

Otis James

The Adventures of a Country Boy at a Country Fair



James Otis

**The Adventures of a Country
Boy at a Country Fair**

«Public Domain»

Otis J.

The Adventures of a Country Boy at a Country Fair / J. Otis —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	8
CHAPTER III.	11
CHAPTER IV.	14
CHAPTER V.	17
CHAPTER VI.	20
CHAPTER VII.	23
CHAPTER VIII.	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

James Otis

The Adventures of a Country Boy at a Country Fair

CHAPTER I. *A YOUNG FAKIR*

"I'm going to try it. Deacon Jones says I can have the right to run both things for ten dollars, and Uncle Nathan is going to lend me money enough to get the stock."

"What scheme have you got in your head now, Teddy Hargreaves?" and Mrs. Fernald looked over her spectacles at the son of her widowed sister, who was literally breathless in his excitement.

"I'm going to run a cane an' knife board at the Peach Bottom fair, and try to make money enough to pay the debt mother owes on the place."

"You're crazy – mad as a March hare! The idea of a child like you setting yourself up to earn three or four hundred dollars, when your father worked all his life and couldn't get so much together."

Mrs. Fernald really appeared to be angry, and she really believed there was good cause why she should lose her temper. The thought that little Teddy – a "whiflet" she called him – should set up his opinion in such matters against his elders, and attempt to earn in one season an amount which Seth Hargreaves had never been able to repay during his thirty-six years of life, was so preposterous that the good lady looked upon the boy's assertion as positive proof that he was not only ready but willing to "fly in the face of Providence."

"I shall try it all the same," Teddy replied in a most provokingly matter-of-fact tone, "an' I'm going down to see Uncle Nathan this very minute."

"Very well, and I consider it my bounden duty to advise your mother to keep you in the house until the fair is ended," Aunt Sarah said, as she took from its peg the well-worn gingham sun-bonnet.

Teddy had no desire to prolong the conversation, which had been begun simply because his aunt insisted on knowing where he had been, but hurried away from the gate on which he had been swinging while Mrs. Fernald questioned him, as if fearful lest she might try to detain him until the matter could be settled according to her own ideas of propriety.

"I can have the right to run what I want to, every day the fair lasts, for ten dollars, an' now, if you lend me fifteen, I'll be all right," the boy cried as he burst into Nathan Hargreaves' store, just as the old gentleman was adding a trifle more sand to the sugar, in order to compensate for what might possibly have been spilled by the careless clerk.

"Oh, it's fixed, eh? And you're really goin' to turn fakir?" Uncle Nathan asked, wrinkling his face into the semblance of a laugh, but remaining silent, as if fearing to waste even such a cheap thing as mirth.

"What's a fakir?"

"A man, or a boy, for that matter, who goes out to sell things as you count on doin', if I'm fool enough to let you throw away fifteen good dollars of mine."

"But you promised to lend me the money."

"An' I'm going to do it; but that don't make me any less a fool jest because I'm holdin' to my word. Tell me what you count on doin', an' then we'll come down to the business end of the scheme."

"I'll pay the ten dollars I've got to Deacon Jones for the right to run the games, an' with what you lend me I'm goin' to Waterville an' buy a whole lot of knives an' canes. There's a storekeeper over there who promises to sell that kind of goods for less than they cost him."

"An' he's lyin' when he says it. People don't do business for the fun of it; but that's neither here nor there so far as our trade is concerned. I'm goin' to give you the fifteen dollars now – it's a power of money for a boy of your size, Teddy – , an' if you make anything, as I allow you will, I'm to have eighteen dollars back; don't forget that part of the trade."

"I'll stand to what I agreed, Uncle Nathan, and you shall be paid the very day the fair closes."

"Here it is," and with a sigh which was almost a groan Uncle Nathan took from a fat calfskin wallet three five-dollar bills, adding, as he handed them to Teddy: "Be careful of it, my boy, for I'm puttin' almost too much confidence in a child of your size, an' nobody knows how distressed I'd be if anything happened to prevent your paying it back."

Teddy placed the money carefully in the inside pocket of his vest, and, after promising for at least the hundredth time that it should be repaid by the close of the following week, hurried home confident in the belief that he was on an extremely short road to wealth.

Mrs. Hargreaves was by no means as sanguine as her son concerning the success of the scheme, and actually appeared frightened when Teddy showed her the money he had received from his Uncle Nathan, who was reputed to be the "closest-fisted" merchant to be found within a day's ride of Peach Bottom Run.

"If you should lose it, Teddy, and be unable to pay him back at the exact time you promised, it would be the undoing of us, for we could never expect to get another dollar. I know he is not generous, but have always believed that if we should be in yet more straitened circumstances he would give us some assistance. He has neither charity nor mercy for any one who does not pay a little more than his just debts – "

"But I shall give back every cent of this, mother, so don't look as if you were in such distress. I want to go to Waterville to buy my stock in the morning, an' am counting on walking. It's only seven miles, an' I'll save fifty cents by traveling on shanks' mare."

"I will have breakfast ready by four o'clock; but you must come back on the stage, Teddy."

"Yes, if I feel very tired; but I don't know of any easier way to earn a dollar than by walking both ways."

The young "fakir" believed he knew exactly what kind and amount of stock he wished to purchase on the following day, therefore he had no preparations to make for the journey save to get his limbs in the best possible condition for the tramp by retiring very early, in order to "scoop in" plenty of sleep.

The thought of the success which should attend him in his new venture kept his eyes open a long while after getting into bed, and when he finally succeeded in crossing over to the land of Nod, dreams of the fortune to be made during the coming week visited his brain, and remained there until his mother's voice summoned him to breakfast.

The sun had not yet come up from behind the hills when he was trudging sturdily along over the dusty road, carrying a generous luncheon tied in a snowy-white napkin, and with his money secured by many pins in the lining of his cap.

"Be careful not to lose it, for your Uncle Nathan would never forgive you," his mother had said, and he cried cheerily, as he walked swiftly down the lane to the highway:

"There's no fear of anything like that happening; the bills can't get away without my knowing it so long as they stay here," and Teddy pulled his cap yet more closely down on his head.

In a trifle more than two hours he was at Waterville, wondering why the stores were not open, no matter how early it was, when such an important customer as himself came to town.

Since the merchants were evidently ignorant of his arrival, as was evidenced by the fact that their places of business yet remained closed, there was no more profitable occupation for him than to eat a second breakfast, which he proceeded to do, using a hand-truck on the depot-platform as a seat.

The train which left New York on the evening before had arrived some time previous, and the station was temporarily deserted by all save a boy of about Teddy's age, who was walking to and fro in an aimless manner.

By the time the young "fakir" had finished his second biscuit he noticed that the stranger was watching him narrowly, and, holding forth the napkin with its generous store, he asked:

"Have one?"

"I don't care if I do," said the boy, carelessly, and he continued:

"I reckon you live 'round here?"

"No, I jest come up from Peach Bottom Run, an' am waiting for the stores to be opened."

"Why, you're from the same place where the fair is goin' to be held."

"No; I live at the Run, an' the fair is over to Peach Bottom, most five miles from my house. Are you goin' there?"

"I should reckon I was. Why, I'm goin' to help run it."

"You are?" and Teddy's mouth opened wide in astonishment.

"Yes, sir-ree, an' you fellers will be jest about crazy when I tell you what I've come to do."

"Don't flash it upon us too quick, for we want kind of keep our wits about us till the fun is over."

The tone of sarcasm in Teddy's voice appeared to nettle the stranger.

"I've come down here to give away a steamboat what's worth five hundred dollars."

"Then there ain't any need for you to go any farther, 'cause I'm willin' to take it now."

"If you won't be so smart I'll tell you about it," was the dignified reply. "There's a firm out in Detroit what's goin' to do that very thing to the feller that can guess how much she weighs, an' I've been hired to help the man who is comin' down to Peach Bottom to show off a lot of boats."

"What are you goin' to do?" and now Teddy was interested.

"Row around in the creek while he looks out for the stuff in the fair. It won't be any more'n fun, an' if you'll come over I'll take you out."

"I don't s'pose you could help me guess how much the steamer weighs, could you?"

