

Eggleston George Cary

The Last of the Flatboats



George Eggleston

The Last of the Flatboats

«Public Domain»

Eggleston G.

The Last of the Flatboats / G. Eggleston — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Preface	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	13
CHAPTER V	15
CHAPTER VI	17
CHAPTER VII	20
CHAPTER VIII	22
CHAPTER IX	25
CHAPTER X	27
CHAPTER XI	30
CHAPTER XII	33
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	35

The Last of the Flatboats A Story of the Mississippi and Its Interesting Family of Rivers

Preface

Vevay, from which “The Last of the Flatboats” starts on its voyage down the Mississippi, is a beautiful little Indiana town on the Ohio River, about midway between Cincinnati and Louisville. The town and Switzerland County, of which it is the capital, were settled by a company of energetic and thrifty Swiss immigrants, about the year 1805. Their family names are still dominant in the town. I recall the following as familiar to me there in my boyhood: Grisard, Thiebaud, Le Clerc, Moreraud, Detraz, Tardy, Malin, Golay, Courvoisseur, Danglade, Bettens, Minnit, Violet, Dufour, Dumont, Duprez, Medary, Schenck, and others of Swiss origin.

The name Thiebaud, used in this story, was always pronounced “Kaybo” in Vevay. The name Moreraud was called “Murrow.”

The map which accompanies this volume was specially prepared for it by Lieut. – Col. Alexander McKenzie of the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army. To his skill, learning, and courtesy I and my readers are indebted for the careful marking of the practically navigable parts of the great river system, and for the calculation of mileage in every case.

G. C. E.

CHAPTER I

THE RESCUE OF THE PIGS

“Give it up, boys; you’re tired, and you’ve been in the water too long already. And, besides, I’ve decided that this job’s done.”

It was Ed Lowry who spoke. He was lying on the sand under a big sycamore tree that had slid, roots and all, off the river bank above, and now stood leaning like a drunken man trying to stand upright.

Ed was a tall, slender, and not at all robust boy, with a big head, and a tremendous shock of half-curly hair to make it look bigger.

The four boys whom he addressed had been diving in the river and struggling with something under the water, but without success. Three of them accepted Ed’s suggestion, as all of them were accustomed to do, not because he had any particular right to make suggestions to them, but because he was so far the moral and intellectual superior of every boy in town, and was always so wise and kindly and just in his decisions, that they had come to regard his word as a sort of law without themselves quite knowing why.

Three of the boys left the river, therefore, shook the water off their sunburned bodies, – for they had no towels, – and slipped into the loose shirt and cottonade trousers that constituted their sole costume.

The other boy – Ed’s younger brother, Philip – was not so ready to accept suggestions. In response to Ed’s call, he cried out in a sort of mock heroics: —

“Never say die! In the words of the immortal Lawrence, or some other immortal who died a long time ago, ‘Don’t give up the ship!’ *I’m* going to get that pig if it takes all summer.”

The boys all laughed as they threw themselves down upon the sand by Ed.

“Might as well let him alone,” said Will Moreraud; “he never will quit.”

Meantime Phil had dived three or four times more, each time going down head first, wrestling with the object as long as he could hold his breath, and each time manifestly moving one end or the other of it nearer the shore, and into shallower water, before coming to the surface again.

When he had caught his breath after the third or fourth struggle, he called out: —

“I say, boys, it isn’t a pig at all, but a good average-sized elephant. ‘Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish,’ *I’m* going to get that animal ashore.”

“He’ll do it, too,” said Constant Thiebaud.

“Of course he will,” drawled Irving Strong. “It’s a way he has. He never gives up anything. Don’t you remember how he stuck to that sum in the arithmetic about that cistern whose idiotic builder had put three different sized pipes to run water into it, and two others of still different sizes to run water out? He worked three weeks over that thing after all the rest of us gave it up and got Mrs. Dupont to show us – and he got it, too.”

“Yes, and he can do it now backwards or forwards or standing on his head,” said Constant Thiebaud; “while there isn’t another boy here that can do it at all.”

“Except Ed Lowry,” said Irving Strong. “But then, he’s different, and knows a whole lot about the higher mathematics, while we’re only in algebra. How is it, Ed? You’ve been sick so much that I don’t believe you ever did go to school more than a month at a time, and yet you’re ahead of all of us.”

Just then Phil came up after a long tussle under the water, and this time stood only a little way from shore where the water was not more than breast high. He cried: —

“Now I’ve ‘met the enemy and it’s ours,’ or words to that effect. I’ve got the elephant into three feet of water, but I can’t ‘personally conduct’ it ashore. Come here, all of you, and help.”

The boys quickly dropped out of their clothes, and went to their comrade’s assistance.

“What is the thing, anyhow?” asked Irving Strong.

“I don’t know,” said Phil. “All I know is that it’s got elbows and wrists and all sorts of burs on it, on which I’ve been skinning my shins for the last half hour; and that it is heavier than one of your compositions, Irv.”

The thing was in water so shallow that all the boys at once could get at it merely by bending forward and plunging their heads and shoulders under the surface. But it was so unwieldy that it took all five of them – for Ed too had joined, as he always did when there was need of him – fully ten minutes to bring it out upon shore.

“I say, boys,” said Ed, “this is a big find. It’s that ferry-boat shaft the iron man told us about, and you remember we are to have fifty dollars for it.”

“Then hurrah for Phil Lowry’s obstinate pertinacity!” said Irving Strong. “That’s what Mrs. Dupont called it when she bracketed his name and mine together on the bulletin-board as ‘Irreclaimable whisperers.’ Phil, you may be irreclaimable, but you’ve proved that this shaft isn’t.”

It was just below the little old town of Vevay on the Ohio River, where Swiss names and some few Swiss customs still survived long after the Swiss settlers of 1805 were buried. To be exact, it was at “The Point,” where all Vevay boys went for their swimming because it lay a little beyond the town limits, and so Joe Peelman, the marshal, could not arrest them for swimming there in daylight without their clothes.

During the high water of the preceding winter a barge loaded with pig-iron had broken in two there and sunk. The strong current quickly carried away what was left of the wrecked barge, – which had been scarcely more than a great oblong box, – leaving the iron to be undermined by the water and to sink into the sand and gravel of the bottom.

The agent who came to look after matters quickly decided that at such a place very little of the cargo could ever be recovered – not enough to justify him in sending a wrecking force there. He thought, too, that by the time of summer low water – for the Ohio runs very low indeed in July and August – the iron would have settled and scattered too much to be worth searching for.

But Phil Lowry not only never liked to give up, he never liked to see anybody else give up. So what he looked upon as the iron man’s weak surrender gave him an idea. He said to the agent: —

“That iron’s where we boys go swimming in summer-time. If we get any of it out during the low water, can we have it? Is it ‘finder’s keeper’?”

“Well, no,” said the man, hesitating. “But I’ll tell you what I’ll do. If you boys get out any considerable quantity, – say fifty tons or more, – enough to justify me in sending a steamboat after it, I’ll pay you three dollars a ton salvage for it.”

So the boys formed a salvage copartnership. Long-headed Ed Lowry, in order to avoid misunderstandings, drew up an agreement, and the iron man signed it. It gave the boys entire charge of the wreck, and bound the owner to pay for recovered iron as he had proposed. Just before signing the paper the agent remembered the ferry-boat wheel shaft, which had been a part of the cargo; and as it was a valuable piece of property, which he particularly wanted to recover, he added a clause to the contract agreeing to pay an additional fifty dollars for it, if by any remote chance it should be saved.

During the summer the boys had been specially favored by circumstances. The river had gone down much earlier that year than usual, and it went at last much lower than it had done for many years past. As a consequence they had prospered well in their enterprise. Their pile of iron “pigs” on the shore when the shaft was found amounted to three hundred tons, and the agent was to arrive by the packet that night to pay for it and take possession. This was, therefore, their last day’s work, and thanks to Philip Lowry’s “obstinate pertinacity” it was the most profitable day’s work of them all.

CHAPTER II

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

When the wheel shaft was tugged ashore, the boys slipped on their clothes again and retired to the shade of the big sycamore tree, where Ed Lowry had left the book he had been reading. Ed Lowry always had a book within reach.

Philip threw himself down to rest. He was not only tired, he was physically “used up” with his labors under water in tugging first one and then the other end of the heavy shaft toward the shore.

It would have been very hard work even in the open air. Under water, and without breath, it had completely exhausted the boy. Just now he was bent upon sleep. So in spite of the sun glare, and in spite of the chatter around him, and still more, in spite of a sense of triumph which was strong enough in him to have kept anybody else awake, he fell into a profound slumber.

“Well, we’ve finished the job,” said Constant Thiebaud after a while. “What’s the result, Ed?”

Ed Lowry pulled a memorandum out of his pocket and studied it for a while.

“We have saved a trifle over three hundred tons of pig-iron,” he replied, “and for that, at \$3.00 a ton, will get a little over \$900. We’re to get \$50 more for the shaft, which makes \$950. It’ll be a trifle more than that, but not enough more to count. My calculation is that we shall have about \$190 apiece when the agent settles with us to-night – possibly \$195.”

“And a mighty good summer’s work it is,” said Will Moreraud.

“Especially as it’s been all fun,” said Irv Strong, “to a parcel of amphibious Ohio River boys who would have stayed in the water most of the time anyhow. It’s better fun diving after pig-iron than after mussel-shells, isn’t it?”

