Horatio Alger Jr.

Wait and Hope: or, A Plucky Boy's Luck

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Содержание

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Chapter I

Ben and His Aunt

Five o'clock sounded from the church clock, and straightway the streets of Milltown were filled with men, women, and children issuing from the great brick factories huddled together at one end of the town. Among these, two boys waked in company, James Watson and Ben Bradford. They were very nearly of an age, James having just passed his fifteenth birthday, and Ben having nearly attained it.

Both boys looked sober. Why, will appear from their conversation.

"It's rather hard to get out of a job just now," said James.

"Why couldn't the superintendent discharge somebody else?"

"I suppose it's all right," said Ben. "We were taken on last, and we haven't as much claim to remain as those that have been in the mill longer."

"I don't believe there was any need of discharging anybody," complained James.

"You know business is very dull," said Ben, who was more considerate, "and I hear they have been losing money."

"Oh, well, they can stand it," said James.

"So can you," said Ben. "Your father is pretty well off, and you won't suffer."

"Oh, I shall have enough to eat, and so on; but I shan't have any spending money, and I can't get a new suit, as I expected to this fall."

"I wish that was all I had to fear," said Ben; "but you know how it is with me. I don't see how Aunt Jane is going to get along without my earnings."

"Oh, you'll get along somehow," said James carelessly, for he did not care enough about other people's prospects to discuss them.

"Yes, I guess so," said Ben, more cheerfully. "There's no use in worrying. Wait and Hope – that's my motto."

"You have to wait a thundering long time sometimes," said James. "Well, good night. Come round and see me to-morrow. You'll have plenty of time."

"I don't know about that. I must look up something to do."

"I shan't. I am going to wait till the superintendent takes me on again. There's one comfort. I can lie abed as long as I want to. I won't be tied to the factory bell."

The house which James entered was a good-sized two-story

house, with an ample yard, and a garden behind it. His father kept a dry-goods store in Milltown, and was generally considered well-to-do. James entered the mill, not because he was obliged to, but because he wanted to have a supply of money in his pocket. His father allowed him to retain all of his wages, requiring him only to purchase his own clothes. As he was paid five dollars a week, James was able to clothe himself with half his income, and reserve the rest for spending-money. He was very fond of amusements, and there was no circus, concert, or other entertainment in Milltown which he did not patronize.

Ben kept on his way, till he reached the small house where his aunt lived, and which had been his own home ever since his parents died, when he was but five years of age. Two years before, Mr. Reuben Bradford, his uncle, died, and since then the family had been supported chiefly by Ben's wages in the mill. His aunt got some sewing to do, but her earnings were comparatively small.

There was one thing Ben dreaded, and that was, to tell his aunt about his loss of employment. He knew how she would take it. She was apt to be despondent, and this news would undoubtedly depress her. As for Ben, he was of a sanguine, cheerful temperament, and always ready to look at the bright side, if there was any bright side at all.

His little cousin Tony, seven years old, ran out to meet him.

"What makes you late, Ben?" he asked.

"I am not so very late, Tony," answered Ben, taking the little

fellow's hand.

"Yes you are; it's half-past five o'clock, and supper's been ready quarter of an hour."

"I see how it is, Tony. You are hungry, and that has made you tired of waiting."

"No, I am not, but I wanted you to come home. It's always pleasanter when you are at home."

"I am glad you like my company. Good evening, Aunt Jane."

"Good evening, Ben. Sit right down at the table."

"Wait till I've washed my hands, aunt. I came home by Mr. Watson's, and that made me a little longer. Have you heard any news?"

Ben asked this, thinking it possible that his aunt had already heard of the discharge of some of the factory hands; but her answer satisfied him that she had not.

"Butter's a cent higher a pound," said Mrs. Bradford. "I declare, things seem to be going up all the time. Thirsty-five cents a pound! It really seems sinful to ask such a price."

"I wish that wasn't the worst of it," thought Ben.

"I'm afraid even at twenty-five cents it will be hard for us to pay for butter, if I don't get something to do soon."

"I guess I won't tell Aunt Jane till after supper," Ben decided. "After a good cup of tea, perhaps it won't make her feel so low-spirited."

So he ate his supper, chatting merrily with his little cousin all the time, just as if he had nothing on his mind. Even his aunt

smiled from time to time at his nonsense, catching the contagion of his cheerfulness.

"I wish you'd split a little wood for me, Ben," said Mrs. Bradford, as our hero rose from the supper table. "I've had some ironing to do this afternoon, and that always takes off the fuel faster."

"All right, Aunt Jane," said Ben.

"I guess I'll wait till I've finished the wood before telling her," thought Ben. "It won't be any worse than now."

Tony went into the woodshed, to keep him company, and his aunt prepared to clear away the supper dishes.

She had scarcely commenced upon this when a knock was heard at the door. The visitor proved to be old Mrs. Perkins, a great-aunt of James Watson, who was an inveterate gossip. Her great delight was to carry news from one house to another.

"How do you do, Mrs. Bradford?" she began. "I was just passin' by, and thought I'd come in a minute."

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Perkins. Won't you have a cup of tea?"

"No thank you. The fact is, I've just took tea at my nephew Watson's. There I heard the news, and I couldn't help comin' right round and sympathizin' with you."

"Sympathizing with me! What for?" asked Mrs. Bradford, amazed. On general principles, she felt that she stood in need of sympathy, but her visitor's tone seemed to hint at something in particular.

"It ain't possible you haven't heard the news?" ejaculated Mrs. Perkins, feeling that she was indeed in luck, to have it in her power to communicate such important intelligence to one who had not heard of it.

"I hope it isn't anything about Ben," said Mrs. Bradford alarmed.

"Yes, I may say it is something about Benjamin," answered Mrs.

Perkins, nodding in a tantalizing manner.

"He hasn't got into any scrape, has he? He hasn't done anything wrong, has he?" asked Aunt Jane startled.

"No, poor child!" sighed the old lady. "That's the wust on't. It ain't what he has done; it's because he won't have anything to do."

"For mercy's sakes, tell me what you mean, Mrs. Perkins."

"Hasn't Benjamin told you that he's lost his place at the factory?"

"Is this true, Mrs. Perkins?" asked Mrs. Bradford, turning pale.

"Yes, business is dull and fifty men and boys have been turned off.

James Watson and your Benjamin are among them."

"Ben never told me anything about it," faltered Mrs. Bradford.

"Heaven only knows what we shall do."