"There ain't anybody as can do that, 'cause you see she ain't built yet; but you can find out all about it by lookin' on the fair grounds for the circulars what the Davis Boat and Oar Company of Detroit will throw around, an' if there's somethin' else you want know jest ask for Sam Balderston; all the folks will know me before I've been there very long."

"I'm going to work at the fair myself," Teddy replied, and then, in response to his new friend's questions, he gave him all the particulars of his proposed venture.

"I reckon you'll get along all right, an' come out way ahead, if some of these smart fakirs don't try to get the best of you. Say, why can't I go to your house, an' stay till it's time to go over to the fair? I'll pay my way."

"If mother's willin', I'd like to have you, an' I don't believe she'll care. Now, I've got to buy my stuff. Where'll I meet you afterward?"

"I'm goin' with you," Sam said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "I know a good deal about such things, an' won't see you cheated."

Teddy hardly thought he was in need of any assistance; but since he did not want to offend this fellow who was concerned in giving away a steamboat, he could not well refuse, therefore the two started up the street together.

CHAPTER II. *AN OLD FAKIR*

Sam had very much advice to give during the short walk, and while the greater portion of it was worthless, there were bits which might be of value to the young "fakir."

"Don't buy anything till you have seen all there is in town, an' then you'll know which is the cheapest," Sam repeated several times, with an air of wisdom, and Teddy believed this to be a good idea.

With this object in view the two boys walked from store to store, examining that particular quality of canes and knives which Teddy thought would be best suited to his purpose, and Sam had no hesitation in criticising the goods boldly, until more than one of the clerks lost his temper entirely and refused to show the full stock.

"If you go on this way, Sam, we won't get the business done to day, an' I want to send the stuff down in the stage, which leaves here at three o'clock."

"There'll be plenty of time for that; I know what I'm about. Now, if you had sent your money to me, I'd got you a dandy lot in New York for almost nothing."

"Seein's how I didn't even know your name till a couple of hours ago, there wasn't much chance for me to do that, an' I guess I'll make out well enough here if you don't keep on raisin' a fuss with the clerks."

"I won't so much as yip ag'in, if that's the way you look at it. The question is, which store you're goin' to buy from?"

"There's a place near the depot that wasn't open when we came past. Let's go there, an' then I'll make up my mind."

Sam, feeling a trifle injured because his advice had not been fully appreciated, said nothing more until they were near the station, and then, seeing a train approaching, he proposed that they stop for a few minutes.

"Jest as likely as not there'll be people on it whom I know goin' to the fair, an' you want to get acquainted with all the fakirs, so's they'll help you along now an' then."

"The stage goes at three."

"An' it ain't more'n ten now. Come on!" Sam cried, triumphantly, as he motioned for Teddy to come nearer.

Sam had already quickened his pace, and Teddy was forced to follow, or injure the feelings of one whom he believed held a responsible position in the Peach Bottom exhibition. Among the passengers alighting from the train as the boys arrived was a man who carried a large package enveloped in green cloth, and Sam whispered, excitedly:

"I'll bet that's an old fakir, and if he is we want to let him know who we are."

Teddy failed to understand exactly why this was necessary; but his companion seemed so positive on the point that he remained silent.

This particular passenger appeared to have plenty of time at his disposal. He placed his package at one end of the platform, lighted a pipe, and then walked to and fro as the remainder of the travelers dispersed.

"You foller me, an' we'll find out who he is," Sam whispered, when he thought a fitting opportunity had come, and then advanced boldly toward the stranger. "Goin' to the fair?" he asked.

"Yes; what of it?"

"Nothin', only I s'pose you know you've got to take another train here."

"If I didn't why would I be loafin' around this dead place?"

"I jest spoke of it 'cause this feller an' I are goin' there, too," and Sam waved his hand in the direction where Teddy was standing.

"I s'pose there'll be other boys besides you at the fair, eh?"

"But we belong to it. I'm to give a steamboat away, an' he's goin' to run a cane an' knife board. We're waiting here to buy the stock."

"Oh, you are, eh?" and now the man appeared to be interested. "I reckon you're goin' to spend as much as a dollar?"

"One? Why, he's got fifteen, an' the whole of it will be spent before the stage leaves. We know something about the business an' don't count on gettin' an outfit for nothing."

"I thought you was a fakir," the man said, in a more friendly tone, as, unobserved by the worldly-wise Sam, he made a peculiar gesture to a stranger immediately in the rear.

"That's what I am," was the proud reply, "an' I'll make things hum over at Peach Bottom before I leave the town. You see I thought I'd speak to you, 'cause all of us fellers should know each other."

"You're right, an' it's mighty lucky you did strike up an acquaintance, for I can give you a big lift. I've helped many a boy into the business when they had money enough to help themselves."

The last dozen words were spoken in a loud tone, as if for the benefit of the stranger in the rear; but instead of waiting to hear more the latter turned abruptly and walked toward the package with a green covering at the end of the platform.

"I knew we oughter talk with you."

"Did you count on buying your stuff in this one-horse town?" the man asked as Teddy approached, and the latter replied:

"There wasn't any other place I could go to, 'cause it costs too much for a ticket to New York."

"How big a stock do you want?"

"All I can get for fifteen dollars. Don't you think that will be enough?"

"It depends," the stranger replied, reflectively. "If you buy the goods here you'll have to pay such a big price that it won't be much of a pile. Now, if – I've got the very thing in mind! You'll remember the day you saw me if my plan works. I know a fakir here who has a fine layout that he wants to sell. You can get fifty dollars' worth of stuff for – well, he asks twenty; but I'll say you are friends of mine, an' the chances are you can make a trade."

"That would be a regular snap!" Sam cried, and Teddy's eyes glistened at the thought of thus procuring a full outfit so cheaply.

"I'll do what I can for you," the man said, in a patronizing tone. "At any rate, I'll make him come down in his price, and if there's any balance it can be paid after the fair has been opened long enough for you to take in some money."

"If business is good, I'm willing to do what is right," Teddy replied; "but I must pay Uncle Nathan first."

"How much do you owe him?"

"Fifteen dollars."

"Why, bless my soul, it'll be a pretty poor fair if you can't make five times that amount in the first two days."

"Where can we see the man?" Sam asked, eager that his wonderfully good trade should be consummated at the earliest possible opportunity.

"I don't know; but he's somewhere in the town. Give me your cash, an' I'll hunt him up inside of half an hour. The stuff is right here in the baggage-room, and you can ship it on the stage without any trouble."

Just for an instant Teddy hesitated to part with what seemed to him like an enormous amount of money; but then came the thought that an old fakir would not wrong a young one – and he considered himself such. After some little difficulty he succeeded in extracting all the pins, and the three notes

were handed to the generous stranger almost at the same moment that the green-covered package disappeared from the edge of the platform simultaneously with the departure of the second stranger.

"Wait right here for me," the man said, as he put the money in his pocket. "I've got too much work to do to spend any very great amount of time hunting you fellows up in case you don't stay in one place."

After thus cautioning them, the old fakir walked slowly away, and Sam said:

"It was lucky you fell in with me, Teddy, for I know how these things are worked, an' can give you a good many pointers before the fair is over. Why, you'll have a first-class outfit for about half what it's worth."

"Yes, it's a good chance; but I can't see why he didn't take us with him if he was in a hurry, an' then he wouldn't have had to come back."

"He's got to do that anyway, for his stuff is here," Sam replied, pointing toward where he had last seen the man's package; but it was no longer there. "I guess the baggage-master has taken it in," he added; "but you needn't be afraid of losin' your money while I'm with you."

Then Sam occupied his companion's attention by telling of his many alleged wonderful exploits, and an hour passed before his story was concluded.

In the meantime one train had arrived and departed; another was on the point of leaving the depot, bound for Peach Bottom, when Teddy cried as he leaped to his feet:

"See! I'm certain that's the man who has got my money!"

"Where?"

"On the platform of the front car!"

Before he could say anything more the train steamed out, leaving the would-be young fakir staring at it in distress and consternation.

"Of course it wasn't him," Sam said, confidently, when the last car had disappeared from view. "The stuff he was goin' to buy for you is here in the baggage-room, 'cause he said so, an' we'll see him before long."

Teddy's suspicions had been aroused, and he was not easily quieted. The thought that it was possible he might have lost the money loaned him by Uncle Nathan was sufficient to cause the liveliest fear, and he said, decidedly:

"I'm going to know where that man's baggage went to."

