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"ALMOST A CROWD, FOR RUSSELLVILLE, STOOD IN FRONT OF THE DRUG STORE."



*Young series*

# THE YOUNG REPORTER

A Story of Printing House Square.

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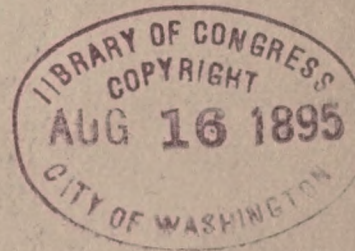
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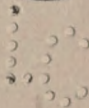
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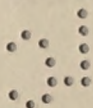
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THE YOUNG REPORTER.





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# THE YOUNG REPORTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A NIGHT IN THE TRANSPORT OFFICE.

THE big clock in The Russellville Record office said half-past three, and Dick Sumner stood in front of his case distributing type.

“It’s a dark day,” he said to himself, glancing at the window, “and I’m afraid I feel rather dark myself. But that won’t do;” and he straightened himself up and began to drop the types faster than ever.

Dick was the “last boy” in the Record office and had all of a last boy’s privileges: the privilege of sweeping the office, making the fires, washing the rollers, doing all the dirty work.

“It’s a long day, too,” he said as he took up the next handful of type. “I wish that clock would move a little faster.”

Not that he was in a hurry to get away from his work. That would not have been like Dick at all, for his heart was in the business, and there was nothing too hard or too inky for him to undertake.



It was because he thought his fate was to be decided that evening that he was anxious for evening to come. And so it was, but very differently from the way he expected. He considered it an eventful day in his life, but he had no idea how very eventful it was to be.

The trouble was that the three dollars a week he was earning in the Record office was not enough for him to make. It did very well when he went into the office, about a year before, when his father was alive and his money was not needed at home ; but since then his father had died and left hardly anything for the support of the family. Dick felt that it was his place to take care of his mother and his sister Florrie, but he could not do it on three dollars a week. By giving up his place and going to work in the saw-mill he could earn about a dollar and a half a day, for he was large and strong for a boy of eighteen ; but if he did that he could hardly hope for advancement, and it would put an end to his learning the trade he liked better than any other.

That was the problem in the Sumner family, and as he dropped the letters into their boxes, Dick could not help thinking about it. Inclination said : " Stick to your trade ; " and Duty said — well, there was a difficulty, for he was not sure what Duty said. On the one hand he was learning the trade of his choice, and after a while his wages would increase ;



but on the other hand the dollar and a half a day was greatly needed at home.

If his mother had advised him one way or the other, Dick would have followed her advice on the instant ; but she was as undecided about it as Dick was. They had had many serious talks about it, Mrs. Sumner and Dick and Florrie, without making up their minds ; but the time had come when Mrs. Sumner must begin to make a little money by sewing, or else Dick must leave the Record office and go to the saw-mill.

“Think it over this afternoon, Dick,” she said when he went away after dinner, “and to-night we will decide it one way or the other.”

There was not the least doubt in Dick’s mind, as he kept the types click, click, clicking into their boxes, that he was to be either a printer or a saw-mill hand. There were just two fates before him, he thought, and that night was to decide between them. But he was mistaken.

No wonder the clock moved slowly. He was about to take up another handful of type, when there came a summons that he was accustomed to hearing so often that it always made him smile : —

“Here, Dick !”

The call came from the editor’s room in the front. The Record office is a small place, with only two rooms. In the front room the editor sits with his pen and shears and his pile of exchanges ; and in



the back room the three printers work. The door between them always stands open.

"Yes, sir!" Dick answered; and he put down his type and hurriedly dried his hands on a discarded proof.

"I think I'll let you do that governor business to-night, Dick," the editor said. "It's not every day we have a governor in town, and people will want to read something about him. You might have a little talk with him; get him to say something nice about Russellville. You'll have all the week to write your story, and I think you can do it justice."

"Very well, sir; I'll do the best I can with it," Dick answered, and went back to his type.

"That governor business!" It was a vague order, but Dick understood it, and it brought a flush to his temples. It meant that that night he was to be a reporter for the paper, instead of only a drudge in the office. He was proud of the commission, and yet a little afraid of it. He had often done little reporting jobs for the paper before, attending unimportant meetings and writing a few lines about them which had actually appeared in print. Occasionally he had ventured into a bit of descriptive writing, with some success. But that governor business! That was more than he would have believed the editor would trust him with.

The editor knew what he was doing, though.



Dick had a reasonably good education, having gone through the village school, and he knew how to get a fact and write it in good plain English without any nonsense. He was a manly looking fellow, too, five feet nine; and his cheery, handsome face and bright gray eyes opened many a door for him where an older man might have been repulsed.

“What is the governor business you’re going to do?” the foreman asked presently, after hearing the editor go out and shut the front door.

“Oh, have n’t you heard of it? I thought everybody in Russellville knew about it,” Dick replied. “Of course you know that Mrs. Thornton is a sister of Governor Wright, the governor of the State, and that she is very sick. She is much worse to-day, and they have telegraphed for the governor to come on, and he is expected here about nine o’clock this evening.”

Dick had more things to think of now, as he went on distributing his type without throwing italic words into the quad box as some printers do when excited. Seeing the governor would interfere with his business at home, and that must be postponed. And going up to a real governor and interviewing him, he regarded as a very serious matter. But he knew the Thorntons well, and they would make a way for him to reach the governor, when he was at leisure. There was one dark spot, though, in this bright prospect. He could not help thinking that in



another week he might be rolling logs in a saw-mill instead of interviewing governors for a very respectable weekly newspaper.

At nine o'clock that evening Dick started out for the Thorntons' house, revolving in his mind a dozen questions that he intended to ask the governor if he got the chance. The governor was to drive over; for although Russellville is less than an hour's ride from New York it is several miles from the nearest railway. It is a slow, old-fashioned town and its Record is a slow, old-fashioned newspaper; but that was in Dick's favor, for none but a very old-fashioned paper could have sent its office boy to interview the governor of the State.

As he went down the quiet street, Dick saw that something unusual was going on. People were gathered in little groups talking; and almost a crowd, for Russellville, stood in front of the drug-store.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"The governor," was the answer, "has been killed!"

"No, not killed," said another, "but very badly injured. The horses ran away and he was thrown out. They have taken him to his sister's, and three doctors are trying to bring him back to life. He has been unconscious ever since the accident."

For a moment Dick was dazed; and then there



came upon him that feeling of responsibility that comes even to an old reporter when an important piece of news lies before him.

To verify the report — he was sure that that was what he ought to do first, for such things are often exaggerated. He hurried on to the Thornton house and found a crowd in front. While he waited one of the doctors came out; and Dick, knowing him, stepped into the carriage with him. Yes, the rumor was only too true. The horses had taken fright, Governor Wright had been thrown out; he had been carried unconscious to his sister's house, and the physicians had found a bad fracture of the left thigh. There were injuries to the head, too, but it was impossible to say yet how serious. The doctor was hurrying after splints and bandages and would return to the house. Dick could go back with him, he said, and see the governor's secretary, who was in the party.

It was while he rode in the carriage with the doctor that an idea came to Dick which changed his whole subsequent life. Here was news, he was sure of it; a serious accident to the governor of a great State was news that even the big city papers would print, and if they would print it they would pay for it. He might make three dollars, a whole week's wages, if he could get the news to one of the morning newspapers. No telegraph office in Russellville was open at that hour, but there was a train for the



city at eleven o'clock, if he could get a friend to drive him over to the station.

With this idea in his head Dick worked like a Trojan. To see the governor was out of the question, but he saw the secretary and talked with him. Then he saw the doctors and got a brief written statement from one of them. The driver had a story to tell, and Dick made full notes of it all. In an hour he felt sure that he had everything at his fingers' ends.

"But will this be fair?" he asked himself as he went down the street to meet the friend who was to drive him to the railway. "I was sent out to report the governor's visit for *The Russellville Record*, and will it be fair for me to write an account of the accident for some other paper?"

It was a very proper question for him to ask, and fortunately his editor was on hand to answer it. He was walking up the street that Dick was walking down.

"It's a very bad accident, sir," Dick hurriedly said; "the governor's thigh is broken and his head is injured. Would it make any difference to you, Mr. Davis, if I should take an account of it to one of the New York papers?"

"Not the least in the world!" the editor replied, smiling; "it's a good idea. Go ahead, my boy, and they'll pay you for it."

At twelve o'clock, midnight, Dick was in New



York city, having stopped a moment at home to explain the situation ; and ten minutes later he was in front of The Daily Transport office. He had passed the building often before, but never at midnight ; and when he saw the row of bright lights all across the third and fourth stories, and the men at work in the brilliant counting-room below (enough men, it seemed to him, to write and print the paper themselves), he began to feel a little timid about going in.

“ Pshaw ! ” he said to himself after hesitating a moment outside ; “ I have something to sell that I ’m sure the paper wants to buy. Anyhow, I don’t believe they ’ll eat me in there.”

When he inquired for the editor at one of the counting-room windows, the nearest clerk raised his head from his work long enough to nod toward the stairway, and to say : —

“ Third story ! ”

This was surprise number one for Dick. Here was a great New York office without an elevator, and with long dark stairs to climb ! It was his favorite paper, too ; the best of them all, as he thought, and he was rather disappointed. But he climbed the stairs, one long flight and two shorter ones, and went through an open doorway into a blaze of light.

It was an immense room that he found himself in, with long rows of desks and chairs and electric



lights innumerable, and larger desks at the farther end by the front windows. A small space about the entrance door was enclosed with a railing. Thirty or forty men sat at the desks; a few writing, some reading newspapers, others grouped together and talking in low tones. Everything was as calm as a May morning.

This was surprise number two. The paper must go to press certainly in an hour or so, yet all these men were as unconcerned as though they were writing for a monthly magazine. And where were the messenger boys, rushing excitedly in and out, bearing important dispatches from all parts of the world? Not a messenger did he see. Why, there was more excitement in *The Russellville Record* office on publication day.

An office boy stood in front of him inquiringly, and Dick said that he had some news for the editor.

"Night city editor," said the boy; "step this way."

He led Dick through a long alley between two rows of desks to the front of the room, and pointed to a chair at the side of the editor's desk. Dick sat down and felt reassured when he found that the night city editor was a very young man, not more than four or five years older than himself.

"We had an accident in our place — in Russellville — to-night," he said when the editor looked up; "Governor Wright was thrown out of his



carriage and was very seriously hurt. His thigh was broken and they do not know yet how dangerous the injuries to his head may be."

"And your name is?" — the editor asked.

"My name is Richard Sumner, sir," Dick answered. "I am from The Russellville Record."

"Just tell me the circumstances, Mr. Sumner, as briefly as you can," said the editor.

Dick felt that he was blushing, for it was the first time he had ever been called Mr. Sumner. But he had the story well in mind, and told it as briefly and clearly as he could, with all the important points well brought out.

Before the young editor had time to say anything, after Dick finished, an elderly gentleman, who had been sitting at a neighboring desk, apparently paying no attention to the talk, pushed back his chair and stood up and began to open a most formidable battery upon the young printer. He first wiped one pair of spectacles and put them on, then wiped another pair and put them on over the others. Through both pairs of glasses he looked searchingly into Dick's face. But his own gray-whiskered face was such an embodiment of good-nature that Dick was not alarmed.

"Young man," said the older editor, his glass guns still aimed straight at Dick's face, "can you write that story as well as you have just told it?"



“I think so, sir,” Dick answered. “I wrote part of it while I was in the cars.”

“Then give me what you have ready,” said the editor, “and sit right down at that desk and finish it. Give all the particulars fully; we have plenty of room for important news. But no slush, mind you; not a line. Have you taken this to any other paper?”

“No, sir,” Dick replied.

“But there is a telegraph office in Russellville?”

“Yes, sir, there is,” Dick answered; “but it was closed at eight o’clock, before the accident happened.”

“Then don’t go anywhere else,” said the editor. “Stay here with me till I can show you a proof, and I will pay you extra for it. Now fire away; you have an hour and twenty minutes to write. We go to press at 1.50.”

Dick sat down at a desk with a handful of manilla paper before him, and spent a minute or two in thinking before he began to write. There he was with important news, and only two of the forty men paid any attention to him, or even looked at him. And he could not understand why they would take news from a stranger so willingly; he had expected to be questioned very closely, for how could they know that his news was true? But there was no time to waste, and he fell to work.

It was not instinct that taught him to begin the



article with a brief statement of all the principal facts. He had learned that way by reading the *Transport* carefully. Then he went on with an account of Mrs. Thornton's relationship to the governor, her illness and relapse, the governor's arrival in Russellville, the fright of the horses, the accident, and the extent of the governor's injuries. After these things came an interview with the doctors and the private secretary and a copy of the statement that one of the doctors had written for him. Last of all was a talk with the driver, in which that well-frightened person told in his own way how and why the horses ran away.

"Don't hurry yourself," the night city editor called over to Dick, seeing how rapidly he was moving the pencil. "Plenty of time. You've nearly forty minutes yet."

When Dick looked up to answer, a cold chill ran down his spine. The editor with the spectacles was at work on his early copy with a blue pencil, marking out whole paragraphs, killing lines and parts of lines, transposing sentences, inserting new words, making changes here, there, and everywhere. He had never seen copy with so many blue lines.

"A nice job I've made of it," he said to himself. "I guess they'll not want any more of my copy in the *Transport* office." But the next minute he saw that the young editor was doing precisely the



same thing with the copy he was reading, and that consoled him.

Long before 1.50 came, Dick's copy had all been edited and sent up to the printers. Both the editors seemed to have forgotten him, and he was left to amuse himself with the loose newspapers and directories and traveler's guides that were scattered about. The older editor was constantly going out of the room and coming back, and the younger was busy with copy that was laid upon his desk every few minutes.

"There is later news for you," said the editor with the glasses, as he came in with a handful of proofs and handed Dick an open telegram.

The dispatch was dated "Russellville, 12.45, via Branchport, 1.20 A.M."; and the date line made Dick open his eyes. "Governor Wright still unconscious," it said. "Slight fracture of skull. Physicians give little hope of his recovery. Good night. Simmons."

"Why!" Dick exclaimed; "how did you get that, sir?"

"Newspapers have long arms, Mr. Sumner," the editor replied with a smile; and the next minute he was busy with his proofs.

Dick understood now why the Transport's editors had been so willing to accept news from a stranger. They had treated his news exactly as though they were sure of its truth, even to putting it in type, to



be ready if it proved genuine. But without confirmation they would not have published it, except perhaps as a rumor. Then in some unknown way they had managed to get one of their own men to Russellville, and his telegram had removed all doubts and added later news. The skilful way it was managed filled him with admiration.

“And they don’t care a cent whether I see a proof of my article or not,” he said to himself. “In fact I don’t believe they will show me a proof at all, for it’s not necessary. They’re just keeping me here so that I won’t take the news to any of the other papers. They’re after a ‘beat,’ and I think they’ve got one.”

Rap-tap-tap, tap-tap, tap-tap, tap-atap-atap-atap, atap. It was a heavy pounding somewhere overhead; and Dick knew what that meant, too. The printers were “planing down a form” — leveling the type with a mallet and smooth block of wood. That is one of the last operations before the presses begin to move, and a sure sign that the paper will soon be out. But the gray-bearded editor worked away at his proofs, and still Dick was left to himself.

Presently there came up through the floor a noise that sounded like suppressed shrieks, followed in a few seconds by a rumble and jar that shook the building. The belts had taken hold, and the presses were at work, three stories below, far under the sidewalk.



At 2.10 A.M., a boy rushed in with an armful of fresh papers, and handed one to each of the fifteen or twenty men who still remained in the room. Dick had no need even to open the paper to see his article, for there it was in the place of honor, the first column of the first page, with a big head over it, and the first third of a column double-leaded to make it look larger. He was almost frightened when he turned the paper over and found that he had written a column and a quarter.

“That is a good thing of yours, Mr. Sumner,” the spectacled editor said; and Dick felt himself growing red when fifteen or twenty pairs of eyes were turned toward him. “You evidently know a piece of news when you see it, and you have handled the subject well. Let me have your name and address, please; there may be more news in Russellville.”

While Dick was writing his address on a piece of paper the other morning papers were brought in by a boy and laid upon the spectacled editor's desk. He picked out the three or four leading ones and hastily looked them over.

“We've done them!” he exclaimed; and he turned about and beamed smiles over everybody present. “No one else has a word about Governor Wright's accident. Your first article in the *Transport* is a straight out-and-out beat, Mr. Sumner.”



He turned to his desk again and hastily wrote a few words with his blue pencil.

“Hand this to the cashier on your way out,” he said, giving Dick a small slip of paper; “and come to us when you have more news. Good night, Mr. Sumner.”

Pride, excitement, fatigue were all helping to make Dick feel that the night's work was not quite real. He had stepped upon the magic carpet and it had carried him to enchanted regions far away from Russellville and the Record office. On the first landing he stopped under the light and read what the spectacled editor had written upon the slip of paper:—

CASHIER DAILY TRANSPORT, —

Please pay the bearer twenty-five dollars for important exclusive information.

JOHN B. GOODE, *Night Editor.*



## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRINTER BOY BECOMES A REPORTER.

HERE, Dick! Wash the small rollers and be quick about it."

"Well, this is a funny old world," Dick said to himself. "Last night some of the big editors were calling me Mr. Sumner and telling me I'd written a good article, and this morning I'm only 'Here, Dick!' again."

But he picked up the black sponge and began the inky work as cheerfully as a boy could who had been up all night and lived for two or three hours in a dream.

He had taken an early train from the city, and by walking from the railway had reached home in time for a bite of breakfast before he opened the office as usual. Not a word did he say to any of his fellow-printers about what he had done; but a copy of The Daily Transport was carefully folded up in his coat pocket. He thought more of that one than any of the other copies that he had bought at the news stands, because it was the one that had been given him in the office. It was a sort of sacred relic to him, important enough to be framed.

Somehow the saw-mill project seemed miles away



now. There was little chance of such a piece of news happening in his way again, but it did not seem possible that he could be taken away from the types and presses, after such an experience.

“Here, Dick!”

It amused him more now than ever, the constant calling of “Here, Dick!” But this call came from the editor’s room, and he hurriedly washed the worst of the black from his hands.

“I have just been reading your article in *The Daily Transport*, Dick,” the editor said. “You gave them the facts very correctly, and they must have turned them over to a good man to write the story, for he has done it capitally. Do you know who it was?”

“I wrote the article myself, sir,” Dick answered modestly.

“What!” the editor exclaimed; “you wrote the article! Well, that’s strange. You know I used to have something to do with the *Transport* myself, and of course I know that when a stranger goes in with important news they have him tell it to one of the reporters, and the reporter writes the article. Tell me how it happened that they let you write it.”

Dick gave a brief account of all his experiences in the *Transport* office, not forgetting his first statement to the night city editor that was overheard by the night editor, the cutting and changing of his copy, and the compliment that the night editor paid him.



“Well, I am glad to hear that,” Mr. Davis said when he had heard the whole story. “I am really glad to hear that, Dick. You did them a first-rate piece of work, and you have evidently established yourself in the good opinion of the night editor. You don’t know how much that means, but I do. I know Dr. Goode, the night editor, very well. Almost every newspaper man around New York knows him and loves him, for he is one of the dearest old men in the world. He is always on the lookout for bright young men who can be turned into good reporters; and if I am not much mistaken he has you in his eye and you will hear from him again.”

“But I had only given the young editor a very brief account of the accident when Dr. Goode took me in charge, sir,” Dick interrupted.

“That’s it exactly,” Mr. Davis continued; “and Dr. Goode overheard you, and he saw in a minute that you had the story properly laid out in your mind and knew how to handle it. That was why he took you out of the young editor’s hands and looked after you himself. You see the young man, the night city editor, has charge of the city news at night, but Dr. Goode, the night editor, has charge of the whole paper at night, under the managing editor. Your plain, straightforward way of writing evidently pleased him, and I am afraid that before the year is up I shall lose one of the best office boys I ever had.”



“Thank you, sir,” said Dick, blushing furiously. “You are very kind to say so; but I don’t think there is any danger of that.”

There was great danger of it, however, and steps to bring it about were in progress at that very moment.

“Don’t take too much credit to yourself, though, Dick,” Mr. Davis went on with a smile. “I don’t want to see you spoiled at the start. Remember that circumstances had more to do with it than you had. If Russellville were not such a little out-of-the-way place, there would be some newspaper correspondent here, and then you would have had no chance at all. If Dr. Goode had not accidentally overheard you telling the story, he could not have taken a fancy to your way of telling it. But that is the way things always go; we are creatures of accident. The bright man takes advantage of the accidents and turns them to good account, and that is exactly what you did.”

Dick might not have set type as complacently that morning if he had known all that the night editor did before he went home. The young printer was hardly out of the Transport office before Dr. Goode took up a small slip of paper and wrote a brief note to the city editor with his ever-present blue pencil.

“Dear John,” he said in the note, “the young man who did the Governor Wright beat for us this morning is Richard Sumner, of Russellville.



“He has a nose for news and he writes good English.

“You might make a reporter of him, if you have a vacancy. Yours, J. B. G.”

When the city editor reached his desk at ten o'clock in the morning he found this note among a dozen others, and, after reading it, he laid it under a paper weight till the rush of morning work was over. Then he took it up again and wrote a very short letter to “Mr. Richard Sumner, Russellville,” and sent it to the mail box. The fewer letters a man gets the longer he takes to answer them; and the city editor of the *Transport* gets so many that he answers each one on the instant.

Dick was in blissful ignorance of all this; and when he was sent after the evening mail, about five o'clock, it gave him a start to find a letter addressed to himself, with *The Daily Transport* printed across the envelope in big type.

“Dear Sir,” the letter read, “I should be glad to have you call and see me at *The Daily Transport* office any day before six o'clock P.M.

“Truly yours, J. H. Brown, *City Editor.*”

When Dick showed this note to the editor of the *Record*, that gentleman merely gave an “I-told-you-so” smile and said: “Those fellows don't waste much time, do they?” But when he read it at home before supper to his mother and Florrie, it threw the household into confusion.



“O Dick!” his mother exclaimed; and Dick noticed that she turned her head away, “they want you to write more for them, I know they do; and to think that I almost wanted you to leave the business and work in a saw-mill! Of course they would send for you, you write so well; and your being a printer is a great help, for you could help to print the paper.”

“I don’t believe that’s what it is about,” said Florrie. Happy as she was over Dick’s success, she could not help teasing him a little. “I think Dick has made some bad mistake in his article, and they want him to come and explain it.”

But while she spoke Florrie stood behind his chair stroking his head; and more than one Russellville boy would have been glad to sit in Dick’s chair at that moment.

“You must not have such an idea, mother,” Dick answered. “I have great hopes that they will give me something to do, from what Mr. Davis told me to-day. But it would be something very small, at the best. It was not my writing they cared for, but the news I took them. I can write a plain statement well enough, but what is that compared with the way that most of those Transport men can write? Even if they give me a chance, I may not be able to please them.”

It was fortunate for Dick that he was as honest with the city editor a few days later as he was with



his mother. Men go to see the city editor every day who try to pass themselves for something they are not, and the editor sees through their little deception in a minute and shakes them off. But Dick told everything about himself frankly. Instead of trying to magnify himself he said that he was working in a printing-office for three dollars a week; that he was a little past eighteen years old, and had been through the Russellville public school.

"I'm afraid I am not as good a speller as I ought to be, sir," he added doubtfully.

The editor smiled.

"That does n't make the least difference," he said. "One of the best reporters I ever had spelled door d-o-a-r. If a reporter can get the news, the printers will see to his spelling."

They talked for ten or fifteen minutes, and the editor liked Dick's honest, manly way.

"Well," said he in conclusion, "we will take you on trial as a reporter. You can begin to-morrow morning, if you like, and report to me at ten o'clock. The salary will be fifteen dollars a week."

The salary will be fifteen dollars a week. The salary will be fifteen dollars a week. Dick kept saying it over and over to himself as he went down the stairs. Perhaps there was some mistake about it. No, that was what the editor said, fifteen dollars a week. He was rather alarmed at it. For such a salary they would expect more of him than he was



capable of. Fif-teen dollars a w-e-e-k! Fifteen times fifty-two is 780; seven hundred and eighty dollars a year!

When Dick reported for duty the next morning he felt that he was beginning a new life. Mr. Davis had released him immediately from the Record office, and he was no longer a printer's boy. He had a vague idea that he would be sent out to a good street corner to pick up some of the things that are constantly occurring in New York. Maybe he would happen upon a fire, or it might be the catching of a pickpocket, or somebody run over.

But his first morning's experience was very different from this. After reporting to the city editor he was told to sit down and wait; and he sat in one of the chairs from ten o'clock till half-past two without anybody paying the slightest attention to him. Other men came in and got their orders and went out again, but Dick seemed to be entirely forgotten.

"I wonder whether Mr. Brown thinks I'm too young, now he's had a second look at me," he said to himself. "It's very strange. Here they're paying me two dollars and a half a day, and they don't give me anything to do."

It was a great relief to him when one of the reporters, a man whom he remembered seeing in the office on the night of his first visit, came up and spoke to him. Dick remembered him particularly because he was the handsomest man in the office



and seemed to have a pleasant word for everybody. He was very dark, with a silky black mustache, and was extremely well dressed.

“Well, my boy,” said this handsome reporter, “you’re going to be a newspaper man, are you?”

“I hope so, sir,” Dick answered. “But I’ve not done much so far. They have n’t given me anything to do yet to-day.

“Oh, you need n’t worry about that!” the man laughed. “I suppose you are on salary, so you’ll soon have enough to do. You’ll only get little jobs at first, till they see what you can do. Thought of going out to try and pick up some news? Oh, you could n’t do that. We very seldom pick up news. You see that book on the city editor’s desk? That is what we call the assignment book. The city editor knows everything that should happen in the city to-day, all the routine things, and he makes a list of them in his book. Then he assigns one man to attend to each thing. There’s a conference in the mayor’s office at three o’clock, and he wants Jack Randall to attend to it (I’m Jack Randall); so he writes my name opposite the entry, and that’s my business for the afternoon. I must be off. If you get stuck on anything, come to me and I’ll help you out. Ta-ta.” Handsome Jack Randall tapped Dick lightly on the shoulder and was off, little thinking how much pleasanter he had made the day for the new reporter.



By three o'clock Dick began to feel the gnawings of hunger; but his new friend Randall was gone, and he had no one to ask what was the reporters' lunch hour. After some hesitation he stepped up to the city editor and asked: —

“Could I go out for a few minutes to get something to eat, sir?”

Mr. Brown leaned far back in his armchair and looked Dick pleasantly in the face, in a very reassuring manner.

“Go out just whenever you like, Mr. Sumner,” he answered, “and eat all you want. You don't need to ask permission. And when you come back make yourself as comfortable as you can. We don't have any slave rules in the Transport office.”

It was new to Dick to feel at liberty to go in and out as he liked. One of the cheap restaurants in the neighborhood of Printing House Square supplied the food he needed, and he was soon back in his chair. He saw that the city editor had a pile of fresh newspapers on his desk, and was busy reading them. They were the early editions of the afternoon papers.

“Mr. Sumner!” said the editor, looking toward Dick; and Dick hastened to him. Here was work evidently for him to do, and he was anxious to make a beginning. The editor had a small clipping in his hand, just cut from one of the newspapers.

“Here is something for you to do this evening,



Mr. Sumner," the editor said. "There is to be a meeting of the Stonecutters' Protective Union, in Germania Hall, that you can attend. They seldom do anything but make speeches, and the whole thing probably will not be worth more than four or five lines. But you must always be on the lookout for anything unusual, of course, that might make it of more importance. Hand your copy to the night city editor; and have it in as early as you can, please."

"Yes, sir," Dick answered as he took the printed slip the editor handed him. He was a little disappointed, but of course he did not show it. Mr. Randall had told him that he would get only small jobs at first; but to write four or five lines for a day's work seemed to him rather discouraging.

"Well, my boy," one of the older reporters said to him as he resumed his seat, "you've got your first assignment, have you? Let me see; oh, the stonecutters' union;" and the man laughed; "you'll get plenty of those little jobs till they find out what you can do. It's by doing these little things well that you'll gradually work into better ones."

"I suppose a man must begin at the beginning, sir," Dick replied; and then wondered at what he had said, for he had never called himself a man before. But he sat down and began to study his slip carefully. At eight o'clock, so the slip said, the meeting was to be held; and there would be several



addresses by prominent speakers. He laid it out in his mind just how his few lines should be worded. He was glad to think that it would take some little skill, at any rate, to condense a report of a meeting into four or five lines.

It was not six o'clock yet when Dick left the office, and he had plenty of time for a leisurely walk up the Bowery. He had often seen the Bowery before, but never had it seemed so bright and busy to him. Instead of being merely a visitor now he had business there, business for a great newspaper, and he was actually a reporter going after information.

The meeting proved to be very different from what Dick expected. The big hall was crowded, and the two factions in the union could not agree. One of the speakers was mobbed and injured, several shots were fired, the police rushed in with their clubs, and chairs were freely used as missiles. It was anything but a routine meeting.

"Why!" Dick said to himself as he hurried back to the office after eleven o'clock, "in Russellville we'd half-fill the paper with such a thing. Even in New York it must be worth more than four or five lines. I think the city editor would want me to write a little more than that—say fifteen or twenty lines, as several people were hurt."

The whole appearance of the office was changed when he reached it. The day staff of editors had gone home and the night staff had taken their places,



and the big room was brilliant and hot. Nobody paid any attention to him, for every one was busy. The night city editor's only information about Dick's work was in the single line in the assignment book:

“Meeting of Stonecutters, Germania Hall — Sumner.”

Dick sat down at his desk and wrote on the manilla office paper: —

“At the meeting of the Stonecutter's Protective Union, held in Germania Hall last evening, the two factions in the society came to blows, and several persons were seriously injured, besides one man being shot. The Hon. George R. Heard, member of Assembly, made an address; and some of the members, taking exception to his remarks, attacked him with chairs and table legs, and he was so badly hurt that an ambulance had to be called to take him to Bellevue Hospital. The police rushed in with drawn clubs, and several shots were fired. One man was hit by a bullet, but his name could not be ascertained. The hall, which was crowded, was cleared by the police.”

“There!” Dick said to himself after he had read the page a dozen times and made some changes each time; “I think that tells the story. If only I have not made it too long. Jack Randall would tell me if he were here, but he is out. I don't think this will be too much about it.”

He walked over to the night city editor's desk



and handed in his page of copy, as he saw the other reporters do.

“A meeting of stonecutters, sir,” he said.

“Very well,” the night city editor replied, scarcely looking up. But he took his blue pencil and checked Dick’s name in the assignment list and laid the page of copy on top of a heap of such pages. It must take its turn, and it might not come under his eye for an hour yet. Dick went to his seat and took up a newspaper, but he waited anxiously to learn the fate of his first day’s work as a reporter.

It was nearly midnight when Dick’s copy was picked up by the editor, and he was looking at the moment in another direction.

“Hello here!” he heard the editor exclaim. “What’s this? what’s this? Assemblyman Heard injured and taken to Bellevue Hospital; another man shot! Why, this was a riot; we must have a column of this! Who was such a— Oh, this is Sumner, a new man. Here, Mr. Sumner, please.”

Dick was dazed as he stepped up to the editor’s desk. It was plain that he had made a terrible blunder.

“I am afraid you do not appreciate the value of news, Mr. Sumner,” the editor said. “A stonecutters’ meeting is worth only a few lines, but a riot at such a meeting is a very different thing. We must have a much better account of this. You sit



down and tell all the facts you have to Mr. Herrick here. Mr. Herrick, you take Sumner's facts and write the story. Mr. Black, call up Bellevue Hospital on the telephone, and inquire how badly Assemblyman Heard has been hurt. Get Police Headquarters, too, and ask for all particulars. We must know something about the man who was shot. Mr. Banks, you will find a biography of Assemblyman Heard in the library; write me a brief account of his life, please, — about two sticks. We must have this ready in half an hour, gentlemen, if possible."

Three men set to work to do over again the report that Dick had made a failure with! He was ready to sink through the floor, but he sat down and gave Mr. Herrick as complete an account of the meeting as he could. It was easy to see now that the news was of importance, and he wondered at himself for not seeing it before. The order for four or five lines had misled him.

Before one o'clock the new report was ready, nearly a column of it, the different parts of it neatly joined together by Mr. Herrick. Oh, how skilfully that man handled the matter, Dick thought, and how well he knew just where to bring in Mr. Black's part of the story and Mr. Banks' biography.

"A nice thing to have to tell mother and Florrie," Dick said to himself as he went sadly down the stairs; "to make such a break as that, and have my



work done over again. I'm afraid I haven't got the brains to work for a big city paper, that's about the amount of it. Anyhow I don't suppose they'll want me any longer now that they see what I am. It will seem hard to go back to washing rollers and sweeping out the office after thinking myself a reporter; but it's all my own stupidity."

Turning one of the sharp corners at a landing, Dick almost ran into Dr. Goode, who had been out eating his midnight lunch. The doctor wore only one pair of glasses now, and he had to look closely to see who was before him.

"Oh, it's you, Sumner, is it?" he asked as he recognized the new reporter. "I see you had a little misfortune with your assignment to-night. But never mind, my boy;" and he laid his hand kindly on Dick's shoulder. "Such things happen to new men sometimes; we rather expect them. It's not the first mistake we mind, but having the same mistake made over and over. Keep your spirits up, and you'll soon be doing some good work for us."



## CHAPTER III.

### THE STOLEN LOCOMOTIVE.

WELL, Mr. Sumner, your assignment last night turned out larger than we expected," the city editor said when Dick reported in the office next morning.

Dick had spent a miserable night, and he anticipated at least a severe lecture. But the editor's manner was kind and reassuring.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "the stonecutters had a very lively meeting, and I ought to have known that it was an important piece of news. I'll try to use better judgment next time, sir."

"Oh, I think you'll soon learn," the editor said. "We don't expect you to have much experience on your first day. You see when I tell you to write four or five lines, that is with the expectation that the matter will be of no importance. Something unexpected may happen and make it worth two or three columns. You will find it a good plan always to tell your facts briefly to the night city editor when you come in, and he will tell you about how much to write."

Several of the older reporters were ready to talk to Dick when he took his seat. It was easy for



them to see that he was worried over his mistake, and they felt sorry for him.

“If you had told some of us what you had when you came in,” said Mr. Herrick, the reporter who had rewritten Dick’s article so skilfully, “we’d have put you on the right track. But don’t worry over it; you look as if you’d cried yourself to sleep.”

“Not quite as bad as that,” Dick answered with something of a smile. “But I did have a very bad night of it. You see I was kept so late that I missed my train for home, so I went to the Astor House and took a room. It’s a terrible noisy place over there.”

“It’s worse than noisy,” Mr. Herrick laughed, “it’s too expensive for a young reporter. You’re not living out of town, are you?”

Dick explained that he lived in Russellville with his mother and sister.

“Oh, that will never do!” Mr. Herrick exclaimed. “No reporter can hope to live out of town. Our hours are so irregular that you’ll miss your train about five nights a week. The best way is to rent a furnished room and live in the city. That’s the way most of us do. It leaves a man free to work at all hours.”

“Yes, that’s a reporter’s life,” said young Tom Brownell, who was only two or three years older than Dick. “A furnished room, meals in a Park



Row beanery, and empty pockets on Saturday night. That 's all we can look forward to."

"Don't stuff the boy, Brownell," said Mr. Banks, whose seat was near. "Brownell is a space man, Mr. Sumner, who makes about sixty dollars a week and boards in a hotel. But it is a fact that you'll not be able to live out of town. You cannot do better than rent a little room for the present and take your meals in whatever restaurant you happen to be near."

This was a new idea to Dick, and he had plenty of time to think it over while waiting for an assignment. Russellville was so near, it had not occurred to him that he would not be able to go home every night; but if he should be kept late often, and miss his train four or five nights a week, the hotel bills would soon use up his salary. Still, there was an objection to his living in a furnished room and restaurants.

"If I am to pay my way separately in the city," he considered, "what am I going to have left for mother and Florrie? Fifteen dollars a week is a great deal of money, but money seems to disappear very fast here in the city."

He had plenty to do on that second day, but it seemed to him that it was all work that an errand boy might have done. First he was sent to a steamship office to inquire about an overdue vessel, then down to Wall Street to carry a message to the



financial reporter; and in the evening he had two little meetings to attend, but they were of no importance, and he had not a single line to write.

“It’s tough, is n’t it?” he said to Randall, when his last job was done and he was free to go home. “I’ve not had a line to write to-day.”

“Tough!” Randall exclaimed; “why, my boy, I’ve often worked for two weeks on a job and then had nothing to write. You can’t expect to write much at the start, and some men never do. You will soon see that all the reporting of any importance is done by about half a dozen men. They get all the long articles to write, because they know how to do it. The rest have to take what is left.

“Besides that,” Randall went on, “a new man has to wait for his opportunity. They’ll keep giving you this little work to do till some day a little thing turns out big, and then you’ll have a chance to show what stuff there is in you. That’s the way a new reporter gets a start.”

“Oh!” Dick gasped; “and I had just such a chance as that last night, and lost it!”

“Yes, you did,” Randall admitted; “but you can’t expect to do everything in a day. Another chance will come some day; watch for it.”

