



LARRY HUDSON'S
AMBITION



JAMES OTIS



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LARRY HUDSON'S AMBITION



“ ‘ LOOK HERE, KID, I DON'T WANT TO BE HARD ON YOU.’ ”

(See page 226)

LARRY HUDSON'S AMBITION

BY
JAMES OTIS *Kaler*

Illustrated by
ELIOT KEEN



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1870

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LARRY HUDSON'S AMBITION.

CHAPTER I.

ANTICIPATION.

DEACON ELI DOAK, owner of the Herdsdale farm, was not a hard taskmaster, so the neighbouring farmers declared; but his son Joe and his nephew Ned Clark were wont to grumble not a little because he insisted that during the six working days of the week no time should be spent in idleness, save the thirty minutes allowed for "nooning."

Very often each day during the springtime did Joe Doak gaze with pardonable pride at his father's well-tilled acres, and mentally compare them with others in the immediate vicinity. Although quite positive that when the time came for him to choose a vocation in life, it would not be that of a farmer, he derived no slight amount of pleasure in viewing

the broad fields of brown earth closely striped by rows of green, laid out with almost mathematical precision. He delighted in surveying the evidences of his father's skill as a husbandman; yet at the same time there were rebellious thoughts in his mind when he was called upon to thin out, weed, or otherwise care for those lines of green which nodded as if with delight to the cooling breezes.

"I reckon there's no question about Herdsdale bein' the best farm in this county; but jest wait till I've had a chance to choose for myself, and then see how long I'll stay 'round here weedin' an' hoein', when money can be earned so much easier in the city," Master Doak often said to his cousin Ned, who had been counted as a member of the Doak family since the death of his mother, the deacon's sister.

And Ned Clark, wiping the perspiration from his freckled nose, would look up from the back-aching task of weeding, to say meekly:

"I allow there's a heap of worse places in this world than Herdsdale; but I don't reckon any two boys have to work harder than you an' me. I wish

I could go to the city for just one day! I'd find as good a chance to earn money as Sam Bartlett did, or know the reason why."

"Sam was mighty lucky."

"I don't know as you'd call it luck, 'cause he had his eyes open all the time for jest sich a job."

"An' so have you an' I, only we can't get into the city. Father don't trust us with his business as Mr. Bartlett did Sam. Why, that fellow must be makin' as much as three or four dollars every week of his life!"

"He's doin' all of that, an' the day's bound to come when I'll have as good a show. I don't reckon on always bein' a farmer."

It was as if the boys would never tire of discussing Sam Bartlett's extraordinarily good fortune, and the possibility of their being able to follow the example set by him, although it seemed very remote, for Joe's father was not a man who believed that the members of his household might really need a holiday.

"Perhaps next year we'll get a little forehanded with our work, an' then you can go fishin', or I'll take you to town-meetin'," the deacon would say

when his son or nephew approached him on the subject of a day's pleasuring ; but until this particular season the industrious farmer had, apparently, never seen a time when he could afford to be thus generous.

Therefore it was that the boys were astonished almost to the verge of bewilderment when, on an exceedingly warm day in June, while they were hoeing potatoes in the lower meadow, Deacon Doak said, abruptly, but without ceasing to ply the hoe industriously :

“ I reckon the time has come when I feel sort of obleeged to keep the promise I've made you boys.”

Joe and Ned suddenly ceased work to look at the speaker.

“ Keep movin' them hoes, boys. There's no reason why you can't work an' talk at the same time. If you feel called upon to stand there like a couple of graven images jest because I've begun to figger on takin' you to the city, why we'll drop the matter till after sundown.”

This threat was sufficient to arouse the boys to renewed activity, and they resumed their labour with



“JOE AND NED SUDDENLY CEASED WORK.”

feverish energy lest the deacon should fail to continue what promised to be a marvellously interesting conversation.

“Your mother,” — the deacon always included Ned when he used the term “mother,” — “your mother, she allows that all hands of us would be the better for a little pleasin’, an’ I ain’t *prepared* to say she’s wrong, though it’ll cost a powerful sight of money. Besides, all play an’ no work is a good deal worse than when its t’other way about.”

“But where are we goin’, father?” Joe interrupted, so eager to learn where this long-deferred holiday was to be spent that he could not wait until his father was ready to explain in his own fashion.

“If it so be that we can get the chores done up ahead, an’ Ezra Littlefield’s folks are willin’ to have an eye out for the cattle, seein’s how all our men will be away, I’ve figgered that we’d spend the Fourth of July in the city. I knowed you’d be surprised,” he added, as the boys, forgetting the implied threat made a moment previous, gazed at him in mute but joyful astonishment, “an’ I ain’t *prepared* to say that it won’t be a foolish thing to

do; but your mother puts it after her fashion by sayin' that she hasn't been off the farm since Maria Boyd's funeral, an' that's nigh on to eight years ago. She says she's pinin' for a change. I did some think of sendin' her an' Ellen down to town alone; but the more I turned it over in my mind, the more certain I was that they couldn't be depended upon to take care of themselves. It's a powerful big place, New York is, to say nothin' of the money the trip will cost, an' there's too many rowdies an' swindlers hangin' 'round after a chance to get the best of country people, for me to think of their meanderin' down there alone. I've made up my mind to take the whole family, though, as I said before, it's goin' to be dreadful expensive."

"And are we to go to New York to stay a whole day, father?"

"That's what I've counted on if we can get the chores done up in time, an' Ezra Littlefield's folks will look out for the cattle. We'll take the first train, an' come home on the last, which don't leave there till nigh on to seven o'clock. Seein's the Fourth comes on a Saturday, we shall have all of

Sunday to rest up in, so I allow we can stand that much of a strain. You'll find it's a good deal harder work traipsin' 'round the city in the hot sun, than hoein' potatoes out here, even though you may not be willin' to say so."

"I'd like to do that kind of work every day in the year," Ned said, emphatically.

"Yes, an' you'd need to have a whole bank right at your back in order to do it. But there must be a powerful sight of chores done 'twixt now an' then, an' standin' still lookin' at me ain't the way to get through with 'em."

Then the deacon attacked the weeds yet more vigorously with his hoe, and the boys, determined to earn this unexpected holiday, followed his example with the utmost vigour, but all the while burning with the most intense desire to discuss the possibilities of an entire day spent in the city.

Owing to the fact that the deacon stayed in the lower meadow during the remainder of the afternoon, urging them from time to time to renewed exertions, and now and then hinting that it might become necessary to defer the excursion in case they failed to

“get ahead with their work,” the boys did not have an opportunity of holding a private conversation until the evening’s devotions had come to an end, and they were in the privacy of their own chamber.

Almost immediately after Mrs. Doak had, following her usual custom, kissed them good night, with a whispered “God love you,” and departed noiselessly, as if thinking they had already journeyed into Dreamland, Joe sat upright in bed.

“It seems too good to be true! I didn’t dare even to speak about it this afternoon, ’cause father believes it’s goin’ to cost so much that I’m ’fraid he may give the whole thing up if he can find any excuse for not goin’. But only think of it, Ned! We’ll have the same chance Sam Bartlett had, an’ perhaps a good deal better one, for he didn’t get there ’till most ten o’clock, while the first train must pull up in New York by seven, at the very latest. Three hours ought to be enough for us to see all that’s goin’ on, an’ then we’ll look around, the same as Sam did. S’posin’ both of us should strike a job at a dollar a day? Don’t you reckon we’d go there to live? Well, I guess not!”

Fully a moment elapsed before Ned made any reply, and then it was to say:

“It would be mighty fine, livin’ in the city earnin’ plenty of money; but it’ll be hard to find as good a home as Herdsdale, Joe. We’d kind of miss Aunt Mercy’s good-night kiss, an’ when the night came that she didn’t whisper ‘God love you’ over me, I wouldn’t feel half as safe as I do now.”

“I guess if we was makin’ money we could come back often enough. Why, it only costs eighty-five cents for a ticket from here to New York, an’ jest as likely as not we should be home every Saturday night.”

“That wouldn’t be so bad,” Ned replied, thoughtfully. “I’d rather work in a store than on a farm any day; but we’ve got to see all the Fourth of July business before we go’ round lookin’ for a job.”

“I’ve thought that out in great shape. Three hours will be plenty of time for us to see the city, an’ if it ain’t, why, I reckon we would get ’round among all the stores in one afternoon. Say, do you s’pose father will give us any money?”

“I don't reckon so after what he said about the expense. You see he's got to pay the fares for Aunt Mercy an' Nell an' you an' me, an' it'll cost a heap. It's the first time I've ever had a chance to stay all day in the city, an' if I want to I'm goin' to spend the whole of my sixteen cents. That ought to be enough for anybody, an' it won't be jest fair in us to ask Uncle Eli for more.”

“I've got twenty-three.”

“I know it; but perhaps I can make up them seven cents between now an' Saturday mornin'. There's four whole days before — ”

“If you don't, I'll even things so we'll have jest alike. There's one thing we *must* do, an' that's to find out where Sam Bartlett is workin', so's we can go to see him. I wouldn't miss it for anything. Besides, he would be likely to tell us of the people who want to hire fellows from the country.”

It was a late hour before slumber visited the boys' eyelids, so many and so varied were the plans they formed in connection with the proposed excursion. Both were fully determined upon obtaining a situation in the city as Sam Bartlett had done, and neither

had the lightest shadow of a doubt but that such a position as he desired could readily be found.

If there was any bitterness in the sweets of their anticipations, it arose from the thought that they might not be quite so comfortably situated in the way of a home in the city, as at Herdsdale ; but that was a minor consideration, and dismissed from their minds with no misgivings.

Perhaps never before had the two boys risen so early as on the morning following Deacon Doak's announcement that his family were to celebrate the Fourth of July in New York, and the good man said to his wife, with a chuckle of satisfaction, as the boys set about doing their chores without waiting to be bidden :

“ I guess, mother, it ain't sich a bad idee to give the young folks an outin' this year. Them youngsters are bound to do double work 'twixt now an' Saturday mornin', which will go a long way toward makin' up for the day we're to spend in idleness.”

“ It does me good to see them so happy, father. You're not what might be called a hard man with your help ; but you don't seem to remember that boys

need a day's pleasin' now an' then to keep them up to their work."

"I ain't so certain about that, mother. I never had it when I was young. It was day in an' day out the same old story, an' well for me, else we mightn't have been so comfortably situated in our old age."

"You surely had a rest now an' then?"

"One day in seven, mother, one day in seven, with perhaps now an' then an extra hour or two when work was slack."

"Josey an' Ned are twelve years old, an' since they were big enough to lend a hand on the farm this will be the first real holiday they have had," Aunt Mercy said, without the slightest tinge of reproach in her tones, as she plunged her arm elbow-deep into the cheese-curd.

The deacon made no reply to this, but before the day was ended he gave each of the boys ten cents, as he said :

"I'm willin' you should spend a little money foolishly once in awhile, with the hope that after it is gone you'll realise how easy it can slip through your fingers, an' what a poor showin' you get for it.

Squander this if you like, but remember that you'll feel a good deal better next Christmas if its hoarded up agin a rainy day."

"An' then perhaps when Christmas came you'd think we'd be wiser to wait till the next Fourth of July," Joe suggested, as he tied the money carefully in one corner of his handkerchief.

"Well, so I allow you would be, my son. So long as you don't spend money you'll always have a little in your pocket ; but once it's squandered, there's the end of it."

"But then we never should have any good times until we got too old to enjoy them."

"I ain't goin' to say a word agin your spendin' the whole of it. That's what I gave it to you for ; but at the same time, Joseph, I'm cautionin' you that when it's spent, it's gone, an' you won't see it any more, whereas, so long as it's in your pocket, it's always ready for a rainy day. You'll never be so old that the value even of a ten-cent piece won't be of some account to you. Now I ain't intendin' to preach economy agin till after we've been to the city, 'cause that is to be a day when I want you to do jest

what pleases you best, an' I hope all hands may have a good time. You will, if it's in my power to give it to you."

The boys thanked the deacon as warmly as the magnitude of the gift seemed to demand, and were then reminded that this was "no time to be loafin' if they expected to go to the city next Saturday."

Deacon Doak was right in predicting that Joe and Ned would perform double their ordinary amount of work during the days which intervened before the Fourth of July. They were among the first astir in the morning, and the last to leave the fields at night; but this industry did not prevent them from making many unnecessary preparations for the wonderful journey.

One evening was spent in visiting the Bartlett farm in order to obtain Sam's address; the others were devoted to greasing their boots, brushing their clothing, and making ready generally for what seemed to them an exceedingly long journey, and then the eve of the Fourth of July had come.

Mr. Doak was in quite as high a state of excitement as the other members of the family. Ezra

Littlefield had promised to care for the cattle, and although the deacon had every reason to feel positive his herds would not be neglected, he took many unnecessary precautions against a possible accident.

Mrs. Doak had little or no time in which to indulge in nervousness. She seemed to think it necessary to set her house in order with the most scrupulous exactness, and on this evening her household duties were not finished until long past the usual time for retiring.

Little Nell, Joe's sister, darted here and there like a busy sparrow, now aiding her mother, and again discussing with her brother and cousin the especial points of interest in New York which she wished to visit.

"We're all going to Central Park in the afternoon," she announced, "and mother says we'd better stay right there till it is time to go to the depot."

"I'd like to see the park," Joe replied, with a long-drawn sigh; "but I'm afraid it can't be done this trip. Perhaps I'll have plenty of time later."

"Why can't you go to-morrow?"

Joe had not proposed to make public his intention of seeking employment in the city; but now he was forced to do so in order to answer his sister's question, and the announcement of his determination caused no slight consternation in the busy household.

Mrs. Doak at first protested that he should not think of doing anything of the kind; that it was more than foolish for him to want to live in the city; but suddenly, and, as it seemed to Joe, just at the moment when the discussion was most interesting, she waived all her objections by saying:

“Very well, Joseph, if you want to leave the farm I won't say anything against it. Perhaps you are none too young to choose for yourself, an' I'm not goin' to dictate as to what shall be done to-morrow, when we are to enjoy the day as each pleases.”

The deacon would have taken up the subject at this point, but it appeared very much as if a warning look from his wife had prevented him from giving words to that which was in his mind, and he remained silent, while Joe and Ned were considerably disappointed because the announcement of their

intention to leave the farm had not caused more sorrow.

Five minutes later this matter was temporarily lost sight of as the deacon explained how *he* thought the day should be spent, arguing that he could best direct the movements of the family because of his familiarity with the city; but reiterating that each member should act according to the dictates of inclination or fancy, being restricted only so far as concerned the departure of the last train for Canton.

Then came the evening devotions, when the good man prayed fervently that each might be guided aright while exposed to the temptations of a great city, and ten minutes later Mrs. Doak had kissed the boys good night, whispering the "God love you" which, to Ned at least, gave such a sense of security for the future.

The boys should have closed their eyes in slumber immediately Mrs. Doak left them, for it had been arranged that the family would be awakened at four o'clock on the following morning, and it was now fully an hour past their usual time for retiring.

Instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to

rest, however, Joe and Ned indulged in anticipations of the visit for at least the hundredth time, or speculated upon the good fortune which would probably be theirs before another day had come to an end, ceasing not their conversation until a late hour, when nature finally asserted herself, and they journeyed into Dreamland, there to gaze at the wildest pictures of life in a city that the busy elves had, perhaps, ever painted for country boys.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE CITY.

DEACON DOAK taught the members of his household to rise before the sun did, in order that every moment should be utilised after the day had really begun, and it was his custom to make certain no one played the laggard.

On this particular Fourth of July morning, however, there was no necessity for him to call either Joe or Ned. It was not yet three o'clock when the former, whose rest had been disturbed owing to the excitement caused by undue anticipation of the holiday, suddenly awakened, and there was no desire in his mind to linger in bed.

Although the train did not leave Canton station for the city until half-past five, and the boys had made all their preparations for the journey on the previous evening, it seemed to Joe as if there was but scant time in which to make ready for

departure, and he aroused his cousin by shouting, nervously :

“Get up, Ned! Get up! We’ll be sure to miss the train if you don’t hurry!”

“But it isn’t daylight yet,” and Master Clark opened his eyes sleepily.

“It soon will be. The sky in the east is gray already, and I can hear father stirring around downstairs. If we should be only so much as a minute behindhand, I expect he would go off and leave us, because he says the general run of boys need a lesson on punctuality now and then.”

It was needless for Joe to continue his arguments in favour of immediate rising; by this time his cousin was fully awake to the fact that this was the day on which they were to witness the Fourth of July celebration in the city, and Joe had not yet ceased speaking before Ned was out of bed, dressing himself with nervous haste.

“It’s kinder strange that on the average mornin’ I’m obleeged to call you three or four times before you show any sign of life,” Deacon Doak said, without pausing in his task of blowing the fire,

as the boys came down-stairs. "When the potatoes are to be hoed, or the garden patch weeded, it's as if you youngsters were reg'larly tied down under the bedclothes ; but talk of a good time, an' you can turn out early enough."

"There's a big difference between goin' into the city to stay a whole day, an' hoein' potatoes," Joe replied, cheerily. "Perhaps if we should turn out two or three mornin's for the same reason, we might get into the habit of doin' it."

"Perhaps I could work you into the way of doin' sich things cheaper by cuttin' a stout birch rod. I don't allow you boys realise how much this day's business is likely to cost me."

"But you'll have jest as much fun as we shall, father."

"Do you s'pose I'd traipse way down to the city, to say nothin' of spendin' all the money it costs, jest for a good time?" and the deacon paused in his labours to look at Joe reproachfully. "If it wasn't for takin' care of mother an' you children I wouldn't think of leavin' the farm."

“But you’re certain to have a good time, never mind why you go,” Joe persisted.

“My mind ain’t sot on sich things so much as your’n is, Joseph, an’ I’ll venture to say you don’t take your love of gaddin’ ’round from your father’s side of the family. Howsomever, we’re goin’ to the city, cost what it may, an’ I don’t see any reason why you boys shouldn’t be hustlin’ ’round, doin’ what you can to help me an’ your mother, instead of standin’ there as if you’d nothin’ in the world to do but climb into the wagon when we’re ready to start for the depot.”

Both Ned and Joe understood that the deacon had awakened in an unpleasant frame of mind, probably caused by thoughts of how much money it would be necessary for him to spend before night-fall, and, lest he should yet reconsider his intention of giving them a holiday, they bustled around as actively as he could have desired.

The distance from the farm to the station was less than half a mile; yet Major, the superannuated plough-horse, was standing before the door, harnessed to the double-seated wagon, at five o’clock,

and both Mrs. Doak and Nell were occupying their accustomed places in the vehicle.

“The house is locked, an’ I’ve got the key in my pocket, father,” Mrs. Doak cried, as the deacon disappeared from view around the corner of the building.

“I want to make sure everything’s as it should be,” he replied, almost sharply. “Somebody’s got to look after the farm if it’s to be saved from goin’ to rack an’ ruin.”

“It won’t be racked an’ ruined much ’twixt now an’ night,” Mrs. Doak replied, cheerily, and added, in a lower tone, to the children, “It does beat all how kind of flighty an’ out of sorts your father gets when there’s a dollar to be spent. He talked last night as if this outin’ was somethin’ he had fixed up ’specially for my benefit, an’ was likely to bring him next door to the poorhouse; but when I said I’d be willin’ to stay at home, he allowed it wasn’t the expense he was countin’ so much as the wastin’ of a whole day in foolishness.”

“If he stayed at home he couldn’t do more’n potter ’round, ’cause our farm work is ahead of

everybody's in this section, an' he wouldn't lose a dollar if we should idle away a whole week," Joe said, quite decidedly, and at that moment Jethro, the dog, dashed around the corner of the house as if he had just learned the astounding news that the Doak family was about to set out on a long journey.

"Now what will we do with Jeth?" Nellie asked, excitedly. "I gave him his breakfast out in the cow-stable, an' hoped we should leave before he got through eating. Of course he can't go to the city with us."

"I should say not, unless you are countin' on losin' him. Ned an' I'll tie him in the shed."

"It would be cruel to leave the poor dog shut up while we are enjoying ourselves. I'd almost rather stay at home than think of him in the shed all day."

"Bless your heart, child, there's no need of worryin' about Jeth. He won't try to come on the cars, but will stay with Major contentedly enough," and raising her voice, Mrs. Doak cried, "Hurry, father, hurry! We haven't any too much time if we count on takin' the first train!"

"I allow, Mercy, that I've travelled enough in my

time not to need any lessons now. All you an' the children need do is to follow my example, an' don't fret about missin' the train till I've given the word," the deacon replied with dignity, as he returned from the stable. "I wanted to make certain the Jersey heifer was looked after properly, an' seein's how that's been done we may as well jog along. Got everything you counted on takin'?"

"We are all ready, father. I was sure of that before gettin' into the wagon."

It seemed to Joe as if his father was bent on missing the train, so slow were his movements. Even after he took his seat in the vehicle it was as if he restrained rather than urged Major, although that could hardly have been possible, for the old horse was by no means excitable, and seldom, if ever, could be induced to travel at any other pace than his usual steady trot, which carried him over the ground at the rate of perhaps three miles an hour.

During the short ride Mrs. Doak and Nellie talked animatedly of what they expected to see; but neither Joe nor Ned joined in the conversation. The pros-

pect of spending a day in the city, and the belief that once there they could find such lucrative employment it would not be necessary for them to return to the farm again, save when bent on pleasure, plunged them into rather a serious frame of mind.

They were aroused to more cheerfulness when it became necessary to make arrangements for Major's comfort during such time as he was to remain in Tisdale Dean's barn, and to entrust Jethro to Will Dean's keeping until the train had left the station, when there would no longer be any danger the dog might attempt to follow them.

Then, arriving at the depot fully half an hour before the time set for the departure of the cars, the boys met four or five intimate acquaintances who were not so fortunate as to be able to spend the day in the city, and both found great enjoyment in enumerating the many strange and wonderful things they would in all probability see before returning home.

When the rumbling of the approaching train could be heard far away in the distance, Deacon Doak marshalled his family at the edge of the platform, in-

structing them to remain in line ready to step on board instantly the cars came to a standstill.

Acting upon his instructions, Joe and Ned scrambled up before the passengers who wished to alight at Canton could descend, and, after affording others considerable discomfort, found, to their great satisfaction, three unoccupied seats. Taking possession of one for themselves, and reserving the others for the remainder of the family by depositing in them the bundles and wraps Aunt Mercy had thought necessary should be carried, the boys believed they had done their full duty in a proper manner.

Ten minutes after the train left the station, the novelty of being in such rapid motion had lost its charm for Joe and Ned, and they decided it was time for a second meal.

“We had breakfast so early I guess a bite won’t do any of us harm,” Aunt Mercy replied, as she unpacked the generous store of food which had been prepared in order that they might not be forced to purchase such necessaries in the city.

It was as if every member of the family was unusually hungry, despite the fact that they had broken

their fast less than two hours previous, and when all were satisfied Mrs. Doak surveyed the remainder of her store with dismay.

“I s'pose I'm as bad as any of you, but it does beat all how that lunch has shrunk. I declare there isn't enough to last us till noon, for we'll want a pretty early dinner after walkin' 'round the city.”

“I reckon you'll have to make what you've got last us through the day, mother,” and the deacon clasped his hand tightly over the pocket in which was his wallet. “We can't afford to pay any sich prices as city folks charge for a little somethin' to eat.”

“I dare say we shall get along, an' if the children grow hungry they can buy peanuts, which, so I've heard tell, are powerful fillin,'” and with this comforting remark, Mrs. Doak gave herself wholly up to the pleasurable and unusual sensations of the outing.

Joe and Ned almost forgot that this was the day on which they were to make such a great change in their condition, and, when the cars rolled into the enormous station at the terminus of the journey,

there was so much to occupy their attention that it was as if the plan had never been decided upon.

Deacon Doak, who believed himself thoroughly familiar with the city, led the way into the street, past the throng of noisy hackmen, and through groups of his fellow passengers, at a swift pace, much as though his well-being depended upon gaining the open air in the shortest possible space of time, and, once on the street, the boys stood in mute surprise and bewilderment.

Everything around them was so entirely different from what could be seen at Herdsdale that they were literally unable to follow their leader, until he seized Joe by the coat collar, whirling him swiftly around, as he said, sharply :

“Don't stand there gapin' as if you'd never seen the city before. Keep close behind me unless you want to be lost, for I tell you flatly that your mother's day's pleasin' sha'n't be spoiled by my havin' to run hither an' yon after you two.”

Thus admonished, the boys took good care to keep very near the deacon during the next half-hour ; but they were disappointed because he walked at such

a rapid pace that it was impossible for them to gain more than an exceedingly brief glance at the shop windows, wherein were displayed many strange and curious articles.

Down one street and up another Mr. Doak led his family, never allowing them to halt a single instant until Mrs. Doak said, breathlessly, and in an imploring tone :

“Do stop a minute, father, for it seems as if I couldn't take another step. It appears as if you was huntin' for somethin'.”

“Huntin'? Of course I am! Do you s'pose we come down here for nothin' else but to see the city?”

“We've passed sights enough to keep me starin' all day. I've heard a good deal about New York; but never believed it was such a dreadful big place as this. What more do you want, father?”

“Want? I come down here to show you an' the children the Fourth of July celebration, but I'm afraid they've made up their minds to have the doin's Monday instead of to-day. I've been tryin' to follow the crowd; but the folks 'round here 'pear to be

walkin' hither an' yon without knowin' where they're bound."

"We ought to go out to the park if we want to see the fun," Joe said, with an air of exceeding wisdom. "That's where Ned an' I counted on findin' the most goin' on."

"There's enough here, goodness knows," Aunt Mercy replied, with a long-drawn sigh. "It's terrible hard work traipsin' over these brick an' stone sidewalks."

"S'posin' we have a ride on the elevatin' cars?" Joe suggested. "Sam Bartlett says we can go to the park on 'em, an' I've always wanted to ride in the air."

"We can't afford to spend money jest for the sake of tryin' experiments, an', besides, they don't look any too strong to suit me. I ain't given to that sort of thing at my time of life," and the deacon gazed scrutinisingly at the overhead structure. "If they'd let us ride on them cars for nothin', I don't believe I'd take the risk. It's like temptin' Providence."

"But they must be safe, father," Nellie said, pleadingly, eager as either of the boys to ride far

above the street in the cars. "If they wasn't, the city folks wouldn't go on them."

"City folks are willin' to do a good many things which wouldn't be prudent, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'. I've said you children should gallivant 'round this day in any way that seemed pleasin', an' I'm not the man to break my word ; but I wouldn't have said it if I'd thought there was a chance you'd want to climb into them things. Jest look at that little strap of iron ! It's all there is to keep 'em up, an' it ain't reasonable to suppose they'll hold any very great heft."