"How'll you find out?"

"Ask the baggage-master."

"Don't make a fool of yourself. It would be nice for an old fakir like that man to know you thought he'd steal your money."

"I don't care what he knows, so long as I get my fifteen dollars back."

Teddy, trembling with apprehension and excitement, went into the baggage-room and asked there if a green-covered package had been taken in by any of the attendants.

No one had seen such an article, and all were positive there was nothing of the kind remaining in their charge.

Then he asked if a bundle of canes had been left there, and to this question there was a most decided negative.

"The hangers-on at the fairs haven't begun to come yet," the baggage-master said, "and when they do come, we sha'n't have any of their stuff to handle, for it will all be transferred across the platform without being brought in here. What is the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

The lump which had been rising in Teddy's throat was now so large that it was with difficulty he could say:

"A man has run off with fifteen dollars of mine, an' Uncle Nathan will jest about kill me!"

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND

The baggage-master immediately displayed the utmost sympathy for the victim of the old fakir's seductive scheme, and Sam was loud in his denunciations of a brother in the craft who would serve them in such a shabby manner.

"You leave him to me, an' I'll show you what can be done," that young gentleman said, and Teddy replied, reproachfully:

"I've left too much to you already. If you hadn't thought it was necessary to make the acquaintance of every fellow who was going to the fair I'd have my fifteen dollars in my cap now."

"I'll get them back for you."

"How?"

"I can't say jest now; but you wait an' see what I can do."

Inasmuch as Teddy must account first to his mother and afterward to Uncle Nathan for that amount, the confident assertion of his friend failed to give him any mental relief, and he said, quite sharply:

"You thought it was all right to give the money to him, an' if you didn't know any more than a country boy who'd never even heard of such fellows, I can't see how you can do much toward helping."

At this point the baggage-master, who had been listening to the conversation, broke in with the sage remark:

"It's no use for you fellows to fight over what has been done. The money is gone; there's no doubt about that; but it may be you can get it back."

"How?" Teddy asked, eagerly.

"By notifying the police, and it is possible that they may find your man long before the fair is ended."

"But even if they should, how can I pay Uncle Nathan the eighteen dollars he wants, after givin' Deacon Jones the ten which I promised?"

"That, of course, is a question I cannot answer," the officer of the company replied, not unkindly; "but it will certainly be better to get some of the money back than to lose the whole."

"Of course it will," Sam said, promptly, after waiting a few seconds without hearing any reply from Teddy. "Tell us what to do, an' I'll see to the whole thing."

"Hello! What kind of a meeting are you holding here?" a cheery voice cried, and, looking up, the disconsolate Teddy saw a merchant whose stock he had been examining a short time previous.

In a few words the baggage-master explained the condition of affairs.

"Can nothing be done?" the merchant asked.

"It is barely possible. The fact of the matter is that the two swindlers left on the last train, and this boy's money has gone with them beyond a doubt."

Then the merchant turned to the would-be fakir and asked for further particulars, which were readily given, the latter saying, as he finished the sad story:

"Uncle Nathan is bound to raise a big row, an' I won't be able to help mother, as I counted on doing; but I s'pose it serves me right."

"I'm not so sure of that, lad, for all of us are liable to be taken in at some time or another. It is possible you may make money at the fair, and I will give you credit to the amount you lost. Go to the store, show this slip, and get what you think may be needed."

While speaking the merchant had been writing on a piece of paper torn from his memorandum book, and when he handed it to Teddy the almost heartbroken boy read the following words:

The bearer, Edward Hargreaves, is entitled to credit, thirty days' time, on all he may need, to the extent of thirty dollars.

John Reaves.

"But I only lost fifteen dollars," Teddy said, as he read the order.

"I so understood; but you may need more, therefore I have made the amount sufficiently large. Don't hesitate to buy what is wanted, and whether you ever find the swindler or not, I feel very positive my bill will be paid."

Teddy tried to thank the merchant, but that lump in his throat was still too near his mouth to admit of many words, and Sam whispered:

"Don't say anything more about it. You've struck the biggest kind of luck, and the safest way is to hold your tongue."

Even had it been possible to speak, Teddy could not have said all that was in his heart, and before Sam had time to give any further advice the merchant boarded a train which was just starting for New York, leaving the young fakir and his newly-made friend to settle matters among themselves.

"You're in big luck," the latter said, consolingly. "What's the difference if you have lost fifteen dollars so long as you know how to get thirty dollars' worth of goods to start in business?"

"But this bill will have to be paid, and Uncle Nathan must have his money; that leaves me forty-five dollars in debt."

"S'pose'n it does? You're bound to make a good deal more'n that, an' I'm here to help you through."

Teddy came very near saying that if Sam had not been there the fifteen dollars would still be reposing beneath the lining of his cap; but he succeeded in checking himself, and the reproachful words remained unspoken.

At this point in the conversation the baggage-master insisted that information of the swindler should be given to the police, and, whether they desired to do so or not, the boys were forced to accompany him to headquarters.

Here it is possible their story might have been told without exciting more than ordinary interest if the name of the kindly-disposed merchant had not been used; but that was sufficient to awaken a decided interest, and every detail was written down carefully.

"We will try to get the money for you," the chief said. "Several of my men will be at the fair, and if you see this fellow again, information must be given to them immediately."

Teddy had but little hope that any good would result by this means, but he promised faithfully to do as requested, and then the boys were at liberty to finish the business which had been interrupted so disastrously.

So much time had been wasted that it was necessary to move around very lively in order to have the goods ready before the stage should leave, and Teddy did a great deal toward expediting matters by explaining to the clerk at the store on which he had the order for credit exactly what he proposed to do.

The young man understood at once the kind of goods which would be needed, and without listening to the many suggestions made by Sam selected a good assortment of both knives and canes.

"Ain't you getting more than thirty dollars' worth?" Teddy asked, as the clerk continued to add to the pile.

"I think not. These are all cheap goods, you know, and make a big show without amounting to any very great value. I will put in cotton cloth enough for the cane board, and as many rings as you will need unless business should be very brisk."

The clerk was bent on making the bill exactly the size of the order, and when the prices had been figured out Teddy had invested just thirty dollars in a stock which must bring in a profit of at least fifty per cent. in order to admit of his paying the debts already contracted.

The goods were to be put on the stage by the salesman, and there was nothing further for the boys to do but decide on their manner of traveling to the Run.

"After losin' fifteen dollars, I reckon there's only one thing for me to do," Teddy said, as they left the store. "I'm goin'to walk; but you can do as you please."

"S'pose'n we both ride? You're bound to make a pile of money before the fair is over, an' can afford – By jinks! There's that fakir now!"

In an instant Sam was off at full speed, crying: "Stop thief!" with the full strength of his lungs, as he pursued a man carrying a bundle covered with green cloth.

Such an appeal was well calculated to arouse every idler in the immediate vicinity, and before Teddy fully understood what had happened not less than twenty men and boys were in chase of the stranger, who, strange to say, had not quickened his pace.

The thought that it might yet be possible to regain his money lent unusual speed to the would-be fakir's heels, and he was among the foremost when the man suddenly halted, turned squarely around, and asked:

"What is the matter with you people? Do you want me?"

"I guess we do," a policeman replied, as he seized the stranger by the collar. "Somebody yelled for us to stop the thief, and you must be the man."

"Who says I am?" was the angry question.

By this time both Teddy and Sam had discovered the latter's mistake. The only point of resemblance between this stranger and the one who stole the money was that both carried packages covered with green cloth; but while the first bundle was bulky and apparently heavy, this was small and readily held under the man's arm.

Sam did not wait to explain matters. Fearing lest he might get into serious trouble because of the mistake, he slipped quietly away, leaving Teddy to bear the brunt of the accused's wrath.

The latter realized that something must be done at once, for the greater portion of the crowd was looking inquiringly at him, and he said, in a voice which was far from steady:

"I didn't do the hollerin'; but a feller who was with me when a man stole my money thought you must be the one."

"Where is he?" the stranger asked, advancing threateningly.

"I don't know. He ran away when he saw it was a mistake."

The crowd immediately began to disperse. The policeman called down quite the reverse of blessings on Sam's head, and then walked away, leaving Teddy and the stranger comparatively alone.

