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J. T. TROWBRIDGE





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"HE HAD NOTHING ON HIS FEET BUT SOME OLD RAGS LOOSELY
TIED WITH STRINGS," PAGE 9.

A START IN LIFE

A STORY OF THE GENESEE COUNTRY

BY

J. T. TROWBRIDGE

II

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LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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THE
ABORIGINAL

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A START IN LIFE

CHAPTER I.

SHOWS THAT ONE NEED NOT GO BAREFOOT EVEN WHEN
ONE IS WITHOUT SHOES.

WHEN the region lying west of the Mohawk River was mostly a wilderness, and the oldest of the towns which now star its banks were little more than frontier villages, in the streets of one of them, bearing then, as now, the imperial name of Rome, there appeared, at the close of a gloomy afternoon, a limping, overgrown boy.

He was about seventeen years old, and perhaps not large for his age; it might have been the gauntness of his frame and the shortness of his rent coat-sleeves and tattered trousers which gave him his overgrown appearance. He did not limp because he was lame, but he had nothing on his feet but some old rags

loosely tied with strings; they were continually getting awry, and he had to pick his way over sharp clods.

It was late in November; and what is now a handsome street, well paved, with level sidewalks, fine residences and showy shops, was then a rough wagon-road cut up into gullies and ruts; the puddles had become ice, and the wrinkles and ridges of frozen mud were cruel to unprotected feet.

The wayfarer stopped occasionally to adjust his bandages and tighten the strings at his ankles, and at last turned up at a store, the front of which bore the sign,

BROOKE BROTHERS & Co.

As he entered, he took from his jacket pocket a crumpled paper, which he handed to a man who came forward, and then watched with painful solicitude while he unfolded the scrap and pursed his brows together over it, as if either it were hard to read, or its contents were unsatisfactory.

“Did Thomas Tadmore give you this?” the storekeeper inquired.

“Yes, sir,” faltered the short-sleeved, bare-ankled boy.

“You are Walden Westlake?”

“Yes, sir. I have worked for him all summer. He has never paid me anything. I have got through now; and when I asked for my money he gave me this.”

“It’s an order for clothes and shoes, to the amount of twenty dollars,” the storekeeper said to another man who now came forward. “We don’t owe Thomas Tadmore twenty dollars, do we?”

“We don’t owe anybody by that name anything; not a dollar,” said the second man, who was considerably older than the first, reaching for the paper. “This looks like one of Tadmore’s tricks.”

The gaunt youth seemed to grow gaunter than ever at these words, and his anxious face took on an expression of despair.

“You have had dealings with him, haven’t you?” he said.

“Dealings enough,” said the older man. “But the indebtedness has always been the other way; it’s like getting grease out of a grindstone to collect money of Tom Tadmore.”

“But he has corn and potatoes and wool, which he says he is going to sell you,” the boy insisted. “Can’t you trust him for at least a part of this order? I have worn out my clothes working for him; my shoes have fairly dropped off my feet. Now winter is coming, and I don’t know what I am to do.”

“I’m sorry for you, my boy,” said the older man. “But we can’t trust Tadmore. Haven’t you found him out?”

“He hasn’t kept his word with me,” was the miserable reply. “But I didn’t think he would turn me off so, without anything.”

“It’s a hard time to get work,” said the younger man, handing back the order. “You’d better go home to your folks if you have any. Where do you live?”

Having put the worthless paper back into his pocket, Walden Westlake remained silent

for a moment, then answered with a swelling heart, —

“My folks live in Whitestown. But I can’t go back to them.” When pressed for the reason, he went on, his tongue growing eloquent when once loosed.

“My father died a year and a half ago; I am one of the younger children. Our oldest brother, Eli, is head now; a good man enough, but he’s a perfect tyrant, and he treats us outrageously. I stood it as long as I could, then I told my mother I wouldn’t be a slave to my own brother any longer; I was going to try my luck away from home. She couldn’t do anything for me; he has his way in spite of her; and, seeing just how it was, she said she didn’t know but I’d better go.”

“Didn’t your brother feed and clothe you decently?”

“Yes, the food and clothes were well enough.”

“Did he overwork you?”

“We had enough to do. But that I didn’t care for. I’m not afraid of work, and I should

have been contented to stay with him if he had been kind. He used to be. But almost the very day he took our father's place, and had authority over us, he changed. He made new rules; and, I tell you, we got hard words and something worse if we stepped over one of 'em. So I left last May, and came over here and hired out to Mr. Tadmore."

"Walked from the frying-pan into the fire, eh?" said the younger storekeeper, eying the boy with a sort of humorous commiseration.

"In one sense I did," replied Walden, his face kindling with intelligence and honest pride, which made those who heard him forget his split trousers-legs and bandaged feet. "He worked me half to death, and then half-starved me. But he never dared to strike me a blow. And we can take from a stranger what we can't take from our own kin."

"Well," said the man, kindly, "go and sit down by the fire, and toast your shins and think it over. It's a hard case, but I guess you'd better make up your mind to go home."

"I didn't run away; don't think that," said

Walden, looking back, as he started for the fireplace. "I walked away. I told my brother I would if he struck me another blow. 'In that case,' says he, 'I'll give you a flogging that will last you;' and he did give me a stinger! Then I came off with not much else but the clothes I had on, and they were too small even then."

"Don't you want to see your mother?"

"Don't I want to see—my"—But, instead of finishing the sentence, Walden Westlake gave way to unmanly tears.

CHAPTER II.

A GOOD HAND WITH AN AXE, BUT POOR AT FIGURES.

HE went and sat down by the open fire, and, pulling off the wrappings of rags, looked ruefully at his bare bruised feet. He tried to dig a sliver out of one of them with the point of a dull knife, by the light of the blazing logs, which one of the men came and poked for his benefit.