The children were thoroughly disappointed, and, seeing the expression on their faces, Aunt Mercy hastened to say :

"Your father knows what is best, an' I do hope you won't persist in travellin' any sich way. I declare I shouldn't have a minute's peace of mind if I knew you was up there reg'larly rushin' on to destruction. Stay with us till after we've seen the celebration, an' then perhaps father will let us have dinner in one of the eatin' places we've seen. I *would* like to taste a city meal once in my life."

Deacon Doak turned as if to reprove, then checked himself suddenly, and said :

“It’ll be time enough to think of gluttony after we’ve seen the sights. Are you boys countin’ on stayin’ with us, or do you want to go off somewhere an’ lose yourselves?”

“Where are you goin’?” Joe asked, careful not to commit himself before learning something of the programme laid out by his father.

“If there ain’t goin’ to be any show I’m willin’ to take all hands across the Brooklyn bridge, although we shall have to pay for goin’ on it. A man can’t turn ’round in this city without puttin’ out money.”

“Ned an’ I counted on seein’ the bridge, an’ if you feel so bad ’bout the elevatin’ cars I reckon we’ll give up ridin’ on em’, though I did want to tell the fellows in Canton that we’d done it.”

“Come along, then, an’ don’t stop in the street agin to talk, or folks will think we’re dreadful green,” and the deacon led the way once more at his best pace, literally dragging Aunt Mercy and Nellie on when they would have stopped at the more alluring shop windows.

It was a devious course the deacon pursued in order to gain the bridge, and more than once did Joe or Ned, who had heard very much concerning the city from Sam Bartlett, suggest that he was making an unnecessarily long journey; but the good man continued on without suffering himself to be turned from his purpose.

“It may be that Sam Bartlett, a snip of a boy who allers claimed to know more than his elders, can tell me how to find my way 'round this town; but he'll never get the chance. I don't doubt but what he is familiar with all the crooks an' turns he oughtn't to be, but at the same time common sense tells me what must be the shortest cut. We landed midway between the two rivers, an' if we go to the east till we see the water, it'll then be a sure an' straight course up-stream till we come to the bridge.”

The deacon would not listen to any argument against his plan, and the result was that the visitors from Herdsdale not only walked a much longer distance than was absolutely necessary, but passed through a decidedly uninteresting portion of the city.

Even Joe and Ned were more than willing to keep close at his heels when they were on those streets where the press of vehicles was greatest, and many times did Aunt Mercy declare emphatically that "only a merciful Providence saved them from being trampled to death under the feet of the horses."

"When a woman at my time of life takes to gallivantin' 'round sich a bewilderin' place as this, she ought to expect danger'll follow her; but I was so foolish as to think I could get along as easy as the city folks seem to do."

"So you can, mother, so you can, so long as you do what I tell you. I've been in this town often enough to know my way almost as well as Sam Bartlett could show me, an' you ain't in any special danger while I'm with you. We must be pretty nigh to the bridge by this time, an' I for one won't be sorry of a chance to rest. This 'ere is harder work than hoein' potatoes, an' the worst of it is that we 'pear to be missin' all the celebration."

"That's 'cause we didn't go right up to the park," Joe added, quickly.

“Be quiet, Josey; your father knows all about it, an’ it don’t stand to reason he’d miss anything if there was a free show goin’ on, more ’specially since he’s spent so much money to bring us here. But dear me, I’d be willin’ to miss everything that has ever happened if I could be in my own rockin’-chair at home for the next hour. I’m almost beat out.”

“We’ll rest when we get on the bridge, mother, an’ then we’ll eat dinner; I’m beginnin’ to feel sharkish,” and the deacon looked around expectantly at the packages which the different members of the family were carrying.

“There isn’t any dinner left to speak of, father. The children ate the most of it while we were on the cars, though goodness knows I thought I’d put up enough to keep a dozen hungry men in vittles for more’n one day.”

“Ate it all?” the deacon cried, sharply. “Do you mean to tell me that three small children have devoured everything?”

“There’s two or three doughnuts, an’ a piece of dried apple pie left; but the rest has disappeared,

an' with it has gone five cents' worth of peanuts Josey bought."

"Then I reckon there's one family in this town that'll be hungry before nightfall, for it don't stand to reason I can squander hard-earned money buyin' vittles in the city," and the deacon pushed ahead once more with a resolute expression on his face, as if he was willing to endure considerable suffering rather than patronise a "city eatin'-house."

To the weary pleasure-seekers it seemed a very long time before the wonderful structure appeared in sight; but once they were on it, midway between the two cities, fatigue was forgotten as they surveyed the beautiful panorama spread out before them.

Clinging to the iron guards, jostled by the pedestrians, and affording no slight amount of amusement to all who saw them, the visitors from Herdsdale gazed in almost mute astonishment at everything around and beneath them, until Joe heard a gentleman say to his companion, as the two passed:

“It is nearly twelve o'clock; we should have taken the cars if we cared to keep our appointment.”

“Did you hear that, Ned? Here's the forenoon gone, an' we haven't done a thing about findin' a place to work.”

“We sha'n't have much chance if we follow Uncle Eli 'round.”

“Then we must start off by ourselves; he said we could do as we wanted to this day.”

“Ain't we goin' to see the celebration?”

“It don't look like it. I counted on bein' all through with that by this time, an' we haven't had dinner yet.”

“We'll have to buy it ourselves, I guess, 'cause uncle won't spend much more money.”

“Let's talk to mother 'bout it,” and immediately Joe broached the subject in a whisper, while the deacon was still deeply engrossed with the wonderful scene around him.

“I'll do what I can, Josey, for your father himself must be hungry by this time; but he's dreadful set about spendin' money for things that cost as much as he says vittles does in the city.”

Then Aunt Mercy spoke in a low tone to the deacon, and quite an animated conversation ensued, after which, much to the surprise of the children, Deacon Doak cried, in a reckless tone :

“We’ll risk it, seein’s Fourth of July don’t come but once a year! Follow me, an’ we’ll get a reg’lar city dinner, never mind what it costs!”

“He must be terribly hungry,” Joe whispered to Ned, and the two boys were very careful not to lose sight of their leader during the next ten minutes, at the end of which time he stopped in front of what appeared to them to be a most magnificently furnished restaurant.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPENSIVE EXPERIMENT.

WHEN Deacon Doak led the way into the restaurant there was a look of determination on his face such as his family had never seen since the day of the town meeting, when he was elected treasurer of Canton.

It was as if he had not realised the full extent of his recklessness until after entering the building; but, once having committed himself, was bravely resolved to stand by his proposal to the bitter end.

Filled with surprise by the apparent gorgeousness of the furnishings of the restaurant, Joe and Ned meekly followed behind Nellie, each feeling almost guilty because of the part he had played in leading the deacon into such an extravagance as this dinner promised to be.

A coloured waiter conducted the visitors to a table at one side of the room, and would have taken

Deacon Doak's hat but that the latter clutched it firmly with both hands as if to intimate that he did not intend to part with his property until after good assurance that it would be safely returned.

A second attendant attempted to aid Mrs. Doak by withdrawing the chair and then pushing it forward as she was about to sit down ; but the deacon, on the alert for any "sich tricks," said, in a commanding tone :

"Don't you let him fool you, Mercy ! He's tryin' to come that silly game of pullin' the chair away when you sit down, an' you're too heavy for such pranks."

This caused Mrs. Doak to feel nervous, and before fully committing herself to the act of sitting, she clutched the chair with both hands, thus preventing any possibility of "a prank" on the part of the polite servant.

The wraps and baggage were carefully placed near the wall, although the attendants offered to care for them ; Nellie was given a seat next her mother, and the two boys took positions on that side of the table nearest the door.

The first waiter handed the deacon a printed bill

of fare, and while the latter was wiping his spectacles preparatory to reading it, Ned said to Joe, in a cautious whisper :

“I don't see how Uncle Eli can make up his mind to stay in this place.”

“Why?” and Joe looked up in surprise.

“Because there's liquor here, an' he's such a great temperance man.”

“Where's your liquor?”

“In that bottle, of course. What else would they have in a thing like that?” and Ned pointed to the carafe.

“Do you really suppose that is spirits?”

“It's in a bottle.”

“I don't believe it, 'cause father wouldn't have anything of the kind near him,” and, first looking around to make certain he was not observed, Joe smelled of the contents of the carafe. Then, to his cousin's astonishment, he boldly poured out a few drops and tasted of it. “It's nothin' but water, though why they keep it in a bottle beats me. Say,” he added in a hoarse whisper to his mother, “what's these towels for?”

“Be still, Joseph, or folks will think for certain that you come from the country. They’re napkins, the same as I have when the sewin’-circle meets at the farm.”

“I s’pose they’ve got ’em on now ’cause this is the Fourth of July, eh?”

“Joseph, don’t talk ’bout what’s before you,” the deacon said, sternly. “I can’t have my family disgracin’ me, when it’s likely to cost half the price of a small farm for our dinner. Listen to this, Mercy,” and the good man bent forward as he read in a voice tremulous with emotion, “‘Two boiled eggs, twenty cents.’ What do you think of that for a city price? A dollar an’ twenty cents a dozen for eggs! Why, if we could sell ’em at half that figger, I’d think myself in a fair way to be a rich man! An’ hear this, ‘Pumpkin pie, fifteen cents,’ an’ all I’m gettin’ from the cannin’ shops is four dollars a ton for the best pumpkins the sun ever shone on! I allow there must be, at the least calculation, thirteen cents profit on one piece of pie, an’ it would cost me as much to feed this family on sich truck as I get for three hundred an’

seventy-five pounds after haulin' em two miles an' a half."

"It's a dreadful price, I know, father; but then we ain't called upon to eat pie nor eggs. I'd like a good piece of beefsteak, so's to see how they cook it."

"You would, eh?" and now the deacon's voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion. "Listen to this 'ere, an' then ask me if I'm goin' to buy five pieces of beefsteak jest because it's the Fourth of July? 'Sirloin steak, seventy-five cents.' Three-quarters of a dollar, Mercy, an' there are five of us! Where do you think we'd be landed after this dinner was over, an' the taxes comin' on month after next?"

Mrs. Doak held up both hands in pained astonishment.

"Haven't you made some mistake, father? They surely can't charge so much as that for one little piece of meat!"

"But they do, Mercy; here it is in black and white, an' if we called on for it you'd find how true it is."

“Let’s go right straight out. It would be a sinful waste of money to attempt to fill these children up at them prices,” and Mrs. Doak half arose from her chair.

“Sit down, Mercy; we must get somethin’, if it ain’t more’n a cup of coffee, an’ — ‘Coffee, twenty cents a pot.’ There! What do you think of that? It looks like as if we’d have to fall back on milk. I ain’t so sure but what bread an’ milk would be hearty enough, seein’s how — ‘Milk, ten cents a glass!’ Mercy Doak, where have you led me? Ten cents a glass! There can’t be less than four tumblers in a quart, an’ that would amount to forty cents, while we’re sellin’ our’n to the creamery for two an’ a half! I don’t wonder farmers are ground down in this country when eatin’-house people want sich a wicked profit. It’s downright swindlin’, that’s what it is.”

“Don’t let’s stay, father, don’t let’s stay.”

“I ain’t sure but we’re in for it now, seein’s we’ve got sot down, an’ are occupyin’ the time of these ’ere niggers. I reckon coffee is cheaper’n milk, ’cause a pot oughter make five cups, hadn’t it?”

“Yes, indeed; more'n that, father, even if it was only a quart pot.”

“There don't seem to be anything cheaper, so we'll start in on that, an' while the nigger's bringin' it I'll kinder study this thing a little.”

The deacon gave his order for “one pot of coffee” in a subdued tone, and when the waiter left him continued his perusal of the bill of fare.

“Here's hot rolls marked fifteen cents; but it don't say how many they give of 'em.”

“I shouldn't think there could be less than half a batch at that price, an' two rolls, if they're sizeable at all, will make as much of a dinner as I need after your readin' what you have.”

The deacon beckoned to an attendant who was standing idle near by, and said to him much as if asking a very great favour:

“I've jest sent one of your men for a pot of coffee, an' have made up my mind to buy a plate of hot rolls, too. Won't you see about it?”

“I guess this is the last time Uncle Eli will pay for a city dinner,” Ned said, in a whisper, as at the same time he leaned back in the rest-inviting chair,

in order that he might receive the full benefit of the luxuries which were to be purchased at such an extravagant price.

“It ain’t likely he’ll bring us here again, an’ I’m beginnin’ to think, Ned, that we’ll have to earn a good deal more’n a dollar a day if we’re goin’ to pay sich a price as this for vittles. It would take pretty nigh that much, ’cordin’ to what father’s read, to give me a regular dinner if I was very hungry.”

By this time the waiter had returned, bringing on a silver salver a pot containing less than two cups of coffee, as was afterward learned by actual measurement, and a plate on which were three rolls.

These articles he placed in front of the visitor from Herdsdale, and then stood behind the latter’s chair in an attitude of respectful attention.

Deacon Doak looked alternately at what he had supposed would serve as a lunch for five, and at his wife, speaking not a word until fully a minute had elapsed, when his indignation could no longer be restrained, and said, in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by those in the immediate vicinity :

“We might have known before we left home,

Mercy, that we was bound to be swindled if we come down to the city. Is this what they call a pot of coffee? Why, it don't hold much more'n a teacupful, an' there's the bread they charge fifteen cents for — three little, scraggly biscuits at five cents apiece! Thirty-five cents for *this* dinner, an' 'cordin' to the looks of things we'll have to drink out of one cup, for that's all the man brought."

"I don't know as I'm so very hungry, father," Aunt Mercy whispered, in a soothing tone. "There's coffee an' bread enough for you, at all events, an' the rest of us will buy peanuts, or some-thin' of that sort, after we get out-of-doors."

"You won't do anything of the kind, Mercy Doak. I'll admit I'm a savin' man, an' perhaps some of my neighbours are in the right when they say I hold on to a cent almost too long; but I ain't so savin' as to be willin' to set down here an' eat these biscuits while you an' the children look on, for you're all as hungry as I am. It seems like a sinful waste to pay the prices these folks ask; but now that we're here it's got to be done, an' we'll try to economise after we get home. A few quarts of water in the milk, or a sprinklin' on

the next load of hay we haul, will help set this bill somewhere near right. I'd like powerful well to sell some truck to the man who keeps this place; then I reckon I'd square the bill! See here, mister," he added, addressing the waiter, "I live up to Canton, an' came down with mother an' the children to see the celebration. We brought some fodder with us, an' allowed it would be enough to last all day. The boys were greedy, an' eat the most of it before we got into town. Now I want dinner; the cheapest thing that's fillin' which you can scare up for five of us. I can't really afford to pay what you ask, an' it would take too long to hunt over this piece of paper agin, so s'posen you give me the best you can for the smallest money."

"Corned beef hash is hearty, sir," the man ventured to suggest.

"An' good too, if it's made right. Is that about as cheap as any of your truck?"

"Yes, sir, I think it is the most economical dish we have."

"Bring me five plates of it, an' another cup so I can give mother some coffee. The children will get

along on cold water, I reckon. Say, do you folks want to buy any milk or eggs?"

"You must speak with the proprietor about that, sir."

"Is he here?"

"Not now, sir; but he is in every morning between nine and ten."

"Away the rest of the time, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I don't wonder things is run this way. If he'd 'tend to business an' look after the pennies, he wouldn't have to try so mortal hard to get dollars out of other people's pockets by chargin' ten cents for one little glass of milk, when the most anybody else would dare to ask for a quart is five. Say, my name is Eli Doak, Canton, York State, an' if the man who owns this vittlin'-room wants to buy prime butter, fresh eggs, or milk at anything like the prices he's got marked down here, I wish he'd give me a call."

"I'll speak to him about it, sir," the waiter replied, evidently trying exceedingly hard to restrain a smile, and then hurried away to fill the modest order.

Ten minutes later the visitors from Herdsdale had been served. Mrs. Doak shared the coffee with her husband; the children had goblets filled with cracked ice and water, and a plentiful supply of bread had been brought with the hash.

“Now this ain’t so bad, after all,” Deacon Doak said, approvingly, as he conveyed from the plate to his mouth as large a quantity of the hashed meat as he could conveniently raise on the end of his knife. “With what bread there is here it ought to be all the vittles we’ll need ’twixt now an’ the time we get home. I’m glad I put the case before that nigger jest as I did. He seems to be a decent kind of man.”

“So he is, father, an’ this dinner is good enough for a king, though I can’t say that the hash is anything extra nice. Time an’ time agin we’ve had jest as good on our own table, an’ I daresay this will cost twice as much as it would at home. Do you know how much they ask for it?”

“I didn’t look. He said it was the cheapest thing in the place,” and the deacon turned his attention to the task of appeasing his hunger, until, unable longer

to restrain his curiosity, he again took up the bill of fare that he might ascertain how much would be charged for this frugal dinner.

It was several moments before he found the item for which he was searching, and then the paper fluttered from his almost nerveless fingers as he gazed reproachfully at his wife.

“Bless my heart, father! What *is* the matter with you? Are you goin’ to have another spell of dyspepsy?”

“Dyspepsy! I’ll have worse than that, mother, before I’ve paid for this ’ere dinner. What do you s’pose they charge for hash?”

“They couldn’t decently ask more’n ten cents for each plate, an’ even then they’d get a terrible profit. I’m sure it don’t cost anything to make, ’cause they can take what’s left over from dinner, an’ there’s always enough, if you boil a big piece of beef, to work up, with what vegetables you have, more hash than would supply all the people here.”

“*It’s twenty-five cents a plate, Mercy!*”

The knife and fork fell from Mrs. Doak’s hands as

she gazed at her husband with an expression on her face very like that of fear.

“It’s twenty-five cents a plate! Five twenty-fives is a dollar an’ a quarter. Twenty cents for the coffee is a dollar forty-five, an’ fifteen for them biscuits makes a dollar an’ sixty cents for this poor little lot of vittles. Why, that’s nigh on to as much as we spend for a whole week’s feed at home!”

Mrs. Doak pushed her chair back from the table.

“What are you goin’ to do now, mother?” the deacon asked, sharply.

“It’s taken away all my appetite, Eli, to think of how much money you’ve got to pay.”

“This ain’t no time to lose your appetite, Mercy. We’ve got to eat every scrap, an’ then we sha’n’t come out anywhere nigh even. Set still till that hash is gone, an’ then do your share on the bread. I ain’t countin’ on buyin’ sich stuff for a dollar an’ sixty cents, an’ then leavin’ more’n half for them to sell over agin to somebody else! Joseph, Edward, see that you take care of all that bread. You won’t get any more to-day.”

"We will, an' as much agin, if they are willin' to bring it on," Joe replied, cheerily.

From that moment until all the eatables had disappeared, the visitors from Herdsdale were most industrious, and then the deacon, with a long-drawn sigh, as if the movement gave him real pain, drew a well-worn calf-skin wallet from his pocket.

The waiter, observing the action, placed before him a small slip of paper, on which was written a list of the articles served, with the prices affixed.

"So you make out a reg'lar bill, eh? Well, I should think you ought to. I'd be willin' to do the same if I made sich a profit," and very slowly Deacon Doak counted out the necessary amount.

"Pay at the desk, please."

"The desk, eh? Where's that?"

"Over there, sir, where the lady is sitting."

"Well, I'll walk up an' settle, but I hope they won't charge me anything for goin' across the floor. It wouldn't be strange if they should try to, 'cordin' to what I've seen in this 'ere place."

In single file, as if it were necessary all should take part in the performance, the Doak family marched

up to the desk, the observed of all observers, and the deacon said, as he handed his money and check to the cashier :

“If it so be you ever get up to Canton, come out to Herdsdale farm an’ I’ll sell you all the hash you can carry away for a dollar an’ sixty cents.”

No reply was made to this remark ; but the fact that he had thus freed his mind gave the deacon considerable satisfaction, and he said when the family were on the sidewalk once more :

“I guess I come pretty nigh gettin’ even with that young woman. She’ll remember what I said till the next Fourth of July, or I’m mistaken, an’ perhaps the rest of the folks that come here won’t have to pay quite so much, or else they’ll have decent-sized coffee-pots when they try to sell ’em for twenty cents apiece.”

“What are we goin’ to do now, father?” Mrs. Doak asked, eager to change the subject of conversation.

“If I did what I ought to, I’d go straight back home an’ try to make up for the money we’ve squandered ; but now that we’re here we’ll see what’s left

of the celebration, if it so be there is any," and the good man turned abruptly around as if to lead his family in search of the "celebration," when he was accosted by a man dressed in what might be supposed the extreme of fashion, and wearing a profusion of jewelry.

"I'm glad to see you, farmer, glad to see you," the stranger said, affably, as he held out his hand, which was immediately clasped by the deacon, who stood gazing at him inquiringly. "It's some time since you've been in the city, isn't it?"

"Yes, nigh on to three years. But where have I seen you, neighbour? I can't remember your face for the life of me. Was you ever out to the Herdsdale farm, or in Canton?"

"I've been in Canton very often. You must remember me. My name is Folsom."

"I don't seem to recall the name; but then my memory ain't anywhere nigh to what it used to be. Instead of tryin' to remember, I ought to be glad to see any one I know, after all that's happened," and the deacon immediately began a detailed account of his visit to the restaurant.

Meanwhile Mrs. Doak and Nellie took refuge in the nearest doorway, and Joe and Ned moved restlessly here or there, eager to continue the search for the "celebration."

While he talked with the alleged Mr. Folsom the deacon unconsciously moved farther and farther from his family, until his newly discovered friend and himself were in the very midst of the throng which was constantly passing in either direction.

Several times he was rudely jostled by the pedestrians, and once a stranger pressed so violently against him that the good man very nearly lost his temper and turned to rebuke the offender.

While doing so he was pushed on either side by several who approached unnecessarily near, and when he turned again Mr. Folsom had disappeared.

"Did you see where that man went, mother?" he asked, as he stepped into the doorway by the side of Aunt Mercy.

"Bless you, no, father. There are so many people around here that it don't seem as if I could see any of 'em. Where are the boys?"

"I thought they was with you."

“I saw both of them on the corner a few minutes ago, an’ supposed you was lookin’ out for ’em. It would be a dreadful thing if they should get lost in this big city.”

“Now don’t begin to borrow trouble, mother, for we’ve had enough of it this day. We’ll stand here an’ wait for ’em. Most likely they’ll be back in a minute, an’ — Where’s my wallet?”

The deacon almost screamed as he hurriedly searched first one pocket and then another, without finding that for which he sought.

“I’ve been robbed, Mercy — robbed even worse than I was in that eatin’-house, for my watch has gone with the money. Here we are, both boys missin’, an’ not a cent to pay our way home! Yes, everything has been stole,” he added, as he made another and equally unsuccessful search, “an’ I’ve always allowed that a man who’d come down here to the city an’ let these sharpers get the best of him was a fool!”

CHAPTER IV.

A DISAGREEABLE ENCOUNTER.

JOE and Ned had no idea of abandoning the deacon while he was talking with the man who called himself "Folsom."

At the moment when the good man was accosted by the alleged frequent visitor to Canton, a street vendor had passed with toy pistols for sale, and his wares so closely imitated real weapons that both the boys were eager to make an investment.

The price of the toy was twenty-five cents, and seemed too large a sum to be expended for such a purpose; but Joe felt positive a reduction would be made if two were sold to the same customer, and proposed to follow the man until they found a convenient opportunity to bargain with him.

The vendor, however, continued to move on at a reasonably rapid pace until he was more than a square from where the deacon stood, and not until

he had halted to resume business was there an opportunity for Joe to do as he desired.

By this time the boys were hidden from view of the Doak family by the throng of pedestrians, and so intent on the proposed bargain that probably neither had given heed to the direction in which he had come, therefore it might have been impossible for them to retrace their steps to the spot where the deacon was bewailing the loss of his money.

This was a matter of but little concern to them just at the moment, however; they were for the time being oblivious to everything save the desire to become possessors of the toys.

"How much shall we offer him for two?" Joe asked, when the man had halted.

"With what money Uncle Eli gave me, I've only got twenty-six cents; but I'd spend fifteen of it for the sake of havin' one of them pistols."

"I've got seven cents more than you, an' will give that much extra if we can buy them. Keep close behind me so if he makes an offer we can take him up before he has time to back down."

Then, almost timid at the idea of bargaining with

a city trader, Joe approached, and opened the business by asking :

“Say, mister, if you could sell two of them pistols how much would you take for them?”

“Seein’s it’s you, I’ll part with a couple for fifty cents, an’ they’re dirt cheap at that price. The man what makes ’em has died broken-hearted because the public didn’t jump in an’ buy when he offered them at sich a ridiculously small figger, an’ I’ve got the last of the stock. It’s the only chance you’ll have to-day, sonny, to get two pistols like these for half a dollar.”

“But you only ask a quarter when you sell one.”

“Sure, an’ I’m not raisin’ a cent because you want more’n your share. Take my advice an’ don’t delay ’bout buyin’, ’cause they’ll be gone in less’n five minutes after it’s known I’m here sellin’ ’em. The folks in this city are jest crazy over this thing, an’ I don’t dare to stand very long in one place for fear of bein’ arrested on a charge of blockin’ the street with them as wants to buy.”

“But, see here, Ned an’ I haven’t got much more’n fifty cents, an’ we can’t put out all our

money. Now, if you'll take off somethin' for the sake of sellin' two, we'll buy 'em."

"How much cash have you?"

"I've got thirty-three cents; but he has only twenty-six."

"Pass over half a dollar, an' then you'll have nine cents left. Plenty enough for you boys to spend on foolishness. Buy one of these an' you've got somethin' to last you a lifetime. You won't never need another pistol of this kind, no matter how old you grow, because these are made to wear."

The man extended one hand in which were the two toys, and held out the other for the money with such a peremptory gesture that Joe was almost persuaded it was necessary he should purchase the goods.

"I wouldn't have but one cent left after that trade, an' you an' I can't stand it," Ned said, quickly, fearing lest his cousin was about to conclude the bargain. "I'll go fifteen cents, an' we'll take two at that price," he added, to the vendor.

"Fifteen cents for a pistol like that! You might

be ashamed to offer it. This 'ere weapon would cost two dollars up where you live."

"I don't believe there's anything like it in Canton."

"Of course, there ain't, 'cause they come too high. There's only one man in this city what can buy 'em at a figger low enough for him to peddle them out at a quarter, an' that man is me. The Canton storekeepers would charge all of two dollars if they could get 'em, but they can't."

"Will you take fifteen cents?"

"Not much. Give me forty-five an' the two of 'em is your'n. That's the very best price I can make, an' it's jest like throwin' goods away. Why, you can use them the balance of the day, an' tomorrow trade 'em off for twice as much."

Ned shook his head and turned away that he might not be tempted.