Watch for it! Dick did nothing but watch for it. No matter how small his assignment was, and for days and weeks they were all small, he went about it full of the hope that it might turn out to be



of importance. Sometimes he was almost discouraged, particularly when he looked about him and saw how many older men in the office, men who had been reporters for years, got no better work to do than he. Some of these men, too, were much better men than he; he could not help seeing that. They had traveled everywhere, and were thoroughly educated, and spoke many languages, but still their opportunity had not come. Perhaps his chance might never come again either.

There were other things to make Dick feel uncomfortable. His mother had given him the best advice when he found that he must live in the city, and of course Dick had followed it, but he found himself very unsettled.

“If you must miss the train so often,” she said to him, “you will have to live in the city; but do nothing rash till you are sure of keeping your place in the office. Rent a little room somewhere for the present, and after a while Florrie and I will move in, if everything goes well, and we can take a tiny little flat, and all live together again.”

So Dick was cut off from his family, a young lone bachelor in New York; and the little hall bedroom was doleful, and the restaurant meals were growing monotonous, for he could not afford to go to the good restaurants; even the cheap ones swallowed up a large share of his salary.

“Here is a meeting of the Harbor Commissioners



that you can attend this morning, Mr. Sumner," the city editor said to him one day. "They never do anything worth printing. Last time we merely said of them 'The Harbor Commissioners met yesterday and did nothing.' There probably will not be more than a line or two to write about them."

"Yes, sir," said Dick, and he could not help adding mentally, "that's the reason I get the job, I'm afraid, because it is of no account. But never mind; my chance will come some day, and then I'll get better work."

It was as small and unimportant an assignment as was given out that day in the office; but small as it looked it was destined to help Dick to a better standing on the Transport. The subject of tug-boats running about the harbor without proper lights came up at the meeting, and one of the Commissioners told of a thrilling experience he had had a few nights before, while taking the Vice-President of the United States down the harbor in a Revenue Cutter. A tug carrying no lights lay directly in the cutter's way in the Swash Channel, and the cutter almost ran her down in the darkness. The Vice-President's life, the speaker said, and the lives of all on board the cutter were put in great danger.

This caught Dick's attention at once.

"The Vice-President in danger because a New York tug carried no lights!" he said to himself. "It seems to me that ought to make a story that



people would like to read. I wonder whether my chance has come at last. I'll not miss it this time at any rate."

He took full notes of the story, and as soon as the meeting was over he returned to the office and reported to the city editor, telling him briefly what he had heard.

"That's good, Mr. Sumner, that's good," the editor replied. "We want that by all means. Write it up as fully as you think the facts will stand."

Dick felt his hand shaking when he began to write. It was his first real chance since the night when he wrote an account of the governor's accident—except, of course, the chance that he let slip. Besides, he had not written enough yet to forget that he was writing for more than a hundred thousand readers. But the excitement wore off as he grew more interested in the subject, and when he finished he had written a plain but exciting account of the Vice-President's adventure, enough to fill about two thirds of a column in the paper.

It was almost exasperating to him to see the matter-of-fact way in which his copy was received; how it was laid under a paper-weight with a dozen other articles, to remain there unnoticed until the night city editor came and in its turn passed judgment upon it. He was sent out immediately on another mission, and it was not till late that night that he heard anything about it. Then it was the



ever kindly Dr. Goode, the night editor, who mentioned it.

“O Sumner, see here a moment,” the doctor called, adjusting his two pairs of glasses.

As Dick approached his desk he saw that the proof the doctor held in his hand was headed in big letters, “The Vice-President’s Peril,” and that it was his own article.

“This is a good thing you have done here, Sumner,” the doctor said. “We like stories of this sort, and I’m going to put you on the first page.”

A few weeks earlier Dick would have stayed in the office till the paper went to press, for the sake of seeing his article in print, but being more experienced now, he wisely went home and to bed.

In the morning Dick found the city editor making remarks to the reporters, as usual, about their articles. “Well done, well done, Mr. Banks;” or perhaps, “You made too much of that burglary story, Mr. Black.” His turn came almost as soon as he entered the room.

“You did a good thing yesterday, Mr. Sumner,” was the greeting. “I see none of the other papers have your story about the Vice-President’s peril. I suppose there were other reporters at the meeting?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” Dick answered; “five or six others. We all heard the story at the same time, but perhaps none of the others used it.”



“Then you showed a better news sense than any of them,” Mr. Brown retorted, “for such a story as that is news.”

Dick was pleased with himself and all the world that morning, but it surprised him a little to find that he still got the same unimportant assignments — trivial meetings, things that an errand boy could have done equally well. This went on for so many days that he began almost to think there was not much use in taking advantage of an opportunity after all. But when he found such thoughts in his mind he held a little conversation with himself, for he did not like it.

“Now hold on to the ropes and keep pulling, Dick Sumner!” he said to himself. “Don’t be a baby. Better work is coming by-and-by. If one or two good pieces of work don’t bring it, then three or four will, or five or six. Do the best you can; and if you begin to grumble, I’ll be ashamed of you.”

He was always among the first to arrive at the office, perhaps because he had no great fancy for staying alone in his dismal little furnished room; and one morning when he entered he was the very first reporter, and only the city editor was at his desk.

“I thought you would be the first man here,” Mr. Brown said. “You are generally early, Mr. Sumner, and I am glad that this time your prompt-



ness is to be rewarded. I am going to give you an assignment of great importance this morning, because I know you will do it faithfully, and I think you will do it well. It is a job that would naturally go to Mr. Randall, because he does all our Sing Sing work; but he is out of town to-day, and I am going to entrust it to you."

Dick merely answered "Yes, sir;" but the announcement filled him with wonder. An assignment of great importance! A job that would naturally go to Mr. Randall—to Jack Randall, the best reporter and best writer in the office! He could hardly believe that he was to have a chance at such work.

"Here is a dispatch just received from Sing Sing prison," the city editor went on, "saying that four prisoners escaped this morning by stealing a locomotive. You understand that the New York Central Railroad runs through the prison grounds through a deep open cut in the rock. There are bridges across the cut, and every morning some of the prisoners are taken over the bridges to work in the quarry."

"Yes, sir," Dick repeated. He had read of this, though he had never visited Sing Sing.

"This morning, according to this dispatch," Mr. Brown continued, "four of the prisoners broke away from their guards while a slow freight train was passing under the bridges, dropped from one



of the bridges to the tender, drove the engineer and fireman off with revolvers, uncoupled the engine, and escaped. It is an exceedingly dramatic story and must be told fully. You must take the first train for Sing Sing and get all the facts. See the warden, go over to the quarries, look at the bridge and the position of the train, get the names and histories of the escaped convicts, and of course be on the lookout for their capture. Tell the story vividly, but do not exaggerate the facts. Now the sooner you reach Sing Sing the better."

To go into the great Sing Sing prison, to talk with the warden, to go over the prison grounds, and to come back and describe one of the most remarkable prison escapes ever made! Dick could hardly believe that such a job had been put into his hands.

He knew that that day's work would give him a standing in the office if he did it well, and he hurried down the stairs determined to put his whole heart and brain into it.

As he reached the head of the long flight leading into the publication office he saw that a man below was about to come up. The man had stopped for a moment to talk with one of the clerks, and his hand rested on the top of the newel post.

It was Jack Randall, the man who should have had this great Sing Sing story to write! He had returned unexpectedly, and in a minute more the city editor would see him.



Dick's thoughts flew fast for a moment. If he went on down the stairs, he would immediately be swallowed up in the crowded streets and it would be too late to recall him. But would that be fair? The work must certainly have been given to Randall, if he had been in the office; it had gone to Dick only through a misunderstanding. His mind was made up in an instant, and he turned and ran quickly up the stairs.

"Mr. Randall is downstairs, sir," he said to the city editor; "he will be up here in a moment." It was like giving away half his chances in life, but he was sure it was the right thing to do.

Mr. Brown looked up squarely into Dick's eyes as he answered.

"It was very thoughtful in you to come and tell me, Mr. Sumner," he said, "but I shall not change the assignment. You go ahead and do the work."

Dick was off like a flash for the Grand Central Station, exchanging salutations with Randall when he encountered him on the stairs. "How much better I can do the work now," he thought, "than if I had gone ahead with a guilty conscience!"

In the train he met four other reporters, one of whom he knew. They were from the other morning newspapers, and before they reached Sing Sing he found that one of the party was the great Bailey of the Herald, one of the best-known reporters in New York, and another Henderson of the Tribune,



whom he had heard spoken of as one of the finest writers on the press. It was a fresh feather in his cap to be sent to do the work that such men were doing. But could he compete with them, he wondered?

In Sing Sing the five reporters walked down to the prison together and were shown into the warden's office, and Dick's idea of the power of the press was vastly expanded when he saw how they were treated. The warden, the man in charge of all that great prison with its thousands of prisoners, whose word was law to scores of keepers, could not do enough for them. Did they smoke? A box of Havana cigars was passed about. Would they eat a bite of lunch? Just a taste of chicken salad and a little cold fruit? No? Then let him ring for a glass of wine, for they would have a hard day's work. But that was precisely why they would not take the wine, for such reporters as the four Dick met, capable of doing the best work, do not drink wine because they have work before them.

The warden took them into the cell corridors, which made Dick shudder, and showed them the cells of the men who had escaped. Everything was open to them; the prison books, showing the records of these men; even the dark cell where one of them had been kept in manacles for misconduct a few weeks before. Then he told them the



story of the escape, and an intensely interesting story it was.

“Three of the men are burglars under long sentences,” he said; “and the fourth is a five-year man for murder in the third degree. They are all old offenders and desperate characters. This morning they were taken as usual to their work in the quarries, guarded by two keepers armed with rifles. When the freight train came along, moving slowly through the cut under the bridges, these four men threw down their tools and ran for one of the bridges. The guards fired, but missed them; and the men dropped from the bridge to the tender behind the engine. In an instant they were in the cab, and with cocked revolvers in their hands they ordered the engineer and fireman to jump off. We do not know how they got the revolvers. The railroad men were compelled to obey, and as soon as the convicts were alone on the engine they uncoupled it from the train and pulled open the throttle.

“Now comes the strangest part of the story,” the warden continued. “Not one of those men knew anything about running an engine, and they pulled the throttle wide open. To do that suddenly is very dangerous, and almost on the instant the engine blew off one of her cylinder heads. That was all that saved the men’s lives, for guards in the sentry boxes were firing at them with rifles. But so much steam escaped from the disabled



cylinder that they were completely enveloped, and the guards could not aim. The rascals literally rolled out of range in a cloud of steam, and were away before we could reach them.

“However,” the warden went on, “they had not gone more than four or five miles before the other cylinder head blew out, and the engine of course came to a stop. Then the men jumped off and took to the woods. They are still in convict clothes, and I have twenty men hunting them. We shall soon have them back.”

“What a story to write!” Dick exclaimed when the warden concluded. “It’s better than fiction.”

“Fiction!” sneered Henderson of the Tribune; “our facts beat fiction every day. There would be no fiction if there were no facts, Mr. Sumner.”

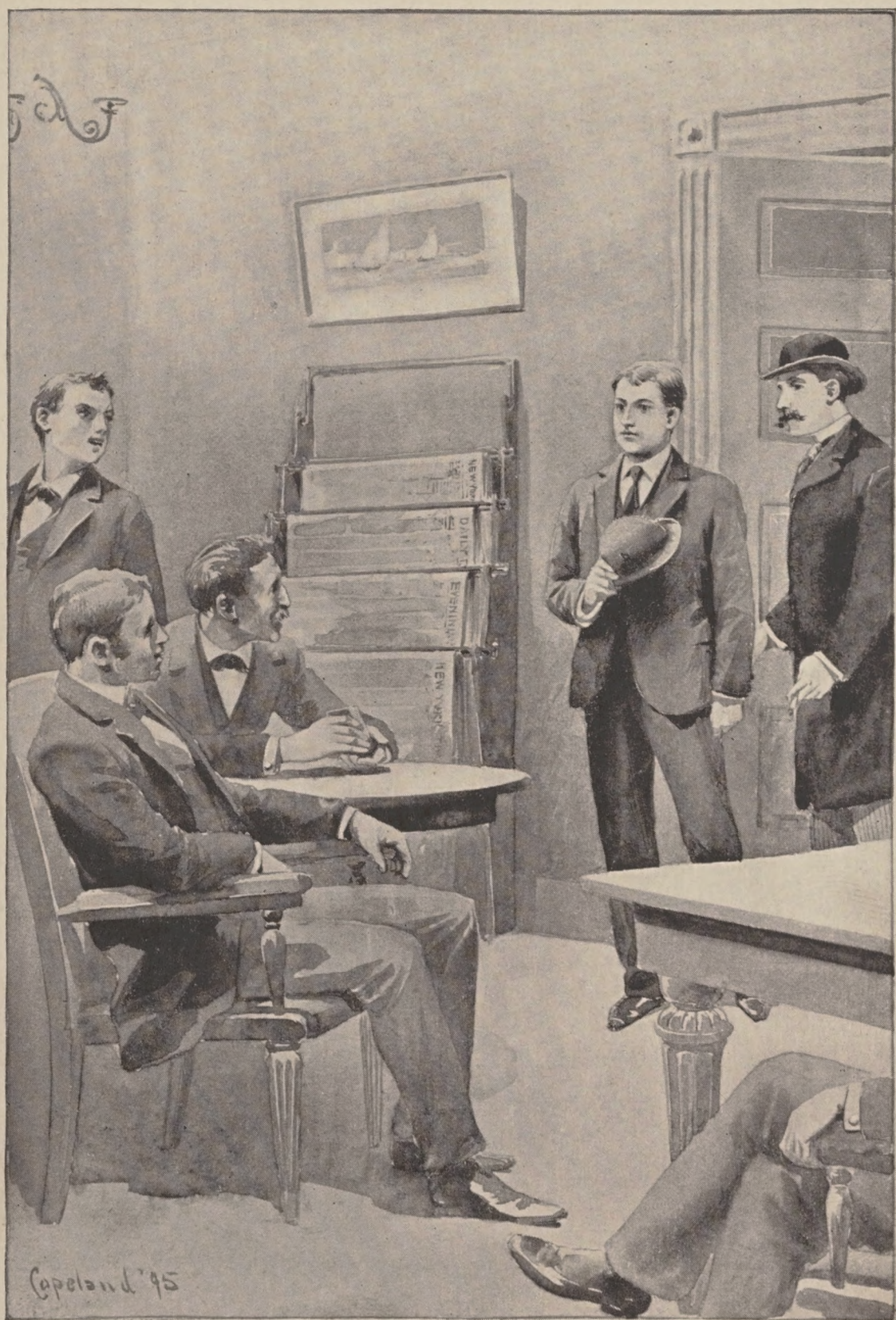
Dick did not stop to ponder over this remarkable proposition; he was too anxious to go out over the bridge to the quarry and see the scene of the escape, so that he could describe it accurately. The warden took the reporters all over the ground, and after that they separated, each one to pick up whatever additional information he could.

It occurred to Dick that the railroad people would have something to say about this summary mode of taking one of their engines, and he knew that the more people he saw who were in any way connected with the escape, the better story he could make. He went first to see the telegraph operator at Sing









"YOU'RE JUST IN TIME, RANDALL!"



Sing, for something must have been done by wire. He soon made friends with the operator and had a long talk with him.

“There’s a telegraph office at the prison, you know,” said the operator, “and while the thing was happening they wired me, ‘Four convicts stolen engine of 89, and running down the track with it.’ Eighty-nine is the number of the freight train, and they knew it. Well, sir, you can just believe that gave me a start. An engine running wild down the track! There was no telling what they might run into, nor what lives or property they might destroy. My business was to send the news to the superintendent in the Grand Central Station and I did that just as quick as these jars of lightning would let me.”

That was as much as the operator knew about it, but a word that he dropped gave Dick a hint of something better to come. To work out this new clew, however, it was necessary for him to go to Tarrytown, and he took the next train for that place, which is the next station below Sing Sing. In a few minutes he was talking with the Tarrytown station agent.

“I am a reporter for The Daily Transport, sir,” he said to the agent. “Will you please tell me what orders you received about 89 this morning?”

“My boy,” said the agent with great emotion, “I will tell you, but it makes my breath stop to think of



it. You must understand that we have a siding here which ends on the wharf, and a fast train run on to that siding would inevitably be thrown into the river. The switch that controls it we call the north switch. Eighty-nine was due here in less than a minute when the telegraph operator handed me an order from the train dispatcher in New York. The order read: —

“ ‘Open the north switch and throw 89 into the river.’ ”

“Well, sir,” the agent went on, “my heart stopped beating and my knees trembled. How many lives would I destroy if I obeyed that order? But it was only for a second. Only one man runs these trains, and that is the train dispatcher.”

“And you opened the switch?” Dick asked, almost breathless with interest.

“I opened the north switch,” the agent replied. “It was my duty to do it; there was the order. I hope I may never have to endure such agony again, my boy, for I expected the next minute to see the train plunged into the river and everybody in it killed. Thank God, the engine blew out both her cylinder heads before she got here, and of course stopped. The train dispatcher, you see, knew that the convicts were running wild down the road, and he ordered the switch opened to prevent the much greater damage they might do further on.”

When Dick mentally laid out his story in the train



returning to the city, this incident seemed to him the most dramatic thing in it.

“It’s worth a year’s salary to talk to such a man,” he said to himself. “I thought I knew something about obeying orders, but I understand it better now. And I don’t believe that any of the other fellows have got hold of this part of the story. Oh, if only they have n’t!”

Jack Randall was in the office when Dick returned and sat down to write.

“Do you mind my looking over your copy?” he asked, after a few pages were written. “I know everybody up there, so I’m interested.”

“I should be delighted,” Dick answered; “and I hope you’ll tell me if you see anything wrong.”

It was a long evening’s work writing the article, for the pages made a thick pile — enough to fill two and a half columns of the paper. Dick had done a tremendous day’s work, but the excitement prevented his feeling yet the exhaustion that was sure to follow.

“Do you find any bad breaks?” he asked, after Randall had read the last page.

“Bad breaks!” Randall repeated; “why, Sumner, it’s a classic. I thought you had some stuff in you, but I did n’t believe you could write like this. That ‘open the north switch and throw 89 into the river’ is worthy of Dickens; there’s a touch of the Sidney Carton in it. You’ll not be doing any more



half-stick meetings and five-line fires after this, Sumner."

"I'm in hopes that I have that exclusive," Dick said. "I did n't meet any of the other fellows while I was getting it."

"It's the best part of the story," Randall replied, "though the whole thing is remarkable. You don't want to go home yet, do you? I mean to that hall-room cell of yours. A fellow always feels a little excited over a good subject like that, and wants somebody to talk to when it's done. I know how it is. Come around to the Scribble Club with me for an hour or two and meet some good fellows."

"The Scribble Club?" Dick repeated. "I have n't heard of that."

"No," said Randall, "it's not a big affair, like the Press Club; just a quiet little club, very sociable and homelike. All newspaper boys, of course."

Randall had described Dick's condition exactly. He was excited, wrought up to the highest pitch by his work, and the idea of going alone to his little room and trying to sleep was very repugnant. He was glad to accept the invitation and make the acquaintance of the Scribble Club.

The club room was an apartment of good size, up one flight, over a restaurant in Duane Street. Its founders had doubtless had in mind the convenience of the situation, for it was connected by an electric bell with the restaurant below, and a push of the



button summoned a waiter to take orders for anything desired. The room was comfortably furnished with armchairs and one large and several small tables; the floor was carpeted, and files of the daily newspapers hung upon the walls.

There were four young men in the room when Dick and Randall entered, all reporters engaged on various newspapers, and the entrance of Randall was the signal for a shout.

“You’re just in time, Randall; we want to start a game of poker, and you’re the fifth man. The fellows don’t care to play four-handed.”

“I don’t mind, if it’s a small limit,” Randall answered. “You can draw up a chair and watch us, Sumner. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Sumner, of the Transport.”

“Oh, just the usual,” was the reply as all the men spoke to Dick. Several of them he had met before in reporting. “Five cents ante; quarter limit.”

The five seated themselves around one of the small tables and began the game. Dick had never seen cards played for money before, and it shocked him; but he reflected that he had nothing to do with it, and could not prevent it if he would. He drew up his chair behind Randall and watched the play, and it was not long before he understood the principles of the game.

After watching for some time he took from his



pocket a letter from his mother that he had found in the office and opened it. It contained the first request for money that she had made. "I do not like to ask for your little savings, my dear boy," she wrote, "and I know how expensive you find everything in the city. But I am down almost to the last cent of my quarterly income and have several bills to pay. I do not know how we will manage unless you can send me twenty dollars."

"How lucky that I have been very careful!" Dick said to himself. "I have twenty-five dollars, and five dollars will easily take me through till next payday. I will go out early in the morning and take mother the money. I can show her my Sing Sing story, too, and I know she'll be proud of that."

"The game's getting rather dry," Dick heard one of the players say as he returned the letter to his pocket. "Let's moisten it a little;" and the speaker arose and pushed the button.

"A Santa Cruz sour will about fit me," Randall said when the waiter came and the others had ordered various drinks. "What will you take, Sumner?"

"I never drink anything, thank you," Dick answered. He might have added that he had been invited many times to drink since his arrival in New York.

"But you need a drop of something to-night, Sumner; you really do. You're as pale as a ghost.



You're all used up, man, and a sour will be just the thing for you. It's only a dash of rum in a glass of lemonade, you know."

"I certainly feel pretty tired," Dick admitted. "If I thought it would give me a little strength, I would take it—as a medicine.

"Of course it will," Randall laughed; "it would give grace and vivacity to a bronze statue. Make it two sours, waiter."

Dick took his first drink of liquor, not without some misgivings, and in a few minutes he felt much refreshed. He was thinking of starting for his room when one of the players announced that he had a midnight assignment and must go.

"Then you take his place, Mr. Sumner," one of the others said. "It's only a five-cent game, you know; you can't lose anything at it, and we can't well play without five."

Dick was on the point of saying that he did not understand the game, when Randall began to urge him.

"Take a hand for a few minutes, to oblige us, Sumner," he said. "We'll not play more than half an hour longer."

If it had not been for the liquor, Dick certainly would have refused to gamble. But that one glass of rum not only made him feel stronger, but somehow made him careless of what he did; and he took the vacant place.



Gambling games rarely stop at the time appointed, and at the end of an hour Dick was still playing. He had lost several dollars by that time, which was inconvenient, and had taken another Santa Cruz sour, which was worse. He felt strong enough now, and determined to recover his money. Two of the other players had lost far more than he; and they had, as they expressed it, "a mission to get even."

"Well, suppose we raise the limit to a dollar to give the losers a chance," some one suggested.

"I'm willing," Randall said; "they're entitled to a chance."

All the others were willing, even Dick, who was reckless enough now for most anything, and anxious to win back what he had lost.

At the end of another hour Dick was in the position that many a young reporter has found himself in to his sorrow. He had lost all his money except a little small change that jingled in his vest pocket, and he felt confused and wretched. There was no money left to take to his mother, not even money to pay his expenses through the week; and over all was the terrible consciousness that he had been drinking and gambling and had disgraced himself.

"Never mind, old fellow," Randall said, slapping him on the shoulder when the game was over. He saw the anguish in Dick's face and felt sorry for



him. "Never mind; you've done a beautiful piece of work to-day."

"Yes, I have!" Dick answered with deep sarcasm in his voice; "a beautiful piece of work!"



## CHAPTER IV.

### A WILD NIGHT ON NEW YORK BAY.

SIMPLY immense, Sumner!" was the city editor's greeting when Dick went into the office on the morning after his Sing Sing experience. "'Open the north switch!' ha, ha! Nobody else has a line of that. How did you get hold of it?"

Dick might have answered that he got it by honest hard work and following up a very slight clew, but he merely said that he stumbled upon it. The pleasure of doing the piece of work in that day's paper was all gone. His head still ached, and he was thoroughly ashamed of himself. Never before had so many of the good men of the office taken pains to speak to him; never in his life had he received half as many compliments. But he could think of nothing but his shame at the Scribble Club, of his gambling and drinking and losing his money.

The money loss was the smallest part of his disgrace, still it troubled him greatly. It was absolutely necessary for him to send money to his mother and to have enough to support him through the week, and he knew of no way to get it.

"There must be some way to raise a little money



when a fellow is making a fair salary," he reflected. "Randall will know. He knows how I happen to be without money, and he can tell me what to do."

Randall's advice to an older man would have been to take his watch to a pawn shop; but when Dick asked it was different. Dick had had little experience of life; he was a boy among men of the world and he had great ability; and all these things helped to make Randall take an interest in him. For there are many worse men in the world than Jack Randall. Generous to a fault, with no one but himself to support, he made money easily and spent it with equal facility, and spent it as readily on a friend as upon himself.

"Why, my boy, of course I can tell you what to do," he said when Dick told him just how he was situated. "It was my fault for letting you play at all, and I ought have known better; but upon my word it was only thoughtlessness on my part. It was not that I wanted to teach you the lively ways of the Scribblers."

"As far as the money goes," he went on, "that's easily remedied. I am hard up myself, as usual; but as soon as Dr. Goode comes in this evening I will borrow twenty-five dollars from him and turn it over to you, and you can pay it back whenever it's convenient; no hurry about it at all."

Dick's assignments that day were much better ones than he had had before, and he tried to work



hard enough to forget his troubles. It was almost a certainty that Dr. Goode would have something to say in the evening about the Sing Sing story, for the doctor seldom read an unusually good article in the Transport without saying a few encouraging words to the writer.

“And to think that if he speaks to me about it I shall have some of his own money in my pocket, borrowed to replace what I lost at gambling!” Dick reflected. “I half-wish I were back in the Record office, washing rollers for three dollars a week.”

Dr. Goode took his time about commending Dick's work that evening. He waited for an opportunity to have him as nearly alone as possible, and then spoke, Dick thought, more kindly than he had ever heard him speak before.

“I like the construction of your Sing Sing story, Sumner,” the doctor said, taking off both pairs of glasses and wiping them with his handkerchief and then replacing them. “A good article must be built up, you know, like a ship; one part here, another there, and every part in the right place. I see that you understand that. You write good English, too, and that shows that your reading has been good, for no man can write good English who does not read good English.

“Of course you understand,” the doctor went on, “that doing such a piece of work as you did yester-



day gives a man a certain standing in the office. He is considered one of the good men and steps up above the humdrum fellows who have no stuff in them. Naturally you will have a better class of work in the future, and in a short time your salary will be raised, for we do not ask good men to work for fifteen dollars a week. In time I expect you to be one of the best reporters in the city, if you take care of yourself.

“But only if you take care of yourself,” the doctor continued, laying his hand gently on Dick’s knee. “Many a man has started here with prospects as bright as yours, and has gone to pieces. Scribble clubs and rum and cards will soon darken the brightest prospects.”

Dick started and blushed furiously and his lips trembled.

“Yes, I know all about it, my boy. Randall did not want to tell me, but I wound it out of him because I like you. I like all young men who have brains. I understand what the temptations are; I have been through it myself. I don’t want to lecture you, but merely to put you in the way of seeing for yourself. Look about the office among all the men you know, and you will see that the really successful ones keep away from the little clubs and the cards and the drink. A dissipated man may flourish for a time if he is exceptionally brilliant, but he is sure to be left behind at last.



See that for yourself, and with your brains you will need no other argument."

Dick went home to Russellville that night for the first time in over a week, and his mother and sister gave him such a welcome as they considered due to a distinguished young writer and journalist, as they called him — half in jest and half in earnest.

"Say, sis," he expostulated from the depths of the biggest rocking-chair, "do me a favor, will you? Never call me a journalist again. You don't know how the real reporters and writers laugh at that word. They say that a journalist is a decayed penny-a-liner who comes 'round on payday and tries to borrow a quarter. The fellows who do the work and make the money are content to be called reporters."

"Very well," Florrie laughed; "then I'll always call you a reporter." She could not help noticing the change in Dick — a change for the better. He was so much more manly, so self-possessed, and he was dressed so much better.

"But I want you to tell me about Sing Sing," she went on. "Did you really go into that big prison and see the warden? And did you see that splendid man who obeyed orders about the switch, though he thought it was going to kill ever so many people? How do you ever have courage to ask questions of everybody, Dick?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, that was a pretty hard



pull at first," Dick replied. "The first time I was sent to interview a man I walked up and down outside for half an hour before I raised courage to go in. But that feeling soon wears off; I don't think of being diffident about it now. Indeed, I think I rather like it. I want to take you and mother into the city with me in two or three weeks to help me interview a man."

"O Dick!" they both exclaimed, "how could we do that?"

"Easily," Dick answered, smiling over his little mystery. "You see the man is a real estate agent; he has flats to let."

"Do you mean it, Dick?" his mother asked. "Do you feel secure enough in the office to take such an important step?"

The subject of taking a small flat in the city and all living together was thoroughly discussed. Mrs. Sumner had a little income of her own, and by uniting this with Dick's salary a cheap flat could be rented, not more than twenty dollars a month. "And it would be a positive saving to me," Dick argued; "the restaurants are so expensive."

"We can even do a little better than that," he went on. "I don't know whether you have heard me speak of Darling, one of our copy readers. I did n't discover his room till I'd been some time in the office, for it's separate from our city room; but Darling is a fine fellow, three or four years older



than I am, handsome, too, and very quiet. He has no relations in the city, and when I mentioned the other day that we thought of taking a flat, he said he'd like to rent a room from us, for he does n't like to be among strangers. He would pay about four dollars a week just for the room, and with that we could afford a thirty-dollar flat; and we can get a very fair one for that."

"Thirty dollars a month!" Florrie exclaimed. "I should think we ought to get a fine house for that."

Dick laughed merrily at his sister's rural notions. He had learned something about city ways and prices.

"Perhaps I'll not be out again till it's time for you to come in and select the flat," he said. "I'll have longer articles to write now since the Sing Sing business, and long articles always keep a man late."

The brightest reporters, however, cannot be assigned to important things when no important things are happening; and weeks passed before Dick had another chance to show his mettle. He was relieved of the tiresome work of attending petty meetings, and that was a gain; and he was sure that when a chance came for doing good work, he would have his share of it.

Darling, whose work was from six in the evening till the paper went to press at two in the morning,



not only liked Dick's writing, but liked Dick himself, and he did all he could to hasten the day when Mrs. Sumner and Florrie should come in to help select a flat.

"At two to-morrow afternoon, Darling," Dick announced when the time came. "My mother and sister are to meet me at the south end of the postoffice at two o'clock, and you must be there and go with us, for you are interested in this thing, too. I hope we can find a flat where you can room with us. There ought to be no trouble when flats are so plenty."

"There will be, though," Darling answered; "there always is. When the flat suits, the price is too high; and when the price suits, the flat does n't. But I'll meet you at any rate, and we'll see what we can do."

It was not till Dick saw the next day that Darling preferred to walk with his sister, that he noticed how very pretty Florrie looked. She was a little girl in his eyes, though nearly seventeen, and her abundance of wavy brown hair, her expressive eyes, her pink cheeks, and her graceful bearing had never attracted his notice before.

"We will take a Fourth Avenue car," Dick said, after Darling had been introduced to his mother and sister. "There are a great many flats in Fourth Avenue and some parts of it don't look expensive."



It amused Dick to see how attentive Darling was to Florrie; helping her into the car and pointing out the sights of the lower city. Dick had never paid much attention to young ladies.

The car carried them up past Union Square, and a few blocks beyond that Dick saw a sign at the door of a large apartment house — “Apartment to Let. Inquire of the Janitor.” He knew it to be a very elegant and expensive place, for business had taken him there a few days before. But it occurred to him that it would be a good chance to let his mother and Florrie see one of the finest apartment houses in the city, and at the same time he would surprise them a little with the price, which was sure to be high. He signaled the conductor to stop and gave Darling a sly look, which was understood.

“We would like to look at the apartment you have to let,” Dick said to the attendant at the door; and in a moment they were all in an elevator resplendent with gilt and mirrors, rapidly traveling skyward.

“It is a small apartment,” the attendant said when they reached the place; “only a drawing-room, two bed chambers, and bath. But there is a beautiful view; this is the eleventh floor.”

Mrs. Sumner shrank back from the window with an exclamation of alarm. “Oh, I never could live up here, Dick!” she said. “It makes me giddy



just to look out. They're such stuffy little rooms, too, though very handsome. I suppose they'd want a pretty good rent, small as it is. What is the rent, young man?"

"Thirty-five hundred a year, ma'am," the attendant answered. "We will have a larger apartment vacant in about two months; that will be five thousand."

Darling was afraid that the ladies would express the surprise he saw in their faces, so he hastily said: —

"We could hardly wait two months, and these rooms are too small; so we may as well look elsewhere. Shall we go down?"

"It was a shame not to tell you before we went in, mother," Dick said when they were in the street again; "but I wanted to give you a little surprise. Those three small rooms are three thousand five hundred dollars a year, and we've got to have at least six rooms for thirty dollars a month. So you see what a task we have before us."

It was a task indeed, but it was successfully accomplished. After visiting places little better than tenement houses, and other places far beyond their means, they found an apartment in Forty-ninth Street, near Lexington Avenue, that was satisfactory in both size and price.

"No, you're not going to fool me again, Dick," Mrs. Sumner said when she first saw the marble



columns in front, the carved doors, and the mosaic pavement. "I'm not going into any more of your three thousand five hundred dollar places."

"No danger of that here, Mrs. Sumner," Darling said with a smile. "The show is all on the outside here to catch the eye. We shall find it plain enough within."

It was plain, but clean and comfortable. "Just made for us," Dick whispered to his mother. Up two flights of carpeted stairs, the apartment consisted of three cheerful bedrooms, parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and bathroom, all opening into a private hall; and the rent was thirty dollars a month.

"If that hall bedroom will suit Mr. Darling," Mrs. Sumner said, "I think we can get along very nicely here—though I must say I like to have a backyard."

"It is exactly the room I want," Darling declared; and the flat was rented and arrangements made for moving in immediately.

"I think we're going to be just as snug as can be here," Dick said to Darling several days later, when the moving was completed, but the rooms not entirely put in order yet. "What do you say to a little housewarming to-night, to give us a good start in the new home? Just among ourselves, you know. I think an oyster supper would be the thing, and I'm sure the folks would gladly sit up and help us eat it after we're through work."



“That’s a good idea,” Darling answered. “You go ahead and make the arrangements and I will pay half the bills.

“It will be just fun to do the cooking,” said Florrie. “I’ll manage to cook whatever you get, and sit up to help eat it. It’s the cutest little kitchen, with everything so handy that cooking is no trouble at all.”

“Oysters always go well,” Dick went on; “though anything ought to taste good in such a cozy little dining-room. We’ll need about two quarts; and I’ll get some celery and crackers and a little Roquefort cheese to wind up with. Some other night we’ll have a rarebit; sis is famous for making rarebits.”

Preparations for the night’s banquet were begun, but fate had decreed that Dick was not to help eat it. In his enthusiasm he had forgotten for the moment that a reporter is never master of his own time, but may be sent to the most unexpected places at the most unexpected times.

Dick’s day work kept him busy till eight o’clock in the evening, and as he had a small article to write after reaching the office, he had reason to believe that he would have nothing more to do that night. But he had hardly taken his seat when the night city editor called to him:—

“Sumner, can a man get over from Staten Island to the New Jersey shore in a sailboat to-night?”



It was not unusual for Dick to be asked such questions, because he made a specialty of studying up all the routes of travel in and about the city. He was a perfect walking guide-book, and almost every day he found the knowledge useful.

"He might, sir," Dick replied, "but a sailboat is always very uncertain."

"I have sent Lawrence to the lower end of Staten Island," the editor went on, "with orders to get a sailboat and go over to Port Monmouth as fast as possible. Do you think he can get there before midnight?"

"It's very doubtful, sir," Dick answered. "Of course it depends upon the wind, and I should not like to take any chances on it."

"Can you get to Port Monmouth?" the editor asked. "Remember the last train went at six o'clock."

"Oh, yes, I can get there if you don't mind the expense," Dick asserted. "It is merely a question of money."

"You mean a tug?"

"Yes, sir," said Dick; "I mean a tug."

"Very well, then," said the editor; "you can drop that insurance matter and take this case. You must get to Port Monmouth at all hazards. Of course you know all about the stealing of the body of Sterling, the great millionaire, from St. Mark's Churchyard; and you know what desperate efforts



the police are making to catch the thieves. The chief of police started for Port Monmouth on the six o'clock train, and he is supposed to have a clew to the thieves there. You must find the chief and learn whatever he learns. It is a matter of absolute must. You *must* get there. Here is an order on the cashier for fifty dollars for expenses."

"The World has proposed to us," the editor continued, "to share the expense of a tug. Stop at the World office and say that we accept the proposition. They will send Mr. Hills with you to represent them. Now be off and don't lose a minute."

Dick lost about twenty seconds in telling Darling that he was off for New Jersey and could not help eat the supper, and in almost no time he was at the World office, where he was joined by Mr. Hills, a short, stout reporter with a head full of brains.

"The East River's the place," Mr. Hills panted. "Right down Fulton Street to South."

Hiring a tug seems an easy matter with plenty of money at command and so many tugs in the harbor looking for work. But at nine o'clock at night one might almost as well try to hire a white elephant. Towing is day work; and at six o'clock the tugs steam to their berths along the East River, fires are banked for the night, and captains and crews go home, leaving only watchmen in charge.

The two reporters boarded a dozen tugs, but



everywhere the answer was the same: "Impossible! Fires banked, crew gone home."