Irving was the only boy in the party whose people were comparatively well-to-do, and who could therefore afford to think of the fun they had had without much concern for the profits. But Irv Strong had no trace of arrogance in his make-up. He could have dressed, if he had chosen, in much better fashion than any other boy in town. But he chose instead to wear blue cottonade trousers and a tow linen shirt, and to go barefoot just as his comrades did. So in speaking of the pleasure they had had, he put the matter in a way that all could sympathize with. For truly they had had more “fun” as he called it, than ever before in their lives. Ed Lowry could have told them why. He could have explained to them how much a real purpose, an object worth struggling for, adds to the enjoyment people get out of sport; but Ed usually kept his philosophy to himself except when there was a need for it. Just now there was no need. The boys were as happy as possible in the completion of their task, just as they had been as happy as possible in performing it. Satisfaction is better than an explanation at any time, and Ed Lowry knew it.

There was silence for a considerable time. Perhaps all the boys were tired after their hard day’s work. Presently Constant Thiebaud spoke.

“A hundred and ninety dollars apiece! That’s more money than any of us ever saw before. I say, boys, what are we going to do with it?”

There was a pause.

“Let him speak first who can speak best,” said Irv Strong. “So, Ed Lowry, what are you going to do with *your* share of the money?”

“I’m going shopping with it – shopping for some ‘bargain counter’ health,” replied the tall boy.

“How do you mean?” asked two boys at once, and eagerly.

“Well, my phthisic was very bad last winter, you know. It isn’t phthisic at all, I think. Phthisic is consumption, and I haven’t that – yet.”

He spoke hopefully, rather than confidently. He hoped his malady might not be a fatal one, but sometimes he had doubts.

Let me say here that his hope was better founded than his fear. For at this latter end of the century, Ed Lowry – under his own proper name and not under that which I am hiding him behind in this story – is not only living, but famous. His bodily strength has always been small, but the work he has done in the world with that big brain of his has been very great, and his name – the real one I mean – is familiar to everybody who reads books or cares for American history.

“But whatever it is,” Ed continued, “the doctor wants me to go South for this winter, and now that I’ve got money enough, I’m going to do it.”

“But you haven’t got money enough,” said Irv Strong. “A hundred and ninety dollars won’t much more than pay your steamboat fare to New Orleans and back. What are you going to live on down there – especially if you get sick?”

The irrepressible Phil selected this as the time to wake up. “Well,” he said, sitting up in the sand and locking his muscular arms around his knees, “*I’m* in this game a little bit myself. I’ve got one whole hundred and ninety dollars’ worth of stake in that big pile of iron; and from Mrs. Dupont down to the last one-suspended chap in the lot of you, you are all always talking about my ‘obstinate pertinacity.’ Well, my ‘pertinacity’ just now ‘obstinately’ declares that Ed shall take my share in the stake and spend it for his health. He shakes his head, but if he won’t, then I ‘solemnly swear or affirm’ that I’ll take every dollar of it out to the channel there and throw it in. I’ll – ”

But Phil had broken down. His affection for his half-invalid brother was the one thing that nothing could ever overcome. He didn’t weep. That is to say, none of the boys saw him shed tears, but instead of finishing the sentence he was uttering, he suddenly became interested in the pebbles along the river shore, fifty yards lower down the stream.

Ed, too, found it difficult just then to say anything. Ed had always been disposed to worry himself about Phil – to regulate him, and when he couldn’t do that, to suffer in his own mind and conscience for his brother’s misdeeds – which, after all, were usually nothing worse than manifestations of excessive boyish enthusiasm, the undue use of slang, and an excessive devotion to purposes which Ed’s calmer temper could not quite approve. Just now Ed had made a new discovery. He had found out something of the rattling, restless, reckless boy’s character which he had never fully known before. For he did not know, as the other boys did, how Phil, a year ago, had waited for half an hour behind the schoolhouse, and armed with stones had wreaked a fearful vengeance upon the big bully twice his size, who had used his strength cruelly to torment Ed’s weakness. That story had been kept from Ed, because it was well understood that he did not approve of fighting; and the boys, who fully sympathized with the little fellow’s animosity against the big bully, didn’t want him censured for his battle and victory.

So there was silence after Phil’s declaration of his purpose, which every boy there knew that he would fulfil to the letter. At last Ed said: —

“On my own share of the money I could go by taking deck passage.”

“Yes,” cried Phil, suddenly reappearing in a sort of wrath that was very unusual with him – “yes, and live on equal terms with a lot of dirty, low-lived wretches – ugh! Now see here, Ed! I’ve told you you are to take my share of the money. If you don’t, I’ll do exactly what I said, – I’ll get it changed into coin, and I’ll drop it into the river at a point where no diving will ever get it. I’ve said my say. I’ll do my do.”

“Look here,” drawled Irv Strong, after a moment. “Let’s *all* go to New Orleans, and don’t let’s pay any steamboat fare at all except to get back!”

“But how?” asked three boys, in a breath.

“Let’s run a flatboat! In my father’s day, pretty nearly all the hay, grain, bacon, apples, onions, and the like, grown in this part of the country, were sent to New Orleans in flatboats. I don’t see why it wouldn’t pay for us to take a flatboat down the river now. We’ve more than enough money to build and run her, and we can get a cargo, I’ll bet a brass button.”

The boys were all eagerness. They knew, of course, what a flatboat was, but they had seen very few craft of that sort, as the old floating flatboats had almost entirely given place on the Ohio to barges, towed, or rather pushed, by big, stern-wheel steamboats. For the benefit of readers who never saw anything of the kind, let me explain.

A flatboat was simply a big, overgrown, square-bowed and square-sterned scow, with a box-like house built on top. She could carry a very heavy cargo without sinking below her gunwales, and the house on top, with its roof of slightly curved boards, was to hold the cargo. There was a little open space at the bow to let freight in and out, while a part of the deck-house at the stern was made into a little box-like cabin for the crew. The scow part, or boat proper, was strongly built, with great timber gunwales, and a bottom of two-inch plank tightly caulked. The freight-house built on it was so put together that only a few of the planks were required to have nails in them, so that when the boat reached New Orleans she could be sold as lumber for more than she had originally cost.

She was simply floated down the river by the current. There were two big oars, or “sweeps,” as they were called, with which the men by rowing could give the craft steerage way – that is to say, speed enough to let the big steering oar throw her stern around as a rudder does, and guide her course. All this was necessary in making sharp turns in the channel to keep off bars; but as the flatboats usually went down the river only at high stages of water, the chief use of the oars was to make landings.

Ed could have told his comrades some interesting facts concerning the enormous part that the flatboats once played in that commerce which built up the great Western country; but, as Irv Strong said, there was “already a question before the house. That question is, ‘Why can’t we five fellows build a flatboat, load her, and take her down the river?’ We’ll be the ‘hands’ ourselves, and won’t charge ourselves any wages, so we can certainly carry freight cheaper than any steamboat can. We’ll earn some more money, perhaps, and if we don’t, we’ll have lots of fun, and best of all, we’ll ‘bust that broncho,’ or bronchitis of Ed’s – for that’s what it is. They call it phthisic only because that’s the very hardest word in the book to spell.”

The sun was getting low, but the boys were deeply interested. They would have determined upon the project then and there but for Ed’s caution. As it was, they made him a sort of committee of one to inquire into details, to find out what it would cost to build a flatboat, what living expenses would be necessary for her boy crew, what it would cost them for passage back from New Orleans, and on what terms they could get a cargo.

This is how it all began.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN PHIL

Ed's report was in all respects favorable to the enterprise. Perry Raymond, who in the old days had built many scores of flatboats, was now too old to undertake an active enterprise. But he told Ed, to the very last board, how much lumber would be required, and the price of every stick in it. He volunteered, as a mere matter of favor and without any charge whatever, to superintend and direct the work of the boys in building a boat for themselves. The result was that they could build a boat for a very small fraction of their money, and Perry promised to show them how to caulk it for themselves.

Ed had seen the principal merchants of the place, also. It was their practice to exchange goods for country produce – any sort that might come to them, whether hay, or onions, or garlic, or butter, or eggs, or wheat, or wool, or corn, or apples, or what not.

It was their business to know pretty accurately how much of each kind of produce they were likely to get during any given season in return for their goods, and how best to market it. They knew to a nicety how much butter and how many eggs or how many bushels of onions or how many pounds of hay they could get for a parasol or a bit of lace or a calico dress or a sack of coffee. Their chief problem was how to sell all these things to the best advantage afterward. Usually they found their best market down the river.

So when Ed Lowry presented the case to them they were quick to see advantage in it. His proposal was that the boys should provide the flatboat and take her to New Orleans at their own expense; that the merchants should furnish a cargo to be sold on commission either at New Orleans or on "the coast," as the river country for a few hundred miles above that city is called, the boys to have a certain part of the money as freight and a certain other part as "commission."

Every merchant in town was ready to furnish a part of the cargo, and it seemed altogether probable that the boys would easily secure more freight than they could carry, though their flatboat was to be one of the biggest that ever floated down the river. As she was likely also to be one of the last, coming as she did long after that system of river transportation had been generally abandoned, Irv Strong, in a burst of eloquence, proposed that she should be called *The Last of the Flatboats*, in order, he said, "that she may take rank with those noble literary productions, 'The Last of the Barons,' 'The Last of the Mohicans,' 'The Last of the Mamelukes,' 'The Last Days of Pompeii,' and 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel.'"

Ed Lowry laughed, and the other boys voted for the name proposed.

As the boat was nearing completion, a few weeks later, and indeed had already received a part of her cargo, the question arose, who should be her captain.

The first impulse of everybody concerned was to say "Ed Lowry," but Ed vetoed that.

"I'm an invalid," he said, "or half an invalid at the best, and this thing isn't play. There are very serious duties for the captain of a flatboat to do. He must be able to expose himself in all weathers, which I can't do. He must be ready in resource and very quick to decide. In an emergency, it is far more important to have a quick decision than a wise one, and especially to have the one who decides a resolute person who will carry his decision into effect."

