over London."

"And are you all alone here?"

"No, sir, not quite alone. I found a friend in that boy there, and we have worked together since I came up."

"Well, lad, if you really want work I can give it you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" George exclaimed fervently.

"And your friend too, if he likes. I have some works down at Limehouse and employ a good many boys. Here is the address;" and he took a card from his pocket, wrote a few words on the back of it, and handed it to George.

"Ask for the foreman, and give him that, and he will arrange for you to begin work on Monday. Come along, Nellie; we have got to buy the fruit for to-morrow, you know."

So saying he took his daughter's hand, and George, wild with delight, ran off to tell Bill that he had obtained work for them both.

"Well, Nellie, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, I am glad you could give him work, papa; didn't he look pleased? Wasn't it funny his saying he wouldn't have any money?"

"Yes; I hardly expected to have met with a refusal in Covent Garden; but you were right, child, and you are a better judge of character than I gave you credit for. You said he was a nice-looking lad, and spoke like a gentleman, and he does. He is really a very good style of boy. Of course he is shabby and dirty now, and you see he has been an errand-boy at a grocer's; but he must have been better brought up than the generality of such lads. The one he called his friend looked a wild sort of specimen, altogether a different sort of boy. I should say he was one of the regular arabs hanging about this place. If so, I expect a very few days' work will sicken him; but I shouldn't be surprised if your boy, as

you call him, sticks to it."

The next morning the two boys presented themselves at Mr. Penrose's works at Limehouse. These were sawing and planing works, and the sound of many wheels, and the hoarse rasping sound of saws innumerable, came out through the open windows of the building as they entered the yard.

"Now what do you boys want?" a workman said as he appeared at one of the doors.

"We want to see the foreman," George said. "I have a card for him from Mr. Penrose."

"I will let him know," the man replied.

Two minutes later the foreman came out, and George handed him the card. He read what Mr. Penrose had written upon it and said:

"Very well, you can come in on Monday; pay, eight shillings a week; seven o'clock; there, that will do. Oh, what are your names?" taking out a pocket-book. "George Andrews and William Smith;" and then, with a nod, he went back into his room, while the boys, almost bewildered at the rapidity with which the business had been arranged, went out into the street again.

"There we are, Bill, employed," George said in delight.

"Yes, there we is," Bill agreed, but in a more doubtful tone; "it's a rum start, aint it? I don't expect I shall make much hand of it, but I am wery glad for you, George."

"Why shouldn't you make much hand of it? You are as strong

as I am."

"Yes; but then, you see, I aint been accustomed to work regular, and I expect I shan't like it – not at first; but I am going to try. George, don't yer think as I aint agoing to try. I aint that sort; still I expects I shall get the sack afore long."

"Nonsense, Bill! you will like it when you once get accustomed to it, and it's a thousand times better having to draw your pay regularly at the end of the week than to get up in the morning not knowing whether you are going to have breakfast or not. Won't mother be pleased when I write and tell her I have got a place! Last time she wrote she said that she was a great deal better, and the doctor thought she would be out in the spring, and then I hope she will be coming up here, and that will be jolly."

"Yes, that's just it," Bill said; "that's whear it is; you and I will get on fust-rate, but it aint likely as your mother would put up with a chap like me."

"My mother knows that you have been a good friend to me, Bill, and that will be quite enough for her. You wait till you see her."

"My eye, what a lot of little houses there is about here!" Bill said, "just all the same pattern; and how wide the streets is to what they is up Drury Lane!"

"Yes, we ought to have no difficulty in getting a room here, Bill, now that we shall have money to pay for it; only think, we shall have sixteen shillings a week between us!"

"It's a lot of money," Bill said vaguely. "Sixteen bob! My

eye, there aint no saying what it will buy! I wish I looked a little bit more respectable," he said, with a new feeling as to the deficiencies of his attire. "It didn't matter in the Garden; but to go to work with a lot of other chaps, these togs aint what you may call spicy."

"They certainly are not, Bill," George said with a laugh. "We must see what we can manage."

George's own clothes were worn and old, but they looked respectable indeed by the side of those of his companion. Bill's elbows were both out, the jacket was torn and ragged, he had no waistcoat, and his trousers were far too large for him, and were kept up by a single brace, and were patched in a dozen places.

When George first met him he was shoeless, but soon after they had set up housekeeping together George had bought from a cobbler's stall a pair of boots for two shillings, and these, although now almost falling to pieces, were still the best part of Bill's outfit.