"Can't you send for the captain?" Dick asked in several places. The answer led him to believe that every tugboat captain in New York lived in Harlem, or Morrisania, or some other distant section.

"Get an ocean steamer to whistle for one," one of the watchmen suggested. "That may bring one out."

"Capital idea!" Dick exclaimed. "Here's the Ward Liner Santiago just below, at foot of Wall Street. We'll get her to whistle up a tug."

But that proved another disappointment. "Could n't think of it," said the second officer, who was in charge. "If the captain himself was aboard, he wouldn't do it, because if he did he'd make the ship liable for the tug's charges."

Matters were growing desperate. It was half-past nine by this time, and the editor's words kept ringing painfully in Dick's ears: "It is a matter of absolute must. You *must* get there."

It was an inspiration that caused Dick to stop a nautical-looking man in South Street and ask him what saloon the tugboat men most frequented.

"Duffy's," replied the man without hesitation; "corner of Fulton Street. It's full of 'em at this minute."

In Duffy's saloon the reporters found a crowd of tugboat men, and among them Captain Brett, of the



tug Dart. Several of the captain's men were there, too; and he was willing to negotiate.

"Do you hear the wind howl?" Captain Brett asked. "It's an ugly night down the bay. But I'll risk the boat if you'll risk your lives. Ten dollars an hour it will cost you, gentlemen, from the time we leave the pier till we get back."

The terms were satisfactory and the bargain was made, and in less than twenty minutes the Dart was steaming down the East River, Dick and Mr. Hills in the pilot house with Captain Brett.

"You must understand," said the captain, his voice half-drowned by the furious wind that pounded against the windows, "that I only take you to Port Monmouth. I don't agree to land you there. There used to be an old wharf there, but it may have blown down; and anyway I could n't find it this dark night. You must take your chances of getting ashore."

"Very well," Dick answered. "Stop at the Battery boat-stand as you go out, and we will attend to the landing."

"What good will that do?" Hills asked.

"Why, we'll hire a Whitehall boatman to go with us, boat and all," Dick answered. "With his boat on board we can land wherever we like."

"Good!" said Mr. Hills; "that's as good an idea as if I'd thought of it myself."

Five dollars proved sufficient to induce one of



the boatmen of Whitehall to put his boat aboard the tug and go along himself, and a few minutes later the little tug was dancing madly on the rough surface of the upper bay.

“This is nothing to what you’ll catch down below,” was Captain Brett’s comforting assurance. Down past the lights of Quarantine the tug steamed, through the Narrows, and into the lower bay. The roughness was nothing compared to the inky blackness. The world surely never saw a darker night.

It was almost 11.30 when Captain Brett rang a bell and the engines stopped.

“Now, then, gentlemen,” said he, “as near as I can judge we’re off Port Monmouth. I can’t say to a certainty, but that’s my opinion. A man can’t see through such thick black as this, and you mustn’t expect it. If you like to take your chances, I think you’ll find Port Monmouth somewhere off to the south’ard here.”

Dick opened the pilot house door and stepped partially out, and Hills followed. The wind almost swept them from their feet; the total darkness, the fury of the gale, the tossing of the little boat were enough to appall them.

“I don’t half-like this,” Mr. Hills said as they hastily drew back and closed the door. “The captain may be mistaken after all, and not be anywhere near Port Monmouth. What do you think?”

“There is only one thing to think,” Dick



answered decidedly. "We must get ashore. Let them lower the boat, captain."

In five minutes more, after some risk in the heavy sea, they were both in the Whitehall boat, and its owner was rowing them in the direction in which the shore was supposed to lie. Another minute or two and the boatman called out:—

"There's something ahead here, and we're near the beach, for I smell it. Yes, we've made it; here's the end of the old wharf. That was a good guess on such a night."

Dick and his companion, with their landsmen's eyes, could see nothing; but they could feel the worm-eaten timbers of the decaying old wharf. How long it might be and how far the end from shore they could not even guess. But they could tell by feeling that the structure towered far above their heads. There was no help for it but to climb the timbers, feeling their way slowly from one to another, to the platform far above. To make matters worse, Mr. Hills was much too fat for a climber, and Dick had almost to drag him up.

After climbing thus nearly twenty feet, with hands cut by barnacles and rusty spikes, both men stood safely upon the platform of the pier. Neither of them had ever been in Port Monmouth before, and perhaps that was not Port Monmouth after all. How many planks were missing from the shaky old pier? How far was it to shore? In what direction



lay the town? They must find it all out by feeling.

“That is all we want,” Dick called down to the boatman. “The tug can take you back to the city. We are all right now.”

“Are we?” Hills panted. “I wish I thought so!”



## CHAPTER V.

### “SHADOWING” THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

THE gale threatened every moment to blow Dick and his companion from the old pier; and while the lights of the tug became smaller and smaller they felt their way carefully toward the shore.

“Let me go first,” Dick said, “as I am so much lighter. We might find a rotten plank anywhere, or no plank at all. If there should be a wide gap, I hardly know what we’d do, for we never could walk one of the timbers in this wind.”

Fortunately there were no wide gaps and no planks too rotten to bear their weight; and after traversing more than a hundred feet of pier, putting a foot down carefully with every step before trusting much weight upon it, they felt themselves upon the sand of New Jersey.

“I suppose the telegraph office must be the first thing for us to find, if this is really Port Monmouth,” Dick suggested. “I should like to let the office know that I am here.”

“So should I,” Mr. Hills responded; “and here is a good omen for us.”

The good omen was the first ray of light they had



seen since leaving the tug. Through an opening in the black clouds the moon was making a sickly effort to shine. The light was very dim, but far better than the intense darkness.

“There is a big house!” Dick exclaimed; “up this road, or street, or whatever it is. We can rouse them up and find out where we are.”

They followed the sandy road up to the house, which looked like a country tenement house, for it was large and neglected, and one of the folding front doors stood open. They stepped up to the big piazza and knocked, and in an instant there was a scraping and barking in the hall as if a dozen dogs were after them. Dick and Hills were both brave enough, but the pace they made down the walk and through the front gate would have done them credit in a footrace.

“I see something moving up the road,” Hills exclaimed a moment later. “Just this side of that clump of bushes. But I’m afraid it’s only a white cow.”

“No, it’s not,” Dick shouted, looking in the direction indicated. “It’s a white horse, and there’s a buggy behind it, and of course there’s somebody in the buggy. But it’s turning off into another road. Hurry up, Hills; we’ll intercept it.”

By cutting across a large open field they came out in another road ahead of the buggy, and in a moment they were within speaking distance of its occupant.



"Is this Port Monmouth, mister?" Dick asked.

There was no reply for a moment, and Dick repeated the question.

"Hello, Sumner! what are you doing here?" came a voice from the buggy. "Of course this is Port Monmouth; and a beautiful little place it is, for a blind man. Don't you know my voice? I'm Atwater of the Herald. I just drove up from Long Branch. How did you get here?"

"Hills of the World and I have just landed from a tug and been chased by dogs," Dick laughed. "We're looking for the telegraph office and the operator."

"Don't worry about that, my child," Atwater said. "I have the operator here in the buggy with me; picked him up as I passed his house. Follow us, and we'll be at the telegraph office in a minute or two."

Dick and Hills followed the buggy, and soon the telegraph office was reached and opened. Each man reported himself to his office by wire in the same brief style:—

PORT MONMOUTH, N. J.

The Daily Transport, New York:

Arrived 11.30.

SUMNER.

"The operator tells me he knows nothing about the chief of police being here," Atwater said, after the dispatches had been sent.

"Nice situation, isn't it?" Hills exclaimed—



“to hunt the chief in a charming Jersey town without a light, where everybody is asleep.”

“It won't do to take any chances,” Dick said. “How many houses are there in the town, Atwater?”

“About forty or fifty,” Atwater replied; “little bit of a place.”

“Then it seems to me the only way is to visit every house and make inquiries,” Dick suggested. “We can divide the town into sections, and that will give us each about fifteen houses to go to.”

This heroic measure was agreed upon and the routes were laid out and the three reporters began the process of arousing every family in Port Monmouth. An hour later each one had rare stories to tell of encounters with dogs and threats of arrest and wordy combats with sleepy and irate householders. But there was no sign of the chief of police. The search had been so thorough that it was certain he was not in Port Monmouth.

“It's a false alarm,” Hills said in a disgusted tone. “Fine work this, hunting a chief of police in a New Jersey forest.”

“And there's an oyster supper a-cooking for me at home,” Dick added; “and here I am, hungry as a bear.”

“Well, we can only send in ‘good-night’ and go to bed,” Atwater said sadly. “I thought we were going to have a fine story. There's a



little hotel here, and we can all go home in the morning."

Dick's second dispatch was very brief. It merely said, like the dispatches of Hills and Atwater: "Chief not been seen here. Good-night. Sumner." The "good-night" was not a message of politeness, but a signal well understood in the office that Sumner had nothing more to send.

"I'd like to know, Atwater," Dick said when they were settling themselves in a big double-bedded room in the hotel, "how you heard of this thing in Long Branch."

"Would you, sonny?" Atwater answered. He was very young himself, not more than two or three years older than Dick, and they had met several times before and had become well acquainted. "Then I'll tell you. You must know that before I became a distinguished journalist I was an ornament to the telegraphic profession; in other words, I was a country operator. Last evening I had some business in Long Branch, and while waiting in the station for the train to take me home, I heard the sounder say something about the chief of police. That made me prick up my ears and listen to the message going through. It was n't intended for me, but it may have gone to a worse man. It said that the chief had come to Port Monmouth looking for Sterling's body; and the minute I heard that, I chartered a horse and



buggy and drove up here. That unravels the mystery, does n't it?"

It did, and at the same time it gave Dick an idea. "To understand telegraph operating," he thought, "must be a great advantage to a reporter. This case is an example of it. I must learn enough of it, at any rate, to send and receive a message."

"Say, you fellows, dry up, will you?" Hill grunted from his bed. "I want to go to sleep."

To return to the office with nothing, after his midnight voyage in the tug, was what Dick confidently expected. But he was not done with the great Sterling's body case yet.

Shortly after eight o'clock in the morning the three were awakened by a racket downstairs. They heard rapid footsteps on the stairs, and a moment later their door burst open and Lawrence bounded into the room — Lawrence, the Transport man, who had been sent to cross from Staten Island in a sailboat. He had reached Port Monmouth after daylight.

"We're going to have something to do yet, fellows," he announced, after greeting the three in bed. "The chief is certainly somewhere in the State, though he's not in Port Monmouth. I've just come from the telegraph office, and the operator tells me he is in New Jersey. He is trying to locate him for us."

About two hours later Lawrence entered again



with further news. “I’ve found him,” he said. “The chief went down to Shamong last night, and he’s still there.”

“Shamong? Where is Shamong?”

“Away down among the scrub pines. It’s down below Manchester and Whiting’s, about a hundred and fifty miles from here.”

Dick bounded out of bed; he saw that there was probably more work before him.

“Say, Sumner,” Hills said, his eyes half-open, “get my instructions for me, will you, like a good fellow?”

“Yes, and mine too,” Atwater echoed; “there’s no use of our all getting up at this unearthly hour.”

It was a matter of pride to Dick that these older reporters should feel sure that he knew just what to do. He and Lawrence went down to the telegraph office, and Dick wrote three messages. One of them said:—

Daily Transport, New York:—

Chief of police is at Shamong. Send instructions.

SUMNER — LAWRENCE.

The others were the same, but addressed one to the Herald and one to the World, with Atwater’s name signed to the first and the name of Hills to the other.

Several hours passed before replies were received



to these messages, and when they came Hills, Atwater, and Lawrence were ordered home and Dick was instructed to "go on to Shamong and find the chief."

That meant that Dick was to travel alone into the wilds of South Jersey in search of the chief and Mr. Sterling's body. He was sorry to go alone, it was so much more pleasant to travel in good company; but as far as the work was concerned he felt equal to it. Possibly, just possibly, the chief might have found the body or caught the thieves; and that would be a tremendous piece of news.

There was one difficulty about reaching Shamong, as he found by the time-table. The only train of the afternoon went as far as Whiting's, fifteen miles north of Shamong, and stopped there. The only chance was to go to Whiting's and hire a carriage there to take him on to Shamong.

Daylight was fast changing into dusk when Dick's train drew up at Whiting's. His first step was to go into the telegraph office. "When out of town, always keep your wires open," Dr. Goode once had told him; and he had often found the advice valuable.

"Please ask Shamong to keep open late for a Transport special," he said to the operator.

"All right," the operator answered. "I think you'll have company down there too."

"What do you mean?" Dick asked.

"Well, I can't tell all I know," the operator



replied; "but I think you'll not be the only reporter in Shamong to-night."

"Oh, it's like enough," Dick laughed. "We generally travel in flocks. I wish you would tell me where I can find somebody to drive me down there."

"Do you see that big white house with the green blinds?" and the operator pointed down the street. "That's Dr. Townsend's house. The doctor's son has a horse and buggy for hire, and I guess he'll drive you down."

But the doctor's son, when Dick found him, seemed anything but anxious to drive to Shamong that night. The roads were bad, he said, and the night would be dark and his horse was lame and the buggy needed mending, and there were a dozen other excuses. The more Dick urged, the more excuses were made.

"I'll drive you down there for five dollars," the young man said at last; and it was evident from his tone that he considered that so high a price that it would put an end to the matter.

"Hitch him right up!" Dick answered. "I'm in a hurry to get there."

The young man went out and returned in a few minutes to say that the horse was ready. He went to a little stand in the room, opened the drawer and took out a very small revolver and made a great show of loading it.

"I never travel at night without being armed,"



he said, evidently to convince Dick that it would be useless to try to murder and rob him on the road.

“It’s a good plan,” Dick coolly replied; “neither do I.”

That drive from Whiting’s to Shamong was an experience that Dick long remembered. The road was a mere track through the pine woods, with trees growing so close to the ruts that there was barely room for the passage of the buggy. The young man drove so fast that Dick expected every moment that one of the hubs would strike a tree and he be sent sprawling over the horse’s back. He reached Shamong safely, however, and went directly into the station and telegraph office, the only building in the little hamlet that showed any sign of life, except the hotel across the way. The livery bill was paid and the doctor’s son headed his horse for Whiting’s without waiting for further developments.

“You’re looking for the chief, are you?” was the operator’s greeting to Dick as the latter stepped into the stuffy little office in which a dozen young countrymen with pipes and cigars in their mouths were gathered. “Well, you’ll have to go on five miles farther to find him, for he’s out at Mr. Waite’s place.”

“Five miles farther!” Dick exclaimed. “And who is Mr. Waite, and what is the chief doing at his place?”



"He's an old friend of the chief," the operator answered, "and the chief comes out here to shoot birds with him every year. That's what he is doing here now, and you fellows are all on a wild-goose chase. I've had telegrams from about a dozen reporters to keep open for late specials, but you won't have any specials to send. He's not looking for anybody's body out here, he's shooting birds. There's one of his guides sitting on the table; the man in the big hat. You can ask him."

Dick immediately began to question the guide, and it did not take him long to find that the operator was telling the truth. There was no news to be had, for the chief was only taking a little holiday instead of hunting grave-robbers. He crossed over to the hotel and talked with the landlord, and there the bird-shooting story was confirmed. It was a tame ending to a long hunt, but there was no help for it. Dick returned to the Telegraph office and he was hardly inside when one of the loungers exclaimed:—

"There's a locomotive coming up the road!"

Sure enough, there was the headlight staring them in the face. The occupants of the office ran out to the platform just in time to see the engine stop.

The young man who sprang from the engine before it came to a full stop was the Philadelphia correspondent of *The New York Herald*. He had



heard by telegraph of the chief's visit to Shamong, and as there was no train he had chartered the locomotive to carry him to the spot. While he stood talking to the operator, learning just what Dick had learned, three carriages drove up, and several reporters whom Dick knew ascended the station steps. There were five of them, four from the principal morning newspapers of New York, and one from *The Philadelphia Age*. These men had all been sent out in trains that carried them to Manchester, a little town on another railroad about ten miles away, and there they had taken carriages and started post-haste for Shamong, arriving all together.

It was amusing to Dick to see this congregation of reporters, numbering seven now, and no news for them to gather. He was in position to stand by and see the others work, for he had been over the ground thoroughly. But the businesslike way in which some of them went to work made him a little uneasy. They seemed to know just the people to inquire for; and perhaps their information might be better than his, after all. It was a place for him to keep his eyes and ears open, at any rate.

"Where can I find Mr. Peter Smith?" was one of the first questions asked by the Herald correspondent.

"I want to see Dave Hardy," one of the others said to the operator; "where does he live?"

It was a relief to Dick when he found that Peter



Smith was the hotel keeper with whom he had already talked, and that Dave Hardy was the guide. The men separated, each one working in his own way; but in a few minutes they were all back in the telegraph office; and all had found out just what Dick knew before, that the chief was only out on a pleasure excursion.

While there was news in prospect, these seven newspaper men had held aloof from one another; each was suspicious of the others, and each preferred to make his own inquiries without any confidence. But now that the work was over, with no chance of anybody "beating" the others, they were all the best of friends, and as jolly companions as a lot of schoolboys just let out for recess.

"It would be folly for us to drive five miles out to see the chief," the Herald man said, "when we know that he is not here on business. Anyhow he could n't do anything without coming here to the station and telegraph office. There's nothing for us to do but telegraph the facts in a few words and go to bed. I've sent my engine back; it's too expensive a luxury to keep."

"That's all we can do," echoed the World man, "as far as business goes. But I have a important duty to perform. My stomach has been on strike for the last three or four hours, and I'm going over to the hotel to order some supper. Any of you fellows want to eat?"



“Yes, yes, yes!” burst from six other throats. “We all want to eat. We’re starving, every one of us. Order suppers for seven, Mr. World, to be ready in half an hour. Don’t forget the raw oysters and broiled lobsters and about fourteen Welsh rarebits.”

“You’ll be lucky if you get ham and eggs,” said the Tribune man, who knew the ways of country hotels. “But they’ll have some bottled Bass. Let’s see; seven of us, are there? Have them put fourteen bottles of Bass on ice, World.”

“None for me,” Dick interrupted; “I don’t want any Bass.”

“Twelve bottles then;” and the World man disappeared to arrange for the suppers, while the others sat down on tables and boxes to write their brief dispatches.

The loungers about the telegraph office, all greatly interested in the scene, did not quite know what to make of these seven newspaper men. Half an hour before they had avoided one another, had little to say, and seemed to be at swords’ points; and now here they were chatting in the most friendly way, as if they were all old friends, and ordering suppers together.

While they were writing, the Age man touched Dick lightly upon the knee and inclined his head toward the door in a way that meant an invitation to come out. He was hardly older than Dick, the



Age man ; but he had much more to say, and was inclined to be boisterous in his manner. Dick followed him out to the platform.

" You 're from the Transport, ain't you ? " the Age reporter asked when they were alone outside.

" Yes," Dick replied.

" Well, I 'll put you up to a good thing, if you 'll take my advice. There 's no reason why we should n't have a sensation out of this business. Let the other fellows telegraph home that the chief is only shooting birds, but you and I can do better. We can get up a column apiece about the chief's mysterious movements down here, and tell how he's supposed to be shadowing the thieves and to be on the track of the body. I don't want to do it alone ; but if it's in both the Age and the Transport, that will give it an appearance of truth, and we 'll have a beat on all the other fellows. Your people won't like your coming home without sending any copy."

It was the first time that Dick had ever had such a proposition made to him, and he was indignant.

" My people would rather have me come home a hundred times without copy than send them a story that was not true," he answered. " I like a sensation, but I want it to be a real one ; not one that I make myself. They trust me to tell the truth when they send me out, and I intend to do it."

" Humbug ! " the Age man sneered. " Do you think the Transport always tells the truth ? "



“As far as I know it does,” Dick answered. “I know its reporters pretty well, and I don’t believe there is a man in the office who would knowingly send in a false report. I know that I would n’t for one.”

The Age man said something about Dick being “too good for a newspaper man” as they returned to the office and finished up their dispatches, but Dick did not care to reply. He was sure of his ground; and it was almost with satisfaction that he noticed afterwards that the other reporters avoided the Age man — not on account of the proposition he had made, for Dick said nothing about that, but because they were able to read him through and through almost instantly, and saw that he was a man to be avoided.

This is a faculty that comes quickly to a bright reporter, and it had come already to Dick to a degree that sometimes startled him. From talking with scores of new men every day — men who often had something to conceal or something to exaggerate or something to distort — he had learned to read a man’s heart and brain almost the instant he set eyes upon him.

“That Tribune man is a prophet,” somebody exclaimed at supper. “He said ham and eggs, and ham and eggs it is. But they’re wonderfully better than nothing.”

It was a surprise to Dick that nobody said a word



to him about drinking ale while they were eating. All the others drank it and after supper smoked cigars, but Dick neither drank nor smoked. Instead of being urged, he was left to follow his own inclinations. And the best men in the party, he was glad to notice, treated him like a professional equal. Some of the men there were favorably known in every newspaper office in New York, and Dick had often heard of them. He was too modest even to think that it was because he had attended to his work faithfully and well, without bluster or boasting, that these men liked him; but that was the reason. They read him as easily as they read the Age man, but with different results.

Dick and the World man were quartered in the same room for the night, for the little hotel had not seven sleeping rooms to spare.

"I'm afraid it looked unsociable not to take a glass of ale or a cigar with the rest at supper," Dick said before they went to sleep; "but I have made up my mind neither to drink nor smoke, and I could n't break my resolution."

"Unsociable!" his companion repeated; "why, you were one of the jolliest fellows in the party! There's nothing unsociable about not drinking ale when you don't want it. The talk about drinking for sociability's sake is very much in your eye, Sumner. When a man drinks it's because he wants the stimulant, not because he wants to be sociable.

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That was why I drank the ale, and I'll warrant it was the same with all the other fellows."

"Well, it was very kind in you all not to urge me to drink or smoke when I didn't want to," Dick said.

"No; you're mistaken!" the World man retorted, resting his head upon his hand, and his elbow on the pillow. "Excuse me; but I'm a much older man than you, Sumner, and I know these things better. Reporters are supposed to have some sense, and a sensible man never urges a fellow to drink who does n't want to. When a man tries to urge you against your will, it is safe to set that man down for a fool.

"Not only that," he went on, "but it's only a softshell who could be induced to drink when he didn't want to. Such a man would hardly have brains enough to make a good reporter, and I hear you're a pretty good one, Sumner. No, sir! I take my share of drinks, I'll admit, but if I didn't want one, I should like to see the man who could induce me to take it; and I should have a very poor opinion of any man who tried, too. However, it's after midnight, and the early train goes at six;" and the World man, totally disregarding the hygienic principles that he often wrote paragraphs about, drew his head completely under the covers.

Dick thought that he had just fallen asleep for a moment, though in reality he had slept for several



hours, when at half-past five the red-haired, freckle-faced boy of the hotel made a tremendous racket with his knuckles against the doors of the reporters' rooms.

“Wake up, gents,” he shouted. “The chief of police is over at the station, waitin' for the early train!”

In five minutes the reporters were all at the station with the chief, and he was joking them about their wild-goose chase.

“I'm glad I got the better of you once, boys,” he laughed; “but it was accidental. It would take a smarter man than I am to fool you fellows on purpose. I'm too smart to try it, anyhow.”

In the ride back to New York Dick became well acquainted with the chief of police, and the acquaintance often proved valuable to him afterwards. When he reached the office he gave the city editor a full account of his adventures.

“It often happens,” the editor said as he laughed with Dick over his odd experiences, “that the reporter's adventures in gathering news would make a more interesting article than the news he goes after; but we seldom print the reporter's side of it. However, I think we will make an exception in this case and let you write us a special about your experiences in hunting Sterling's body. Make it about a column and a half. We pay extra, of course, for breezy specials.”



## CHAPTER VI.

### HOW DICK SPURNED A BRIBE.

THE opportunity to write this "special" was a great relief to Dick; for, notwithstanding his success in a professional way, he found it hard to make both ends meet. The writing of one amounted to little, but he knew that one would open the way for more.

There were scores of little expenses that he had not counted upon, and the support of the family devolved mainly upon him. He was proud of this, even though it did take his last cent every week. Then there was the twenty-five dollars he owed Randall, which he felt must be paid off soon; and he was in need of newer and better clothes. The Russellville clothes did very well while he was doing small work in the office, for the men he met on these little jobs were dressed no better than he; but in the class of work he was doing now it was different.

He was constantly meeting the best reporters in New York, men who made a great deal of money, and who wore the best clothes they could buy, and carried fine watches, and often wore expensive diamonds. Dick cared very little for the diamonds and



jewelry, but he wanted to present as good an appearance as his associates. Occasional specials would help him wonderfully in this and a hundred other things, for they paid ten dollars a column; and he knew that if he had any sort of success with them they would almost double his pay.

He did not know, of course, that the chance to write specials was an arrangement that had been made expressly to give him more money, growing out of a conversation between Dr. Goode and the city editor.

"Sumner's work is always good," the night editor had said. "I never feel any anxiety about an assignment when it is in his hands. You ought to increase his salary, for he is doing some of his best work in the office."

"Yes, he is," the city editor had replied. "He has made a remarkable record so far. I don't know of any young man who has taken hold as he has. It seems to be intuitive with him to know a piece of news when he sees it, and there is no limit to his energy. The best of him is that although he must know he is doing unusually good work, it does n't spoil him. He is just as ready to go out on a small affair as a big one. But you know I make it a rule not to raise a new man's salary in the first six months. However, I can make it up to him by giving him specials to write and in other ways, to give him more money. He must have more, of



course. He does n't seem to think of anything but his work; no poker games on his mind, no billiards, no little club rooms, no rum, nothing but solid hard work."

"Such men must be encouraged," the doctor laughed; "for they're not plenty."

Ignorant of all this, Dick took his few spare hours to write his first special, sitting up several times long after Darling reached home.

"It's a jolly place to write, here in the dining-room," he said one night when Darling came in at half-past two; "after the folks are in bed. The light is so good, too. Somehow I never could take any pleasure in reading or writing at night when I lived in a furnished room, because the gas was always so dim."

"Did n't any of the fellows tell you how to manage that?" Darling laughed. "Of course you never could get a fair light in a furnished room, because the landladies plug up the tips of the burners. That lets only a little gas through, and saves bills, you know. You should have bought a burner of your own and a pair of nippers, and unscrewed the landlady's burner when you wanted to read or write, and put your own on. That's the way all the boys do."

"Maybe you do that in your room here," Dick suggested with a twinkle in his eye.

"I don't have to, Dick," Darling replied. "There



are no mean tricks about that mother of yours — nor your sister either,” he added, and then blushed a little because Dick smiled.

There was no doubt of Dick’s ability to write a good special after his first one appeared. It was not merely a correct account of his experiences in looking for the chief of police and Sterling’s body; all the details were truthfully given, but they were given in such a way as to bring out every funny point to the best advantage. It was a comical article from beginning to end, and Dick was set down for a humorist as well as an accurate reporter of facts. There was some glory in this, and some profit, too; for thereafter most of the subjects that might be turned into humorous specials were handed over to Dick.

“I want you to run up to Saratoga,” the city editor said to him one day after he had been long enough in the flat to pay a second month’s rent. “You can go up to-night, do the work to-morrow, and come back to-morrow night. I have had several reports about unfair dealings among the bookmakers, and I want you to go out to the race track and investigate for yourself. Make full inquiries; and after you have all your facts go to Hyer, the leading bookmaker, tell him just what reports we have heard, and ask him what he has to say about it.”

Dick had never ridden before in such a train as



carried him to Saratoga that night. It was one of the famous "Saratoga Specials," made up of a dozen parlor cars and drawn by two powerful engines. Leaving New York at six in the evening it set him down in Saratoga before midnight, and he slept in a gorgeous room in the Grand Union Hotel, with music playing on the balcony and colored lights flashing across the fountain in the courtyard.

It seemed to him next day as if half of New York had migrated to Saratoga. He knew a great many people in the city, and almost every other man he met he was sure he had seen before. Many of them he knew, and some of these were of great assistance to him in making his investigations. He did a hard day's work, but after all it amounted to nothing, for he could discover nothing irregular in the bookmaker's methods.

He still had Mr. Hyer, the chief bookmaker, to see, and it was nearly six o'clock in the evening before he found him in the lobby of the hotel. None of your vulgar, horsey, gambler-looking men was Mr. Hyer, with flashy clothes and showy jewelry; but a most respectable-appearing man, so quiet in dress and manner that he might readily have been mistaken for a clergyman. Dick stepped up and introduced himself and asked for a few moments' conversation.

"We had better go into this little writing room," said Mr. Hyer, "where we can talk without inter-



ruption ;” and he led the way into a cozy little room with a beautiful table in the centre and the softest of chairs on each side.

There was no hesitation on Dick’s part now about talking to strangers. It was an old story with him, and he felt as much at home with a man he had never seen before as with an old friend. Certainly he had never talked with a more polite or more agreeable man than Mr. Hyer.

Dick told the bookmaker what reports had reached the Transport office about unfair methods on the race track, and Mr. Hyer listened with great attention.

“It is very kind of you,” he said when Dick concluded his story, “to come directly to me with these reports, instead of publishing them first and investigating afterward. But that is quite like the Transport’s way of doing ; they have always treated me with the greatest fairness. These reports have been circulated by enemies of mine who seek to do me harm, and I can show you in a few words that they are utterly unfounded.”

He went on in the smoothest manner to give Dick a detailed account of his methods of doing business, and made everything appear as fair and honorable as a transaction in real estate. He was very earnest about it, too ; for the publication of even a hint of unfairness in his dealings would have done him immense damage and cost him thousands of dollars.



"I think I have made everything clear to you," he said in conclusion. "You see for yourself that there can be no possible foundation for these libelous attacks. And now," he went on, his hand moving down toward his trowsers pocket, "you have been at a good deal of trouble and expense to come up here and make this investigation. Besides, you have dealt fairly with me in coming directly to me, and I like to do well by those who do well by me. Just slip this into your pocket."

Mr. Hyer's hand was on the table close by Dick's when he finished speaking, and "this" was a great roll of greenbacks that he tried to thrust under Dick's palm. It was a roll that a man could hardly close his fingers around.

"Oh, no, sir!" Dick exclaimed, hastily drawing back his hand. The hot blood mounted to his face, and he would have made some forcible remarks if Mr. Hyer had not been so extremely polite and gentlemanly. "No, sir. It is the Transport that pays the expense and pays me for my trouble."

"Yes, of course; I understand that," Mr. Hyer replied; "but this is altogether outside of business matters. You have done me a kindness, and I merely want to return a favor. You need have no hesitation in accepting this trifling gift. Of course it will not influence you in the least in what you write."

The gentlemanly, smooth-tongued gambler still held the roll of notes within easy reach.



Dick was on the point of flaring up and exclaiming, "Do you take me for a thief, sir?" but how could he do it with such a gentle, suave man as Mr. Hyer? Perhaps it was really meant only as a kindness, without any intention to bribe him. Still he could not trust himself to say much.

"It is impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, well, don't let me annoy you with urging it upon you," said Hyer, drawing back his hand. "I thought a little money might be useful to you; but no matter. At any rate, let us crack a bottle of wine together. Do you prefer Mumm or Heidsieck?"

"I do not drink wine, thank you," Dick replied. "And I see it is nearly seven o'clock, so I shall barely have time to eat dinner and catch the evening train."

He pushed back his chair and took a step toward the open door, and the gambler followed.

"You see, Mr. Sumner," he said—and he repeated some of his former arguments—"I am sure that a fair-minded man like yourself will see that my business is conducted on an entirely honorable basis."

They were just within the door of the small room, and the great lobby of the hotel, into which the door opened, was crowded with guests recently returned from the races. Mr. Hyer had his left hand upon Dick's right sleeve, as though to



emphasize his words, and his right hand still held the fat roll of notes.

“So good-night, Mr. Sumner.”

While the gambler was uttering the words Dick felt a pressure upon his vest pocket, and instinctively clapped his hand upon the spot. There was the roll of notes stuck endwise into his pocket, and Mr. Hyer had disappeared in the crowd.

It was plain enough what that meant. Hyer had forced the money upon him, against his will, in the hope of influencing his report.

For a second or two Dick was dazed, and the righteous anger showed in every feature of his face. He looked anxiously in every direction, but the gambler had vanished utterly.

“Mr. Hyer!” he called. Of course there was no answer; but several gentlemen idling near by looked at Dick in surprise to see any one in such an excited state in that abode of luxury and pleasure.

Dick took the roll of notes from his pocket and held it in his hand. To throw it upon the table and leave it there was his first impulse; but a second's consideration showed him that that would be foolish. Some one would of course pick it up, and he would have no proof that he had not kept it.

“If only there was some one with me!” he said to himself. But there was no one, and he must make his own way out of the difficulty. He stepped



back into the little room and sat down in his old chair, still holding the roll in his hand, for he would not have it in his pocket. Never had a roll of money looked so utterly detestable to him before; it was an unclean thing, and he loathed it.

For a moment he sat there bending over the table, torn with anger and doubt; not doubt whether he should keep the money, but how he should rid himself of it. It would not have been Dick Sumner, however, to remain in such a condition long.

“Of course!” he exclaimed, straightening up in his chair, “it is plain enough what I must do; but I declare I was so mad for a minute that I didn’t know what I was about. I must go to some respectable person and tell him the whole story, and put the money in his hands to be returned to that smooth-tongued fellow. Mr. Clair is my man—Mr. Clair, the proprietor of the hotel. It’s fortunate I met him this morning and had a talk with him.”

Dick made his way across the crowded lobby to Mr. Clair’s office, still carrying the roll in his hand and holding his hand far out from his body; he would not have the money near him. The door was partly open and he stepped inside.

“Mr. Clair, can I speak with you a moment?” he asked.

“Certainly. Come in and take a chair. Why, what is wrong? You look ill, Mr. Sumner;” and



he arose from his chair and helped Dick into a comfortable seat.

“No, sir; I am quite well,” Dick answered. “But I am afraid that I am rather excited. Will you do me the favor to take this roll of money and count it, Mr. Clair?” And he held out his hand and the great hotel proprietor took the money. Dick felt better the moment it was out of his hands.

“Ten, twenty, thirty, forty” — Mr. Clair said, unrolling the money and counting it; “two hundred and thirty, two hundred and forty, two hundred and fifty. Just two hundred and fifty dollars here, Mr. Sumner. You must have picked a winner at the races this afternoon, I think.”

“No, sir!” Dick exclaimed. “That money was stuffed into my pocket against my will by Mr. Hyer, the bookmaker. It will be a great favor to me if you will seal it up and see that it is returned to him, for I cannot handle it again.”

Then in reply to Mr. Clair’s inquiring looks he went on and told the whole story; what his business was with Mr. Hyer, and how he had refused the money over and over, and how Mr. Hyer had at length forced it into his pocket and disappeared in the crowd.

“I don’t think I ever had anything to hurt me quite as much, Mr. Clair,” he said in concluding. “To think the man should take me for a thief!



That he could imagine I would go back to the office, and home to my mother and sister, with a roll of stolen money in my pocket! Worse than stolen! Why, I might better put my hand in your money drawer than take it in such a way as — as” —

The recital of the story brought the hot blood to Dick's head again. Finding himself unable to finish the sentence, he turned away his head.

“Never mind, my boy.” Mr. Clair got up and shut the door, and laid his hand kindly on Dick's shoulder. “Don't take it too hard. You must make allowances for the man you were dealing with. Perhaps he has met reporters who were willing to listen to such arguments. Indeed, I have met some myself who would not have been a bit alarmed at finding two hundred and fifty dollars in their pockets. But not from the great New York papers,” he added, noticing Dick's look of surprise. “No, I must say that for them. It is only with the small fry.”

“You give me more confidence in human nature, at any rate,” Mr. Clair went on. “I have to deal with thousands and tens of thousands of people here, and my experience often leads me to doubt whether there is a single honest man in the world. But there is one, I'll swear to it, and I am glad to know him. I know you better than you think, for a hotel keeper, like a reporter, must learn to read a man's heart by the outward signs. Some time you may be in need of a friend, my boy; when that



day comes, call on Henry Clair. Come in and eat dinner with me."

On the way home in the train that night Dick concluded that he would say nothing in the office about the attempt to bribe him. There was nothing in the episode that he could reproach himself with, and yet the mere offer of a bribe to him seemed to him to involve some disgrace. There must have been something in his manner, he was afraid, that led the gambler to believe that he could be bought; and the thought worried him. He had nothing to write; before he saw Mr. Hyer he had made up his mind that no unfairness could be proved, however strong the suspicion might be. The gambler's effort at bribery convinced him that something was wrong, and he would have been delighted to make an exposure; but he had no facts to go upon.

Some unimportant matter was given him to investigate in the morning, and when he returned to the office about the middle of the afternoon Dick was startled by a word from the city editor: —

"Mr. Harding has been inquiring for you, Sumner. I think he is disengaged now, and you had better go into his room."

Mr. Harding, the editor-in-chief! In his months in the office Dick had not set foot in the real editor's room, and had seen him only two or three times. A few months before he would have thought nothing of such a summons, for he was accustomed to



talking with Mr. Davis, the editor of *The Russellville Record*. But he had learned what a great man the editor of a big New York paper is, at least in his own office; how autocratic, how unapproachable, how weirdly, wonderfully imposing, a summons from the editor-in-chief sets even the managing editor in a flutter!