"I don't know as it does any harm to have a lot of fools chasing a man," the latter said, "but it might give him a bad name in his work."

"I'm very sorry, sir, but you see – "

"I'm not blaming you, my boy, since it was the other fellow who did the mischief. Tell me how you lost your stuff."

"My what?"

"Your stuff – money."

"Oh!" and Teddy at once gave the stranger a detailed account of all that had happened, the latter saying, as the story was concluded:

"I wouldn't be afraid to bet my head that Long Jim was the duck who played the trick. I know he came here, headed for the fair grounds, and it's jest about his style of working."

"Do you think there's any chance I'll get it back?"

"He shall give up if I see him. I'll be at the fair myself, working a neat little game, and will see you there."

With this remark the stranger walked away, and Teddy went toward the depot once more, feeling quite certain he had made a friend who would aid him in his new venture.

CHAPTER IV. *UNCLE NATHAN*

When Teddy reached the depot he was not obliged to hunt very long for Sam, for that young gentleman crept out from behind a pile of baggage on seeing his friend was alone, and asked, in a hoarse whisper:

"What did that feller do to you?"

"Nothing; but that don't prove we should get out of another scrape so easily, and you must be careful, or we'll be in no end of trouble before the fair is ended."

"I was only tryin' to catch your money."

"It surely wouldn't have done any harm if you had found out whether that was the man or not before you started the whole crowd after him."

"That's right, rub it into a feller when he tries to do you a good turn," Sam said, sarcastically, and then remembering an instant later that he proposed to be this boy's guest, he added, "I was only lookin' out for you, an' so long as there's been no harm done we needn't talk about it. Do you still mean to walk home?"

"There's nothing else to be done, if we want to get to the Run to-night, for the stage left while we were chasing that man."

This was exactly what he did not want to do; but, under the circumstances, there was no help for it, and the young gentleman who expected to form such a prominent portion of the fair set out by the side of the friend whom he had injured while thinking to do him a favor.

At the end of a trifle less than three hours, when both were footsore, hungry, and weary, the boys arrived at Teddy's home, and Mrs. Hargreaves made the stranger welcome despite the inconvenience caused by his coming.

Not until after Sam had retired did Teddy tell his mother of the theft, and for several moments the widow was in great mental distress; but finally she viewed the matter in a more cheerful light, and it was resolved that Uncle Nathan should not be told of the mishap.

"It would only make him angry," Mrs. Hargreaves said, "and you must pay him before the merchant who was so kind to you gets his money; but I am terribly afraid, Teddy, that the whole scheme will be a failure."

The amateur fakir assured her as best he could, and when they retired that night both Teddy and his mother were in a comparatively contented frame of mind.

The following day was Sunday, on which not even the all engrossing topic of cane-boards and knives was to be discussed; but before the family had finished breakfast the arrival of a stranger forced them into worldly topics.

The newcomer was none other than the man whom Sam had accused of being the thief, and he explained the cause of his visit by saying:

"I have reason to believe that Long Jim, the fakir who got away with your son's money, will be over here to-night, because the hotels at Peach Bottom are crowded, and it is possible he may be forced to give up the stuff." Although not exactly understanding what he meant, the widow insisted on his coming into the house, and he laid the details of his plan before Teddy and Sam.

"I'll hang around here for him," the stranger said, "and you shall say if he is the man who did you up; after that I'll take a hand in the business, and it'll be queer if between us all we can't make him do the square thing, more especially since the rest of his gang haven't come yet."

As might be expected, Teddy was excited by the prospect of recovering the money which he had believed was lost beyond reclaim, and plans were at once laid to trap the dishonest fakir.

While this conversation was being carried on Uncle Nathan came in to learn how his nephew had succeeded in town, and the stranger introduced himself as Frank Hazelton, a dealer in jewelry, which was to be on exhibition during the coming week at the fair.

The old man was delighted to make the stranger's acquaintance, for he fancied there would be an opportunity for him to take the agency of a valuable line of goods without the outlay of any money, and in a very few moments the two were fast friends.

Uncle Nathan not only monopolized nearly all the conversation, but insisted on showing Mr. Hazelton around the village, and actually forced the latter to accompany him, despite the fact that it was Sunday, when an honest merchant is not supposed to so much as think of business.

On the following day it would be necessary for those who had purchased the privilege of doing business on the fair grounds to be present, ready to select their different sites for working, and very shortly after the sun sank behind the hills Sam and Teddy retired in order to be ready for an early start next morning, since the first stage left the Run at half-past five.

It lacked fully an hour of that time when the boys were called to breakfast by Mrs. Hargreaves, and in less than fifteen minutes they were at the table eating a hearty breakfast, which was interrupted by the appearance of Uncle Nathan, who looked as if he had not been in bed since the evening previous.

"I've been robbed!" he cried, passionately, "and this is what comes of trying to help my nephew enter a disreputable line of business. I believe you induced that man to come here, explaining all about my store, simply that he might act the burglar. And it wouldn't take much to make me think you had agreed to divide with him the ill-gotten gains," he added, shaking his fist in the direction of Teddy, who was so astounded by the news as to be literally incapable of movement.

"What do you mean, Nathan?" Mrs. Hargreaves cried.

"Just what I said! My store was robbed last night, and your precious son knows the thief better than I do!"

"You mean the man who came here yesterday?" the widow asked, while Teddy and Sam gazed at the old man in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Of course I do; who else could it be? Didn't I take him over there yesterday, and didn't I explain just how difficult it was to deposit money in a bank, because a man would have to pay a dollar to go to Waterville an' back, or trust the stage driver to do the business?"

By this time Teddy had recovered something like composure, and he said, gravely:

"We have no means of knowing what you said to Mr. Hazelton, but if you told him all your business, that is no concern of ours. You insisted on his going away with you, and we haven't seen him since."

"But you lied to me about my money."

"In what way?"

"You never said a word about its being stolen."

"If I never said a word I couldn't have told a lie. He has evidently given the whole story; but what happened in Waterville has nothing to do with the robbery of your store."

"Oh, it hasn't, eh? Well, I'm beginning to think it was a job cooked up by all hands to get the best of me."

"If it had been," and now Teddy was on his feet, looking the angry old man squarely in the face, "why wouldn't I have said something about it in order to make the story seem straighter? A merchant in Waterville trusted me for the goods I wanted after he heard the money was gone, and I count on paying you before I do him."

"Oh, you do, eh? Well, it's mighty doubtful whether you or this precious friend of yours will ever see the fair, for I'm going to get out a warrant for the whole lot before I'm done with this thing."

"Would you arrest Teddy when he has been in this house ever since you left here yesterday morning?" Mrs. Hargreaves cried.

"I'll have my money back, and the sooner your smart son tells me where it is, the sooner he can go about his business; but he must first pay me back my eighteen dollars."

"I only borrowed fifteen, Uncle Nathan, and that you will get before next Wednesday. If you want to arrest me, go ahead; but I promise that you'll be sorry for it."

"So you threaten, do you? That's what comes of trying to help an ungrateful boy! I knew he was going to the bad from the first minute he talked about having a cane-board," the old man added, as he turned to the widow, "and I predict that he'll come to no good even if he manages to get out of this scrape."

"You thought it was a good idea for me to do as I proposed," Teddy replied, standing his ground bravely, "and was willing to loan me the money, provided I would pay you three dollars for the use of fifteen for one week."

"That's right; throw in my teeth what I wanted to do in order to help you along, and call me an old skinflint. I am old enough to expect such things from such as you."

"I haven't called you any names, nor do I intend to do so; I only wanted mother to know the truth of the business between us. Do you really believe I had any hand in breaking into your store?"

"If you didn't your friends did, and that amounts to the same thing, as you'll soon find out. I'll have a warrant issued for the arrest of the whole crowd, if you don't tell me the truth this very minute."

"But I don't know anything, Uncle Nathan."

"I'll have the truth out of you before the day is ended," the old man cried, angrily, and without saying or doing anything save to shake his fist in the direction of his nephew and Sam he left the house.

As yet none of the little party knew the full extent of what had happened, but before Uncle Nathan was fairly out of the yard a neighbor came around to tell Mrs. Hargreaves that the old man's store had been entered by burglars on the night previous, and a large amount of money, together with the most valuable goods, had been carried away.