"Oh, I guess you'll get along someway," said Mrs. Perkins, complacently. She was not herself affected, having sufficient property to live upon. "Well, I must be going," said the old lady,

anxious to reach the next neighbor, and report how poor Mrs. Bradford took it. "Don't you be too much worried. The Lord will provide."

"I am afraid we shall all starve," thought Mrs. Bradford mournfully.

She opened the shed door, and said: "Ben, is it true that you've lost your place at the mill?"

"Yes, aunt," answered Ben. "Who told you?"

"Old Mrs. Perkins. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"There's no hurry about bad news, aunt."

"I am afraid we'll all have to go to the poorhouse," said Aunt Jane, sighing.

"Perhaps we may, but we'll see what else we can do first. Wait and

Hope, aunt – that's my motto."

Mrs. Bradford shook her heard mournfully.

"I don't mind it so much for myself," she said; "but I can't help thinking of you and Tony."

"Tony and I are coming out all right. There's lots of ways of making money, aunt. Just do as I do – 'Wait and Hope.'"

Chapter II

Three Situations

Before going further it may be as well to explain exactly how the Bradfords were situated. To begin with, they had no rent to pay. The small house in which they lived belonged to an old bachelor uncle of Mrs. Bradford, living in Montreal, and all they were required to do was to pay the taxes, which amounted to very little, not more than twelve dollars a year. Ben had earned at the factory five dollars a week, and his aunt averaged two. To some readers it may seem remarkable that three persons could live and clothe themselves on seven dollars a week; but Mrs. Bradford was a good manager, and had not found the problem a difficult one.

Now, however, the question promised to become more difficult. If Ben found nothing to do, the family would be reduced to two dollars a week, and to live comfortably on that small sum might well appal the most skilful financier.

Ben woke up early, and immediately began to consider the situation. His motto was "Wait and Hope"; but he knew very well that he must work while he was waiting and hoping, otherwise he would differ very little from the hopeful Micawber, who was always waiting for something to turn up.

"Aunt Jane," he said, after a frugal breakfast, over which Mrs. Bradford presided with an uncommonly long face, "how much money have you got on hand? I want to know just how we stand."

Mrs. Bradford opened her pocketbook with a sigh, and produced two one-dollar bills and thirty-seven cents in change.

"There's only that between us and starvation," she said mournfully.

"Well, that's something," said Ben cheerfully. "Isn't it, Tony?"

"It's a lot of money," said the inexperienced Tony. "I never had so much in all my life."

"There, somebody thinks you are rich, Aunt Jane," laughed Ben.

"What should the poor child know of household expenses?" said

Mrs. Bradford.

"To be sure. Only we may get some money before that is used up.

They owe me at the factory for half a week – two dollars and a half.

I shall get it Saturday night. We won't starve for a week, you see."

"Where are you going, Ben?" asked Tony; "won't you stay and play with me?"

"I can't, Tony. I must go out, and see if I can find something to do."

Milltown was something more than a village. In fact, it had

been incorporated two years before as a city, having the requisite number of inhabitants. The main street was quite city-like, being lined with stores.

"I wonder if I can't get a change in a store," thought Ben. So he made his way to the principal street, and entered the first store he came to – a large dry-goods store.

Entering, he addressed himself to a small, thin man, with an aquiline nose, who seemed to have a keen scent for money.

"What can I do for you, young man?" he asked, taking Ben for a customer.

"Can you give me a place in your store?" asked Ben.

The small man's expression changed instantly.

"What do you know of the dry-goods trade?" he inquired.

"Nothing at present, but I could learn," answered our hero.

"Then, I'll make you an offer."

Ben brightened up.

"If you come into the store for nothing the first year, I'll give you two dollars a week the second."

"Do you take me for a man of property?" asked Ben, disgusted.

The small man replied with a shrill, creaking laugh, sounding like the grating of a rusty hinge.

"Isn't that fair?" he asked. "You didn't expect to come in as partner first thing, did you?"

"No, but I can't work for nothing."

"Then – lemme see – I'll give you fifty cents a week for the

first year, and you can take it out in goods."

"No, thank you," answered Ben. "I couldn't afford it."

As he went out of the store, he heard another grating laugh, and the remark: "That's the way to bluff 'em off. I offered him a place, and he wouldn't take it."

Ben was at first indignant, but then his sense of humor got the better of his anger, and he said to himself: "Well, I've been offered a position, anyway, and that's something. Perhaps I shall have better luck at the next place."

The next place happened to be a druggist's. The druggist, a tall man, with scanty black locks, was compounding some pills behind the counter.

Ben was not bashful, and he advanced at once, and announced his business.

"Don't you want a boy?" he asked.

The druggist smiled.

"I've got three at home," he answered. "I really don't think I should like to adopt another."

"I'm not in the market for adoption," said Ben, smiling. "I want to get into some store to learn the business."

"Have you any particular fancy for the druggist's business?" asked the apothecary.

"No, sir, I can't say that I have."

"I never took much, but enough to know that I don't like it."

"Then I am afraid you wouldn't do for experiment clerk."

"What's that?"

"Oh, it his duty to try all the medicines, to make sure there are no wrong ingredients in them – poison, for instance."

"I am afraid I shouldn't like that," said Ben.

"You don't know till you've tried. Here's a pill now. Suppose you take that, and tell me how you like it."

The druggist extended to Ben a nauseous-looking pill, nearly as large as a bullet. He had made it extra large, for Ben's special case.

"No, I thank you," said Ben, with a contortion of the face; "I know I wouldn't do for experiment clerk. Don't you need any other clerk? Couldn't I learn to mix medicines?"

"Well, you see, there would be danger at first – to the customers, I mean. You might poison somebody, and then I would be liable for damages. If you will get somebody to sign a bond, forfeiting ten thousand dollars in any such case, I might consider your application."

"I don't think I could find any such person," said Ben.

"Then I am afraid I can't employ you. You are quite sure you don't want to be experiment clerk?"

"And swallow your medicines? I guess not. Good morning."

"Good morning. If you want any pills, you will know where to come."

"I would rather go where they make 'em smaller," said Ben.

Ben and the druggist both laughed, and the former left the shop.

"That's the second situation I have been offered today,"

soliloquized our hero. "They were not very desirable, either one of them, to be sure, but it shows there's an opening for me somewhere."

The next was a cigar store.

"I might as well go in," thought Ben.

A little hump-backed man was behind the counter.

"Want to hire a boy?" asked Ben.

"Are you the boy?"

"Yes."

"What can you do?"

"I am willing to do anything."

The hunchback grinned.

"Then perhaps I can give you a situation. Will you work for three dollars a week?"

Ben reflected.