“Come in, Sumner,” was Mr. Harding’s greeting. He spoke very pleasantly Dick thought, for so great a man; but his manner was quick and decided, as though he had many reputations to make or mar before sunset. “You have been up at Saratoga, have you?”

“Yes, sir,” Dick answered, “I went up about” —

“No matter! Never mind what about; Mr. Brown will attend to that. And you had a peculiar experience up there, did you?”

Dick started. How could Mr. Harding have heard of his peculiar experience, when he had not mentioned it to a soul in the office?

“Yes, sir,” he answered, “I had a very unpleasant experience.”

“Sit down here and tell me all about it, but briefly, briefly.” And as the editor pointed to a chair Dick wondered how he could find time to listen to so small a matter, with such an awful collection of letters and manuscript and proofs piled before him. “Never mind the news part. Who was it offered you the money?”



“Mr. Hyer, sir,” Dick replied; and in as few words as possible he described the circumstances.

“H’m, Hyer! I thought so. Then the charges against him are true. Bribery is always a confession of weakness, Mr. Sumner. I have a letter here from my friend Clair that will interest you; you may read it.”

Wonderingly, Dick took the letter the editor handed him, and read:—

GRAND UNION HOTEL, Saratoga Springs.

*My dear Mr. Harding,*— If it will not violate any of your office rules, I shall be greatly obliged if you will hand the enclosed check for \$250 to your young reporter who was here to-day, Mr. Richard Sumner, as a slight token of my admiration and esteem.

Mr. Sumner came to me for assistance when an attempt was made to bribe him to suppress news. The money had been forced into his pocket, and he put it at once in my hands to be returned to the owner.

He was so heartbroken over the affair, so grieved that even an attempt of the sort should be made that it really did me good to see him. I owe him something for the new sensation he gave me, and this little check will not nearly pay the bill.

Sincerely yours,

HENRY CLAIR.

“Bother those blushes of mine!” Dick said to himself as he read the letter. “Why in the world is it that the blood always rushes to my head and makes me blush like a girl when anything excites me?”

“It is very kind in Mr. Clair, sir,” he said as he handed the letter back to the editor; “but”—



“Of course not,” Mr. Harding interrupted. “It is not to be thought of. Here is the check; send it back to Mr. Clair yourself with my compliments and regrets. That is all, Mr. Sumner.”

It seemed to Dick that his dismissal was rather curt, but he was not used yet to the ways of great editors with young reporters. He was barely out of the room when a bell tapped.

Any Transport man would have known that it was the editor-in-chief's bell without hearing it. The movements of the office boy on duty would have made that plain. At a tap of the editor-in-chief's bell the office boy flies, because a nod from the great man will put a new boy in his place. For the managing editor's bell he moves with some celerity, for the managing editor is his immediate boss. The city editor's bell summons him usually, when it is struck hard and the tap is repeated. When a reporter calls he is deeply engrossed in affairs of his own. This time it was the bell of the editor-in-chief, and the boy flew past Dick to answer the summons.

“Mr. Brown,” the editor said to the boy; and in a twinkling Mr. Brown stood before his chief.

“What are you paying Sumner, Mr. Brown?” the editor asked.

“Fifteen dollars a week, sir.”

“He's the man who did the Sing Sing story,



is n't he? And that humorous account of the search for Sterling's body?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may raise him to forty dollars, beginning with this week."

"Very well, sir."

That was all; the deed was done. If the Czar of Russia had ordered the beheading of one of his subjects, the order could not have been obeyed more promptly. A newspaper office is an absolute monarchy, and the editor-in-chief is the monarch, particularly when, as is the case with the *Transport*, the editor is also the principal owner. He distributes his favors or his frowns according to his own sweet will. If he had said, "I do not like Sumner's work, let him go," Dick's career in that office would have come to an untimely end. The city editor makes rules for his reporters, but the editor-in-chief sweeps them away with a breath when he chooses.

"Very well, sir," said the city editor; and from that moment Dick's salary was forty dollars a week, besides the ten dollars or more extra that he could make by writing specials.



## CHAPTER VII.

DICK LANDS IN MEXICO WITH A FAMILY.

DR. GOODE took pains to have a talk with Dick a few nights after his unexpected increase of salary.

“I’m not going to congratulate you on your good fortune, Sumner,” he said, “till I see whether it is a good thing for you or the opposite. It may prove to be the worst thing that ever happened you, though I hope not. It all depends upon yourself. You have made a brilliant beginning, and I think you are sure to hold out if you keep yourself in check.

“Above all things, don’t let the size of your head increase; don’t ‘get a swelled head,’ as the boys say. Your falling into favor with the old man is more accident than anything else.”

Dick had often heard that expression used before. The editor-in-chief is generally called “the old man,” even when he happens to be one of the youngest men in the office.

“It’s not because you are such a tremendous fellow that you have been advanced in this way,” the doctor went on. “You have done good work, but other men do good work too. Your refusing to take



a bribe in Saratoga I take no account of at all; that was a matter of course. I should be sorry to think you could have done anything else. In the ordinary course of events, after the good work you have done, you would have been raised in a few months to perhaps twenty-five dollars a week, and then a little higher after a year or so. But the old man has taken a fancy to you and your work, and pushed you ahead with a jump. That thing happens sometimes, and I am glad that it has happened to you. But don't take too much of the credit to yourself. It is luck, chance, fate, providence, whatever you choose to call it; your own merit has precious little to do with it.

"Though it has something, I'll admit," he continued, laying his hand, as he had done before, on Dick's knee. "The old man must have been pleased with some of your articles, as we all were. But be careful of yourself; more careful now than ever. You know what the prince's smile means to the courtier. Your position in the office is better than it has been, for the prince is known to have smiled upon you. But hold your horses."

It did not take long for Dick to find that to be in favor with "the old man" was to be in favor with everybody in the office. The office boys kept fresh mucilage constantly in the bottle on his desk, and there are few stronger signs of good standing in a newspaper office than that. He was often given



special work that was not scheduled on the assignment list at all, with orders to report to the managing editor or the editor-in-chief; and as this work seldom kept him late at night, he had more time to enjoy the delights of the new flat. His clothes were as good now as any reporter could desire, he carried a watch, the last of his debt to Randall was paid, and he had a small bank account. Dick was happy, not only because of these things, but because he was thoroughly in love with his work, as every successful reporter must be.

“You don’t have to go out again to-night, do you, Dick?” his mother asked as he lay comfortably stretched out on a sofa after the meal that was the family’s supper, but Dick’s dinner.

“Yes, I must go back to the office,” he answered; “but I don’t know of anything to keep me late to-night.”

“You’re working too hard, Dick,” his mother went on; “too hard and too much at night. You’ve grown taller since you came to New York, but you’re much thinner and paler. Where are those beautiful roses you used to have in your cheeks?”

“Oh, bother the roses, mother,” Dick laughed; “they’ve washed off, I suppose, like the printer’s ink I used to have on my hands. And I don’t see why night work should hurt me. You know what Dr. Goode says: ‘It’s not working at night that



hurts a man, but playing at night.' I don't do much playing by day or night. I get my pleasure out of my work, and that pays better. I'll run down to the office, and I'm pretty sure I can be home by ten o'clock. Then I'll have just the best night's sleep you ever saw, for I do feel a little tired."

With this idea in his mind Dick went down to the office, and the city editor's greeting upset all his plans not only for that evening, but for many evenings to come.

"Sumner," Mr. Brown asked, "how soon can you be ready to sail for Mexico?"

It was a blow to Dick in some respects and a pleasant surprise in others; but he promptly answered:—

"I'm ready now, sir."

"Well," Mr. Brown said, smiling at Dick's readiness to start for anywhere at a moment's notice, "there is n't any steamer going just at this minute; but there's one at noon to-morrow that you can take. It is one of Mr. Harding's jobs, and he will give you instructions when he comes in at nine o'clock. You are to interview President Diaz for him; and we prefer to have you go by steamer rather than by rail, because that will give you a chance to touch at Cuba and some other points and write us some descriptive letters."

"I will give you an order for money to cover your expenses," Mr. Brown continued, "and we can



send your salary to your family while you are away, if you like. You will be able to give us some good letters from Cuba and Mexico."

Dick was sure of that. Summer had changed to fall, and fall was rapidly turning into winter; and to visit the tropics in winter, to go out of the cold and slush of New York into a region of eternal summer, was something that he had dreamed of, but hardly hoped ever to realize.

"President Diaz speaks English fluently," Mr. Harding told him when he arrived, "so you will have no trouble on that score. Of course the language of the country is Spanish. Here is a letter of introduction to the American minister in Mexico that will open the way for you.

The good night's sleep that Dick had arranged to have did not come. A large part of the night was spent in packing and making ready, and when at length he got to bed he had too many things to think of to fall asleep.

"Remember that you are all we have, Dick," his mother sobbed when she bade him good-by in the morning; "don't be rash, for I do not see what we should do if anything should happen to you."

"It's hardly more than a picnic, mother," he replied as gayly as he could. "In four or five weeks I'll be with you again; and won't I have great stories to tell you about what I've seen!"

Florrie and Darling went to the wharf with him,



and their waving handkerchiefs were the last impression that Dick had of New York as the steamship Alameda drew out from her pier and crept down the Hudson River.

The upper and lower bays, the Narrows, the Quarantine islands, the forts, and big summer hotels along shore were all familiar sights to him, but life aboard ship was like being in a new world. It was his first ocean voyage, and he was prepared to enjoy every novelty and make the most of it.

It was a surprise to him that the ship was more Spanish than English. The officers all spoke English and so did four or five of the passengers; but the waiters spoke Spanish, the bills of fare were printed in both Spanish and English, the cooking was Spanish, and in the cabins and staterooms were posted notices from which he learned his first Spanish sentence:—

*Aqui no se permite fumar* — “Smoking is not permitted here.”

It was a necessary warning, for nine tenths of the passengers were Cubans, dark-skinned little fellows with cigarettes forever between their lips.

All these things Dick noticed before the ship passed Sandy Hook, for after that there was an unpleasant period of two days when he lay in his berth seasick and forlorn. When he appeared on deck again the steamer was below Hatteras, and a school of porpoises were playing antics in front of the bow.



“Going to Havana, señor?” he was asked as he stood leaning over the forward rail watching the graceful movements of the fish; and looking up he saw that the speaker was a tall young Spaniard, perhaps two or three years older than himself, handsomely dressed, but with a look in his face that Dick did not particularly like.

“Yes,” he replied; “to Havana first, then on to Vera Cruz and Mexico.”

“Good!” the Spaniard exclaimed. “I too am going to Mexico; we shall be friends. It is my native city — Mexico — and I am going home.”

Dick brought his interviewing powers to bear, and in five minutes he learned that the Mexican was Señor don Manuel de Comacho, a lieutenant in the Mexican navy, who had been spending a year in Paris, and who was now going home with his young wife and an infant two or three months old.

“But we are not in favor there now,” Comacho laughed; “my father was Secretary of the Treasury before Diaz became President, but now he is out. Perhaps I may get into trouble by going back.”

“You are very free in telling your affairs to a stranger,” Dick thought; but he answered pleasantly, glad to have some English-speaking person to talk to. At the dinner table he was surprised to find the lieutenant’s wife as fair as a lily; a pretty young woman enough but proud, particularly of her complexion, for in Mexico a white skin is thought



the perfection of beauty. She spoke nothing but Spanish, however, so Dick could only bow when he was introduced.

“To-morrow we shall be in Havana,” Comacho said. “We might go about the city together. I shall be a useful guide,” he added, laughing, “for you speak no Spanish, and you would lose yourself.”

Dick ridiculed the idea of his losing himself anywhere, but it suited him very well to go ashore with some one who knew the place. Forty-eight hours the Alameda was to lie there before continuing her voyage across the Gulf of Mexico to Vera Cruz.

It was just as the sun was rising that the vessel steamed into Havana harbor, saluting with her brass cannon as she passed the Morro Castle. The scene filled Dick with rapture, as it does every one who is not too familiar with it. The pink and blue and yellow houses of the city, the fleet of vessels at anchor, the church bells ringing with a tone so different from the bells at home; the fort on one side of the entrance and the oldtime castle on the other; and better than all, to Dick's mind, a man on the opposite shore leading a flock of sheep down to the water to bathe, with a long crook in his hand, just like the biblical shepherds. It was fairyland under a hot sun; and by the time that he and Comacho had visited neighboring sugar estates and tobacco plantations, and had seen the great Tacon



Theatre, and eaten cooling ices in the Café da Louvre, and driven through the Prado, Dick declared that he had enough to write about for six months.

“But I do not see you taking any notes,” said Comacho; for Dick had told him that he was a newspaper man.

“No,” Dick answered, “I never take notes. They only bother me. Sometimes a name or a date I put down, but nothing more. A thing that makes an impression upon me I never forget; a thing that makes no impression is not worth writing about.”

Comacho's affairs were soon to make an impression upon Dick that he little suspected. The Alameda dropped anchor several days later in the roadstead of Vera Cruz, a mile or more from shore and just to the south of the great Castle of San Juan de Ulloa, and the health officer of the port came out with several assistants in a handsome boat. The officer made his inspection and was rowed away, and five minutes later Dick found Comacho seated upon the grating at the stern, his face buried in his hands weeping bitterly.

It was new to Dick to see a man shed tears, though he remembered that in Saratoga his throat had become rather lumpy while he was talking to Mr. Clair. But he had traveled with the young Mexican and eaten with him and met his wife, so he felt that he owed him some allegiance.



“Why, what’s the matter, old fellow?” he asked, laying his hand kindly on Comacho’s shoulder. “What are you crying for?”

“Oh, I’m in great trouble, Sumner,” the lieutenant answered. “A friend of mine who came out in the doctor’s boat tells me that I am suspected of carrying dispatches from my father to enemies of the government who have gone abroad, and that I am to be arrested as soon as I go ashore.”

“Is that all!” Dick exclaimed. “Why, that’s nothing to cry over, man. If they can’t prove anything against you, they’ll have to let you go again.”

“Ah, it is not here as it is in your country!” the lieutenant sobbed. “If they get me in jail once, they may keep me there for years. Oh! oh! oh!”

“Say, now you stop this!” Dick commanded; he was becoming disgusted at the spectacle. “You are an officer in the navy, and you have a family aboard the ship to take care of, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to sit down and cry. If you brace up and act like a man, I’ll try to help you out of the scrape.”

“Oh, you can’t, you can’t!” Comacho replied; “you are only a stranger here, and you can do nothing.” But he took out his handkerchief and tried to dry his eyes.

“Can’t I?” Dick asked. “Well, here’s the first thing. If you have any contraband papers with





"WHAT'S THE MATTER, OLD FELLOW?"







you, go down to your stateroom and read them and burn them."

"I have none — not one," Comacho answered.

"Very well. Now where will they arrest you?"

"At the Custom House mole. We all have to take small boats from the ship to the shore and land at the Custom House mole, and the minute I land there they will arrest me."

"Then don't land at the Custom House mole!" Dick exclaimed. "Pay one of the boatmen to land you up or down the coast; anywhere but at the mole."

"They would n't dare do it," Comacho answered. "It would be as much as their heads were worth."

Dick took a turn across the deck with his hands in his pockets, deep in thought.

"How long have you been out of the country?" he asked a moment later.

"More than a year and a half."

"Then you must have changed in appearance!" Dick exclaimed; "you can't look just the same as you did. Why not disguise yourself as much as you can, and you go ashore alone and try to pass the officers undetected; and I will follow later with your wife and baggage."

"I believe I could do that!" Comacho answered, his face brightening. "I have raised a little beard since I went away and I am stouter. I think I can



slip past the officers into the city, and in the city my father's friends will help me."

"You can take my big ulster and steamer cap; they will nearly cover you up," Dick said. "Besides, they will expect to see you with a wife and child; your going alone will help to fool them."

"And you will bring my wife and baby ashore? and the baggage, the six trunks? O señor, señor, you know not how much you do for me! Take them to the Hotel Veracruzana, and this evening bring them to the railway station. The train starts for Mexico city at nine, and I will meet you in the station — unless, indeed, I am in prison."

Under the influence of Dick's energy the Mexican was becoming quite bold. The tears were gone now, and in the big ulster and peaked steamer cap his own mother would hardly have recognized him.

"You must explain everything to your wife," Dick cautioned him, "for you know she cannot understand me. And impress it upon her that she is not to say one word to anybody till I have her safely landed in the hotel."

In a minute more Comacho was in one of the small boats, under a curved canvas awning like the cover of a prairie wagon, on his way to the mole. Anxiously Dick watched and saw him land, saw him ascend the stone steps, and saw him go under the big stone arch that leads from the Custom House



into the city. He had passed the officers without recognition, and was safely landed in Vera Cruz.

Up to this time Dick had thought very little about himself in the matter. Comacho had been his companion for ten or eleven days, and when he was in trouble Dick was glad to help him. But the comical position in which he had put himself began to make itself evident when the Mexican's trunks were hoisted out of the hold.

“It's one of the funniest things I ever saw—this part of it,” he said to himself, while the baggage was coming up. “Here's a young reporter leaves New York a single man, and remains single all the way to Vera Cruz, with just the one trunk he started with. Then he lands at Vera Cruz with rather a pretty wife to whom he can't say a word because he does n't understand her language, and a dear, sweet, little baby that he does n't even know the name of, and six more strapping big trunks. I wonder whether I'm going to have adventures like this all through Mexico? I'm beginning well, at any rate.

“There's a more serious side to it, too; but I am going into that with my eyes open. I am going ashore with the wife and child of a man who is wanted by the government, and I may easily be mistaken for him and be arrested. But that would be too good to be true. Would n't the New York boys be jealous if I should walk right into a Mexi-



can prison the minute I landed? The story of the arrest would be worth at least two columns, and the court proceedings ought to make at least two fine articles. Then there might be some English-speaking prisoners in the jail who could tell me a lot of capital stories, and after a few days the American minister would have me out with great *éclat*, and my liberation would make another article. But that's too good luck even to think about."

It required the largest of the rowboats to carry Dick's party and their trunks ashore, and when they landed at the mole the boatmen shouldered the trunks and took them to the open gallery in which they were to be examined by the Custom House officers.

Dick opened his own trunk first to give Señora Comacho time to get out her keys, and the inspector gave its contents hardly more than a glance. But the Mexican lady did not understand, and Dick explained to her, by holding up the key of his own trunk, that he must have her keys. He began to unlock her trunks when she produced them, but the inspector stopped him.

"Oh, it's all right, is it?" Dick said. What the inspector said was all Greek to him, but he understood the meaning of the motions the man made toward the big gate. "Don't care to look at them, don't you? That's because they belong to a good-looking young lady. You Custom House fellows



are all alike, whether you speak English or Spanish."

They were at liberty now to take their trunks to the hotel, but how to get them there was more than Dick could see. He wanted a dray; but he could see the street through the broad arch, and there was no wheeled vehicle in sight. He did not know, of course, that all such carrying is done on porters' shoulders in Vera Cruz. When he stepped through the arch to look up and down the street a dozen porters followed him back to the trunks.

"These porters will carry your trunks to the hotel," said the inspector, not in so many words, but by pointing first to the porters, then to the trunks.

Those little porters! Some of them looked like boys of twelve or fourteen. All were bare-headed and bare-legged, and their tawny little legs did not look strong enough to carry much of a load.

"Si! si!" said Dick. He had learned that much Spanish on the steamer. "Hotel Veracruzana."

The undersized porters shouldered the heavy trunks with ease and filed out into the street, seven of them, one after another, Dick and Señora Comacho, the latter with the baby in her arms, bringing up the rear.

"This *is* rich!" Dick exclaimed as they marched solemnly up the hot street. "What would n't I give to have Dr. Goode and Jack Randall see this pro-



cession; and mother and Florrie, too. But I think some of them would be wanting to know where I got this wife and baby."

"This the hotel?" he wondered, when the porters turned into a sombre stone building with a display of canned goods on the shelves inside. "Why, this is a grocery store."

But a moment later he took it to be a cigar store, then a barroom, then a restaurant. It was the hotel office nevertheless, and the lady with the baby remained standing by the door while Dick went up to the clerk to negotiate.

Such a hotel office he had never seen before. It was a large room, certainly fifty or sixty feet square, with a counter running partly across near the front, and shelves back of the counter filled with cans and bottles, and all the rear part of the room occupied with chairs and marble-topped tables.

The clerk was full of smiles, as a matter of course. No words were needed to tell him what was wanted. Here was a family just arrived by the steamer, and they desired accommodations. He summoned a copper-colored boy to show them to their room, and bowed profoundly.

"Yes, but hold on here!" Dick exclaimed as the truth flashed upon him. "This is not a family, you know; this is parts of two families. We've come in sections. The lady wants a room, and so do I; but we want them separate."



The clerk raised his eyebrows in astonishment at Dick's rapid English.

"Two rooms," said Dick; "two — two;" and he held up two fingers.

"Dos?" said the clerk. He understood the word two, and repeated it in Spanish.

"Wait till I bring the lady," Dick answered. "I can't tell her what I want to say," he added under his breath; "but she ought to see for herself, and explain it."

And so she did. A few rapid sentences exchanged between the lady and the clerk, with many gesticulations, set everything straight. Señora Comacho and her child were led away in one direction, and Dick was escorted in another to a room scarcely smaller than his flat in New York.

"They're determined to make a family man of me," he said as he glanced about the room; "and it would take a good-sized family to occupy this room properly. Four big beds, four washstands, four rocking-chairs, brick floor, and enough windows for a whole house."

By the middle of the afternoon he had seen most of the sights of Vera Cruz, including the great hospitals that once were monasteries, and the Alameda, the Trianon, and the ugly black buzzards that clean the streets, and was sure that he had material for one or two good articles. He must, he knew, escort his fair charge down to dinner; and he



had returned to the hotel for that purpose and was trying to devise a way of sending a message to her. when the lady herself appeared.

She seemed to be much excited about something, and the moment she saw Dick she gave an exclamation of surprise and beckoned him to follow her up the stairs.

Dick stood for a moment undecided.

"This is awkward," he thought. "Next wife I have shall speak English, sure; then I'll know what I'm about."

But the lady continued to beckon, and there was nothing Dick could do but follow. He followed her to the door of her room; and there in the room, placidly smoking cigarettes, sat the lieutenant, Señor don Manuel de Comacho.

"O Comacho, this is very reckless!" Dick exclaimed, stepping in and hastily closing the door.

"Oh, no," Comacho replied with a look of the most intense cunning in his face; "I fooled them nicely. I came in the back way."

Dick hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry. After all his trouble in the morning, all his well-laid plans, the Mexican had deliberately walked into the hotel and flattered himself for his shrewdness because he came in by the backdoor.

"You are too brave," Dick said, certain that the lieutenant could not appreciate the sarcasm; "you Mexicans do not seem to know what fear is. If



your whole navy is officered by men like you, Comacho, it is invincible."

"A Mexican knows no fear, Sumner," the lieutenant answered proudly; and as Dick made a mental picture of this particular Mexican sitting on the grating shedding seas of tears because he was in fear of being arrested, he found it necessary to step to the window to admire the scenery.

Brave as he was, the lieutenant would not run the risk of going down the public room to dinner; he meekly held the baby, while Dick and the señora dined, and food was afterward sent up to him.

By a quarter before nine in the evening Dick and his companions were in the railway station, Comacho still disguised in the big ulster and the steamer cap. The railroad is operated on the English plan, with compartment cars, each compartment large enough to hold eight persons, with a door on each side. The train stood beside a platform, with the station lights burning brightly on one side and nothing but intense darkness on the other. The party seated themselves in their compartment, and in three minutes more the train would have been under way and Comacho out of present danger, when they heard the tramp, tramp, tramp! of a squad of men marching down the platform.

"I'm gone!" Comacho exclaimed; and instantly buried his face in his hands and began to weep.

Before Dick could reply, the squad of six men,



with an officer at their head, halted near the compartment door, and the officer stepped up to the door, and seeing a lady inside, removed his hat.

He pressed a paper, an official-looking document, into Comacho's hands, said something in Spanish, and politely stepped aside to give his prisoner an opportunity to speak to his wife.

"Oh, I'm arrested! I'm arrested!" Comacho wailed; and he frantically wrung his hands, while great tears coursed down his cheeks.

"You ought to be!" Dick declared, thoroughly disgusted at the fellow's cowardice. "You blubbering baby, you ought to be hanged! But you're not gone yet, if you have the heart of a mouse. Do you see that door on the opposite side of the car? I don't know where it leads to, but you do. Open that door, if you're a man, and disappear in the darkness."



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A VOYAGE TO PORTO RICO.

NO, no!" the lieutenant moaned; "I can't do it; I can't do it! It's all up with poor Comacho."

He put his head down again and burst into another flood of tears. His wife threw her arms around his neck and wept hysterically; and to complete the picture the baby began to cry.

The first warning bell gave notice that in another minute the train would start.

"If you are determined to do nothing for yourself, Comacho," Dick said, "I will stay behind with you if I can be of any assistance."

"No," Comacho moaned, "leave me to my fate; I am past help. If you will go on with my wife and child to the capital, it will be the greatest favor you can do me. Here, take the ulster and cap; they are no use to me now."

Pulling off the heavy coat and giving a last embrace to his wife and baby, the bold lieutenant stepped out of the compartment and gave himself up to the officer, and at that moment the last bell tapped and the train moved off.

Dick was in anything but a comfortable situation, with an all-night's ride before him with the hysterical



young woman and the crying baby; but he looked upon it as a valuable experience, worth a column or two sometime, perhaps, as a phase of Mexican life.

“It was rather stretching a point,” he reflected, “to try to help the fellow escape. If he had been a criminal, of course I should n’t have done it; or even if there had been any regular charge against him; but a mere suspicion of a slight political offence is different. However, there’s no use trying to help such a fellow as that. Why, an American boy ten years old would have more grit.”

The train had not gone far before Dick found himself holding the baby, in an awkward fashion enough; and in an hour or two both mother and child were asleep. He did not know that the darkness was hiding from him some of the grandest scenery on the continent; snow-capped mountain peaks, and vast plains thousands of feet below, with their scores of little cities, with burnished domes and spires on their cathedrals. He did not even know, shut up in the close compartment, that when the train reached the foot of the mountain the ordinary engine was exchanged for a great double-headed locomotive, with two smokestacks and two engineers.

He did know, however, that between midnight and daylight the air was unpleasantly cold; and he was not at all sorry when at eight o’clock in the



morning the train drew into the great station in the city of Mexico.

In the midst of her preparations for getting out, the Señora Comacho pressed a little slip of paper into Dick's hand with something written upon it. It gave him a start, for he did not know what it could mean. Was the lieutenant's wife trying to begin a flirtation with him? That was so absurd that it almost made Dick laugh; but he had heard that Spanish women are given to that sort of thing.

When he looked at the paper he saw the words, written in a fine Italian hand:—

“Calle Estampa de Jesus Maria, Numero Cinto.”

In his ignorance of the language he could only look at the lady and smile and bow.

“Maybe she's asking me to call and see her,” he reflected. “Calle may mean ‘call ye’; perhaps it's an invitation to meet her under the shadow of the cathedral spire at midnight. It's a pity I'm not more romantic.”

He kept the paper in his hand, not knowing what else to do with it; and when they reached the street and the lady held up her finger to the nearest cabman, and pointed smilingly to the paper, he saw that his suspicions were unfounded. The words were nothing but the address to which the lady desired to be driven — the address of the lieutenant's father.

“Si, si!” the driver exclaimed when Dick handed him the paper; “Haysoos Mar-eea, Numero Cinto.”



“‘Jesus Maria’ is rather an odd name for a street,” Dick thought; “but it does n’t sound quite as irreverent when they pronounce it Haysoos Mar-eea, as these Mexicans do.”

Dick kept his eyes wide open, as usual, and he had not gone far before he discovered that almost every street in the city is named after some saint. And, more than that, that every block of every street has a separate name, a method bewildering to most strangers.

He saw his fair charge and her child safely within the doorway of a fine old stone mansion, and ten minutes later he was in his room in the Hotel Iturbide, the vast building that was erected by the Emperor Iturbide for a palace.

To present his letter to the American minister was Dick’s first work; and he went about it so promptly that before dark he was informed that President Diaz would give him an audience in the palace the following morning at eleven o’clock.

The exterior of the palace was a disappointment. With its long range of low, plain walls, it reminded Dick of the old Madison Square Garden. But when the six soldiers at the gate presented arms as he drove in, his opinion of it rose; and he was soon following an orderly through an endless series of handsome apartments, to the throne room in which he was to meet the President.

“I am glad to meet a representative of one of



the foremost American newspapers," the President of Mexico said as he gave Dick's hand a warm shake.

And Dick was delighted to be so agreeably surprised in the President. The Comacho incident had given him a bad impression of the Mexicans; but here was a Mexican of a very different sort.

"It would be hard to make this man shed tears," he thought as he looked admiringly at the handsome man by his side. "No nonsense here. Six feet tall, if he's an inch; straight as an arrow, darker than a copper cent, muscles firm as iron."

"They call me the Aztec," the President laughed, when the conversation turned upon his personality. "I thank them for doing me justice, for I am of almost pure Indian blood. Study the people while you are here, Mr. Sumner, and you will find that no man need blush to be called an Aztec. You will hear of me that I have spent seven days in the saddle with no food but a handful of meal. It is true. Yes" (and his rich dark eyes flashed), "and I can do it again, if my country requires the service."

After a conversation of nearly an hour the President conducted Dick into several of the state apartments, to show him the portraits of famous Mexicans.

"All this is Maximilian!" he exclaimed, waving his hand toward the handsome mirrors, the gilded



chairs, the glistening chandeliers. "Poor Maximilian! He did much to ornament our capital."

That evening Dick received an unexpected call from the minister.

"You are acquainted in the Calle Estampa de Jesus Maria?" the minister asked, smiling; "at numero cinco, number five? You have friends there?"

"I have been there twice," Dick answered — "once to see Lieutenant Comacho's wife safely home, and once to make the call of courtesy, inquiring after her welfare."

"I see," the minister said; "there is no harm done; but if I were you I should not call there again. There are wheels within wheels in this country. The Comachos are under the displeasure of the government, and it is not safe to have much to do with them. I can only give you a hint."

"Yet this is a republic!" Dick exclaimed.

The minister smiled.

"Your friend Comacho has been brought up from Vera Cruz," he said, "and is now in the capital — in the Belen."

"The Belen?" Dick repeated inquiringly.

"Yes; our famous prison. You remember the poem, 'Storming the Belen Gate'? It is the same old Belen, still a prison. Comacho is there; and it is a very uncomfortable place, I assure you."

"And how long will they keep him there?" Dick asked.



“Till the government sees fit to let him out,” the minister said. “The *habeas corpus* is merely an ornament here. When a man once goes to prison—but I must remember that I am talking to a newspaper man. It does not do for a minister to express himself too freely.”

Two days later Dick and the minister ate luncheon in private with President Diaz; and Dick lost no opportunity to make short excursions to neighboring towns and into the country. He explored the great cathedral, the largest church building on the American continent; he visited the floating gardens, the base of the volcano Popocatepetl, the famous Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadeloupe; he consorted with the pure Indians in the country and walked with the water-carriers as they worked; he delved here and there and everywhere for facts; and no man ever saw more of the Mexican capital in a week than Dick did.

But with all the sight-seeing he did not neglect the writing.

“A hod-carrier could write good letters with such facts as I have,” he said to himself. “I must get them on paper while they are fresh in my mind.”

Night after night he toiled away in his room; and as the letters went home by rail, the early ones were appearing while he was still in the Mexican capital.

“I feel as if I ought to call upon Comacho at the



Belen," he said to the minister when the time had nearly come for his stay to end. "He is a cowardly fellow, but it seems unkind to go off without bidding him good-by."

"I will take you there," the minister replied; "you can go safely with me."

Dick's work had taken him inside many prisons, but he had never seen anything quite as gloomy and depressing as the interior of the Belen. A guard was sent for Comacho, and he was brought to the stone-paved reception room with manacles on his feet, and coatless, but with a gaudy striped serape or Mexican blanket about his shoulders. There was a beard of many days' growth upon his face, and altogether he looked wretched and forlorn.

He burst into tears, as usual, as soon as he caught sight of Dick.

"I have no hope of getting out," he moaned; "none; I am ill-fed, ill-treated, dirty. I should never have come back to this wretched country."

The scene was too painful to stand long, and Dick cut it as short as possible. He wished the lieutenant a speedy deliverance and bade him good-by; and that was the last he saw of Señor don Manuel de Comacho.

"I have been particularly impressed with one thing in Mexico," he said to the minister after they had left the prison. "It seems to me that the best people in this country are the Aztecs; the Indians,



as we call them, for want of a better term. Where they have not been contaminated by associating with the conquering whites, the Spanish, Portuguese, and people of other nations, they are a remarkably fine race — brave, honest, often handsome; altogether superior to the mixed Spanish people, who form the aristocracy here.”

“It would hardly do for me to express an opinion on the subject,” the minister replied, “but I think your powers of observation do you great credit.”

While Dick was on his way home, toiling away with his pencil even in the cars and on the steamship, he had no idea of the great success he had made of his expedition. He did not see a copy of the *Transport* while he was away; but many other people saw it and read and enjoyed the letters of the bright young correspondent from Cuba and Mexico. In the *Transport* office they were considered so good that his name, Richard Sumner, in full was signed to each letter; and other newspapers liked them, too, so well that they were copied all over the country. He was making his name known, and favorably known, all over the land.

“It’s lucky,” he said to himself over and over, “that I made it a rule to write each subject while it was fresh. It makes a perfect jumble in a man’s head, traveling so fast in such strange countries. If I had merely made notes, I’m afraid I should be all mixed up. I hardly feel like Dick Sumner, any-



how, after this strange experience. I should n't be a bit surprised to find myself wearing white cotton trousers rolled above the knee and a white shirt flying outside my waistband, like some of the natives on the coast. But I never shall forget Comacho, whatever happens. Poor old Comacho! He's an awful baby, but I'm sorry for him."

It was shortly after noon when the steamer landed Dick in New York, and he determined to run into the office first to shake hands, before going home to enjoy a few hours of rest that he felt he had earned. He imagined that the boys would be glad to see him again, and he was sure that he would be glad to see the boys. He sprang up the stairs two or three steps at a time.

"Hello, Sumner! what are you doing here?" the city editor exclaimed as Dick walked through the big room. "Did n't you get my cable in Havana?"

It was very different from the greeting he had expected.

"Cable!" Dick repeated; "I've had no cable. I have n't heard a word from the office since I went away."

"I was afraid it had miscarried since I got no answer," the editor went on. "You were ordered to go on to Porto Rico. I suppose you don't know yet that your letters have made a great hit; but that's the fact. Everybody is copying them, and the old man says you must keep on striking while



your iron is hot. You've hit off those Spanish countries in grand style, and you're booked to make a tour of Porto Rico, the only other Spanish island of the West Indies. But Mr. Harding will tell you all about it when he comes down."

"I'll run up home and see the folks and be back in time to meet him."

"Yes, that will do it. He'll send you down in the first steamer, I'm pretty sure. There's a direct steamer from here to Porto Rico."

Dick carried both joy and mourning with him to the flat — joy over his return, mourning over the necessity of his going away again almost immediately.

"Why, that will be another month's journey!" his mother exclaimed; "and just when you've made yourself so famous, too. I'm so glad you signed your name to those beautiful letters, Dick."

This was the first intimation Dick had that his name had been signed to the letters. His mother had carefully saved the papers that had the letters in, and there, sure enough, was his name at the end of every one — Richard Sumner — in bold capitals. Dick was as much pleased about it as anybody, for he knew the vast difference to the writer between an anonymous article and one with a signature.

He took out a pocketful of letters that had been waiting for him in the office, and almost the first



one opened was from the Benedict and Jackson Syndicate, asking him to write them a series of tropical letters. Another was from one of the great illustrated weeklies, asking for a page article on Mexico and the Mexicans. They almost upset Dick for a moment, all these evidences of success, pouring in upon him at once. The publishers' letters he passed over to his mother and Florrie without a word.

“God bless you, my dear, dear boy!” his mother exclaimed, after she and Florrie had read the letters. She threw her arms around his neck; and when Florrie did the same thing from the other side, they almost smothered him. “It’s no more than you deserve; not a bit. Nobody knows as well as I do how hard you work, nor what a good boy you are.

“Oh, now, listen to me!” she went on, laughing and crying by turns; “calling him a boy! Calling Richard Sumner, the great newspaper correspondent, a boy! But you’ll always be a boy to your old mother, won’t you, Dick?”

“That I will!” Dick exclaimed, “whatever happens. But do you know these tears remind me of a funny thing I saw in the railway car down in Mexico. I’ll tell you about it after a while. I was almost drowned in tears down there — not my own, though. I don’t see how people could think those letters amounted to much, for I had to write them in the most outrageous places; sometimes in my



cabin when the ship was rolling; sometimes in the cars; once on one end of a table in a Mexican restaurant while a lot of Spaniards were playing monte on the other end; and one I wrote while sitting on a rock on the side of the volcano Popocatepetl."

"But we'll make up for all that botheration to-night," he rattled on. "We'll have a regular feast after Darling comes home from work; that oyster supper we missed before. Oh, you ought to see the little Mexican oysters!"

"What's that about an oyster supper!" Darling exclaimed as he entered the room. "I can hear the word oysters through a brick wall."