It is not difficult to imagine the consternation which seized upon the little party after Uncle Nathan's departure. Teddy was so overwhelmed that it was literally impossible for him to say a word, and Sam shook like one in an ague fit at the thought that he might be carried off to jail before it was possible for him to astonish the people by his skill as an oarsman.

"You must not think of leaving here until we know what your uncle proposes to do," Mrs. Hargreaves said, as she returned to the dining-room after talking with the neighbor. "Of course I know that neither of you two boys had anything to do with the robbery; but you must not run away."

"I've got to leave, no matter what the old fool says," Sam replied. "I don't know how the folks would get along if I didn't show up, an' it won't do to disappoint them."

"Are you going?" Teddy asked, and Sam replied in a voice which trembled despite all his efforts to make it sound firm:

"Of course I am. You don't allow I'm such an idiot as to stay till he can have me arrested, an' if you're sensible, both of us will go."

"I must stay here, an' lose all my chances of making money," Teddy said, gloomily.

"All right, then I'm off, an' after I once get on the fair grounds I'll bet that old duffer won't get hold of me."

Sam did not propose to lose any time. He had no baggage, and in a very few moments after so deciding he was walking up the road over which the stage would pass, while Teddy, with a heavier heart than he had ever known before, waited for his uncle to send the officers of the law to carry him to prison.

CHAPTER V. *THE FAIR*

It seemed to Teddy as if everything pleasant in life had departed from him as he waited for the return of Uncle Nathan accompanied by the officers of the law, and neither he nor his mother had any idea that the visit would be long delayed.

The widow had every proof, even if her heart had not told the truth, that her son was innocent of the charge which the angry old man made. She knew both he and Sam remained in the house during the entire day previous to the robbery, and it would have been almost impossible for them to have left during the night without her knowledge; but at the same time it was only reasonable she should be distressed in mind as to the final outcome of the matter.

One, two, three hours passed, and yet no arrest had been made.

Teddy no longer hoped to play the part of fakir at the fair; but yet he fancied it might be possible to sell his stock, which had already been forwarded by the stage, to some more fortunate fellow, and in order to do this it was necessary he should be on the grounds at the earliest possible hour; but the charge made by his uncle held him a voluntary prisoner.

At eight o'clock a neighbor, whose love of gossip was greater than her desire for housework, came to the garden gate to say that she had just heard the justice of the peace refuse to issue a warrant for either of the boys, and she added to this information her belief that it, the burglary, was a judgment upon Uncle Nathan for presuming to talk business on the Sabbath.

When this busybody had departed, Mrs. Hargreaves said, as she re-entered the house:

"There is no longer any reason, Teddy, why you shouldn't carry out your plans. Every one in this village knows where to find you in case a warrant is granted, which doesn't now seem possible, and it is better to go ahead as you proposed, knowing that your mother is certain you are innocent of any wrongdoing."

Teddy's one desire had been to be on the fair grounds, and when this advice was given from "a fellow's best friend," he started at once, saying as he left the house:

"I'll come back if there's nothing to do; but there's no reason to worry if you don't see me until Saturday, for I shall stay just as long as things run smooth."

Ten minutes later, while he was trudging along the dusty road with no other idea than that he would be forced to walk the entire distance, a friend in a wagon overtook him, proposed that he ride, and before the fair grounds were reached he had heard all the particulars of the robbery.

It appeared that the burglars must have effected an entrance to Uncle Nathan's store after midnight Saturday, and when the proprietor arrived on the following morning there was absolutely no clue to the thieves.

"They must have had a wagon to take away all the old man says he has lost," Teddy's informant added, as the story was concluded, "and because of that the justice refused to issue a warrant for the man who slept at the hotel last night. Of course the idea that you knew anything about it was all in that old fool's eye."

"Then nobody has been arrested?" Teddy exclaimed, in surprise.

"Of course not, an' more than one in town hopes he'll never see hide nor hair of his goods or money; but between you an' me I don't believe he's lost half as much as he tries to make out."

To this last assertion Teddy gave but little heed; the all absorbing thought in his mind was as to whether he would actually be arrested for the crime, and this was sufficient to prevent any speculations as to the amount of loss, or his former dreams of the future.

Arriving at the fair grounds, he found everything in a state of confusion. Goods were arriving and being put in place; men were quarreling for this or that vantage ground, and carpenters were busy in every direction.

As a matter of course, he knew that all this would be changed on the following day when the visitors began to arrive; but, nevertheless, it gave him a homesick feeling which he could not suppress, and, for a time, prevented him from attending to his own interests.

"Hello! What are you sittin' there for?" a voice cried, after he had remained inactive near the entrance nearly an hour, debating in his own mind whether or not it would be worth the while to unpack the goods which he knew were awaiting his call somewhere on the grounds.

Looking up quickly he saw Sam, self-possessed and jaunty as at the first moment he met him in Waterville, but wearing an air of considerably more importance.

"Have you gone to work yet?" he asked, listlessly.

"Of course not; there's nothin' for me to do till the folks begin to come in to see how well I can row a boat. What did the old duffer do?"

"Do you mean Uncle Nathan?"

"Of course."

"He hasn't had anybody arrested yet; but there's no knowin' how soon he'll begin."

"He'd better not try it on me," Sam said, with an assumption of boldness. "I've found a feller here that's goin' to show off rifles, an' I can borrow as many as I want if he does any funny business."

"Would you shoot anybody?"

"You jest stay till an old lunatic comes along sayin' I've helped to rob him when your mother knows where I was, an' see what I'll do," Sam replied, in a really bloodthirsty tone as he turned to walk away, and then, as if reconsidering the matter, he stopped long enough to say, "Wait here a minute, an' I'll show you a feller what knows a thing or two."

Inasmuch as Teddy had no idea of moving from the position he had taken up near the gate it was not irksome to do as the exhibitor of boats requested, and without troubling his head as to who this very important person might be, he remained at the precise spot until Sam returned with a boy who appeared to be a year or two older than himself.

"This is Dan Summers, an' he's here to help show off a dandy rifle made in Chicopee Falls down in Massachusetts, or some such place. He'll help us out of the scrape if anybody can."

Dan looked as if this introduction was disagreeable to him rather than otherwise, and after nodding to Teddy, he said, in an explanatory tone:

"I'm here to help the man what exhibits goods from the Stevens Arms Company, that's all; but I don't see how I could be of any help if you fellers have got in a fuss."

"Neither do I," Teddy replied, and then to show that no one could aid him, he told the whole story, including all that Uncle Nathan had said.

"I wouldn't let that worry me," Dan said, philosophically, when the tale was ended. "If you want to make any money out of this fair it is time you was lookin' out for a stand, an' I know of the best place on the grounds. Come with me now, an' you can get it before the crowd of fakirs have a chance to take it up."

Teddy, rather liking the appearance of this boy, resolved to follow his advice, and signified the same by slipping down from the stack of exhibits, as he said:

"Show it to me an' I'll get right to work, for there's forty-five dollars I've got to pay back, no matter what Uncle Nathan makes up his mind to do."

"That's the way to talk," Sam cried, approvingly, and forthwith he proceeded to take charge of his two acquaintances, resolved that lack of energy should not prevent him from sharing in their triumphs, if indeed, they had any.

Dan professed to have had considerable experience with fairs, and the manner in which he proceeded to work showed that there had been no boasting on his part. He selected a spot where

nearly all of the visitors would be forced to pass in order to see the cattle or the racing, and set about putting up a stand for Teddy in the most approved manner.

He ordered Sam here and there to such places as he had seen an accumulation of lumber, and so well did he work, after borrowing an ax and a hatchet from a "candy butcher," that it was not yet noon when Teddy had an inclosure sufficiently large for his purpose; the cloth was in place and the holes cut for the canes, so that it would be but the work of a few moments to make everything ready when business should begin.

"You can't do the whole thing yourself if there is anything like the crowd that ought to come," Dan said, "and I advise you to hire a clerk."

"Where'll I find one?" Teddy asked, helplessly.

"Take some of the fellers from your own village; but be sure they're honest, for after business begins there won't be any chance to watch 'em."

Teddy thought he could find the proper party before the following day, and then came the question of where they were to sleep.