"I see," said Irving Strong. "What we need in a captain is 'obstinate pertinacity.' I move that Phil Lowry, as the possessor of a large and varied stock of that commodity, be made captain of *The Last of the Flatboats*."

As Phil was the very youngest of the group, and as he had always been regarded rather as a ready than a discreet thinker, there was a moment's hesitation. But a little thought convinced every one of the boys that Phil was by all odds the one among them best fit to undertake the difficult task

of command – the one most likely to bring the enterprise to a successful termination, especially if any serious difficulties should arise, as was pretty certain to happen.

“It’s an awful responsibility for Phil to assume,” said Ed that night to their widowed mother, a woman of unusual wisdom.

“Yes,” she replied; “but, after all, he is the one best fit, and that ought to be the only ground on which men or boys are selected for places of responsibility. Besides, it will educate Philip in much that he needs to learn. No matter what happens on the voyage, he will come back the better for it. He ought to have the discipline that responsibility gives. The one lesson he most needs to learn is that he is not merely an individual, but a part of a whole: that his conduct in any case affects others as well as himself, and that he is, therefore, responsible to others and for others. It is well that you boys have made him your captain. Now remember to hold up his hands and obey him loyally in every case of doubt. That will be hard for you, Edward, because of your superior knowledge – ”

“No, it won’t, mother, pardon me,” responded Ed: “first, because I know too much about some things not to know that other people know more than I do about others; and secondly, because I thoroughly understand what Napoleon meant when he said that ‘one bad general in command of an army is better than two good ones.’ The most unwise order promptly executed usually results better than the wisest order left open to debate. Phil will never leave things open to debate when the time comes for quick action, and besides, mother, I have a much better opinion of Phil’s capacity for command than you think. His readiness and resourcefulness are remarkable. He may or he may not get us safely to New Orleans. But if he doesn’t, I shall be perfectly certain that nobody else in the party could.”

So it was that Phil Lowry, the youngest of the party, and the most harum-scarum boy in all Vevay, was chosen captain of *The Last of the Flatboats* by those who were to voyage with him, simply because they all believed him to be the one best fit for the place.

CHAPTER IV

A HURRY CALL

Without theorizing about it, and, indeed, without knowing the fact, Phil began at once to rise to his responsibility. The success of the enterprise, he felt, depended in a large degree upon him, and he must think of everything necessary in advance.

One night, late in September, he asked his comrades to meet him “on business” in Will Moreraud’s room over a store. When they were all gathered around the little pine table with a smoky lamp on it, Phil drew out a carefully prepared memorandum and laid it before him. Then he began: —

“As you’ve made me responsible in this business, I’ve been studying up a little. The river’s going to rise earlier than usual this year, and in two weeks at most there’ll be water enough to get the boat over the falls at Louisville.”

“How do you know that?” broke in Constant Thiebaud, incredulously.

“Because there has already been a smart rise all along, as you know, and heavy rains are falling in the West Virginia and Pennsylvania mountains. The Allegheny River is bank full; the Monongahela is over its banks; and the Muskingum and the Big Kanawha and the Little Kanawha are all rising fast. There’ll be lots of water here almost before we know it.”

“Whew!” cried Irving Strong, rising, — for he could never sit still when anything interesting was under discussion, — “but how in the name of all the ’ologies do you know what’s going on in the Virginia mountains, and the rivers, and all that?”

“I’ve been reading the Cincinnati papers every day since you made me ‘It’; that’s all. Mr. Schenck lends them to me.”

“Well, Gee Whilicks!” exclaimed Constant, “who’d ’a’ thought of that!”

“No matter,” said Phil, a little abashed by the approbation of his foresight which he saw in all the boys’ eyes and heard in all their voices. “No matter about that; but I’ve more to say. The sooner we can get away with the flatboat, the better.”

“Why? What difference does it make?”

“Well, for most of the things we are taking as freight the prices are apt to be much higher in the fall than later, after the steamboats load up the market. That’s what Mr. Shaw says, and he knows. So we must get the boat loaded just as quickly as we can, and go out as soon as there is water enough to get her over the falls.”

“But we can’t do that,” said Ed, “because most of the produce we are to take hasn’t been brought to town yet. The hay is here, of course, but apples have hardly begun to come in —”

“That’s just what I’m coming to,” interrupted Phil. “I’ve been studying all that. We could get enough freight for two cargoes by waiting for it, but the best figuring I can do shows only about three-quarters of a load now actually in town. I propose that we go to work to-morrow and get the other quarter. That’s what I called you together for.”

“Where are we to get it?”

“Along the river, below town — in the neighborhood of Craig’s Landing.”

“But how?” asked Ed.

“By hustling. I’ve made out a list of everybody that produces anything for ten miles down the river and five miles back into the hills, — Mr. Larcom, Captain John Wright, Johnny Lampson, Mr. Albritton, Gersham McCallum and his brother Neil, Algy Wright, Mr. Minnit, Dr. Caine, Mr. Violet — and so on. Craig’s Landing is the nearest there is to all of them, and they can all get their produce there quickly. I propose that every boy in the crew take his foot in his hand early to-morrow morning, and that we visit every farmer in the list and persuade him to send his stuff to the landing at once. I’ve already seen Captain Wright, — saw him in town to-day, — and he promises me thirty barrels of

apples and seventy bushels of onions with some other things. I'll go myself to Johnny Lampson. He has at least a hundred barrels of apples, and I'll get them. They aren't picked yet, but I'll offer him our services to pick them immediately for low wages, and so – ”

“I say, boys!” broke in Irv Strong, “I move three cheers for ‘obstinate pertinacity.’ It's the thing that ‘goes’ in this sort of business.”

“And in most others,” quietly rejoined Ed Lowry. “I'm afraid I've never properly appreciated it till now.”

Phil had some other details to suggest, for he had been trying very earnestly to think of everything needful.

They would need some skiffs, and he reported that Perry Raymond had six new ones, of his own building, which he proposed to let them have as a part of the cargo. They were to use any of them as needed on the voyage, and their use was to offset freight charges. They were to sell the skiffs at New Orleans or above, and to have a part of the proceeds as commission.

“I move we accept the offer,” said Will Moreraud. “It's a good one.”

“It is already accepted,” replied the young captain a trifle sharply. “I closed the bargain at once.”

His tone was not arrogant, but it was authoritative. It was a new one for him to take, and it rather surprised the boys, but on the whole it did not displease them. It meant that their young captain intended to be something more effective than the chairman of a debating club; that having been asked to assume authority, he purposed to exercise it; that being in command, he meant to command in fact as well as in name.

Some of them talked the matter over later that evening, and though they felt a trifle resentful at first, they finally concluded that the boy's new attitude promised well for the enterprise, and, better still, that it was right.

“You see he isn't ‘cocky’ about it at all,” said Will Moreraud; “it just means that in this game he's ‘It,’ and he's going to give the word.”

“It means a good deal more than that,” said shrewd Irv Strong, who had been born the son of an officer in a regular army post. “It means we've picked out the right fellow to be our ‘It,’ and I, for one, stand ready to support him with my eyes shut, every time!”

“So do I,” cried out all the lads in chorus. “Only you see,” said Constant, “we didn't quite expect it from Phil. Well – maybe if we had, we'd have voted still louder for him for captain; that is, if we've got any real sense.”

“It means,” said Ed, gravely, “that if we fail to get *The Last of the Flatboats* safely to New Orleans, it will be our own fault, not his.”

“That's so,” said Irving Strong. “But who'd ever have expected that rattlepate to think out everything as he has done?”

“And to be so desperately in earnest about it, too!” said another.

“Well, I don't know,” responded Irving. “You remember how he stuck to that cistern sum. It's his way, only he's never before had so serious a matter as this to deal with, and I imagine we have never quite known what stuff he's made of.”

“Anyhow,” said Will, “we're ‘his to command,’ and we'll see him through.”

With a shout of applause for this sentiment the boys separated for sleep.

CHAPTER V

ON THE BANKS OF THE WONDERFUL RIVER

It was a busy fortnight that followed. The boys visited every farmer within six miles of the landing to secure whatever freight he might be willing to furnish. They picked and barrelled all of Lampson's apples, dug and bagged and barrelled all the potatoes in that neighborhood, and got together many small lots of onions, garlic, dried beans, and the like, including about ten barrels of eggs. These last they collected in baskets, a few dozen from each farm, and packed them at the landing. Of course every shipper's freight had to be separately marked and receipted for, so that the proper returns might be made.

During all this time the boys had lived in a camp of their own making at the landing, partly to guard the freight against thieves, partly to get used to cooking, etc., for themselves, partly to learn to "rough it," generally, and more than all because, being healthy-minded boys, they liked camping for its own sake.

Their little shelter was on the shore, just under the bank. They occupied it only during rains. At other times they lived night and day in the open air. They worked all day, of course, leaving one of their number on guard, but when night came, they had what Homer calls a "great bearded fire," built against a fallen sycamore tree of gigantic size, and after supper they sat by it chatting till it was time to sleep.

They were usually tired, but they were excited also, and that often kept them awake pretty late. The vision of the voyage had taken hold upon their imaginations. They pictured to themselves the calm joy of floating fifteen hundred miles and more down the great river, of seeing strange, subtropical regions that had hitherto been but names to them, seeming as remote as the Nile country itself until now.

And as they thought, they talked, but mainly their talk consisted of questions fired at Ed Lowry, who was very justly suspected of knowing about ten times as much about most things as anybody else in the company.

Finally, one night Irv Strong got to "supposing" things and asking Ed about them.

"Suppose we run on a sawyer," he said. Ed had been telling them about that particularly dangerous sort of snag.

"Well," said Ed, "we'll try to avoid that, by keeping as nearly as we can in the channel."

"But suppose we find that a particularly malignant sawyer has squatted down in the middle of the channel, and is laying for us there?"