"Hello, Darling, old man! Ain't I glad to see you again, though!"

"And ain't I glad to have you back!" Darling retorted, wringing Dick's hand. "And back in such shape, too. Oh, you've done yourself proud, Dick. Everybody has read your letters, and everybody likes them. And I'm so glad, Dick," — he lowered his voice a little and looked toward the door, for Mrs. Sumner and Florrie had stepped out to see after Dick's trunk, — "I'm so glad the first thing you think of is home. So many of the fellows would think first of having a rousing time with the boys."

"Pshaw!" Dick interrupted; "if a man can't have a good time at home, where can he have it?"



“That’s my idea. But some fellows don’t think so. I knew almost from the start that you were a fellow who would follow his ideals, Dick. Just let you get it into your head that the proper thing, the manly thing, was to be fast, to be a good fellow in the little clubs, to play poker and drink cocktails, and you’d have gone into it strong, and it would have run you to the dogs in no time. But your good sense and good principles led you the other way, and you’re just as hearty in your work as you might have been in deviltry. Whatever you set up for your ideal, that you’d follow to the death. You don’t know how much I think of you, old man. There’s no nonsense about you, either; not a bit. Shake again.”

“Well,” Dick laughed, anxious to change the subject, “we were saying something about an oyster supper, I think. We must have it to-night, for Mr. Brown tells me they’re going to send me right off to Porto Rico. That means another month’s journey, I suppose. We’ll have the supper to-night after you come home from the office; just mother and Florrie, you and myself; ‘us four and no more,’ as the rhyme goes.”

“Of course it’s understood that I pay half the expense,” Darling said. “But I’m sorry you’re going right off again — and glad too; when do you start?”

“Not settled yet,” Dick answered. “I’m to see



the old man about it this afternoon. But in the first steamer, I suppose."

The neighbors in the flat had grown accustomed to the late hours kept by the two newspaper men. At first they had been very suspicious. Dick and Darling must be gamblers, they thought, to be out so late every night; or perhaps they were actors; but they learned the truth after a few weeks.

"That old yarn about living in New York for twenty years without knowing your next-door neighbors," Dick said one day, after some one had been asking a great many questions of Florrie, "may be true to some extent. But I notice our neighbors keep pretty well informed about our affairs."

At the supper that night, which began at half-past two and lasted for several hours, because there was so much to talk about, Dick made an important discovery. He had had very little to do with any women but his mother and sister; but when he saw Darling watching with admiring eyes every move that Florrie made, and helping her to the choice bits of celery and the fattest oysters, and saw Florrie showing Darling many little attentions, he was shrewd enough to draw a conclusion that pleased him very much.

"You must appreciate me while you have me, mother," Dick laughed while they were eating; "and you must pet me up as much as you can, sis, for Porto Rico is all settled. This is Tuesday night



(or rather it's Wednesday morning now), and I'm to sail on Thursday morning at eleven o'clock. I'm to go in a freight steamer, too, but she's said to be a good, safe one; a British steamer called the Smeaton Tower, that's chartered by the company. The next passenger ship does n't sail for ten days, so I engaged passage in the freighter, which goes on Thursday. I'm to share the captain's cabin with him; and if he turns out to be a good fellow, it ought to be a pleasant voyage."

Dick insisted that his mother and Florrie and Darling must all go to see him off, because the Smeaton Tower was lying in the upper bay near the Statue of Liberty, and he would be taken off to her with the captain and supercargo in a tug from the foot of Wall Street, and it would give them a pleasant little sail.

"Having a supercargo I think is a good point," he laughed. "It's quite a reminder of Robinson Crusoe, is n't it, to be talking about the supercargo. He's the man, of course, who has charge of the cargo, and sees that the right stuff is landed at each port. You know the steamer goes all around the island, touching at every port. And there'll be no chance to send any letters up till I return, because our steamer will be the first one back. But I've left eight Mexican letters in the office, so you'll have the extreme pleasure of seeing my name in the paper two or three times a week while I'm away."



“And you can't imagine how kind the old man is, Darling,” he went on. “I asked him for permission to write some letters for Benedict and Jackson's Syndicate and the Illustrated Weekly, and he told me I should write wherever I chose; that he was glad I had the opportunity.”

“He's a brick!” Darling exclaimed. “He never forgets that he was a young fellow once himself.”

When Dick climbed aboard the Smeaton Tower he had barely time to wave his handkerchief to his friends, for the tug turned about immediately for the city, and the steamer was put under way.

The vessel was an agreeable surprise. Dick had never seen her before, and as she was a freighter he rather expected to find her a dirty, old tub with tar on her decks. But she was neat as a pin, a strong iron ship of about two thousand five hundred tons, high forward and aft and low amidships, with the coziest of cabins aft, fitted with substantial mahogany furniture, and a little fireplace for use in cold climates.

“Make yourself at home in the stateroom,” said Captain Godfree, a jolly little Englishman from Plymouth. “You're to sleep in my bunk and I take the broad sofa. I must be on the bridge till we're out of the harbor, but you'll find your baggage all in there.”

“Well, if this is a freighter, give me a freighter to travel in every time,” Dick said to himself as he entered the captain's stateroom. “Why, it's as



big as any four staterooms I ever saw, and here's a regular library in the bookcase. And here's the chronometer; and drawers under the bunk that I'm to sleep in, and everything fitted up in grand style with mahogany and marble. I'd no idea they made these freighters so comfortable. Now this will be a real voyage; more like the voyages I've read about. The passenger steamers are too much like hotels to suit me."

Dick was soon on the bridge with the captain and pilot and supercargo, watching once more the receding shores of New York harbor. He was not familiar enough with the ship yet to notice that the two mates were doing nearly all the work on deck, and that only one or two seamen were in sight. When the vessel was well outside of Sandy Hook the pilot was taken off in his boat, and Captain Godfree took command.

"Come and take the bridge, Mr. Turner!" he called to the second mate.

"Now, then, Mr. Gran," he said to the big first mate, who was on deck just below the bridge, "we'll go and stir up those lubbers in the foc's'le."

"They're full of bad whiskey, nearly every man before the mast," Captain Godfree exclaimed, turning to Dick. "Carried on board dead, some of them. It's always so every time we start out; and it's not as much their fault, the poor duffers, as it's the fault of the wretched shipping system in New



York. We'll soon straighten them out, anyway. Come along, Mr. Gran."

The captain and first mate went up forward and threw open the iron doors of the fore-castle, which was flush with the deck. One or two limp men half-crawled and half-fell out when the first door was opened.

"Stand up here, you drunken scoundrels!" the two officers shouted; and each seized his man by the collar and raised him to his feet, shaking him soundly.

They found a flask of liquor in the pocket of each man, which they threw overboard without ceremony. Quickly the others were dragged out and searched. Some of them showed fight, but they were quickly cuffed into submission. In a few moments all were out and set to work but one man. He braced himself full length across the little room in such a way that the united strength of the two officers could not budge him.

"I'll try the steam winch on him," said the first mate.

He took a short rope and put a noose around the man's legs, and made the other end fast to the steam winch.

"Oh! you'll pull his legs off!" Dick shouted from the bridge as the mate started the winch.

"We'll see which'll give way first," Mr. Gran answered; "the winch, the foc's'le, or the man."



## CHAPTER IX.

### A STRANDED SHIP AND A BOARD OF SURVEY.

IN a struggle between steam and iron on the one side and human flesh on the other, the flesh must generally give way; and it was so in this case. The winch turned, the rope tautened, and in another second something must have broken.

The man was more sober than his companions, as well as more stubborn; and the moment the rope began to strain he simply bent his body, and the winch drew him easily out upon the deck. A minute later he was unfastened and set to work.

“That’s the usual picnic we have at the beginning of a voyage,” Captain Godfree said when, everything being in working order, he returned to the bridge. “We ship a new set of seamen for each voyage, and they generally come aboard too drunk for duty. A bad condition that poor Jack has come to in these days, is n’t it? You see the minute they arrive in New York after a voyage they are seized upon by the sailors’ boarding-house keepers, who get all their money away from them and supply them with food and drink till it’s time to get rid of them. Then the boarding-master finds a new ship for Jack and gets an order for his advance pay, and brings



him aboard so full of Water Street whiskey that half the time the man does n't know what ship he is on, nor where he is going. If the boys who think of running away to sea knew what the life of a modern sailor is, they'd go rather slow."

"I should think it would be dangerous to take the ship to sea with a crew that you know nothing about," Dick suggested.

"Oh, no. You see there are enough of us who belong with the ship to handle her. Besides myself there are the first and second mates, the chief engineer and first and second assistants, the quartermaster, and four stokers. With these and the supercargo and the cook and two stewards, we can keep the crew in order.

Dick expected to have a view of the whole length of the New Jersey coast, as he had had in the *Alameda*; but in this he was disappointed. The *Smeaton Tower* headed a little east of south as soon as she passed Sandy Hook, her bow pointed direct for Porto Rico; and in about two hours the American coast sank below the horizon.

There were three good meals a day in the comfortable cabin; and for the evening there was a checkerboard, with the captain and supercargo to play with; and there was the full run of the ship for Dick, with a much better chance to see everything than one can have on a passenger ship. The six days between New York and Porto Rico went by



like a song, the sun growing hotter every day. About two o'clock in the afternoon of the sixth day, the high mountains of the island were sighted.

"There we are," said Captain Godfree; "you see the little sextant and the chronometer have guided us right, though we have hardly seen as much as a schooner since we lost Sandy Hook. We'll eat dinner in San Juan to-night, if everything goes well."

It was a beautiful sight, that mountain-peak in the clouds, and Dick remained on the bridge to watch it. By three o'clock the mountains were much plainer, and by four he could distinguish their outlines plainly. When the supper-bell rang at five, he was just beginning to make out some cocoanut trees on shore.

"I don't like the looks of the weather very much," Captain Godfree said as they went down into the cabin. Dick and the captain and the first mate and supercargo ate together always at the first cabin table, the second mate eating from the same table later on.

"There's a squall coming," Captain Godfree continued, "but we may get into harbor before it reaches us."

The captain got the meal started, but Dick saw that he was not at ease. He ate a few hurried mouthfuls; and then, taking his cup of tea in his hand, he arose and said:—

"You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen; I must



be on the bridge when we're approaching land in a squall."

The others quickly finished their supper and went up to the bridge. Dick was surprised to see how much darker it was. The clouds had grown blacker and there were some lights on shore. The captain stepped to the signal dial and pulled the handle that gave the engineer the order:—

"Half speed!"

It was the act of a prudent commander. If he had not done it, the bones of the Smeaton Tower would be lying on the rocks of Porto Rico at this moment.

All who had any right to be on the bridge were there to see the steamer enter the harbor of San Juan, the capital of Porto Rico. They were Captain Godfree and first mate Gran, each of whom had made eight previous voyages to the island; Mr. Maloney, the supercargo, an old navigator, who was perfectly familiar with the place; and Dick, an interested spectator.

"There is the great castle of San Juan on the side and summit of that hill," said Mr. Maloney; "the harbor runs in behind the hill, and the city lies on the other slope. You see where the two mountain ridges seem to join? Well, just below that the city lies. That light on the right is the lighthouse; on the left are the castle lights. We run in between the two."



“How far are we from the harbor mouth, captain?” Dick asked.

“About four miles,” Captain Godfree answered. “Now see how close a guess I have made. We are running six miles an hour, and you can tell by looking at your watch now and when we have the light abeam.”

Darker grew the sky and brighter gleamed the lights on shore. There came a blinding flash of lightning, followed instantly by such a pour of rain as falls only in a tropical shower.

A moment later there was a grating and grinding and crunching beneath their feet, and the ship stopped with a jar that threw them all against the bridge's rail. The propeller continued to revolve, but the vessel was stationary. Dick did not know what it meant, but he saw by the countenances of his companions that something had happened.

Not a soul moved for a second or two, but the seconds seemed like half-hours. Then the captain sprang to the signal dial.

“Blast my eyes!” he shouted. “I've put the ship aground!”

“Stop her! Back her!” he signaled; and the propeller first stopped, then began to reverse. But the ship's only answer was to begin pounding against the rocks. She was hard and fast on a reef.

Everything was in confusion in a moment. The



captain was shouting orders, men were rushing about the decks, the rain continued to pour, lightning flashed, and thunder seemed to roll across the water and echo a dozen times among the mountains. To add to the weirdness of the scene, a number of bright lights sprang up along the shore; some down on the beach, others apparently up in the hills.

Dick was soaked with the rain, but he did not know it. The violent pounding of the ship made standing uncertain, and he wound his arm around one of the iron stanchions.

“I’m sorry for Captain Godfree,” he said to himself, “but I would n’t have missed this for a thousand dollars! Just this scene alone is good for two or three columns. Those must be tar barrels they’re burning on shore for signals; and there are hundreds of people running about them, looking in that light like naked savages on a cannibal island. Talk about shipwreck scenes in the theatre! They’re nothing compared with the reality.”

Dick was alone on the bridge now. All the officers were on deck. He heard the captain rapidly issuing orders.

“Lower away the port quarterboat, Mr. Gran!”

“Sound the wells, Mr. Turner!”

“Quartermaster, heave the lead!”

“This is something for me to keep an eye on,”



Dick thought. "I'll have a chance to see exactly what they do when a steamship is run on a reef."

At that moment Mr. Maloney sprang up the iron ladder and seized Dick by the arm.

"Don't stay up here!" he shouted; nothing less than a shout could have been heard in that furious din. "She's liable to pound the masts out of herself at any minute, and these iron masts will smash everything when they fall. You'll be safer in the cabin."

Dick had no idea of hiding himself in the cabin, but he went down as far as the deck, where he almost ran against Captain Godfree.

"Blast my eyes, Sumner!" the captain shouted; "I've made the wrong port. This is not San Juan at all; this is Arecibo, forty miles down the coast!"

By this time the officers had executed their orders.

"Port quarterboat lowered, sir!" Mr. Gran shouted.

"Fore and aft wells dry, sir," said Mr. Turner.

"Six fathom fore and aft, sir," the quartermaster reported. "Less than two fathom amidship. She's run up on a reef till she's nearly balanced on it."

But the worst report of all came from the engineer. He ran up to say:—

"Machinery disabled, sir. The jar has disconnected the main steampipe!"

"You must mend it, chief!" the captain answered.



“We *must* have steam or we’re gone. She’ll break in two inside of an hour on this reef.”

Leaving that work to the chief engineer, the captain went on issuing orders.

“Get out a kedge anchor, Mr. Gran, and put the cable on the after winch.”

This work took some minutes, and while it was in progress Dick was delighted to hear the propeller revolving again, for that showed that the steampipe had been repaired. Dick was dodging into the little chart room every minute now, making memoranda of all the orders issued; for in that flood of rain it was impossible to write.

When the kedge anchor was in place over the stern the after winch was started and the line tautened, but after a hard pull it snapped like a cord.

“Get out another anchor!” The captain and all on board were growing more excited — all but Dick; he was busy taking notes.

The second kedge anchor did better. With the engines reversed at full speed and the winch revolving, they could feel the ship move. They sighted her bow with one of the fires on shore, and she certainly backed. She had begun to move faster, when there was a terrible crash aft and the stern flew up into the air.

“That settles us!” the captain shouted. “We’ve struck something and knocked the whole stern out of her.”



But he kept the engines backing and the winch going, and in a minute the stern settled to its proper position and the ship continued to back. The anchor cable was cut and the quarterboat hoisted, and on went the ship, backing slowly seaward. She was afloat!

“Sound the bells, Mr. Turner!”

“Heave the lead, quartermaster!”

The ship was taking a little water, so “start the number two pump, Mr. Gran,” was ordered. But the stern was still sound as far as could be seen in the rain and darkness, and she still floated and moved.

For nearly half an hour the captain kept the engines reversed and the ship backing seaward; then he started her ahead, pointed up the coast toward San Juan.

“That thing never happened to me before,” Captain Godfree said when he and Dick were in the cabin together an hour later. “There must have been something in the atmosphere to deceive me; perhaps it was the refraction; I had no more doubt that we were off San Juan than I have that we’re sitting here. We had a narrow escape, and there’s no telling how badly we’re injured till we get into San Juan harbor. I think we have lost most of our propeller, but we have enough left to move us. It’s a bad beginning for your Porto Rico voyage.”

“Bad!” Dick repeated; “why, you could n’t have



done anything to suit me better. I know as much about stranding a ship now as an old sailor. I'm only sorry I could do nothing to help you."

"Oh, but you can!" Captain Godfree retorted. "You can do a great deal to help me. It's lucky for me I have you aboard, for you can give me a great deal of assistance with the cabling and the Board of Survey."

"Board of Survey?" Dick asked; "what is that?"

"Oh, you see you don't know all about stranding a ship yet!" the captain laughed. "When you get her off, that's only the beginning of the job. The Board of Survey is worse than running on the rocks. We have all that to come yet, and it will make a good newspaper article for you, too."

"Why, you're a perfect jewel of a captain to travel with!" Dick exclaimed. "The voyage down will make one article, stranding the ship is good for another, and this Board of Survey, whatever it is, will be the third, before I begin with Porto Rico at all. One thing I don't understand, captain. What were all those lights on shore? How did they come to be there?"

"Those were signals for us," the captain replied, "to warn us off. They saw us standing in for the shore, and knew that we'd be on that deadly Arecibo reef in a few minutes unless we put about. Arecibo is one of the ports we touch at, and our



agents there burned those tar barrels to show us we were in danger. That is one of the most dangerous reefs on the coast, covered with the bones of lost ships. When we brought up sharp astern and probably broke our propeller, we ran into the ribs of some sunken vessel.

“But I want you to help me, Sumner,” the captain went on; “and we have a big job before us. I’ll explain to you what has to be done in such a case, so that you’ll understand. As soon as we reach port I have to cable my owners that the ship has been stranded and tell them how much damage was done. That has to be done with the cable code, of course, because telegraphing from Porto Rico to London costs three dollars a word, and we must put it in as few words as possible. You’ve no idea what hard work it is to put a dispatch into the code; at least it is for me; perhaps it may be easier for you.

“Then,” the captain went on, “comes the Board of Survey. This is a British ship, as you know; so as soon as the cable is sent I go to the British consul in San Juan and report that my ship has been stranded and ask him to appoint a board of survey. He does so, appointing generally three masters of vessels that happen to be lying in the harbor. They examine the ship and decide whether she is fit to proceed on her voyage or not. Their decision is law, too, and we have to obey it.”



“Why!” Dick exclaimed, “I had no idea there was so much red tape about it. What is the use of all that fuss?”

“Because the ship might be so badly injured as to be unseaworthy,” the captain replied; “and to take her to sea in that case would be to risk the lives of the crew. I could n’t compel the crew to go another mile in her without a survey.”

“Now here is the cable code,” the captain continued, handing Dick a small red-covered book. “You see there are single words to express most every sentence a shipmaster could want to send. Of course the owners in London have another copy of the book, so that they can decipher the dispatch. The single word ‘Refuse,’ for instance, means ‘No cargo to be had here,’ and saves five words in telegraphing. I will write out the dispatch I want to send, and you can translate it into the code for me.”

The captain took a pencil and wrote his dispatch in plain English, in this way:—

Smith & Jones, London:—

Stranded at Arecibo. On the rocks forty minutes. Damage unknown. Proceeded to San Juan and requested Board of Survey.

GODFREE.

“Now, there are twenty-four words,” the captain continued, “for the cable company charges for the address and signature. You will find some word in the book that means a whole sentence, and that will reduce the number of words about one half.”



Dick examined the book and soon mastered its principles. It might be hard work for a sea captain to prepare a cipher dispatch, but it was easy enough for a newspaper man. The word *adjoins*, he found, meant "stranded at"; *forward* meant "on the rocks forty minutes"; *mystery* meant "proceeded to"; and simply the word *board* stood for "requested Board of Survey." For "damage unknown" he had to search some time, but at length he found that the word *motion* expressed that. So his cipher dispatch, when done in the code, read in this way:

Smith & Jones, London:—

*Adjoins*, *Arecibo*, *forward*, *motion*, *mystery*, *San Juan*, *board*.

GODFREE.

"There," he said as he finished it, "try that over with the book, captain, and see whether it does n't express what you want to say."

"That's it exactly," the captain declared, after a long struggle with the book. "You've got it into thirteen words—a saving to the company of over thirty dollars; and you did it in ten minutes. It would have taken me half the night to cipher that thing out, Sumner."

"I know something about the expense of cabling from Porto Rico," Dick said. "A reporter finds out a little of everything, you know. I interviewed a man once who had been a cable operator in San Juan. He happened to be there when the Count



de Paris arrived on his way from Havana to Barcelona. The count's daughter was very sick in England, and he sat down in the office and wrote her a letter of one thousand four hundred words, and cabled it. That cost him over four thousand dollars."

"That might do for a millionaire like the Count de Paris," the captain laughed, "but I don't think my owners would stand it. Now we must take hold of the Board of Survey matter, and I want you to do a little headwork for me there. You're just the man to do it, too."

"Well, we've got safely out of one bad scrape to-night," Dick answered; "I think we'll pull through the next one."

"The main thing I'm afraid of, Sumner," the captain said, "is that the Board of Survey may order us into dry dock for repairs. There is no dry dock at Porto Rico, and we'd have to go over to St. Thomas. If they should make us put in a new propeller, we'd have to cable to England for it, and that would keep us in St. Thomas at least a month or six weeks."

"That would be very bad for me," he continued, "to have the ship lose so much time. The owners won't say much about my stranding the ship, if I don't lose too much time over it. Now what we've got to do is to influence the Board of Survey so that they'll let us proceed on our voyage, and I want to do that through you."



“Through me!” Dick exclaimed.

“Yes, through you. You see shipmasters ain’t very good writers, as a rule, and it will be an easy matter to arrange things so that they’ll ask you to act as clerk and do the writing. Then whenever they get stuck for a sentence to put in the report, you can suggest one. And of course you’ll suggest the things that we make up our minds we want in the report. Oh, that will work; I’ve seen that done before.”

“Well,” Dick laughed, “that seems fair enough. Of course you’ll not want me to put in anything that is n’t fair and square. I want to help you in every honest way I can.”

They sat up late discussing the report they wanted the board to make, and the substance of it all was that the ship was seaworthy and should be allowed to proceed on her voyage.

“That’s it!” the captain exclaimed; “of course she’s seaworthy. We’re moving under our own steam, ain’t we, and taking hardly any water? We’re fit to go around the world in. But I don’t honestly believe,” he added “that there’s more than part of one blade left in our propeller.”

When the Smeaton Tower lay safely in San Juan harbor next morning Dick went out with Captain Godfree in one of the small boats, and they saw for themselves what had happened to the propeller. Two blades were gone entirely, the third was broken



off about six inches from the shaft; and the fourth, the only serviceable blade, had lost but a few inches from its tip.

“But the bonnet is what I’m afraid of,” the captain said; “the bonnet you know is the part that fits around the shaft, that the blades are fastened to. If that should be cracked, it might drop off at any minute and then we’d be helpless. However, we’ll go on if the board will let us.”

There was an interval of two days between the arrival of the Smeaton Tower at San Juan and the convening of the Board of Survey. This time Dick used to the best advantage on shore, driving out to the sugar and coffee plantations, making himself acquainted with the people and their mode of life, and riding over the railway.

“It’s the people I like best to write about,” he often said to himself, “because they are what the reader takes most interest in. Suppose I should try to write a glowing description of one of those mountain-peaks? How many readers would care anything about it? But everybody is interested in the way the people of other countries live. I don’t want to be one of the glowing-sunset writers, all color and no substance.”

On the third day the members of the Board of Survey visited the ship. The British consul had selected three shipmasters who were altogether satisfactory to Captain Godfree. One was Captain



Fraser, of the steamship *Caribbee*; another was the good-natured captain of a fine Spanish steamer lying in the harbor; and the third was a real live Yankee skipper from Maine, whose schooner was waiting for a cargo of sugar.

Dick and the captain naturally made everything as pleasant for the board as they could. A fine lunch was spread on the cabin table, to which they immediately sat down. The three shipmasters spent half an hour in looking over the vessel, rowed around to the propeller in a small boat, asked to have the engines moved, went down into the hold, and retired to the cabin with Dick and Captain Godfree, to make out their report. Dick, as had been anticipated, was asked to act as their clerk.

“I think we can say that the propeller is damaged but still serviceable,” said Captain Fraser, who was the spokesman.

Dick put that down; the consul had sent out the proper blanks for the report, and only the board's findings had to be written in.

“And — and” —

“Engines moved and found in good order?” Dick suggested.

“Yes, put that in,” Captain Fraser said. “And you can say that we have inspected the hull and find it fairly tight — with very little cement started. And you might add that we find that — that” —

Captain Fraser looked inquiringly at his fellows.



“That the ship is seaworthy and able to proceed on her voyage?” Dick suggested.

“Y-e-s,” Captain Fraser said, looking inquiringly at the others, who both nodded. “Yes, you can put that in, with a recommendation that she be docked on her arrival in New York.”

It was all down in a minute, and Dick filled out the duplicate copy to be filed with the consul, and the members of the board signed them both.

The danger of being sent to St. Thomas was over. The board had officially declared the ship seaworthy, and nothing would prevent her now from going on to her other ports.

“You did that famously, Sumner!” Captain Godfree exclaimed, giving Dick a stunning slap on the back after the board had gone. “I should have been in a tight fix without your help. I wish I could always have a newspaper man on board.”

That same night the ship steamed back to Arecibo, having a quantity of cargo for that port, but this time she was careful to avoid the reef. Then she proceeded to Mayaguez, a port on the west coast, to deliver more cargo. In Mayaguez harbor she was soon surrounded by a little fleet of bum-boats, every boat loaded with something to sell — parrots, cigars, cigarettes, fruits, shell-work, sugarcane, bay rum, walking sticks, and a dozen other things.

“Hold on there!” the captain exclaimed to the first boatman who came up the ladder. “What have



you got in those bottles? I'm not going to have any rum brought aboard to the crew."

"Him only bay rum, señor," the man replied. "Not drinkee; only rub on face after shavee. Very nice bay rum, señor."

"We'll see about that," the captain replied; and he sent for a corkscrew and opened several of the bottles. He and Dick both smelled them and were convinced that they contained nothing but bay rum.

"All right," said the captain. "You can sell all the bay rum you like, but no other kind. Put the quartermaster at the head of the gangway, Mr. Gran, and let him open every bottle that's brought aboard. They may sell bay rum, but nothing to drink."

Either to let the crew go ashore or to allow any liquor on board meant a repetition of the scene of the first day, and strict orders were given that no one should land. Shoal water compelled the ship to anchor nearly a mile from the wharf, and the cargo was taken in lighters. But the order of course did not prevent Dick and the captain from landing, and they learned in the afternoon that a ball was to be given in the "Gran Hotel Marina" that night.

"I want you to see that," the captain said to Dick. "A ball in one of these old towns will give you something to write about. Our agents here will get invitations for us."



They returned to the ship for supper, and about nine o'clock in the evening, dressed in their thinnest clothes (for the night was intensely hot), they set out for shore and the ball, leaving Mr. Gran in charge of the deck.

The open space in front of the hotel was full of carriages, and the ball was in full progress when they arrived. The dancers were in the dining-room, clad in the gayest of clothes. Music was playing, gay señors and señoritas were whirling. On the broad portico that extended across the whole front of the building most of the spectators were gathered, for the air was cooler there.

Dick was enjoying the scene very much, going in and out among the dancers, admiring their grace and wondering at their strangely cut clothes, when Captain Godfree beckoned him to a retired part of the portico.

"I think we'd better get out of this, Sumner," the captain whispered. "I have just found out that there's a case of yellow fever in the house."

"There is!" Dick exclaimed.

"Yes; and only two rooms from where they're dancing, too. All those doors down the other end of the portico open into bedrooms, and the sick man is in the second room. He was taken down yesterday, but they're keeping it quiet so as not to break up the ball. These natives are not much afraid of the fever, you know, but it won't do for



us; and the sooner we get out the better. The sick man is an American shipmaster with a brig lying in the harbor."

"An American!" Dick repeated; "and all this music and dancing about his ears! Perhaps you had better go, captain; but I shall stay and see whether my countryman is in need of help. Oh, yes; I could n't do anything else," he went on in answer to the captain's surprised look. "You would do the same thing for an Englishman; any decent man would. I am not afraid of the fever; I have seen plenty of it in Havana and Vera Cruz."

"By George, I'm glad the English and Americans are cousins!" the captain exclaimed. "That's said like a man. But in this case it would be worse than useless for you to stay, for the man is well supplied with money, has good nurses and a good English doctor attending him; so you would only be in the way. Come along."

Dick would not go until he learned from the hotel people that his countryman was supplied with every possible comfort; and then he and the captain returned to the ship. It was after midnight when they reached her side, and they were surprised to hear a great commotion on deck.

"On deck, there, Mr. Gran!" the captain shouted when they were within a few feet of the vessel.

"Aye, aye, sir!" Mr. Gran replied; "I'm glad you're back, sir. These lubbers have been drinking









HE SNATCHED A BELAYING PIN FROM ITS SOCKET AND SPRANG FORWARD.



bay rum till they're wild. They're in a state of mutiny, sir."

"Are they?" the captain exclaimed. "I'll sober 'em, the drunken beasts!" He sprang up the ladder with Dick close behind, and the moment he reached the deck he threw off his coat.

"Call Mr. Turner and the quartermaster," he ordered; and Mr. Gran turned to obey.

The men, eight of them, were in a cluster forward, near the starboard rail, fighting furiously, struggling, swearing, striking, too drunk to know or care that the captain had returned.

Without waiting for assistance, Captain Godfree sprang into the midst of them, knocking two down with the first rush and staggering two more. Three of the others shrank back before the captain's powerful fists; but one big fellow stood his ground and whipped out a long knife. In a second, almost, one of the men who had been knocked down sprang to his feet and seized the captain from behind, while the big fellow in front, his face livid with rage and rum, raised his hand with the knife.

Dick stood perhaps ten feet away, with the captain's coat over his arm. He heard the two mates and the quartermaster coming, but before they could reach the spot the captain would be a dead man. He saw the gleam of the long knife.

Without an instant's hesitation he snatched an iron belaying-pin from its socket and sprang forward.



Crash! crash!

Two blows with that heavy club laid the knife-wielder helpless upon the deck. Next moment the two mates and the quartermaster were there, and the mutiny was ended. Dick was glad to see the man with the knife struggle as the mates put handcuffs on him; he was afraid he had killed him.

“Sumner, I’ll always read the newspapers with greater respect after seeing what kind of fellows make them,” Captain Godfree said when they had retired to their cabin. “Whether it’s to manage a board of survey, to brave the yellow fever, or to knock out a drunken sailor, you’re on hand every time. If you’ll stay on board this ship, I’ll make a mate of you in short order.”

“Oh, that would be a holiday!” Dick laughed. “I’ve got three hours of writing to do now, captain.”



## CHAPTER X.

### DICK MEETS A FIGHTING PREACHER.

A WHOLE week at home! That was the order when Dick reached the office after his Porto Rico trip. It was necessary to give him a chance to write what he had in mind.

"The facts have got 'way ahead of me," he said to the managing editor. "I don't think I wasted any time, but there was so much to see that I could n't write fast enough."

He did not say that he had sat up writing half the night, sometimes all night, after a day of sight-seeing; but that was the truth. His Mexican letters were still running, and he had a thick batch of letters ready from Porto Rico; but there were many more to write, and he was told to stay at home for a week to catch up.

"It's the first real good chance I've had to see how you live here," Dick said to his mother. "I've been kept so on the jump that the flat has been only a lodging-house for me, and not always even that. But think of a whole week! I'll be at work at night when Darling comes home, and what talks we'll have! And sometimes I can borrow time



enough to take you and Florrie out to some place of amusement."

"I don't care very much for amusements, Dick," his mother answered; "and Florrie has been out a good deal lately; not in the evenings, but going to matinées."

"Oh, she has, has she?" Dick laughed. "I can see through a millstone when there's a hole in it. Darling is busy in the evenings, but he is free in the afternoon for matinées. Ho! ho!"

Florrie entered the room at this moment and heard the mention of Darling's name.

"What's that you're saying about Harry Darling, Dick?" she asked, blushing.

"I have n't told anything, Florrie," Mrs. Sumner hastily said; "but I don't think you want to have any secrets from Dick, do you?"

"Of course I don't," Florrie answered, blushing very red. "There's no secret about it, anyhow. Harry Darling and I are engaged, Dick."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Florrie!" Dick exclaimed; and he sprang up and threw his arms around his sister and kissed her. "Darling is one of the best fellows in the world; one of the few men I know I'd be willing to see you marry. He's as true as steel, Florrie."

"Don't you think I know it?" Florrie answered, still blushing. "But I was almost in hopes you'd be opposed to it. It's so commonplace to have



everybody think it just right. Mother thinks so, and of course Harry and I think so, and now you think so too. There ought to be some opposition, to add a little romance to the thing."

"Romance in a flat!" Dick laughed; "the thing's impossible. 'Get your facts straight,' as Dr. Goode would say, and never mind the romance."

"Maybe I know more about Dr. Goode than you think," Florrie answered. "Did they tell you in the office that Harry had been promoted? He is not an ordinary copy reader now, but Dr. Goode's assistant, and helps to make up the paper, whatever that may be. I thought you all helped to make up the paper."

"Is that so?" Dick exclaimed. "That's good news, sure. Then he makes up all except the last page, which is the first page, Florrie. That's a riddle for you. The doctor's assistant makes up all but the first page of the paper, which is the last page made up, because it contains the latest and most important news. The doctor would n't trust anybody else to make that up; and I just wish you could see him make it up some night when there's fifteen columns of news to go into seven columns of space. The type is all spread out on galleys, you know, and the foreman reads the titles to him on account of the doctor's bad eyes."

"There's just about three minutes, we'll say, before the last form has to go down. 'Train



Robbery in Arizona, half a column,' says the foreman.

" 'Kill it,' says the doctor.

" 'Holman on Hard Money, column and a half,' says the foreman.

" 'Hold Holman for to-morrow,' says the doctor. And he takes his blue pencil and slashes away at the proofs, making a line out of a stickful and a stickful out of a column, till he squeezes a little of everything into his seven columns. It's a beautiful sight, and away goes the form on time. And so Darling is really the doctor's assistant! You don't know how glad I am for both pieces of news, Florrie."

Dick soon took possession of the little parlor and turned it into a workshop and kept his pen going till, as he said, it grew hot and he had to stop to let it cool. It was always a pen with him when he had a proper place to write, not a pencil; pencil copy looked too sloppy, he thought, and he did not like sloppy copy. He made it a rule to turn in every article ready for the printers—heading on, sub-heads in their proper places, every page edited, even the type marks put on. This habit did him many a good turn in after years.

When Darling came home that night Dick was still writing, but he stopped to help eat the late supper that always waited on the table.

"I hear great news of you, Darling!" he



shouted as soon as Darling came in ; “ shake, old man.”

“ Thank you,” Darling said without any embarrassment as he grasped Dick’s hand. “ Then they’ve told you, have they? Well, Dick, I don’t wonder you’re a good fellow, to have such a sister.”

“ Oh, put it the other way about,” Dick laughed ; “ that you don’t wonder she’s so good because she has such a brother.”

“ I have some more news for you, too,” Darling went on as they attacked the supper. “ Dr. Goode just told me to-night. The old man is going to send you on a trip down the Mississippi into the Southwest as soon as you have finished your Porto Rico stuff; and do you know I’m more than half-sorry, Dick.”

“ Well, I don’t know.” He was hardly certain whether to feel sorry or glad. “ I’ve got to be doing something, and I suppose I might as well be in the Southwest as anywhere.”

“ Yes, as well there as anywhere, if you are away from home. But I’d rather have you at home, Dick, for several reasons. This sort of thing can’t go on always, you know, making these long trips; it never does, at any rate. A man makes a half-dozen or a dozen of them, and then they tire of his style or he tires of the traveling or for some other reason it comes to an end. You are making hay while the sun shines I’ll admit, but I’d like to see



you begin to do something better, something more permanent."

"Where do I have the time?" Dick interrupted. "I have hardly a minute to myself."

"That's just it," Darling went on. "You have no time to yourself at all. Your Transport articles are copied everywhere, your syndicate articles have gone all over the country, and your Illustrated Weekly story was tip top; everybody said so. Indeed, for such a young fellow you have made yourself quite famous already—in a newspaper way. But after all, Dick, I'm more than half-inclined to think you would be better off if you were doing ordinary city work. Then you would have time to lay the foundation for better things."

"I may be doing that now," Dick replied. "Don't you see, Darling, this sort of work is my only chance to sign my articles. I could n't sign a report of a fire in Canal Street, you know, or the flight of a bank cashier or any other city news."

"That's true," Darling admitted. "Still, I think there are better things in store for you than signing newspaper articles, if you manage right and prepare yourself for them. Your style is very good indeed—for a newspaper writer; bright, I mean, and interesting and taking. But it lacks finish, Dick, and finish you can give it only by reading, which you have no time for as things go now. You should read Macaulay carefully, both the history and the



essays, if only for the sake of the beautiful diction. And Scott and Thackeray you must read by all means. Of course you have read them, but I mean read them as a study, not merely for the sake of the story. Read them and study their methods of construction, their ways of carrying the reader gracefully from one point to another without sacrificing the interest, and of course their wonderful delineation of character.