"I've got that all fixed," Sam said, confidently.

"The man what runs the museum in that big tent is a friend of mine, an' he won't say a word if we stay under the canvas to-night."

"How long have you known him?" Teddy asked, warned by previous experience that Sam's statements were not always to be depended upon.

"I never saw him till this morning; but that don't make no difference so long as he's willin' for us to stay there."

"We'll go over an' look around," Dan said, leading the way, and to the surprise of at least one of the party it was found that Master Sam's statement was absolutely correct.

The proprietor of the museum was more than willing to allow the boys to sleep under his canvas, for the very good reason that they would act as sentinels in lieu of those he had neglected to hire, and all three went away in search of a place where they could obtain meals during the expected five days of excitement and money-making.

This was even a more simple matter than the first. At a boarding-house nearly opposite the main entrance to the grounds they could be accommodated at a reasonable rate, and the preliminaries had been settled. It only remained now to welcome the visitors, and get from them as much money as possible.

Teddy almost forgot the terrible fact that his Uncle Nathan might yet have him arrested, and Sam acted as if such a thing had never been possible.

It is true all three of the boys discussed the possibility of finding the money which had been stolen from Teddy; but neither thought of connecting the two crimes as the work of one person.

During the afternoon Teddy looked around in the hope of seeing the man, unjustly accused of the theft, who had promised to aid him; but as yet he had not put in an appearance, and it seemed as if all the choice places would be taken before he arrived.

It was anything rather than sport to wander around the almost deserted grounds, and at an early hour, after partaking of a remarkably poor supper, the three boys sought the seclusion granted by the mildewed canvas of the alleged museum of the "world's wonders."

A goat, a wax baby, two or three snakes, an alligator, and a contortionist, who was none other than the proprietor of this magnificent array of "marvels," made up the entire list of curiosities; but the tent would shelter the young fakirs from the wind and dew, and it was possible they might sleep as soundly as at home.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLUE

Sam and Dan, who had worked at many fairs and been forced to sleep in far less desirable places, thought it was a rare piece of good fortune to get such comfortable quarters free; but the prospect of lying on the ground all night was far from pleasing to Teddy.

He looked around for some spot softer than another; but there was no choice, and he said to himself:

"There's one satisfaction about it, I'm better off on the ground than I would have been if Uncle Nathan had succeeded in having me arrested and put in jail."

This thought caused the interior of the tent to seem less disagreeable, and he almost persuaded himself that it would be sport to stay all night in a museum with a real contortionist as host.

Dan had thrown himself at full length on the ground where he could watch the proprietor of this "enormous exhibition" cook his supper on an oil-stove, and Sam, anxious about other people's affairs as usual, devoted his entire time to asking questions regarding the business.

"How do you count on gettin' along when the crowds get here? You can't sell tickets an' act too."

"I've got a barker an' a clown coming to-morrow; it was no use to pay 'em wages for layin' around when there was nothing to be done but put up the tent."

"What's a 'barker?'" Sam asked, in surprise.

"Why, the man who stands outside an' does the talking, of course."

Then, his supper having been cooked and eaten, the host amused himself and his guests by telling of his experience in the show business; relating stories and talking of the different fakirs he had met.

"When I started out," he said, "I made up my mind that a fortune could be made in one season. I bought a fine tent; had lots of performers, about twenty animals, and a dozen cases of stuffed birds and other curiosities. We struck hard luck from the sendoff, an' first the woman with an iron jaw gave me the shake because she got tired of waiting for the salary that never came. Two of the bears grew so disgusted with the bad business that they died, and one after another of the people skipped, till I was pretty nigh alone. A sheriff in Harmer seized the cases, another levied on my live stock, and it has only taken two seasons to bring the show down to where you see it."

This was not pleasing information for Teddy, who was obliged to make such a large amount of money in order to free himself from debt, and he asked:

"Isn't it possible to make money at every fair? I thought the fakirs got rich in a little while."

"So did I before I went into the business. A fellow may make a big stake this week and lose it all at the next stand. If you strike bad weather, or a crowd that hasn't got any money, it's up-hill work to pull in the entrance fee. Now, I have to pay a hundred dollars for this privilege, because I've got a big tent, and it wouldn't be any more if I had a show to compare with it in size. It'll take a good many ten-cent pieces to make that up."

This plain statement of facts caused Teddy to figure how many nickels he must receive before the capital invested and stolen would be returned, and the result was far from gratifying.

"The eighteen dollars which must be given to Uncle Nathan, the thirty I owe in Waterville, and ten I paid for the privilege of running the boards makes eleven hundred and sixty five-cent pieces. I'll never see so many customers as that, and Aunt Sarah was right when she called me a fool for thinking of going into the business," he said to himself, as his companions began to make their preparations for the night.

It is useless to "cry over spilled milk," however, and this he realized in time to prevent himself from being plunged into the lowest depths of despondency. It was barely possible business would

be exceptionally good, he argued mentally, and if hard work could accomplish the desired result he must be successful.

Dan was already lying down with his head toward the side of the tent and his feet near the oil-stove, which had been left burning because of the dampness, and Teddy crawled over by the side of him. Sam had decided to sleep by the side of his host, probably with the idea that he might appear to be on terms of greater intimacy, and all hands gave themselves up to slumber.

The excitement of the morning and subsequent labor had so tried Teddy that, despite the hardness of his bed, he fell asleep in a very few moments, and it was not yet nine o'clock when all the inmates of the tent, save the goat, and possibly the alligator and snakes, were wrapped in blissful unconsciousness.

Half an hour later a terrific yell from Sam caused the remainder of the party to spring to their feet in alarm.

"What's the matter?" Dan cried.

"Somebody has got into the tent and been poundin' me with a club! I'm pretty near killed."

The faint glow cast by the oil-stove was not sufficient to illumine any portion of the tent, and the host made all haste to light a lantern, after which Dan proceeded to search for the supposed intruder; but before he had taken a dozen steps the proprietor of the museum burst into a hearty laugh.

"Funny, ain't it?" Sam cried, angrily. "I s'pose you'd laugh if I'd been killed in your old tent!"

This savage remark appeared to excite the man's mirth rather than check it, and while he was thus enjoying himself Teddy and Dan stood gazing at him in surprise.

It was several minutes before the man could speak, and then he said, as he pointed to the goat who stood a short distance away calmly munching some potato parings:

"That's the fellow who has been beating your friend with a club. I always let him loose at night, and he has walked over our dying boy."

Sam insisted that he had been beaten with a club; but on examining his clothing two spots of fresh earth were found, showing where the animal had stepped. A hoof-print on the sleeve and another directly on the breast of his coat comprised the full amount of damage done.

The boy who had believed himself so dangerously wounded now grew angry, and, leaping to his feet, declared he would not remain in the tent another minute unless the goat was tied.

"There's nothing to prevent your bunking somewhere else," the owner of the animal replied, quite sharply.

"Billy always has had the liberty of the tent at night, and I reckon he won't lose it now."

Sam started toward the entrance; but before reaching it he realized that he would be punishing no one but himself, and slowly turned back, saying as he approached the stove:

"It's too late to hunt for lodgings now, an' I s'pose I'll have to make the best of it."

"I guess you will," the host replied, quietly, and the angry Sam lay down on the seat of the baggage wagon, to insure himself against another visit from "Billy."

This incident had driven the desire for sleep from the eyelids of Teddy and Dan, and they remained awake some time after the loud breathing of their companions told that the visit from the goat had been temporarily effaced from their minds.

Now Teddy discovered what a hard, uncomfortable bed the bare earth was, and after tossing about for half an hour, he whispered to Dan:

"Do you suppose it would be any better in the wagon?"

"No; you'll get used to it in a little while, and the ground is softer than a board."

Teddy was about to reply when the sound of voices from the outside attracted his attention, and then came the crackle as of a match being lighted.

Two or more men had halted near the canvas within a few feet of where the boys were lying, evidently that they might be sheltered from the wind while getting their pipes or cigars in working order.

A moment later both the listeners heard one of the newcomers say:

"I don't think it will be safe for you to show up very much while we stay here."

"Why not? If them boys recognize me it will be an easy matter to frighten 'em into holdin' their tongues, and there's goin' to be good pickin's this week."