"I doubt if sawyers often do that," said Ed, meditatively.

"Well, but suppose one cantankerous old sawyer should do so," insisted Irv. "You can 'suppose a case' and make a sawyer anywhere you please, can't you?"

Everybody laughed. Then Ed said: "Now listen to me, boys. I've been getting together all the books I can borrow that tell anything about the country we're going through, and I'll have them all on board. My plan is to lie on my back in the shade somewhere and read them while you fellows pull at the oars, cook the meals, and do the work generally. Then, when you happen to have a little leisure, as you will now and then, I'll tell you what I've learned by my reading."

"Oh, that's your plan, is it?" asked Phil.

"Yes, I've thought it all out carefully," laughed Ed.

"Well, you'll find out before we get far down the river what the duties of a flatboat hand are, and you'll *do* 'em, too, 'accordin' to the measure of your strength,' as old Mr. Moon always says in experience meeting."

“But reading and telling us about it is what Ed can do best,” said Will Moreraud, “and that’s what we’re taking him along for.”

“Not a bit of it,” quickly responded Phil. “We’re taking him along to make him well and strong like the rest of us, and I’m going to keep him off his back and on his feet as much as possible, and besides – ”

“But, Phil, old fellow,” Ed broke in, “didn’t you understand that I was only joking?”

Ed asked the question with a tender solicitude to which Phil responded promptly.

“Of course I did,” he replied. “You always do your share in everything, and sometimes more. But I don’t think you understand. You know we started this thing for you. I don’t know – maybe you’ll never get well if we don’t do our best to make you – ” but Phil had choked up by this time, and he broke away from the group and went down by the river. A little later Ed joined him there and, grasping his hand, said: —

“I understand, old fellow.”

“No, you don’t; at least not quite,” replied the boy, who had now recovered control of his voice. “You see it’s this way. You and I are *twins*. You’re some years older than I am, of course, but we’ve always been twins just the same.”

“Yes, I understand all that, and feel it.”

“No, not all,” persisted the younger boy. “You see I’ve got all the health there is between us, and it isn’t fair. If you should – well, if anything should happen to you, I’d never forgive myself for not finding out some way of dividing health with you – ”

“But, my dear brother – ” broke in Ed.

“Don’t interrupt me, now,” said Phil, almost hysterically, “because I must tell you this so that you will understand. When we made up this scheme and you fellows chose me captain, I got to thinking how much depended on me. There was the cargo, representing other people’s money, and I was responsible for that. There was the safety of the boat and crew, and that depended upon me, too. But these weren’t the heavy things to me. There was your health! That depended on me in a fearful way. I felt that I must find out what was best for you to do and then *make* you do it.” He laughed a little. “That sounds funny, doesn’t it? The idea of my ‘making’ you do things! – Never mind that. I went to Dr. Gale – ”

“What for?” asked Ed, in astonishment at this new revelation of the change in Phil’s happy-go-lucky ways.

“To find out just what it would be best for you to do and not to do, in order to make you well and strong like me.” He choked a little, but presently recovered himself and continued. “I found out, and I mean to *make* you do the things that will save you, even if you hate me for my – ”

He could say no more. There was no need. Ed, with his ready mind and big, generous heart, understood, though he wondered. He grasped his brother’s hand again and said, between something like sobs: —

“And I’ll obey you, Phil! Thank you, and God bless you! Be sure I could never hate you or do anything but love you, and you must always know that I understand.”

Then the two turned away from each other.

On their return to Vevay a few evenings later, Ed said to his mother: —

“You were right, mother; responsibility has already worked a miracle in Phil’s character.”

“No, you are wrong,” said the wise mother. “It is only that you have never quite understood your brother until now. Nothing really changes character – at least nothing changes it suddenly. Circumstances do not alter the character of men or women or boys. They only call out what is already there. Responsibility and his great affection for you have not changed your brother in the least. They have only served to make you acquainted with him as you never were before.”

“Be very sure I shall never misunderstand him again!” said the boy, with an earnestness not to be mistaken.

CHAPTER VI

THE PILOT

The boys went hurriedly back to Vevay. They had cargo enough and to spare. Indeed, they feared they might have difficulty in bestowing it all on their boat. And the rise in the river was coming even earlier and faster than Phil had calculated. They must get the Vevay part of their load on board and drop down to Craig's Landing before the water should reach their freight there, which lay near the river. So they hired a farm hand to watch the goods at the landing and hastened to town.

There they worked like beavers, getting cargo aboard, for it was no part of their plan to waste money hiring anybody to do for them anything that they could do for themselves. They loaded the boat under Perry Raymond's supervision, for even the tightest and stiffest boat can be made to leak like a sieve if badly loaded.

Finally, everything was ready. The town part of the cargo was well bestowed. Ed Lowry had deposited his books on top of tiers of hay bales, in between barrels, and in every other available space, for there was no room for them in the little cabin at the stern, where the boys must cook, eat, sleep, and live. The cabin wasn't over twelve feet by ten in dimensions, and a large part of its space was taken up by the six sleeping-bunks. For besides themselves there was a pilot to be provided for.

His name was Jim Hughes. Beyond that nobody knew anything about him. He had come to Vevay, from nowhere in particular, only a few days before the flatboat's departure, and asked to be taken as pilot. He was willing to go in that capacity without wages. He wanted "to get down the river," he said, and professed to know the channels fairly well.

"If he does," said Ed Lowry, "he knows a good deal more than most of the old-time flatboat pilots did. With the maps I've secured I think we can float the boat down the river without much need of a pilot anyhow. But as Hughes offers to go for his passage, we might as well take him along. We may get into a situation where his knowledge of the river, if he has any, will be of use to us."

So Jim Hughes was shipped as pilot of *The Last of the Flatboats*.

When all was ready that gallant craft was cast loose at the Ferry street landing, and as she drifted into the strong current, there was a cheer from the boys on shore who had assembled to see their schoolmates off.

"She floats upon the bosom of the waters," cried Irv Strong, "with all the grace of a cow learning to dance the hornpipe."

Irv was in exuberant spirits, as he always was in fact. He was like soda water with all its fizz in it, no matter what the circumstances might be, and just now the circumstances were altogether favorable.

"I say, boys," he cried, "let's have a little dance on deck! Tune up your fiddle, Constant."

Constant dived into the cabin and quickly returned with his violin, playing a jig even as he emerged from the little trap-door at the top of the steps.

Phil did not join in the dance, for he had discovered a cause of anxiety. Their pilot was making a great show of activity where none whatever was needed. From the Ferry street landing to "The Point" the current ran swiftly in a straight line, and if let alone, the boat would have gone in precisely the right direction. But Hughes was not letting her alone. With long sweeps of his great steering-oar he was driving her out dangerously near the head of the bar, now under water but still a shoal.

Phil, who was observing closely, called out: —

"I say, Jim, you must run further inshore, or you'll hit the head of the bar."

"Lem me alone," said Jim. "I know the river."

Just then the boat scraped bottom on the bar. Phil called out quickly: —

“All hands to the larboard oars! Give it to her hard!” and himself seizing the steering oar, he managed by a hair’s breadth to swing the great box – for that is all that a flatboat is – into the deep and rapid channel near the Indiana shore.

As she drifted into safe water, Phil said: —

“That’s incident number one in the voyage.”

“Yes, and it came pretty near being chapter first and last in the log-book of *The Last of the Flatboats*,” replied Irv Strong.

For several miles now there was nothing to do but float. But Phil was closely watching Jim Hughes and observed that that worthy made three visits to the hold, – as the cargo part of the boat is called, – going down each time by the forward ladder and not by the stairs leading to the cabin.

When the boat reached the big eddy about half a mile above Craig’s Landing, it was necessary for all hands to go to the oars again in order to make the landing.

Presently Phil observed that Hughes was steering wildly. His efforts with the steering oar were throwing the boat far out into the river, away from the shore on which they were to land, and directly toward the head of a strong channel which at this stage of water ran like a mill-race along the Kentucky shore on the farther side of Craig’s bar. Should the boat be sucked into that channel, she would be carried many miles down the stream before she could ever be landed even on the wrong side of the river, and she could never come back to Craig’s Landing unless towed back by a steamboat.

Phil, seeing the danger, asked: “Why don’t you keep her inshore?”

“None o’ yer business. I’m steerin’,” answered the pilot.

One quick, searching glance showed Phil the extent of the man’s drunkenness, – or his pretence of drunkenness, – for Phil had doubts of it. There were certain indications lacking. Yet if the fellow was shamming, he was doing it exceedingly well. His tongue seemed thick, his eyes glazed, and his walk across the deck appeared to be a mere stagger, supported by the great oar that he was wielding to such mischievous effect.

There was not a moment to be lost if the landing was to be made at all. Phil called all the boys to the larboard sweep and went to take possession of the steering-oar. Jim Hughes resisted violently. Phil, with a quietude that nobody had ever before seen him display under strong excitement, picked up a bit of board from the deck, and instantly knocked the big hulking fellow down by a blow on the head.

The man did not get up again or indeed manifest consciousness in any way. If this troubled the boy, as of course it must, he at least did not let it interfere with his duty. He had a difficult task to do and he must do it quickly. He gave his whole mind to that. The boys obeyed with a will his shouted orders to “pull hard!” then for two of them to go to the starboard oar and “back like killing snakes.” In a little while the boat swung round, and Phil called to Will Moreraud to “take a line ashore in the skiff and make it fast.” The youth did so, just in time to prevent the boat from grounding in the shoal water below the landing.

When everything was secure and the strenuous work done, the boy sank down upon the deck and called to his brother.

“See if I’ve killed him, won’t you, Ed? *I* can’t.”