I wish I could picture him there, so lank and ungainly, so wretched and so ragged, his foot drawn up and his body crooked over it, the wincing face very near the callous sole and probing blade, in the red fire-gleam. In that strained position his sleeves slipped farther than ever up toward the sharp elbows, and the receding trousers-legs seemed to be taking final leave of the lean projecting shanks. But one could see that his features, if not hand-

some, had a rude strength, and that here was the rough material of a man.

Perhaps the younger storekeeper saw it, for in a little while he came and stood with his back to the fire, and his hands spread out towards it, parting his coat-tails, and looked down with genial curiosity at the bent, barefooted boy.

“Rather hard travelling, isn’t it?” he said, with a smile.

“It is for me!” Walden lowered his heel to the warm hearth, straightened the curve in his back, and, snapping the blade, returned the knife to his pocket. “I never went barefoot before in cold weather.”

“What sort of work have you been used to?”

“Almost every sort of farm-work; planting, hoeing, driving oxen, milking cows, sugar-making; I can’t tell what.”

“A good hand with an axe?”

The boy looked up with a smile. “I can make cord-wood of a tree about as quick as any fellow of my age,” he said, with modest confidence.

“Ever been much to school?”

“I’ve generally had about three months’ schooling in winter, till last winter.”

“Your tyrant of a brother kept you out?”

“No,” said Walden, frankly, eager to do justice even to the author of his woes. “It wasn’t his fault. He was willing I should go when work wasn’t driving. But we had a master who was as much of a tyrant in school as my brother was at home. One day he undertook to whale one of the little fellows for some trifling thing, when four or five big ones pitched in and turned him out. He couldn’t keep our school after that; so I lost a good half of the term.”

“That was a foolish thing for the big boys to do,” observed the storekeeper.

“I suppose it was,” the boy by the fire answered, with a laugh; “though I was never so tickled at anything in my life.”

“From a love of malicious fun?” queried the storekeeper, with a look of disapproval.

“Partly from a love of fun, maybe, but not malicious fun.” Walden grew serious as he added, “I think it was more from a love of jus-

tice. It was a satisfaction to see the master paid off for his cruelty to others."

All this time he was unconsciously giving glimpses of his own character to the shrewd and kindly storekeeper.

"Are you good at figures?" was the next question.

"Not so good as I ought to be, considering the amount of schooling I have had," he candidly admitted.

"Whose fault is that?"

"Partly my own, I suppose; for if a scholar is in earnest he can learn, even with poor teachers."

The storekeeper questioned him still further as to his proficiency in arithmetic; then remarking, with a regretful shake of his head, "It's a pity you did not do more in figures; there's nothing so useful in business," walked off to serve a customer.

Walden followed him with a quick glance, thinking, "If he had found I was first-rate at accounts, maybe he would have given me a place in his store." But immediately his good-

sense showed him the absurdity of such a thing. Glancing down at his lank, ill-clad limbs, he said to himself, "I'm no more fit for a clerk than a scrawny colt is for a war-horse!"

Then he sat warming himself, and contemplating his gloomy prospects, while the bleak November evening closed in. Without money, or work, or clothes, what was he to do?

It was the darkest hour in Walden Westlake's life; darker by far than the time when he left his comfortable home and went out to seek employment in a world which he knew well enough he would find rough. That was in the joyous days of spring; now winter had fairly begun. Then hope of success beckoned him on; now disheartening failure was his lot.

An inexpressible yearning possessed him to go back to his mother and his forsaken home. He longed to lay his face in his mother's lap, as he used to do when a child, tell her his griefs, feel her comforting hand upon his head, and hear her soothing voice, —

"There, there, my son! don't cry! it will all turn out right, I am sure, if you try to do right."

He knew that was just what she would say, and he endeavored to draw consolation and strength from such imagined sympathy and advice.

“If he had tried to do right!” But had he not tried? He had worked faithfully for Thomas Tadmire, and waited patiently for his pay, and now it appeared that he was never to get a cent of it. He could hardly repress his angry sobs as he thought of his bitter wrongs.

Was it his duty to return and humble himself to the brother who had given him that last undeserved flogging, in addition to the other hard blows and hard words which he had found too much to bear? He might have done even that, but for one thing.

“If it was May again, with the summer before us, and plenty of work, he would be glad to see me, and I shouldn’t be so much ashamed. But I know what he would say now. ‘Been idling all the season, have you? and now cold weather, an empty stomach, and bare bones send you back to them that can feed and clothe you; just as I expected! A pretty

prodigal you are!’ He sha’n’t say that,” the homeless one muttered to himself, after a moment’s reflection; “he never shall say that to me!”

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING QUESTION FROM THE FRIENDLY STORE-KEEPER.

AGAIN the younger man came and warmed his back at the fire, with his palms outspread behind him against the blaze.

“Well,” he said, as if reading the boy’s miserable thoughts, “what have you concluded to do?”

Walden was tying the rags on his feet again, in preparation for another dreary tramp over the frozen ground. He could not find voice to speak for a moment, and he went on adjusting the wrappings without looking up.

“I guess you’ll go back to your brother, won’t you?”

“To get more insults and very likely more blows!” Walden replied, lifting his eyes with a look of resolute despair. “No, sir; that’s the last thing I shall do.”

“Well, then, what’s the first thing?”

“The first thing seems to be the only thing I *can* do to-night. I shall go back to Mr. Tadmore. I’ll tell him what you say about the order, and demand my money.”

“I’m afraid you won’t get it,” said the man.

“I don’t expect to. But if he won’t pay me, he must keep me. He can’t turn me outdoors in this condition, in this weather; I shall have something to say about that!” Walden added, with a surly smile.

He got up and was shuffling off with his bandaged feet, when the man called after him:—

“See here, boy! let me look at that order again.” Walden’s heart gave a leap as he reproduced the crumpled paper. “I’ve spoken to my brother, and he thinks he can get a little of it out of Tadmore, one way or another; anyhow, we’ll take the risk. I think I could manage him, if I was to stay here; but I’m going out to our new settlement in a day or two.”