"They're yours for forty-five cents, an' I wouldn't sell 'em to my grandmother for forty-four."

"Let's buy them, Ned," Joe whispered. "What that man says must be true. We never saw anything of the kind for the money."

"But we shall have only fourteen cents left, an' who knows but we'll need to ride in the cars before we strike such a job as Sam Bartlett found."

"I'll risk that part of it if you will. We've got all the afternoon, an' it can't be terrible far to walk when the stores are so near together."

Ned hesitated, but Joe insisted, and the result was that forty-five cents of their hoard went into the vendor's possession, while they stood on the sidewalk clutching their prizes.

"Hi! Jimmy! Get on to the galoots from Cohoes!" a shrill voice cried from behind Joe, and turning suddenly the latter saw a boy of about his own age with a bootblack's outfit suspended from his shoulder.

"Come over here an' see the country jays!" the lad continued, shrilly, not a whit abashed by the fact that Joe was looking at him sternly. "They've come down to take the town."

"What's the matter with you?" Joe asked, sharply.

"Hurry up, Jimmy! Hurry up, or you'll lose the show!"

By this time Joe was thoroughly provoked. It seemed to him a good and sufficient cause for anger that they should be thus rudely pointed out as country boys, and when to this was added the intimation that they were so odd in appearance as to constitute a "show," the insult was too great to be borne calmly.

"You'd better mind what you're sayin', Mr. Smarty. We may come from the country; but we don't count on lettin' you poke fun at us."

By this time the bootblack's friend, he who had been addressed as "Jimmy," arrived on the scene, and immediately began calling to other acquaintances, all the while pretending to be so convulsed with laughter that it was with difficulty he could speak.

"Don't say anything to them, Joe," Ned whispered. "It would be an awful thing if we should get into a row, an' a policeman arrested us. Let's go back to Uncle Eli."

Joe stood irresolutely an instant while Ned tugged at his coat sleeve, and when he finally decided to follow this very good advice it was no longer possible to do so.

Thanks to the shrill cries of the two bootblacks a crowd numbering a dozen or more boys had gathered, some carrying papers under their arms, others with boxes and brushes in their hands or swung over their shoulders, and not a few empty-handed.

The newcomers pressed so closely around the visitors from Herdsdale that it was literally impossible for them to advance a step in either direction, and Ned began to exhibit symptoms of the liveliest alarm.

The city boys amused themselves by making loud comments on the general appearance of the two from Canton, and pressed closer and closer until Joe and Ned soon found themselves forced back against the wall of a building.

"I ain't goin' to stand this," Joe whispered. "If these fellows think we're afraid, they'll talk an' act a good deal worse than they're doin' now. I'd almost rather be arrested than to stay here lettin' them poke fun at me."

"But what else can you do? We don't stand any show with a crowd like this."

"I'll make one or two of 'em sorry they ever saw

a feller from Canton," and as Joe raised his fist threateningly, loud, derisive laughter burst from the throng.

"Look out there! Somebody's pullin' the string, an' he'll come apart if we ain't careful!"

"Get in here closer. Let's see how a country sport can put up his hands!"

"Give him all the room he wants; but don't hurt him, 'cause he's bound to get back an' take care of the calves to-night."

Each member of the throng seemed to think it necessary he should make some derisive remark; but no one appeared to be afraid of Joe's threatening gestures.

"They want to pick a fuss, an' would be only too glad if we'd start it," Ned whispered. "Let them keep on a spell, it won't hurt us; an' if a policeman comes along I'll ask him to drive them off."

"I can take care of two or three, an' I'm goin' to. I'd rather get a terrible thumpin' than let 'em talk like this," and Joe was about to rush forward, although there could be no question but that he would be the one to suffer in the encounter, when a

familiar voice was heard above the din of the street, crying :

“Joseph! Edward! What are you doin’ there?”

“Hi! Here’s the boss guy himself, lookin’ after the kids,” some one shouted, and all unconscious that the remark was intended for him, Deacon Doak advanced quickly toward his son and nephew, as he said :

“After all the trouble we’ve had to-day it does seem as though you might have enjoyed yourselves in some other fashion than by runnin’ away. You’re mother is most distracted, thinkin’ you’re lost.”

“Yes, go back, sonny, an’ sooth your marm!” one of the bootblacks shouted, and as the others gave way to bursts of seemingly uncontrollable laughter, Joe darted toward the speaker, but the deacon’s hand arrested his movements so suddenly that he was only saved from falling by Ned’s opportune grasp.

“Joseph, are you tryin’ to raise a row with these boys?”

“They’ve been pokin’ fun at Ned an’ me till I couldn’t stand it any longer,” Joe whimpered.

“And you would disgrace your mother an’ me by fightin’, would you?” the deacon asked, sternly.

“Be careful of him, perfessor,” one of the tormentors cried. “Be careful an’ don’t let him hurt hisself; better save him to kill a crow with.”

It was as if the deacon had but just begun to understand that the shrill cries were intended for his own ear, and he turned quickly, still holding Joe by the coat-collar, as he asked:

“Are you talkin’ to me, sonny?”

“Your name is Freshfield, from Jersey, ain’t it?”

“Are you another who has met me up to Canton, an’ want to talk about old times out on the sidewalk where some one can steal my money? My name is Doak; I’m from Canton, an’ don’t want any truck with sich as you.”

“Fellers, this is Perfessor Doak from Canton,” the bootblack said, with mock politeness, as he bowed first toward the deacon and then to his comrades. “Step up here an’ shake hands with the perfessor, while I hold the kid for him.”

“Hurrah for Perfessor Doak from Canton!” one of the throng shouted, and while they were yelling

at the full strength of their lungs, careful to keep beyond reach of the deacon's arm, yet pressing sufficiently close to give him the full benefit of the noise, a policeman appeared in the distance.

As if by magic the tormentors vanished.

"How long have they been sassin' of you, Joseph?" the deacon asked, in a more kindly tone, when he was assured the last of the throng had departed.

"Almost ever since we left you an' mother. We come over here to buy a pistol from a man, an' hadn't more'n done so before these fellers flocked 'round."

"I've always told you, Joseph, that it was wrong to fight; but if you'd turned to an' given that smallest chap a good sound floggin', I ain't certain but that I'd have upheld you in such a course. I thought we had boys up to Canton who would beat the world for impudence, but these are the worst I ever saw. Come back with me to where I left your mother, an' we'll see how we're goin' to get home to-night."

"Why, we'll go on the cars, won't we, Uncle Eli?" Ned asked, in astonishment.

“I ain’t so certain ’bout that, unless somebody up ’round the depot knows who I am, for every cent of money I brought with me has been stolen.”

“Stolen?”

“Yes, I thought I was bein’ robbed pretty hard while we was in that eatin’-house; but I’d no sooner got out on the sidewalk when somebody took my wallet an’ watch. It wasn’t any great shakes of a timepiece, ’cause it hasn’t run for the last two years; but there was silver enough in the cases to make it worth two or three dollars.”

“How much money did you lose, father?”

“Well, there was a good deal more’n five dollars, which makes us pay dear for our whistle this day, to say nothin’ of the trouble we may have gettin’ home.”

Joe and Ned gazed at each other in dismay, both feeling almost guilty because they had spent so much money in the purchase of the toys when it might be so sadly needed.

There was but little opportunity, however, for them to dwell upon the robbery and its possible results. The policeman had continued on his beat

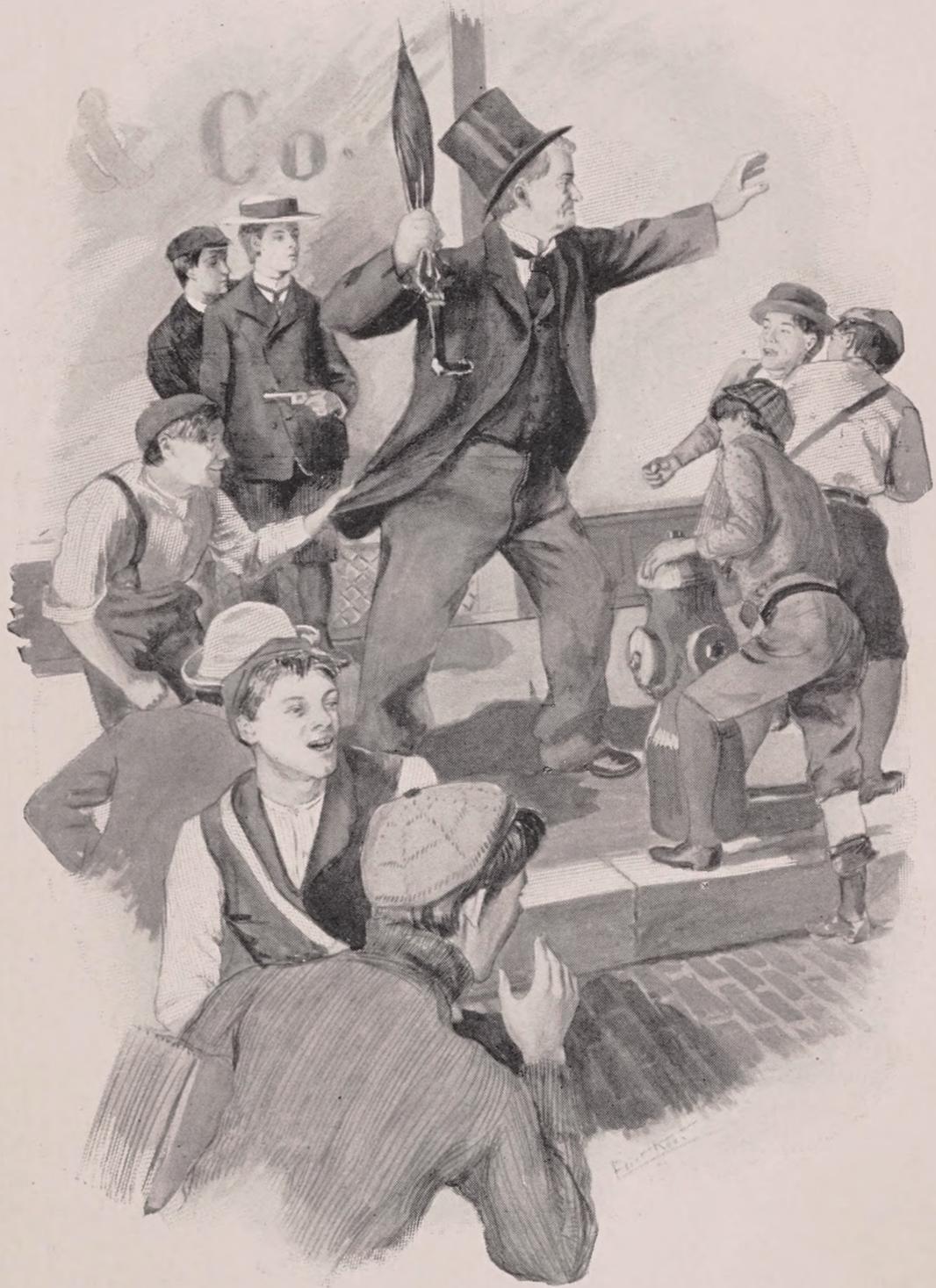
up the street, and the crew of bootblacks and news-boys reappeared as suddenly as they had vanished, immediately resuming their sport by discussing the personal appearance of the deacon as they previously had that of Joe and Ned.

Slow to wrath and a man of peace though Deacon Doak was, he could not wholly restrain his temper under this flood of adverse criticism, and, much to the amusement of his tormentors, made strenuous efforts to seize one of them.

“I’ll give you a lesson in good manners if nothin’ more, you little rascals!” he cried, angrily, as he ran after first one and then another with no better success than to arouse the mirth of the passers-by.

Not until he had tried unsuccessfully half a dozen times to catch one of the aggressors did he realise that he was making an unenviable exhibition of himself, and then, with his back against the building, as Joe and Ned had stood a few moments before, he stood glancing quickly around from time to time, as if hoping to find some way of escape.

The city boys were in high glee now they had succeeded in arousing the deacon to anger, and



"THE CITY BOYS WERE IN HIGH GLEE."

danced just beyond reach of his arm as they hurled taunts and unfriendly criticisms in order that his wrath might not cool.

Deacon Doak was powerless to end the scene in which he and his two boys were the central figures, for when he attempted to move up the street toward where his wife and Nellie were waiting, the boys followed, so impeding his progress that it was almost impossible for him to make any headway.

“I declare, this is almost as bad as bein’ robbed,” he said, with a long-drawn sigh, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. “I never had an idee boys could act so much as if the evil one himself was in ’em!”

“Stand right here, Uncle Eli, till that policeman comes back, an’ they’ll run as soon as he shows himself.”

“Yes, an’ in the meantime who can tell what mother is doin’? She may make up her mind that I’ve got lost as well as you, an’ start out to hunt us up. I don’t believe I should ever be able to find her agin in this pesky city.”

At this moment, when the deacon was despairing

of being able to rid himself of the noisy throng, a boy similar in appearance to those who were having so much sport at the expense of the visitors from Canton came on the scene, and for an instant Joe thought he was an accession to the ranks of the mischief-makers.

In this he soon found himself mistaken, however, for instantly the newcomer appeared, the taunts of the others decreased in volume, but were not stilled entirely until he shouted, harshly :

“Now, then, what are you duffers up to? Jumpin’ on an old man an’ two kids jest ’cause they come from the country, eh? You ought’er be ashamed of yourselves, an’ I’ll soon see that you are if this hootin’ an’ yellin’ ain’t stopped mighty quick. Come an’ tackle me if you want some fun, but leave the hayseeders alone so long as they mind their own business.”

One by one the deacon’s tormentors stole quietly away until only two were left, and the boy who had worked such a decided change in the scene turned toward them sharply :

“Did you hear what I said, or do you want me

to whistle it? Get a hustle on, or I'll give you a chance to put up your hands. Think it's mighty smart to corner a couple of kids what don't know the city, eh? It's big odds you didn't dare to stand up in front of 'em, but kept your distance while you thought you was bein' so terribly funny. Get a move on now, or I'll take a hand in this little show, an' you won't have sich a snap as you counted on!"

The last of the throng which had caused Deacon Doak so much annoyance beat a retreat, although the boy who had put them and their comrades to flight was no larger than the smallest member of their party.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

DEACON DOAK gazed for an instant admiringly at the boy who had thus rescued him from an unpleasant position, and then glanced up and down the street, to make certain his tormentors had really taken their departure, after which he said to the stranger :

“You’ve done us a powerful sight of good, sonny, an’ if you ever come to Canton I’ll try an’ make it up to you.”

“I didn’t do anything but walk ’round the corner. Them chumps are mighty stout when they think they can scare anybody ; but there ain’t one of the gang who dares to stand up an’ give or take like a man. Had they been guyin’ you very long ?”

“How’s that ?”

“Had they been guyin’ you very long — makin’ fun of you, I mean, same’s they was when I come up ?”

“They started in on the boys quite a spell ago,” and Deacon Doak motioned toward Joe and Ned, who were gazing with undisguised admiration at the lad who could put to flight half a dozen or more fellows, each of whom might have been his equal both in strength and agility. “When I came up they pitched into me, an’ I declare to you there was so many of ’em I couldn’t seem to get away, while as for catchin’ ’em, the pesky little things are like fleas.”

“I know their tricks. There’s two in that gang what make a reg’lar business of guyin’ folks from the country, an’ some of these days they’ll get into trouble.”

“I’m powerful obleeged to you, sonny, ’cause if you hadn’t come up jest as you did I don’t know what might have happened.”

“That’s all right,” the boy replied, carelessly. “I always hate to see ’em bullyin’ a jay; but I ain’t so sure as I’d tried to break up the fun if Bim Crowley hadn’t been in the crowd.”

“What had Bim Crowley to do with it?”

“He travels with that gang, an’ I promised his

mother day before yesterday I'd see he didn't get into trouble. Them duffers counted on lookin' out sharp for the cops ; but a policeman's eye ain't shut more'n half the time, an' all hands might have been nabbed jest at the very minute they thought things was goin' smooth, see? That would be tough on Bim's mother, you know, an' I wasn't goin' to take the chances."

"How does it happen that they ran the minute you showed your nose 'round the corner?"

"Oh, they know me, that gang does," the boy replied, with a swagger, "an' they know what would happen if any of 'em tried to be too smart where I was."

"Do you mean to tell me, sonny, that you could have got the best of that whole crowd?"

"I shouldn't have tried it while they was all together ; but I'd took one or two at a time, an' before next Saturday night every feller would have found hisself done up in great shape, see? Say, where was you goin' when the gang stopped you?"

The deacon was rapidly growing confidential with

this new acquaintance, and he had good cause, for the boy was the only one, out of the many thousand people he had met that day, who seemed willing to aid or advise.

Drawing Joe and Ned closer, as if to introduce them more particularly to the stranger's notice, he began a recital of the forenoon's mishaps, concluding the not very pleasant story by saying :

"We've kind'er slipped by the celebration, so to speak, an' got rid of all our money without anything to show for it. I did begrudge what I spent in that eatin'-house, but now I wish I'd gone the whole figger, an' had a reg'lar dinner. Then there would have been so much the less for the thieves to get."

"You run up agin that bunco man dead easy."

"Eh?"

"I mean the duffer what called hisself Folsom was a bunco steerer, an' you gave right up to him."

"Yes, I s'pose I did," the deacon said, thoughtfully, "an' I've read enough about countrymen bein' buncoed to have had my wits about me, but yet I didn't. Say, sonny, what's your name?"

"Larry Hudson."

“Of course you live here in the city?”

“Yes, I sorter hang 'round.”

“Don't you have any business?”

“Oh, yes; I shine for a livin'. Sometimes I get it, an' sometimes I don't.”

“You do what?”

“Shine — black boots, you know. Didn't you say you had the old woman an' another of the kids with you?”

“Bless my heart, I'd almost forgotten about mother, an' there's no knowin' whether she stayed where I left her or not. What with losin' my money, an' gettin' into a row with them pesky boys, I'm kind'er mixed up. It went out of my mind for a minute that mother must be got home somehow, which is where the rest of us ought to be, though I declare I don't know how it's to be done. S'posen you come along with us, unless you're in a hurry.”

“There ain't any rope tied to me this afternoon. Business was dull, an' I knocked off work quite a spell ago.”

“Then you haven't got anything to do the balance of the day?”

“It don’t look like it. I can’t kick agin knockin’ ’round on a day like this. I had a pretty fair trade in the mornin’, an’ can afford to lay still a spell, I reckon.”

“Do you live anywhere hereabouts?”

“Me an’ another feller are swellin’ in a room up on Mulberry Street this week; but unless trade grows better, I reckon we’ll have to snoop ’round the streets for a place to sleep pretty soon.”

“Do you mean to say you haven’t any home?” and the deacon looked at Larry in astonishment.

“Do you think if I had one I’d be hangin’ ’round here now?”

“Where are your folks?”

“Mother’s dead, an’ father’s down on the Island doin’ time.”

“Doin’ what?”

“Doin’ time — arrested, you know, an’ sentenced for six months.”

“What had he been up to?”

“Boozin’; he’s what you call a chronical drunkard, but he don’t bother me, an’ you can bet I let him alone.”

“You seem to be a real decent sort of a boy to have a drunkard for a father.”

“It ain’t any sign ’cause the old man goes wrong that I have to,” Larry replied, stoutly. “Why did you want to know if I had anything to do the balance of the day?”

“I was thinkin, I’d hire you to show us ’round — I declare I forgot jest for the minute that I hadn’t anything to hire you with. Well, we’ll get along an’ find mother. You’re comin’?”

“Sure; I’ll hang by you a spell longer, for them duffers ain’t so far off but what they’ll tackle you agin if they see me leave. Better get a move on, or the old woman may be gone.”

Thus admonished, the deacon walked rapidly in the direction from which he had come, and Larry took charge of the two boys, who already looked upon him as a hero.

“So you haven’t seen any of the Fourth of July yet, eh?” he asked.

“This is all we’ve got to show for it,” and Joe proudly displayed his toy pistol. “Ned an’ me bought two of these for forty-five cents.”

“Only two of ’em? Why, you must have money to burn! You ought’er got five or six at that price. They’re worth ten cents apiece, an’ I wouldn’t give that much for a dozen.”

“Ten cents? But the man asked a quarter for one.”

“He might have asked it; but I don’t reckon he sold many at that price. You can find all you can lug on the Bowery for a dime.”

Joe glanced quickly toward his cousin, and then replaced the toy in his pocket with a gesture of impatience.

“I don’t wonder city folks laugh at us for bein’ green, ’cause that’s what we are. I believe we’ve been cheated pretty near as bad as father has. I’d like to know how Sam Bartlett got along when he first come to this town.”

“Who’s Sam Bartlett?”

“A feller from Canton who come down here an’ got a mighty fine job—pays him as much as a dollar a day, an’ when he left home he was jest as green as we are.”

“If he was he must have cut his teeth since then,

or nobody'd ever keep him," and Larry looked at the two from Herdsdale with a smile.

"Yes, I know we're green," Joe admitted, frankly, "an' so would you be if you'd always lived on a farm, an' this was the first time you'd come to the city."

"Well," Larry said, emphatically, "if I had a home on a farm you can bet I'd never want to go to the city. I don't see why it is that kids in the country allers think it's sich a mighty fine thing to live in town."

"Don't you think it is?"

"You can bet your bottom dollar I don't! Jest show me a chance to get a home in the country, an' then see how hard it would be to pull me out of it! But say, how's your father goin' to get back?"

"That's what's worryin' us," Ned replied, promptly, "an' I guess he's doin' a heap of thinkin' to figger it out. Look here, Larry, if you wanted to find a job 'round this place, where would you go?"

"But I don't want to find one, 'cause I can make

more at blackin' boots than I could workin' in a store. It costs so blamed much to buy clothes, if you're swellin' behind a counter."

"But s'posen you *did* want to get one, where would you go?"

"Look here!" and Larry stopped suddenly in front of his new acquaintances. "Are you kids sich fools as to want to come down here to live?"

"That's what we counted on doin' if we could get a job."

"Well, take my advice, an' go back to the farm jest as quick as ever you can. If that feller what you know says the city's better'n the country, he's 'bout the same as a bloomin' idjut. I've knocked 'round this town all my life; sometimes had a home, but more often I hadn't; one day I'd earn enough for my grub, an' the next I'd have to fill up with wind puddin', 'cause I had no money to buy anything with. Fellers on a farm can always get enough to eat, an' a good place to sleep."

"But they have to work mighty hard for it."

"An' do you s'pose you're comin' down here an' earn a livin' without havin' to do anything? By the

time you'd been here a month you'd find out whether that was true or not. When a feller has to hustle for himself he's bound to work, 'cause he won't find anybody else to do it for him, an' it ain't every day he has a job in the city."

"But Sam Bartlett has."

"You mean he had one yesterday; but perhaps he's been bounced by this time. I'll tell you one thing for certain: he's got to work as hard as ever he did on a farm if he counts on keepin' his job, an' spend about ten times as much as it would cost him to live in the country. I know what I'm talkin' about, I do! You fellers don't want to waste any time lookin' for work 'round here, but get back jist as quick as you know how."

"Yes, that's it!" Ned exclaimed, as if he had but just fully realised their destitute condition. "We've got to go back for a fact; but how it's goin' to be done, now Uncle Eli has lost his money, beats me."

"What's the old man's name?" Larry asked, suddenly.

"Eli Doak, an' he's a deacon of the First Baptist Church, in Canton."

“Got a big farm?”

“There ain’t any up our way that can beat the Herdsdale,” Joe replied, proudly.

“Is he your father?”

“Yes, an’ he’s jest the same as Ned’s, too, though he’s only Ned’s uncle.”

The conversation was interrupted at this point, as Deacon Doak paused in front of the doorway where his wife, who had been exhibiting every symptom of nervousness and alarm, greeted him with an exclamation of joy.

“I began to be afraid, father, that in huntin’ for the boys you’d got lost yourself. Goodness knows I never want to come to this wicked city again so long as I live!”

“After one experience like this, mother, I don’t calculate I shall hanker after anything of the kind myself. The boys didn’t stray so far but that I found ’em without much trouble, an’ we had what you might almost call a fuss with some of the unmannerly children who live down this way. If it hadn’t been for that little shaver who’s talkin’ with Joe, I declare for it, Mercy, I believe the

youngsters of this city would actually have made me forget myself. I was cornered, with them baitin' me like you would a bull, till anger eenamost got the best of me. That little feller come up, bold as a lion, an' drove off the whole crowd that I couldn't do nothin' with. Now I'm goin' to hold on to him till we start for home. The way things have turned out it don't look as if I knew quite so much about the city as I allowed I did."

"But how are we to get to Canton, father?"

"I declare for it, Mercy, I haven't had time yet to figger that out. We'll jog along toward the depot, an' try to work it in some way, if it so be we can."

At this moment Larry, who had been holding a whispered conversation with his newly made friends from the country, came forward as if half ashamed of himself for so doing, and winked violently with one eye while he made energetic gestures with his thumb.

"Bless my heart, father, that boy acts as if he had the St. Vitus dance. Is anything the matter with him?"

“‘Cordin’ to what I’ve seen of him to-day I shouldn’t say there was. He’s got more common sense in that frowsy head of his than the average run of grown men. I reckon he wants to tell me somethin’,” and the deacon advanced in obedience to the gestures.

“Look here, mister,” Larry said, in a hoarse whisper, as he glanced furtively over his shoulder to make certain neither Aunt Mercy nor Nellie could overhear the conversation, “you’re in kind of a tight box about money, an’ no mistake.”

“I reckon you’re right, my boy. Even if I am green I don’t need anybody to explain to me that I’m a stranger in a strange land, an’ broke at that.”

“How much does it cost to get you an’ your fam’ly out to the farm in fair style?”

“Eighty-five cents apiece, an’ if I hadn’t been an old fool I’d have come down on the excursion train where the rates was cheaper, for one was run to-day; but I’d heard so much ‘bout folks buyin’ these ‘ere excursion tickets, missin’ the cars when they wanted to go back, an’ havin’ to pay another fare, that I
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thought I'd be on the safe side, an' this is the way it has turned out."

"Eighty-five cents apiece, an' there's five of you. How much does that figger?"

"Four dollars an' a quarter."

"Well, see here, deacon, I ain't what you might call a millionaire, but I've got three dollars, an' it won't take me more'n five minutes to raise the rest from some of the fellers what are workin' 'round here. They know I'll pay 'em back, so it won't be a great job to gather in the cash. Now s'posen I do that, couldn't you send me the money sometime next week?"

"Of course I could, my boy," and in his sudden joy at thus finding what had seemed almost insurmountable difficulties smoothed from his path, the deacon clasped both of Larry's dirty hands. "I'd send it straight away Monday mornin,' an' a quarter added to it for interest."