“The construction of a novel was a natural gift to Scott and Thackeray, you will say; but it was not to them any more than it is to others. Their construction is art, not nature; but it is such high art that the art is concealed and seems to be nature. Then you must read Shakespeare, as a matter of course; it will stir you up when you feel sluggish. And Burns, Byron, Tennyson, and our best American poets. And above all things study the Bible. You read it for devotional reasons, I suppose, but I mean study it carefully as a literary work. Some of the books of the Bible contain the grandest examples of elegant, concise diction in the language. The knowledge always on tap in works of reference I suppose you have become familiar with in the office.”

“Oh, have n't I!” Dick exclaimed. “I don't see why they did n't teach me about those things in school, but I never knew much about the standard works of reference till I went into the Transport



office. The cyclopædias tell me something about almost any subject; if I want to know about any place in the world the Gazetteer tells me. I want to know the date of any important thing that has happened and there is Haydn's Dictionary of Dates, or I want to quote a line from some good writer and I take down Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. Dodd's Beauties of Shakespeare is almost equal to a knowledge of the plays and poems, and if I want to find any particular passage in Scripture the Concordance points it out to me in a moment. It's a good education in itself to know where to find these things. Then the biographies tell me about all the prominent people of the past or present."

"I see you've worked that mine pretty well!" Darling laughed. "But don't expect to get a knowledge of English literature out of the works of reference. You don't want to be a reporter or correspondent all your life, naturally, and it is safe to assume that you will not make a great poet, though you might try your hand at some verses, provided you don't publish them. Then the three things nearest you are plays, novels, and short stories. There is a great deal of money in a successful play; and with two or three successes a writer's fortune is made."

"I hardly think I could make a play go," Dick answered. "I have never taken as much interest in the theatre as a man ought who undertakes a



play, though I am fond of dramatic situations in what I write. Between ourselves, Darling, I have sometimes thought of trying a novel. I could certainly do a better one than some I have read."

"The young bird flies high!" Darling laughed. "You must not ask yourself whether you can do better than a poor novel, but whether you can do as well as a good one. Don't expect to write a *Rob Roy* or a *Vanity Fair* at the first trial. And don't be everlastingly wondering whether you have genius. 'Genius is talent well worked,' Henry Ward Beecher told me one day, and I believe it. You have some talent, and certainly you have the capacity for hard work, so you need not worry about genius. If you are going to try novel-writing, there is no harm in your traveling for a while, for you must become acquainted with different people and places or your hands will always be tied. Then, if all else fails, a situation in the office is always open to a man of your sort — inside the office, I mean; reading copy or the night city editorship, or something of that sort."

"Oh, don't mention it!" Dick exclaimed in horror. "A year ago I should have thought that grand; but now I have had a taste of the free life, of coming and going at will, of seeing new places and new people all the time, and I could not stand being shut up in an office, and having a desk that I must open at a fixed hour every day and close at



another fixed hour, with a certain amount of unvarying drudgery between. I never could stand that now, Darling."

"You can stand more than you think," Darling retorted. "It is one of the drawbacks to a reporter's life, that it is too free. It unfits him for any indoor occupation afterward. He becomes a sort of civilized wild Indian, a gypsy in evening clothes, and longs for his imaginary forest. But never mind. If you have determined to try a novel, keep your eyes open for good characters and good situations, and read whenever you have a spare moment. And don't be too sure that you can write a good novel because you can write a good newspaper article. There is money and fame in novels if you can reach the top notch, but not otherwise."

In his week of leisure, as he called it, Dick finished up all his Porto Rico matter by working every day and a large part of every night, and then came his instructions for the trip into the Southwest.

"We know what travel on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers meant in old times, before the days of railroads," Mr. Harding told him. "I want you to tell the public what it is now. Go down to Pittsburgh and take a boat down the river. Go to Wheeling, to Cincinnati, and so on down the river at least to Memphis. There you can cross over to Arkansas and make a visit to Hot Springs



which is one of the most picturesque towns in this country. Then you can take the Red River to New Orleans, and from there go on to Key West. Telegraph me when you reach Key West, and I will either bring you home or send you further instructions. I think you will find much material of interest. Take your time to it and do your best. The winter has been so mild that the rivers are still open."

Dick climbed into a sleeping-car berth in Jersey City at nine o'clock in the evening, and at seven o'clock next morning he was in Pittsburgh.

"There's article number one," he said to himself as he stepped from the car. "'A night in a sleeping-car.' It's so commonplace that people don't write about it, but I think it will make a good story. There are always some curious characters in a sleeping-car, and they are always different."

He walked down a long smoky street to the river and made inquiries in several shipping offices. Yes, there was a boat to sail for Wheeling that afternoon at five o'clock; the *Crescent*. No boats going farther than Wheeling, because the water was low. But he could go aboard when he liked and make himself comfortable. He paid his fare for a state-room to Wheeling, for it was an all-night journey; and hunted up an express wagon to carry his trunk to the boat. No meals on the boat till supper time, he was told; but there were plenty of restaurants.



There were curious sights to see in Pittsburgh throughout the day, and there were the bridges to cross to Allegheny City, and the inclined railway to ride on, and many unaccustomed scenes by the riverside. He took mental note of them all; not because they interested him specially, but because it was his duty.

It was not at five o'clock that the Crescent started for Wheeling, but at nine; Ohio River boats are not express trains. Dick had books in his trunk, for he had thought over the conversation with Darling and made up his mind to become familiar with the best works of the best authors.

"What a solid old fellow Darling is!" he thought as he took out a volume of Tennyson and began to read. "And how much better he knows the world than I, though I am seeing so much more of it. I can see how a man's ideas enlarge as he grows older. Now there was that telegraphing scheme of mine. I was determined to learn to send and receive a message. That was not many months ago, but my mind has changed about it entirely. I should n't think of wasting time over it. Reading will be of much more use to me."

At two o'clock in the morning, long after Dick had laid aside his book and gone to writing, he heard a man's voice on the forward deck of the little stern-wheeler. He went out to see what it meant, and got his first clear idea of navigating the upper Ohio.



One man was on the lower deck, forward, taking soundings with a pole. Dick could not see him, but he heard his constant calling of the depths: "One half;" "One quarter;" "M-a-r-k O-n-e!" meaning a fathom and a half, a fathom and a quarter, one fathom. As fast as these calls came, the man on the upper deck repeated them to the pilot, who was in his house on the highest deck of all the "Texas"; and the pilot repeated them too, to make sure that he received them correctly. In a minute the figures became larger.

"Five nalf," came from down below.

"Five."

"Four nalf."

"Four."

"Is that fathoms?" Dick asked of the man on the upper deck.

"Not much!" the man answered. "That's feet!"

Almost at the same instant the boat's bottom grazed the sand, and there was a slight jar that brought Dick's Porto Rico experience to mind. But it was over in a moment, and the boat went on.

"That was a tight squeeze!" the man exclaimed. "Sand bar; the river's full of 'em. That's the way we get it, when the water's low. We can't quite travel over a heavy dew with this boat, as some people say; but we're all right as long as they give us three feet of water."

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when the



Crescent reached Wheeling, and she went no farther. Dick immediately began to make inquiries for another boat to carry him on to Cincinnati, but the prospects were discouraging.

“T ain’t likely no boat can get through under two or three weeks,” he was told. “If there should come a heavy rain, there might be a boat in four or five days; but that’s doubtful.”

That would not do. Although he was to take his time, it would not be fair to waste a week or more in Wheeling. He inquired about railway trains, and finding that a train started for Cincinnati at two o’clock he had his trunk transferred to the railway station and bought a ticket.

How slow the boats seemed, when the train was under way! In ten minutes he was crossing the river by a bridge that the boat had gone under hours before it reached Wheeling. He was in Ohio now, and by seven o’clock he should be in Columbus; by one next morning, in Cincinnati.

There were few passengers in the train; in Dick’s car not more than three or four, and he settled himself comfortably in a corner and fell to reading. Suddenly he was roused, after an hour or two, by the stopping of the train and the pouring into every car of a crowd of people. It was a country town at which the train had stopped, and a fair was in progress. The people were going home from the fair.



In a minute or two Dick's car, like all the other cars in the train, was packed with people. They not only occupied every seat, but crowded the aisles. There were a few women and children, but most of the newcomers were men; and Dick noticed that nearly all of the men were somewhat under the influence of liquor.

The train had not gone more than two or three miles after leaving the station before two of the men who stood in the aisle directly by the side of Dick's seat began to quarrel, and from quarreling they soon went on to fighting. After a few blows with their fists they drew knives and began to lunge at each other. In a minute the friends of the two men joined in the fracas, some on one side and some on the other, and the fight became general. Many of the other men drew knives, several shots were fired, the women and children screamed, and the whole car was in an uproar. The worst of the fight was almost directly over Dick's head.

"Gentlemen, you'll have to stop this or get off the train!" the conductor shouted as he entered the car.

But he might as well have talked to the waves of the sea. Half the men were fighting, and the others seemed unconcerned. The conductor pulled the bell-rope to stop the train, and went out to summon the train hands to his assistance. Before he reached the door his foot slipped; and Dick, looking down,



saw that he had slipped in a pool of blood. Somebody had been cut. One man had been pushed through a window and held so far out that Dick was afraid his head would strike a telegraph pole. Three or four seats just opposite Dick had been ripped out and lay overturned on the floor.

Just as the train stopped, the conductor entered the car at the other end, accompanied by several train hands. As he entered, a man who had been in the car all the way from Wheeling, stood up and spoke to him. Dick noticed that the man was very large; well over six feet high, and broad in proportion; and that he wore good black clothes.

“Conductor,” said the big man in a loud voice, “you must stop this riot. I call on you to stop the fighting in this car.”

“I can’t do it,” the conductor replied; “I have n’t men enough on the train to stop it.”

“Then call on your passengers!” the big man shouted; “you are entitled to call on the passengers to assist you.”

“Very well,” said the conductor, as though he would clinch the argument on the spot; “I call on you!”

The big man had not another word to waste. Evidently he was a man of action, and all he wanted was the summons from the conductor that gave him a legal right to participate. He pulled off his black coat and threw it upon the seat, laid his hat on top



of it, pulled up his sleeves, and "sailed into" the crowd of fighters with the energy of a battering-ram.

It was a giant among pygmies. With every blow of the powerful fists one or two of the fighters went down. The Ohioans were so surprised at the single-handed onslaught that they hardly struck back. Down they went, one after another and in bunches, and the thud, thud of the sturdy blows came harder and faster. When the big man reached the door at Dick's end of the car there was hardly a fighter left on his feet.

The big man had quelled the riot and made a score of sore heads, but he did not stop there. He gathered up the fellows who were nearest the door, two and three at a time, and threw them bodily out of the car. At this there was a wild rush for the opposite end by all who were able to walk, and in no time all the fighters were out. The conductor pulled the rope and the train started, leaving the rioters quarreling and fighting by the side of the track. The big man walked quietly back to his seat and put on his coat and hat.

"Well, that was the most beautiful piece of pugilism and pluck I ever saw in my life," Dick said to himself. "To think of one unarmed man pitching into this whole crowd, where nearly every man had a knife in his hand, and thrashing the whole lot of them in a minute, just with his fists. Why, it was



superb. He looks like an uncommon man, too; I must find out who he is."

Dick went back to the seat adjoining the big man's and spoke to him.

"You did that beautifully, sir," he said. "I am a newspaper man, and if you have no objections I should be glad to know your name."

The big man turned around with a pleasant smile on his face, and without showing the least sign of the recent conflict.

"Certainly, young man," he said; "you are welcome to know my name, if you desire it. My name is Cook — Joseph Cook."

"What!" Dick exclaimed before he could stop himself, "not the Rev. Joseph Cook, the celebrated clergyman and lecturer?"

"If you leave that word 'celebrated' out," Mr. Cook replied, "I will own up to all the rest. Yes; I am the Rev. Joseph Cook, clergyman, lecturer."

"You see," he went on, turning further around so that he faced Dick, "I am billed to lecture in Columbus at eight o'clock this evening. That was why I did n't want the train delayed by that crowd of drunken ruffians. The conductor and his trainmen could have stopped the riot very readily if they had had any courage. But the quickest way was just to stop it myself, though I am afraid we are going to be late now, for we are more than an hour behind time."



“Whew!” Dick said to himself, “this is news. I shall have to stop off at Columbus and telegraph this.” His old news instinct was aroused in a moment. He had not done any telegraphing to the Transport for some time, for such matters as letters from Mexico and Porto Rico go always by mail, not by telegraph. But for a man of the prominence of the Rev. Joseph Cook to put down such a riot single-handed, that was genuine news and must reach the office at once.

He continued the conversation with Mr. Cook and listened to some very interesting anecdotes, and talked with the conductor and several of the trainmen, and by the time they reached Columbus, not much before nine o'clock, he had well in mind the story that was soon to be written and telegraphed.

The car was in such disorder, with its bloodstains, broken glass, and torn-out seats, that at Columbus it was taken out of the train and sent to the railroad hospital for repairs. The lecture committee had learned by telegraph of the lateness of the train, and they had held the audience in the Opera House till Mr. Cook arrived. A carriage was waiting at the station for the lecturer, and he was driven at breakneck speed to the Opera House with Dick sitting by his side.

Dick soon had a seat at the reporter's table, where he found every facility for writing, and where he immediately felt as much at home among the



reporters of Columbus as though he had been in the Academy of Music in New York. But, like an experienced newspaper man, he told the other reporters nothing about the riot in the train. That was his own news, and too good to share with anybody.

It was not a report of the lecture that Dick wrote while Mr. Cook was speaking; it was an account of Mr. Cook's adventure. And before the lecture was finished he slipped out and carried to the telegraph office a column-long account of the one-sided battle. By the time that the last of it reached the Transport office he was aboard the midnight train for Cincinnati.

"That's a jolly beginning for a new trip!" he said to himself as he pulled the thick sleeping-car blankets over him. "If every day turns out as well I'll be in luck."



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE "HOODOOED" STEAMBOAT.

EARLY on a Friday morning the train landed Dick in Cincinnati; and after eating breakfast in the railway restaurant he went down to the river front to look for a boat. The river was much larger than at Pittsburgh or Wheeling, but he was disappointed in the boats. He had read of the palatial Ohio and Mississippi steamboats running to New Orleans, with their luxurious cabins, hundreds of passengers, bands playing, cargo on all the decks. But, as far as he could see, in Cincinnati there was no boat to equal even the third-rate boats of the Hudson River. They were all stern wheelers, large enough but clumsy in shape, with their passenger accommodations all on the upper deck, which was supported by posts that looked entirely too small for the weight. On every boat the whole lower deck was open, exposing to view the engines and all the machinery.

The Belle of the River, one of the largest of the Ohio River boats, was to start for New Orleans that afternoon, and Dick determined to take passage in her, at any rate as far as Memphis. The fare to Memphis, he learned, was only twelve dollars,



including meals and stateroom, and the voyage might be made in a week, or it might take three times as long, according to circumstances. He could not buy a ticket, as he was in the habit of doing at home. There was a clerk in the little office on board; and the clerk kept a register in which each passenger wrote his name, just as in a hotel, and opposite the name the clerk wrote the passenger's destination and the amount paid.

"Oh, I wouldn't start with you for anything, captain!" he heard one of the ladies of a large party say to the captain later in the day, when he had his trunk on board and was settled in his stateroom. "What in the world makes you start on a Friday? Such an unlucky day. We're going to take the train to Louisville in the morning, and go on board there. None of us would think of starting on a journey on Friday."

"There's a point!" Dick said to himself. "I wonder whether people are more superstitious down this way than they are at home. I must keep an eye open for that."

He had a chance to see more of it before he started. There were fifteen or twenty passengers that he saw or heard of, and perhaps more that he knew nothing about, who would not start on Friday, but waited to take the morning train and catch the boat at Louisville. And of those who did go many spoke of the unlucky day, and



hoped that something would delay the boat until Saturday.

Naturally Dick laughed at this folly; for a bright newspaper man has no superstitions about Friday or anything else. It is not luck that he relies upon, but pluck.

"They must be ignorant, or they'd know better," he said to himself. "I notice, too, that none of the passengers look as though they had much money to spare; and from what they say I think they travel by boat only because it is cheap. They don't seem to think it possible that a man should go in the boat if he has money enough to go by rail."

There were thirty or forty passengers on board at the start, Friday or no Friday; but Dick saw very little of them on the first night. He had an article to write; and he shut himself up in his stateroom.

After breakfast next morning there was a commotion in the cabin. One of the colored stewards was talking loudly in front of the clerk's office, and the clerk was trying to pacify him. Dick stepped up to see what it was about.

"He's been drinking, that's all," the clerk explained. "I suppose he has found a bottle of liquor in one of the staterooms he cleans, and has helped himself. You go on about your work now," he added to the colored man, "and keep quiet."

But instead of keeping quiet he became more



boisterous than ever and began to swear at the clerk.

“Here, George! Henry! Thomas! Take this man away from here!” the clerk called to a number of waiters about the table. “Take him down on the lower deck till he cools off.” In a minute a half-dozen of them, all colored, surrounded the man.

Suddenly the waiters all sprang back in alarm. The man had thrust his hand under his shirt bosom, and Dick expected to see him draw out a knife. But when the hand came out it had only a little round packet about the size of a very small egg, covered with brownish cloth, much handled, and dirty-looking.

The negro waiters could hardly have shown as much alarm if the man had drawn a knife. They shrank back in fear; it seemed to Dick that they actually turned pale; the teeth of some of them chattered.

“He got de rabbit foot!” one of them exclaimed.

“He a Hoodoo, boss!” another cried: “’tain’t safe to tech him. I would n’t lay hands on him fer no money.”

Dick was becoming very much interested. He had heard of the negroes carrying a rabbit’s foot for a charm, and of their Hoodoo nonsense, but he had never expected to have the good luck to see it so soon.

“Stan’ back!” the half-drunken man shouted,



waving the little package in the air. He had sense enough left to see that the other waiters were afraid of him and to take advantage of the fact. "Stan' back! I'll work de rabbit's foot on any man w'at comes near me."

The clerk sent a boy in a hurry after the two mates, and in a minute they appeared — big, brawny, white men. They had no fear of the rabbit's foot, and they seized the man and hustled him out of the cabin and down the companionway, Dick and many of the other passengers following.

The man was still abusive, but he was released on the lower deck; and he went immediately to the boiler and began to warm his little packet. He held it first one side toward the hot boiler, then the other, and turned it round and round.

"He warmin' de rabbit foot!" Dick heard one of the black roustabouts say in an alarmed tone. "He'll do mischief, dat man will."

In a few minutes, perhaps when the rabbit's foot was warm enough to be in good working order, the man walked back to the two mates, who were still watching him.

"I pay you off for dis!" he shouted. "I sink dis boat wid de rabbit foot, I will. I kill you yet."

In a second the first mate had the man by the throat and half-doubled him backward.

"That's what I've been waiting for!" the mate exclaimed; "I just wanted you to threaten some-



body. Now I'll put you and your rabbit's foot out of harm. Get me a rope, somebody."

The man was quickly tied hand and foot and fastened to a stanchion, and in the scuffle the little packet was knocked from his hand. Dick picked it up.

"Oh, gimme back me rabbit's foot!" the man whined. His pluck was all gone, now that he had lost his charm. "Please, boss, gim it back ter me."

"Oh, no!" Dick laughed. "It's too dangerous for you to carry. It's warm, too, and there's no telling what damage it might do."

Not one of the black deck hands would approach the packet. They held aloof; even some of the passengers looked alarmed when Dick took out his penknife and opened the blade.

"Don't you do it!" one of them advised. "'Tain't well to fool with them things."

"No, don't cut it open," another said. "Some harm'll come to you, sure, if you do."

"Nonsense!" Dick exclaimed. "No wonder these poor colored men are superstitious, if you white men encourage them in this way."

Without more ado he ripped open the packet with his knife. There were many wrappings under the brown cloth—first a layer of oiled silk, then one of flannel; but the interior was soon reached. There in the centre lay the wonderful charms:—

A rabbit's foot with hair and claws all complete.



Half of a gold ring.

A lock of straight black hair, tied with a string.

And —

Four small pieces of broken glass.

"It don't look very dangerous, does it?" Dick asked; and he tossed the packet over the boat's side into the river.

Several times that morning he heard colored men on board prophesying evil because the man had "hoodooed de boat"; and some of the white passengers sagely shook their heads. Just as the boat was approaching Louisville, half an hour before noon, when Dick was in his stateroom, the light mulatto boy who waited upon him entered the room.

"If I was you, I'd leave dis boat at Louisville, boss," the boy said. "I'd git off here if I could, but I'se shipped for de voyage. De boat's boun' to come to some harm, suah! Dat feller he hoodoo her; he wo'k de rabbit foot on her, and somethin' goin' to happen."

"All right, George," Dick laughingly replied; "that's just in my line of business. If anything happens to the boat, I must be here to see it, so I'll stay on board."

The stop kept the boat at Louisville for more than an hour. The "Hoodoo man" was released and put ashore with a warning not to come back, and the thirty or forty passengers whose fear of starting on Friday had led them to take the train,



joined the boat. By half-past one she was on her way down the river again.

"That was a good incident, that Hoodoo man," Dick said to himself; "I was lucky to see it." He did not know that the incident was only begun.

"Don't you want to go up on the Texas deck?" one of the passengers asked him — a pleasant-faced young fellow in a red flannel shirt. "We'll be going over the falls in a minute or two, and it's worth seeing."

Together they went up to the Texas, the highest deck of all, many feet above water, where a number of men were already standing.

The falls of the Ohio at Louisville might more properly be called rapids, for they stretch out over half a mile or more. When the water is high they are almost obliterated; but in low water they become a raging, roaring descent, studded with dangerous rocks. While the boat was rushing through this rapid Dick felt several sharp bumps against the bottom; but they were different from the bumps he had felt at Porto Rico or anywhere else, and he attached no importance to them.

Five minutes afterward, with the boat still in the rapids, several newcomers ran rapidly up to the Texas and began to watch a boat that was putting out from the Kentucky shore. Dick looked too; and as soon as the boat was near enough to be seen plainly, he watched with great interest.



For it was no ordinary boat that was coming out toward them at great speed. Painted white, her brass mountings glistened in the sun. Her eight oarsmen pulled with the strength and precision of man-of-war's men. The man at the tiller was in uniform, and all the men wore blue caps. It was a pretty sight, that handsome boat so excellently handled.

"What boat is that coming out?" Dick asked one of the newcomers.

"That is the life-saving crew from Louisville," the man replied.

"The life-saving crew!" Dick repeated; "and what are they coming out here for?"

"Don't you know we're sinking?" the man asked. "The hold is half-full of water now. The life savers must have seen us strike the rocks five minutes ago, and they're coming out to our assistance. Oh, it's a fine thing, that life-saving service! If the boat goes down in deep water, they'll find some way to get us all ashore. Just see them come!"

Dick and his red-shirted companion hurried down to the deck below them, and there everything was in confusion. Women and children were screaming, and several women had fainted. Men were rushing about after life preservers and gathering up their valuables. The boat's whistle had begun to blow continuously, and the horrible racket added to the excitement.



“Now don't get excited!” the clerk was shouting, in a way little adapted to calm the passengers' fears. “The life-saving crew is right alongside of us, and they'll get us all off. Keep cool, ladies; keep cool.”

“How deep is the water here at the foot of the falls?” Dick asked the clerk.

“Sixty feet!” was the whispered reply; “deepest place on the river.”

Dick started for the lower deck, but on the way he nearly ran into a woman with two little girls and no man to help her. They had secured a life preserver somewhere, and the woman was frantically trying to fasten it to the smaller girl. He instantly brought his good sense to bear for the relief of the frightened family.

“Let me show you how to fasten that, madam,” he said as coolly as though he were talking about strapping a valise; and he drew up a chair and sat down and took the little girl on his knee. “Not that you're going to need it now,” he went on, “but it's as well to understand these things. We are not in any danger; and anyhow I shall stay right here by you and take care of you. You sit down on the other knee” (to the larger child) “there; now you're just as safe as if papa had you, for I could swim this river a dozen times without losing my breath.”

A hundred shouts of “Keep cool” and “Don't be excited” could not have quieted the little family as Dick's quiet, confident manner did.



"Two steamboats have got us!" somebody cried at the after end of the cabin; "one on each side of us."

This caused a rush to the forward and after decks, and the passengers saw that a big steamboat was made fast on each side. The whistling had called them to the sinking boat's assistance, and they were helping her to a shallow place of safety. The life-saving crew were on board, too; and they helped give the people confidence. Now that any one who chose could step to the deck of one of the other boats, nobody cared to go.

Slowly the three boats together moved toward the Kentucky shore; and when they were close by the lower end of the canal by which boats avoid the falls in going up the river, one of them let go and drew ahead, and the other pushed the Belle of the River close against the rocky shore.

She had hardly lain there two minutes before down she went to the very bottom with all on board. But fortunately the bottom of the river was not more than two feet below the bottom of the boat, for it was a shallow flat that had been selected to let her sink in; and when she rested upon the mud the water did not reach her lower deck.

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried Dick's woman with the two little girls. "I just felt it in my bones that something was going to happen when we started on a Friday. I don't know what ever



possessed me to do it. And when that negro man hoodooed the boat, that just finished us."

"You must not think so, madam," Dick replied. "The current carried us slightly out of the channel and we struck a rock. Our starting on a Friday had nothing whatever to do with it; and certainly you cannot believe that an ignorant negro could bewitch the boat with a rabbit's foot. That is too ridiculous to think of."

Before the woman could say anything further two men walked through the cabin talking. "I'm going to take my family ashore just as soon as they get out a gangplank," one of them was saying. "That coon hoodooed the boat, and she'll have nothing but bad luck."

Dick went down to the lower deck and found the negroes in a great state of excitement. There was not one of them but believed that the accident had been caused by the man with the rabbit's foot.

"I'm a-gwine to sneak first chance I gits," he heard one of the roustabouts say to another; "no hoodooed boat for me!"

"I'm almost sorry this thing happened," Dick said to himself, "though it's all in the way of business for me. Nothing in the world will ever convince half of these people that the boat was not bewitched by that steward. I suppose it's in some such way as this that most wonderful stories



originate. But I didn't imagine that intelligent white people could believe in such nonsense."

There was too much going on, however, for him to spend much time thinking about the coincidence. The Belle of the River was still whistling, and one boat after another came to her assistance, till there were six or eight alongside. As they all burned soft coal, their smoke soon made the air almost unbearable.

"Well, that's an idea!" Dick exclaimed as he watched the proceedings. "A fellow can learn something every day, if he keeps his eyes open."

A man had been down in the hold and had found a ragged hole six feet long and about four feet wide in the boat's bottom; but as she rested in the mud the hole was temporarily stopped and no more water could flow in. It was the suction pipes that caused Dick's exclamation. Each of the helping boats got out a big hose and ran one end into the Belle's hold, while the other end was attached to their steam pumps. When they all began to pump they brought the water out in a hurry, and soon had the hold dry

"Now they'll build a bulkhead around the hole," the clerk said to Dick as he stood and watched; "a big square box; and first they'll lay in a lot of mattresses and pillows off the beds, and then layers of mud and stones, and put a good stout plank cover over it. That will keep us afloat till we get to



Paducah. There's a marine railway at Paducah, and we'll make repairs there. Say," he added in a lower voice, "do you think the coon really had anything to do with it?"

Dick was too much disgusted to give a serious reply.

"Undoubtedly!" he said. "I don't think the rabbit's foot alone could have done it; but when you combine the foot with a bit of gold ring, certain atomic forces are liberated which are difficult to control. Then by adding three or four bits of old glass, the isothermal pressure becomes tremendous. A lock of hair of course increases the equilibrium in the proportion of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle. But we were very lucky, after all. That was only a forefoot of a rabbit. If it had been a hindfoot, we'd all been drowned, sure."

"That's just my opinion of it," the clerk replied, seriously shaking his head; and Dick moved away.

The process of building a bulkhead was easily described, but the work itself took more than twenty-four hours, and the boat lay close to the Kentucky shore till early on Monday morning. A plank was laid from the upper deck to the rocky bluff on shore, and all who chose were at liberty to go ashore and spend the time in Louisville, only three or four miles away.

But Dick was too busy for that. He was trying hard to "keep up with his facts," as he put it;



and he spent much of the time in his stateroom writing.

"I'd like to know why it is," he said to himself, "that something unusual happens wherever I go. Is it because I'm on the lookout for such things, I wonder? Or do I have better luck than most correspondents? First, a riot in the cars put down by a celebrated preacher, then a bewitched steamboat, and now a little shipwreck. Why, I could n't have done better so far if I'd managed the program myself. But if this thing keeps on, Mr. Dick Sumner, you're going to run into an accident some day that will put a sudden end to your newspaper writing."

Slowly the boat made her way down the river, stopping at all the principal towns to take in cargo. Furniture, wagons, sash and blinds, bales of hay, bags of feed — a thousand different things were taken aboard till all the deck room was filled, and even the Texas deck was piled up high, making the boat look twice as large as she had looked before. Sometimes the stop was only for two or three hours, at others it lasted all day or all night. There was no pretence of hurry.

Dick would have caught up easily with his facts in this slow journey, only new facts, new subjects for articles, were accumulating all the time. The passengers he thought were worthy of a letter to themselves; many of the river towns were worth



describing. He could not turn in any direction without adding new material. The young fellows who wore flannel shirts and carried guns, and there were fifteen or more of them, were "swampers," he learned. Having finished their summer and fall work on northern farms, they were on their way to the Red River swamps in Louisiana to cut cypress timber, and late in the spring they would return. Of course they were full of good stories and Dick gathered them all in.

One night these swampers gave Dick a capital story. The wooded shore on the north was in Illinois, on the other side lay Kentucky. It was a bright moonlight night and every mark in the river was plain as day. But for some reason the captain decided to stop for the night, and he took the boat close up to the Illinois shore and tied her, bow and stern, to two immense chestnut trees.

"What's the matter, captain?" Dick asked. "Why don't you go on?"

"Oh, we might as well give the old thing a rest!" was the only reason the captain cared to give.

The swampers decided that it was exactly the proper sort of night for a coon hunt, and southern Illinois exactly the proper place. They got out a plank and went ashore and built a rousing bonfire, around which they sat and played their fiddles and sang songs till midnight. When they started



on the hunt Dick borrowed a gun and went with them, for he was acquainted with them all.

"That's article number nine," he said to himself when he returned. "Coon Hunt in Illinois. Odd duty for a New York reporter, too, to go coon hunting in Illinois."

On the eleventh day after leaving Cincinnati, the Belle of the River reached Paducah, Kentucky, and Dick had his first opportunity to see the working of a marine railway. There was a hill rising from the river, and at the top of the hill a long shed in which immense wooden cylinders were revolved by an engine. Wooden tracks reached some distance up the hill, and great iron chains ran down to the water, the upper ends being made fast to the cylinders.

These chains were fastened around the boat, and when the cylinders revolved they were wound up and drew the boat sideways out of the water. Out she came, with crew, freight, and passengers all on board; not only out of the water, but twenty or thirty feet up the hill, where the workmen could reach her bottom to repair her.

This was not done at once, however. Another boat was in the way at first, and two days passed before Dick's boat was raised. Then two more days dragged along without any sign of the repairs beginning. The delay gave Dick a grand chance to write, but he soon began to feel that he was wasting the Transport's time.



"How long will it take to repair the boat, after they begin?" he asked the captain.

"Not more than two or three days," was the answer.

"And when will they begin?"

"Oh, I should n't wonder if they'd begin tomorrow or next day."

"That's too slow for me!" Dick exclaimed. "I'll have to leave you, captain, and finish the journey to Memphis by rail. I believe there is a railroad from here to Memphis."

He went ashore and made inquiries in Paducah, and found that there was a train for Memphis at seven in the evening. By bedtime he was bowling across Kentucky in a railway car, through endless cotton fields, with the withered cotton stalks standing like skeleton sentinels in the moonlight. At two o'clock in the morning he was in Memphis.

"Any restaurants open at this time of night?" he asked of the solitary "cabby" outside the station.

"Plenty of them, sir," the man replied; "step right in and I'll take you to one."

The train for Little Rock started at six, so he had four hours to eat his supper and take a look at Memphis by moonlight. He had been "roughing it" so long on the boat that the sight of paved streets and substantial city houses seemed almost strange. At half-past five he was in the Little Rock train with some vague, shadowy impressions



of Memphis in his mind. What was clearest to him was a high bluff, and at the foot of the bluff a broad sheet of silver that narrowed down to a ribbon in the distance. The silver ribbon was the Mississippi River by moonlight.

Dick's train was ferried across the river on a large steamboat, and soon after daylight the journey across the eastern part of Arkansas began. It was a hundred miles of dismal swamp, the railroad running on an embankment through the swamp. Here and there were log cabins, inhabited by people with skins turned deep yellow by their diet of salt pork, quinine, and vile whiskey. This at least was the train conductor's explanation of their remarkable color.

"They have one advantage over the rest of us," Dick exclaimed with a shudder; "they must be awfully glad to die!"

At Forest City the train began to ascend to higher lands, and the young correspondent soon had his first look at a prairie. It was miles and miles across, without a fence or a tree. But there were some cultivated fields and comfortable homes that were a relief after the depressing swamp.

At Little Rock, Dick changed to the Iron Mountain train that was to carry him to Malsem, where he must change again to a little narrow-gauge road for the Hot Springs. There were only men in his car in the Iron Mountain train; men mostly of the



cowboy, "dead drop" sort; and all the conversation he heard around him was about shooting and fighting.

"I'd 'a' licked that feller in less than two minutes, if they had n't 'a' pulled me off," he heard a one-eyed man in the seat in front of him say.

"I had the dead drop on him, an' he knowed it!" came from the seat behind.

"Well," Dick quietly laughed to himself; "here's another phase of the great American people. I've left the superstitious ones and now I've fallen in with the fighters. But if they shoot and fight as much as they talk about it, I wonder that any of them are still alive."



## CHAPTER XII.

### A NARROW ESCAPE IN ARKANSAS.

ARE you going over to Hot Springs?"

It was decidedly the most civilized-looking man in the car who sat down beside Dick and asked the question. He was a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, who proved afterward to be a cotton planter from Georgia.

"Can you tell me of a good place to stay there?" the stranger went on, after Dick had answered his question in the affirmative. "I have never been there and know nothing about the place."

"I have never been there either," Dick answered. "I only know that the Arlington is the largest hotel, and I shall go there for a few days at any rate, till I can look about."

He was glad for the company of the young cotton planter, for the only drawback to the journey so far had been want of suitable companionship. The captain and clerk of the boat and some of the swampers were good fellows in their way, but they and Dick had few interests in common.

"If only I could have Darling or Jack Randall or some of the other fellows with me!" he often said to himself. "There are so many odd things to see;



but it half-spoils the pleasure to have to see them alone."

Late in the afternoon Dick and the cotton planter were settled in good rooms in the Arlington Hotel, and before supper they went out to the broad front piazza together to see what they could of the town. While they sat there a brass band marched down the street, playing lively airs.

"I wish they'd keep Mose Harrison in jail all the time," one of the other guests said to Dick, "so the music would last."

"Who is Mose Harrison?" Dick asked; "and what has his being in jail to do with the music?"

"Oh, you've just come, have you?" the man answered. "Well, you see Mose Harrison is the editor of *The Daily Horseshoe*, and he's in jail for thirty days for libel. The jail's down at the other end of town, and Mose's friends have hired the band to go down there every evening and give him a serenade. He'll be out in two or three days now."

"I think Mose Harrison is a man for me to meet!" Dick said to himself. Then turning to the planter he asked:—

"What do you think of Hot Springs, so far? Rather a lively place, is n't it, where a prisoner in jail is serenaded every evening? There are more cowboys and sombreros and spurs in the streets than I ever saw before."

"It's wonderful what a newspaper head Mr.



Harding has!" he could not help thinking. "It looked to me like a dry subject, coming down the river into Arkansas to write letters. But the old man knew what he was about. This place alone is worth making the journey for. It is full of queer people from all over the Southwest, and it is sure to give me some good stories. The situation of the town is a novelty itself, lying here in a deep valley between two high mountains, the valley hardly five hundred feet wide. Then the hot springs boiling out of one of the mountains and the steaming water running off in a steaming creek through the main street."

The way good subjects were coming to him lifted a little weight from Dick's mind, for he had not felt altogether sure about his letters. He had written two sets of very successful letters over his signature, and so established a standard that he must maintain. If these articles from the Southwest fell flat, the newspaper world would say: "Oh, it was only a spurt. Sumner did some good things once, but he has written himself out." The subjects were too good, however; he had no fear now of making a failure.

As he intended to make something of a stay in Hot Springs, to become familiar with the place and its people, Dick soon began to look about for a more retired place than the hotel. He found it in a large brick and iron building called the Douglas and



Johnson block, fronting upon the main street. There were stores underneath, and up one flight of broad iron stairs were large and comfortable rooms to let. Two of the rooms were vacant, and Dick took one and the cotton planter the other. Several good restaurants in the neighborhood were open at all hours.

On the second day after he was settled in his new quarters Dick took a walk up the main street, past the stores and saloons and gambling houses, to inspect a new quarter of the city. Immediately behind him as he walked was a large, handsomely dressed man, so close that he might easily have touched Dick's back. The man was taking slightly longer steps than Dick, and so was gaining upon him; and when they were directly opposite the Arlington Hotel he stepped a little to one side, intending to pass Dick.