Thereupon the older man called out, “Don’t

let Tadmore know, if we advance anything on that order; he never will bring us any of his stuff if you do."

"Then I mustn't go back there to-night," said Walden. "For if he asks me I can't lie to him."

"We'll manage somehow to get around that," said the younger man, to the boy's great content.

Ready-made articles of clothing were in those days few, and generally of coarse quality. The store of the enterprising Brooke Brothers was probably the only place in all that region where anything of the kind was to be had.

A thick red flannel shirt, to take the place of the worn-out cotton one which the boy wore, was the first thing selected. The next was a cloth cap. Then he chose a pair of blue-yarn socks for his bare feet, and a pair of cowhide boots, which he thought extravagant, having aspired to nothing higher than shoes. But there were no shoes of his size in the store, and the younger Mr. Brooke strongly advised boots,

in view of the deep snows those old-fashioned winters were sure to bring.

Jacket and trousers to fit were a more difficult matter. Those best adapted to his inches had the sleeves and legs as much too long as those he wore were too short. But the younger Mr. Brooke said that was a good fault.

“You’ll be growing,” he said; “and in the meantime you can wear your trousers and cuffs turned up.”

As the clothes were of a stout gray homespun, Walden was well pleased. He put them on in the corner of the store, and came forward and showed himself proudly in the fire-light. The elder Mr. Brooke held a candle to him while the younger stooped to adjust the rolled-up part of the legs, remarking:—

“I suppose you can have ’em cut off, or tucks taken in ’em, if you think best. The sleeves look very well.”

“I rather think he’d better have the trousers cut off,” said the elder Mr. Brooke. “Wife will do it in a few minutes, this evening. How’s the shirt?”

“Just the thing!” said the enthusiastic wearer.

“Well, you’ll want that and the socks washed once in a while; so you’d better take an extra pair of each,” said the younger storekeeper, with a generosity that brought tears to the boy’s eyes. “If we can’t get our pay out of Tadmore, we’ll charge ’em to you. Is that right?”

“Right — certainly — if I am ever able to pay for them,” said Walden.

“There isn’t much doubt about that if you’re the kind of a boy I take you for. Now I want to ask you another question.”

Walden’s eyes had wandered down admiringly at his new trousers, and the stout boots that had replaced the wrappings of his feet. But he looked up quickly into the man’s genial face.

“I’m going out with a load of goods to our new settlement in the Genesee country, where we’re setting up a store and a sawmill. About day after to-morrow, if the weather continues favorable; I’ve been waiting for the mud to

dry up, or freeze up, so I can haul through. There'll be plenty to do out there for a young fellow who can swing an axe, and is minded to make himself useful. How would you like to go with me?"

CHAPTER IV.

OUR HERO APPEARS IN HIS NEW RIG, AND MOUNTED ON
MR. BROOKE'S BEST HORSE.

IN his comfortable clothes and new boots, Walden Westlake was beginning to take more hopeful views of things. But he was not prepared for this joyful surprise. If the dismal November evening had changed just then to a fine morning in spring, the world could not have looked brighter to him all at once than when he heard the storekeeper's astonishing proposal.

"Do you mean I am to go out to the new settlement to *stay*?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Why not?" said Mr. Brooke. "It's a fine country; just as good as this. In a few years there'll be as handsome farms there as any hereabouts. People laugh at me, and say there'll be no inhabitants to speak of but bears and panthers, in the Genesee region, for the

next hundred years. I tell 'em the wilderness will be a garden of civilization in half that time.

“A young man with the right stuff in him, going out there now, will have chances to take up land of his own, or start some thriving business, and grow up with the country.”

Walden kindled with something of his new friend's enthusiasm, and laughed with repressed glee at the prospect held out to him.

“You can stop here with us till we are ready to start,” Mr. Brooke continued, “and help a little, to pay your way. It's a long journey, and you'll probably have a chance to turn down your trousers before ever you come back.”

“I should hope so,” said Walden, “if I am to grow up with the country!”

Eager as he was to accept a proposal which seemed to him so full of promise, he found there was a serious side to it when he came to think it over that night.

Having eaten a bountiful supper of baked potatoes and broiled bacon with the Brooke

family, washed his feet and greased his boots before the kitchen fire, and gone to bed, leaving his trousers to be shortened by the housewife's shears, he lay for a long while thinking excitedly of the adventure before him, and of the home he was perhaps leaving forever behind. Once more the longing to see his mother came over him, and with his improved prospects he did not dread so much a meeting with his oldest brother.

"I'm independent now, and he can't say I go back for anything I want of him," he said to himself, with a grateful heart.

The next morning, his face seemed to show what had been passing in his mind, for when he asked what work he should go about the younger Mr. Brooke looked at him pleasantly, and said, —

"I shall let you do what you like to-day; and I rather think I can guess what that will be. How long since you've seen any of your folks?"

"Not since I left home in May," replied Walden, with glistening eyes.

“I thought so. And there’s no knowing when you will have another chance to visit them. Now, if you would like to go over to Whitestown and bid ’em good-by, I’ve a horse you can ride,—unless,” the storekeeper added, with a humorous twinkle, “you prefer to try your new boots on the road.”

Something between a sob and a laugh broke into the boy’s speech when he attempted to reply. He glanced down at his improved trousers and well oiled boots, then looked up at Mr. Brooke, winked hard, and dashed away a tear or two, as he faltered, —

“I should like to ride. I didn’t expect any such luck as that! though I did wish I could go over and say good-by to the folks.”

Accordingly, not long after breakfast the horse was saddled, and, mounting at the front steps, Walden received his employer’s parting advice.

“If you have any clothing at home you haven’t outgrown, you’d better get it. I don’t think you’ll have trouble with your brother when you tell him of your engagement with

me. If he's inclined to be brotherly, you'll meet him more than half way, of course. If he is harsh with you, treat him respectfully, but don't answer back. If it so happens that he tries to detain you, I'll see about it."