"That will do, with strict economy," he thought, "till the factory takes me on again."

"I'll come for a few weeks, at that rate," he said.

"But perhaps you won't like your duties," said the hunchback, grinning in a curious manner.

"What would be my duties?"

"I should paint you red, and have you stand outside the door, as an

Indian," was the answer.

Ben didn't relish the joke.

"You'd better take that position yourself," he retorted.

"Nobody'd know the difference."

"Get out!" roared the cigar dealer angrily.

Ben left at once.

"That's the third situation I've been offered," he said: "I'd give 'em all three for a decent one."

Chapter III

At Lovell's Grounds

On the way home Ben met James Watson.

"How are you, James?" he said. "What have you been doing this morning?"

James gaped.

"The fact is," he said, "I have only just got up and had my breakfast."

"I don't see how you can lie abed so late."

"Oh, I can do it just as easy. I guess I was born sleepy."

"You look so," retorted Bed, with a laugh.

"What have you been doing?" inquired James lazily.

"I've been about in search of a place."

"You have!" said James, with sudden interest. "Did you find any?"

"Yes, I found three."

"What!" exclaimed James, in surprise.

"I was offered three places."

"Which did you take?"

"I didn't take any; I didn't like them."

"You are too particular, Ben. Just tell me where they are; I'll

accept one."

"All right!" said Ben. "I'll give you all the information you require.

The first is a dry-goods store."

"I'd like to be in a dry-goods store. What's the pay?"

"Fifty cents a week for the first year."

"Faugh!" ejaculated James, disgusted. "What's the second place?"

"Experiment clerk at the druggist's."

"Good pay?"

"I don't know."

"What are the duties?"

"To taste all the medicines, to make sure there's no poison in them. The druggist offered me a pill, to begin with, about as large as my head."

"I wouldn't take it for a hundred dollars a week. What's the third?"

"In a cigar store. The pay is three dollars a week."

"That's better than nothing. Where is it? I guess I'll take it."

"I don't think you'll like the duties," said Ben, laughing.

"I wouldn't mind selling cigars."

"That isn't what you're wanted for. You are to be painted red, and stand outside as an Indian."

"That's the worst yet. I don't wonder you didn't take any of those chances. What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Try and find some more places."

"Leave that till tomorrow. You know there's going to be a big picnic at Lovell's Grounds, with all sorts of athletic sports. There are prizes for wrestling, jumping, and so on."

"I would like it well enough, but I can't afford to go."

"There'll be nothing to pay. Father subscribed for two tickets, so I've got a spare one. Come, will you go?"

"Yes, I will, and thank you."

"Then come round to the house as soon as you've got through dinner."

"All right! I'll come."

"I suppose you haven't found a place?" said Mrs. Bradford when Ben entered.

"Not yet."

"I don't know what's going to become of us if you don't," said Aunt

Jane mournfully.

"Don't get discouraged so quick, aunt. I've only been looking round one forenoon. Besides, I've been offered a place, and declined it."

"Declined it! What could you have been thinking of?"

Ben then told his aunt of the place at the druggist's. He thought he would not mention the others.

"If you'd taken it, we might have got our medicine cheaper," said Aunt Jane, who did not comprehend a joke, and understood the offer literally.

"I should have got mine for nothing," said Ben, laughing, "and

more than I wanted, too."

"What pay would you get?"

"I didn't ask. The first pill the druggist offered me was too much for me. So I respectfully declined the position."

"Pills are excellent for the constitution," said Mrs. Bradford, in a rather reproachful tone. "I never could get you to take them, Benjamin. Some day you'll lose your life, perhaps, because you are so set against them."

"I can't say I hanker after them, aunt," said Ben good humoredly. "However, you see, I might have had a place, so you mustn't get discouraged so quick."

"Will you stay at home this afternoon, Ben?" asked little Tony.

"I can't Tony; I have an engagement with James Watson. Aunt Jane, if I am late to supper, don't be frightened."

Ben found James ready and waiting. They set out at once.

Lovell's Grounds were situated a mile and a half away; they comprised several acres, sloping down to a pond, which was provided with pleasure boats. The grounds were frequently hired by parties from neighboring towns, having been fitted up especially for the enjoyment of a crowd. To-day they were engaged by a young people's association, and the program included, among other things, some athletic sports.

The grounds were pretty well filled when the two boys arrived. In fact, the performance had already commenced.

"You're just in time for the fun, boys," said George Herman, a mutual acquaintance, coming up to meet them.

"Why, what's up George?"

"There is to be a fat man's race of two hundred yards, for a prize of five dollars."

"Who are going to enter?"

"Tom Hayden, the landlord of the Milltown House, and Jim Morrison, the tailor. One weighs two hundred and fifty, the other two hundred and forty-three."

"Good!" laughed Ben. "That will be fun. Where do they start from?"

"There! Don't you see that chalk-mark? And there come the men."

There was a level track laid out, extending two hundred yards, which was used for such occasions, and this was one of the attractive features of Lovell's Grounds.

The two men advanced to the starting-line, each accoutered for the race. They had divested themselves of their coats, and stood in shirt-sleeves, breathing hard already, in anticipation of the race. Their bulky forms appeared to great advantage, and excited considerable amusement. Tom Hayden, who was rather the heavier of the two, had encircled his waist with a leather strap, which confined it almost as closely as a young lady's waist. This was by advice of Frank Jones, a young fellow noted as a runner.

"I don't think I can stand it, Frank," said Hayden, gasping for breath.

"Oh, yes, you can, Mr. Hayden. You'll see how it will help you."

"I can hardly breathe. You've got it too tight."

Frank Jones loosened it a little, and then turned to Morrison.

"Won't you have a girdle, too, Mr. Morrison?" he asked.

"Not much. I don't want to be suffocated before I start. Have you made your will, Hayden?"

"Not yet, I will make it after I have won the prize."

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Frank Jones, who officiated as starter.

"As ready as I ever expect to be," answered Hayden, trying to draw a long breath, and failing.

"Then, start at the word three. One! Two! Three!"

Amid shouts of applause, the two fat men started. It cannot be said they started like arrows from the bow, but they certainly exerted themselves uncommonly. Their faces grew red with the efforts they made, and their colossal legs hurried over the ground as fast as could reasonably be expected.

"I could beat them easily," said James Watson.

"Of course you could. Just wait till you've got as much to carry.

Look! there's Morrison down!"

It was true. Somehow one of Morrison's legs entangled with the other, and he tumbled and rolled over and over.

"Go in and win, Hayden!" shouted fifty voices to his gasping competitor.