Dick would have sprung forward in haste if he had been able to see even five seconds into the future. But not having that faculty, and paying no attention to the man who was almost by his side, he went quietly on.

Crash! There came the crack of a rifle, the whiz of a bullet within six inches of Dick's head, the crash of broken glass, and the man by his side fell heavily against Dick and dropped to the pavement.

Instantly there was a rush of men from the



neighboring stores, and the prostrate man was picked up and carried into a drug store, Dick helping.

"It's no use," said the druggist after making a hasty examination. "The bullet has gone through his brain, and he's dead as a door-nail. What he needs is a coroner, gentlemen; a doctor's no use now."

The murder caused very little excitement, but everybody in the city knew what it meant, and everybody was willing to tell Dick all about it. The murdered man was a gambler who a few days before had had an altercation with another gambler named Tom Davis. Tom Davis had sworn to have revenge, and to bring it about he had taken a room in the Arlington Hotel—a front room—and stationed himself in it with a rifle and waited patiently for the other man to pass. When the man passed on the opposite side of the street he had fired and killed him, and then disappeared, without stopping to inquire what damage might have been done to Dick's head, only six inches away.

"I suppose it's lucky for me that Tom Davis is a dead shot!" Dick reflected. "That bullet certainly was not a foot from my ear."

That night he sat in his room writing, as he did every night, when he heard a heavy thud, thud, thud on the iron stairs that made him pause and listen.



“There must be a troop of cavalry coming upstairs!” he exclaimed.

Tramp, tramp! If they were men, there were many of them, and all in heavy boots.

The sound came nearer and nearer; up the stairs, into the wide hall floored with iron and glass, and stopped, as it seemed to Dick, directly in front of his door. All was still for a moment, and he heard a whispered consultation outside; then came a heavy knock upon the door.

Wondering what it could all mean, Dick stepped to the door and opened it; and in a second he found himself looking into the barrel of a cocked revolver.

It was the first time he had ever had a revolver pointed directly at his head; and it was not six inches away. Before he had time to feel alarmed he saw that the man who held it was in uniform, and that six men who stood in line behind him with rifles in their hands were also in uniform. They were policemen.

There was security in those blue uniforms; such security that Dick, with the revolver still in his face, began to smile at the ludicrous situation.

“You have the drop on me!” he exclaimed. “Here, take my watch and pocketbook. It’s all I have.”

The man in front did not answer, but began to look past Dick into the room, as though searching for some one.



“Walk in, gentlemen,” Dick said; “just keep your thumb on the hammer of that pistol, will you? those things sometimes go off. Perhaps he’s here, whoever you are looking for. If he is, I’ll be obliged to you if you’ll take him out.”

He was so cool about it that the officer in advance, who proved to be the chief of police, could not help smiling. He lowered his revolver and stepped inside.

“I’m sorry to disturb you,” he said; “but it is necessary to search this building. I have reason to believe that Tom Davis, the gambler, who murdered a man this afternoon, is in hiding in some of these rooms.”

The chief went on to ask Dick questions about the occupants of the other rooms, all of which Dick answered as well as he could; and for the next half-hour he heard the chief and his men tramping through the halls and knocking at doors. It was a false alarm, however; the gambler was not there.

Dick was destined to meet the chief of police a few nights later under more pleasant circumstances. Stopping to take breath about midnight, an hour when the editor of *The Daily Horseshoe* was reasonably sure to be in his office, he stepped down into the next block to make the acquaintance of Mr. Mose Harrison, the man who was serenaded every evening in jail.

“I’m glad to meet you,” Mr. Harrison said with



great cordiality when Dick introduced himself. "I wish you had come in sooner. It will seem natural to you to be in a newspaper office and see the emblems of the profession about you;" and he waved his hand toward a rosette of rifles, swords, bowie-knives, and revolvers fastened to the wall behind his desk.

"We don't have quite so much ornamentation in our New York offices," Dick laughed. "But perhaps you need them here more than we do."

"Yes, we do!" was the reply. "But things ain't what they used to be. Why, I've seen the time— Hold on though, I didn't mean to be so inhospitable. There's a saloon right next door; come and have a smile."

"Thank you; I never smile — not in that way," Dick answered. And Mr. Harrison proceeded to finish his sentence.

"I've seen the time when there was a man lookin' for me in the next block below, and another in the block above; and it was sure death if I let 'em get the drop on me. And same to them — yes, hang it, Sumner, I meant just as well by them. We all meant business. Good-evenin', chief; walk in and take a chair."

The chief of police walked in while the editor spoke.

"Chief," he went on, "this is Mr. Sumner of The New York Transport. Sumner, Mr. Gardner, our chief of police."



Dick and the chief both smiled as they looked at each other.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting the chief before," Dick said. "He brought six men and a revolver to my room to introduce him a night or two ago."

"Well, accidents will happen," the chief laughed. "The joke was on me that time, I'll admit. There's a saloon right next do', gentlemen; will you step out and take something?"

"Wait until the paper goes to press, chief," Harrison said, "and I'll join you. Sumner don't drink."

The chief had an item to give about some police case, and he soon went out.

"Hang it, Sumner!" Harrison exclaimed, "I've got to have six or eight more paragraphs. I'll put you in for one; you and your experience with the police. But I want somebody to turn down. I wish you'd tell me who else I can turn down to-night."

"What do you mean by 'turn down'?" Dick asked; "I don't quite understand you."

"Oh, somebody to 'go for,'" Mr. Harrison answered; "somebody to give a black eye to. To say that the sheriff's about to seize his property, or that his son's in jail in Chicago, or some pleasant little news like that. If I don't have a few such items, people will say the Horseshoe's growing dull."



Dick protested that he was not well enough acquainted in Hot Springs to give advice on so important a matter; and while he was speaking the door opened and a short, chunky young man walked in.

“Well, what luck, Howell?” Harrison asked.

“Not a line,” the newcomer replied. “Everything’s too quiet.”

“That’s so,” said Harrison. “Everything’s too quiet to live. Come here till I introduce you to another newspaper man, Howell. This is Mr. Sumner, of The New York Transport. Our reporter, Mr. Sumner; Mr. Howell, from Waco, Texas.”

Mr. Howell, of Waco, Texas, was delighted to meet a newspaper man from New York, and said so. The honor so weighed upon him that in a minute or two he suggested:—

“There’s a saloon right next do’, gentlemen. Will you take a little walk?”

Once more Dick had to decline either to walk or smile. But Mr. Howell was not to be put off so easily.

“You must find things pretty stupid down here,” he said, “after New York. This town’s growin’ stupider every day. But if you’ll wait till the paper goes to press, at three o’clock, I’ll take you to a neat little dollar limit game up in the Burnt Rag. We have a game there every night. It’ll make a night’s sport for you.”



“Much obliged,” Dick laughed, “but I have a night’s sport waiting for me in my room. I have about two more columns of solid nonpareil to write before breakfast time.”

As he walked back to his room Dick was in an unhappy frame of mind.

“I’ve read of such newspaper offices as that,” he said to himself, “but I had no idea they really existed. The trouble is that when people read about such a place, they imagine that all newspaper offices are the same. If I only had Darling or Dr. Goode here to talk to Mose Harrison and Mr. Howell, of Waco, Texas! And to see the revolvers and bowie knives, and hear about the ‘turning down’ and ‘the saloon next do’! Darling would laugh at it; but, on the whole, I should n’t like Dr. Goode to see it. He has such a high idea of the profession that it would make him feel very sore.”

Dick’s days in Hot Springs were given to sight-seeing, and his nights to writing, and when at the end of several weeks he started for Texas and New Orleans, he had written a large number of letters. He had had the satisfaction of seeing many of them in print, too; for the New York papers came rapidly by rail, and he found that the letters were being copied as widely as the others had been.

After a brief stay in the northeast part of Texas, that was not very fertile in material, he went by rail to Shreveport and took passage on the Red River



boat *Argosy* for New Orleans. The boat was to start at six o'clock in the evening; but she had a great quantity of cotton to load, and the weather was so cold that it was hard to get negroes to do the loading, so she was delayed till nearly nine. The worst part of the waiting was that supper was not served till the boat started; but Dick amused himself by watching his fellow-passengers. In one party there were five or six young ladies and as many young gentlemen, very lively young folks, and some of the ladies very pretty; but before the boat started the party dwindled to three young ladies, the others having come on board merely to see them off.

"Now if I had only had more experience with young ladies," Dick said to himself, "I'd manage somehow to make the acquaintance of those three. They seem to be very nice ladies, and it would make the time pass pleasantly." Almost for the first time he regretted that his work had made it impossible for him to enjoy ladies' society as most young men do. Indeed he had hardly thought of it before; but now he realized that he was sadly lacking in experience as a gallant. "However," he consoled himself, "very likely I could n't manage to be introduced to them, anyhow."

What he desired was destined to be managed for him better than he could have arranged it himself. Soon after the boat started, the clerk, who



knew his name because he had written it in the register, stepped up to him and said : —

“ There are three young ladies on board without any escort, Mr. Sumner ; very fine young ladies, daughters of a cotton planter down the river. I should like to introduce you to them, so that you can escort them to supper.”

Of course they were the very young ladies he had been desirous of meeting ; and he blessed the good old-fashioned custom of the southern steam-boats that makes it the duty of the clerk to see that all unprotected ladies are provided with escorts to take them properly to the table.

“ It would be a long time, I ’m afraid,” he said to himself, “ before an escort would be found for a lady on one of our Hudson River or Sound boats.”

Dick was surprised at his success in making himself agreeable to his new companions. If one of his articles had been reprinted by fifty different papers, it would not have pleased him more than to find that the young ladies enjoyed his company.

“ But it ’s only because I have a lot of amusing things to tell them,” he modestly thought. “ I ’m glad they ’re not the kind of young ladies who would want to flirt. I can turn my hand to almost anything, but that ’s one of the things I certainly could not do.” He had not at that time made a study of any young lady for use in his projected novel.

Somehow the first three days of the voyage, when



the young ladies were on board, passed very quickly and pleasantly; and the last three, after they had landed at their father's plantation, rather seemed to drag. Perhaps it was because the scenery grew somewhat monotonous. Dick helped the three ladies up the steep gangway at the plantation; and when he returned to the boat and left them standing on the bluff, the clerk said to him:—

“Now wave to them; wave your handkerchief. They'll expect you to wave good-by to them.”

Dick waved with a will, and they returned the compliment quite as heartily. The boat swung around a bend, and the three pleasant young ladies became only a memory.

When he arrived in New Orleans Dick had a self-conscious feeling that troubled him at first. He felt that he had become somewhat countrified in appearance; that people were looking at him; that he needed brushing up. It was the natural result of spending so many weeks on the river and among the mountains, and it soon wore off. Another trouble was that he was running short of funds. So much travel had exhausted most of the money that had been furnished him, and it was necessary to send for more.

“It won't do to run out of money here,” he thought, “where nobody knows me. Of course I have only to send to the office for more, but there might be some delay about its getting here.”



For economy's sake he stayed only a day in the famous St. Charles Hotel, and then moved into a furnished room in a comfortable old-fashioned house facing Lafayette Square, two or three blocks up St. Charles Street. This was a mistake that Dick would not have made a year later on. As the correspondent of a great New York newspaper his credit would have been good to any reasonable amount in a first-rate hotel till his funds arrived; whereas the private landlady would need her money, and would most likely exact it in advance; and in a restaurant expected funds are not as good as cash in the pocket.

Though he knew that his money was sure to arrive, the depleted state of his purse worried Dick, for he had only a few dollars left. On his first day in New Orleans he wrote to the Transport office for a check for three hundred dollars, and it would take, as he reckoned it, at least five days to receive an answer — perhaps six.

“The letter might miscarry,” he said to himself a dozen times; “and if it should, another week would be lost, and I have not enough for two weeks. I should have sent for the check sooner.”

There were enough sights in New Orleans to occupy his time. The strange cemeteries, with their brick graves built above ground; the French quarter and French market; the old Spanish fort; the lake and its beach and its Coney-Island-like attractions;



the river front, — all these things made material for letters. The steamer for Key West was to sail on Thursday morning at eight o'clock, and Wednesday was the sixth day from the date of his letter to the Transport; but no check had arrived.

There were two mail deliveries in St. Charles Street every day, one at nine o'clock in the morning and the other at noon. The postman made his nine o'clock visit, but there was no letter for Richard Sumner, Esquire. He began to feel that he really had cause for anxiety; no check, hardly any money, and his steamer to sail early the next morning.

When the time for the noon delivery came, Dick was sitting on a sunny bench in Lafayette Square, directly opposite his house, where he could watch the door, waiting impatiently for the arrival of the very last mail that could bring him a check in time for the next day's steamer. He saw the postman walking rapidly up the street, ringing doorbells and handing in letters. He saw him stop at the house next door to his and hand in a letter there. He saw him go on a few steps and pause a moment, then go on again, on past his house without ringing the bell! Dick could hardly believe his eyes; hardly realize that there was no possible chance of getting his check in time.

"Well," he said to himself, "I've done my best to get money by mail, and I've failed. Now we'll



see what the telegraph will do. I don't intend to lose that boat."

As he got up from the bench to go to the telegraph office a hundred factory bells and whistles were sounding for noon. He walked down St. Charles Street to the main telegraph office, under the St. Charles Hotel, and wrote his dispatch:—

Daily Transport, New York:—

No check received. Please telegraph me three hundred dollars immediately.

SUMNER.

He actually grudged the fifty cents for sending the dispatch, his money was so low. But after sending it he walked back to his old seat in the square. With all his tribulation he was thinking out the next article he was to write; and he thought and thought, sometimes about the money and sometimes about the article, till suddenly he clapped his hand down upon his knee.

"There's another complication!" he exclaimed. "They won't pay a telegraphic money order before nine in the morning, nor after five in the afternoon. It's almost certain that my money won't get here before five o'clock, and I'll not be able to get it to-night. By the time that I can get it in the morning my steamer will be gone!

"Now there's a way out of every difficulty," he continued, "and there's a way out of this. What I must do is go back to the telegraph office, intro-



duce myself to the manager, explain the case to him, and arrange to get the money this evening whenever it arrives. I think that will do it."

For this purpose he walked back to the telegraph office and sent in his card to the manager. He was shown into a handsome private office, where he soon made known what he wanted.

"I suppose you have some papers that will identify you, Mr. Sumner," the manager said when Dick concluded; "letters in your pocket or something of that sort?"

"Oh, yes, I have plenty of letters," Dick answered as he drew out a handful and showed them.

"That's all right," the manager said. "Your money is here, Mr. Sumner. Just show these letters to the cashier, and he will pay it over to you."

His money there! why, it was less than an hour since he had telegraphed for it! But it was a fact nevertheless; and within three minutes he had the three hundred dollars in his pocket, in good crisp notes, and was walking back toward his old seat in the square. The ringing of the bells and blowing of the whistles for one o'clock, just as he sat down, reminded him that exactly an hour had passed since he first started for the telegraph office; and now the money was in his pocket.

"That is almost worth making an article of," he reflected; "sending from New Orleans to New York for money and having it here within an hour. An



outsider would hardly believe it possible, but I can see exactly how it was done. When my telegram reached New York it was sent right up in the pneumatic tube that runs from the Western Union office to the Transport office, so no time was lost in the delivery. The office boy handed it at once to the city editor, and his reply to it was something like this, written on one of the office noteheads:—

Western Union:—

Please send three hundred dollars immediately to Richard Sumner, New Orleans, and charge to account of Daily Transport.

J. H. BROWN, *City Editor*.

“That went right down to the telegraph office in the pneumatic tube, and the next minute they were telegraphing the manager here to pay me three hundred dollars. And here’s the money in my pocket, and I take to-morrow’s steamer for Key West.”



## CHAPTER XIII.

### DICK BEGINS TO WRITE A NOVEL.

“COME home,” was the order that Dick received in reply to his telegram from Key West reporting himself there and asking for instructions.

He was very well satisfied with this, for various reasons. He was far behind in his facts, although he had been writing, writing, as fast as he could. While in Texas and on the Red River he had been writing still about Hot Springs; and even in Key West he had not begun yet to do his descriptions of New Orleans.

However, there was a weightier reason than this that made him desire to go home. While on his travels the plot of a novel had somehow stolen into his mind, and he had worked it out so far that he was anxious to begin writing it.

“I certainly could not do anything toward putting it on paper while I am traveling,” he said to himself. “My time is not my own now, anyhow, but even if it were I should have no chance. I can’t help thinking about it and working it out. The only way that I can ever write a novel is to have the whole thing thoroughly in mind before I begin to write, so that when I do write I shall know exactly what I am about.



“They say that novelists’ methods of work differ very much. Some men begin to write with nothing but the main idea in their minds, and let the thing develop as they go along. Those are the men who write and rewrite, and cut and add and change, till at last there is hardly anything left of the original. I know one celebrated writer who rewrote a novel six times, and it was very bad when he finished it.

“That plan would not do for me. I must have everything perfectly mapped out before I begin; so well in hand that I could write the last chapter first, or the middle one, or do any scene or conversation without reference to the rest. I don’t think it is because I am too lazy to rewrite; more likely my newspaper training has taught me to gather all my material up and sort it out before I pick up the pen.”

There was time to collect facts for several good articles in Key West before he could start; for Key West is unique among cities. The most southerly point in the United States, most of its inhabitants are Cubans who work in the big cigar factories, and their ways of life are distinctly Cuban. Then the isolated position of the place, on a tiny island miles from the continent, makes it almost a land to itself, with many strange customs not to be found elsewhere.

Dick found that he could return to New York either by the direct steamer or by the Plant System boat to Tampa, and thence by rail up the Atlantic



Coast. He promptly chose the latter way, not only because it was much faster, but also on account of the opportunity it gave him to see more of the country.

“I cannot see too many places,” he reflected, “if I am going to write novels; and I am certainly going to try. If I should have occasion to write about Tampa or Jacksonville or Charleston or Richmond, it would be necessary to know something about those places. This rail ride will ‘enlarge my field of action,’ as Darling would say.”

After a beautiful voyage up the smooth Gulf of Mexico the steamship landed him in Tampa, and there he found a through train ready to carry him to New York. For scores of miles through Florida the tracks ran between orange groves; and as the trees were white with blossoms, the air was perfumed with their delightful fragrance. Into Georgia the train carried him, then across South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, into Pennsylvania, and at last across New Jersey to Jersey City. Washington was a sore temptation to him to stop, for he felt that he ought to become familiar with the National Capital. But none knew better than Dick that a newspaper’s order to “come home” does not mean come next week, or the day after to-morrow, but come at once. There might be work of the utmost importance waiting for him.

It was seven o’clock in the evening when the



train arrived in Jersey City, and Dick went directly to the Transport office to report his return.

“Darling will be glad to see me back, anyhow,” he said to himself as he sprang merrily up the stairs; “so will Dr. Goode. The doctor always has a warm welcome for a fellow who’s been away on a journey. Three whole months since I’ve seen any of the boys! There’ll be some new faces among the reporters, I suppose. It’s funny to think that I’m one of the ‘old’ men now!”

He spoke to the office boys as he entered the big room, and hurried up to the front to see Dr. Goode and the managing editor and the night city editor and Darling. Jack Randall and Lawrence and two or three others tried to stop him as he passed, but he waved his hand to them and went on.

Something looked unfamiliar at the desks by the front windows. It took him a second or two to grasp the situation and see that Darling was sitting at the managing editor’s desk, and that Mr. Brown, the city editor, was in Dr. Goode’s chair.

“Hello, Darling, old chap!” he exclaimed, putting out his hand; “what are you doing here?”

“Be a little more respectful, if you please, in addressing your managing editor!” Darling answered. “I can’t have reporters and correspondents calling me ‘old chap’ in the office.” There was a sly twinkle in Darling’s eye as he said it; and he gave Dick’s hand a tremendous wrench.



“Managing editor!” Dick repeated. “You don’t say that you’re” —

“Oh, yes, I do,” Darling interrupted. “These little things happen sometimes. The managing editor that was has gone to take charge of a paper in Minneapolis, and I have been put in his place.

“Shake again!” Dick exclaimed. “You the managing editor! Why that makes you my boss, and you might send me out to do a fire to-night, if you wanted to; but you’d better not. But where is the doctor? What is Mr. Brown doing at his desk?”

Darling turned towards the papers in front of him and looked at them hard.

“There is bad news as well as good, Dick,” he replied after a moment’s pause. “Dear, old doctor! He” —

“What! he’s not sick, is he?” Dick interrupted. But the moisture in Darling’s eyes was more eloquent than words. “O Darling! Oh, no, old chap, you don’t mean it? He’s not” —

Darling sadly shook his head and fumbled among his papers. “A week ago yesterday, Dick, we took him over to Greenwood. His poor old eyes will never give him any more trouble in this world. All these things have happened within a few days, and we wrote you about them; but I suppose you left Key West before the letters arrived.”

Dick turned away without another word, for he



would not trust his voice in that cruel moment. Sadly he shook hands with Mr. Brown, then looking toward Darling again, he said almost in a whisper:

“There is nothing for me to do to-night; I need not stay here. I—I must go home. I will be up when you come home, Darling.”

As he walked quickly out of the big room Dick saw several new men, much such young reporters as he once was, nudge each other and look at him. He knew what that meant, for he had noticed it before. The youngsters were saying to one another, “See that fellow! that’s Richard Sumner, the man who’s been writing those letters from Mexico and the Southwest!”

Once he had been looking at the older men in the same admiring way; but now that his own time had come it could not even make him smile. For who was to tell him when he did good work, and point out weaknesses in his style, or comfort him in trouble, or advise him, or do him a thousand little kindnesses, with Dr. Goode lying over in Greenwood?

There was a warm welcome for him in the flat, and he did his best to conceal his grief over Dr. Goode behind his satisfaction at Darling’s promotion. That he could hardly realize any more than he could fully realize that he should see his good friend no more.

“It’s too astonishing for a man to grasp so



suddenly," he said to his mother and Florrie after the first volley of hugs and kisses. "Darling is exactly the man for the place; exactly. But there were four or five people between him and the managing editorship. However, they do those things sometimes, as I have learned by experience."

"You'll have to mind your p's and q's now, Mr. Richard Sumner," Florrie laughed. "If you don't do exactly as I want you to about everything, I'll have Harry reduce your salary or put you back at city work. I'll see that he keeps you busy."

"I don't think he can keep me any busier than I always am," Dick retorted. "I've hardly had a minute to myself since I began work on the Transport. But I want to begin some work for myself now, and I'm remarkably glad that Darling is the man I'll have to negotiate with."

There was time to do at least part of an article between the supper and the hour for Darling's arrival, and Dick shut himself up and fell to work as naturally as if he had not been away.

"Hello!" he exclaimed when he came to a short pause somewhere after midnight. "I'd forgotten that I was in New York. I've been so engrossed with writing about New Orleans and the levee and the Spanish fort and St. Charles Street, that I seemed to be down there among the Creoles." He was always pleased when he found himself carried away with his subject in this way; so completely



saturated with it that he became oblivious to his real surroundings. He liked to laugh with his funny characters, and sometimes to drop a stray tear with the unfortunate ones — when he was entirely alone.

When Darling came in, a little later now than before, because he had to look over an early copy of the paper before leaving the office and sometimes make a second edition, Dick was ready to join him in the late supper. They had a long talk about Dr. Goode and everything that happened in the office.

“I intended to have a confab with the managing editor as soon as I got back, Darling,” Dick said after he had heard all the news; “but I did n’t think my talk would be with you. You know what we were saying some time ago about my writing — writing a novel. I have been reading as much as I could while I was away, and I have the plot of a good story in my mind. Pretty well worked up, too, so that when I begin to write it I can go straight ahead.

“Now what I am most in need of is time to write. I have about a week’s work to finish up the letters of my last trip, and of course I will do that first. After that I want to get some time to myself, if I can manage it. Mother was so economical while I was away that she has saved more than half of my salary; and that with what I had saved before will bring my fund up to nearly a thousand



dollars in the bank. I can do the actual writing of a novel in three months; and I feel as if I could afford to ask for that much vacation from the office, without salary of course. Now is the time for me to strike while my name is in the papers so much."

"You are quite right to strike while the iron is hot," Darling replied. "The kind of work you are doing now will not last always, as I told you before; it never does with any man. But I think you can do better than ask for a long vacation. I have never known a man to be given a long vacation for such a purpose, and I should not like to begin with you in making such a break. They all know how we stand toward each other, and they would accuse me of favoritism at once if I did it. Why not go on space, Dick?"

"On space?" Dick repeated. "I don't see how that would help me any."

"It would help me to help you," Darling replied; "and of course I want to help you as much as I can, though on the other hand I must do what is best for the office. You would n't ask me to show you favors that I would not show to another man in your place."

"Certainly not!" Dick exclaimed. "I would n't accept them."

"You can go on space as a special man, and I shall feel warranted in paying you fifteen dollars a column. Of course in that case your salary will



stop, and you will be paid only for what you write, or the time you are actually busy. That will leave you master of your own time to a great extent. You might average perhaps three days a week for the paper and three for yourself, and at that rate you could finish your novel in six months. You know some of the space men make a great deal of money. I think that will be better for you than to stop work entirely for three months; and it will certainly be better for the office, because we can call upon you whenever we need you."

"I don't know but you're right about that, Darling," Dick answered after a little reflection. "It will seem strange at first not to have the salary coming in regularly; but, then, three columns a week will more than make up for it, and I think I ought to average that much."

Dick had a great deal to think about when he went to bed an hour or two before the sun rose. But the desire to write his novel was stronger in his mind than anything else, except his grief over the loss of Dr. Goode. He felt that his plot was a good one — original and bright. His newspaper letters had met with great success; why should his novel not do as well?

For the next week he toiled away, every afternoon and part of the night, till his letters were finished. When the last one was done he laid down his pen with some regret.



“Now for space work,” he said to himself, “and what I hope will be the best work I have done yet. The novel is so thoroughly laid out that I have nothing to do but write it. It may not go at all; it may fall flat or be laughed at; but I am going to do my best with it. If I can write one novel that will go, I can write more.”

He fell to work at it at once, stopping only when Darling gave him special work to do for the office. At the end of a fortnight Darling asked him how the novel was coming on.

“Oh, I’m learning!” he laughed. “I know more about novel-writing now than I did two weeks ago, at any rate. Did n’t I tell you that I had it all so well laid out in my mind that I had only to do the actual writing? Well, I really believed that, which just shows how little I knew about the trade. Why, Darling, I wrote the opening sentences a dozen times before I got them to suit me! After the first two chapters were done I saw how very much the whole opening scheme might be improved, so I threw them away and began over again. I’m on my fifth chapter now, but there’s hardly a line that has not been written two or three times over.”

“I’m glad of that,” Darling said; “nothing but hard pulling will produce good work. How much do you do every day?”

“Well, after I go down to the office to see



whether I'm needed, I do a thousand words in the afternoon. That is my regular afternoon's work. Then after dinner, with the whole night before me, I hope for two thousand words more. You know I am a very rapid penman. But I don't push myself at night. If I'm not in the mood, I read for an hour or two. That generally puts me in proper trim."

"What do you read? Shakespeare?"

"No," Dick replied; "never while I'm writing. He is a capital stimulant at other times, but in the midst of writing I find he confuses me. His heroic style is so totally different from the modern style that there must be an interval between. No; at those times I want a language nearer to the language I use myself, and I find it in Thackeray—usually in *Vanity Fair*."

"I have heard other writers say the same thing," Darling acquiesced. "A writer unconsciously imitates to some extent the style he has just been reading. At least, so I understand; a managing editor, you know, is a complicated machine for watching the news of the world and getting it all into his own paper. He cannot be expected to be an expert in literary style."

"He is valuable as a signer of reporters' checks," Dick laughed; "and when a man runs short of money in a distant city he is the most important person in the world."



The interruptions in the novel-writing were always provoking, but they could not be avoided. Sometimes Dick was kept away for days at a time, and on one occasion for a whole week. "Never mind, I'm fresh for a new start," he said to himself at such times, and took up the thread where he had laid it down. Mrs. Sumner and Florrie took great pains to keep the flat quiet while he was at work, for somehow, though he could write newspaper articles with the whole office talking around him, the least noise disturbed him when he was at work on his novel.

"Sh!" he heard one little girl say to another in the hall one day as they passed the door of his flat; "don't talk so loud, there's a man writing a book in there!" But he could not even smile just then, for he was trying to work his way through a difficult situation.

Almost the only newspaper work that Dick really enjoyed while he was engaged upon the novel came to him about the time that he had reached the twelfth chapter; and perhaps the way that came to him had something to do with his enjoyment of it. When he went into the office Darling handed him a memorandum, and with the memorandum a brief note from the editor-in-chief, not intended for Dick's eyes.

"Send the best writer you have on this job," the note said; "get Sumner if possible."



“This job” was to write a complete description of the working of the New York Fire Department, and to do it properly Dick must go to an engine-house and live there like a fireman till the engine was called out to at least one fire ; and then go out with it and help handle the hose. To be allowed to do this he must go first to the department headquarters in Mercer Street and get a permit.

“That is very nice in the old man to call me the best writer in the office,” he said to Darling. “I only hope the publishers will think so when I send them my novel.” He said nothing about the note to any one else, except his mother and Florrie, but he thought about it a great deal. “The best writer in the office! And the Transport is everywhere admitted to be the best written newspaper in America!”

He could not help feeling elated over such a compliment as he rode up to Mercer Street. “Here, Dick!” he kept saying to himself; “Dick, wash the rollers! “Dick, come here!” and then by contrast, “Send the best writer in the office; get Sumner if possible.” But experience had given a veneering to his exterior, and he would not for any money have let his companions know that he gave the note a second thought.

“I think we had better send you down to Number Four in Liberty Street,” the chief of the fire department said when Dick made known his mission.



“There are a great many fires in that district, and Number Four is the headquarters of the chief of the First Battalion. He can give you the information you require.”

The chief wrote out an order to the foreman of Number Four, directing him to “allow Mr. Richard Sumner to remain in the engine-house for forty-eight hours, or longer if he desires; give him all possible information and allow him to accompany the apparatus to fires.” It was such an order as only the representative of a first-rate newspaper could have obtained.

When Dick arrived at the Number Four engine-house in Liberty Street, opposite the site of the old postoffice, next morning, he was politely received by the foreman of the company, and by the chief of the First Battalion. He saw on the ground floor of the building a beautiful fire engine, resplendent with polished brass, and by its side the tender, with its reel of hose. At the rear were three stalls with fine large horses in them; and near the centre was a smooth pole running up to the upper stories of the building through hatchways cut in the floors.

“So you are going to be a fireman for a few days, are you?” the battalion chief asked as he read Dick’s order. “Well, you will find it exciting work if we happen to have a good fire. And you’ll have to step around pretty fast, to go out with the



apparatus. Come upstairs with me and I will show you first where the men live."

Dick and the chief were crossing the floor of the big room toward the stairway when there came a terrible clatter.

"Tap-tap-tap!" rang a big gong almost over their heads.

"Tap-tap-tap!" rang a smaller gong in the rear by the horses.

Instantly there was a rush of men and horses across the floor toward the engine and tender.

"Look out! Dodge the horses!" the chief shouted; and at the same moment he seized Dick by the arm and dragged him to the foot of the stairs, out of the way.

It was none too soon either; for the next second the three powerful horses dashed past like the wind and took their places, one on either side of the pole of the engine and the third between the shafts of the tender. The harness lay ready on their backs, and Dick noticed that men were already at their stations to snap the springs that attached the horses to the apparatus. But what a rush it was! In another second the driver was in his seat in the front of the engine, and the engineer and his assistant were on a platform at the rear. A driver and six firemen were on the tender, and each driver had the reins in his hands, ready for a dash. One man stood by the big folding doors in front, his hand on



the latch, ready to throw them open. Every man was in uniform, and every man knew just where to go. Dick took it all in, though the whole thing took less than ten seconds.

“Tap-tap!” said both bells again; and the drivers jumped down from their seats, the horses were unfastened and trotted back to their stalls; it was all over.

“What does that mean?” Dick asked. “If there is a fire, why doesn’t the engine go?”

“Because it was not one of our numbers,” the chief explained. “It was a genuine alarm of fire, but not in our district. Of course every engine in the city does not go to every fire; each engine goes only to the fires in its own district, and we know where the fire is by the number of taps. But every engine in the city is manned and made ready to go out whenever an alarm comes. You see we cannot tell when the bell begins to tap whether it is going to be one of our numbers or not. For instance, the gong just struck three and two — thirty-two. That station is away up in Harlem, and we could hardly reach it in an hour. But the gong might have gone on and added four to the thirty-two, making 324. That would have been one of our stations, and we would have gone out. You see we were all ready on the first tap for whatever might happen.”

“Well!” Dick exclaimed, “that is a very com-



plete system. But what I don't understand is how the horses got out here so fast. I didn't see anybody touch them."

"No!" the chief laughed; "no one touched them. But I shall have to begin back at the fire itself to make that clear to you. For an easy example, we will suppose that a fire is discovered in the Astor House, and that somebody runs out and pulls the handle in the nearest alarm box, which is at Vesey Street and Broadway. The number of that box is 23, and the pulling of the handle immediately telegraphs '23' to the fire headquarters in Mercer Street. A clerk sits there by the instrument, with a cabinet in front of him full of tiny drawers, each drawer containing a little brass disk notched in the side to correspond with the numbers. He takes out disk number 23 and drops it into a slot prepared for it in another instrument, and presses a button. Quick as a wink '23' is telegraphed to every engine-house in the city.

"Now we come to the horses," he continued. "That little flash of electricity does a great deal of work. It not only taps the number on our big gong, but at the same time it releases a weight which drops and pulls back the bolts that fasten the horses in their stalls, and rings a smaller gong over their heads. They are so used to the business that the instant they hear the gong they know they



are free, and they start on a run for their places in front of the engine and tender. They know where to go and what to do as well as the men."

"I like to see the horses best of all!" Dick exclaimed enthusiastically. "What noble fellows they are! But the whole thing is very complete."

"Oh, that is only a beginning," the chief said. "Come upstairs now till I show you where we live. You see this pole running up? It goes all the way to the roof, and is for the men to slide down when they are in a hurry. If they happen to be up above when an alarm comes, they don't think of using the stairs but slide down the pole. It is smooth and perfectly safe. That's what you will have to do if you want to catch the engine at night. You saw how quickly everything is done. We go out of the door in ten or eleven seconds after the first tap of the bell, day or night, and you'd never catch us if you waited for the stairs. If you get there in time, jump right up on the ash-box with the engineer and fireman at the rear of the engine. We can't wait for you, you know."

Dick looked critically at the slippery pole and the distance to the ground floor.

"I'll be there," he said confidently. "I can go down that pole as fast as anybody."

"Now here is where the men sleep," the chief went on; "here in the third story. Each man has his little iron bed and"—



“Tap – tap!” said the great gong and a smaller one up in the sleeping-room.

Dick did not wait for the third tap. He knew that the engine might be out of the house in ten seconds, and it was his duty to catch it.

He sprang for the pole, threw his arms around it, and slid down to the ground floor as if he had been shot out of a cannon. In a fraction of a second more he was in his place on the ash-box of the engine.

But there was none of the commotion below that he had expected to see. Instead, there came a clapping of hands and some laughter and shouts of, —

“Bravo, reporter! you’re on time!”

“Good for the newspaper man!”

“The Transport never gets left, does it?”

“You’ll do for a fireman,” said the foreman, trying hard not to laugh; “but that bell was only the twelve o’clock time signal. We don’t go out for that.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A NIGHT RIDE ON A FIRE ENGINE.

THE comfort of Dick's stay in the engine-house depended very largely upon how he took this laughter at his expense, and he was shrewd enough to know it. He had mistaken the noontime signal, when the correct city time is sent to every engine-house for a fire alarm, and the fun-loving firemen could not lose such a good chance to laugh at him.

There was no danger, though, that Dick would lose his temper, and so make himself the butt of countless other jokes. He enjoyed his mistake as much as any of them and laughed with the rest, and so began a pleasant acquaintance with the men that was an advantage to him in a business way, for they all had good stories to tell.

"Every house ought to have a pole like that," he laughed; "it's ever so much easier than coming downstairs."

Returning to the third story, he went about with the chief to see the men's sleeping-room and the big sitting-room on the second floor, where they amuse themselves with checkers, chess, dominoes, and newspapers and magazines.

"A fireman is always on duty, you know," the chief



explained. "Only one or two men go out to their meals at a time, so we are never left short-handed. At any moment a bad fire may break out, and we must be ready. For a big fire we have what we call second and third alarms. At a first alarm only four engines go to a fire. If I see when I reach the spot that it is likely to be a bad fire, I send in a second alarm, and that brings four more engines. If it is very dangerous, I send also a third alarm, and that calls four more; twelve in all. Besides these there is what we call the general alarm, 666, which calls every engine in the city — more than a hundred of them. But I hope we will never have occasion to use that."

"Well, I'm sure to see how you work at a fire," Dick said, "as I am to stay till I have a chance to go out with you."

"You might possibly have to wait a day or two," the chief answered; "but often we go out three or four times in a day and night."

When Dick went downstairs again he discovered on one side of the big room a dial telegraph instrument with which the foreman communicated with headquarters; and on the slate that hung by it he read this message, which evidently had just been sent: —

"Richard Sumner has presented an order to remain here and accompany apparatus to fires. Is it genuine?"



“ Ah, ha ! ” he laughed ; “ they ’re not going to be caught napping with any forged order. I think it ’s the most perfectly organized system I ever saw.”