"Oh, he won't try that; he knows me too well!" replied Walden. "I think he'll be all right when he sees me in this rig."

Mr. Brooke laughed. It was certainly a very different "rig" from that in which the boy had made his appearance the night before. In his new suit, with boots in stirrups, sitting erect in the saddle, he could not help showing something of the pride and happiness which filled his heart; and his employer was not ill pleased.

"I've got a prize in that boy," he said to his brother, as they stood in the door and saw him ride off at a brisk trot.

Walden made the journey in high spirits, often contrasting his present content with the sense of wrong which embittered him when last he travelled that road. It was May-time then, but his sky was full of wrath and gloom.

It was not so much hope that had sustained him in the rash step he was taking, as a fierce determination to free himself from his thralldom, and win a success which should some day burn his unjust brother's heart.

He remembered how ardently he had longed for that triumph; how sweet had been the thought of that innocent revenge.

“He shall be sorry for his treatment of me; he shall find that even a younger brother is entitled to some respect!” he had muttered angrily to himself, again and again, as he passed those fields and farmhouses by which he was returning in so changed a mood.

Some of the scenes recalled vividly his feelings at that time. There was a wayside trough by which he had sat down to rest, the sight of which brought up wonderful confused visions of himself, here a rebel and an outcast, driven forth by a brutal elder brother, and there a radiant youth returning to confront an elder brother humbled and repentant.

Such was the dream he had nourished at that spot. It had faded now. Not that he

had forgotten his wrongs; but he felt that he could almost forgive the author of them if he should come forward to meet him with kind words.

As he approached the neighborhood where he was known, and became conscious of eyes gazing at him from the farmhouses he passed, Walden felt no little satisfaction at being seen in decent clothes, mounted on a good horse. He was anxious to give old acquaintances an impression that he had got on very well away from home; perhaps forgetting what very different notions they would have formed if they had seen him limping up to Brooke Brothers' steps the night before.

He stopped to speak to persons whom he knew, and, in reply to their questions, said, with an air of some importance, that he was making a mere flying visit, that he had got a good chance and was "going West."

That phrase meant something in those days altogether unlike what it means now. It was only to push on a hundred miles or so into the wilderness of western New York. But that

was about as formidable an undertaking as anything the words imply to-day.

At last, on the brow of a gentle declivity, Walden came in sight of his old home. There was the low brown gable, and the great chimney built outside the house, and the tall well-sweep on the edge of the little peach-orchard in the rear. Through the pleasant valley beyond, the Mohawk River wound, a curve of shining silver in the morning sun.

A gust of tears swelled the boy's heart and rained quick drops from his eyes at sight of these well remembered scenes. How often, in the thirst and weariness and homesickness of the season that was past, he had thought of that pleasant peach-orchard and its delicious fruit, and of the cool bucket rising at the end of the long well-pole, to poise plashing on the curb!

There was the lane where he had so often ridden the colts and driven the cows to water down to the river's brink, singing as he went and came; and there the upland, with its fields and groves, where he had wandered many a

summer's afternoon, his boyish soul filled with the mystery and beauty of the world, and dreams of a golden future.

It was a hopeful, not unhappy childhood he had known there ; and over him, as he gazed, swept a great wave of yearning and regret. He was for a few minutes almost sick of his engagement with Mr. Brooke. But then the great grievance he had suffered at his brother's hands rose up before him ; and his hope of "growing up" with the new country came back fresh and strong.

CHAPTER V.

WHY ELI WESTLAKE WAS NOT SO GLAD AS HE MIGHT
HAVE BEEN TO SEE HIS YOUNGER BROTHER.

HE had recovered his fortitude just in time. Out of the barnyard lane before him came a yoke of steers, pushing and clashing their horns. They turned into the road, guided by a sturdy young man wielding a short hickory gad. A heavy log-chain trailed from the jingling ring of the yoke; the near ox was stepping over and on it as they turned, and the driver was reaching across to beat the crowding off ox over the forehead, when he looked up and saw the horseback boy in the road.

“Whoa! back!” he suddenly called, plying his stick deftly over the faces of both steers; and as they came to an unwilling stop, he gave Walden an astonished, sarcastic gaze.

It was hard for Walden to control his excite-

ment and speak calmly as he drew rein ; but he succeeded.

“How do you do, Eli ?” he said, with a constrained and somewhat sallow smile. “How are all the folks ?”

Instead of answering his questions, the oldest brother regarded him with rather less astonishment and rather more sarcasm in his gaze, and said, bluntly, —

“Come back, have ye ? Where did ye get that horse ?”

“It’s a borrowed one,” said Walden ; and he was going on to explain as soon as he could get a good breath to keep his voice from quavering, when Eli broke in again, —

“Of course, I know it’s a borrowed one, — that is, without it’s stolen ; for I didn’t for a moment suppose you owned him. But I asked where you got him.”

“And I was going to tell you I got him of Mr. Brooke, of Brooke Brothers, who keep the big store in Rome,” Walden answered, with spirit, glad to let his brother know he had such a friend.

“Why *didn't* you tell me, then?” Eli demanded.

“Because you were so short with me I didn't have a chance. There was no need of your” — Walden then remembered Mr. Brooke's advice, and checked himself.

“No need of my what?”

Thus urged, Walden answered, firmly, “No need of your being so quick to put in that fling about the horse being stolen. Whatever else you can say of me, you know very well I never deserved any such taunt as that.”

“You mean to say you never took anything that didn't belong to you?” said Eli.

“Never!” exclaimed Walden, hotly.

“Oh! haven't you?” sneered Eli. “Whoa! back!” and he rattled his stick on the horns of the restless steers.

“If you think I have, what is it?” asked Walden.

“You've taken your services, which belong to me till you are twenty-one,” said Eli.

“You might have had them, if you had been to me what father supposed you would be when

he made that will. He never meant that I should be treated as you treat those dumb beasts ! ”

Walden's face flushed, and he spoke with the memory of his wrongs surging in his voice.