CHAPTER III.
WORK

The next morning George went out with the bundle containing his Sunday clothes, which had been untouched since his arrival in town, and going to an old-clothes shop he exchanged them for a suit of working clothes in fair condition, and then returning hid his bundle in the hay and rejoined Bill, who had from early morning been at work shelling walnuts. Although Bill was somewhat surprised at his companion not beginning work at the usual time he asked no questions, for his faith in George was so unbounded that everything he did was right in his eyes.

"There is our last day's work in the market, Bill," George said as they reached their loft that evening.

"It's your last day's work, George, I aint no doubt; but I expects it aint mine by a long way. I have been a-thinking over this 'ere go, and I don't think as it will act nohow. In the first place I aint fit to go to such a place, and they are sure to make it hot for me."

"That's nonsense, Bill; there are lots of roughish sort of boys in works of that sort, and you will soon be at home with the rest."

"In the next place," Bill went on, unheeding the interruption, "I shall be getting into some blooming row or other afore I have been there a week, and they will like enough turn you out as well as me. That's what I am a-thinking most on, George. If they

chucks me the chances are as they chucks you too; and if they did that arter all the pains you have had to get a place I should go straight off and make a hole in the water. That's how I looks at it."

"But I don't think, Bill, that there's any chance of your getting into a row. Of course at first we must both expect to be blown up sometimes, but if we do our best and don't answer back again we shall do as well as the others."

"Oh, I shouldn't cheek 'em back," Bill said. "I am pretty well used to getting blown up. Every one's always at it, and I know well enough as it don't pay to cheek back, not unless you have got a market-cart between you and a clear road for a bolt. I wasn't born yesterday. Yer've been wery good to me, you have, George, and before any harm should come to yer through me, s'help me, I'd chuck myself under a market-wagon."

"I know you would, Bill; but, whatever you say, you have been a far greater help to me than I have to you. Anyhow we are not going to part now. You are coming to work with me to start with, and I know you will do your best to keep your place. If you fail, well, so much the worse, it can't be helped; but after our being sent there by Mr. Penrose I feel quite sure that the foreman would not turn me off even if he had to get rid of you."

"D'yer think so?"

"I do, indeed, Bill."

"Will yer take yer davey?"

"Yes, if it's any satisfaction to you, Bill, I will take my davey that I do not think that they would turn me off even if they sent

you away."

"And yer really wants me to go with yer, so help yer?"

"Really and truly, Bill."

"Wery well, George, then I goes; but mind yer, it's 'cause yer wishes me."

So saying, Bill curled himself up in the hay, and George soon heard by his regular breathing that he was sound asleep.

The next morning, before anyone was stirring, they went down into the yard, as was their custom on Sunday mornings, for a good wash, stripping to the waist and taking it by turns to pump over each other. Bill had at first protested against the fashion, saying as he did very well and did not see no use in it; but seeing that George really enjoyed it he followed his example. After a morning or two, indeed, and with the aid of a piece of soap which George had bought, Bill got himself so bright and shiny as to excite much sarcastic comment and remark from his former companions, which led to more than one pugilistic encounter.

That morning George remained behind in the loft for a minute or two after Bill had run down, attired only in his trousers. When Bill went up the ladder after his ablutions he began hunting about in the hay.

"What are you up to, Bill?"

"Blest if I can find my shirt. Here's two of yourn knocking about, but I can't see where's mine, nor my jacket neither."

"It's no use your looking, Bill, for you won't find them, and even if you found them you couldn't put 'em on. I have torn them

up."

"Torn up my jacket!" Bill exclaimed in consternation. "What lark are yer up to now, George?"

"No lark at all. We are going together to work to-morrow, and you could not go as you were; so you put on that shirt and those things," and he threw over the clothes he had procured the day before.

Bill looked in astonishment.

"Why, where did yer get 'em, George? I knows yer only had four bob with what we got yesterday. Yer didn't find 'em, and yer didn't – no, in course yer didn't – nip 'em."

"No, I didn't steal them certainly," George said, laughing. "I swapped my Sunday clothes for them yesterday. I can do without them very well till we earn enough to get another suit. There, don't say anything about it, Bill, else I will punch your head."

Bill stared at him with open eyes for a minute, and then threw himself down in the hay and burst into tears.

"Oh, I say, don't do that!" George exclaimed. "What have you to cry about?"