“ How do you get up steam so fast in the boiler ? ” he asked the foreman. “ Of course you must be ready for work when you reach a fire.”

“ I ’ll show you,” the foreman replied. “ To begin with, the boiler of the engine has two hundred and sixty flues, and that gives great heating surface. Then you see this pipe that comes up through the floor and fits over a corresponding pipe at the back of the engine ? When the engine is backed in, the two pipes run together, and when it goes out they separate and automatic valves close them up.

“ Well, that pipe runs down into the cellar and connects with a furnace there in which a fire is always kept burning. The hot water runs up into the boiler, so, as you will easily see, the water in the boiler is always hot. That is a great help in making steam quickly. The furnace alone gives heat enough to keep five pounds of steam pressure always on the boiler.

“ Then we burn English cannel coal, at twenty dollars a ton, because it is full of oil and burns rapidly. The engine’s furnace is piled full of combustible wood soaked in oil, with a layer of cannel coal on top — always ready to start a quick fire. The engineer has a little torch made of tow fastened to a bit of wood, with a fusee stuck in the end.



The fusee will not blow out in the hardest wind, and the instant the engine goes out the door the engineer strikes it against the wheel and touches off his fire. Inside of two minutes he has a hundred pounds of steam on."

At that moment the battalion chief joined them.

"We do everything," he said, "on the principle that a minute's work at the beginning of a fire is worth more than an hour's work after it has gained headway. We must be on hand quickly; and, as you see, we don't waste much time."

Throughout the afternoon and early evening the engine was manned five or six times, and every time Dick was promptly in his place; but it did not go out. When bedtime came, between nine and ten o'clock, the chief gave him some final instructions.

"And you must mind what I tell you," he said, "or you'll not get to the fire, if there is one."

"I am used to obeying orders," Dick replied.

"Very well then," said the chief, "here is order number one. You see that brass handle around the back of the boiler? Hang on to that with both hands, for your life depends on it. At night when the streets are clean we go on a dead run, and turning the corners will throw you off your feet."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Dick.

"Order number two. Keep your eye on the horses. If a horse falls, jump for your life; for the



tender will be right behind you, and it will be on top of you and crush you in a second."

"Order number three. Here is a fireman's hat for you and an old coat. See, I hang them on the end of the brass handle, near where you will stand. You see every man has his hat and an old coat hung by his place on the engine or tender. We don't wear uniform at night, except the hat. These are all hung up ready for work in case we go out. Now come up stairs till I put you to bed properly."

"Here is your bed," he continued when they were in the third-story room, "and here is a pair of rubber boots I can lend you. Take off your shoes and put these on; you'd never get into those shoes in time."

"Am I to sleep in rubber boots?" Dick asked with a laugh.

"No; but put them on. That's right. Now stuff the ends of your trowsers into the tops of the boots. So. Now, then, strip down your trowsers till the top part is all inside out, and pull off both boots and trowsers, leaving the ends of the trowsers still sticking in the boot-tops.

"That's it; you're doing famously. Now we stand the boots here by the side of the bed, with the trowsers skinned down partly over their legs, leaving a free passageway for a foot into each boot-leg. There! now you've gone to bed like a fireman.

"Do you see the reason for all this?" the chief asked. "When the tap of the bell wakes you, you



spring out of bed, and down go your feet right into the boots. With the same movement you are inside your trowsers also, and you pull the trowsers up as you run to the pole. The hat and coat, being already on the engine, you put on whenever you get a chance. That is our secret of quick dressing. It is these little things that help us get the engine out of the house in ten seconds from the tap of the bell.

“Now one more thing,” he continued. “When you slide down the pole and land at the bottom, don’t stand there to look at the scenery but get out of the way. The man behind you will be right on top of you if you don’t move fast.”

Dick found it hard work to go to sleep with the prospect of that dreadful gong ringing at any moment; but at length he dropped off; and when he awoke he did not have to collect his thoughts, for the gong was saying, —

“Tap-tap!”

He had never put on boots and trowsers in a second and a half before, but he did it that time. He was not the last man at the pole, either; there were two or three behind him. He remembered the danger at the foot of the pole and sprang to his place on the engine. The engineer and his assistant were already there; the horses were in place; the driver was in his seat with the reins in his hands. The man stood by the big doors, ready to throw them open.



“Tap-tap!” the gong had already struck, and somebody on the tender had called out “Two!”

“Tap-tap-tap-tap!” said the gong.

“Four!” said the voice.

Two-four. Not one of Number Four’s alarms yet.

“Tap-tap!” said the gong.

“Two-four-two,” said the voice; but long before the words were finished the big doors flew open and out went the company with a rush; engine first, tender following. Out with a bound across the floor; with a heavy holding in as the engine swung into the street; with a mad, whirlwind dash down Liberty Street.

There was a whip in the socket, but the driver did not take it out. The horses were wild with excitement.

“Hi! hi! hi! hi!” the driver shouted; for the street was clear and he wanted their top speed. They seemed to Dick to be entirely beyond control already. “Hi! hi!” On they flew, faster and faster every moment.

Thick black smoke was pouring out of the funnel, and the tender was right behind. Dick kept his eye on the horses, remembering his orders. He breathed nothing but smoke and cinders, but no matter.

Excitement? Take all the horse races that ever were run, all the boat races that ever were rowed, all the Roman gladiatorial combats tossed in a heap;





ON THEY FLEW, FASTER AND FASTER EVERY MOMENT.







mix in a thousand bull fights and a year's railroad accidents, a century of Presidential elections and a hundred wars in the East,—and you get a faint idea of the flash and fury of a night ride on a fire engine through the streets of New York. Dick felt the blood pumping in his veins.

“Hold fast!” the engineer shouted. And as the engine swung into Pearl Street at a terrific gait Dick's feet flew out and nothing but his grip upon the brass bar saved him.

“Where is it?” he shouted to the engineer; no ordinary tone could have been heard in that din.

“Pearl above Fulton,” was the answer.

How cool the engineer was! and all the fireman, for that matter. This man was calmly testing his watercocks, while his assistant oiled the machinery. The steam-gauge stood at one hundred and five.

“Hi! hi! hi!” There was the fire bursting from the fourth-story windows of an old-fashioned brick warehouse, almost beside them; but there was no let-up in the speed till the last moment. Then the engine stopped “all at once,” as Dick said to himself; and the tender stopped close by a fire hydrant, and some of the men began to unwind part of the fifteen lengths, seven hundred and fifty feet, of hose it carried.

Number Four was the first engine on the spot, being nearest the fire; and even in his excitement Dick could not help but admire the beautiful system



with which everything was done. The foreman of the first company to arrive was in charge of the fire till the battalion chief arrived in his wagon; and the battalion chief was in command till the chief of the whole department came.

But wonderfully few orders were given, because every man knew just what to do and did it. A pipe was run from the hydrant to the engine, and the hose was attached to the engine's discharge pipe. Four men meanwhile were throwing their weight against the steel doors of the building; for the warehouse was provided with outer doors and shutters of steel.

But the doors would not yield, and out came the axes from the tender.

Crash! crash! Ah, how those big axes cut through the steel! In a few seconds the doors were cut away as if they had been made of paste-board.

“Man the pipe!”

Dick had not been told what his duties were to be at an actual fire. But his blood was up; he was bound to do something, and seeing four men enter the doorway with the line of hose, he sprang forward and joined them in a scramble up the steep wooden stairways of the burning building.

As he passed through the doorway a long hook-and-ladder truck came dashing down Pearl Street.

Up they went with a rush to the top story,



dragging the hose with them. There was hardly time to take a long breath before a stream of water was playing upon the fire. Through the windows Dick saw the ladders from the long truck, and in a minute more firemen of another company were cutting a hole through the roof and throwing in their own stream of water. The smoke was blinding, but the fire was soon under control.

When the order was given to "shut off Number Four," Dick returned to the street, where he found the scene greatly changed. Hundreds of people had gathered, and the police had formed the "fire lines" to keep them back out of danger. Several more engines were in sight, and three long extension ladders reached the top of the building. Besides, there was a big wagon that he recognized as the property of the fire patrol; a wagon filled with rubber blankets, which the men spread over the goods in the lower stories to protect them from damage by water.

All these things were done so rapidly that Dick was bewildered. The time was not measured by minutes but by seconds. From the time of the first tap on the gong till Number Four reached the burning building, less than two hundred seconds passed. Then in fifty seconds more the first stream of water was playing upon the fire.

"I saw you going up with the hose," the battalion chief said when they returned to the engine-



house. "So you have had some experience as a fireman. Now the men go to work and clean the engine and make ready for another alarm. We may have another call like that at any moment — or a much worse one."

Dick concluded that he had swallowed enough smoke and cinders to give him a clear idea of fire department work; "but I shall stick it out through the night," he said. "I belong to the company at present; and if the engine goes out again, I go with her."

There were no more calls that took the engine out that night, and when he went home in time for breakfast he knew that he had material for one of his best articles. But writing it occupied the whole day, and the novel had to stand.

"Now I hope they'll let me have a week without any more interruptions," he said to himself next day when he took up a handful of his latest pages and read them over to start in the right vein. "I am making as much money as I did on salary, but I should rather lose a little money than be interrupted so often. If I could just have a month to myself, I'd soon finish the book."

His wish was not quite gratified, but almost. He had days at a time to go on with his work, and the interruptions were brief. Steadily the heap of manuscript grew, and nearer and nearer the end approached.



“Now, Dick, you must stop and rest,” Mrs. Sumner said to him one day, entering the parlor when he had accidentally left the door unlocked. They all laughed at his habit of locking the door, Dick as well as the rest. “But it makes me feel so much more secure. I don’t like to feel that anybody can suddenly walk in and bother me,” he said.

“You must stop and rest,” Mrs. Sumner said. “You’ve been writing and writing and writing till you’re as pale as a ghost, and I’m sure you don’t eat anything. Do just look at that pile of pages you’ve written! I believe it grows an inch or two thicker every day, Dick.”

“Give me a week more, mother,” he replied, “and I’ll take all the rest you like. Just one week more, and the great book will be finished. I don’t know how it’s going to turn out, whether it will go or not; but it will be a relief to have it finished, at any rate.”

“Go!” his mother exclaimed; “what’s the use of talking that way, Dick? Of course it will go. Everything you’ve ever written, almost, has gone, and why should n’t this? The best publisher in the land will be only too glad to get it, with your name at the top.”

“Oh, I suppose they’d make a grand scramble for it if they knew anything about it!” Dick laughed. “They’d be rushing up here with checks and greenbacks till I’d have to keep a clerk to count them,



But seriously, mother," — and he got up and put his arm lovingly around his mother's waist, — "do you know why I am so anxious to write a successful novel?"

"Why, to make you rich and famous, I suppose," Mrs. Sumner answered, looking proudly up into his face.

"I want to make some money for my sweetheart, mother dear," Dick said. "And you are the only sweetheart I ever had or ever expect to have. Some day Florrie will be leaving us, and she and Darling will have a house of their own in the city. Then if I have the money and don't have to be at the office every day, my little sweetheart and I can have a snug little cottage out of town somewhere (in Russellville, for instance), with a lawn in front and a garden behind, and honeysuckle climbing over the piazza. Then I can write, write, write, all day, as you put it. I don't really believe you like living in a flat any better than I do, little sweetheart."

"O Dick!" His mother's head was on his shoulder now, and her voice was choked with tears. "I've never liked it as well as the old house, but I would n't have said so for the world. But to think of going back to Russellville and attending my own church again! It's never seemed like home in these big city churches, Dick; and I do so like to have a yard to walk about in. And that's what my



boy has been working so hard for. O Dick, Dick, what a good son you are! But you're not growing tired of newspaper work, are you, Dick?"

"Tired of it!" Dick exclaimed; "why it's meat and drink to me, mother. I think I should wilt and wither if I did n't do some reporting. But if I can do it occasionally, and at the same time be able to write and sell novels, you see how nicely everything will go with us. I may be making a mistake; nobody may like my book."

"Don't talk that way, Dick," his mother said. "You know that everybody will like it. And I'm afraid you are nearer right than you imagine about Florrie. I'm afraid that she and Darling will soon be leaving us."

"All the more haste then for the novel," Dick laughed. "Let me have another hour at it this afternoon, and then I'll take a rest till after supper."

Day and night, almost, he continued to struggle with the book; for it was nothing less than a struggle. To write the story was comparatively easy; if it had been only a long story, he would have finished it quickly enough. But a novel is more than a long story. He must develop the characters of his heroes and heroines, and develop them in such a way that every incident and every conversation advanced the plot.

When at length it was finished he began to have more doubts about it than he had felt while he was



actually at work. Somehow the bright points that he had had in mind did not appear so bright when he saw them on paper. Some of the best of them he had omitted entirely; they were clear enough in his mind, but they did not get into the manuscript.

"I don't quite know what to make of it, Darling, now it's done," he said; and Darling noticed a shade of worry in his face. "I can't tell for the life of me whether it is good for anything or not."

"Of course you can't," Darling answered. "No writer can form a just opinion of his own work while it is fresh in his mind. He knows what he intended to do and say, but whether he really has said and done those things on paper is beyond his comprehension till the thing cools off. I don't pretend to be much of a writer myself, but I am acquainted with some famous authors and that is what they tell me. The only way to judge fairly of your own manuscript is to bury it in the bottom of a deep trunk for a year or two, till you have forgotten all about it. By that time the characters and the incidents are all new to you, and you can see the weak points and strengthen them."

"Ah, if I only could do that!" Dick exclaimed. "But that is possible only for the millionaires who write for fun or fame. A man who writes for money cannot afford to do it—at least, not at the start. You see I have no hesitation in saying that I write for money. Other men use their brains in



great commercial enterprises for money; you use yours in the service of the Transport for money; Mr. Harding uses his in editing the paper for money; why should not I use mine in writing novels for money? I think it is perfectly legitimate."

"I agree with you," Darling laughed. "It is perfectly legitimate to write novels for money; the thing is to get the money. You must give the public something they want before you can get their money. But I think it is just as well for you that you can't afford to let your manuscript lie for a year before you try to sell it. My honest opinion is, Dick, that if you were to let that book lie by for a year and then read it, you would wonder how you could possibly have written anything quite so bad. Mind you, I say this without knowing anything about your novel. I say it on general principles. That is the experience of most writers."

"It is a very discouraging outlook!" Dick exclaimed.

"Not at all!" Darling asserted. "On the contrary, it is a sure sign of progress. If you keep on writing for a year, you will know much more about novels and about literature in general than you know now. You will judge your early work by higher standards. When a writer looks at his last year's work and sees how bad it was, it is a strong indication that he is doing better work this year, and that he will do still better next year."



“I have put my heart and soul into this book, Darling,” Dick burst out. “That is Besant’s advice to young novelists, you know, and I have followed it. ‘Drain yourself dry,’ he says, in substance; ‘more heart and soul will come to you in time for the next one.’ I think I have done the best I am capable of.”

“Well, if you are going to throw Besant at me,” Darling retorted, “I will give you some more of him: ‘Always watch how it is looking from before the footlights,’ he says. That is, see how it appears to the audience — to the reader. You know what your meaning is, but do you make it clear and entertaining to the reader? The probabilities are that you don’t in a first novel.

“No; I am not trying to discourage you,” he went on, seeing the disappointed look on Dick’s face. “But I know you have your hopes set very high on this book, and I want to prepare you for what may happen. You must remember that not every good newspaper writer can write a good novel. Besides, how many writers have made a success of a first novel? You don’t need half your fingers to count them on. However, it is done, and the publishers will have it read by men who are good judges, and they will form a cool-headed — perhaps I might say a cool-blooded — opinion of it. That is where the publisher is the young writer’s best friend, preventing him often from making a fool of himself



in print. It will probably go through the hands of several readers, for I think it will hardly be bad enough to be condemned positively by the first man. But now that you have your article manufactured, what are you going to do with it? Where is your market?"

"I have written to Brounlow & Company, the publishers," Dick replied, "(they publish *The Illustrated Weekly*, you know, so they are familiar with my work), telling them what I have, and asking them to examine it. And they have answered that they will be happy to see it. That was the proper way to go at it, was n't it?"

"Yes, that is the usual process."

"And the manuscript is going to them to-morrow, and then we'll see what we'll see."

With the novel out of the house Dick gave all his time to newspaper work again, and it seemed so easy and so pleasant after the long daily tasks he had been doing! It was profitable too, for with his fifteen dollars a column he made more money than he had made on salary.

He could not reasonably expect to hear from the novel within three or four weeks, but at the expiration of a fortnight he began to watch his daily letters for one of the familiar envelopes of Brounlow & Company. And at length it came, and Dick punished his own impatience by looking for some time at the outside before he tore it open. There



was no telling what grand offer for the manuscript the letter might contain.

“We have read your novel with much pleasure,” the letter said, “and we regret that we do not find it suited to our present needs. The manuscript is returned this day by registered mail.”

Dick did not gasp for breath when he read it, or fall helplessly back into a chair, but he was terribly disappointed. To be sure, there were hundreds of other publishers, some of whom might want it; but for Brounlow & Company to refuse it he considered a bad sign.

Refuse it? Of course that was what it meant. Dick had heard of such letters before. A merchant says bluntly that he does n't want the goods that are offered him; but a publisher, more polite, reads everything offered with a pleasure little short of delight, and is torn with poignant regret over what he is compelled to send back.

For the next few months the postoffice department derived considerable revenue from Dick's novel. After the Brounlow incident he sent it to Whitelow & Company, who read it with interest and returned it by registered mail. Pinklow & Company, Greenlow & Company, Blacklow & Company, — all the primary colors and many of the tints took it under consideration; some read it with interest and some with pleasure, but they were all of one mind about returning it by registered mail.



“It’s a dead, flat failure, old fellow!” the unsuccessful author said to Darling when he concluded to waste no more postage stamps.

“It’s a pretty strong verdict against it, that’s a fact,” Darling admitted. “Suppose you let me read it some day before you plant it in the bottom of your trunk.”

“You’re a lucky fellow, Dick,” was Darling’s opinion after the reading. “If anybody had published that, you’d never have stopped kicking yourself. It’s as different from your newspaper work as day is from night—worse I mean. Occasionally there is a gleam of intellect in it, too. I should hardly fill up my trunk with it, unless you’re in need of ballast.”

Florrie’s was the only dissenting voice. “There’s a conspiracy against you, Dick,” she insisted. “You have done something or other to offend those publishers, or their readers are jealous of your splendid work and don’t intend to give you a chance. It’s perfectly shameful the way they treat you!”

But Florrie had not read the novel.



## CHAPTER XV.

“THE THROUGH SLEEPER.”

MR. HARDING tells me you have asked for a month's vacation, Dick, and that he has given it to you,” Darling said one night when they were eating their late supper together. “I am glad to hear it; a rest will do you good.”

“I went to him direct instead of applying to you,” Dick answered, “because I thought it might be awkward for you to grant it, though you would not want to refuse me. But it is not for a rest; I am going to do some more writing.”

Nearly six months had passed since Dick had arrived at the melancholy conclusion that the novel was a failure. He had borne his disappointment manfully, working harder than ever and making himself not only by all means the best reporter on the Transport, but one of the very best in New York. Besides his regular work, he had been doing a number of humorous sketches for his own paper and for the syndicates, and they had proved as popular as the best of his descriptive articles. With these and his Transport pay he had added largely to his savings, and nothing seemed lacking to make him happy but the one thing he had striven for and failed to obtain.



"Oh, ho!" Darling exclaimed. "Going to do some more writing, are you? I thought you'd hardly be satisfied with one trial, and that a failure. Is it another novel, Dick?"

A weaker man might have been confused at the mere mention of novel-writing after such a decided rebuff, but Dick saw nothing to be ashamed of in the failure he had made. He had done his best, and though the result was unfortunate, it was not disgraceful.

"I have not given up the idea of novel-writing," he answered; "not by any means. But I know a heap more than I did a year ago, Darling. I can see now that I was one of the fools who 'rush in where angels fear to tread.' I was entirely too young and inexperienced then to undertake a novel, just as I am now. I tried to fly too high. I wonder that you did n't tell me so, for you must have known it."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, Dick," Darling answered. "Of course I knew it. But I saw that you had your heart set upon writing a novel, and I thought the best way was to let you find out for yourself. You had had so much success with your newspaper articles that it was natural for you to think yourself something of a writer. Nothing but experience, I knew, would teach you that a man needs great knowledge of the world and of human nature to write a really good novel.



“You learned that,” Darling went on; “and from the way you swallowed the unpleasant medicine I knew that some good would come of it. There was no sulking about you, no bitterness, no repining. You pitched into newspaper work harder than ever and fell to reading whenever you had a chance. I may tell you now, though I did not want to raise your hopes at the time, that I found a great deal of the real stuff in your novel when I read it. The construction was bad and the style rather stilted (two faults that were pretty sure to kill it), but there was enough meat in it to convince me that you will write a real novel some day if you keep at it.”

“I’m awfully glad to hear you say so, old chap;” and Dick spoke as though he meant it. “But that will be in the dim and distant future. They gave my wings such a clipping I’ll not undertake to fly again in a hurry; I must learn to walk first. It’s not a novel I am after this time, but something much simpler and shorter. It is a humorous sketch of American life on the rail that I want to write, to the title of ‘The Through Sleeper.’ It will be about forty or fifty thousand words; and if some publisher will take it up and illustrate it in the way I have in mind, I think it will go. I can do it easily in a month.”

Through the whole of the month’s vacation Dick worked almost day and night.

“No, I don’t want to go and exercise in the park,”



he said when his friends tried to get him out of the house; "I don't want to hear the birds sing or see the lambs gambol on the green. I have no business with such things just now. I live in 'The Through Sleeper' at present, and my head is full of air brakes and coal dust and lower berths, and I don't want anything to drive them out till I put a dash at the end of the story."

When the month expired he went down to the office, looking thinner and paler, but as full of energy as ever.

"Now, then, Darling," he said, "here I am, ready for the old work again. 'The Through Sleeper' has started on time. I have gone through the regulation correspondence with Brounlow & Company. They have asked to see my work, and it has gone to them; and I have resolved to think no more about it till I hear from them. Perhaps it will go and perhaps it won't. If that does n't go, I'll write something that will; they may depend on that; they may even drive me to writing verses yet, if they continue to return my prose."

"You are back just in time to do a little artistic work for us," Darling replied. "There is some trouble among the students down at Princeton, and I want you to go down there and write us a good story. If it turns out well, you might telegraph about a column of it, for you cannot get through in time to bring or mail it. You will have to see Dr.



McCosh, of course, and get both sides of the story from the students."

It was after six o'clock in the evening when Dick reached Princeton, and he walked directly over to the college grounds and called at President McCosh's house. His conversation with the president convinced him that the story was a capital one, and that he would have at least a column to send.

"Now I must look out for my wires," he said to himself; "these country telegraph offices have an awkward way of closing early in the evening sometimes, and I can't have my copy ready much before midnight."

He went to the telegraph office and introduced himself to the operator.

"I want to send a two thousand word special to the Transport to-night," he said. "I will have the first copy in about half-past eleven."

"You can't do it from this office!" the operator replied very gruffly. "We close at eight o'clock."

"But you wouldn't close at eight with a two thousand word special in sight, would you?" Dick asked. He knew that a month's regular business in the office would hardly amount to two thousand words.

"We close at eight o'clock!" was the only reply; and the operator said it very decidedly.

"Well, suppose I pay you a couple of dollars for your trouble in keeping open?" Dick suggested.



“Can’t be done!” the operator snarled. “I tell you we close at eight o’clock.”

“Then maybe five dollars would make it an object to you?”

“No, nor five hundred!” snapped the operator. “I have an engagement to-night, and I would n’t keep the office open for fifty specials.”

The situation was growing serious. He must get the special off, and there was no other telegraph office within reach. Dick had had some experience with unaccommodating operators, but precisely such a refusal as this he had not met before. He thought it over for a few moments and then said quietly:—

“Let me have a blank, please.”

The operator pushed a pad of blanks through the window, and Dick wrote this message:—

Superintendent Western Union, New York.

Please instruct Princeton operator to keep open till midnight for two thousand word Transport special.

RICHARD SUMNER, *Transport Correspondent.*

Usually newspaper dispatches are sent “collect”; that is, they are paid not for at the sending office, but are charged to the newspaper and paid in the monthly bill. But Dick laid a silver half-dollar on top of his dispatch, as he pushed it back to the operator, to make sure.

As the operator picked up the message and read it his face flushed.

“Oh, say!” he exclaimed; “you don’t need to



send this message. I'll keep open for you all night. If you were to send that, they'd make inquiries why you had to send it, and then they'd bounce me, sure."

It was precisely what Dick had anticipated; he was sure the operator would not let the message go through; for a two thousand word special is not to be despised even by a great telegraph company, and the company would not have much further use for an operator who refused one.

"Of course they would," he answered; "but that is your affair, not mine. My business is to get my dispatch through, even though it gives you some extra work. As you agree to keep open for me you can tear the dispatch up and give me back the money; but I give you fair warning that if you close the office I shall have to report you."

"That's a wrinkle that I must tell the boys about," Dick said to himself as he went out to finish gathering his facts. "Every reporter has trouble about getting his dispatches through sometimes, and a message to the superintendent opens the way in a hurry." A few months before, when he was constantly in touch with the telegraph offices, he would have thought nothing of such an incident; but now he was glad to find that the old newspaper instinct was still strong within him; he was half-afraid that novel-writing and story-writing might have spoiled him for reporting.



His next work was a large political meeting in the Metropolitan Opera House, at which some of the great statesmen of the country were the speakers. Several of the speeches were to be reported in full, and Dick expected to be put in charge of at least four or five reporters, as he had often been before. His own part was to write about a column and a half of introduction and description. But no other reporters were sent with him, and he soon found that a new order of things had begun in stenographic reporting.

“It was a narrow escape I had,” he thought, “for at one time I had a strong notion to learn shorthand writing. Even when I began work on the *Transport* it was quite the fashion for the reporters to learn stenography. But I was a lucky fellow that I did not waste the time over it, for it has become a separate business entirely, and has nothing to do any more with real reporting. The new way is much better for the paper, too, because much quicker.”

It was a pleasure to him to see how the system of verbatim reporting had improved. Instead of sending a half-dozen reporters to take the speeches desired, the *Transport* had simply sent for one of the new order of employing stenographers, and told him what speeches were desired in full. This man attended the meeting with a dozen messenger boys in waiting. He took all the notes himself, and as



fast as he filled a page or two with notes a messenger boy rushed off with it to the stenographer's office near Printing House Square, where a half-dozen young stenographers, all trained to read their employer's notes, were ready to write them out in full. As fast as the pages of copy were ready they were sent over to the Transport office; and so rapidly was it all done that by the time the last speaker finished, the previous speeches were in type. More marvelous still, some of the earlier speakers, while still on the platform, were actually shown proofs of the speeches they had delivered an hour before.

“I must be growing old!” Dick said to himself, “to see these changes going on in newspaper systems. Some day they may do away with reporters altogether. I hope my novels or funny sketches will begin to sell before that time comes.”

In less than a month after the completion of “The Through Sleeper” he found a letter from Brounlow & Company waiting for him in the office. It contained simply a request that he call and see them, and he found time to go the same day.

“Our readers have given a very favorable opinion of ‘The Through Sleeper,’ Mr. Sumner,” one of the members of the firm said to him. “In fact they consider it unusually good; but of course we never can tell how such a thing may strike the



public. We have decided that we can offer you five hundred dollars for it, for publication in *The Illustrated Weekly*, the story to be brought out in book form immediately after the serial publication, well illustrated, in a one-dollar volume. On sales of the book, of course, we will pay you the usual ten per cent. royalty.”

Here was a victory at last! That was Dick's first thought; but a moment later he began to consider that the battle was not half-won yet. It was only the publisher who was convinced so far of the excellence of his story. The publisher was willing to risk his money in bringing out the book, but it was the public who had to give the final verdict. If the public liked the book well enough to buy it, the publisher would buy more stories from him. But if otherwise — why, then otherwise.

Some imposingly long blank contracts were filled out and signed, and “*The Through Sleeper*” became the property of Brounlow & Company, under certain conditions. Dick read the contract through before signing it, like a prudent business man; but in the end he had only a confused notion of having agreed to all sorts of odd things about reading proofs, charge for changes in type, sale of copies at trade price, insurance of stereotype plates, and assignment of copyright.

It had long been a heroic notion of Dick's that when he got his first check for a piece of real



literary work, if indeed he ever did get one, he would carry it lovingly to his mother and lay it in her hands.

“There, mother,” he would say, “that is the first money I have made out of literature. It is yours, every cent of it; buy yourself something nice with it.” And then he would hold his mother in his arms and kiss her, and she would congratulate him on his success. He thought of this while he sat in the Brounlow office. But this little castle in the air crumbled, as so many of them do.

“Our custom is to pay for serial stories as they appear,” the partner said. “‘The Through Sleeper’ will run through five numbers, so we will pay you one hundred dollars for each instalment as fast as it is published. I suppose that will be satisfactory?”

“That will answer every purpose,” Dick replied; he would not say that it was satisfactory, for he had set his heart on a good plump check to carry home. But never mind; he had good news to carry — news that was better than the check.

There was no telling how soon the story might appear, or how long it might be kept waiting; even the publishers could not tell that, so much depended upon circumstances. Dick had heard of manuscript being kept for months, even years, in the publishers’ safes, after it was accepted and paid for.

Weeks passed without any signs of “The Through Sleeper”; and the weeks grew into months. Dick



was sent on a mission to the far Northwest, and for many days he saw no newspapers. He was in the midst of his work there when a very short note came from Darling.

"No time to write you a letter to-night, Dick," the note said.

"Just want to tell you your 'Through Sleeper' began in to-day's Illustrated Weekly.

"I read it at lunch time; it's immense. The fellows say it's the funniest thing that's appeared in this generation; I think so, too.

"They're all talking about it. If it holds out as it begins, you've made a hit, sure.

"All well at home. Yours, Darling."

Dick's face flushed as he read the note — the old flush around the temples that he had not felt for many a day.

It was an army post that he was staying at, and in a few days more a bundle of papers arrived, among them some copies of The Illustrated Weekly.

"Why did n't you tell us you were an author as well as a correspondent, Sumner?" the officers asked after they had read the story. They had been very hospitable before, but now they could hardly do enough for him. Of course they told him how much they enjoyed the story; but what was much better was to see them splitting their sides with laughter over it, and to hear them talking about it.



“Score two points!” Dick said to himself. “They like my story in the office, and they like it at the army post; but they’re all my friends. That fickle old military man, General Public, is still to be heard from.”

Four of the five numbers had appeared when Dick returned to New York, and there was no longer any doubt about the fate of “The Through Sleeper.” It was not only a success; it had carried everything by storm.

“Oh, you go take ‘De T’rew Sleeper’!” he heard one newsboy say to another on his way to the office; and he reflected that newsboys do not commonly read The Illustrated Weekly stories, so they must have heard the expression from some one else. Yes, it was true enough. Everybody was talking about it and repeating odd sayings from it.

In the office he had to go through an ordeal of congratulations. Not only Darling, but Jack Randall, Lawrence, Herrick, Banks, Black, and a dozen others, told him how glad they were that he had made such a success. Even Mr. Harding sent for him.

“I’m much obliged to you, Sumner,” the editor-in-chief said. “You have given me more good laughs than I had had in an age before. I’ll never be able to ride in a sleeper again without thinking of you. It is good clean humor, too; wholesome, easily digested.”



The welcome at home was equally flattering. “You’ve about killed mother and me,” was Florrie’s salutation. “We’re just sore with laughing over that ‘Through Sleeper.’ How in the world could you do it, Dick? You’re never a bit funny at home.”

“I don’t have time to be,” was the only answer Dick could give.

He might have been hand-shaken to death if he had not been sent to Washington to write a series of articles about the National Capital—a mission that required time, and that was sure to keep him away for several weeks. He was walking down Pennsylvania Avenue one day when his eye was caught by an attractive poster on a bill-board. There was a big picture of a railway train, with red fire puffing out of the engine’s black smokestack, and some lettering above and below the picture.

“Just a railroad advertisement,” he said to himself, and went on. But in an instant he stopped and turned back. He had not clearly read the words, but something about them seemed familiar.

“The Through Sleeper,” he read on the poster in letters six inches long.

Then came the picture of a train made up of sleeping-cars, and underneath the picture several more big lines:—

“By Richard Sumner.

“The Talk of the Town. — New York Herald.



“ Nothing recent has approached it in wit and vigor. — New York Transport.

“ All Booksellers. . . . One Dollar.”

This was Dick's first intimation that his work had appeared in book form. He soon found a book store and bought a copy and went to his room in Willard's Hotel to examine it. It was “ alive with illustrations,” as he said, and they added greatly to its handsome appearance. The printer, the engraver, the binder, had all helped to make an attractive volume.

For two or three weeks after the appearance of the book he was busy among the public buildings, going through the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum, the Treasury building, and scores of others. One of his articles was to be a characteristic description of the White House; and with the aid of the Transport's Washington correspondent Dick secured an appointment with the President.

When the hour arrived he was shown to the second story of the White House, where the offices are; and for a few minutes he was kept waiting in the broad hall where Tad Lincoln used to play while his father was closeted in an adjoining room with Seward and Sumner, Grant and Sherman, and many another man of note. At length the private secretary stepped out and ushered him into the apartment where so much of the history of this nation



has been made, — the Chief Executive's private office, — and he was introduced to the President of the United States.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Sumner," was the President's greeting. "I suppose you came down in The Through Sleeper? You have kept us all laughing here for the last two or three weeks."

The President himself took Dick over the White House and through the conservatories; and when he returned to the hotel he found one of Darling's short letters waiting for him.

"Brounlow's announce ten thousand 'Through Sleepers' sold up to to-day," the letter said.

"The Transport fellows propose to give you a dinner at Delmonico's. You fix the date and wire answer."

It did not take Dick long to prepare the answer. "Dinner declined with thanks," he telegraphed. So many congratulations had been a worriment to him for some time, and he was sure he could not stand a whole evening of it around a dinner table.

But he was not to get out of it so easily. "Cannot be declined," Darling wired later in the day; "arrangements all made. Fix the date."

Very reluctantly he selected the next Thursday evening, and necessarily he returned to New York on the Thursday afternoon. He expected to feel uncomfortable, with everybody staring at him and talking about him in one of Delmonico's great



private rooms, but it proved different. "The old man" himself was there, and Darling, of course, and Mr. Brown, who was in Dr. Goode's place, and Jack Randall, and about fifteen more from the Transport office, and men from several of the other papers — all of whom Dick knew; and with great thoughtfulness they had invited Mr. Davis, the editor of The Russellville Record, Dick's former employer. Several members of the Brounlow firm were present, too; it was a real family party with no strangers to chill the atmosphere.

When the coffee cups came round after dinner, the diners were not content to abide by the toast program they had made, but began to shout for "Sumner! Sumner!"

Dick was compelled to make a speech, and he did it very modestly and sensibly. He liked to write funny stories, he said, particularly when they paid well; but for real thorough enjoyment nothing suited him as well as regular newspaper reporting. He hoped that no matter what happened he might always be able to devote at least part of his time to reporting and newspaper correspondence; and he wished that his lines might always fall among as able and kind and true a set of comrades as his fellows of the Transport.

There was great cheering when Dick sat down, and then came calls for "Mr. Harding! Mr. Harding! The chief!"



“Gentlemen,” Mr. Harding began when he arose amid the clapping of hands, “this is an unusual sight for Delmonico’s — a banqueting table upon which no wine glasses appear. I see in this a delicate compliment to the guest we have assembled to honor, who has shown us that he is capable of doing hard work and good work without the use of wine or stronger liquids. You have honored yourselves by honoring his principles in this way.”

He went on to pay a tribute to Dick’s character that brought the red flush about the young author’s temples again. He was industrious, he was manly, he was upright; true, solid, unwavering, always in what he thought was right.

“Ask me to show you a man of brains,” he concluded; “a man who has done many good things and who is destined to do many more; who would not stoop to a mean act; whose watchword is ‘Upward,’ ever upward; who is as gentle and pure in his life as he is brilliant in his profession; ask me to show you such a man and I point, gentlemen, to our young friend, Dick Sumner.”

In these later days, when Dick is needed in the Transport office, a telegram quickly reaches him in the cottage in which he and his mother live in Russellville. He is frequently to be seen in the offices of Brounlow & Company, for his second and third and fourth books have succeeded as well as the first, and he is a man of affairs. Sometimes he is



detained till the last train has left the city, but that makes no difference now; for there is a room always ready for him in the big old-fashioned brick house on Brooklyn Heights that has been Florrie's home ever since she became Mrs. Harry Darling.



**I**N WILD AFRICA. *Adventures of Two Boys in the Sahara Desert, etc.* By Col. THOS. W. KNOX, author of "The Boy Travelers," "The Young Nimrods," "A Lost Army," etc. 325 pp. Illustrated. Cloth, \$1.50.

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The narrative is replete with adventure and incident, combined with the description of the countries traversed and the people who inhabit them. A part of the route has been personally traveled by the author, who has thus been enabled to inform himself thoroughly concerning the countries he has described.

No author understands better how to write for young people than Colonel Knox, and parents and guardians owe much to him for conveying a vast deal of very useful information, geographical and historical, respecting the manners and customs of foreign nations.—*Boston Commercial Bulletin.*

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