“ You were to work for me till you were twenty-one,” said Eli. “ Have you come back to stay ? ”

“ No, Eli,” Walden replied, with more steadiness of tone. “ I have made an engagement with Mr. Brooke, who loaned me this horse.”

Eli studied him with a bitter sneer, and after a moment's silence rejoined, —

“ You think you can do better, I suppose.”

“ If I get kind treatment and encouraging words, I call that doing better,” said Walden, looking down with dignity from his horse.

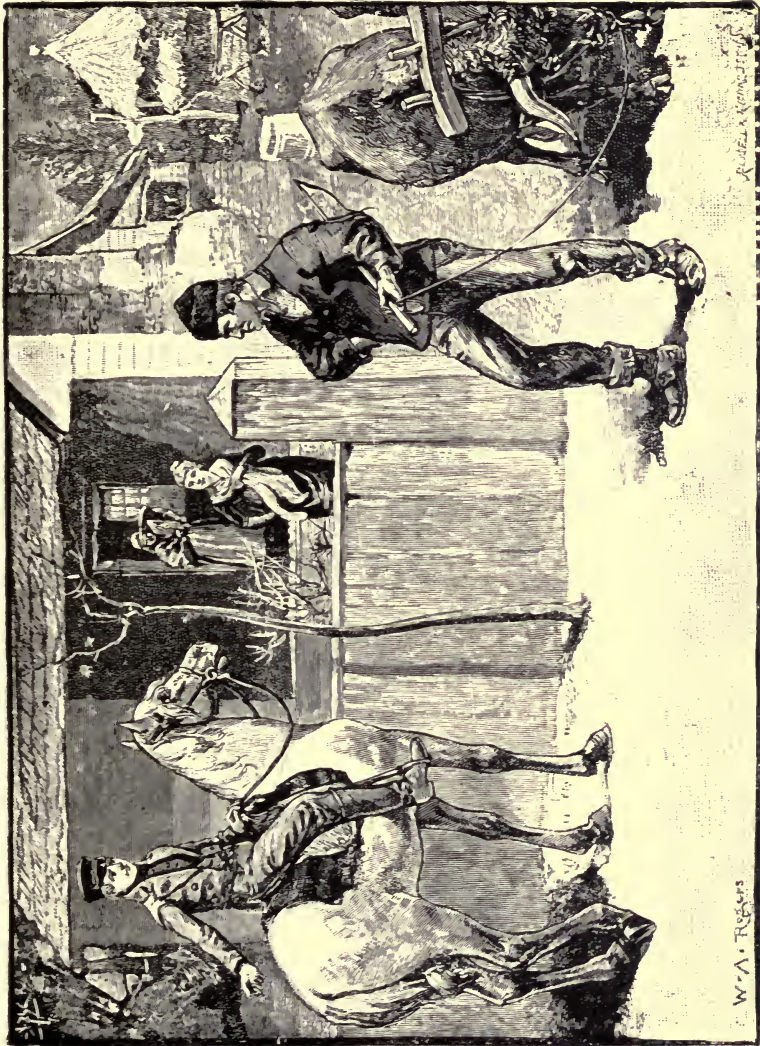
Eli hesitated, and appeared for a moment to be swallowing something very disagreeable. The truth is, he had missed Walden's help on the farm, and had felt pricks of conscience on account of his own harsh conduct towards him. Hearing how hard he worked and how ill fed he was in Thomas Tadmore's service, he

had until this hour fostered hopes of seeing him return penitent and submissive. To see him come back proud and resolute, well clothed and mounted on a good horse, was not an agreeable surprise.

“Small loss ! guess I can stand it if he can,” he had said many times of Walden in his absence, and he had even tried to think the farm would get along as well without him. But all the time his inmost thought said otherwise ; and he was forced to respect and prize his brother all the more since the Brookes of Rome had taken him up.

Perhaps, by a little more conciliatory treatment he might yet win the lost one back. It was a hard thing for Eli to make up his mind to, but after a while he swallowed the unpalatable morsel in his throat, and said, in a tone that reminded Walden of the old days before their father died, and they were still like brothers, —

“I guess you’d better come home, Walden. Mother misses ye, and I’d do anything for *her*, as I suppose *you* would. Come back,



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"ELI STOOD BY THE STEERS, LOOKING UP WITH A SCOWL AT THE BOY ON THE HORSE." Page 43.

and it sha'n't be my fault if there's any more trouble."

Walden was touched. That Eli should speak to him in that way almost realized his former dream of triumph. But something deeper in his heart was stirred, as he answered, with almost tearful emotion, —

"I would do anything for her, as you know. For her sake I stayed with you months longer than I should have done if I had had my own way. And if you," he could not help adding reproachfully, "if *you* had cared half as much for her feelings then as you seem to now, you would have treated me more as she always said I should be treated."

Eli stood by the steers, looking up with a scowl at the boy on the horse looking earnestly down and speaking these plain words. It was some seconds before he could bring himself to reply, —

"I don't pretend that I always did just right; there's nobody but what makes mistakes now and then. I'm quick, and maybe too arbitrary. I felt I had got to take father's

place and do my duty to the younger children. I always meant to do right by you. I'll prove it to you, if you care to come back and try it again."

"If you had talked this way six months ago," said Walden, bitterly, "I never should have gone. But it's too late now. I have made different arrangements."

It was stinging to the pride of Eli to find that he had humbled himself in vain. He did not ask what the different arrangements were, but turned and brandished his whip over the steers, playing a lively tattoo on their horns and heads.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHORT LEAVE-TAKING AND A LONG JOURNEY.

By this time the strange boy on horseback, who had stopped to talk with Eli in the road, had been recognized by the eyes peering at him from the kitchen windows. As he dismounted at the gate, his younger brothers, Amos and James, came running from the barn, with ears of corn they had been husking still in their hands; his elder sister Susan came smiling from the house, with a cheery welcome; and, last of all, out tottered his gray-haired mother, to fling herself on his neck with sobs of joy.