"Aint it enough to make a cove cry," Bill sobbed, "to find a chap doing things for him like that? I wish I may die if I don't feel as if I should bust. It's too much, that's what it is, and it's all on one side; that's the wust of it."

"I dare say you will make it even some time, Bill; so don't let's say anything more about it, but put on your clothes. We will have a cup of coffee each and a loaf between us for breakfast, and

then we will go for a walk into the park, the same as we did last Sunday, and hear the preaching."

The next morning they were up at their accustomed hour and arrived at the works at Limehouse before the doors were opened. Presently some men and boys arrived, the doors were opened, and the two boys followed the others in.

"Hallo! who are you?" the man at the gate asked.

George gave their names, and the man looked at his time-book.

"Yes, it's all right; you are the new boys. You are to go into that planing-shop," and he pointed to one of the doors opening into the yard.

The boys were not long before they were at work. Bill was ordered to take planks from a large pile and to hand them to a man, who passed them under one of the planing-machines. George was told to take them away as fast as they were finished and pile them against a wall. When the machines stopped for any adjustment or alteration both were to sweep up the shavings and ram them into bags, in which they were carried to the engine-house.

For a time the boys were almost dazzled by the whirl of the machinery, the rapid motion of the numerous wheels and shafting overhead, and of the broad bands which carried the power from them to the machinery on the floor, by the storm of shavings which flew from the cutters, and the unceasing activity which prevailed around them. Beyond receiving an occasional

order, shouted in a loud tone – for conversation in an ordinary voice would have been inaudible – nothing occurred till the bell rang at half-past eight for breakfast. Then the machinery suddenly stopped, and a strange hush succeeded the din which had prevailed.

"How long have we got now?" George asked the man from whose bench he had been taking the planks.

"Half an hour," the man said as he hurried away.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bill?" George asked when they had got outside.

"Didn't think as there could be such a row," Bill replied. "Why, talk about the Garden! Lor', why it aint nothing to it. I hardly knew what I was a-doing at first."

"No more did I, Bill. You must mind what you do and not touch any of those straps and wheels and things. I know when I was at Croydon there was a man killed in a sawmill there by being caught in the strap; they said it drew him up and smashed him against the ceiling. And now we had better look out for a baker's."

"I suppose there aint a coffee-stall nowhere handy?"

"I don't suppose there is, Bill; at any rate we have no time to spare to look for one. There's a pump in the yard, so we can have a drink of water as we come back. Well, the work doesn't seem very hard, Bill," George said as they ate their bread.

"No, it aint hard," Bill admitted, "if it weren't for all them rattling wheels. But I expect it aint going to be like that regular.

They've just gived us an easy job to begin with. Yer'll see it will be worse presently."

"We shall soon get accustomed to the noise, Bill, and I don't think we shall find the work any harder. They don't put boys at hard work, but just jobs like we are doing, to help the men."

"What shall we do about night, George?"

"I think that at dinner-time we had better ask the man we work for. He looks a good-natured sort of chap. He may know of someone he could recommend us to."

They worked steadily till dinner-time; then as they came out George said to the man with whom they were working:

"We want to get a room. We have been lodging together in London, and don't know anyone down here. I thought perhaps you could tell us of some quiet, respectable people who have a room to let?"

The man looked at George more closely than he had hitherto done.

"Well, there aint many people as would care about taking in two boys, but you seem a well-spoken young chap and different to most of 'em. Do you think you could keep regular hours, and not come clattering in and out fifty times in the evening, and playing tom-fools' tricks of all sorts?"

"I don't think we should be troublesome," George said; "and I am quite sure we shouldn't be noisy."

"You would want to be cooked for, in course?"

"No, I don't think so," George said. "Beyond hot water for a

cup of tea in the evening, we should not want much cooking done, especially if there is a coffee-stall anywhere where we could get a cup in the morning."

"You haven't got any traps, I suppose?"

George looked puzzled.

"I mean bed and chairs, and so on."

George shook his head.

"We might get them afterwards, but we haven't any now."

"Well, I don't mind trying you young fellows. I have got a bedroom in my place empty. A brother of mine who lodged and worked with me has just got a job as foreman down in the country. At any rate I will try you for a week, and if at the end of that time you and my missis don't get on together you must shift. Two bob a week. I suppose that will about suit you?"

George said that would suit very well, and expressed his thanks to the man for taking them in.

They had been walking briskly since they left the works, and now stopped suddenly before the door of a house in a row. It was just like its neighbor, except that George noticed that the blinds and windows were cleaner than the others, and that the door had been newly painted and varnished.