A very slight examination showed that, while the blow from the bit of plank had brought some blood from the pilot’s head, it had done no serious damage. His stupor, it was Ed’s opinion, was due to whiskey, not to his chastisement.

Nevertheless it was a very bad beginning to the voyage, and Phil was strongly disposed to discharge the fellow then and there, and trust, as he put it, to “a good map, open eyes, and ordinary common sense, as better pilots than a drunken lout who probably doesn’t know the river even when he is sober.”

But the other boys dissuaded him. They thought that Jim’s intoxication was the result of his joy at getting off; that they could find his jug in its hiding-place and throw it overboard, – which

presently they did, – and that after he should get sober, Jim’s experience in flat-boating might be of great advantage to them.

“You see,” said Ed Lowry, “we’ve taken a big responsibility. All this freight, worth thousands of dollars, belongs to other people, and I suppose half of it isn’t even insured because the rates on flatboats are so high. Think if we should lose it for lack of a pilot!”

“Yes, think of that!” said two or three in a breath.

“Very well,” said Phil. “I yield to your judgment. But my own opinion is that such a pilot is worse than none. I’ll keep him for the present. But I’ll watch him, and if he gets any more whiskey or plays us any more tricks, I’ll set him ashore once for all if it’s in the middle of an Arkansas swamp.”

The river was rising now, more and more rapidly every hour. There was three days’ work to do getting the rest of the cargo aboard and making room for it in the crowded hold. But at Ed Lowry’s suggestion the boys avoided overtaxing themselves. The energetic Swiss blood in the veins of Constant Thiebaud and Will Moreraud prompted them to favor long hours for work on the plea that they could make it up by rest while floating down the river.

But under Ed’s advice Phil overruled them, and it was decided to breakfast at six o’clock, work from seven to twelve, dine, rest for an hour, and work again till five.

CHAPTER VII

TALKING

The pleasantest part of the day, under this arrangement, was that between five o'clock and bedtime.

The boys talked then, and talking is about the very best thing that anybody ever does. It is by talk that we come to know those about us and make ourselves known to them. It is by talk that we learn to like our fellows, by learning what there is in them worth liking. And it is by talk mainly that we find out what we think and correct our thinking.

Ed Lowry was reading a book one day, when suddenly he looked up and said: —

“I say, fellows, this is good. Lord Macaulay said he never knew what he thought about any subject until he had talked about it. Of course that's so with all of us, when you come to think of it.”

“Well, I don't know,” said Phil. “I often talk about things and don't know what I think about 'em even after I've talked. Here's this big bond robbery, for example. I've read all about it in the Cincinnati newspapers and I've talked you fellows deaf, dumb, and blind concerning it. Yet, I don't know even now what I think about it.”

“I know what I think,” said Will Moreraud. “I think the detectives are ‘all off.’”

“How?” asked all the boys in chorus.

“Well, they're trying to find the man who is supposed to be carrying the plunder. It seems to me they'd better look for the other fellows first; for if they were caught, they'd soon enough tell where the man that carries it is. They wouldn't go to jail and leave him with the stuff.”

“The worst of it is they're publishing descriptions of the fellow and even of what they've noticed concerning his clothes and beard, as if a thief that was up to a game like that wouldn't change his clothes and part his hair differently and wear a different sort of beard, especially after he's been told what they're looking for.”

“Yes, that's so,” said Irving Strong, reading from one of Phil's Cincinnati newspapers:

“‘Red hair’ – a man might dye that – ‘parted on the left side and brushed forward’ – he might part it in the middle and brush it back, or have it all cut off with one of those mowing machines the barbers use, just as Jim Hughes does with his – ”

“Now I come to think of it,” continued Irv, after a moment's thought, “Jim answers the description in several ways, – limps a little with his left leg, has red hair when he permits himself to have any hair at all, has lost a front tooth, and speaks with a slight lisp.”

“Oh, Jim Hughes isn't a bank burglar,” exclaimed Will Moreraud. “He hasn't sense enough for anything of that sort.”

“Of course not,” said Irv. “I didn't mean to suggest anything of the kind. I merely cited his peculiarities to show how easily a detective's description might lead men into mistakes. Why, Jim might even be arrested on that description.”

“But all that isn't what Macaulay meant,” said Ed. “He meant that a man never really knows what he thinks about any subject till he has put his thought into words and then turned it over and looked at it and found out exactly what it is.”

“I guess that's so,” drawled Irv. “I notice that whenever I try to think seriously – ”

The boys all laughed. The idea of Irv Strong's thinking seriously seemed peculiarly humorous to them.

“Well, I do try sometimes,” said Irv, “and whenever I do, I put the whole thing into the exactest words I can find. Very often, when I get it into exact words, I find that my opinions won't hang together and I've got to reconstruct them.”

“Exactly!” said Ed Lowry. “And that is the great difficulty animals have in trying to think. They haven’t any words even in their minds. They can’t put their thoughts into form so as to examine them. It seems to me that language is necessary to any real thinking, and that it is the possession of language more than anything or everything else that makes man really the lord of creation.”

“Yes,” said Phil. “Even Bre’r Rabbit and Bre’r Fox and all the rest of them are represented as putting their thoughts into words.”

“Perhaps,” said Irv, “that’s the reason why educated people think more soundly than uneducated ones. They have a nicer sense of the meaning of words.”

“Of course,” said Ed. “I suppose that is what President Eliot of Harvard meant when he said that ‘the object of education is to teach a man to express his thought clearly in his own language.’”

“Very well,” said Phil. “My own thought, clearly expressed in my own language, is that it’s time for supper. Come, stir your stumps, ye philosophical pundits! Bring me the skillet and the frying-pan, the salt pork to fry, and prepare the apples and potatoes and eggs to cook in the fat thereof. In the classic language of our own time, get a move on you, and don’t forget the coffeepot; nor yet the coffee that is to be steeped therein!”

The boys were ready enough to respond. Their appetites, sharpened by hard work in the open air, were clamorously keen. The supper promised – fried pork, fried apples, fried eggs, and coffee with a short-cake – seemed to them quite all that could be desired in the way of luxury. They could eat it with relish, and sleep in entire comfort afterward. Probably not one of my readers in a hundred could digest such a supper at all. That is because not one reader in a hundred gives himself a chance for robust health by working nine hours a day and living almost entirely in the open air.

Jim came out when supper was ready and helped eat it there on the shore. At other than mealtimes it was his custom to stay on board the flatboat, and not only so, but to keep himself below decks, although the weather was still very warm. He had got over his drunkenness, but he was still moody, apparently in resentment of the rough-and-ready treatment he had received at Phil’s hands.

He rarely talked at all; when he did talk, it was usually in the dialect of an entirely uneducated person. But now and then he used expressions that no such person would employ.

“He seems to slip into his grammar now and then,” was Irv Strong’s way of putting it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIGHT TO THE RIVER

By the time that the last of the cargo was bestowed, the boat was so full that there was scarcely a place in which to hang the four fire-extinguishers which Mr. Schenck had supplied for the protection of the cargo, of which he owned a considerable part.

The river by this time was bank full. Indeed, the flatboat lay that last night almost under an apple tree, and directly over the place where three days before the boys had cooked their meals.

When the final start was made, therefore, it was only necessary to give three or four strokes of the great "sweeps" to shove the craft out into the stream. After that she was left free to float. The biggest bars were at least ten feet under water, and the boat "drew" less than three feet, heavily laden as she was. For the rest, the current could be depended upon to "keep her in the river," as boatmen say, and the boys had nothing to do, between Craig's Landing and Louisville, fifty or sixty miles below, except pump a little now and then, cook their meals, and set up the proper lights at night. Of course someone was always "on watch," but as the time was divided between the five, that amounted to very little.

As the boat neared Louisville, Ed suggested to his brother that he had better land above the town, and not within its limits.

"Why?" asked Phil. "We've got to get some provisions as well as hire a falls pilot, and it will be more convenient if we land at the levee."

"But it will cost us five or ten dollars in good money for wharfage," replied Ed.

"But if we land above the town, how do we know the man owning the land on which we tie up won't charge us just as much?" asked Irv Strong, who had never seen a large city and wanted to get as good a glimpse as he could of this one.

"Because the Mississippi River and its tributaries are not 'navigable' waters, but *are* 'public highways for purposes of commerce,'" responded Ed. "If they weren't that last, we couldn't run this boat down them at all."

"Not navigable?" queried Will Moreraud. "Well, looking at that big steamboat out there, which has just come from Cincinnati, that statement seems a trifle absurd."

"Let me explain," said Ed. "The English common law, from which we get ours, calls no stream 'navigable' unless the tide ebbs and flows in it. And as the tide does not ebb and flow in the Mississippi much above New Orleans, neither that great river nor any of its splendid tributaries are recognized by the law as navigable."

"Then the law is an idiot," said Irv Strong.

"One of Dickens's characters said something like that," responded Ed, "when he was told that the law supposes a married woman always acts under direction of her husband. But both he and you are wrong, particularly you, as you'll see when I explain. It is absolutely necessary for the law to determine just how far a man's ownership of land lying along a stream extends. You see that?"

"Of course," was the general response.

"Yes," continued Ed, "otherwise very perplexing questions would arise as to what a man might or might not do along shore. Now in England, where our law on the subject comes from, it is a fact that the tide ebbs and flows in all the navigable parts of the rivers and nowhere else. So the law made the tide the test, or rather recognized it as a test already established by nature.

"Now in order that commerce might be carried on, the law decreed that the owner of land lying on a navigable stream should own only to the edge of the bank – or to the 'natural break of the bank,' as the law writers express it. This was to prevent owners of the shores from levying tribute on ships that might need to land or anchor in front of their property.