She clung to him with smiles and tears as they all went into the house together. Susan walked by his other side, proudly clasping his arm; and the boys capered about, with grins and exclamations of delight. Then Walden, seated in the midst of them, had his story to

tell, and questions to ask, and there was more talk than would fill the chapters which we must hasten to give to other scenes.

Mrs. Westlake fondly hoped that her boy had come home to remain. But she could not disapprove of the engagement he had made with Mr. Brooke; and Amos and James clamorously wished that they could go too. Eli had never treated them so harshly as he had Walden; perhaps because, there being so much more difference between his age and theirs, he had felt less necessity of asserting his authority over them, and they less inclination to rebel. But they fretted under his tyranny, nevertheless, and envied Walden his freedom, and bewailed the fate that kept them still at home.

Considering that his presence could not, under the circumstances, be very welcome to Eli, Walden declined to stay for dinner, but he partook of a lunch which Susan set out for him on the kitchen table, and then helped his mother do up a little bundle which he was to take away with him on the saddle.

Into that bundle he was careful to slip his

Arithmetic, which he so much regretted not having studied more diligently at school, along with two or three other books which he might find useful or entertaining in the back country where he was going.

As he was making a final knot in the great red handkerchief which had been his father's, but which his mother gave him for his bundle, Eli came in.

“Here is Walden!” cried Mrs. Westlake, longing to see the brothers reconciled. “Come to make us a little visit; and now he is starting off again.”

“Yes, I see,” said Eli, grimly, standing in the door.

“And only think,” she added, “he is going to the Genesee country with Mr. Jonathan Brooke!”

This was news to the oldest brother, but he did not betray any surprise. Since Walden was not to stay and help him on the farm, he cared little where he went.

“If it don't beat all!” exclaimed good Mrs. Westlake, all tears.

“Beats all,” said Eli, stolid and sarcastic.

At daybreak the next morning, Mr. Brooke and Walden set off with a load of goods for the new settlement. The stout horse Walden had ridden home made one of the span that was to haul the heavy wagon over the rough roads, past frontier farms and villages, into the great wilderness beyond.

During much of the first day they were within sight of settlements, which became more and more scattered as they kept on. The next day they entered almost continuous woods, following the trail which led to the Holland Land Company's immense “Purchase” in western New York.

Buffalo, on the farther borders of that Purchase, was then a village of two thousand inhabitants. But along the road and its branches there were only, at long intervals, log-huts which served as taverns, and here and there a clearing. Syracuse was then “Cossit's Corners;” it was not even a village.

The Genesee River was not yet bridged, but travellers crossed at the mouth, in a ferry-boat

when it was open, and on the ice when it was frozen. Mr. Brooke, in his talks with Walden on the journey, expressed regret that he had not secured land on the site of certain falls; and predicted the rise of a thriving town there some day.

“My brother and I were thinking of that purchase when Mr. Rochester and his friends stepped in before us. They are going to call it ‘Rochesterville.’ They had better call it just ‘Rochester,’ I tell ’em, and leave off the *ville*. They’ve got five or six houses there already.”

Such was the beginning of a great city.

The ground continued frozen much of the time; but the road, winding among great trunks and passing through hollows and over the roots of trees, was rough and uneven.

“There’s going to be a canal cut right through this region, running the whole length of the State, and connecting the Hudson with Lake Erie; and that before many years,” Mr. Brooke averred. “Folks call me over-sanguine. But you will live to see it, Walden, and I haven’t much doubt but that I shall.”

“It’s a magnificent idea!” said Walden, as he helped pry a wheel out of a rut. But it seemed to him a wild one.

Fortunately for his reputation for sanity, Mr. Brooke did not predict a railroad which they should both live to ride on over that very spot, making more than their entire day’s journey in an hour.

They walked much of the way beside or behind the team, and put up at the cabins which served as taverns, sleeping generally on the floor, beds being a scarce luxury. It was a toilsome trip, as you may well believe. Even the wildness of the forest scenery became monotonous after the second or third day; and Walden was glad enough when, a few miles off the main track, they one evening crossed a tumbling brook and entered a stumpy clearing, which Mr. Brooke called the “settlement.”

CHAPTER VII.

WALDEN ENTERS THE NEW SETTLEMENT, AND DISCOVERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE EATING JOHNNY-CAKE.

WALDEN could distinguish three or four huts and log-houses against the background of the gloomy woods, and one skeleton frame rising over the banks of the stream.

“I’m glad to see that!” said Mr. Brooke, with satisfaction. “It’s our sawmill. The first framed building in the settlement; it has got to saw the boards to cover its own back.”

The saw was in the wagon, under their feet, and some of the necessary gearing was packed behind.

“Well, here we are!” said Mr. Brooke, turning up to one of the log-houses, in which not a light was to be seen, although it was now deep dusk.

“Where is the store?” asked Walden.

“This is it,” replied Mr. Brooke.

Walden was not expecting a very brilliant display there in the backwoods, yet his idea of a store went a trifle beyond that gloomy log-house, with one or two dark windows and a closed door.

“Ase is probably over at Gadbury’s, eating his supper,” said Mr. Brooke. “Run and get him, or ask Gadbury to send somebody to help, while I’m unhitching the team.”

“Gadbury’s” was the tavern, another log-house a few rods away. A man and a boy were grinding an axe by the light of an open lantern hung on a peg by the door; and within, as he approached, Walden could see some men at supper before a glowing fireplace.

He did his errand to the man holding the axe on the stone. The man lifted it to feel the edge; while the stone, relieved of the pressure, and impelled by a final effort of the boy at the crank, spun through the gurgling water of the trough.

“I’m Gadbury,” said the man; “an’ I thought it might be Mr. Brooke; thought I knowed his

voice. Ase!" — calling in at the door — "Mr. Brooke has come and wants ye. There, Sam! guess that'll do fer to-night; though I might put a leetle finer edge on't by daylight, tell yer dad."