"Here we are," the man said. "You had best come in and see the missis and the room. Missis!" he shouted, and a woman appeared from the backroom. "I have let Harry's room, mother," he said, "and these are the new lodgers."

"My stars, John!" she exclaimed; "you don't mean to say that

you let the room to them two boys. I should have thought you had better sense. Why, they will be trampling up and down the stairs like young hosses, wear out the oil cloth, and frighten the baby into fits. I never did hear such a thing!"

"I think they are quiet boys, Bessie, and won't give much trouble. At any rate I have agreed to try them for a week, and if you don't get on with them at the end of that time, of course they must go. They have only come to work at the shop to-day; they work with me, and as far as I can see they are quiet young chaps enough. Come along, lads, I will show you your room."

It was halfway up the stairs, at the back of the house, over the kitchen, which was built out there. It was a comfortable little room, not large, but sufficiently so for two boys. There was a bed, a chest of drawers, two chairs, and a dressing-table, and a strip of carpet ran alongside the bed, and there was, moreover, a small fireplace.

"Will that do for you?" the man asked.

"Capitally," George said; "it could not be nicer;" while Bill was so taken aback by its comfort and luxury that he was speechless.

"Well, that's settled, then," the man said. "If you have got any things you can bring 'em in when you like."

"We have not got any to speak of," George said, flushing a little. "I came up from the country three months ago to look for work, and beyond odd jobs I have had nothing to do since, so that everything I had is pretty well gone; but I can pay a week's rent in advance," he said, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, you needn't mind that!" the man said; "as you work in the shop it's safe enough. Now I must get my dinner, else I shall be late for work."

"Well, Bill, what do you think of that?" George asked as they left the house.

"My eye," Bill exclaimed in admiration; "aint it nice just! Why, yer couldn't get a room like that, not furnished, anywhere near the market, not at four bob a week. Aint it clean just; so help me if the house don't look as if it has been scrubbed down every day! What a woman that must be for washing!"

"Yes; we shall have to rub our feet well, Bill, and make as little mess as we can in going in and out."

"I should think so," Bill said. "It don't seem to me as if it could be true as we're to have such a room as that to ourselves, and to walk into a house bold without being afraid as somebody would have his eye on you, and chivey you; and eight bob a week for grub regular."

"Well, let's get some bread and cheese, Bill; pretty near half our time must be gone, and mind we must be very saving at first. There will be several things to get; a kettle and a teapot, and a coffeepot, and some cups and saucers, and we shall want a gridiron for frying rashers of bacon upon."

"My eye, won't it be prime!" Bill broke in.

"And we shall want some towels," George went on with his enumeration.

"Towels!" repeated Bill. "What are they like?"

"They are cloths for wiping your hands and face after you have washed."

"Well, if yer says we wants 'em, George, of course we must get 'em; but I've always found my hands dried quick enough by themselves, especially if I gived 'em a rub on my trousers."

"And then, Bill, you know," George went on, "I want to save every penny we can, so as to get some things to furnish two rooms by the time mother comes out."

"Yes, in course we must," Bill agreed warmly, though a slight shade passed over his face at the thought that they were not to be always alone together. "Well, yer know, George, I am game for anythink. I can hold on with a penn'orth of bread a day. I have done it over and over, and if yer says the word I am ready to do it again."

"No, Bill, we needn't do that," George laughed. "Still, we must live as cheap as we can. We will stick to bread for breakfast, and bread and cheese for dinner, and bread for supper, with sometimes a rasher as a great treat. At any rate we will try to live on six shillings a week."

"Oh! we can do that fine," Bill said confidently; "and then two shillings for rent, and that will leave us eight shillings a week to put by."

"Mother said that the doctor didn't think she would be able to come out 'til the spring. We are just at the beginning of November, so if she comes out the first of April, that's five months, say twenty-two weeks. Twenty-two weeks at eight

shillings, let me see. That's eight pounds in twenty weeks, eight pounds sixteen altogether, that would furnish two rooms very well, I should think."

"My eye, I should think so!" Bill exclaimed, for to his mind eight pound sixteen was an almost unheard-of sum, and the fact that his companion had been able to calculate it increased if possible his admiration for him.

It needed but two or three days to reconcile Mrs. Grimstone to her new lodgers.