“But on streams that were not navigable, no such need existed. On the contrary, it was very desirable, for many reasons, that the owners of the banks should be free to deal as they saw fit with the streams in front – to straighten or deepen them, and all that sort of thing. So the law decreed that on streams not navigable the owner of the bank should own to ‘the middle thread of the water,’ wherever that might happen to be.

“Now as all these great rivers of ours, the very greatest in the world, by the way, are in law non-navigable, it follows that the men who own their banks own the rivers also, the man on each side owning to the middle thread of water. Naturally, these men could step in and say that nobody should run a boat through their part of the river without paying whatever toll they might choose to charge. Under such a system it would be impossible to use the rivers at all. It would cost nobody knows how many thousands of dollars in tolls to run a boat, say from Cincinnati to New Orleans.”

“Well, why don’t it, then?” asked Will Moreraud. “Why can’t every farmer whose land we pass come out and make us pay for using his part of the river?”

“For the same reason,” said Ed, “that the farmer can’t come out and make you pay toll for passing over a public road which happens to cross his land.”

“How do you mean? I don’t understand,” said Irv.

“Well, the only reason the farmer can’t make you pay toll for crossing his land on a public road is, that the road is made by law a public highway, open to everybody’s use, and it is a criminal offence for anybody to obstruct it, either by setting up a toll-gate, or building a fence, or felling trees across it, or in any other way whatever. And that’s the only reason a man who owns land along these rivers can’t charge toll for their use or put any sort of obstruction in them without getting himself into trouble with the law for his pains.”

“How’s that?” asked one of the boys. “This river isn’t a public road.”

“That is precisely what it is,” said Ed. “Realizing the difficulty created by the fact that this great river system is not legally navigable while its actual navigation is a common necessity, Congress early passed a law making the Mississippi River and all its tributaries ‘public highways for purposes of commerce.’ That’s why nobody can prevent you from running boats on them, or charge you for the privilege.”

The boys were deeply interested in the explanation, which was new to them, and so they sat silent for a while, thinking it over, as people are apt to do when they have heard something new that interests them.

Presently Phil said: —

“That’s all very clear and I understand it, but I don’t quite see what it has to do with where we land at Louisville.”

“Well,” said Ed, “I can explain that. As the river is a public highway for purposes of commerce, nobody can charge you for any legitimate use of it, or its shores below high-water mark, such use, for example, as landing in front of his property, a thing which may be absolutely necessary to navigation. But if a man or a city chooses to spend money in making your landing easy and convenient, say by building a levee or wharf, putting in posts for you to make your boat fast by, or anything of the kind, that man or city has a right to charge you, not for landing, but for the use of the improvements and conveniences.”

“Oh, yes, I see,” said Phil. “Every city does that, and so if you land at its improved landing, you must pay. Well, we’ll land on unimproved shores above Louisville, and above or below every other town that we have occasion to land at. That’s business. But I don’t see why Congress didn’t solve the whole riddle by adopting a new rule as to what are and what are not navigable streams.”

“What rule?” asked Ed.

“Well, the common-sense rule, that a stream which is actually navigable shall be regarded as navigable in law.”

“Actually navigable by what?” asked Ed. “There isn’t a spring branch in all the country that isn’t actually navigable by some sort of boat. Even a wash-basin will float a toy boat.”

“Oh, but I mean real boats.”

“Of what size?”

“Well, big enough to carry freight or passengers.”

“Any skiff drawing three inches of water can do that. Such a rule would include Indian Creek and Long Run, and even all the branches we go wading in, as navigable streams. And then again, some streams are practically navigable even by steamboats at some seasons of the year, and almost or altogether dry at others. This great Ohio River of ours, in its upper parts at least, goes pretty nearly dry some summers. No, I don’t see how any other line than that of the tide could have been drawn, or how the other difficulty could have been met in any better way than by declaring the Mississippi and all its tributaries ‘public highways for purposes of commerce.’ That was the simplest way out, and the simplest way is usually the best way.”¹

“Yes,” said Irv Strong, “and as the simplest way to relieve hunger is to eat, I move that we stop talking and get dinner.”

The suggestion was accepted without dissent, and the two whose turn it was to cook went below to start a fire in the stove.

¹ Ed’s exposition of the law and the reason for it is sound enough. But different states, by statutes or court decisions, have somewhat modified it, particularly as regards the extent of bank ownership. Probably Ed knew this, but didn’t think it necessary to go into details, which, after all, do not change the general truth. —*Author*.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT HAPPENED AT LOUISVILLE

Just before the landing was made at Louisville, Jim Hughes was seized with an attack of cramps and took to his bunk, where he remained until near the time for the boat to be afloat again. The boys had feared that he might go ashore there and get a new supply of liquor, and they had even made careful plans to prevent him from bringing any aboard. His sudden sickness rendered all their plans superfluous.

At Louisville Phil got a fresh supply of newspapers, giving all the latest news concerning the great bond robbery, and took them aboard to read at leisure. He learned that there was no need of hiring a pilot to take the boat over the falls, which in fact are not falls at all, but merely rapids. At very high water such as just then prevailed, the only difference between that part of the river called the falls and any other part was that that part had a much swifter and far less steady current than prevailed elsewhere.

"I could take your money for piloting you over the falls," said the genial old pilot to whom Phil had applied, "but it would be robbery. I'm a pilot, not a pirate, you see. All you've got to do, my boy, is to put your flatboat well out into the river and let her go. She'll amble over the falls at this stage of the water as gently as a well-built girl waltzes over a ball-room floor. She'll turn round and round, just as the girl does, but it'll be just as innocent-like. There'll be never less than twenty-five foot o' water under your gunwales, and there simply can't any harm come to you. Don't pay anybody anything to pilot you over. Do it yourself, and if anything happens to you, just let old Jabez Brown know where it happened, please. For if there's any new rocks sprouted up on the falls of the Ohio since the water rose, an old falls pilot like me just naterally wants to know about 'em."

After laying in the provision supply that was needed, including especially a big can of milk packed in a barrel of cracked ice, Phil returned to the boat and announced his purpose of "running the falls" without a pilot. It was at supper in the cabin that he made the announcement, and Jim Hughes, who had been lying in his bunk with his face toward the bulkhead, suddenly sat up.

"Good!" he said. "They ain't no use fer a pilot when the river's bank full this way. When'll you start, Phil?"

"Just after daylight to-morrow morning," replied the captain.

"Well, I feel so much better," said Jim, getting out of his bunk, "I think I'll sample the pork and potatoes and throw in just a little o' that hot corn bread and the new butter for ballast."

"For a man who a few hours ago was violently ill with an intestinal disorder," remarked Irv Strong a little later with a very pronounced note of sarcasm in his tone, "it seems to me, Jim, that you're eating a tolerably robust supper. Now if I'd had the cramps you've been suffering from to-day, I really wouldn't venture upon cabbage and potatoes boiled with salt pork. I'd try something 'bland' first, like a half pound of shot or a pig's knuckle, or a bologna sausage or a few soft-boiled cobble-stones."

But Jim was deaf to the sarcasm and went on eating voraciously.

"Wonder what that fellow is afraid of," said Phil to Irv as they went out on deck to set the lights and make ready for the night.

"Don't at all know," responded Irv, "unless he owes money to somebody in Louisville. All I know is that he must have feigned that attack of cramps, else he couldn't eat now in the way he does. He didn't want to go ashore with you as you proposed, to hunt for a falls pilot."

"Yes," said Ed Lowry, "I've known all day that he was shamming, because he hasn't had the slightest touch or trace of proper symptoms. Even when he professed to be in the most excruciating pain his pulse wasn't in the least bit disturbed. I'm no doctor, but I know enough to say positively

that a man with any such cramps as he pretended to have simply couldn't have kept his pulse calmly beating seventy-two times a minute as his did. I timed it three times and then quit bothering with the fellow because I knew he was shamming."

"Wonder what he meant by it," said Will.

"Shoo!" said Constant; "he's listening at the top of the gangway."

"And *I* wonder what *that* means," said Phil, whose alert observation of the professed pilot had never been relaxed since the episode at Craig's Landing; "I wonder what he's listening for."

There was naturally no response, for the reason that nobody had anything to suggest. So the boys went toward the bow where the anchor-light hung, to hear Phil read in his newspapers all the latest details about the great bond robbery. They read on deck rather than in the cabin, because one boy must at any rate remain there on watch, and they all wished to hear.

The newspapers related that one of the gang of robbers was believed to have got away with the stolen bonds and money, and that the main purpose now was to find him. One man connected with the crime was already in custody, and from hints given by him it was hoped that he might turn state's evidence in his own resentment against the "carrier of the swag," who, it was believed, had deserted his fellow thieves, or some of them, and meant to keep the whole of the proceeds of the robbery for himself and one or two others. At any rate, the man in custody had given hints that were thought to be distinctly helpful toward the discovery of the "carrier" and his partners who had betrayed the rest of their fellows.

The case was very interesting, but the boys must be up early in the morning, so at last they broke up their little confab, and all but one of them went to bed. Constant Thiebaud, who first reached the ladder-head, found Jim Hughes seated there with his head just above the deck.

"I thought you were in bed long ago," said Constant.

"So I was," said Jim; "but I got restless and came out for some air."

It wasn't at all the kind of sentence that Jim Hughes was accustomed to frame, and the boys observed the fact. But they had got used to what Irv Strong called Jim's "inadvertent lapses into grammar," and so they went to their bunks without further thought of the matter.

CHAPTER X

JIM

It didn't take long to "run the falls." From where the flatboat lay above Louisville to the lower end of the rapids was a distance of about eight or ten miles. Not only was the river bank full, but a great wave of additional water – a rise of four or five inches to the hour – struck them just as they pushed their craft out into the stream. There was a current of six miles an hour even as they passed the city, which quickened to eight or ten miles an hour when they reached the falls proper.