About seventy-five yards remained to be traversed. It look as if Hayden could win the race with opposition. But he was quite

out of breath. He pressed both hands on his stomach, stopped, and deliberately sat down on the track.

"Don't give it up!" yelled the crowd. "Keep on, and the prize is yours!"

"I can't," gasped Hayden, "and I wouldn't for five times the prize. I don't want it."

So the prize was not awarded, but the crowd had their fun, and the two fat competitors sat down together to rest under a tree. They did not recover from their efforts for at least an hour.

"Is there to be a boys' race?" asked Ben.

"Yes, the boys' race is next in order. You'd better enter."

"I will," said Ben. "What's the prize?"

"Five dollars."

Ben's eyes sparkled.

"If I could only win it," he thought, "it would be equal to a week's pay at the factory."

Chapter IV

The Boys' Race

Ben felt that his chances of winning the prize were very good. Among his schoolmates he was distinguished for his superiority in all athletic sports. He could jump farther and run faster than any of the boys of his age; and this was a ground of hope. On the other hand, he could not tell how many contestants there might be. He had measured himself against the boys of his acquaintance; but there were hundreds of other boys in the city, and among them it was quite possible that there might be one who surpassed him. However, Ben was always hopeful, and determined to do his best to win.

One of the committee now came forward and announced the boys' race. The distance was to be the same, the prize five dollars, and there was a limitation of age. No boy over seventeen years of age was permitted to enter.

"Are you going to compete, James?" asked Ben.

"I guess not. I don't stand any chance against you."

"I don't know about that. I might stumble or give out."

"I should like the five dollars well enough."

"Then enter your name."

"Well, I will. I may as well try."

So Ben and James were the first to enter their names.

"Are you coming in, George?" asked Ben of George Herman.

"No; I lamed myself in jumping yesterday, and am not in condition; my brother, Frank, is going to enter. Of course he won't stand any chance, for he is too young."

The next to put down his name was Radford Kelso.

"You can't run, Radford. You're too fat," said George Cormack.

"You're as fat as I am," retorted Radford. "I stand as much chance as you."

Next came Arthur Clark and Frank Jones, both tall and long of limb, and looking as if they might be dangerous rivals. Both were strangers to Ben.

"I am afraid one of those fellows will outrun me," said Ben, aside, to

James.

"They are taller, but perhaps they can't hold out as well."

"But the course is only two hundred yards," said Ben; "that is against me."

Just then the announcement was made, on behalf of the committee, that the distance would be increased to three hundred yards, and that there would be a second race of a hundred and fifty yards for boys under fourteen, the prize being two dollars and a half.

"Frank," said George Herman to his brother, "you had better

wait and enter the second race."

"I think I will and here is Charlie. He can go in, too."

Edward Kemp, Harry Jones and George Huntingdon next entered their names for the first race. The list was about to be declared complete, when an active, well-made youth advanced, and expressed a wish to compete. He had just reached the grounds, and learned that a race was to be run. He gave his name as John Miles, from Boston.

"Who is he, George? Do you know him?" asked Ben.

"I believe he is visiting some friends in Milltown."

"He looks as if he might run."

"He is well made for running. The question is, has he had any training."

"That's going to decide the matter."

"Take your places, boys!"

At the order, the contestants, whose names have already been given, took their places in line.

John Miles glanced carelessly and rather contemptuously at his rivals.

"I'll show them how to run," he said.

"You are very kind," said Frank Jones, who stood next to him. "We never saw anybody run, you know."

"I have practiced running in a gymnasium," said Miles pompously.

"Running is the same all the world over."

"Perhaps it is; but I run on scientific principles."

Frank Jones laughed.

"You are very condescending to run with us, then."

"Oh, I go in for all the fun I can get."

"I suppose you expect to win the prize?"

"Of course I do. Who is there to prevent? You don't pretend to run, do you?"

"Well, I've always supposed I could run a little, though I have never run in a gymnasium; but there are better runners here than I. That boy" – pointing to Ben – "is said to be a good runner."

"He!" said John Miles contemptuously. "Why, I'm a head taller than he. He's a mere baby."

"Well, we shall see."

Time was called, and the signal to start was given.

The boys started almost simultaneously; Arthur Clark was fastening a girdle about his waist, and that delayed him a little. For a few rods all the boys kept pretty well together. Then three gradually drew away from the rest. These three were John Miles, Frank Jones, and Ben Bradford. Arthur Clark was just behind, but his loss at the start put him at a disadvantage.

When the race was half over, John Miles led, while, fifteen feet behind, Ben Bradford and Frank Jones were doing their best to overtake him. John Miles wore upon his face the complacent smile of assured victory.

At two hundred yards, Frank and Ben had partially closed the gap between themselves and John Miles. Intent though he was on his own progress, Ben had leisure to observe that Miles was

beginning to lose ground. It seemed clear that he was inferior to Ben in sustained power.

"There is hope for me yet," thought Ben. "I am not in the least tired. Toward the end I will put on a spurt, and see if I can't snatch the victory from him."

"Go in and win!" exclaimed Frank Jones. "You're got more wind than I. Don't let a stranger carry off the prize."

"Not if I can help it," said Ben.

He was now but four feet behind John, and there were fifty yards to be run.

For the first time, John Miles became apprehensive. He turned his head sufficiently to see that the boy whom he had considered beneath his notice was almost at his heels.

"I can't let a baby like that beat me," he said to himself, and he tried to increase the distance by a spurt. He gained a temporary advantage, but lost more in the end, for the attempt exhausted his strength, and compelled him to slacken his speed farther on.

Twenty yards from the goal the two rivals were neck and neck.

"Now for my spurt!" said Ben to himself.

He gathered himself up, and darted forward with all the strength that was in him. He gained six feet upon his rival, which the latter tried in vain to make up.

The excitement was intense. Popular sympathy was with Ben. He was known to be a Milltown boy, while John Miles was a stranger.

"Put on steam, Milltown!" shouted the crowd.

"Hurrah for Boston!" called out two personal friends of John Miles.

Ben crossed the line seven feet in advance of John, amid shouts of applause.

Frank Jones came in an easy third, and Arthur Clark ranked fourth.

"I congratulate you," said Frank to Ben, who stood, flushed and pleased, at the goal. "You've won the prize fairly."

John Miles stood by, mortified and sullen.

"Better luck next time!" said Frank Jones. "You see we know a little about running."

"I should have won easily enough if I hadn't had a sudden attack of cramp," said John grumbling.

"You didn't run as if you had the cramp."