"I don't want anything added to it; but you look like a square old man, even if you never was in the city before, an' I'd like to help you out of the scrape."

“It seems kind’er ridiculous for a man of my years to be borrowin’ money from a boy like you, who looks as if he hadn’t a cent to bless himself with; but I’m in what you might call a pretty desperate situation jest now, an’ willin’ to do most anything that’s honest.”

“You wait right here. I guess we can fix this thing up mighty quick.”

Without stopping for a reply Larry hurried away, and the deacon stood gazing after him until Aunt Mercy, from her safe refuge in the doorway, called:

“What has happened now, father? I do hope there ain’t any more trouble.”

“Indeed there isn’t, mother; but what’s happened is surprisin’. That ’ere ragged little chap, what don’t look as if he had a friend in the world, is goin’ to lend me money enough to buy tickets for Canton, an’ has gone now to gather it up.”

“What?” Aunt Mercy literally screamed in astonishment, while Joe and Ned stepped nearer as if doubting whether they had heard correctly.

“That’s a fact. He says he’s got three dollars an’ can borrow the rest. I’m almost ashamed to

take money from a child like him ; but what am I to do if I don't ? ”

“ You can pay him back as soon as ever you get to Canton. ”

“ Of course I can, an' that's what I count on doin' ; but at the same time it won't be takin' anything away from the obligation I'm under to him. If an honest man is the noblest work of God, as they say, I don't know how much higher up you ought to place a boy like that. ”

“ It's a pity he hadn't better clothes, an' didn't keep his face clean, ” Mrs. Doak said half to herself.

“ I'll admit it don't look as if he'd been overly careful in sich matters ; but there's no doubt about his heart bein' all right. I wish I could help him as much as he's goin' to help me. I wouldn't begrudge even a dollar in doin' it. ”

“ Why don't you give him a chance to work at Herdsdale this summer ? ” Joe asked, excitedly. “ He's been tellin' us that boys are fools to leave a farm for the sake of livin' in the city, an' says if he had a home in the country you couldn't pull him away from it. ”

“Yes, I allow he may mean that; but city boys ain’t any great shakes as workers,” the deacon said, cautiously. “They spend too much idle time to know the value of an hour.”

“He says they have to work harder here than the boys do at home, else they’ll go hungry, an’ when Ned an’ I told him we wanted to get a job down here so’s to leave the farm, he jest as much as allowed we was crazy — says Sam Bartlett’s a bloomin’ idjut for comin’ to this town.”

“That youngster is sound to the core!” the deacon exclaimed, approvingly; but it appeared as if he avoided the subject of inviting Larry to Herdsdale, for he immediately began discussing with Aunt Mercy the question of whether it was safe for them to remain and attempt to see some portion of the “celebration,” or return home by the next train.

Ten minutes later Larry returned, marching toward the visitors from Canton with a business-like air, and announcing the result of his efforts by saying, curtly:

“She’s fixed, deacon, — it’s all right!” Then, turning to the boys, he added: “If you fellers

want to see anything of the Fourth of July you'd better go up to the park. I allowed your father'd be willin' to stand the treat even if he had been robbed, so I got more money than was needed for the tickets. My partner happened to be pretty well fixed, an' let me have three dollars, if I'd pay him back next week."

"An' you borrowed three whole dollars!" Joe exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, an' it ain't sich a dreadful great pile but that Jake'll get it back, no matter how things turn."

"I'd like to go to the park," Ned said, reflectively; "but we counted on goin' to see Sam Bartlett, to find out if he knew where we could get a job."

"If that's all you want to see him for you'd better keep away. Stay where you are till you've got some of the hayseed from under your collar, an' then you'll know what's best to be done."

Larry spoke in such a confident tone, with the air of one who is thoroughly conversant with the subject, that Joe was convinced the wisest course would be to return to Herdsdale, and indicated

that he no longer wished to see Sam Bartlett, by saying :

“I’m afraid father won’t want us to go anywhere except straight to the depot.”

“I’ll ’tend to that part of it,” Larry replied, decidedly, and motioning the deacon from Aunt Mercy’s side once more, he pressed into his hand a small roll of bills, as he whispered :

“There’s five dollars, an’ now you’d better let me show you the way up to the park. There’s no call to go home before night, I don’t s’pose?”

“I did think that the sooner we got out of this wicked city the better,” the deacon replied, thoughtfully.

“It strikes me you ought’er see what you can, now you’re here. I’ll take care of your crowd till the train goes, so you won’t get into any more scrapes. We’ll take the elevated road, an’ go right to the park. It won’t be sich a terrible walk from there down to Forty-second Street.”

“When I left home you couldn’t have persuaded me to give myself up to the care of a boy no bigger than you are ; but, after what has happened, I guess

I'll be safer in doin' it than if I try to hustle 'round alone. It'll cost considerable to ride in them cars, won't it?"

"I guess it won't break you, if you've got the best farm in your section of the country, same as the kids say you have; an' seein's how you come down here to celebrate, there's no use cryin' baby jest 'cause you lost a little money. Keep your upper lip stiff, an' it won't be a great while before you'll forget what's happened to-day."

"If I should live to the age of Methuselah I don't think it would ever be possible for me to forget this day's carryin's on, my boy. We'll go to the park, an' do jest as you tell us 'twixt now an' the time the train leaves for Canton."

CHAPTER VI.

“MR. FOLSOM.”

ALTHOUGH Larry did not succeed in showing his friends from Canton very much of the celebration, he led them to many places of interest, and under his guidance the latter portion of their visit in New York was as pleasant as the forenoon had been disagreeable.

The deacon resolutely put from his mind, for the time being, all sorrow regarding the money he had lost, and entered into the amusements of the day with the zest of a boy, while Aunt Mercy, for whom Larry seemed to have conceived a sudden attachment, lost all fear of the “wicked city.”

Mr. and Mrs. Doak were resting from the fatigue of sightseeing, having just come from the menagerie, and the boys and Nellie were watching the antics of the bears, when Aunt Mercy said to the deacon :

“That Larry seems to be a likely sort of a boy, father.”

“Indeed he is,” the deacon replied, emphatically, “an’ if he’s trained right I’ll answer for it he’ll be an honest man.”

“If he lives in this big city from hand to mouth, as it seems he’s doin’ now, there ain’t much chance of his gettin’ any very great amount of trainin’, father.”

“That’s a fact, an’ I believe I know what’s in your mind this minute, Mercy. You’re thinkin’ Herdsdale could support another boy, eh?”

“I was wonderin’ why we mightn’t take him home with us for a spell, an’ if he liked the farm work, an’ turned out to be as steady as he gives promise of bein’, why not let him stay? You have to hire men, an’ it would be a charity that wouldn’t cost us a penny.”

“It’s the responsibility, mother, that I’m thinkin’ about. If we took the boy it would be to make him one of the family, an’ then we’re answerable, so to speak, for his bringin’ up. I’d be willin’ to try him the rest of this season, an’ by fall we’d know what he amounted to.”

"That's all any reasonable person could ask for. It seems to me as if there was a sort of Providence in his bein' thrown in our path the way he has been, an' that we've had opened before us a chance to do good that shouldn't be neglected."

"I reckon you're right, Mercy. Let's talk with the boy, an' see how he takes to it," and the deacon beckoned to Larry.

"Ain't gettin' tired, are you?" Master Hudson asked as he approached. "There's time enough to see a good many things between now an' seven o'clock."

"I can't rightly say I ain't tired, 'cause mother an' me have done more sightseein' this afternoon than we ever did in the whole course of our lives before; but it's pleasant to stay here restin', an' we ain't goin' away any sooner than was calculated on. We want to talk to you a little, my boy."

"Talk to me, eh? Well, fire away."

"Joe tells me you said you'd rather live in the country than in the city?"

"Of course I should."

“There’s a power of hard work on a farm, my boy, a power of hard work.”

“It can’t be a marker alongside of what it is in town, deacon. If you’d skinned ’round the streets in a snow-storm from mornin’ till night, tryin’ to earn money enough to buy breakfast, an’ crawled into a doorway ’long about midnight without havin’ found it, you’d say farm work was a snap.”

“Did you ever sleep in a doorway?” Aunt Mercy asked in surprise.

“Did I ever? Well, I should say I had, though the cops look after a feller sharper’n they used to, an’ it’s mighty hard work to sneak into such a place nowadays. Why, a good many times I’ve thought myself lucky to find a cart, though I’m livin’ pretty high jest now, an’ that’s a fact.”

“It seems that you earn more’n it costs to keep you, else you wouldn’t have had three dollars on hand to lend me,” the deacon suggested.

“Business has been good this week. It ’most always is jest before the Fourth. There’s a good many people goin’ off on the cars an’ don’t have time to shine their own boots, an’ then likely’s not they’ll

give you a chance to lug their grip to the depot, so take it one way and another a feller can pick up more money now than most any other time. It's when we get a long spell of wet weather that the bootblacks fare slim, an' have to snoop 'round lookin' for some other kind of a job."

"How long have you lived in this way, Larry?" Mrs. Doak asked.

"Pretty much ever since I can remember. Father always boozed heavy — got drunk, you know, an' there was a good many times when mother an' me had it kind'er slim. I was only a little kid when she died, an' since then I've picked up what I could get."

"Do you always expect to stay in this kind of business?" the deacon asked.

"I should hope not."

"Why don't you get a job in a store?"

"Well, you see, it don't exactly pay. A feller has to be a howlin' swell to do anything of that kind, an' clothes cost a pile of money. I did think one spell of goin' to sea, but Tom Delaney tried it last year, an' when he got back an' told his story,

I didn't want any of it. Some of the boys set up a newspaper stand, and have a chair for customers what want their boots blacked; but there's so many Italians at that kind of thing now that it's pretty hard work to get a livin'. Something'll turn up before long, I reckon, an' I'll find a better job than blackin' boots. Say, *will* you look at that bloomin' bear? Why don't you come over here where you can see him?"

"I want to talk business with you a few minutes, Larry," the deacon replied, as he detained the boy by taking hold of his arm. "Mother an' me have been thinkin' about offerin' you a chance to go up on the farm for the balance of the season, an' then if you like us, an' we like you, perhaps there wouldn't be anything to hinder your stayin' till you could get some kind of an education, an' was a little forehanded when you struck out into the world agin."

"Is there plenty of work up there for a boy like me?" Larry asked, in a matter-of-fact tone not altogether pleasing to the deacon, who had expected a great display of gratitude.

"Plenty of it, an' perhaps a good deal more'n

you'd like. Farmers have to work hard for a dollar nowadays, an' then scrimp an' twist to save it."

"That part of it is all right," Master Hudson replied, with a careless wave of the hand. "If there's a chance to earn a dollar, so's I can pay my way, an' you'll put me on to it, I'll promise to stick at the job as long's anybody wants me. It ain't any good for me to tell you that I'd like to go, 'cause a feller what wouldn't jump at the chance to get sich a home as he'd have on a farm would be the bloomingest kind of a bloomin' idjut. When would you want me?"

"What is there to prevent your goin' with us to-night?"

"Well, there's that three dollars, you know, that I've got to ante up 'twixt now an' next week."

"Couldn't you send it down to the boy you borrowed it of?"

"I reckon I could if I told him it was comin'."

"Then s'pose you leave us here, go down-town an' 'tend to the business, an' come back to the depot. I reckon I ain't so terrible green but that I can find my way."

“An’ do you really want me to go with you, deacon, or are you jest doin’ this thing to kind’er square up for my lendin’ you money to go home?” Larry asked, earnestly.

Deacon Doak appeared confused for an instant, and then, recovering himself as with an effort, replied :

“Well, my boy, I’ll admit that when mother an’ me first talked this thing over, it *was* kind of in the nature of tryin’ to pay back the good turn you’ve done us, but, after we’d considered the matter, it seemed as if it was our duty to lend a hand, if it so be you wanted one lent. I ain’t what you might call a rich man, Larry ; but I’ve got more of this world’s goods than some of my neighbours, an’ the time’s comin’ when I’ll be called to account for the use of it. I don’t take any credit on myself for what I’m willin’ to do now, ’cause if you’d been a different kind of a boy I shouldn’t have thought of it ; but it seems as if what looks like a duty would be pleasant all ’round, an’ I can only say we’ll be glad to have you come to Herdsdale for the rest of the season. Then, as I said before, if you like

me, an' we like you, there's nothin' to prevent your stayin' till the time comes for you to go out into the world agin."

"Well, say, deacon, you're a Jim dandy, if you are green! I don't reckon you'd take any boy in who couldn't earn his own way, so I'll go, an' be mighty glad of the chance. If I should ever forget how I've been knocked 'round here in town, an' slip up on my work, jest kick me right out, that's all. Now I'll go down an' see the boys, so's to know how we can send the money. When shall I tell 'em to expect it?"

"You can send it Monday, an' they'll get it Tuesday mornin'."

"All right, deacon; take care of yourself goin' down to the depot, an' don't get on to the wrong track. If any Mr. Folsoms come 'round, give 'em a pretty wide berth."

With this advice Larry hastened away to make his arrangements for the journey, and the deacon said, in a tone of disappointment :

"I counted on his bein' more tickled at the chance of goin' to Herdsdale; but he seemed to look at it as

an every-day occurrence. Perhaps we've been mistaken, mother, in judgin' him."

"I don't believe we have, father, an' I'm not certain but that the way he accepted your offer is the true one. You're allowin' that the boy'll pay his way in work, an' he's expectin' to do so. It's only a bargain between you, the same as if you was hirin' a man, an' we're tryin' to make ourselves believe we are doin' a charitable deed when it can't rightly be called that."

"Why not?" the deacon asked, in surprise.

"'Cause you've given him to understand that he must earn his way, an' if he does that, it ain't a question of his bein' beholden to us."

"But, mother, we're showin' him the way to a good home."

"Yes, an' makin' him pay for it."

"I thought you looked at the matter in the same light I did, Mercy."

"So I did, father, to a certain degree; but there's no reason why we should try to deceive ourselves into believing that we're doin' a very charitable deed, an' expect Larry to get down on his knees in gratitude, when it isn't so."

"Well, well, have it your own way, mother, have it your own way. I allow, though, I could hire better hands on the Herdsdale than this city boy."

"I was only tryin' to explain why I thought he didn't show more gratitude, an' why we shouldn't expect it of him, father. You've done a good deed, there's no question about that, in givin' him a chance to go with us. Now let's go over an' look at the bear he told about."

Perhaps the deacon himself was surprised when, after remaining in the park until the day had nearly come to an end, he succeeded in leading his family to the Grand Central Depot by the most direct course, and he congratulated himself by saying to Aunt Mercy :

"It wouldn't take me such a dreadful long while to get used to city ways, for I'm learnin' fast. There ain't a man in this world could come down here any straighter'n I've done, an' I didn't ask a single question, except of that policeman down there by the gates."

Larry was already at the station when the visitors from Canton arrived ; but so decidedly changed in

appearance that Joe and Ned could not repress an exclamation of astonishment.

His face had been scoured until it was literally polished. His hair was combed smoothly, and held in place by such an amount of water that it was even yet trickling down his neck, while a well-worn derby hat, several sizes too large, covered the back of his head; a pair of trousers, which had evidently been fashioned for a large man, were rolled up at the bottom and turned down at the top until, in his opinion at least, they fitted him perfectly. A red and white checked shirt, evidently new, and a coat so small that it seemed positive the garment would be rent in twain if he brought his hands together suddenly in front of him, completed the wardrobe which had effected such a change in Master Hudson's appearance.

"Yes, I'm rigged out in great shape," he said, as if in reply to the steady gaze of the Doak family. "I didn't want to shame any of you, an' some of the fellers was willin' to help me out, so's I could kind'er flash up 'cordin' to the luck I've struck. The shirt's new; cost twenty-six cents. The hat

I found in an ash-barrel last week; the coat Sim Downing give me 'cause it was gettin' a little too small for him, an' the trousers I picked up over on East Broadway from a feller that I've been kind'er tendin' out on while he was sick. Swell, ain't it?" and Larry turned slowly around that the visitors from Canton might have ample opportunity to see him in all his gorgeousness.

"I'm glad you've washed your face," Aunt Mercy said, desirous of complimenting him upon his appearance, and not able to do so honestly in regard to the costume.

"Yes, I had a rub down, though there wasn't any great need of it; but Sim Downing said country folks are terrible scared of a little dirt, an' I'd better take a wash before I started. I fixed it so we can send the money back, an' the fellers are pretty nigh wild about my luck in runnin' across you, deacon. If you wanted a hundred boys on your farm, you'd scare 'em up now in less'n ten minutes."

"I didn't know but what you'd think, after talkin' it over among your friends, that you was gettin' the

smallest end of a bad bargain," the deacon replied, with a smile.

"Not much. I know a good thing when I see it, an' if solid work is goin' to keep me at Herdsdale you bet I'll stay. Say, here's the eighty-five cents to pay for my ticket, 'cause of course I ain't allowin' you to spend anything on my account. Hello! I wonder what Slick Jake's doin' up here? It ain't so very long since he was sent to Sing Sing."

"Who did you say?" the deacon asked, with mild curiosity.

"Why, Slick Jake — that duck over there by the ticket office," and as Larry pointed to the opposite side of the waiting-room Deacon Doak started up with a cry of mingled anger and surprise.

"That's the chap what called himself Folsom! He's the one who stole my money an' watch!"

"Hold on!" and Larry seized the old gentleman by the arm, holding him back with so firm a grasp that he could not free himself. "You'll get into a reg'lar row by tacklin' him here, 'cause of course the whole gang is with him!"

"But I don't count on settin' still like a lamb led

to the slaughter, an' lettin' him walk off with my property!" the deacon cried as he tried in vain to free himself from the boy's detaining grasp.

"He sha'n't get away with it, an' I ain't goin' to let you make trouble for yourself. He's here with three or four pardners, an' before you'd more'n show yourself they'd put up some kind of a job that would make you wish you hadn't said a word."

"But he sha'n't be allowed to carry away my property!" the farmer panted.

"That part of it is all right, deacon; but you must let me tackle Slick Jake, 'cause I know him."

"But I'm the one he robbed."

"That's a fact, an' I'm the one what'll get the stuff back. He can't put up much of a job on me; but I want some of the fellers 'round before I brace him. Keep your eye on the duck while I hunt for a couple of newsboys what work up this way."

"Do as Larry says, father," Mrs. Doak whispered, nervously. "He knows the ways of the city better than you do, an' no matter how much the man stole, you can't afford to have it said that the deacon of

the First Baptist Church of Canton was fightin' in a city depot."

While the good woman was doing her best to soothe the angry owner of Herdsdale, Larry had left the waiting-room, and Aunt Mercy was still trying to pacify the deacon when Master Hudson returned, followed by three boys.

Without waiting to speak with his new employer, Larry lounged carelessly across the room, and accosted the alleged Mr. Folsom in the most friendly manner.

"How's business, Jake?"

"Hello, kid, what are you doin' togged out in this style?"

"I'm goin' into the country to live with that farmer from Canton what you went through this forenoon."

"Mr. Folsom" scowled, and looked quickly around the room.

"Yes, he's here, an' would have been fool enough to tackle you to get back the boodle, but I stopped him. Now see here, Jake, I want you to give up that stuff."



“AUNT MERCY WAS STILL TRYING TO PACIFY THE DEACON.”

"Oh, you do, eh? Better keep your tongue between your teeth, my bantam, or I'll make you sing a different tune! Don't think you can bully me —"

"I ain't tryin' to; but I'm goin' to have that stuff, or — No, you won't give me the slip," Larry added as "Mr. Folsom" moved toward the door. "Close up, fellers, an' yell the best you know how if he tries to break away."

The man stopped suddenly as Master Hudson's friends obeyed the command by stepping directly in front of him, and a subdued noise on the opposite side of the room told that Aunt Mercy was trying to forcibly detain the deacon from joining the throng.

"We've got you dead to rights, Jake, an' you'd better give up, or the cops will soon invite you to go with 'em down-town," Larry whispered as he clutched "Mr. Folsom" by the arm.

"What do you want?"

"You know well enough. Give it up, an' there won't be any row."

The fellow understood that he was beaten. It would not be possible to rid himself of four boys of the streets as readily as he might have done in case

it was the deacon he had to deal with, and after standing irresolutely a few seconds, glaring around as if meditating escape, he said, angrily :

“I’ll come down if you’ll go outside.”

“You’ll do it right here ; there ain’t much hayseed under our collars ! Come down with the wallet an’ the watch, an’ we’ll clear out.”

Again “Mr. Folsom” looked around him. Several of the waiting passengers were gazing curiously at him and the boys, which was sufficient evidence that he could not hope to escape by force, and thrusting his hand into his pocket he drew forth a roll of bills.

“You know I haven’t got the jay’s stuff about me. He had less than a tenner in his calf-skin, an’ this will square it,” he said, thrusting a note into Larry’s hand.

“But here’s only ten dollars,” Master Hudson replied in a business-like tone. “What about the watch?”

“It was N. G.”

“All the same you’ve got to flash it up.”

“You know I can’t,” “Mr. Folsom” muttered, with

a scowl which told how Larry would be treated if the meeting had taken place in some more secluded spot.

"I reckon five dollars will fix it."

Two or three curious ones had moved nearer to ascertain what demand the boys were making, and the bunco man saw that his partners were taking advantage of the opportunity to leave the building.

"Here's the money," he snarled, hurriedly placing another note in Larry's hands as he moved toward the door.

"Let him go, fellers," Master Hudson cried, as his friends would have barred the way, and "Mr. Folsom" suddenly disappeared from view.

By this time the deacon had succeeded in freeing himself from Aunt Mercy's detaining grasp, and as he advanced Larry handed him the money, asking as he did so:

"Will this square it, deacon?"

"Did you make that scoundrel pay you fifteen dollars?" the good man cried in astonishment as he gazed at the notes and then at Larry and his friends.

"That's the way it looks. Does it make you square?"

“Yes, an’ a good deal more. The watch wasn’t worth a cent over three dollars, an’ I didn’t have but eight dollars left after gettin’ through the eatin’-house.”

“Then s’posen you give these fellers somethin’ for standin’ by me, an’ the rest we’ll call profit.”

The deacon drew from his pocket a few pennies, and was counting them when Master Hudson exclaimed:

“I reckon you haven’t got enough there. A quarter for each feller won’t be any too much, an’ when that’s been paid your Fourth of July won’t stand you in so very much, even if Slick Jake did get the best of you.”

Deacon Doak hesitated an instant before parting with what seemed to him like a very large amount of money, and those who had aided in the task of reducing the alleged Mr. Folsom to submission received the reward of their labours as if such matters were of every-day occurrence.

“They don’t seem to make very much account of gettin’ twenty-five cents for lookin’ at a man,” the deacon said, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, as

Larry's friends left the station. "Up our way we're glad to work hard all day for a dollar."

"It's a good deal the same down here," Master Hudson replied, as he tried in vain to brush a large stain from the sleeve of his tightly fitting coat. "The chances are that it'll be quite a spell before they run across another snap, an' seein's how you've come out of the game considerably ahead, there ain't much chance for kickin'."

"They're welcome to the money, so far as I'm concerned," Deacon Doak said, quickly, "an' I don't begrudge it to 'em; but I couldn't help thinkin' that it would be better if they realised jest how many cents there are in a dollar."

"I'll trust them fellers to find out that much, 'cause it's a case of goin' hungry if they make any mistake. Look here, deacon, there's my partner that's come up to see me off; if we pay him the money to-night I won't have to bother about sendin' it Monday, an' you're fixed all right now."

"Surely; I'd eanermost forgot about it, an' little wonder, after seein' what city boys can do. You settle with him, an' if it so be that he'd like to

come up to Herdsdale some Saturday afternoon, to see how you're gettin' on, he'll be looked after if for no other reason than that he was willin' to help me out'er what would have been a bad scrape except for havin' run afoul of you."

Larry did as he was bidden, and, after a short consultation with Joe Doak, led his partner to where Aunt Mercy was sitting, saying as he did so:

"The deacon told me Tim might slide up to your farm some day, but I thought he'd better hear what you had to say about it. Tim's my partner, an' if the folks up your way want to hire any more farmers, he's right on deck for a job."

Aunt Mercy assured the boys that Tim would be made welcome at Herdsdale, and before it was possible to say very much more, one of the railroad officials announced, in a loud voice, that the train for Canton would leave the station in five minutes.

Deacon Doak quickened the motions of his family by declaring that there was no more time "for foolishness," and in a few seconds the sightseers from Herdsdale, and he who was to visit the farm, were in their seats, the day's pleasuring at an end.

CHAPTER VII.

AT HERDSDALE.

THE younger members of Deacon Doak's family were tired and sleepy when the train arrived at Canton, and gave little attention to what might be going on around them ; but Larry Hudson was very much awake as he stepped from the cars to the station platform.

From such an apology for a home as he had known in the city, to a farm, was a decided as well as a sudden change, and he was eager to get a general idea of his new abode at the earliest possible moment.

Joe and Ned remained with Nellie and her mother while the deacon went for his horse, which had been left in Tisdale Dean's stable, and Larry insisted on accompanying the good man, saying, when the latter suggested that he "might as well stay with the rest of the family till Major was harnessed ;"

"I reckon I'll go with you, deacon, 'cause if I've come up here to be a farmer, the sooner I get into trainin' the better. I'd like to see how you harness a horse, so's I can do it myself when the right time comes."

The deacon made no reply to this remark until he and Larry had arrived at Mr. Dean's stable, and then said, as if speaking to himself :

"I allowed you'd move around right lively while everything was new ; but the question is whether you'll be as ready for work after it becomes an old story."

"If I ain't you can fix things all right," Larry replied, cheerily.

"How?" and the deacon turned that he might the better see his new assistant's face.

"By firin' me right out. I ain't countin' on livin' up this way unless I can earn my board an' a little more, so when that can't be done is the time to wind up the trade."

To this sage remark Deacon Doak made no reply, but busied himself with putting the harness on Major, his new assistant watching carefully every move he made.

“That’s all right,” Larry said, confidently, when the horse was ready. “I can do that much whenever you call on me.”

“If it wasn’t quite so late, an’ I didn’t feel so tired, I’d give you the chance to show your smartness.”

“Yank that stuff right off; it won’t take me more’n a jiffy to put it back, an’ you can rest yourself over there on the hay while I’m workin’.”

It appeared very much as if the deacon was eager to prove to this boy from the city that he was overconfident, for in a twinkling old Major was stripped once more, and the harness thrown carelessly on the floor.

Larry hesitated only so long as was necessary to sort out the different portions of harness, and then, rather awkwardly, as might have been expected, he made Major ready without the slightest mistake.

The deacon remained silent, probably because he did not believe it would be good policy to praise the lad for performing such a simple task, and Larry clambered into the wagon at the heels of his new employer.