"I guess the edge is fine enough," said the boy, straightening his shoulders. "I druther go a-fishin' all day, any time, than turn grin'-stun half an hour."

"Wal, mos' boys would," said the tavern-keeper, with a quiet chuckle. "An' there's things I druther du 'n grind folks's axes fer 'em. But yer dad's welcome."

"He says the' ain't another man that can put such an edge on a tool as you can, nowheres," replied the boy, shouldering the axe and starting off.

"That's the way they all talk when they want to git favors out of ol' man Gadbury," said the tavern-keeper, good-naturedly. "I see through their palaver, but I 'commodate 'em all the same. On hand, Ase?"

"I suppose I must say yes, though I shall feel for the rest of my natural life that I hadn't

quite finished my supper," said a coatless young man, coming away from the table with his mouth full and a piece of Johnny-cake in his hand.

The voice gave Walden an unpleasant start, and, as he was going off with Mr. Gadbury, he turned to glance back at the speaker.

"It can't be!" he thought. "Yes, it is, though!" And, staring in through the open doorway, he saw the young man take the Johnny-cake in his teeth, while he pulled down a coat from some peg and put it on.

He had a burly figure, stout arms, and coarse features, with prominent cheek-bones; to which the wedge of Johnny-cake in his mouth lent a grotesque aspect, in the eyes of Walden. The boy's first shock of surprise quickly gave place to merry recollections, and some such sense of the ludicrous as one feels at sight of a pretentious person in a new and undignified situation.

"Who would have thought of ever running against him out here in the woods?" he said to himself, as he hurried on after the tavern-



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keeper and his lantern. "Oh, wouldn't the boys laugh if they knew!"

"The wagon can stand there till morning," Mr. Brooke was saying, "with all but a few things I'll have Ase take into the store. Then, if you'll care for the horses, and give us some supper, Gadbury, we'll be grateful."

"I'll do both," said the tavern-keeper, lifting his lantern to take a view of the load. "I hope, for one thing, you've brought three or four good grin'-stones. Settlement's been sufferin' for grin'-stones. Folks come five or six mile to grind on mine, er send their axes fer me to grind for 'em."

"I've got two," said Mr. Brooke; "and half a dozen more coming by water to the mouth of the river." He stopped to give the burly young man some directions about the goods to be taken into the store, then said to Walden, "Come, boy, our hardships are over for one day; let's go in and get warm, and see what they can give us for supper."

Walden kept the wagon between him and the young man; then, taking his bundle of

clothes and hurrying to Mr. Brooke's side, he said, in a low, excited voice, with a smothered laugh in it, —

“Is that the man you said you had left in charge of the store?”

“Ase? Yes,” said Mr. Brooke. “Didn't I tell you his name was Ase?”

“I believe you did; but I had no idea” — the boy's words became lost in a titter.

“Why, what?” said Mr. Brooke. “Did you ever see or hear of him before?”

“You'd think so!” replied Walden. “He used to write his name *A. Randolph Hedgewick*; and I remember, now, some of the girls said his first name was Asa.”

“You don't mean to tell me!” Mr. Brooke exclaimed, laughing, too, as he caught the drift of Walden's explanation.

“Yes,” giggled the boy. “He's the big-feeling tyrant of a master the boys turned out of our school last winter!”

“I'm sorry for that,” said Mr. Brooke, more seriously. “He's my mainstay here in the store.”

Walden made no reply. He was sorry, too, foreseeing no very great satisfaction in the renewal of his acquaintance with Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BACKWOODS LODGING, ABOUT WHICH THERE WAS
DESTINED TO BE SOME DISPUTE.

IN the tavern they found a glowing backlog, a supper of pork-chop and Johnny-cake, and the talk of backwoodsmen awaiting them; all which Walden enjoyed until he caught himself nodding in the corner of the fireplace, and heard Mr. Brooke saying, —

“Well, Gadbury, can you find a place for this boy?”

Walden looked up with a start, and saw the good-natured tavern-keeper looking down at him on his stool, with a whimsical puzzled expression.

“I must find a place, er make one, fuzino!” Gadbury replied, puckering his lean face and scratching his rough head.

Fuzino, a contraction of “as fur as I know,” and equivalent to “for aught I know,” was a

common enough expression among New England and New York country people in those early days; and it was one of two that were as pepper and salt to the landlord's rustic speech, sprinkling it and giving it a flavor. The other was, "Id'n'o'n'ti," signifying, "I do not know, not I."

"The' ain't the fust hooter o' room in this 'ere house," Gadbury went on; "it's chuck-full, beds an' floors. But I guess mebbe I can du suthin' fer him in the 'riginal stand."

Walden was wondering what the "'riginal stand" was, when Gadbury lighted, by means of a pine-sliver, the stub of tallow candle in the lantern which he gave him to carry. Then saying, "Fetch along your passel, 'f ye want anything in't" (meaning the boy's small bundle brought from home), he took up some hot coals on the fire-shovel, and led the way out-of-doors.

The lantern, which was of perforated tin, bristling like a porcupine with rays for quills, shed its nebulous glimmer along a path which took them to the bank of the babbling stream.

There Gadbury, with his coals still glowing before him on the shovel, threw open the door of a hut, and, entering, emptied them in what proved to be a fireplace in a corner.

Walden, at his request, opened the lantern-door for more light; with the aid of which the landlord gathered bark and sticks from a pile near the hearth (if that could be called a hearth which was mere native earth covered with ashes), and cast them on the coals.

“This ’ere,” said Gadbury, “’s the ’riginal tavern-stand, ’n’ the fust thing shape of a house, fuzino, ’n the hull country. Jest a cabin o’ poles, as you see; floor o’ chestnut slabs, though ’twuz a long while ’fore it had any floor at all, er any winder er door, save an’ except we had a hole cut fer a door. An’ nary nail in it.”