"You say so, because you don't know how fast I can run. I didn't run at all this morning."

"That's unlucky. I wanted to see some real running."

"I should like to run the race over again," said John.

"Of course, you can't for the prize has been won."

"I don't care about the prize. I've got money enough."

"I haven't," said Ben; "I care more for the money than the victory."

"Look here!" said John. "I'll put up five dollars myself, if you'll run with me again."

"You will?" exclaimed Ben, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes, I will."

"And you won't ask me to put up anything?"

"No."

"Then I'll run if the committee will let me."

A ready permission was obtained from the committee; but it was stipulated that the younger boys should have their race first. To this both contestants readily agreed, since it would give them a chance to recover from the fatigue of the race they had just engaged in.

Chapter V

Ben Wins Again

"I am very glad you won," said Frank Jones, in a low voice.

"Thank you; so am I," answered Ben, smiling.

"Of course I should have preferred to win myself," continued Frank candidly; "but, as I saw that it lay between you and John Miles, I sided with you."

"Do you know Miles?"

"No, but I spoke with him just as the race began. I saw that he felt sure of winning. He boasted that he had practiced running at a gymnasium in Boston."

"Then I wonder he didn't beat me."

"He would on a short race; but your wind is better."

"I am glad to win, for the sake of the money," said Ben. "I have lost my place at the factory, and my aunt depends on my earnings."

"Then I am glad for you," said Frank. "I didn't need the money myself. If I had won, I would have given it to you, knowing your circumstances."

"You are very kind," said Ben gratefully.

"You may win another five dollars. I hope you will."

"It will be rather hard on John Miles to lose two races and his money, too."

"You needn't consider that. If I judge him rightly, he has self-conceit enough to carry him through a dozen defeats. He will have some excuse ready, you may be sure. He says he lost the first race by a sudden cramp. He has not more cramp than I."

"There are little boys in line," said Ben. "I recognize Frank and

Charlie Herman. Do you know the others?"

"I know nearly all. Next to Charlie Herman are Aleck Gale, Johnny Clarke, little Vanderhoef, Brooks Gulager, and Charlie Boyd. The end boy is Charlie Snedeker."

"Who will win?"

"One of the Hermans, probably."

The prediction proved correct.

Charles Herman can in first, leading his brother by a few feet.

"You ought to divide the prize with me, Charlie," said Frank. "I didn't like to beat my older brother, or I would have run ahead of you."

"You didn't seem to hold back much," said Charlie. "However, I will be generous and give you a dollar. It will be all in the family."

Proclamation was now made that a supplementary race would be run, for a prize of five dollars, offered by John Miles, the contestants being John Miles and Ben Bradford. The distance by request of Miles, was diminished to two hundred yards. John

was shrewd enough to see that the shorter distance was more favorable to himself. Defeat had not diminished his good opinion of himself, not increased his respect for Ben.

"You gained the race by an accident," he said to Ben, as they stood side by side, waiting for the signal.

"Perhaps I did," replied Ben good-humoredly; "all I can say is that it was a lucky accident for me."

"Of course it was. You don't think you can run as fast as I can?"

"I can't tell yet. I will do my best."

"You will have to. I have practiced running in a Boston gymnasium."

"Then you have the advantage of me."

"Of course I have. Besides, I am taller than you."

"For all that, I mean to win your five dollars if I can."

"My money is safe enough. I don't concern myself about that."

"He has a tolerably comfortable opinion of himself," thought Ben; "I begin to want to beat him for something else than the money."

The signal was given, and the boys started.

As in the first race, John Miles soon took the lead. He was nearly three inches taller than Ben. Naturally, his legs were longer, and this was an advantage. Again he put forth all his strength at once; Ben, on the other hand, reserved his strength for the close of the contest. When the race was half over, John Miles was probably twenty feet in advance.

"Boston, will win this time," said Arthur Clark. "See how much Miles leads."

"I am not so sure of that," said George Herman. "I know Ben Bradford. He is very strong, and can hold out well. Miles is using himself up. Do you see how he is panting?"

This was true. In spite of all his training, John Miles had never been able to overcome a shortness of breath which was constitutional with him. It was telling upon him now.

Foot by foot Ben gained upon him. It was the first race over again. Toward the finish he overtook him, and a final spurt won the race – with John Miles full ten feet behind.

"Have I won fairly?" asked our her, turning to John.

"That confounded cramp caught me again," said John sullenly. "If it hadn't been for that, you couldn't have beaten me."

"That was unlucky for you."

"I could beat you by twenty-five yards if I felt all right."

"Boasting is easy," thought Ben, but he did not say it. He felt in too good humor over his second victory.

"We may have a chance to run again some time when you are in better condition," he said cheerfully.

"Maybe so," answered John dubiously. He felt that he had had enough of running against Ben.

Ben's acquaintances gathered about him, and congratulated him over his double victory. Boys whom he did not know sought an introduction, and he found himself quite a lion.

John Miles returned to the two boys who had accompanied

him, and began to apologize for his want of success.

"I was awfully unlucky," he said. "I suppose that fellow thinks, because he has beaten me twice when I had the cramp, that he is a better runner than I am. Just see those fellows crowding around him! I suppose he will strut like a turkey-cock."

But this was doing injustice to Ben. He certainly had reason to feel pleased with his success; for it not only brought him a sum equal to two weeks' wages at the factory, but he received the congratulations of the boys so modestly that he won the good opinion of many who had hitherto been strangers to him.

"By George, Ben, you've done well," said James Watson. "I just wish

I were in your place."

"I owe my good luck to you, James."

"How is that?"

"You invited me to come here. I shouldn't have come but for you."

"I am glad of it, Ben. From what you tell me, the money'll come in handy."

"Indeed it will, James."

"It would come in handy to me, too, but you need it more."

Ben was summoned before the committee of the picnic, and asked whether he preferred to take his prizes in money or in the form of a gold medal.

"In money," he said promptly.

"The medal would always remind you of your victory."

"They wouldn't receive it at a grocery store," said Ben.

"Then you are a family man?" said a member of the committee, smiling.

"Yes," said Ben; "I've got an aunt and cousin to provide for."

The money was accordingly placed in his hands. Two five-dollar greenbacks were a rich reward for his afternoon's exertions, he thought.

"I wish I could earn as much money every day," he thought. "We would have no trouble then about getting along."

About half-past four o'clock, Ben and James left the picnic grounds, and started on their way home. They had occasion to pass the cigar store where Ben had been offered employment. The proprietor was standing at the door.

"Have you made up your mind to accept my offer?" he asked recognizing Ben.