"I wouldn't have believed," she said at the end of the week to a neighbor, "as two boys could have been that quiet. They comes in after work as regular as the master. They rubs their feet on the mat, and you can scarce hear 'em go upstairs, and I don't hear no more of 'em till they goes out agin in the morning. They don't come back here to breakfast or dinner. Eats it, I suppose, standing like."

"But what do they do with themselves all the evening, Mrs. Grimstone?"

"One of 'em reads to the other. I think I can hear a voice going regular over the kitchen."

"And how's their room?"

"As clean and tidy as a new pin. They don't lock the door when they goes out, and I looked in yesterday, expecting to find it like a pigsty; but they had made the bed afore starting for work, and set everything in its place, and laid the fire like for when they come back."

Mrs. Grimstone was right. George had expended six pence in as many old books at a bookstall. One of them was a spelling-book, and he had at once set to work teaching Bill his letters. Bill had at first protested. "He had done very well without reading, and didn't see much good in it." However, as George insisted he gave way, as he would have done to any proposition whatever upon which his friend had set his mind. So for an hour every evening after they had finished tea Bill worked at his letters and spelling, and then George read aloud to him from one of the other books.

"You must get on as fast as you can this winter, Bill," he said; "because when the summer evenings come we shall want to go for long walks."

They found that they did very well upon the sum they agreed on. Tea and sugar cost less than George had expected. Mrs. Grimstone took in for them regularly a halfpenny-worth of milk, and for tea they were generally able to afford a bloater between them, or a very thin rasher of bacon. Their enjoyment of their meals was immense. Bill indeed frequently protested that they were spending too much money; but George said as long as they kept within the sum agreed upon, and paid their rent, coal, candles, and what little washing they required out of the eight shillings a week, they were doing very well.

They had by this time got accustomed to the din of the machinery, and were able to work in comfort. Mr. Penrose had several times come through the room, and had given them a nod.

After they had been there a month he spoke to Grimstone.

"How do those boys do their work?"

"Wonderful well, sir; they are the two best boys we have ever had. No skylarking about, and I never have to wait a minute for a plank. They generally comes in a few minutes before time and gets the bench cleared up. They are first-rate boys. They lodge with me, and two quieter and better-behaved chaps in a house there never was."

"I am glad to hear it," Mr. Penrose said. "I am interested in them, and am pleased to hear so good an account."

That Saturday, to their surprise, when they went to get their money they received ten shillings apiece.

"That's two shillings too much," George said as the money was handed to them.

"That's all right," the foreman said. "The governor ordered you both to have a rise."

"My eye!" Bill said as they went out. "What do you think of that, George? Four bob a week more to put by regularly. How much more will that make by the time your mother comes?"

"We won't put it all by, Bill. I think the other will be enough. This four shillings a week we will put aside at present for clothes. We want two more shirts apiece, and some more stockings, and we shall want some shoes before long, and another suit of clothes each. We must keep ourselves decent, you know."

From the time when they began work the boys had gone regularly every Sunday morning to a small iron church near

their lodging, and they also went to an evening service once a week. Their talk, too, at home was often on religion, for Bill was extremely anxious to learn, and although his questions and remarks often puzzled George to answer, he was always ready to explain things as far as he could.

February came, and to George's delight he heard, from his mother that she was so much better that the doctor thought that when she came out at the end of April she would be as strong as she had ever been. Her eyes had benefited greatly by her long rest, and she said that she was sure she should be able to do work as before. She had written several times since they had been at Limehouse, expressing her great pleasure at hearing that George was so well and comfortable. At Christmas, the works being closed for four days, George had gone down to see her, and they had a delightful talk together. Christmas had indeed been a memorable occasion to the boys, for on Christmas Eve the carrier had left a basket at Grimstone's directed "George Andrews." The boys had prepared their Christmas dinner, consisting of some fine rashers of bacon and sixpenny-worth of cold plum pudding from a cook-shop, and had already rather lamented this outlay, for Mrs. Grimstone had that afternoon invited them to dine downstairs. George was reading from a book which he bought for a penny that morning when there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Grimstone said:

"Here is a hamper for you, George."

"A hamper for me!" George exclaimed in astonishment,

opening the door. "Why, whoever could have sent a hamper for me! It must be a mistake."

"That's your name on the direction, anyhows," Mrs. Grimstone said.

"Yes, that's my name, sure enough," George agreed, and at once began to unknot the string which fastened down the lid.

"Here is a Christmas card at the top!" he shouted. He turned it over. On the back were the words:

"With all good wishes, Helen Penrose."