"But what's the use of runnin' any risk? We've made a fairly good haul already, an' it's better to get safe off with that than stick our noses where it'll be hard work to pull them back."

Teddy was in the highest possible excitement. In the tone of the second speaker's voice he recognized the man who had stolen his money, and he punched Dan with his elbow to assure himself that the latter was listening.

"Keep quiet," Dan whispered, and then the conversation on the outside was continued.

"I'll take good care to keep shady, an' you see what can be done to-morrow."

"Will you promise not to leave the house till after dark?"

"I thought you had more nerve; but so long as you haven't I reckon I'll promise, for this is bound to be a fat thing, and I don't want to lose the whole of it."

"When these country jays begin to send their stuff home I'll have ours shipped, an' there's little danger it'll be overhauled, more especially since the old man couldn't get a warrant for the only one he suspects. It's a safe bet that Hazelton has a pretty good idea who did the job, an' if they make trouble for him he'll most likely tell what he thinks."

"There's no call to be afraid of him after he has worked a couple of days, for those he ropes in would do all they could to have him arrested."

The last portion of this remark was almost indistinguishable, owing to the fact that the men were walking away, and when the sound of their footsteps could no longer be heard Teddy said:

"Those are the men who robbed Uncle Nathan's store, an' I'm certain one of them got my money."

"Would you know their voices if you heard them again?"

"Sure; but why don't we find out where they are going? It wouldn't be a hard job."

"Are you willin' to sneak after them?"

"Of course I am. Come on!"

The boys arose softly and crept through the flap of the tent without awakening the sleepers.

The night was dark and cloudy, and it was impossible to see any very great distance in either direction; but Dan had taken especial heed to the course taken by the men, and he started off without hesitation.

"We ought to have a club or something to protect ourselves in case they should see us," Teddy whispered.

"We won't get near enough to let them do much mischief. Do you see two sparks over there? They are the lighted ends of cigars, an' our men are behind them."

Dan quickened his pace; but he had failed to calculate the distance correctly, and was much nearer the game than he had suspected.

"Be careful they don't see us," he said, in a low tone, and in another instant the boys were directly in front of the men.

Teddy started back in alarm; but he was too late. In an instant the sparks flashed before his eyes, and he fell to the ground unconscious just as Dan succeeded in warding off the blow of a fist which was aimed at him.

CHAPTER VII. *THE CLERK*

When Teddy recovered from the vicious blow which had rendered him unconscious he saw Dan lying on the ground beside him, but no one else was near.

It was as if they had been fighting with phantoms of the brain, save for the fact that both bore the most indisputable signs of having been assaulted by beings of true flesh and blood.

One of Dan's eyes was closed as if by a violent blow, and Teddy bled freely from the ear, the crimson fluid telling eloquently of the exact location of that superior force which had caused so many stars to dance before his mental vision.

"We got through with that part of it mighty quick," Dan said, ruefully, as he rose to his feet. "There wasn't anything slow about the way they struck out after we made fools of ourselves by running into them, eh?"

"I don't understand how it all happened. It wasn't more than three seconds from the time I first saw them before there was a regular set of fireworks dancing in front of my eyes."

"It so happens that they saw us first," Dan replied, as he rubbed his head. "Those men were the thieves, and what I said showed them that we were on the scent."

"Where are they now?"

"You'll have to ask that question of someone else," Dan said, with a grimace of pain. "The last thing I know was when the tall fellow landed one square on my nose, and before I recovered both were out of sight. We have done harm rather than good, for now they know we overheard the conversation, an' we'll be mighty lucky if this is all we get before the fair comes to an end."

"Suppose we tell the police now?"

"What can you say to them? We heard those men talking about something which may have had nothing to do with the robbery, and want to have them arrested. On what grounds will we ask for a warrant? Besides, if Nathan Hargreaves was my uncle, I would let him fight his own battles."

"But I owe him eighteen dollars."

"What of that? He wouldn't take a penny off if you got your head broke while trying to find his money, and after all that has happened I think we have good reason to let him severely alone."

"I'm willing to go back to the tent," Teddy said, as he began to feel faint, and Dan aided him during the short walk, both staggering as they came through the flap, meeting their host near the entrance, who asked, sharply:

"What has been going on? I counted on helping a party of boys, rather than giving my tent up to a lot of roughs, as you appear to be."

In the fewest possible words Dan explained what had happened, and in addition told all the story of Teddy's losing his money, together with the accusation made by Uncle Nathan.

"I'm sorry I said a word," and the proprietor of the museum did really appear to be grieved. "It makes no difference whether you got a whipping or not, the guilty parties are here, and you can count on my help in turning them up."

"That's what I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to do," Teddy replied; "we tried our best to-night, and got the worst of it."

"There is plenty of time between now and Saturday. I'll do all any man can, an' it'll be strange if we don't get some proof before the fair closes."

"How did you know we were out?" Dan asked.

"I saw you go, and there was no reason why I should kick; but I began to be afraid you were up to something crooked. Now I know the whole story, I'll do my best to help you out of the scrape. Go to sleep, and we'll talk the whole matter over in the morning."

This was good advice, but not easily followed. Both the boys began to feel the effects of the blows received from the thieves, and the pain resulting therefrom was not conducive to repose.

They did manage to close their eyes in slumber now and then, however, and when the day broke Mr. Sweet, the proprietor of the museum, was standing ready to minister to their necessities.

"You haven't got exactly the right kind of faces to bring very big business," he said, cheerily; "but I reckon we can make a change in the general appearance. Use this plentifully as a bath, and before business opens you'll be respectable members of society."

It was certainly necessary for them to do something toward improving their appearance. Teddy's ear was swollen to nearly twice its natural size, and Dan had an eye which was rapidly blackening.

Thanks to the application provided by the owner of the museum, these evidences of a fight were rapidly reduced, and when Sam awoke they looked little the worse for wear, although he readily discovered that something serious had happened while he was wrapped in slumber.

"What has been goin' on?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Nothing much," Dan replied, with a forced laugh. "The goat walked over us, and we're kinder used up, that's all. Are you ready to go to breakfast?"

It was evident that Sam did not believe this explanation, but since he said nothing more about it, the two actors in the previous night's adventures held their peace; therefore it would not be in his power to betray any secrets.

Breakfast was eaten at an early hour, and the young fakirs returned to the grounds in time for Teddy to meet the first visitors.

Under Dan's instructions he continued to cry out:

"Here's where you can get a cane or a knife for nothing! Three rings for five cents, and every time you throw it over the mark you get what you ring! Three for five, and every cane or knife you ring is yours!"

It was yet too early for the exhibits to be opened, therefore Teddy had the assistance of his friends in reclaiming the rings thrown, and after nearly four dollars had been taken in with a loss only of a ten cent cane, the amateur fakir began to understand that it would be necessary for him to have a clerk.

"You're bound to do a good business this week," Dan said, at about eight o'clock. "Sam and I must go now to attend to our own work, an' if you see some fellow who can be trusted, I advise you to hire him, or there'll be considerable trade lost, for when these people want to spend their money they won't wait for you to hunt up assistants."

"Yes, I reckon there's more'n a thousand who are jest aching to see how I can row in one of them dandy boats," Master Sam added; "but if you get into any kind of a scrape, an' don't know how to get out, come to me. I'll see you through, no matter how good business is."

These two friends and advisers had hardly left him when a particular chum from the Run came up, and knowing he could be trusted, Teddy immediately made a trade for his services.

Tim Jones accepted the offer of ten cents on each dollar which might be taken in, and straightway engaged himself as Teddy's clerk, promising faithfully to account for every penny he should receive.

"I know you are honest," the proprietor of the board said to his friend, "and I want you to help me on the square, so I'm willing to give a fair price, for I may have to be away a good deal of the time."

"You mean that Nathan Hargreaves is goin' to have you arrested?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he's tellin' around town at the Run that you know who robbed his store, an' says he'll have a warrant out, if he has to go to Waterville for it."

"That is where he's making a great big mistake, Tim; but if he should do anything of the kind I expect you to do your best here," and Teddy spoke very solemnly, for he really believed his uncle

would succeed in having him arrested. "I don't know positively who broke into his store; but Dan an' I heard enough last night to make us believe we can find the thieves if we have time to work it out."