"You don't offer enough," said Ben.

"Isn't three dollars a week enough for a boy like you?"

"Since I last saw you I've earned ten dollars," answered Ben.

"You have!" exclaimed the cigar dealer, in surprise. "I believe you are deceiving me. You don't expect me to believe a story like that."

"There is the proof," said Ben, displaying the greenbacks.

"Are you sure you haven't stolen the money?" asked the dwarf suspiciously.

"I am as sure as that you are no gentleman," retorted Ben, nettled by his tone.

The cigar dealer began to jump up and down with rage, and shook his fist violently at the two boys, who retired laughing.

Chapter VI

Mr. Dobson's Visit

It was a little after five o'clock when Ben entered his humble home. He was in excellent spirits, as may be imagined. His aunt's face, however, presented a decided contrast to his own.

"Well, Benjamin," she said, with a sigh, "I suppose you haven't found anything to do."

"No, Aunt Jane, I have been to a picnic."

"I don't see how you can have the spirits to go to a picnic when we are on the verge of starvation," said Mrs. Bradford reproachfully.

"Not so bad as that, Aunt Jane; we won't starve this week, anyway."

"Perhaps not; but I look forward to the future."

"So do I, Aunt Jane," Ben replied; "but there is this difference between us. You look forward with discouragement, while I look forward hopefully. You know my motto is, Wait and Hope!"

"You'll have plenty of waiting to do," his aunt retorted; "but there isn't much to hope for."

"Why isn't there?"

"I shouldn't think you'd need to be told. You haven't earned

a cent to-day, and – "

"How do you know I haven't?" demanded Ben, smiling.

"How could you? You were going about this morning after a place, and this afternoon you have been at a picnic."

"For all that, aunt, I have earned something – more than if I had been at the factory."

Mrs. Bradford stared at Ben in astonishment.

"How much did you earn, Ben?" asked Tony.

"Haven't I done well enough to earn a dollar, Tony?"

Mrs. Bradford's face assumed a more cheerful look, for a dollar in that little household would go far.

"I don't see how you found time to earn so much, Benjamin," she said.

"Now, just suppose, aunt, that I earned two dollars," said Ben, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

This was too much for his aunt to believe.

"If supposing would make it so, I should be very glad to suppose; but it won't."

"But it's true, aunt."

"I can't believe it, Benjamin, unless you've found the money somewhere, and then you will have to return it."

"No, I earned it, Aunt Jane, and it's mine fairly."

"I am glad to hear it, Benjamin. Is there any chance to earn any more the same way?"

"I am afraid not, Aunt Jane. However, I've done even better than I told you. I've earned ten dollars this afternoon."

"Benjamin Bradford!" said his aunt sharply. "Do you expect me to believe such a foolish story as that?"

Ben laughed, He was not surprised at his aunt's incredulity; he wouldn't have believed that morning that there was any chance of his making so much money.

"I don't know as I blame you, Aunt Jane; but if you won't believe me, perhaps you'll believe your own eyes," answered Ben, as he drew forth the two five-dollar bills from his pocket, and showed them to Mrs. Bradford.

"Are they good?" she asked suspiciously.

"As good as gold, Aunt Jane; well, not exactly as good as gold, but as good as greenbacks, anyway."

"I can't understand it at all," said Mrs. Bradford, in helpless bewilderment.

"Then I'll tell you all about it," said Ben; and he did so.

"I shall have a high opinion of my legs from this time," he concluded, "for they have earned ten dollars in quicker time than my hands can earn twenty-five cents."

Even his aunt, in spite of her despondent mood, could not help being cheerful over such good fortune as that.

"You see, Aunt Jane, that even if I don't earn anything for the next two weeks, we shall be as well off as if I had been working at the factory all the time. So don't worry any more till that time has passed."

"You certainly have been very fortunate, Benjamin," Mrs. Bradford was forced to admit.

A copious rain is very apt to be followed by a protracted drought, and I am sorry to say that this was the case with Ben's luck. Day after day he went about Milltown, seeking for employment, and night after night he returned home disappointed and empty-handed. If it had depended only on himself, his courage would still have kept up; but his aunt's dismal forebodings affected his spirits. He did not find it quite so easy to wait and hope as he anticipated.

Three weeks passed, and Ben was painfully sensible that there was but a dollar in the house.

They had just risen from the dinner table on the day when their fortunes were at so low an ebb, when a knock was heard at the door.

A man of about thirty-five, Mr. Jotham Dobson, was admitted. Mr.

Dobson was a man with a brisk, business-like air.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Dobson?" asked Ben, who had answered the knock.

"Is your aunt at home?" inquired Mr. Dobson bruskly.

"Yes, sir."

"Then, I'll step in a minute, as I want to see her on business."

"What business can he possibly have?" thought Ben. "I wish his business lay with me, and that he wanted to employ me."

"Good morning, Mrs. Bradford," said Dobson rapidly. "No, thank you, I really haven't the time to sit down; I have a little business with you, that's all."

"Perhaps he wants to get me to do some sewing," thought Mrs. Bradford; but she was doomed to be disagreeably disappointed.

"Perhaps you are not aware of it," said Mr. Dobson, "but I am the city collector of taxes. I've got your tax bill made out. Let me see – here it is. Will it be convenient for you to pay it to-day?"

"How much is it?" faltered Mrs. Bradford.

"Eleven dollars and eighty cents, precisely," answered the collector.

Mrs. Bradford looked so doleful that Ben felt called upon to reply.

"We can't pay it this morning, Mr. Dobson," he said.

"Really, you had better make the effort," said Dobson. "You are aware that the tax is now due, and that one per cent a month will be added for default. That's twelve per cent, a year – pretty heavy."

"What shall we do, Benjamin?" asked his aunt, in a crushed tone.

"Wait and hope, Aunt Jane."

"My friends," said Mr. Dobson persuasively, "I really think you'd better make the effort to pay now, and so avoid the heavy interest."

"Perhaps," said Ben, "you'll tell us how to pay without money?"

"You might borrow it."

"All right! I am willing. Mr. Dobson will you be kind enough

to lend us twelve dollars to meet this bill?"

Mr. Dobson's face changed. It always did when any one proposed to borrow money of him, for he was what people called a "close" man.

"I really couldn't do it," he answered. "Money's very scarce with me – particularly scarce. It's all I can do to pay my own taxes."

Ben smiled to himself, for he knew how the application would be answered.

"Then of course we can't pay at present," he said. "We've tried to borrow, and can't."