The boat fully justified the old pilot's simile of a girl waltzing. She turned and twisted about, first one way and then the other, and now and then shot off in a totally new direction, toward one shore or the other, or straight down stream.

It all seemed perilous in the extreme, and at one time Jim Hughes hurriedly went below and brought up his carpet-bag, which he deposited in one of the skiffs that lay on deck.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Phil, who was more and more disposed to watch the fellow suspiciously. "What are you doing that for?"

"Well, you see we mout strike a rock, and it's best to be ready."

"Yes," said Phil, "but what have you got in your carpet-bag that you're so careful of?" and as he asked the question he looked intently into Jim's eyes, hoping to surprise there a more truthful answer than he was likely to get from Jim's lips.

"Oh, nothin' but my clothes," said Jim, hastily avoiding the scrutiny.

"Must be a dress-suit or two among them," said Phil, "or you'd be thinking less about them and more about your skin. Let's see them!" he added suddenly, and offering to open the bag.

Jim snatched it away quickly, muttering something which the boy didn't catch. But by that time the falls were passed and the flatboat was floating through calm waters between Portland and New Albany. So Jim retreated to the cabin and bestowed his precious carpet-bag again under the straw of his bunk, where he had kept it from the first.

"Wonder what he's got there, Phil," said Irv Strong, who had been attentive to the colloquy.

"Don't know," replied Phil; "but if things go on this way, the time will come when I'll decide to find out."

"By the way," broke in Will Moreraud, "did any of you see him bring that carpet-bag aboard?" Nobody could remember.

"Guess he sneaked it aboard as he did that jug," said Phil, "and as he did his cramps."

"Don't be too hard on the fellow, boys," said Ed, whose generosity was always apt to get the better of his judgment. "Remember he's ignorant, and ignorance is always inclined to be suspicious. Probably he hasn't more than a dollar's worth or so in that carpet-bag; but as it is all he has in the world, he's naturally careful of it. He's afraid some of us will steal his things. If he knew more, he would know better. But he doesn't know more. So he guards his poor little possessions jealously."

There was silence for a minute. Then Phil said: —

"See if he's listening, Constant;" and when Constant had strolled to the gangway and reported "all clear," Phil had this to say: —

"I'm not over-suspicious, I think. I don't want to be unjust to anybody. But I'm responsible on this cruise, and it's my duty to notice things carefully."

"Of course," said Irv Strong, the other "irreclaimable." "I haven't a doubt you noticed that I ate four eggs and two slices of ham for breakfast this morning. But before you 'call me down' for it, I want to say that I'm going to do the same thing to-morrow morning, because, since I came on the river, I've got the biggest hunger on me that I ever had in my life, and not at all because I have

any diabolical plot in my mind to starve the crew of this flatboat into submission or admission or permission or any other sort of mission.”

But Phil did not smile at the pleasantry. He hesitated a moment before replying, as if afraid that he might say too much; for Phil, the captain, was a very different person from the happy-go-lucky Phil his comrades had hitherto known. After a little while he said: —

“You remember, don’t you, that Jim Hughes wanted to ‘get down the river’ so badly that he shipped with us without pay? If he is so poor that he has only that carpet-bag and only a few dollars’ worth of stuff in it, why didn’t he try to ‘strike’ us for some sort of wages? Does anybody here know where he came from, or why he came, or where he is trying to go to, or why he wants to go there, or in fact who he is, or anything about him? Can anybody explain why he shammed cramps yesterday?”

“To all the highly interesting questions in that competitive examination,” said Irv Strong, “I beg permission to answer, in words made familiar to one by frequent school use – ‘not prepared to answer.’”

All the boys laughed except Phil. He was serious. The *boy* hadn’t at all gone out of him, as was proved by the fact that in spite of the October chill in the air he just then slipped off his clothes and “took a header” into the river. But the serious *man* had come into him with responsibility, as was shown by the fact that he used a towel to rub himself with after his bath. Having donned his clothes, he continued: —

“There may be nothing wrong about Jim Hughes. I don’t say there is anything wrong. But there is a good deal that is suspicious. So, while I accuse him of nothing, I’m watching him, and I have been watching him ever since we left Craig’s Landing. I don’t believe he was drunk there, for one thing.”

“Don’t believe he was drunk!” exclaimed the boys in a breath. “Why, you had to knock him down yourself to save the landing!”

“Yes, of course,” said Phil. “But I took pains afterward to smell his breath while he was supposed to be in a drunken stupor, and there wasn’t a trace of whiskey on it.”

“But you remember we found his jug hid among the freight.”

“You did,” replied Phil; “and you reported to me, though you may have forgotten the fact, that it was ‘full up to the cork.’ Those were your own words, Will.”

Will remembered, though he had not before thought of the significance of the fact.

“Well, Phil, what was the matter with him, then?” asked Ed.

“Shamming, just as he shammed the cramps yesterday.”

“But for what purpose?”

“I don’t know, any more than you know why he pretended to have cramps. My theory is that he was so anxious to get down the river that he tried to make us miss Craig’s Landing entirely. The sum and substance of the matter is this. At Craig’s Landing I wanted to put the fellow ashore. Now I don’t want to do anything of the kind, and I won’t either, till I can read a good many riddles that he has given me to puzzle over.”

“Can we help you to read the riddles?”

“Yes. Watch him closely, and tell me everything you observe, no matter how little it may seem to mean.”

Just then Jim Hughes came up out of the cabin scuttle, and all the boys except Phil found occasion to go to other parts of the boat. When you have been talking unpleasantly about another person, you naturally shrink from talking to him.

Phil, however, stood his ground. “Hello, Jim!” he called out. “How are the cramps, and how’s the carpet-bag? Going to try to earn your board now by steering a little?”

Jim hesitated in embarrassment. Suddenly Phil began bombarding him with questions like shots from a rapid-fire gun.

“Where did you come from, anyhow, Jim? What’s your real name? What are you hiding from? How much do you know about the river? and about flatboating? Have you really ever been down the river before, or was that all a sham like your cramps yesterday? Who are you? What are you?”

Jim struggled for a moment. There was that in his face which might have appalled anybody but a full-blooded, resolute, dare-all boy. But he quickly mastered himself.

“See here, Phil,” he said in persuasive tones, “you’re mighty hard on a poor feller like me, and I don’t know why. That was a vicious clip you hit me at Craig’s Landing.”

Phil instantly responded, and again after the fashion of a breach-loader. “So you remember that, do you? Then you were not so drunk as you pretended.”

“Well,” said Jim, “I was pretty full, but of course I knew who hit me.”

“You were not drunk at all,” said the boy. “You hadn’t even been drinking. I smelt of your breath, and the blow I struck didn’t knock you senseless, for an hour, as you pretended, or for six seconds either. Now look here, Jim, I don’t know what your purpose is in all this shamming, but I know for a fact that it is shamming, and I’ve had quite enough of it.”

With that the boy turned away in that profound disgust which every healthy-minded boy or man feels for a lie and a liar.

CHAPTER XI

THE WONDERFUL RIVER

As the “Knobs” – which is the name given to the high hills back of New Albany – receded, the day was still young. It was also overcast and cool. So Ed, who was always studying something, brought his big map up on deck and, spreading it out, lay down on his stomach to study it. He worked over it till dinner time, and in the afternoon he spread it out again.

The boys having gathered around him, he said: —

“I say, fellows, we are making a journey that we ought to remember as long as we live. We are going over a small but important part of the greatest river system in the world.”

“Small but important part,” said Will, quoting. “Well, I like that.”

“What’s your objection,” said Ed Lowry, for the moment borrowing Irv Strong’s playful method, — “what’s your objection to my carefully chosen descriptive adjectives?”

“Well, we’re going over pretty nearly the whole of it, aren’t we?”

“Not by any manner of means,” responded Ed. “We aren’t going over more than a small fraction of it.”

“Why, the Ohio River alone is thirteen hundred miles long,” said Will; “I remember that much of my geography; and most of the Mississippi lies below the mouth of the Ohio, doesn’t it?”

“It’s lucky you’ve passed your geography examinations in the high school, Will,” said Ed. “Now come here, all you fellows, and take a look. This map shows the entire system of rivers of which the Mississippi is the mother. It is the greatest river system in the world. There is nothing, in fact, to compare it with but the Amazon and its tributaries, and they have never done anything for mankind, because they lie almost wholly in an unsettled and uncivilized tropical region that has no commerce and no need of any, while the Mississippi and its tributaries have built up an empire. They have in effect *created* the better part of this vast country of ours that is feeding the world and — ”

“Oh, come now,” said Irv Strong. “You aren’t writing a composition or an editorial for the *Vevay Reveille*.” This was in allusion to the fact that Ed sometimes published “pieces” in the local newspaper.

“Well, no,” said Ed, laughing at his own enthusiasm. “Besides, I’ll come to all that some other time perhaps. At present I want to give Will some new ideas about the bigness of our river system. True, the Ohio is twelve or thirteen hundred miles long, but about half of it lies above Vevay, so we’re covering only six or seven hundred miles of it. From Cairo to New Orleans – the part of the Mississippi we shall traverse – is about one thousand and fifty miles long. So we’re only going to travel over sixteen or seventeen hundred miles of river. Now there are about fifteen or sixteen thousand miles of this river system that steamboats can, and actually do, navigate, and nobody has ever really reckoned the length of the rest – the parts not navigable. We’re going over only about one-tenth of the navigable part – one twenty-fifth part perhaps of the whole.”

By this time the boys were all lying prone around the big map, their feet radiating in every direction from it, like light-rays from a star.