"I'd let him hustle to get the stuff, if it was my pudding," Tim replied with emphasis, and then as a party of young fellows bent on spending money approached the board he began to cry, as lustily as might have been expected from any old fakir:

"Here's where you get 'em, three rings for a nickel, and every cane or knife you ring is yours; all for the small sum of five cents!"

Convinced that he had a capable clerk, who was willing to work hard in order to earn an additional percentage, Teddy contented himself with making change for the rush of customers, which continued unabated until nearly ten o'clock and then came a lull, when he was able to watch the other fakirs around him.

Up to this point business had continued in the most promising manner, and if it held out as well there would be no difficulty in his paying all the money he owed, even although there might be no very large profit.

"I only want to get out square," he said to himself, while nursing his injured ear; but this experience led him to believe it was possible to do very much toward helping his mother, and already had he begun to dream of large returns, despite the fifteen dollars out of which he had been swindled.

It was just when his customers had gone to other parts of the ground, and after Teddy had figured up the amount of money taken in, showing that there was nearly eight dollars in the treasury with an offset only of one twenty-cent knife and two ten-cent canes lost, that the young fakir saw Hazelton standing some distance away beckoning to him.

"Look out sharp for things, Tim," he cried, as he vaulted over the railing and ran to the side of the man whom he believed to be a friend.

"Did anything happen last night?" the latter asked.

Teddy told him the whole story, keeping back not one incident.

"I heard quite so much in the hotel where I board. It is Long Jim and his partner who have done the job of which both you and I are accused. As for your uncle, he isn't worth a minute's thought; but I'm going to get to work, an' what he says may go against me, so you and I must turn those fellows up if we can."

"Ain't your business honest?" Teddy asked, in surprise.

"Well, when we come right down to dots, I don't suppose it is. Watch me when I leave here, and you'll have a chance to judge for yourself. I may want to leave my satchel with you for a while, and I reckon you're willing to take care of it?"

"Of course I am. I'll do anything you ask."

"Better wait and see the game first, but don't forget that we've got to turn up the two men who whipped you and your friend last night, or stand the chance of being hauled up for the robbery ourselves."

"Did you say anything to Uncle Nathan to make him think you would break into his store?"

"No; I only played him for a jay, as you shall see me do with two or three hundred of these smart fellows here, and he jumped down on me because there was no one else on whom to fasten the crime. I've got to go, now. Don't forget to hurry back to your cane-board when you see I'm getting through with my first stand, for I want to leave my stuff with somebody whom I can trust."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JEWELRY FAKIR

Teddy's curiosity regarding the kind of business which Hazelton proposed to do was so great that, for the time being, he forgot his own venture in watching this supposed friend.

The jewelry fakir disappeared amid the crowd for a few moments, reappearing in a carriage drawn by a fancifully decorated horse, and the gaudy trappings caused the sightseers to stop, believing something interesting or curious was to be seen.

Hazelton introduced himself as an agent for a large manufacturing company, and proposed to dispose of "samples" of their goods in a manner which would be satisfactory to all. He began by throwing away great numbers of cheap rings made to imitate gold, and as the boys scrambled for them he complained that the older members of the throng – those people whom he particularly wished should test the merits of his wares – were getting nothing.

"I can change that," he said, after hesitating a moment, as if to devise some plan. Then holding up half a dozen pairs of cuff-buttons, he continued: "I am allowed to give away only six of these. What gentleman will advance twenty-five cents for one of these sets, knowing the money will be returned to him? By that means I shall place the goods where they will do the most good."

In a short time the necessary number of purchasers was found, each having paid a quarter of a dollar, and then, with great ostentation, the fakir returned to every one the money he had given.

A similar performance was gone through with in the case of ten seal rings, and by that time the crowd were in a state of high excitement, for they were getting supposedly valuable goods by simply loaning this agent their money for a short time.

The fakir then held up a lot of watch-chains, asking who would give him a dollar for one, but in this instance he made no mention of returning the money.

Believing these also were to be given away, every man scrambled to pass up his dollar before the supply should be exhausted, and fully two hundred dollars was taken in by the generous "agent." Then, as the demand ceased, Hazelton produced from his valise what appeared to be a heavy gold watch.

Wrapping it in paper, and attaching it to a chain, he cried:

"Who wants to take another, and receive as a present what I have fastened to the end of it; but on the condition that this paper shall not be removed until I give permission?"

A young fellow standing near Teddy made all possible haste to pass the fakir a dollar and receive the prize.

Then the remainder of the crowd clamored for more to be put up in the same manner, and Hazelton disposed of at least a hundred before the clamorous throng could be appeased.

While this was being done Teddy saw the young fellow slyly remove the paper and examine his goods. A look of anger and disappointment overspread his face as a cheap, empty locket, fashioned on the outside something like the case of a watch, was revealed to view. Twenty cents would have been an extravagantly high price for what he had paid a dollar; but it was possible the agent would return the money as he had done in the previous cases, and the victimized fellow held his peace.

Hazelton was now ready to take a hurried departure. No more dollars were passed up, and quickly seizing the reins, he said:

"I have not represented these goods to be gold; but they are a fine imitation, and Mr. Nathan Hargreaves, of Peach Bottom Run, will probably act as my agent for the sale of them. You can get what may be wanted from him if you need any more."

The last words were hardly spoken before he drove quickly through the throng, leaving his dupes in a daze, from which they did not recover until he was lost to view.

Now Teddy understood what the "Give-Away" game was, and he also knew that it was far from being honest, although Hazelton had really made no promises which he did not fulfill.

Some of the victims were angry, and vowed to flog "that feller within an inch of his life" before sunset; others bore their loss philosophically, and turned away with the remark that the fakir was "a cute one," while the majority hastened off lest they should be suspected of being victims.

Teddy returned to his cane-board feeling sad because he had been so mistaken in this particular man, and had hardly reached there when Hazelton, on foot, came from the side of the fair grounds opposite where he had disappeared, saying hurriedly, as he handed the boy a black satchel somewhat resembling a sample case:

"Look out for this! All my money is in it."

Without waiting for an answer the man was gone, and the young fakir was in no slight distress at being the custodian of so much wealth.

After considerable discussion with Tim he decided to leave it behind the cane-board where it would be screened from view, and then a crowd of customers suddenly appearing, he was so busy during the next half hour that he hardly had time to think of that which had been intrusted to his keeping.

Not until trade grew dull once more did Hazelton appear, looking decidedly well pleased with himself, and, standing where the passers-by could not hear, he asked:

"Well, what do you think of the give-away game now?"

"It looks to me like a swindle," Teddy replied, bluntly. "The things you sold were not worth half what you got for them."

"Six cents apiece for the chains, and five for the locket is what I pay by the quantity," the fakir said, with a laugh.

"But you made the people think they were getting real watches."

"I was mighty careful to say nothing of the kind. They thought they saw a watch, and I told them I would make each purchaser a present of what was on the chain. Their idea was to get the best of me, and in that I didn't lose very much. It's a case of setting a thief to catch a thief, and the smartest man comes out ahead."

"But why did you leave all the money with me?"

"Because it sometimes happens that my customers make a kick, and try to get back their stuff by force, so I don't carry much cash in my pockets while I am on the fair grounds."

"Of course you are all through now. You can't expect to do the same thing over again."

"That's exactly what I shall do in about an hour, only in a different portion of the inclosure, and you'll see that I can catch just as many suckers as before."

Then, in order to be rid of the satchel, for it seemed as if he was really concerned in the swindle so long as it remained in his keeping, Teddy said he wanted to see what Dan and Sam were doing.

"Go ahead; I'll stay near by where I can keep an eye on the stuff, so you needn't let that worry you."

As a matter of fact, the boy was not eager to leave his place of business; but having said so, it was necessary to go, or let Hazelton understand exactly why the remark had been made.

Cautioning Tim to "keep his eyes open for trade," he walked across the grounds to the building where Dan was employed, and found that young gentleman displaying the good qualities of a peculiar-looking weapon.

"This is the Model Pocket Rifle," Dan was saying to a party of gentlemen. "The shoulder-rest is detachable, and you can buy an effective weapon for a trifle over fifteen dollars, as – Hello, Teddy, how's business?" he added, suddenly, on observing his friend, and the two had an opportunity for conversation, while the curious ones were examining the rifle.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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