"I didn't expect you'd try to borrow of me – the tax collector," said Dobson; "even if I had the money, it would be very unprofessional of me to lend you the money."

"It would be very unprofessional of us to pay you without money," returned Ben.

"I suppose I must call again," said the collector, disappointed.

He was disappointed less for the city than for his own account, for he received a percentage on taxes collected.

"I suppose you must."

"Benjamin, this is awful," said Mrs. Bradford piteously, after Mr. Dobson had retired. "What is going to become of us? The city will sell the house for taxes."

"They'll wait a year first, at any rate, Aunt Jane; so we won't fret about it yet. There are other things more pressing."

"If we don't get some money within a day or two, we must

starve,

Benjamin."

"Something may turn up this afternoon, Aunt Jane. Wait and hope!"

Ben put on his hat and went out. In spite of his cheerful answer, he felt rather sober himself.

Chapter VII

Ben Gets Employment

When Ben got out into the street, he set himself to consider where he could apply for employment. As far as he knew, he had inquired at every store in Milltown if a boy was wanted, only to be answered in the negative, sometimes kindly, other times roughly. At the factory, too, he had ascertained that there was no immediate prospect of his being taken on again.

"It's a hard case," thought Ben, "when a fellow wants to work, and needs the money, and can find no opening anywhere."

It was a hard case; but Ben was by no means the only one so situated. It may be said of him, at all events, that he deserved to succeed, for he left no stone unturned to procure employment.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I can get a small job to do somewhere. It would be better to earn a trifle than to be idle."

As this thought passed through Ben's mind, he glanced into Deacon Sawyer's yard. The deacon was a near neighbor of his mother, and was reputed rich, though he lived in an old-fashioned house, furnished in the plain manner of forty years back. It was said that probably not fifty dollars' worth of furniture had come into the house since the deacon's marriage, two-and-forty years

previous. Perhaps his tastes were plain; but the uncharitable said that he was too fond of his money to part with it.

A couple of loads of wood were just being deposited in the deacon's yard. They were brought by a tenant of his, who paid a part of his rent in that way.

When Ben saw the wood, a bright thought came to him.

"Perhaps I can get a chance to saw and split that wood," he said to himself. "The deacon doesn't keep a man, and he is too old to do it himself."

As Ben did not mean to let any chance slip, he instantly entered the yard by the gate, and, walking up to the front door, rang the bell. The bell had only been in place for a year. The deacon had been contented with the old fashioned knocker, and had reluctantly consented to the innovation of a bell, and he still spoke of it as a new-fangled nonsense.

Nancy Sawyer, an old-maid daughter of the deacon, answered the bell.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Ben politely.

"Good morning, Ben," the deacon's daughter responded. "How's your aunt to-day?"

"Pretty well, thank you."

"Will you come in?"

"I called on business," said Ben. "Don't you want that wood sawed and split?"

"Yes, I suppose it ought to be," said Nancy. "Do you want to do it?"

"Yes," said our hero. "I'm out of work and ready to do anything I can find to do."

"Are you used to sawing and splitting wood?" inquired Nancy cautiously. "We had a boy once who broke our saw, because he didn't understand how to use it."

"You needn't be afraid of my meeting with such an accident," said Ben confidently. "I saw and split all our wood at home, and have ever since I was twelve years old."

"Come in and speak to father," said Nancy; "I guess he'll be willing to hire you."

She led the way into a very plain sitting room, covered with a rag carpet, where the deacon sat in a rocking chair, reading an agricultural paper – the only one he subscribed to. His daughter, whose literary tastes were less limited, had tried to get him to subscribe for a magazine, but he declined, partly on account of the expense, and partly because of the pictures of fashionably dressed ladies, and he feared his daughter would become extravagant in dress.

Deacon Sawyer looked up as Ben entered the room.

"It's Ben Bradford, father," said Nancy, for her father's vision was impaired.

"He ain't come to borrow anything, has he, Nancy?" asked the old man.

"No, he wants you to employ him to saw and split your wood."

"Don't you know I'm a sawyer myself?" said the deacon, chuckling over a familiar joke.

Ben laughed, feeling that it was his policy to encourage what feeble glimmering of wit the deacon might indulge in.

"That's your joke, father," said Nancy. "You'll have to get the wood sawed and split, and you might as well employ Ben."

"I thought you was in the factory, Benjamin," said the old man.

"So I was, but they cut down the number of hands some weeks ago, and I had to leave among others."

"How do you make a livin', then?" inquired the deacon bluntly.

"We've got along somehow," said Ben; "but if I don't get work soon,

I don't know what we shall do."

"Nancy," said the deacon, "seems to me I can saw the wood myself.

It will save money."

"No, you can't father," said Nancy decidedly. "You are too old for that kind of work, and you can afford to have it done."

"You are a sensible woman, even if you are homely," thought Ben, though for obvious reasons he did not say it.

"I dunno about that, Nancy," said her father.

"Well, I do," said Nancy peremptorily.

The fact is, that she had a will of her own, and ruled the deacon in many things, but, it must be admitted, judiciously, and with an eye to his welfare.

"How much will you charge, Benjamin," the deacon asked, "for sawing and splitting the whole lot."

"How much is there of it?" asked Ben.

"Two cords."

"I don't know how much I ought to charge, Deacon Sawyer. I am willing to go ahead and do it, and leave you to pay me what you think right."

"That's right," said the deacon in a tone of satisfaction. "You may go ahead and do it, and I'll do the right thing by you."

"All right," said Ben cheerfully. "I'll go right to work."

I am obliged to say that in this agreement Ben was unbusiness-like. There are some men with whom it will answer to make such contracts, but it is generally wiser to have a definite understanding. For the lack of this, disputes often arise, and mean men will take advantage when so fair an opportunity is afforded them.

After Ben left the room, Nancy, who was sensible and practical, and by no means niggardly as her father, said to him; "You ought to have named your terms, Ben. Then you would know just what you are earning."

"I was afraid I might ask too much, and lose the job."

"Now you may get too little."

"Even if I do, I would rather be at work than be doing nothing."

"That's the right way to feel," said Nancy, approvingly. "I like to see a boy at your age industrious. As to the terms, I will try to make my father do you justice."

"Thank you, ma'am. Can you tell me where you keep the saw and ax?"

"You will find them in the woodshed, in the L part."

"Thank you."

"How long do you expect the job will take you?"

"I should think two or three days; but I have never undertaken such a large job of any kind before."

"Very well. I didn't speak of it because there is any hurry about it."

"You may not be in a hurry, but I am," thought Ben, "for I want the money."