"Say, this is great, ain't it?" he cried when Major had finally been persuaded to set out in the direction of the railroad station.

"What's great?"

"Why, this ridin' in a wagon. I never did anything of the kind before, unless you count holdin' on to the end of one an' takin' the chances of feelin' the driver's whip."

"Never had a ride before?" the deacon cried, in amazement.

"No, sir, an' I never got into the steam cars till I come up here with you. Fellers in the city don't have any sich snap as country chaps. I'm goin' to have the highest kind of a time this summer!"

"It won't be a great while before you find out that weedin' onions or hoein' potatoes is bad for your health," the deacon muttered, as if already he was beginning to regret having invited the stranger to Herdsdale.

"When I do you can send me back," Larry replied, with a laugh, and then he showed his appreciation of the surroundings by whistling softly what sounded like a veritable hymn of thanksgiving.

When Major came to a full stop at the station platform, where the very sleepy Doak family awaited his arrival, Master Hudson took it upon himself to assist Mrs. Doak and Nellie into the wagon, and then, lest he might incommode the others, clambered into the rear of the vehicle.

“There’s plenty of room on this seat,” the deacon cried, impatiently, and Larry replied, contentedly :

“I’m all right here. I can see everything, an’ that’s what I count on doin’.”

Deacon Doak urged Major forward, and, after some show of hesitation, the old horse ambled toward home at a leisurely pace, while Joe, Ned, and Nellie gave themselves up to slumber ; but Master Hudson, wide-awake and on the alert for anything in the way of novelty, listened ecstatically to the croaking of the frogs as he drank in the sweet odours with which the night breeze was laden.

It was Larry who aided his employer in stabling the horse, locking the barn doors, and inspecting the stock to make certain Ezra Littlefield’s “folks” had lived up to their promises ; and when this was done he devoted a few moments to making friends with

Jethro, who had been sniffing at his heels since he leaped out of the wagon.

Then Aunt Mercy called peremptorily for him to come into the house, and, to his great surprise, he saw, on entering, that the family were seated near about a small table in the capacious kitchen as if awaiting his coming.

Larry looked around in astonishment, which was not abated when the deacon motioned for him to take a chair near Joe and Ned, and his eyes opened wide with astonishment when the good man read a chapter from the big Bible that lay open on the table.

Although unaccustomed to anything of the kind, Master Hudson understood full well that it was not proper for him to make any remarks, and he was vainly trying to decide as to the meaning of this late reading, when suddenly all the family knelt beside the chairs they had been occupying.

Awkwardly, and after some delay, Larry followed the example set him, and there was an expression of mystification on his face when the deacon fervently thanked God for having spared the lives of

those who had been exposed to so many and such great dangers during the day just passed. Then the good man prayed for the "stranger that was within their gates," and after a time Larry came to understand that he was the one referred to, a fact which caused it to appear to him as if he was making altogether too much trouble for those whom he had, with but little sacrifice to himself, led out of the wilderness of New York City.

When the evening devotions had come to an end, and Larry was looking around shamefacedly, as if fancying that the family might blame him as the innocent cause of prolonging the prayer, Aunt Mercy asked if the three boys could not contrive to sleep in one bed during that night, promising to make up another next day.

"I can sleep anywhere," Larry said, promptly. "There's a mighty good chance out in the barn; it knocks everything I ever saw, even the night when Tim Jones an' I paid fifteen cents for a bed over on the Bowery. S'posin' I go out there?"

"I hope you don't think we'd let you sleep in the barn when we've beds enough and to spare!" Aunt

Mercy cried, as if horrified by the idea. "I'm so tired with traipsin' back an' forth in that great, wicked city that I don't feel as if I could make any extra work for myself to-night."

"I'm willin' to go wherever'll suit you best, though the hay looked mighty nice," Larry made haste to answer, and Joe impatiently urged him toward the back stairway, saying, as he did so :

"There's no use talkin' about where we'll sleep, 'cause all of us can pile into one bed, an' if we don't get there pretty soon it'll be time to get up again."

Then Aunt Mercy kissed the three lads good-night, and there was a suspicious moisture in Larry's eyes as he followed Joe and Ned, for never did he remember of receiving a good-night kiss before.

"An' you fellers wanted to get a job so's you could stay in the city!" Master Hudson exclaimed, as he surveyed the cleanly, neatly kept room into which his companions led him. "With sich a chance as you've got here, I wonder how some of the places I've lived in would strike you? I haven't been knocked 'round quite so hard as a

good many I know, an' yet I never struck so soft a snap as your barn, without countin' this 'ere swell place."

Joe and Ned were too sleepy to give much heed to the remarks of the delighted lad. As soon as possible they crept into bed, leaving Master Hudson looking out of the window upon the well-kept fields and carefully tended rows of vegetables as if the scene was one of marvellous loveliness.

His companions had been in dreamland a long while before he was ready to take his place beside them, and, as he turned unwillingly from the window to make ready for bed, he muttered to himself :

"Say, this is the softest snap I was ever up against! If it's only a case of workin' hard I'll stick to it mighty close; but I'd like to know if they go in reg'larly for prayin', or if it was only 'cause I was here?"

Then he crept softly in by the side of Joe, and before the question of family worship had been settled in his mind, he was sleeping soundly.

Next morning the new member of the Doak family was down-stairs before the deacon had time to

summon the boys to their morning tasks, and the good man gazed at him in perplexity.

“Couldn’t you sleep three in a bed?” he asked, and Larry replied, emphatically:

“You bet I could! That bed knocks anything I ever saw; a feller without any eyes at all would have to sleep there.”

“Then how does it happen that you’re up so early?”

“I generally turn out ’bout daylight; but if you don’t like to have fellers snoopin’ ’round, I’ll hug the bed a little closer to-morrow mornin’.”

“No, no,” the deacon replied, quickly. “I want to see boys stirrin’ with the birds; but Joe an’ Ned never come down-stairs till they’ve been called two or three times, an’ it surprised me to see you so soon.”

“If you’ve got anything for them to do I’ll tend to it.”

“They must look after their own chores,” and the deacon, opening the door which led to the chambers, called peremptorily for the boys to “stir themselves.” Then he said to Larry, “You can go out with me to

feed the stock, an' then our work will be about over for the day. It's on week-day mornin's that I count on seein' you move around. We at Herdsdale don't do anything more than is necessary on Sunday."

Larry followed his employer, watching every movement, and asking such questions as told that it was his intention to master this portion of a farmer's work at the earliest possible moment.

Jethro, who had guarded the out-buildings during the night, greeted the boy from the city as if he had been an old acquaintance, and Larry decided that he would get on famously with the dog and the calves; but he was rather doubtful as to the temper of the cows and the pigs.

The deacon had brought from the house two large tin pails which glistened like silver in the morning sun, and Master Hudson fancied he would have the opportunity to carry them back to the house filled with water; therefore he was considerably surprised at his seeing his employer take them into that portion of the barn where the cows were stabled.

He gazed curiously as the deacon took from one

of the huge cross-beams an odd-looking, three-legged stool, and an exclamation of astonishment burst from his lips when Joe's father began the task of milking.

"Well, that beats anything I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "Say, that must be fun!"

"Josey an' Ned don't look at it in that light," the deacon replied, grimly.

"Then they must be chumps. Say, would you let me try a hand at that? I'll agree to 'tend to this part of the work if you'll give me a chance."

"It isn't well to make rash promises, Larry, for there may not be so much fun in it after you've milked twice a day for a few weeks. Take hold, an' let's see what you can do."

Master Hudson accepted the invitation immediately; but to his great surprise no milk came, although, as it seemed to him, he did exactly as the deacon had done.

Then it was that the owner of Herdsdale gave him a few timely hints, and after Larry had acted upon them, to the evident displeasure of the cow, he finally succeeded in obtaining the desired result.

"You'll get the hang of it after a spell; but

seein's how we're a little behindhand this mornin', I reckon it'll be best for me to finish the job. The boys will soon be ready to drive the cows to pasture, an' you can go with them."

Larry performed his full share in "doing the chores" that morning, and when he set out for the pasture with Joe and Ned, the meek-eyed cows travelling gravely in advance without apparent need of guidance, the city boy said, with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction :

"Say, I've heard Tim Crowley's brother tell 'bout what a pile of fun country jays had; but I never thought it could come up to this! It beats anything you can run across in town!"

"Wait till to-morrow night," Joe said, with an air of exceeding wisdom. "I reckon father will set us to weedin' the onion bed, an' if you find any fun in that I'm mistaken."

"There ought to be some hard work about farmin' to make up for all the fun a feller can have out here, an' I'm willin' — Look there! Say, is that a bear?" and Larry pointed toward the stone wall, near where could be seen a grizzled brown animal

scurrying along as if bent on hiding himself without loss of time.

Joe and Ned immediately gave way to boisterous mirth, and Larry's face flushed as he understood that his had been a ridiculous question.

"Well, but you're green!" Ned managed to say after a time. "Who ever heard of takin' a woodchuck for a bear?"

"Oh, that's only a woodchuck, eh?" and Larry did his best to look exceeding wise; but his companions were afflicted with another fit of laughter, and before they had recovered he said, almost sharply:

"Say, Tim Jones told me I'd show up in the country worse'n a jay does in the city; but I allowed it wasn't so. I wish you fellers wouldn't say anything 'bout this when you get home, 'cause I don't want your folks to think I'm a reg'lar fool."

Not until the two lads understood that their new friend might be seriously provoked if they continued to see something very comical in the mistake he had made, did they straighten their faces and promise that the incident should be kept a secret, after which

Larry once more gave himself up wholly to the novelty of his surroundings.

If anything had been needed to complete Master Hudson's satisfaction with life in the country, the tramp to and from the pasture would have been sufficient. More than once he assured his companions that "the city wasn't in it at all," and declared that it would be impossible to find work enough at Herdsdale to make up for the "high old times" a fellow might enjoy, even though he should do no more than trudge back and forth between the barn and the pasture.

When Aunt Mercy finally called the boys to breakfast the visitor's appetite was decidedly sharpened, and the tempting array of eatables did not serve to diminish it. He strove to repress any sign of impatience while waiting to be served, however, and kept his eyes fixed upon a plate heaped high with smoking hot biscuit, until the voice of the deacon raised in prayer caused him to start as if in alarm.

Because the family had knelt the evening previous, he fancied it would be proper to do so now,

and had half risen from his chair before heeding the fact that all remained seated, with downcast eyes.

Larry's cheeks were flaming red as he leaned back in his chair, feeling decidedly uncomfortable in mind, and not until the meal was nearly at an end did he recover his composure sufficiently to understand that Nellie was asking him if he intended to take another lesson in milking.

"I'm countin' on gettin' the hang of the work before to-morrow night," he replied, decidedly, and not another word did he speak until Deacon Doak gave a signal that the meal had come to an end by pushing his chair back in order that the cat might leap on his knee.

Then Larry whispered to Joe:

"Come outdoors a minute; I want to ask you something."

Joe led the way to the porch, where one might be completely hidden by the leaves of the honeysuckle, and, after satisfying himself that there was no one near enough to overhear the words, Larry whispered:

"Say, I wish you'd post me up on when it's time to pray?"

It was plain to be seen that Joe did not understand the request, and Master Hudson made it more plain by saying, in a tone of sorrow :

“Last night I got along all right, 'cause I could see that somethin' was up; but this mornin' the deacon took me by surprise, an' I come mighty near makin' a guy of myself.”

Joe explained that his father asked a blessing on every meal, and that the family joined in evening devotions just before going to bed, a statement which seemed to put Larry more at ease, although he concluded the interview by asking, imploringly :

“Say, till I get used to it, I wish you'd kind'er keep your eye on me, so's I won't show up like a bloomin' idjut. You see I count on stayin' quite a spell on this 'ere farm, an' I don't want to get the grand bounce in the start jest 'cause I ain't up to this kind of business. Besides, I'd feel mighty tough if I should show up like a chump after your mother had reg'larly kissed me.”

“I'll see to it that there won't be any trouble,” Joe replied, carelessly. “Of course you can get along all right at meetin'?”

"What kind of a meetin'?"

"A Sunday one, of course; where there's a minister, you know."

"Do you tend on them things?"

"We have to, every Sunday, an' Wednesday night to the prayer-meetin'."

Larry turned away in silence, gazing across the yard toward the barn, and Joe, believing that his friend had gained all the information necessary, went into the house again, leaving the boy from the city alone on the porch.

Half an hour later, when Nellie went out to ask the new member of the family if he would like to study the Sunday-school lesson, Master Hudson was not to be seen, nor did he put in an appearance until the deacon was harnessing Major preparatory to driving to church.

"Hello, where did you go to so quickly?"

"Nowhere, except down by the brook."

"Did you have any idea of fishin' on Sunday?"

Deacon Doak asked, sharply.

"I haven't got any hooks; but I reckon there's plenty of fish."

“Joe an’ Ned are expected to keep close in the house Sundays, except when they go to church or to pasture, an’ you’ll have to come into line with them.”

“Are you findin’ fault ’cause I went down by the brook?” Larry asked, in surprise.

“It’s better for boys to keep out of temptation, an’ you can afford to stay in the house one day in the week.”

By this time Larry was doing his share toward harnessing Major, and he made no reply to the deacon, but there came on his face an expression of mingled surprise and disappointment in sharp contrast to the look of content which he had worn on returning from the pasture.

In obedience to the deacon’s command, he went into the kitchen to wash his face and hands before taking his place in the wagon, and during the ride which followed he took no part in the conversation; but his silence might have been caused by a desire to drink in all the beauties of nature which could be seen on every hand.

Larry entered the church awkwardly, very much

as if afraid to step on the carpet which covered the aisle, and all the while he kept his eyes fixed on Joe that he might copy the latter's movements.

When the day had come to an end he went with the boys to drive the cows home from pasture, and after the patient animals were in the barn took his second lesson in milking; but all the while he remained silent, save when spoken to, thereby causing Joe and Ned much surprise, particularly when he failed to reply after they explained their scheme for catching squirrels.

It was when, Aunt Mercy having kissed them good-night, the boys were alone in the chamber where were now two beds, that Joe insisted on knowing the reason for the change which had come over this boy from the city who had been so enraptured with country scenes.

"You act as if you'd got mad about somethin', an' I know Nell thinks you're stuffy, 'cause she tried to show you her books, an' you didn't even turn your head."

"I didn't know she said anything to me," Larry replied, quickly, looking decidedly disturbed in mind.

“That’s ’cause you was mad ’bout somethin’.”

“But I haven’t been on my ear, an’ that’s a fact.”

“Then what makes you hump yourself, an’ act as if you didn’t want anybody to look your way?”

“It wasn’t ’cause I was mad, Joe; but I’m be-ginnin’ to believe that I won’t be able to hang on here a great while.”

“I knew you’d soon get sick of it; but didn’t count on your backin’ down before havin’ a chance to see what the work was like,” Ned said, gleefully.

“You must be a softy if you think I’m sick of livin’ out here at Herdsdale. I’d like to stay all my life; but don’t believe it can be done.”

“Why not, if father’s willin’ to give you the chance?” Joe asked, hotly.

“It’s jest like this: I’m outer my class; tryin’ to trot where I don’t belong, jest as Tim Jones said. Somehow I can’t get the hang of how you people carry sail, an’ I’ll be gettin’ into a worse scrape than when I went down to the brook this mornin’.”

Then Larry explained how he had offended the deacon by taking a walk, instead of remaining in the

house, and when he had come to an end, Joe said, soothingly :

“That’s nothin’. You’ll soon get the run of things, an’ won’t give father another chance to find fault. You see he’s the deacon of the meetin’, an’ thinks we boys must walk straighter’n the other fellers do. Wait till next Sunday, an’ see how you get along. Ned an’ I’ll keep you posted, an’ in a little while it’ll be the same as if you’d always lived here. Didn’t you go to meetin’ in the city?”

“Folks wouldn’t have us kids in there if we’d wanted to go, an’ then again trade is always good Sunday forenoons, so we couldn’t. Your mother’s awful nice,” he added, abruptly.

“That’s where you’re right!” Ned replied, emphatically.

“It seems as though country jays come nearer bein’ square than anybody else, an’ I’m ’fraid I’m outclassed,” Larry said, with a sigh, after which he crept into bed and refused to speak again that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "GREEN HAND."

THERE was no opportunity for the boy from the city to get down-stairs next morning before Deacon Doak summoned his young assistants.

Larry awakened before the day had fairly dawned, and was trying to decide whether it would be well to run the risk of disturbing the family by going out to the barn, when the owner of Herdsdale cried, impatiently :

"If you boys stay in bed much longer there won't be any need of tryin' to get even half a day's work done."

Joe replied in a sleepy tone that they would come down immediately, and Larry dressed himself hurriedly, determined that the farmer should have no reason to complain of him on the score of tardiness.

Two or three minutes later Deacon Doak started in surprise as his "green hand" came into the kitchen, and began vigorously to make his toilet.

“You’ve been kind’er spry in gettin’ down, eh?” the old gentleman asked, gazing at the lad as if in him he saw something very odd.

“I’d come down before if it hadn’t been that I was afraid it might make trouble. I don’t want to spoil anybody’s sleep, an’ am willin’ to stay in bed till you are ready to get up.”

“I’ll be bound you’re *willin’* to stay in bed,” the farmer said, grimly. “Don’t be afeared of comin’ down too early, an’ the sooner you’re at work mornin’s, the better I’ll be satisfied.”

“I’ve always had to turn out as soon as it was light, an’ it won’t come very hard on me here,” Larry replied, cheerily. “Will I look after the milkin’ this mornin’?”

“You may be practisin’ while I’m feedin’ the stock, an’ then I’ll finish the job. Look sharp, or the cows will kick you over.”

Master Hudson took the glistening tin pails from the table and went rapidly toward the barn, saying to himself:

“He ain’t goin’ to knock me out of gear by talkin’ as if he was ready to fight. I’ve got the chance of

my life, an' if I don't stay on this farm till I can see my way clear to buyin' one for myself, it'll be because somebody else is willin' to pay me more wages. I'm the green hand now, but it won't be for long."

Half an hour later, after the horses and cattle had been fed, and before either Joe or Ned had put in an appearance, the deacon entered the "tie-up" to perform his morning task of milking.

One of the pails was already full to the brim, and Larry was rapidly filling the other, doing the work almost as well as the farmer himself could have done.

The owner of Herdsdale stood on the threshold as if petrified with astonishment during a full minute or more, Larry meanwhile working industriously, and, perhaps, enjoying the good man's surprise.

"It strikes me that you got the knack of it pretty quick, my boy," he finally said, and Larry replied, in a tone of satisfaction :

"I've been turnin' this thing over in my mind, an' it struck me that a feller what couldn't milk hadn't any business on a farm, so the sooner I was broke in

the better. Shall I keep on, or will you take a hand?"

"I reckon you may as well finish, now you've got so far along," and the deacon walked slowly away, as if in deep thought, while the green hand said to himself, with a chuckle of satisfaction:

"I may be mighty green about things on a farm; but if they'll show me half a chance it won't be a great while that they can give *me* points."

Warned by his previous experience, Master Hudson made no mistake when he was summoned to the breakfast-table, but waited quietly until the blessing had been asked, after which he made a hearty and very satisfactory meal.

Nellie found considerable amusement in laughing at Joe and Ned because while they were in bed the green hand had milked all the cows, and Aunt Mercy suggested that Larry be excused from going to the pasture, since it could be plainly seen that his services were too valuable to be devoted to such trifling tasks as driving cattle.

That journey to and from the pasture, when the dewdrops hung like diamonds on every blade of

grass, and the birds were singing their morning hymns, was something the lad from the city would have been unwilling to forego, and he hurried to the barnyard immediately the morning meal was brought to an end.

There could be no loitering by the way on this day, however, for the work of the week was to be begun; but Larry enjoyed the walk fully, even though Joe warned him that when they returned to the farm the task of weeding onions must be begun.

"I'd rather do anything in the world than that kind of work," Ned said, disconsolately. "Hayin' is hard enough; but I'm always sorry when it's finished, because then I know we must begin the weedin'."

"I'll be glad to find out what it's like," Larry said, quickly, and Joe replied, warningly:

"Wait till you've been at it half an hour. Then your bones will ache, an' before noon you'll wish yourself back to the city."

"I want to tackle the hardest jobs first, an' then it won't take so long to find out if a farmer's life is what I've been needin'."

His companions were positive he would soon regret ever having come to Herdsdale, and before they were at the farmhouse again he had come to believe that there must be something truly terrible in store for him.

In order to make certain that his new assistant should know exactly how he wanted the work done, Deacon Doak accompanied the boys to the onion bed, and after the good man had given his instructions Larry was greatly relieved in mind.

True the work was tedious, and well-calculated to make a boy's back ache; but the knowledge that while he was labouring, good, wholesome food was being prepared for him, and that at night he would have a cleanly, rest-inviting bed, caused Larry to believe that young people on a farm were to be envied even during onion-weeding time.

When night came, it was the boy from the city who insisted that he was not so tired but that he could go alone after the cows, and although Joe and Ned believed it their duty to accompany him, they complained bitterly of weariness.

Deacon Doak would have attended to the milking,

but Larry urged that he be allowed to continue what had been so well begun in the morning, and when the family retired that night the owner of Herdsdale said to his wife :

“I reckon it’s only another case of a new broom sweepin’ clean ; but I’m bound to say that our green hand is the most willin’ an’ industrious worker I ever saw. He has done twice as much as Joe an’ Ned put together, an’ yet won’t allow that he’s any more tired than usual. With three sich boys as him, I’d be able to run this ’ere farm without hirin’ a man.”

“Then instead of doin’ a favour by bringin’ him out here, you’re the one who is reapin’ the benefit of a kindly act.”

“We won’t say too much about it on the start, mother, for I hold to it that he’s bound to get over this industrious fit before long.”

In this prediction, however, Deacon Doak made a mistake.

When Saturday came Larry Hudson did even more work than on Monday, when the “new broom” was supposed to be doing its best sweeping, and

certain it was that he appeared better contented each day with a farmer's life.

The onion bed was more than half weeded, and never before had the work been done by Joe and Ned in less than four weeks. In addition to this, Larry had milked all the cows night and morning, thereby relieving the deacon of a disagreeable task.

He never missed an opportunity to assist Mrs. Doak or Nellie, and all the while appeared to be having a royal good time, instead of working "his fingers to the bone," as Joe declared was the case with himself.

The deacon might have been, and probably was a hard taskmaster; but he prided himself on being an honest man, and while the boys were waiting on this Saturday night for supper to be made ready, the owner of Herdsdale held a conversation on business matters with the boy he had brought from the city.

"When I reckoned on doin' you a good turn by bringin' you out here, Larry, it was with the idee that you could jest about earn your board an' clothes, providin' there wasn't too big a streak of laziness

in your body. As things have been runnin' this week, I've made up my mind that you're worth more, an' it's my way to pay all honest debts."

"You don't owe me anything, deacon," Larry said, quickly, as if fearing he was about to be discharged. "If you're satisfied with what I'm doin', it's enough, till I get a little better posted, an' then, of course, I'd like to be paid wages; but it's worth a good bit to have a home like this."

"It suits you, eh?"

"You bet it does, an' Aunt Mercy is the best woman I ever saw, by long odds."

"I'm a good deal of your way of thinkin'," the deacon replied, with a smile; "but that ain't here nor there in the bargain we've got to make. If you stick it out as you've begun, an' I shall hold back the wages till I'm certain on that p'int, I allow to give you eight dollars a month an' your board from this on till after harvestin', when, of course, the price will have to be cut down. Then you'll go to school, an' can't be counted on as bein' worth very much more'n what you eat."

"If you say I'm earnin' that much, all right; I

ain't goin' to kick at takin' it, 'cause I've got to hustle for myself, an' it'll be quite a spell before I scrape up what'll be needed."

"What have you got in your mind?"

"I'm goin' to buy a farm some day, an' it'll take a lot of money to do that."

To this assertion the deacon made no reply, perhaps because just at that moment Aunt Mercy announced that supper was ready, and the appetites of all had been so sharpened by the exercise of the day that there was no disposition to linger after hearing the summons.

That he was considered as being worth to the owner of Herdsdale eight dollars a month more than his board was a surprise, and a very pleasing one to Larry; but before bedtime came Aunt Mercy gave him additional reasons for believing that life on a farm was "a reg'lar snap."

"I've been makin' over a suit of Joseph's, an' I believe it will fit you, Larry," she said as she brought from the sitting-room an armful of garments. "You need somethin' a little extra to wear to meetin', an' here's what will make you look quite spruce."

Coat, trousers, vest, a white shirt, and stockings, the boy from the city saw in one quick glance, and there was an odd expression on his face as he took the articles one by one from Aunt Mercy's arms.

"It's the first reg'lar clothes I ever had, an' I wish I could pay you for them," he said, in a low tone.

"You've done that already, my dear child, if I'd counted my work as bein' worth anything, in the steps you've saved me from day to day. I only wish they were new right out of the store."

"I'd rather have 'em this way," Larry said, shyly, and then he ran at full speed up-stairs, where, half an hour later, Joe found him looking out of the window as if intently watching something.

"Why don't you come down into the sitting-room?" Master Doak asked, sharply.

"I was waitin' up here to think."

"What'er you thinkin' of?"

"How lucky it was I come along last Saturday when your father was gettin' kind'er mixed up."

Joe failed to understand his friend's meaning; but Larry would give no further explanation, and during

the remainder of the evening the boy from the city was unusually silent and thoughtful.

Two weeks more passed, and Deacon Doak had no reason to complain because the green hand failed of sustaining his reputation for industry. Joe and Ned had come to believe that they had good cause for complaint because of Larry's disposition to work when there was no absolute necessity for so doing.

As a matter of fact they could not well be idle while he was employed, and thus, so it seemed to them, he had become a harsher taskmaster than the deacon himself. Both had believed that there would be great sport for them in showing the city boy their favorite haunts in the woods, introducing him to the village lads, and tempting him to display his ignorance of ordinary matters pertaining to farm life; but all these schemes had come to naught simply because he was so exceedingly foolish as to work when it was possible to remain idle.

Nor were they backward about reproaching him for his lack of good sense, as viewed from their standpoint; but to all the arguments they advanced he had the same reply.

"It's all right for you fellers to go off on a good time, 'cause you live here; but I'm hired to do all the work I can, an' if I let up now an' then the deacon will think he's payin' too much. You've got a mighty nice home —"

"It's yours, too."

"Yes, jest so long as your father thinks I earn the right to stay, an' I ain't goin' to take any chances of bein' fired. You fellers would feel the same way if you'd been knocked 'round the same as I have."

It is not to be supposed that Larry did nothing but work during these days at Herdsdale. The walk to and from the pasture never ceased to be delightful to him. Two or three times each week he and the other boys drove to the village, either to carry a load of produce or bring back household supplies, and these excursions, when he was allowed to drive old Major, were decidedly pleasing to Larry.