"Well, that is kind," George said in rather a husky voice; and indeed it was the kindness that prompted the gift rather than the gift itself that touched him.

"Now, then, George," Bill remonstrated; "never mind that there card, let's see what's inside."

The hamper was unpacked, and was found to contain a cold goose, a Christmas pudding, and some oranges and apples. These were all placed on the table, and when Mrs. Grimstone had retired Bill executed a war-dance in triumph and delight.

"I never did see such a game," he said at last, as he sat down exhausted. "There's a Christmas dinner for yer! Why, it's like them stories of the genii you was a-telling me about – chaps as come whenever yer rubbed a ring or an old lamp, and brought a tuck-out or whatever yer asked for. Of course that wasn't true; yer told me it wasn't, and I shouldn't have believed it if yer hadn't, but this 'ere is true. Now I sees, George, as what yer said was right and what I said was wrong. I thought yer were a flat 'cause yer

wouldn't take nothing for getting back that there locket, and now yer see what's come of it, two good berths for us and a Christmas dinner fit for a king. Now what are we going to do with it, 'cause yer know we dines with them downstairs to-morrow?"

"The best thing we can do, I think," George answered, "will be to invite all of them downstairs, Bob Grimstone, his wife, and the three young uns, to supper, not to-morrow night nor the night after, because I shan't be back from Croydon till late, but say the evening after."

"But we can't hold them all," Bill said, looking round the room.

"No, we can't hold them here, certainly, but I dare say they will let us have the feed in their parlor. There will be nothing to get, you know, but some bread and butter, and some beer for Bob. Mrs. Grimstone don't take it, so we must have plenty of tea."

"I should like some beer too, just for once, George, with such a blow-out as that."

"No, no, Bill, you and I will stick to tea. You know we agreed that we wouldn't take beer. If we begin it once we shall want it again, so we are not going to alter from what we agreed to. We see plenty of the misery which drink causes all round and the way in which money is wasted over it. I like a glass of beer as well as you do, and when I get to be a man I dare say I shall take a glass with my dinner regularly, though I won't do even that if I find it makes me want to take more; but anyhow at present we can do without it."

Bill agreed, and the dinner-party downstairs and the supper two nights afterwards came off in due course, and were both most successful.

The acknowledgment of the gift had been a matter of some trouble to George, but he had finally bought a pretty New Year's card and had written on the back, "with the grateful thanks of George Andrews," and had sent it to the daughter of his employer.

At the beginning of April George had consulted Grimstone and his wife as to the question of preparing a home for his mother.

"How much would two rooms cost?" he had asked; "one a good-sized one and the other the same size as ours."

"Four shillings or four and sixpence," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And supposing we had a parlor and two little bedrooms?"

"Five and sixpence or six shillings, I should say," Mrs. Grimstone replied.

"And how much for a whole house?"

"It depends upon the size. We pay seven shillings a week, but you might get one without the kitchen and bedroom over it behind for six shillings."

"That would be much the nicest," George said, "only it would cost such a lot to furnish it."

"But you needn't furnish it all at once," Mrs. Grimstone suggested. "Just a kitchen and two bedrooms for a start, and you can put things into the parlor afterwards. That's the way we did

when we first married. But you must have some furniture."

"And how much will it cost for the kitchen and two bedrooms?"

"Of course going cheaply to work and buying the things secondhand, I should say I could pick up the things for you, so that you could do very well," Mrs. Grimstone said, "for six or seven pounds."

"That will do capitally," George said, "for by the end of this month Bill and I will have more than ten pounds laid by."

"What! since you came here?" Grimstone exclaimed in astonishment. "Do you mean to say you boys have laid by five pounds apiece?"

"Yes, and bought a lot of things too," his wife put in.

"Why, you must have been starving yourselves!"

"We don't look like it," George laughed. "I am sure Bill is a stone heavier than when he came here."

"Well, young chap, it does you a lot of credit," Bob Grimstone said. "It isn't every boy, by a long way, would stint himself as you must have done for the last five months to make a comfortable home for his mother, for I know lots of men who are earning their two quid a week and has their old people in the workhouse. Well, all I can say is that if I or the missis here can be of any use to you in taking a house we shall be right down glad."

"Thank you," George said. "We will look about for a house, and when we have fixed on one if you or Mrs. Grimstone will go about it for us I shall be much obliged, for I don't think landlords

would be inclined to let a house to two boys."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.