“See here,” said Ed; “here’s the Tennessee River. It’s a mere tributary of the Ohio, yet it is about two-thirds as long as the main river. Its head waters are in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. It starts out through Tennessee and tries, in a stupid sort of fashion, to find its way to the Gulf of Mexico through Alabama. But it gets discouraged by the mountains down there, turns back, throws a dash of water into the face of the state of Mississippi, returns to Tennessee and travels north clear across that state and Kentucky, and finally in despair gives up its effort to find the sea and turns the job over to the Ohio. Look at it on the map!”

“And as if it thought the Tennessee had more than it could do to drain so great a region,” said Phil, studying the map, “the Cumberland also went into the business and after pretty nearly paralleling

its sister river for a great many hundreds of miles, fell into the Ohio only a few miles above the mouth of the Tennessee. The two together are longer than the Ohio itself.”

“Very decidedly,” said Ed. “And then there are all the other tributaries of the Ohio, – look at them on the map. Together they again exceed its total length.”

The boys looked at the map and saw that it was so. Then Ed resumed: —

“But, after all, the Ohio and all its tributaries combined amount to a very small part of the great system. The lower Mississippi itself from Cairo to the mouth is almost exactly as long as the Ohio. Then there are the upper Mississippi, – stretching clear up into Minnesota, – the Illinois, the Wisconsin, etc., the Missouri and its vast tributaries flowing from the Rocky Mountains, the Arkansas, the Red River, the Ouachita, the White, the St. Francis, the Yazoo, the Tallahatchie, the Sunflower, the Yalobusha – and a score of others, to say nothing of the vast bayous that connect with the wonderful river down South. Here they all are on the map. Look!”

The next fifteen minutes were given up to a study of the map, interested fingers tracing out the rivers, and a continual chatter contributing, after the manner of boys’ talk, to the general stock of information. Presently Irv Strong spoke. He had never before in his life been silent so long.

“I remember, at this stage of the proceedings, the wise remark of our honored teacher, Mrs. Dupont, that ‘eyes are excellent to see with, but one interpretative brain means more than many additional pairs of eyes.’”

“What’s all that got to do with it?” asked Constant. “She was talking about Darwin and Spencer when she said that. What’s either of them got to do with this river?”

“Ah, Constant!” said Irv, in mock melancholy. “You grieve me to the heart. You never will see the inward and spiritual meaning of my outward and visible quotations. I mean that Ed Lowry has studied out this whole thing and knows ’steen times more about it and what it means than we blockheads would find out by studying the map for a dog’s age. I venture that assertion boldly, without having the remotest notion of what constitutes a dog’s age. My idea is that we fellows ought to shut up, though I’m personally not fond of doing that, and let Ed gently distil into our minds his information about all these things. Let’s have the benefit of the ‘interpretative brain!’”

“Let’s take a header first,” cried Phil, shedding his clothes again. “I’ll beat the best of you in a swim around the boat, or if I lose, I’ll wash the dishes for a whole day.”

And with that he went head foremost overboard, Will and Irv following him.

When they reappeared on deck, blowing like porpoises and glowing like boiled lobsters, Ed said: —

“You fellows are regular water-rats; Phil is, anyhow. He’s in this water half a dozen times a day, no matter how cold the wind is.”

“That’s just it,” said Phil. “The water isn’t anything like so cold as this October air.” Then, with mock seriousness: “Believe me, my dearly beloved brother, it is to escape the frigidity of the atmosphere, or, as it were, to warm myself, that I jump into the river. You were reading a poem the other day in which the stricken-spirited scribe said: —

‘For my part I wish to enjoy what I can —
A sunset, if only a sunset be near,
A moon such as this if the weather be clear,’

and much else to the like effect. As you read the glittering, golden words, I said in my soul: ‘Bully for you, oh poet! I’m your man for those sentiments every time.’ And just now the poet and I agree that nothing in this world would minister so much to our immediate enjoyment as to jump off the boat again on the larboard side, dive clear under her and come up on the starboard. Here goes! Who’s the poet to follow me?” And overboard the boy went, feet first this time, for after striking the

water and sinking to a safe depth, he must turn himself about and swim under water for fifty or sixty feet before daring to come to the surface again.

Nobody tried to perform the feat in emulation of the reckless fellow. It involved a great many dangers and a still greater many of disagreeable possibilities such as broken heads, skinned backs, and abraded shins. Of that I can give my readers full assurance because I've done the thing myself many times, and bear some scars as witnesses of its risks.

But it was Phil's rule of life never to let anybody "do anything in the swimming way" that he couldn't do equally well. He had once seen somebody dive under a steamboat and come up safely on the other side. So he straightway dived under the same steamboat and came up safely on the other side. After that, diving under a flatboat was a mere trifle to him.

CHAPTER XII

THE WONDERFUL RIVER'S WORK

“Now, then,” said Phil, wrapping a blanket around his person, for the air was indeed very chill, and prostrating himself over the map, “now, then, let the ‘interpretative brain’ get in its work! I interrupted the proceedings just to take a personal observation of the river we are to hear all about. Go on, Ed!”

“Wait a bit – I’m counting,” said Ed; “twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight. There. If you’ll look at the map, you’ll see that the water which the Mississippi carries down to the sea through a channel about half a mile wide below New Orleans, comes from twenty-eight states besides the Indian Territory.”

“What! oh, nonsense!” were the exclamations that greeted this statement.

“Look, and count for yourselves,” said Ed, pointing to various parts of the map as he proceeded. “Here they are: New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and the Indian Territory. Very little comes from New York or South Carolina or Texas, and not a great deal from some others of the states named, but some does, as you will see by following up the lines on the map. The rest of the states mentioned send the greater part of all their rainfall to the sea by this route.”

“Well, you could at this moment knock me down with a feather,” said Irving Strong. “Aren’t you glad, Phil, that we jumped in away up here before the water got such a mixing up?”

“But that isn’t the most important part of it,” said Ed, after his companions had finished their playful discussion of the subject.

“What is it, then? Go on,” said Irv. “I’m all ears, though Mrs. Dupont always thought I was all tongue. What is the most important part of it, Ed?”

“Why, that this river *created* most of the states it drains.”

“How do you mean?”

“Why, I mean that but for this great river system it would have taken a hundred or more years longer than it did to settle this vastest valley on earth and build it up into great, populous states that produce the best part of the world’s food supply.”

“Go on, please,” said Will Moreraud, speaking the eager desire of all.

“You see,” said Ed, “in order to settle a country and bring it into cultivation, you must have some way of getting into it, and still more, you must have some way of getting the things it produces out of it, so as to sell them to people that need them. Nobody would have taken the trouble to raise the produce we now have on board this boat, for instance, – the hay, grain, flour, apples, cornmeal, onions, potatoes, and the rest, – if there had been no way of sending the things away and selling them somewhere. Unless there is a market within reach, nobody will produce more of anything than he can himself use.”

“Oh, I see,” said Irv. “That’s why I don’t think more than I do. I’ve no market for my crop of thoughts.”

“You’re mistaken there,” said Constant, who was slow of speech and usually had little to say. “There’s always a market for thoughts.”

“Where?”

“Right around you. What did we go into this flatboat business for except to be with Ed? He can’t do half as much as any one of us at an oar, or at anything else except thinking, and yet we would never have come on this voyage – ”

“Oh, dry up!” said Ed, seeing the compliment that was impending. “I was going to say – ”

“And so was I going to say,” said Constant; “and, in fact, I *am* going to say. What I’m going to say is that there isn’t a fellow here who would be here but for you, Ed. There isn’t a fellow here that wouldn’t be glad to do all of your share of the work, if Phil would let him, just for the sake of hearing what you think. Anyhow, that’s why Constant Thiebaud is a member of this crew.”

It was the longest speech that Constant Thiebaud had ever been known to make, and it was the most effective one he could have made, because it put into words the thought that was in every one’s mind. That is the very essence of oratory and of effective writing. All the great speeches in the world have been those that cleverly expressed the thought and the feeling of those who listened. All the great books have been those that said for the vast, dumb multitudes that which was in their minds and souls vainly longing for utterance.

When Constant had finished, there was silence for a moment. Then Irv Strong said impressively:

—
“Amen!”

That exclamation ended the silence, and expressed the common sentiment of all who were present. For even Jim Hughes, who was listening, had begun to be interested.

Ed was embarrassed, of course, and for the first time in his life words completely failed him. He sat up; then he grasped Constant’s hand, and said, “I thank you, fellows.” And with that he retreated hurriedly to the cabin for a little while.

Constant went to the pump, and labored hard for a time to draw water from a bilge that had no leak. Will went to inspect the anchor, as if he feared that something might be the matter with it. Phil and Irving jumped overboard, and swam twice around the boat.

Finally, all came on deck again, and Will said: —

“Go on, Ed. We want to hear.”

Ed at once resumed, Jim Hughes meantime working with the steering-oar.

“Well, this great river gave the people who came over the mountains, and afterward the people who came up it from New Orleans, not only an outlet to the sea, but a sort of public road, over which they could travel and trade with each other. When the upper Ohio region began to be settled, a great swarm of emigrants from the East poured over the mountains, and made a highway of the river to get themselves and all that belonged to them to the upper Mississippi, the lower Mississippi, and the Missouri River country. My father once told me, before he died, that in his boyhood you could tell a steamboat bound from Pittsburg or Cincinnati to St. Louis from any other boat, because she was red all over with ploughs, wagons, and all that sort of thing. Agricultural implements were all painted red in those days, and as they weren’t very heavy freight they were bestowed all over the boat, – on the boiler deck guards, on the hurricane deck, and sometimes were in the cabin, and on top of the Texas.²

² [2] The “Texas” of a western river steamer is an extra cabin, built above the main cabin and under the pilot-house, for the accommodation of the boat’s officers. It was named “Texas” because about the time of its naming Texas was added to the Union. This cabin was also something added. —*Author*.

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.