During the last week in July, when the boys were hoeing the potatoes, Deacon Doak received a message stating that his sister, who lived in Connecticut, was very ill, and urging him to come to her at once.

A second message, two hours later, told that no time could be lost if he would see her alive, and the deacon decided to set out on the train which left Canton early that same evening.

There was no time in which to hire a man to take charge of the farm, and the good deacon said to his wife, as he was making ready for the journey :

“You an’ the boys will have to do the best you can, mother. The potatoes are to be hoed, the early squash sent to the city, and the cabbages looked after. I can depend on Larry to keep Joe an’ Ned at work ; but you must stand in my place. Don’t let the boys fool ’round with the horses, an’ see that the cattle are looked after.”

The deacon did not cease giving directions as to how the work should be done, until he was in the wagon and Joe had started Major stationward. Even then he continued on the same subject ; but, as he frankly confessed, without much hope his instructions would be understood or followed.

There were two members of the family at Herdsdale who felt the full weight of the responsibilities which rested upon them, and these were Aunt Mercy

and Larry. The former was eager to fill her husband's place as the head of the household, and the latter fearful lest he should be found lacking now there was no one to direct his movements.

On the first night, after Joe had come back from the station, and Major was properly cared for, Larry made a personal inspection of the barns and out-buildings to assure himself all the animals were sheltered, and while he attended to this duty Aunt Mercy was examining the fastenings on the windows of the house, as if she feared that the departure of the deacon would be the signal for all the dissolute characters in the country to rendezvous at Herdsdale.

It was Aunt Mercy who conducted the evening devotions, and at an unusually early hour. When they were come to an end she sent the boys to bed without delay, saying, as she kissed them good night, according to her usual custom :

"You must be up bright an' early, children, in order to show your father that you're as ready to work in his absence as when he is at hand to keep you moving. I do hope I'll waken as early as usual."

"I'll be down-stairs as soon as it's light," Larry said, cheerily. "I haven't overslept myself one mornin' since I came, an' don't count on makin' sich a mistake now."

"I'm dependin' on you, my boy, more than on Joe an' Ned," Aunt Mercy said, quietly, and the lad from the city was very proud as he went to his chamber.

It was when they first got into bed that Joe and Ned usually made their plans for sport, or hatched schemes for trapping squirrels; but on this night they had nothing to say regarding the possibilities of the morrow. Both appeared timid, as if the mere fact that the deacon was absent betokened danger, and, after all three of the boys were in bed, Joe began telling stories of a gruesome kind.

He reminded Ned of the mischief committed on the Littlefield farm by tramps; gave a detailed account of how the village store had been robbed two years before, and repeated a story told by some of the loafers at the station, in which robbers and tramps figured prominently.

Finally Ned begged him to be silent, declaring

there was no good reason for frightening a fellow out of his wits, and Larry stoutly insisted that they were in no more danger now the deacon was absent than when he had been at home.

"But if tramps should come around an' find out that father was away, they'd cut up dreadful," Master Doak declared, and by thus speaking absolutely frightened himself.

"They wouldn't cut up so very rough if I was here," Larry replied, stoutly. "I wouldn't stand any nonsense from them."

"You might have to, if there was a good many of 'em."

"I'd contrive to serve some of the gang out before they cut up very high."

"When they went to Mr. Littlefield's, he an' two men were on the place; but the hoboos made a big row jest the same."

"Have you seen any near here lately?"

"There were four at the station when father an' I got there, an' that's what set me thinkin' about 'em."

"They'll stick to the railroad tracks, instead of comin' out this way," Larry replied, confidently, and

then advising Joe to go to sleep, he made his preparations for the journey into Dreamland.

In a comparatively short time Joe and Ned had forgotten their fears in sleep; but Larry's eyes obstinately remained open. He could not put from his mind the fact that four tramps had been seen at the station, and it was not impossible that they would learn of Deacon Doak's absence from home. A chance word from one of the loungers, when the owner of Herdsdale took his departure, would be sufficient to give them the information, and he knew full well, from stories he had heard in the city, to what lengths these disreputable wanderers would go when a favourable opportunity for mischief offered.

The more he thought of the possibilities, the greater became his anxiety, and the rustling of the leaves outside came to his ears as if they were spoken words.

“If anything should happen while the deacon was away, I'd get the bounce mighty quick,” he said to himself, “an' then what would become of my chances for a farm?”

All in vain did he try to banish these newly aroused fears; they grew stronger each moment, until he could no longer resist the inclination to get up.

At the end of the passage which led past his chamber was a window overlooking the main barn, and to this he crept softly, hardly daring to breathe, lest he should awaken Mrs. Doak or Nellie, who slept in the room below.

There was no moon, but the light of the stars was sufficient to admit of his distinguishing objects a short distance away.

He saw Jethro running to and fro quickly, as if scenting some danger; but no other moving thing came within his line of vision.

He was on the point of going back to his room, angry with himself for having allowed Joe's stories to make him nervous, when the dog suddenly bounded toward the cow stables, barking furiously, and an instant later it seemed positive he could distinguish the voices of men.

CHAPTER IX.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

LARRY'S first impulse was to awaken Aunt Mercy, and he had already started toward the stairway when he realised that as yet he had no proof that strangers were lurking around the premises.

A woodchuck or a hedgehog might have caused the outcry from Jethro, and if he should arouse the household because of any such trifling matter, Joe and Ned would have a perfect right, not only to make sport of his eagerness to find danger, but to call him a coward.

While one might have counted twenty he stood silent and motionless peering out of the window, and all the while it seemed to him that he could distinguish the sound of human voices.

Jethro continued to bark angrily, and finally gave vent to a yelp of pain, which told that some person

had struck him, or that he was getting the worst of an encounter with an animal.

“I know some one is foolin’ ’round the barn,” the boy said, as if trying to stimulate his courage by the sound of his own voice. “It wouldn’t be queer if those tramps Joe saw had found out that the deacon was away, and were here for mischief; but yet I don’t dare to call the family, for fear I’m makin’ a mistake.”

Another yelp from Jethro, and Larry could no longer hesitate.

Creeping softly back to the chamber, he partially dressed himself without awakening his room-mates, and then crept down the kitchen stairs, doing his best to move noiselessly, but accompanied by the creaking of boards at every step.

Ordinarily he might have gone up and down a dozen times, as it seemed to him, without the lightest sound; but now, when he was so eager to move silently, it was as if every timber in the building called out against his venturing forth.

“If Aunt Mercy don’t waken it’ll be because she sleeps mighty sound,” he said to himself, as the

kitchen door creaked loudly on its hinges when he pushed it open. "I reckon I'm makin' a big fool of myself; but I couldn't stay in bed without knowin' for certain what the trouble is with Jethro."

Before venturing to draw the bolts of the outer door, he paused a moment to listen.

Not a sound could be heard, save the barking of the dog, and he had good reason to believe the other inmates of the farmhouse were wrapped in slumber, or had been frightened into speechlessness by the noise he was making.

He went into the open air, closing the door softly behind him, and then, giving no heed to the possible danger he might encounter, walked swiftly toward the barn.

Before having traversed more than half the distance between the kitchen and the cow stable, he knew beyond a peradventure that strangers were on the farm, for at such brief intervals as Jethro ceased his outcries, it was possible to hear the voices of men.

Larry was not absolutely frightened, but he had sufficient sense to understand that it might not be

prudent to advance boldly until after learning who the visitors were.

A moment later he saw the tiny flame of a match, and then came the odour of tobacco, telling that some one had lighted a pipe.

“It’s the tramps, for certain, an’ we’re likely to have a rough time of it before mornin’ if there are four of ’em. I wonder if I’d better run down to the Littlefield farm, or try my hand alone.”

In the city, with nothing but his own body to defend, Master Hudson would not have felt any fear, for, at the last extremity, he could have taken to his heels; but now it was his duty to defend the farm and the family, which placed him at a disadvantage.

He made a wide *détour* around the currant-bushes in order to gain the cow stables under cover, thus spending several moments, after which he had a fairly good view of the unwelcome visitors.

Four rough-looking men were standing near the main door of the building, defending themselves against the attacks of Jethro with such sticks or clubs as had been close at hand. The dog was

too wise to advance near enough so that they might strike him a blow, but darted back and forth, barking loudly, as if believing that some of the family would hear and understand his calls for assistance.

One or another of the men struck at him whenever he came within reach, and all tried their best to frighten the faithful sentinel away by throwing rocks or missiles of any kind.

A fragment of wood hit him on the head, and he gave vent to a yelp of pain, but without ceasing his efforts to drive them away.

Larry crouched behind the bushes, trying to decide just what it was best for him to do, and so near was he to the intruders that he heard distinctly all they said.

“We’ve got to kill that cur, or he’ll arouse the neighbourhood,” one of them cried, angrily.

“It won’t do much harm if the deacon’s family is disturbed; we know there are only three boys an’ two women at home, an’ I reckon sich a gang as that won’t hinder us from usin’ the barn to-night.”

“Are you sure there ain’t any one else near?”

“Didn’t that jay at the depot tell us the nearest

house was well on to half a mile away? Can't you kill that cur?"

"He won't give me a chance. Why don't we go inside, an' let him bark?"

"I'm tryin' to open the door. The duffer what owns this place keeps his doors locked in great shape. Give me a club, an' I'll soon have these staples out."

It was not possible for Larry to see distinctly what the tramps were doing, owing to the darkness; but he understood from the noise that the fastenings of the hasp which held the padlock were being drawn, and, a moment later, the four men entered the barn, closing the door behind them.

Jethro continued to run back and forth, barking furiously, probably wondering why no one came to his assistance; but to his outcries the tramps apparently gave no heed, and Larry was wholly at a loss to decide exactly what was his duty under all the circumstances.

Even though the disagreeable visitors had evidently come there for the sole purpose of finding a comfortable place in which to sleep, there was

much danger to be apprehended. At least one of them held a lighted pipe between his teeth, and during the short time Larry had lived at Herdsdale he had been told often of the danger in thus carrying amid the hay anything which might start a fire. Besides, that very night had Joe told of farm buildings only a few miles away which were set on fire by tramps who indulged in the luxury of smoking after having gone to bed on the hay-mow.

Such visitors as had come to Herdsdale were prone to do mischief simply for mischief's sake, and, when morning came, they would milk the cows, carry away the eggs, and perhaps a chicken or two, even though they did nothing worse.

"It won't do to let 'em stay there, that's certain!" Larry said to himself, after revolving the matter thoroughly in his mind; "but how am I to drive the crowd away?"

By this time Jethro, probably despairing of being able to arouse the family, ceased to bark, and was running to and fro, as if trying to learn why no attention had been paid to his calls for help.

While so doing he discovered Larry, and imme-

diately began leaping up on him by way of explaining what had been happening.

“I know all about it, old man,” Master Hudson whispered, as he caressed the dog; “but it puzzles me to make out how I’m goin’ to get rid of ’em. S’posen we go back an’ tell Aunt Mercy. She ought to know what it’s best for us to do.”

Since Jethro made no reply, Larry could do nothing less than carry into execution his own proposition, and a few moments later was knocking at the door of Aunt Mercy’s room.

“What is it?” she asked, in a tremulous voice, after the boy had tapped softly several times.

“I’m awful sorry to make any fuss for you, Aunt Mercy; but four tramps are out in the cow stable, an’ I don’t dare to leave ’em there.”

“Tramps in the cow stable!” the good woman cried, shrilly. “Mercy on us, Larry, what shall we do?”

“That’s jest what I don’t know, else I wouldn’t have wakened you.”

“But how do you know they are there?” she asked, while by the sounds which came from the

chamber, Master Hudson knew that she was dressing.

“I heard the dog barkin’, an’ went to see what was goin’ on.”

“Did you dare go where they were?” she asked, tremulously, and from the tone of her voice one would have said she was even more alarmed by the knowledge that Larry had been so venturesome than by the startling information he brought.

“Where are you going, mother?” Larry heard Nellie ask, and Mrs. Doak replied, helplessly:

“I don’t know, child, I don’t know.”

“Then why are you dressing?”

“Do you think I could stay in bed while there are tramps in the cow stable?”

“But what can you do?”

“I’m sure I can’t say, Nellie; but it’s certain I wouldn’t trust myself here. Larry,” she added, raising her voice, and speaking in the tone of one who asks a great favour, “what *shall* we do?”

“S’posen I run down to the Littlefield farm an’ ask some of the men to come up here?”

“I wouldn’t have you leave this house for the world. Ain’t there some way of scarin’ them?”

Even in the midst of his alarm Larry could not refrain from smiling at the idea that it might be possible for him to frighten four men who, most likely, were accustomed to terrorising others.

“I’ll try it, if you say the word; but there ain’t much chance it will do any good.”

Aunt Mercy remained silent several seconds, and then asked, helplessly:

“Where are Joe and Ned?”

“Up-stairs, asleep.”

“Why don’t you call ’em?”

“I never thought of it, Aunt Mercy, an’, besides, what could they do?”

“I don’t know, Larry, I don’t know; but it does seem as if the family should be together at such a terrible time.”

Master Hudson ran up-stairs swiftly, and shook Joe and Ned vigorously as he said, in a low tone:

“There are four tramps in the cow stable, an’ Aunt Mercy wants you to come down-stairs.”

The boys would have questioned Larry as to how

he gained such information, but he did not give them the opportunity.

“Come down as quick as ever you can,” he cried, and then descended the stairs as rapidly as possible.

By this time both Aunt Mercy and Nellie, partially dressed, were in the kitchen, and the good woman was on the point of lighting a lamp as Larry entered.

“I wouldn't do that!” he said, hurriedly.

“Why not?” and Aunt Mercy dropped the half-burnt match without heed to the fact that it might blacken her well-polished floor.

“If the tramps think we've found out where they are, there may be worse trouble. By havin' a light here they'd know you was out of bed.”

“I'm so flustered that I really don't know what I'm about. If only the deacon was here!”

Aunt Mercy was standing near the stove, clasping and unclasping her fingers, as one does in perplexity; but as the door leading up-stairs was opened suddenly, she sprang back with a shrill cry of alarm, only to laugh hysterically as she saw Joe and Ned, who had come in answer to her summons.

The boys held in their hands the toy pistols pur-

chased in New York, but despite this warlike array, were trembling with fear.

“What are you countin’ on doin’ with them things?” Larry asked, sharply, as he pointed at the imitation weapons.

“It’s all we’ve got, an’ perhaps the tramps will think they’re the real things,” Joe explained, his teeth literally chattering with fear.

“I don’t believe it’ll pay to try any such game as that. We ought’er go after the folks at the Littlefield farm. You two can stay here, an’ I’ll be down there in a jiffy.”

“Larry Hudson,” Aunt Mercy said, solemnly, “you’re the only one we’ve got to depend on in this terrible time, an’ I never will consent to your leavin’ us.”

“But the tramps must be run out of the barn, Aunt Mercy, ’cause one of ’em was smokin’, an’ might set the hay on fire. It won’t do to stay here like a lot of chickens till they’ve done all the mischief they can. Besides, we’re bound to have a row with ’em before mornin’, unless you’re willin’ they should milk the cows and steal the hens.”

“Do anything you think best, Larry; but don't even so much as think of leavin' us alone,” the good woman cried, in an agony of terror.

“I ain't likely to do much while I stay here,” Larry muttered, taking good care, however, that Aunt Mercy did not hear him.

Neither Joe nor Ned were in a condition to give any advice. They were even more terrified than Nellie, and stood near the stairway door clutching the wooden pistols as if their very lives depended upon keeping a firm hold of the toys.

Larry looked around helplessly. He believed the proper course to pursue would be to arouse the Littlefields; but this was out of the question in the face of Aunt Mercy's injunctions, and yet all looked to him for help.

“I'll run down behind the currant-bushes an' see what they are doing,” he said, going toward the door; but before he could open it Nellie had her arms around his body.

“They'll kill you!” she said, tearfully. “They'll kill you! Stay here with us!”

Larry remained silent an instant, making no effort

to shake off the girl's detaining grasp, and as he stood there the thought came into his mind again that while they remained idle the farm buildings might be burned, in which case it seemed as if he would be the one upon whom Deacon Doak's reproaches might fall.

If ever he was to own a farm, now had come the time to show himself a man, for once he had been turned away from Herdsdale for neglecting his duty, it would be almost impossible to find another situation where he could earn eight dollars a month.

"See here, Aunt Mercy," he said, imploringly. "It won't do for me to hang 'round here while there's so much to be done. The deacon never'd let me stay on this place another day if the tramps burned the barn, an' I'm bound to drive 'em out somehow. Them duffers can't get the best of me, for I've run away from better fellers than they ever dared to be, time an' time again."

"But what can a boy like you do against four wicked men?" the good woman asked with a sob, for now she was crying softly.

"That's what I don't know now, an' I never will

while I stay here with you. I'll promise not to go to Littlefield's; but I must sneak down to the barn."

Then, hurriedly, as if afraid Aunt Mercy might insist upon his remaining, Larry disengaged himself from Nellie's grasp and ran out of the house, Jethro meeting him on the broad stone door-step.

Holding the dog by the collar, the lad made his way hurriedly out through the garden until he was once more opposite the door of the cow stable, but screened from view by the currant-bushes.

He could hear no more than a faint murmuring, which he knew to be caused by the tramps in conversation, and there was nothing unusual to be seen.

The unwelcome visitors were undoubtedly lying on the hay, and this would have been a trifling matter if there was no possibility of their lighting matches while inside the building.

"I wouldn't wonder if tramps had slept on the deacon's hay a good many times, without his knowin' it, an' perhaps these fellers won't do any damage; but then again perhaps they may. If he was home

I wouldn't fret myself very much over it; but with things jest as they are, I'm likely to get into trouble because I don't make 'em clear out."

Having thus spoken to himself, Larry rubbed his nose reflectively, for how it might be possible for him to drive the men away, when there was no one to assist, was a difficult problem to solve.

Surely it was of little avail for him to sit behind the currant-bushes speculating upon the difficulties of the situation, and when this thought came into his mind he stepped out from the shelter as he said to himself:

"I've got to tackle the job, even if I am likely to get the worst of it. The deacon must give me a little credit for puttin' up the best bluff I can."

He was yet holding Jethro by the collar, and did not let the dog loose even when he stood in front of the stable door, his heart beating considerably faster than usual, because he knew full well that the chances of his being able to accomplish anything single-handed were exceedingly small.

He stumbled over a stick four feet long and perhaps two inches in diameter, the end of which

had been sharpened, and knew that it was one of the stakes from the wood-cart.

This was no mean weapon, and his courage revived considerably as he seized it.

Marching straight on, he paused only when he was at the door of the stable, and then it became necessary to let go his hold of Jethro in order to grasp the latch of the door.

It was his purpose to open it suddenly ; but after one vain effort he understood that the tramps had fastened the door on the inside.

As a matter of course his movements caused some noise, and he heard one of the visitors say, in a half-whisper :

“Hark! Somebody is stirrin’!”

“Let ’em stir,” a second voice replied, with a hoarse laugh. “There ain’t anybody ’round this place that can rout us out, an’ what’s better, we’ll be able to order breakfast cooked for us in the mornin’.”

“You’ll be playin’ in big luck if you don’t eat breakfast in jail,” Larry cried, pounding on the door with his club to make certain of attracting attention.

"I'll give you one chance to clear out of here, an' if you don't go it'll be a case of callin' the cops!"

While one might have counted five a profound silence followed this announcement, and then the occupants of the barn indulged in hearty laughter.

"Call 'em an' be blowed!" one of the tramps cried, mockingly. "I never saw a hayseed cop, an' would like to get a squint at one."

Larry had made a mistake in threatening the unwelcome visitors with policemen from a country town, and he understood as much immediately the words had been spoken; but having begun to threaten it was not good policy, so he believed, to retract a single word.

"You'll find out whether there are any cops or not," he said, threateningly, pounding again on the door. "Will you clear out, or must I make you move?"

"You'd better tackle the job without doin' so much chinnin'. We're here for the night, tucked up in bed, an' don't count on bein' disturbed, so toddle back inter the house, an' see to it that breakfast is ready for four when we give the word."

Larry knew full well that it was impossible for him to force the tramps out; but yet he pounded on the door of the stable as if bent on battering it down, and, as he did so, Jethro added to the noise by barking furiously.

Because of the tumult Master Hudson failed to hear the approach of one of the tramps as he crept toward the door to peer out through the crevices, therefore he was startled not a little when the fellow cried, derisively:

“It’s only a kid, an’ I’ll soon settle him!”

Of a surety Larry’s wits were wool-gathering just then, for instead of guarding against an attack, he pounded yet more vigorously until, suddenly, the door was flung open, and an instant later the boy was knocked headlong by a vicious blow, which, glancing from his cheek, struck him on the shoulder.

CHAPTER X.

SLICK JAKE.

THE blow which knocked Larry down was severe, but not dangerous, although at the instant it seemed to him as if one or more bones had been broken.

The tramp had struck him with a club, and doubtless intended to do the lad a serious injury, as would have been the case but for the fact that it glanced from his head, thus breaking the force before striking the shoulder.

As it was, however, flashes as of fire danced before his eyes, and his arm was suddenly benumbed, as if the circulation of blood had ceased entirely. He felt something moist running across his cheek, and knew it was blood, therefore he argued that his injuries might be serious.

Immediately after delivering the cruel blow the tramp had closed and refastened the stable door,

thus indicating that it was a matter of but little importance to him whether the boy needed attention in order to save his life, or if he was but slightly hurt.

During two or three minutes Larry lay where he had fallen, wondering if death were very near him, and then Jethro brought him to a full realisation of the situation by licking his face.

“Our bluff didn’t work, old fellow,” Larry whispered to the dog, and the ghost of a smile came upon his lips as he began to realise how foolishly he had behaved in not being on the alert against such an attack. “I might have known they wouldn’t stand a lot of chinnin’ from me after some of the loafers at the depot posted ’em about things here at Herdsdale.”

Having thus relieved his mind, as it were, Larry set about learning the extent of his injuries by scrambling to his feet.

He was dizzy and faint, while his arm yet remained without power of movement; but his legs were sound, and he went slowly toward the house, trying in vain to devise some scheme whereby

the tramps might be dislodged without calling for assistance from the Littlefields.

“If Aunt Mercy would only let me go after the men!” he muttered, and an instant later was forced to acknowledge to himself that unless the neighbours were willing to run the risk of receiving serious wounds, the unwelcome visitors were likely to remain under cover.

It surely seemed as if Jethro understood that the boy was vanquished, for instead of barking defiance he kept close at Larry’s heels, walking after the fashion of a dog who knows his enemies are too strong to be attacked.

“You can light the lamp if you want to, Aunt Mercy,” Master Hudson said, on opening the kitchen door. “The villains know by this time that we are awake, an’ it won’t do any harm to show signs of life.”

Nellie hurriedly set about doing as he had suggested, thus showing how trying it had been to remain in the darkness, and no sooner was the kitchen illuminated than Aunt Mercy screamed in terror:

“Why, Larry! They must have nearly killed you!”

“It’s only a little blood,” Master Hudson replied, with a poor attempt to speak in a tone of unconcern. “One of ’em hit me with a club; but I don’t reckon that part of the hurt amounts to much; it’s my shoulder that aches.”

“Did you really walk right up to them?” Nellie asked, solicitously, while her mother bustled for warm water and cloths.

“I went to the stable door, an’ was tryin’ to frighten ’em away, when one of ’em clubbed me. It was my own fault, for I ought’er had better sense than to stand there like a chump when I knew they’d play some kind of a game.”

Neither Joe nor Ned spoke; but the expression on their faces told of the terror in their hearts, and, indeed, they had even more reason for alarm than had Larry, since both knew better than he to what lengths tramps would go when feeling secure from policemen or constables.

There were a dozen farms within a radius of five or six miles on which depredations had been

committed by these travelling loafers, and every lad in the village of Canton had heard more or less startling stories of wanton mischief done in the outlying districts. One set of farm buildings had been destroyed within the past two years; sheep had been slaughtered in the pastures; hen-roosts robbed, children maltreated, and women insulted.

The boys came close by Larry's side, and remained there silent and terrified, while Aunt Mercy wiped away the blood, and closed with adhesive plaster a jagged cut on the side of his head. Then pulling away the coat and shirt until his shoulder was exposed, she brought to view the bruised flesh which was already beginning to discolour.

"It's a wonder you wasn't killed, my poor boy," she said, tenderly. "Can you move your arm now?"

"Oh, that's all right," Larry replied, promptly. "For a spell it felt as if all the bones were broken; but now it's only sore."

"It will be a good while before you can use it handily. I'll put on a poultice later when —"

She ceased speaking very suddenly. For the

moment the knowledge of Larry's wounds had caused her to forget that in the stable were four vicious men who might do yet further mischief before going or being driven away, and now as she was reminded of the fact her face grew pale again.

"What *can* we do, my boy?" she asked, piteously. "I won't allow you to go where they are, and —"

"Mr. Littlefield would help us, an' I might run down there."

"I don't dare to have you leave the house, Larry. Suppose the tramps set fire to the stable? Every buildin' would be burned before you could get back."

"Then there's nothin' for it but to wait till mornin', an' watch out for some one to come," Larry said, with a sigh, hoping that the idea of delaying so long would induce her to allow him to go in search of help.

"That is all we can do," Aunt Mercy replied, resignedly, and Nellie cried, timidly:

"They may burn everything before then!"

"We can only ask the Lord to help us, my child. Joseph, let Jethro into the kitchen, and Ned will

bring out the Bible. We'll ask Him for assistance since we are powerless to aid ourselves."

While Aunt Mercy read, Larry stood at the window peering out into the darkness, fearing each instant lest he should see the glow of a fire in the direction of the stable, and listening intently with the hope that he might get some slight idea of what the tramps were doing.

Joe's mother read a full chapter, and then prayed at great length that the Lord would watch over them in their hour of peril, after which she appeared more composed.

"We'll wait patiently till mornin', trustin' that some of our neighbours will drive this way early," she said, quietly. "If the tramps do us harm, we will try to say, 'The Lord's will be done.' What are you doin', Larry?"

"Watchin' out, so that if the stable is set on fire we can do somethin' toward savin' the cows."

Joe and Ned stood close by Aunt Mercy's side, still clutching the toy pistols, and Nellie sat on a footstool resting her head on her mother's knee.

No one spoke; the silence was so profound that

the ticking of the clock sounded like the blows of a hammer, and when Jethro moved restlessly about, it was as if his footsteps were those of a horse.

Larry remained motionless at the window; Joe and Ned finally lay down on the floor, and soon the regular breathing told that they, as well as Nellie, had fallen asleep.