Ben tackled the wood-pile vigorously. It was not a kind of work he was partial to; but he was sensible enough to know that he must accept what work came in his way without regard to his own preferences.

He had been at work about an hour when he heard his name called from the street. Looking up, he recognized James Watson.

"Is that you, Ben?" asked James, in some astonishment.

"It is supposed to be. Don't I look natural?" asked Ben, smiling.

"What are you doing?"

"Don't you see? I am sawing wood."

"You don't mean you go around from house to house sawing wood?"

"Why not?"

"I should think you would be too proud to do it."

"I am not too proud to do any honest work that will put money in my pocket. Isn't it as respectable as working in the factory?"

"Certainly not. I am willing to work in the factory, but I wouldn't go round sawing wood."

"You can afford to be proud, James, but I can't. We are almost out of money, and I must do something."

"I don't believe the deacon will give you much of anything. He hasn't the reputation of being very generous."

"I must take my chance at that."

"I am sorry for it. I wanted you to go fishing with me this afternoon."

"I should like to go, James, but business before pleasure, they say."

"Ben has not pride," thought James, as he went away, disappointed.

But he was mistaken. Ben was proud in his way, but he was not too proud to do honest work.

Chapter VIII

Deacon Sawyer's Liberality

About four o'clock on the afternoon of the third day, Ben completed his job. Not only had he sawed and split the wood, but carried it into the woodshed and piled it up neatly, all ready for use. He surveyed his work not without complacency.

"The deacon can't find fault with that job," he said to himself. "He ought to pay me a good price."

The shed opened out of the kitchen. Ben rubbed his feet carefully on the mat, knowing that housekeepers had a prejudice against mud or dust, and, ascending a couple of steps, entered the kitchen. Miss Nancy was there, superintending her "help."

"Well, Miss Nancy," said Ben, "I've finished the wood."

"Have you piled it up in the woodshed?" asked the lady.

"Yes. Won't you come and look at it?"

Nancy Sawyer stepped into the shed, and surveyed the wood approvingly.

"You've done well," she said. "And now I suppose you want your money."

"It would be convenient," admitted Ben.

"You'll have to see father about that," said Nancy.

"Can I see him now?" asked Ben, a little anxiously, for he knew that his aunt's stock of money had dwindled to ten cents.

"Yes; you may go right into the sitting-room."

This room was connected by a door with the kitchen.

"Wait a minute," said Nancy; and she looked at Ben in rather an embarrassed way.

Ben paused with his hand on the latch, waiting to hear what Miss

Nancy had to say.

"My father is very careful with his money," she said. "He may not realize how much work there has been in sawing and splitting the wood. He may not pay you what it is worth."

Ben looked serious, for he knew that he needed all he had earned.

"What shall I do if he doesn't?" he asked.

"I don't want you to dispute about it. Take what he gives you, and then come to me. I will make up what is lacking in one way or another."

"Thank you, Miss Nancy. You are very kind," said Ben.

"I don't know about that," said Nancy. "I don't pretend to be very benevolent; but I want to be just, and in my opinion that is a good deal better. Now you may go in."

Ben lifted the latch, and entered the sitting-room. He found that the deacon was not alone. A gentleman, of perhaps thirty-five, was with him.

"I hope I am not intruding," said Ben politely, "but I have

finished with the wood."

Though Deacon Sawyer was a very "close" man, he was always prompt in his payments. So much must be said to his credit. He never thought, therefore, of putting Ben off.

"I suppose you want to be paid, Benjamin?" he said.

"Yes, sir, I should like it, if convenient to you."

"Lemme see, Benjamin, how long has it taken you?"

"Two days and a half, sir."

"Not quite. It's only four o'clock now. Have you just go through?"

"Yes, sir."

"We didn't make no bargain, did we?"

"No, sir, I left it to you."

"Quite right. So you did. Now, Benjamin," continued the deacon, "I want to do the fair thing by you. Two days and a half, at twenty-five cents a day, will make sixty-two cents; or we will say sixty-three. Will that do?"

Poor Ben! He had calculated on three times that sum, at least.

"That would only be a dollar and a half a week," he said, looking very much disappointed.

"I used to work for that when I was young," said the deacon.

"At the factory I was paid five dollars a week," said Ben.

"Nobody of your age can earn as much as that," said the deacon sharply. "No wonder manufacturin' don't pay, when such wages are paid. What do you say, Mr. Manning?" continued the deacon, appealing to the gentlemen with him.

Mr. Manning's face wore an amused smile. He lived in the city, and his ideas on the subject of money and compensation were much less contracted than the deacon's.

"Since you appeal to me," he answered. "I venture to suggest that prices have gone up a good deal since you were a boy, Deacon Sawyer, and twenty-five cents won't go as far now as it did then."

"You are right," said the deacon; "it costs a sight for groceries nowadays. Well, Benjamin, I'll pay you a little more than I meant to. Here's a dollar, and that's good pay for two days and a half."

Ben took the money, but for the life of him he couldn't thank the deacon very heartily. He had been paid at the rate of forty cents a day, which would amount to two dollars and forty cents a week, for work considerably harder than he had done at the factory.

"Good afternoon," he said briefly, and reentered the kitchen.

Nancy Sawyer scanned his face closely as he closed the door of the sitting-room. She was not surprised at his expression of disappointment.

"Well," she inquired, "what did father pay you?"

"He wanted to pay me sixty-three cents," answered Ben, with a touch of indignation in his tone. "Twenty-five cents a day."

"Of course that was much too little. What did he pay you?"

"A dollar."

"How much were you expecting to get?" asked Nancy, in a business-like tone.

"I was hoping to get seventy-five cents a day. That would be less than I got at the factory."

"I think your work was worth that much myself," said the spinster.

Ben felt encouraged.

"My father is getting old. He forgets that money won't buy as much as it did in his younger days. He means to be just."

"Then I don't think he succeeds very well," thought Ben.

"I understand such things better," proceeded Miss Nancy, "and I try to make up for father's mistakes, as far as I can. Now tell me what are you meaning to do with the money you received for this job?"

"I shall give it all to Aunt Jane," answered Ben.

"You are a good boy," said Nancy approvingly. "And she will buy groceries with it, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Nancy. It is about all she has to depend upon."

"Just so. Now, Ben, I will tell you what I will do. Father keeps me pretty close myself, as far as money goes, but we have plenty in the house of groceries and such things as your aunt will need to have. Now, will it do just as well if I give you the balance that you have earned in that form?"

"It will do just as well, Miss Nancy, and I am very much obliged to you for your kindness."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.