Once, after it seemed as if the morning must be close at hand, so slowly did the minutes pass, Aunt Mercy asked :

“Can you see or hear anything, Larry?”

“Not a thing; they must be asleep by this time.”

“Do you suppose they'll go peaceably away in the mornin'?”

“I hope so; but one of 'em allowed they was bound to have breakfast.”

“Do you think it would be safe to let them come into the kitchen?”

“I wouldn't do it if we can get rid of 'em; there's no knowin' what sich villainous men might do. Is there much chance the neighbours will come along this way very early?”

“I can't say; but we'll hope for the best, my boy. If father was only here!”

“Somebody at the station told 'em that the deacon had gone away, an' that's why they're carryin' on so bad.”

After this the conversation ceased. Aunt Mercy remained motionless that she might not disturb Nellie's slumber, and the two boys slept on the floor as soundly as if they were in bed with no danger near at hand.

Larry hailed the first pale light of day in the eastern sky, and announced the fact joyously to Aunt Mercy.

“The sun rises about five o'clock, an' it can't be more than four now. We must wait two hours or more, my boy.”

“Would you be afraid to have me go down to Mr. Littlefield's now?”

“Indeed I would; you mustn't stir till they've left the farm. Josey an' Ned seem like children by the side of you, though I don't suppose they are so very much older; but somehow I depend on you while we're in such trouble.”

Larry sighed deeply. He knew full well that the tramps would not leave the farm without making more trouble for the family, unless by some good fortune a sufficient number of the neighbours came to the rescue, and now, even more than during the hours of darkness, was the time when assistance should be summoned.

Another hour passed. The first rays of the rising sun could be seen above the horizon and from the stable came the low call of the cows who waited for breakfast.

Joe and Ned awakened, stiff from having remained on the hard floor so long, and Nellie opened her eyes to a realisation of the situation.

Aunt Mercy's first care was to take the toy pistols from the boys, for they had retained these imitation weapons of defence even while slumbering, and she said, as she hid the useless things beneath a quantity of yarn in the cupboard :

“We won't keep up the semblance of tryin' to defend ourselves, an' perhaps those men may be ashamed of thus frightening an old woman an' four children.”

“The cattle ought to be fed,” Joe suggested; but his mother silenced him with a look.

“After the way Larry was treated I’ll not so much as allow you children to put a foot out-of-doors. One of you may build the kitchen fire, an’ I’ll try to get breakfast.”

Larry hastened to obey her bidding, and once Aunt Mercy had set about the household duties half her fears were put out of mind.

Nellie had begun to arrange the table for the morning meal when Joe cried, in tones of terror:

“They’re comin’ out of the stable! There are all four!”

“An’ they’re makin’ straight for us!” Ned added.

“You’ll have to let ’em in, Aunt Mercy,” Larry said, after one glance at the tramps. “If you keep the door locked they might break in the windows. Please let one of us boys run down to Littlefield’s?”

Aunt Mercy looked around helplessly; but when Larry caught up his hat she cried, sharply:

“You mustn’t be the one to go! I’m dependin’

on you to save us all from bein' murdered. Oh, don't leave us, Larry!"

"Will you let Joe an' Ned sneak out by the front way? I'll stay close by your side; but we must have some help, or there's no tellin' what they'll do!"

It seemed as if a second look at the tramps was needed before Aunt Mercy would consent to Larry's proposition, and then she said, faintly, as if the decision cost her great pain:

"Do as you think best, my child. An old woman like me, who's afraid of her own shadow, isn't fit to decide what should be done. If father was only here!"

"Hurry, boys!" Larry said, sharply. "You can get out of the front door without bein' seen, an' once you are at Littlefield's make sure that two or three men come up here at once. We can keep the tramps quiet a spell with somethin' to eat."

The boys were by no means averse to leaving the house at this time, for the spectacle of Larry's wounds was sufficient to warn them of what might be their fate.

Nellie ran with them to the front door, and when the tramps had knocked loudly and peremptorily at the kitchen entrance, Ned and Joe left the house, running at full speed, as if positive the enemy was at their heels.

Larry opened the kitchen door at the first summons, and without waiting for permission or invitation the four men entered.

They looked around with an air of satisfaction as if pleased because their presence had caused alarm, and one of them asked, gruffly :

“How long before breakfast will be ready?”

“Look here, mister,” Larry began, stepping between the strangers and Aunt Mercy, “if she gives you somethin’ to eat will you go directly away?”

“I don’t know as we’re called upon to bargain with you for what we want. Say, ain’t you the kid who was raisin’ sich a row last night?”

“I’m the one you knocked down, if that’s what you want to know, an’ you are called on to bargain for breakfast, else there’ll be trouble.”

“An’ you’ll make it for us, I s’pose?”

“That’s jest what I *will* do,” and Larry caught

up the heavy iron poker which stood within the unused fireplace. "After last night it wouldn't go against my grain to knock one of you stiff; so keep civil tongues in your heads while you're talkin' to Aunt Mercy."

"Don't anger 'em, Larry, don't anger 'em!" the good woman cried, imploringly. "I'll cook them somethin' to eat."

"I'll do more than anger them if they make a move toward comin' nearer than the table," and Larry swung the iron weapon viciously.

One of the men stepped a pace nearer, as if bent on making an attack; but the boy raised the poker high in the air, and the cowardly ruffian retreated.

"It's jest like this," Larry cried, rejoicing because it seemed as if he had the advantage for the time being. "You can have breakfast, an' then it'll be a case of leavin' in short order. It wouldn't be against the law for me to kill one of your crowd, an' no matter how hard you fight I can get in a blow before you down me. If either of you wants a taste of this, make a move toward doin' more'n I've said, an' you'll get it."



“ THE BOY RAISED THE POKER HIGH IN THE AIR.”



That the boy was in earnest there could be no doubt, and for a moment the tramps were cowed, while even Aunt Mercy appeared less timid.

Larry believed the victory would be his if he could keep the villains in check sufficiently long for the men from Littlefield's to arrive, and he was fully determined to carry out his threat.

The tramps whispered together, and one of them started toward the door, probably intending to go in search of something in the shape of a weapon which would counterbalance the iron poker; but Larry was too quick-witted not to understand the fellow's purpose.

"Come back here!" he cried. "If any of you leave this room I'll knock one of the others in the head! I ain't sich a chump as not to guess what you're reckonin' on."

With an exclamation of rage the man nearest the door came back to the side of his companions, as he said, warningly:

"We'll get the best of you before many minutes, my bantam, an' then you shall smart for havin' been so funny."

“I’ll hold this end of the kitchen for awhile, at any rate, an’ perhaps what comes afterward will give you a dose that’ll pay up for your game. I’ve seen sich as you in the city, an’ don’t count on lettin’ you have it all your own way. Get up to the table, an’ keep your tongues quiet. Move!” he shouted, swinging the poker vigorously as the visitors hesitated.

Although one small boy was confronting four men, either of whom could have crushed him with but little effort, the tramps had no desire to bring about a battle, for the very good reason that Larry would be able to strike at least one telling blow before he was disarmed. Under such circumstances, the lad had much the best of the situation, and the unwelcome visitors were forced to obey.

Master Hudson understood full well, however, that his power was exceedingly limited. It was only while the men remained inside the kitchen that he held the upper hand. Once they got out-of-doors, where clubs or missiles could readily be found, the tables would speedily be turned. In fact, Larry saw one of the men eyeing wistfully Joe’s base-ball bat, which stood in one corner of the room, and

instantly he was on the alert in case the fellow should attempt to gain possession of it.

If help came speedily from Littlefield's farm, then the Doak family would be the victors; but if the men had left home, the tramps would be able to do whatsoever pleased their vicious fancy.

Aunt Mercy, seeing the visitors cower before the boy, began to believe that they would depart peaceably as soon as breakfast had been served, and to hasten such a desirable end she hurried to and fro nervously, but yet at the same time preparing an appetising meal.

Larry decided that Joe and Ned should be able to arrive at Littlefield's within fifteen minutes from the time of departing. Those who came in response to the appeal would traverse the distance in about the same length of time, therefore in half an hour he could reasonably hope for assistance.

No more than ten minutes had elapsed, and he was growing weary with remaining constantly on the alert against the slightest suspicious movement. Would he be able to maintain his position as long as might be necessary?

It was his belief that the tramps would make no effort to do mischief from the time the food was set before them until their hunger was satisfied, therefore he was feverishly eager for Aunt Mercy to serve the meal.

It seemed to him that the good woman had never moved so slowly as now; that the fire burned with far less heat than usual, and that the food was literally refusing to be cooked, so wearily did the moments pass.

"In fifteen minutes more," he said to himself, as he glanced furtively at the clock, and even as the thought formed itself in his mind he heard the hum of voices outside.

The blood bounded in his veins, and only with difficulty could he restrain himself from crying aloud in mingled relief and triumph.

He knew that Joe and Ned had not been able to go as far as the Littlefield farm, and yet there was no curiosity in his mind as to where they had found assistance.

Then the kitchen door was opened suddenly, and as the tramps leaped to their feet Larry uttered a cry of dismay.

In the doorway, with the two boys behind him, stood that man who, on the Fourth of July, had introduced himself to Deacon Doak as "Mr. Folsom," the bunco man, whom Master Hudson knew as "Slick Jake."

Like a flash came into Larry's mind the thought that this fellow was in league with the tramps, and now the house would be plundered; but in this particular he soon discovered that he wronged the light-fingered "Mr. Folsom."

It was evident that the tramps did not recognise him, for they crowded nearer the door, ready to beat a retreat as soon as possible, and were evidently feeling decidedly uncomfortable in mind.

"Look out for yourself, Jake!" Larry shouted, as one of the tramps stole up apparently to strike the newcomer, and the boy advanced a couple of paces nearer, as he cried to the disagreeable visitors, "Don't make the mistake of hittin' anybody, or I'll let this iron fall on the duffer what stands nearest me."

"Mr. Folsom" stepped back a few inches in order to have room to swing his arms, but still guarding the door, and said, with a laugh:

“How does it happen that you're out here, Larry? What kind of a gang have you picked up?”

“These 'ere are some gents what slept on the hay last night, an' have jest ordered breakfast as if they was swells. I'm lookin' after 'em a bit for fear they'll get funny.”

CHAPTER XI.

A PROPOSITION.

AUNT MERCY and the children did not recognise the alleged "Mr. Folsom," which is hardly to be wondered at in view of the fact that they paid no particular attention to him during the time he held the deacon in conversation on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant; afterward, at the station, when Larry forced him to disgorge his ill-gotten gains, the confidence man did not approach the party from Herdsdale.

The only thought in the mind of Aunt Mercy was one of thankfulness that the newcomer was a friend of Larry's, while Joe and Ned were not a little surprised that the stranger whom they had opportunely met walking toward the farm from the direction of the village, should be known to their comrade.

Every member of the family believed it was a piece of rare good fortune that the man from the city chanced to be in the vicinity at that particular time, and Larry was so agitated regarding the possibility of driving away the unwelcome visitors, that he did not speculate as to why Slick Jake happened to be there.

The alleged Mr. Folsom scrutinised the tramps as they stood before him ready for, and evidently anticipating, an attack, and Larry noted with satisfaction the fact that the newcomer's hand was on his hip pocket, as if he had there a concealed weapon.

This last movement had not escaped the attention of the tramps, and it could plainly be seen that they were considerably disturbed in mind because of it.

"So they took possession of the farm, eh?" "Mr. Folsom" asked, after he had scrutinised the tramps to his satisfaction.

"Yes; the deacon is away, an' they counted on gettin' the best of us," Larry replied, still on the alert against any sudden demonstration by the men.

“And this lady would prefer that they made a quick exit?” Slick Jake added, motioning toward Mrs. Doak.

“Yes, an’ the sooner the better,” Larry said, decidedly, while Joe and Ned stepped back quickly, as if fearing they might be in the way, to their own injury, in case the disagreeable visitors should beat a hasty retreat.

“Mr. Folsom” opened the door a trifle wider, stepped back two paces or more, and, with his hand still in the vicinity of his hip pocket, said, sharply :

“Now get a move on, you loafers, and if you stop this side of the railroad station I’ll take more of a hand in the business than I’ve yet showed.”

Knowing, or believing, that the man was armed, and understanding that he would not be gentle in his treatment of them in case they attempted to disobey orders, the tramps almost tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get out of the door.

Once in the open air, they would have started for the station by first going in the direction of the cow stables ; but “Mr. Folsom” brought them to the right-about by crying :

“Wheel around there, and strike out for the road! Don't dare fool about the buildings of this farm!”

This order was obeyed promptly, and the Doak family watched the movements of the men until they had disappeared in the distance without so much as looking back.

Then it was that Aunt Mercy, the tears flowing freely because of her great and sudden relief of mind, said, in a tone of devout thankfulness:

“I truly believe God sent you in reply to our prayers, sir. We have passed a terrible night, and my astonishment is as great as my thankfulness because those horrible men went away without doing us a mischief.”

“They knew it wouldn't be well to play any games with me,” the supposed Mr. Folsom said, as he took Aunt Mercy's outstretched hand. “You won't have any more trouble with them, and in the future I would advise that you provide yourself with something in the way of weapons. When a party of tramps find out there are no men about, they're apt to carry matters with a high hand.”

“The deacon never believed in keepin’ firearms, an’ until Larry came there was nobody on the farm who could use them. The Lord has been good to us, an’ we owe you an’ the boy more than we can ever repay.”

“You’re welcome to the little share I’ve had in it, an’ as for Larry, I know him well enough to understand that those fellows couldn’t get the best of him entirely.”

“I don’t know what we would have done without him, an’ to think that you, a friend of his, should come along jest when you was most needed!”

“My coming can readily be explained. I am interested in a certain line of goods used by farmers, and had begun my day’s work, having slept last night at the hotel in Canton.”

Master Hudson looked up quickly in astonishment, for he had never believed Slick Jake would perform any kind of work save that connected with the swindling of people from the country.

“Mr. Folsom” winked confidentially at Larry, as if to say that he should hold his tongue until the

matter could be privately explained, and Aunt Mercy said, hospitably :

“I’ll warrant you haven’t been to breakfast. I was jest gettin’ it ready, an’ the boys will have time to look after the cattle before it is on the table. Will you please walk into the sittin’-room?”

“I’ll have a look around the farm, if it’s all the same to you,” “Mr. Folsom” replied, and Master Hudson understood that the confidence man intended to hold a private conversation with him.

It was high time the morning work was done, and while Larry was milking the other boys fed the horses and cattle ; but all the while one or the other remained so near at hand that Master Hudson had no opportunity of speaking confidentially with the man who had been of so much assistance to the occupants of Herdsdale farm.

It was as if Joe and Ned were eager to hear every word which fell from the lips of this exceedingly well-dressed stranger, and they hurried with the chores lest he should say something of interest during their absence.

Larry, now that he had time to turn the matter

over in his mind, was most uncomfortable. He was under great obligations to Slick Jake because of what he had just done, yet the boy knew full well that "Mr. Folsom" had no honest business to transact in that portion of the country. If he had any interest in farmers, it was that he might swindle them, and, after all that had happened, the confidence man would be likely to find in Deacon Doak an easy victim, provided he could explain satisfactorily the little misunderstanding in the city.

It appeared to Larry that it was his solemn duty to prevent "Mr. Folsom" from playing any dishonest game on the deacon, and yet he was not disposed to make serious charges against the visitor's honesty while they owed him so much.

Therefore it was that Master Hudson was quite as eager for a private interview as was Slick Jake; but it could not be brought about on that morning.

When Joe went into the next building to feed the horses, Ned remained behind, gazing in open-mouthed astonishment and pleasure at the "city chap," and when Larry suggested that Ned ought to feed the pigs, Joe was ready to take his turn at listening.

“Mr. Folsom” praised the cows, the horses, and even the pigs. Finding that he could not shake off the other boys long enough to have an interview with Larry, he told stories of life in the city, regaled them with accounts of tramps he had known, and otherwise made himself very agreeable and entertaining.

Master Hudson fancied he should be able to speak alone with Slick Jake when the cows were driven to pasture, for he had made up his mind not to take upon himself that portion of the work on this morning; but one of the Littlefield boys chanced to come that way just as the task of milking had been finished, and by way of payment for a detailed story of what the tramps had done, agreed to perform such portion of the morning's chores.

Then Aunt Mercy called the family to breakfast, and “Mr. Folsom” exerted himself to please the good woman with such effect that before the meal had come to an end she gave him a most cordial invitation to remain at the farm until the deacon returned, assuring him she would feel more comfortable in mind if he could so arrange his business as to visit them.

The invitation was finally accepted by the obliging gentleman ; but at the same time he claimed that it was absolutely necessary he attend to certain matters while remaining in the neighbourhood, therefore he could do little more than sleep at the farm.

“It will be a real favour if you do even that much,” Aunt Mercy said, with an air of gratitude. “After all that has happened I shall feel safe while you are here ; but if left alone with the boys I’m certain it would be impossible to sleep a wink.”

Thus it was that the swindler found a temporary home, and, whatever might be the scheme upon which he was engaged, it could the better be carried into execution if it became known that he was Deacon Doak’s guest.

When the meal had come to an end, “Mr. Folsom” asked if one of the boys would show him the way to the Littlefield farm, and Joe eagerly proffered his services, although the stranger might readily have found his way alone.

When the two had departed, Larry went into the cow stable to learn if the tramps had done any mischief there, and to his relief found that they had

been content with a bed on the hay; but the half-burned matches which were strewn around gave proof of the danger to which the deacon's property had been exposed.

On his return to the house, it was as if Aunt Mercy and Nellie could not find words sufficient in which to express their admiration of "Mr. Folsom," and Larry was called upon to explain how it chanced that he was acquainted with one who must be a prosperous merchant, at the very least.

Despite the fact that he owed "Mr. Folsom" a debt of gratitude, the lad believed that he should make some effort to open the eyes of Mrs. Doak to the true character of the man, although he could not bring himself to say the worst.

"I reckon the deacon has met him before," he replied to the eager questions. "Us fellers always called him Slick Jake, an' he was kind'er mixed up in the row when the watch an' money was lost."

"Did he help you get the things back?" Nellie asked, as if certain the reply would be in the affirmative.

“Well, he was in the scrape. I don’t jest like the idea of his stoppin’ here ; but —”

“Why, Larry Hudson !” Mrs. Doak cried, reproachfully. “I am surprised to hear you talk like that after all Mr. Folsom has done for us. But for him we might have been driven out of house an’ home by the tramps.”

“I reckon perhaps that’s so, unless some of the Littlefields had happened along ; but all the same I wish he wasn’t here.”

Nellie looked as if offended by these words, and Mrs. Doak had very much to say regarding the sin of ingratitude, dwelling upon the theme so long that Larry, muttering something about the work which must be done at once, hurried out into the field.

Ned, who shared Nellie’s dislike at hearing anything against the man to whom they owed so much, remained in the house, and Larry had an opportunity for reflection as he hoed the potatoes.

“Slick Jake will clean this place out if somethin’ ain’t done,” he muttered as he worked. “Of course the deacon’s bound to know him ; but if Jake lays right down to it, he’ll talk the teeth out of the old

man's head. Perhaps I can frighten him away, an' then all hands will be down on me, for they think he's a reg'lar peach."

During two hours or more he remained there alone, for Ned had gone to the village with Joe, after the latter returned from the Littlefield farm, to tell the story of their adventures with tramps, and "Mr. Folsom" suddenly appeared.

"So you've turned farmer, eh, kid?" he said, in an exceedingly friendly tone.

"That's what I have, an' it goes 'way ahead of tryin' to get a livin' in the city."

"I reckon I helped you to the job."

"Well, I s'pose you did, though it wasn't what you planned when you swiped the deacon's watch an' money."

"Mr. Folsom" chewed a blade of grass reflectively, and then suggested that they stroll over by the brook, where it was cooler and less exposed to view of those at the farmhouse.

"I've been waitin' for a chance to have a serious talk with you, kid, and the sooner it's done the better, so far as my business is concerned."

“Goin’ to make a trade, eh?” Larry asked, as he threw down the hoe, and walked by “Mr. Folsom’s” side.

“Well, it might be you could do me a good turn, and it’s quite as likely that, if I was so disposed, you wouldn’t find this to be a very pleasant home. After all I’ve done for the family, I reckon they’d be ready to take my word a little quicker than they would yours.”

“See here, Jake,” Larry cried, “have you got nerve enough to stay here till the deacon comes home?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

“Don’t you allow he’s got eyes in his head? He knows you for the duck what robbed him, an’ I reckon you won’t cut much ice in this family after he breaks out.”

“But the question is, kid, was I the one what touched him on the Fourth? Of course the other man and I may look something alike; but I was in Boston the first two weeks in July, therefore couldn’t have met the deacon in New York.”

“So that’s the story, is it?”

"Something after that style. Now sit down, and let's map out our plan," "Mr. Folsom" said, as he threw himself on the grass, the two having by this time arrived at the bank of the brook, where the maple-trees afforded a most grateful shelter against the hot rays of the sun.

Larry did as he was bidden, but objected most strenuously against sharing in any plan concocted by Slick Jake.

"It ain't ours," he said, sharply. "Whatever scheme you've got is all yours."

"Very well, we'll put it that way. I've turned over a new leaf since you saw me last, kid."

"Oh, you have, eh?" Master Hudson said, sarcastically. "What lay are you on now?"

"I've gone into the business of selling farming implements, and count on living straight from this out."

"No more crooked business?" Larry asked, incredulously.

"None in mine; I've reformed, an' reckon myself an honest man."

"Gettin' a good livin' at it?"

“Well, only fair; but it’ll pick up as I make customers. Now I had hit upon Canton as the place where I might earn a dollar; of course I had no idea you were here, and my happening along when the tramps were running matters their own way was a bit of luck for all on the farm.”

“An’ to hear Aunt Mercy talk you’d think that we’d all got our throats cut if you hadn’t come.”

“Perhaps she isn’t so very far out of the way. Those hoboes knew they had the upper hands, and I reckon they’d carried on high if I hadn’t showed up.”

“I allow we’d been in a tight place, though Joe an’ Ned could have brought up somebody from Littlefield’s.”

“Yes, they started out for that purpose, met me, and the job was done in short order. I ain’t takin’ any too much credit on myself, but yet I’ll hold to it that I saved Deacon Doak’s property to a greater or less degree, as the fancy of the tramps might have dictated. Having done that, I’m invited to stay till the owner of Herdsdale comes home. The chances are he’ll think he has seen me before; but I shall show him the mistake, and then, inasmuch as he’s

one of the solid men hereabouts, I will try to sell him goods cheaper than he can get them in the city. If he isn't needing anything in my line, no harm has been done."

"You've got it fixed in great shape, an' I can't see what you want of me."

"Not very much, kid, and that's a fact. When I persuade the deacon that he never saw me before, you have only to hold your tongue. The folks here know you and I are old friends, from what was said when we met, therefore it's only necessary to say that you bought blacking and brushes of me when I kept a shop on Fulton Street. That's easy enough to remember, and if you stick to the story, at the same time swearin' I ain't the duck who touched the deacon on the Fourth, I'll give you a big slice of what I pick up here."

This proposition aroused Larry's suspicions once more. While Slick Jake spoke of having resolved to become an honest man, Master Hudson was disposed to believe him; but to talk of paying for a lie and for keeping silent as to other falsehoods, smacked of Jake's old-time work.

“Your honest business must bring in big money for you to put out so much.”

“Well, I’m where I can’t help myself, kid. If you blow your mouth some of the people may believe you, and my business will suffer. I’ve been crooked, I’ll admit, and now I must make some sacrifices.”

“Well, s’pose I don’t agree to tell about that shop on Fulton Street, an’ swear to the deacon that it was you who got away with his ticker and his leather?”

“In that case, kid, I must count you my enemy, and take measures accordingly. I shall do the friendly act by the deacon, and tell him you’re not a kid that can be trusted. Any old story will do to have you fired off of this farm, and I shall cook up a good one. But there’s no need of threatenin’ a bright chap like you. This town of Canton can be worked to the queen’s taste, especially when it’s known that I am visiting at Deacon Doak’s. I’ll make a big stake, and you shall have as much of it as you could earn in five years by farming. That boy Joe tells me you’re to get eight dollars a month.

Stand by me, and if things go as I'm countin' on, you'll have five hundred flat in your fist the day I pull out."

"I don't want to go into that kind of business," Larry replied, decidedly. "I never did anything crooked, an' it won't pay me to strike in now when I've got the chance of my life."

"Then I'm bound to protect myself, and we'll see who comes out best. Perhaps you may block my game; but I'll go bail you won't be allowed to stay twenty-four hours after the deacon gets back."

Larry tried in vain to keep back the look of distress which came into his eyes. He had no doubt but that Slick Jake, who would not scruple at any wickedness, could work him great harm, and it seemed certain his life at Herdsdale must come to a speedy end in case he refused to accede to the proposition.

"Mr. Folsom" evidently understood somewhat of that which was in the boy's mind, for he said, insinuatingly:

"Look here, kid, I don't want to be hard on you unless I'm driven to the wall. It's mighty little I'm

asking of you, and suppose you take time to think it over? The deacon isn't likely to be home for two or three days; what do you say to leaving matters as they are for that length of time? Hold your tongue and I'll hold mine till the jay flashes up. Then you can decide."

Larry was at a loss for an answer, and "Mr. Folsom" said, persuasively:

"I'm offering you a good bargain, kid. If I should go up to the house now, while all hands believe they owe their lives to me, and set about giving you a black eye, you wouldn't be allowed to wait till morning. Then I'd have the deacon to myself, without fear of interference from you. What do you say?"

Larry's brain was in a whirl. He believed Slick Jake would be able to do all he threatened, and the idea of being forced to leave Herdsdale, particularly with an undeserved stain on his character, was something too terrible to be thought of calmly.

"Mr. Folsom" could guess what was in the boy's mind, and he said, in a friendly tone:

“Come on, kid, we’ll go up to the house, and let things drift for a spell.”

Larry made no reply ; but arose to his feet, walking meekly by Slick Jake’s side, which was much the same as if he had agreed to the latter’s proposition.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCHEME.

MASTER HUDSON was in a decidedly unenviable frame of mind as he walked with Slick Jake from the brook to the house, after the latter had made the proposition which was much the same as an offer of partnership in such villainous scheme as the confidence man intended to work upon the people of Canton and vicinity.

As the matter presented itself to his mind, the coming of "Mr. Folsom" was the signal for his departure, unless he was willing to take part in swindling the old man who had given him a home when he was in sore need of one.

That Slick Jake would do exactly as he had threatened, in case his proposition was not accepted, Larry knew full well, and there was no question in the boy's mind but that the man, who was credited by Aunt Mercy with having saved the deacon's property

from destruction, would tell such a story, even though it should be false from beginning to end, as would ensure his (Larry's) disgrace.

If it was necessary, Master Hudson could walk away from the farm without any great show of sorrow, provided he might count Deacon Doak's family as being friendly toward him; but to go like a criminal whose evil deeds have just been discovered, was more than he cared to contemplate calmly.

He had only to tell one little lie in order to hold his place on the farm until such time as he had earned enough to purchase a home of his own, and that which Slick Jake might give him for his silence would represent his wages for five years' work. Surely the temptation was great!

On arriving at the farmhouse Aunt Mercy welcomed "Mr. Folsom" warmly, as did all the children, and Larry fancied they treated him coldly because he had been so unwise as to suggest that the confidence man was not all he represented himself.

It was as if no one thought of the work to be done, so absorbed were all, even including Aunt Mercy, in thoughts of the danger just passed, and

the sole topic of conversation was regarding tramps and their lawless doings.

Larry would have slipped away in order to continue his self-imposed task of hoeing potatoes; but "Mr. Folsom" was not inclined to lose sight of him for a single moment.

"Considering the natural excitement of the day, I am certain Mrs. Doak will excuse you from work," Slick Jake said, as he prevented Master Hudson from leaving the kitchen when he would have returned to the potato patch, for it still lacked a full hour of dinner-time.

Aunt Mercy replied that the children were at liberty to do as they pleased, and she "hoped" the deacon would not find fault in case the boys had failed to accomplish as much as he fancied they ought.

"It's been a dreadful tryin' time," she said, emphatically, "an' if I find it hard to settle down to work, it isn't to be wondered at that the boys should want to stay 'round the house till things get more quiet."

"I don't believe the deacon will think that's any

reason for our layin' still," Larry replied, with a feeble attempt at cheeriness. "I'm jest as well off in the potato patch, an' reckon I'd better go back."

"Mr. Folsom" would have detained him by force, although exerting it in a playful fashion; but Larry readily evaded the outstretched hand, and hurried toward the field, more eager to be alone in order that he might turn Slick Jake's proposition over in his mind without interruption, than he was to hoe the potatoes.

When half an hour had elapsed, during which time he had worked as industriously with his hands as his thoughts, Ned joined him with the announcement that dinner would be "ready mighty soon."

"I reckon you fellers have been down to the village?" Larry said, rather by way of opening a conversation than from a desire for information.

"Yes, Joe and I went down there a spell, an' then came up to Littlefield's."

"They wanted to hear about the tramps, I reckon?"

“Yes; but we didn’t have the chance to tell ’em much, because Mr. Folsom had given that family all the news.”

“Did he stay a great while over there?”

“Pretty near all the forenoon. I guess he’ll do quite a lot of business with Mr. Littlefield.”

“What is he sellin’?”

“A patent mowin’-machine. He’s countin’ on lettin’ Mr. Littlefield have the right to sell ’em in this county, an’ he says it won’t take a man more’n six months to make himself rich.”

“A patent mowin’-machine!” Larry repeated, as he leaned on his hoe, and gazed at Ned in blank amazement.

“That’s what it is. Say, I should think you’d know all about it if you was acquainted with him in the city.”

“He wasn’t in that kind of business when I used to run across him. Has he got the machines with him?”

“No; but he showed a lot of pictures an’ papers that tell all about ’em. It’s a new invention, an’ the men that go in with him will make a pile of money, the way he figures it out.”

“So that’s the scheme, eh?” Larry said, half to himself. “Does he count on givin’ the deacon the right to sell ’em, too?”

“Well, you see he’s got two things that he’s invented. The other is a machine that will stow away hay on the mow better’n any four men could do it. You only have to set the thing on the barn floor, an’ it does all the work after you’ve pitched the hay on top of it. Mr. Littlefield acted as if he wanted to buy the right to sell that, too; but Mr. Folsom said he was kind’er bound to let the deacon have it.”

Larry resumed his task of hoeing once more, and, from the expression of bewilderment on his face, one could well understand that he was trying to grasp more fully this scheme of “Mr. Folsom’s.”

Ned began to speculate as to what the possibilities might have been in case the gentleman from the city had not arrived so opportunely; but to these remarks Larry gave no heed.

After a time, however, and while his companion was in the midst of a long and startling story of the mischief done by tramps on a farm a dozen miles distant, Master Hudson asked, abruptly:

“Did Jake count that Mr. Littlefield would pay him a big lot of money for the right to sell his machines?”

“It ain’t so awful much when you think of what a pile can be made. He said he’d never sold one of these chances less’n five thousand dollars, an’ folks were jest tumblin’ over themselves to buy at that price; but he was careful who he sold to, for you see he expects to make any amount of money when trade begins.”

“Is Mr. Littlefield goin’ to give him sich a pile as that?”

“I dunno. He allowed that he hadn’t as much, an’ Mr. Folsom was real kind of generous, for he said that he knew well enough the dollars would come rollin’ in by next spring, so he’d take a thousand in cash, an’ Mr. Littlefield’s notes for the balance, which was jest the same as if he went partners with him.”

“An’ he’s goin’ to play the same game on the deacon?” Larry said, after a long pause.

“I reckon he asks more for the hay machine, ’cause that’ll save the work of five or six men. I hope we’ll have one here! Only think that when

you want to load a ton of hay for market, all you'll have to do is back up the cart an' set the thing to work. You can loaf 'round till it's stacked on, an' then there's nothin' to be done but haul it away."

"Yes, I see," Larry said, with a peculiar inflection of voice, and then he plied the hoe with unusual vigour, apparently giving no heed as Ned continued to dilate upon the advantages of the machines, and the vast amount of money the deacon and Mr. Littlefield would be able to earn during the winter.

Now Larry had the outlines of "Mr. Folsom's" scheme. He was not certain whether the enterprising gentleman might attempt to dispose of the notes which would be given in partial payment if a bargain was made; but he felt certain that Slick Jake did not propose to sell anything of value, and the cash payments received would represent his first profit in the transaction.

In fact Master Hudson did not vex his brain with trying to compute the full extent of the swindle. It was enough, so far as he was concerned, that Slick

Jake counted on getting two thousand or more dollars from the farmers, and he was expected to act a certain part in the swindle.

“I won’t hold my tongue,” he said to himself, after some deliberation, and even as the words were formed in his mind came the thought that, unless he agreed to the proposition made by the swindler, he would be obliged to leave the farm with a most serious blot on his character.

Ned insisted that it was dinner-time; but Larry refused to leave his work.

“I’ll get along without anything to eat this noon,” he said, when his companion urged him to cease his labours.

His perplexity and distress of mind was so great that he had no desire for food, and, in addition to this reason, he wished to avoid another meeting with Slick Jake.

Ned exclaimed against his losing dinner, and, finally, realising that it would be impossible to keep out of “Mr. Folsom’s” sight during all the time which must intervene before the deacon’s return, he followed his companion to the house.

Aunt Mercy and Nellie were so deeply occupied with listening to the entertaining stories of city life told by their guest, that but little attention was given to Larry, and he found himself very much alone even when with the members of the family.

While they were at the dinner-table "Mr. Folsom" said, with a meaning glance at Larry, but addressing himself to no one in particular :

"A lad who has the opportunity to live here at Herdsdale is very fortunate indeed, and especially so when he is given the chance to earn considerably more than his board. I know of hundreds of bright boys who would do anything within their power to hold such a situation."

This was much the same as if Slick Jake had spoken directly to Larry, holding up before him that which would be lost if he dared expose him in the swindle he was about to perpetrate in the neighbourhood.

Aunt Mercy agreed with her guest, and the latter added :

"I can fancy how humiliating it would be for a lad, if he had found a home here, to be sent away in disgrace. Suppose, for instance, that a bright boy from

the city, charmed with a farmer's life, should get work on such a place as this, without telling his employer of what he may have done in the past. Then picture the situation if some one happened to tell all the shameful story. Of course he would be driven away at once, and it is not reasonable to believe that he could readily get a position with any other person."

Larry's face flushed crimson. It seemed as if every member of the family must understand that the guest was speaking directly to him, and would believe that there was a story of shame or crime in his past life which he was trying to conceal.

If he could have been alone with Slick Jake just at that moment, it is almost certain he would have agreed to anything the swindler might propose, so horrible was the thought of being driven away in disgrace. He believed that whatsoever story "Mr. Folsom" might tell regarding him would be believed by the deacon, for it did not seem probable that such a gentlemanly person as the guest appeared to be would deliberately tell a falsehood for the purpose of injuring a poor boy.

Larry ate his food hastily, and as soon as he had gone through the form of dinner hurried out of the house with the excuse that he was eager to finish a certain portion of the work before it was time to go after the cows.

A most dismal afternoon he spent, and at night-fall he set off alone for the pasture, returning just as the family were gathering around the supper-table.

It was necessary then that he should milk, and by the time this had been done "Mr. Folsom" and Aunt Mercy were on the porch, while Nellie was washing the dishes.

Larry's portion of the meal had been left on the table for him, and he made haste to satisfy his hunger lest Nellie should be delayed in her task.

Joe, who had been with the guest nearly all day, was now eager to pay another visit to the village, in order to tell once more the thrilling story of his experience with tramps, and when he proposed that Larry accompany him, the latter accepted the invitation without hesitation.

On their arrival at the village store the two boys were questioned closely regarding the events of the

past night, and when this subject had been exhausted, the gossips of the place set about discussing the coming of "Mr. Folsom."

It was known that he was the proprietor of an extensive manufactory, who had come to Canton in order to appoint agents for his wares, and the general opinion of all appeared to be that it was within his power to do a great amount of good in the vicinity.

"I'm told that if he finds trade enough hereabout he'll bring his factory to this village, an' with two or three hundred men workin' at high wages, business will begin to hum," one of the gossips said, with an air of wisdom.

The others were of much the same opinion, and before Joe was ready to return home Larry understood that it would be very difficult indeed to convince these sanguine people that the alleged prosperous merchant was neither more nor less than a swindler, whose only stock in trade consisted of his tongue and his fashionable clothing.

When the boys finally returned home, Aunt Mercy was waiting for them before beginning the evening devotions, and immediately after she had finished

her prayer, in which the "stranger" was particularly remembered, Larry went to bed.

Here, after his roommates had fallen asleep, Master Hudson twisted and turned in bed as he tried in vain to make up his mind to do what he believed his duty, without regard to the probable disgrace which might come to him. It was exceedingly difficult to decide that he would tell the truth at the expense of losing the only home he had ever known; but yet he realised that it should be done.

He knew without being told that the swindler was reposing on Aunt Mercy's best feather bed in the guest-chamber, and that all the household looked upon him as a true, honest gentleman who had befriended them in their hour of need.

The next day passed much as had the preceding one, save that Larry contrived to avoid another confidential interview with Slick Jake, and on the second morning after the arrival of the alleged manufacturer Deacon Doak came home.

He had journeyed on the night express, and entered the house just as Larry was building the kitchen fire.

Aunt Mercy hastened out from her room to greet him, therefore the boy was not called upon, as he had feared he might be, for a detailed account of what had happened on the farm during its owner's absence.

One glimpse of the deacon had been sufficient to decide the question which had been troubling Larry so seriously, and he said stoutly to himself as he went toward the cow stables:

"I'll tell the whole truth, if they question me, an' then if I'm driven away it can't be helped. It's bound to be known sooner or later that Slick Jake has been playin' it on 'em, an' then they'll be sorry for sendin' me off. But that ain't likely to do me much good," he added, bitterly.

Master Hudson came back with the milk just as "Mr. Folsom" stepped out on the porch, and at that moment the deacon came from the shed with an armful of wood.

"Hello!" he cried, in astonishment, dropping his burden suddenly and staring open-mouthed at the guest. "What are you doin' here?"

"This is the gentleman who saved us from the

tramps," Aunt Mercy cried, coming from the kitchen as she heard her husband's salutation. "He's down this way sellin' farmin' tools —"

"Why, mother! That's the man who stole my watch an' money!"

"Don't, father, don't say what you'll be sorry for!" the good woman cried, in distress. "This is the gentleman I've been tellin' you about. If it hadn't been for him nobody knows what would have happened."

At this point Slick Jake came forward with outstretched hand, saying as he did so:

"I see you are mistaking me for some other person. Here is my business card, and if you choose to take the trouble you will soon understand that a man in my position can't possibly be a thief."

The deacon rubbed his eyes, and Larry, believing Slick Jake would soon succeed in persuading the farmer that he was an honest merchant, went to the pasture with the cows.

He had hardly more than disappeared in the distance before Deacon Doak called loudly for him,

but, seeing that it was too late to summon him, listened to the explanations made by his guest.

When Master Hudson returned it could readily be seen that Slick Jake had convinced his host, for the family were at the table, and no one listened more intently or with greater apparent interest to the conversation of the guest than did the deacon.

As soon as breakfast was over the three boys hurried away to the potato patch, where they worked industriously until nearly noon, Joe and Ned trying to make up for lost time, and Larry plodding away as usual, his mind dwelling upon the possibilities of the near future, rather than the task before him.

Then the deacon suddenly appeared, come, as the boys supposed, to make certain they had worked as they should during his absence; but instead of looking around scrutinisingly as would have been natural, he said to Larry:

“I want to talk with you a bit. We’ll go over by the brook, an’ in the meanwhile Joe an’ Ned can keep their hoes movin’.”

Larry looked closely at the deacon, trying to learn if Slick Jake had already begun his efforts at driving

him away from the farm; but nothing could be learned by the scrutiny. The farmer looked grave, as he might well have been if he distrusted the gentleman from the city, or in case he proposed to discharge his "green hand."

Deacon Doak came to a halt in the same spot where Slick Jake had stood when he made his proposition to Larry, and said in a low tone, as if he intended to keep the conversation a secret from the other boys:

"They tell me that you know this man who drove the tramps away?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'd met him in the city, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now see here, Larry, I want you to come out flat-footed with what you know. I was certain the man who is here sellin' farmin' tools was the same fellow who robbed me; but he says it's all a mistake, an' comes near provin' that it is."

Larry was very pale, and his lips trembled as he replied with as much show of calmness as it was possible to call to his aid:

“Before I say anything, deacon, I want to tell you what Slick Jake threatens, if I don’t stick to the story he’s made up —”

“Who did you say?”

“Slick Jake, Mr. Folsom — the duck what stole your watch an’ money. He told me to say that he kept store on Fulton Street, an’ allowed if I didn’t tell it he’d have me driven away from the farm.”

“How did he count on doin’ that?”

“By tellin’ that I’d done somethin’ crooked, or any kind of a yarn that would make you want to get rid of me. Aunt Mercy an’ the others think he’s terrible nice, an’ got kind’er huffy when I said he wasn’t all right. They’ll believe everything he says, an’ it’ll be a case of my leavin’; but they’re bound to know sometime that he’s a reg’lar beat. I’ll give you the story straight, an’ then if he fixes it so’s I’m turned out, you come to me quiet like, an’ give me a chance to sneak away when the others don’t know it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

LARRY'S REWARD.

THE deacon remained silent and thoughtful when Larry ceased speaking, and not until it seemed to the boy as if a very long time had passed did he say anything. Then it was to ask :

“Is there any story to your discredit that can be truthfully told, my boy?”

“Not a thing; but it won't be hard work for Slick Jake to cook up somethin'. I don't claim that I've been so terrible good; but then again I haven't gone crooked in any way.”

“You think this man is the same fellow who stole my watch an' money in New York?”

“I know he is, an' if you want to make sure, let me go down to the city an' get my old pardner. Tim knows this duck jest as well as I do, an' he'll give the story in great shape. Slick Jake counts



“I DON'T CLAIM THAT I'VE BEEN SO TERRIBLE GOOD.”

on makin' you believe that he was in Boston on the Fourth — ”

“That's jest what he told me.”

“He offered to give me some of his pile if I'd hold my tongue while he worked the town.”

“Here is what puzzles me,” Deacon Doak said, thoughtfully. “Neighbour Littlefield is a cautious man, an' counts on knowin' what he's doin' before partin' with a cent; but yet he's paid this man a thousand dollars in cash, an' given his note for three thousand more, to buy the rights to sell the patent mowin'-machine in this county. How can he make sich a mistake?”

“Jake is slick enough to pull the wool over his eyes, an' he counts on doin' the same with you on a hay machine.”

“It must be a great thing, if all he tells is true,” the deacon said, reflectively, as he mentally figured the profit which might be made by the sale of such a labour-saving device.

“If he had so many of these machines as he claims, why didn't he bring two or three around, an' let you see how they worked?”

"He promised to send 'em next week."

"That'll be after you've paid over your money."

"Look here, Larry, I can't get it out of my head that he's the same bunco man who got my watch an' money, but he tells a story I ain't able to dispute. Now I'm willin' to pay him fifteen hundred dollars in cash, an' my note for as much more, if he can give me the legal right to sell the machine for pitchin' hay."

"He might give you the right to sell it, even if he never saw such a machine. Look here, deacon, I don't want to see you swindled, an' if you say the word, I'll go after Tim Jones. I've got cash enough of my own to pay the railroad fares."

"It seems almost too bad to spend so much money," the good man said, musingly.

"It's a good deal better'n lettin' Slick Jake do you out of fifteen hundred dollars."

"You're right, Larry, you're right; but we'll have to make some excuse for sendin' you away. I wouldn't want Mr. Folsom to think I'd doubted his word, if it should turn out that you'd made a mistake, because it would be a big thing to have the agency of that machine."

“I’m sure there ain’t any mistake, for he talked the whole thing over with me, an’ I know him better’n I do you. Can’t you think up somethin’ you want me to ’tend to that’ll take till night? I could catch the noon train, an’ be back here by supper-time.”

“I’ll send you into the swamp back of the pasture to cut alders, an’ if you don’t happen to go there it won’t be my fault.”

“All right; give me the word so’s I can get away before dinner.”

“I’ll tell mother to put up a lunch for you, an’ here’s the money to pay your way,” the deacon added as he handed the boy two dollars.

“I’d rather use my own stuff. You can pay me afterwards, if you feel like it,” and Larry refused to take the proffered bank-note.

The deacon carried out his portion of the scheme while Larry was in the chamber getting his small store of money, and, half an hour before the noon train for New York was due, Master Hudson disappeared in the thicket at the rear of the barns, as if on his way to the swamp.

No one appeared to think it strange that Larry had been sent away just at that time. It was not unusual for one or the other of the boys to do such work as cutting alders, and the reason for his leaving the house before dinner was readily explained by the fact that it would have caused him to be a full hour later at the scene of his labours if he waited until the meal was made ready.

During the afternoon Deacon Doak listened to the schemes of the wealthy manufacturer, and more than once did he hope Larry would discover that he had been mistaken, so promising and alluring were the word pictures drawn by Slick Jake.

The owner of Herdsdale did not appear to be exactly satisfied with the story told about the tramps' visit, for he questioned his wife and daughter closely until it became apparent that Larry had borne the brunt of the affray, and was rather more than holding the unwelcome visitors in check when "Mr. Folsom" arrived.

"I think the boy is entitled to about as much credit as anybody, an' if you'd let him have his

head, mother, he'd brought the Littlefields here in short order," the deacon said, reflectively.

In this "Mr. Folsom" agreed heartily, which caused Aunt Mercy to set him down in her mind as one who was ever ready to detract from his own merits in order to give another more credit than was absolutely deserved.

At nightfall Joe and Ned were surprised and mystified at being ordered by the deacon to go after the cows, when, as they supposed, Master Hudson would bring them home with him.

"Larry'll fetch 'em down," Joe said, as if that assertion ought to dispose of the matter; but his father insisted that he and Ned should attend to it, and off they started, trying in vain to make out why it was necessary for them to walk so far when there appeared to be no real reason for so doing.

At supper-time Nellie inquired why Larry did not come home, and when Aunt Mercy began to speculate as to the reason of the boy's absence the alleged manufacturer began to look concerned.

After the evening meal was finished and the chores done up for the night, the family went out

on the porch, as was the custom during the warm weather, and while there "Mr. Folsom" did his best to conclude the bargain with the deacon, insisting that it was necessary he should leave town early next morning.

"I can sell the right to Littlefield, if you don't want it," he said, almost sharply, to his host, "and there's no good reason why I should stay around here another day when time is so precious."

The deacon raised this point and that, all of which were calculated to occupy some time in the discussing, and when the sun set the family were still listening to "Mr. Folsom's" stories of the money to be earned by the sale of his wonderful machines.

Then Joe and Ned came in from the stables, and five minutes later Deacon Doak saw two boys walking through the garden toward the house.

"There's Larry," he said, "an' it looks as if he'd picked up a friend."

Aunt Mercy, probably thinking there were boys enough in the family already, frowned as Master Hudson announced the stranger by saying:

"This is the feller what was my pardner when I

lived in New York. You invited him to come up sometime, an' here he is."

Tim stepped forward jauntily as if to greet the deacon, when his glance fell upon the supposed "Mr. Folsom."

"Why, hello, Jake, what 'er you doin' out here?"

The manufacturer of machines flushed slightly, and then said, sharply :

"Who are you, and what do you mean by calling me Jake?"

"'Cause that's your name, same's mine's Tim Jones. Now don't try to give me any bluff, old man, for it won't go down."

The guest looked angrily at Larry for an instant, and then said to the deacon, who was eyeing him closely :

"I suppose this is some trick of that jail-bird's you've taken into your family. I didn't intend to say anything about him, hoping he was trying to lead an honest life; but this attempt of his to excite your suspicions as to my identity is more than I can stand calmly. That boy is both a liar and a thief —"

“Look here, Jake,” Tim interrupted, “don’t slip your trolley yet awhile or you’ll get into a fuss. You’re lyin’ about Larry, for he never did a crooked thing in his life, an’ the deacon here ought’er know how much he can bank on you, seein’s it ain’t so long ago since you pinched his watch an’ money. Deacon, don’t you remember that I was one of the fellers what made that duffer give up your stuff?”

“I do believe I’ve seen you before,” the deacon replied; but he looked eagerly toward his guest as if hoping he might be able to disprove the charges made against him.

“I don’t intend to make very much talk,” “Mr. Folsom” said, with a poor assumption of dignity. “I came up here to give you the chance of your life, in a business way, and that young villain to whom you’ve given a good home chooses to intimate that I’m not as straight as a string. He has found one of his friends, told him what to say, and the two come here trying to excite suspicions against me. It isn’t worth my while to bandy words with such as they. I’ll go down to Mr. Littlefield’s, close up the trade for the hay tender, and leave town in the morn-

ing. By listening to these little rascals you've lost an opportunity to make yourself a very rich man."

The alleged manufacturer arose as if to carry out his declared intentions ; but before he could traverse the length of the porch a man came up out of the garden, stepping directly in front of him.

"I'll have to ask you to go back with me, Jake," the newcomer said as he slipped a steel band around the swindler's wrist, "an' if you're as wise as usual there won't be any kick made."

"What charge have you against me?"

"The same old one, though from all accounts I wouldn't be surprised if there were more to come in from the town." Then the officer walked quickly away with his prisoner, and Aunt Mercy exclaimed as she held up both hands in amazement :

"Who'd thought it! Who'd thought it, an' he such a pleasant spoken man, too!"

"Did you bring the officer with you, Larry?" Deacon Doak asked, quietly.

"Yes, sir. Tim said the cops were lookin' for Jake, so we told 'em where he was."

"He's got a deal of power with his tongue, an'

but for you I allow he'd walked away with fifteen hundred dollars of mine, for I'd have paid over that much without raisin' a hair."

By this time Aunt Mercy began to understand that she had very much for which to thank Larry, and by way of beginning to atone for the reproof she had administered both by word and look, the good woman set about making Tim Jones welcome.

Larry's old partner had such a supper that night as he had never eaten before, and when he went upstairs two hours later with his friend, he said, confidentially :

"This is a great snap you've got, old man ; but I don't seem to catch on to the prayers. Is it that way every night, or is this a little extra 'cause the deacon saved his money ?"

Larry explained the rules of the household, and when he had concluded Master Jones said, emphatically :

"It's a great lay-out, even with that thrown in. If I could only strike somethin' of the kind I'd be way up in G."

"Perhaps it'll come your way after a spell, Tim."

“I don't have sich luck. Here are you livin' on the fat of the land, sleepin' in a boss bed, an' havin' reg'lar folks, while I think I'm playin' in luck if the day's work brings in enough to pay for a bed an' my grub.”

Then Larry confided in Tim his intention to own a farm some day, and the latter insisted that he be allowed to “come into the game.”

“I'll save every cent I can get hold of, old man, an' we'll buy a place in partnership.”

To this Larry agreed heartily, and by that time the charms of the “boss bed” had such a hold upon Master Jones that he fell asleep.

It was decided next morning that Tim should spend a week at Herdsdale, much to his delight, and before the visit had come to a close the deacon said gravely, one evening when the family and their guest were seated on the porch :

“I've been thinkin' how near I came to givin' that swindler fifteen hundred hard-earned dollars, an' I'd done it, too, but for Larry. Neighbour Littlefield has been down to the city tryin' to get back the thousand he paid the villain ; but there don't seem to be much show of his succeedin'.”

“I don't know how I would have got along the night the tramps were here, if it hadn't been for Larry,” Aunt Mercy added.

“I'm payin' him eight dollars a month, an' he's earnin' every cent of it, — I only wish Joe an' Ned would work as hard, — therefore, we can't figger that he's receivin' more'n his just due from us. I count myself an honest man, an' as such I'm bound to pay my debts; we owe Larry somethin' besides his wages, an' seein's how he counts on buyin' a farm of his own, I'll start him along by givin' him that five-acre lot out by the swamp; it's good land, an' when he gets a little forehanded he can add to it. We'll have the deed made to-morrow mornin'.”

Tim squeezed his partner's hand, and Larry tried very hard to say something by way of thanks; but the words stuck in his throat. Twice he attempted to speak, and then went out behind the cow stable, where Tim found him ten minutes later.

One can't really tell the whole of a story which isn't ended, and, therefore, it is time to bring this to a close, however much one would enjoy describing

what Tim Jones saw and did during the week that he remained at Herdsdale as Larry's guest.

It was only one year ago that Slick Jake visited Canton trying to sell imaginary machines, and to-day matters at Herdsdale are much the same as when Tim's visit came to an end.

Larry still owns the five-acre lot near the swamp, as a matter of course, and has put in the bank ninety-six dollars, his entire year's wages, with the intention of buying more land. To this amount Tim Jones has added sixty-four dollars, for he counts on being Larry's partner in the enterprise, and Aunt Mercy believes that when the boys get ready to begin business the deacon will make another contribution.

Next month Tim is to leave the city and live at Herdsdale, for Deacon Doak has agreed to pay him eight dollars a month if he proves as valuable at farming as is Larry, and if the two lads ever succeed in owning a "reg'lar place" the public shall be informed of it at the earliest possible moment.

THE END.

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