“How could you build without nails?” Walden inquired.

“How could ye? Jest as a man can du e’en-a’most anything in natur he’s *got* to du. We didn’t have no nails, an’ we got along without nails; used wooden pegs instid. But, soon as

ever I had neighbors to help, I sot to work, cut logs, an' rolled up t'other house, an' had things in style, fer a new settlement."

There were two beds, side by side, made up on the floor; and Walden, looking about him by the gleam of the kindling fire, which soon outshone the feeble lantern-light, asked which he was to sleep in.

"Wal, I guess, nary one o' these," Gadbury replied. "Some o' my boarders 'll be turnin' inter 'em, 'fore a gre't while. But you can go to roost up there," casting his eye up a short ladder.

Walden thought at first that he was expected to perch, like a featherless fowl, on the top rounds; looking for which he perceived that the upper end of the ladder disappeared in the darkness of a loft overhead.

"There's a straw bed up there," said the tavern-keeper, "with on'y one man in't; and you'll haf to sleep with him, fuzino, 'thout you roll yourself up in a blanket er bear-skin on the floor. Now make yerself to hum; and don't be afeered o' burnin' a leetle wood. It's cheap

in this country; don't cost nothin' but elbow-grease, an' I guess by your looks 't you've got your share o' that, to help us out, when we want a back-log or fore-stick."

"What time will these men be coming to bed?" Walden asked; "particularly the one that's to sleep up there with me!"

"Id'n'o'n'ti, but not long fust," the tavern-keeper announced, as he took up the shovel and the lantern and left the hut.

Walden then mounted the short ladder, and, putting his head through the opening into the loft, looked for the bed, one undivided half of which had been assigned him for the night. The reflection of the fire below revealed it, behind the ladder, made up under the low roof. It was so near the opening that he concluded the ladder must be of use to prevent the person who should sleep on the front side from going through to the ground floor, in case he should roll out of bed.

CHAPTER IX.

DEMONSTRATION BY A SCHOOLMASTER THAT A MAN MAY
SOMETIMES COME DOWN A LADDER MORE RAPIDLY
THAN HE WENT UP.

IT was a gloomy place, and silent, but for the crackling of the fire beneath, and the plashy murmurs of the brook outside. Just as he was turning to descend the ladder, footsteps approached the cabin, the door was pushed open, and a man entered. He had a burly figure, and Walden, looking down from his perch, could see a pair of prominent cheek-bones turned up at him in the firelight.

“Hallo!” said the comer, in a voice whose arbitrary tones reminded the boy disagreeably of old times, “what ye doing there?”

“Looking to see where I am to sleep,” Walden replied, stepping down the ladder.

“You needn’t be looking in that direction; that’s my bed.” The voice sounded so natural

that it seemed as if it must add immediately, — “Stand out here in the floor, and I’ll ’tend to your case !”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hedgewick !” said Walden, slipping to the ground. “I haven’t the faintest kind of a wish to have you for a bed-fellow ; but Mr. Gadbury said I was to sleep up there.”

It was an unusual thing for the former schoolmaster of Whitestown to be called anything but “Ase,” or “Asy,” there in the backwoods ; and perhaps something in Walden’s voice sounded familiar to his ears. The two stood face to face in the little firelit cabin, staring, — Walden with a troubled smile, Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick with a scowl of amazed displeasure, followed by a vigorous exclamation, —

“You’re one of the Westlake boys ! You’re Walden !”

“That’s my name,” said Walden. “And I used to go to school to you.”

“What business have you here ?” the man demanded.

“Mr. Brooke’s business,” the boy replied. “I came with him.”

“Well, when he took you,” said Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick, “he took one of the worst of the worst lot of boys in Oneida County, and I shall tell him so.”

“You can tell him what you please,” rejoined Walden, indignantly. “I never had any quarrel with you, Mr. Hedgewick, and, even if I did have, I don’t see the use of bringing it up, out here in a new place like this.”

“Maybe you don’t; but I do.” Mr. Hedgewick put one foot and one hand on the ladder. “My quarrel was with the whole school; and, though you was too much of a coward to have a hand in the final tussle, I saw you laugh when they tumbled me into the snow.”

“I couldn’t help laughing!” said Walden, with a reminiscent chuckle. “Who could?”

“The treatment I received from that school,” Mr. Hedgewick went on, with a fierce look, “I never have, I never can, I never will forgive!” So saying, he went quickly up the ladder.

“Seems to me it’s the school that has the

most to forgive," said Walden, quickly, but with a full heart. "Look here! what are you doing?"

Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick was pulling the ladder up after him into the loft.

"You don't want me for a bedfellow," he replied, "and no more do I want you. We're perfectly agreed as to that."

"Yes!" cried Walden. "But, after what the tavern-keeper said, you've no more right to the bed than I have. Let down the ladder!"

It was too long to go into the loft. So Hedgewick pulled the upper end of it down on his bed and sat on it, leaving the lower end tipped up close under the floor.

"Will you let me have that ladder?" Walden demanded.

"Who are you?" retorted Hedgewick, showing his face at the opening, with a sarcastic grin Walden knew of old, but which did not affright him now.

"I'll let you know who I am, if you don't give me my rights," replied Walden. "I don't want your bed, and I don't say I shall go up

the ladder, but I'll have it, at least one end of it!"

So saying, he caught hold of the lower round, which was easily done, the cabin being low, and swayed upon it heavily, with an astounding result.

Hedgewick, as I have said, was seated on the upper end; he was at the same time leaning forward to jeer at the boy below. Down went Walden's end with a jerk; up went the other to the roof; when with a cry of consternation Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick shot head foremost through the opening, and made a helpless, sprawling plunge to the floor.

CHAPTER X.

SHOWS WHO DID, AND WHO DID NOT, SLEEP IN THE LOFT
AT THE TOP OF THE LADDER.

WALDEN was as much astonished as Hedgewick himself at the effect produced by that sudden spring and pull at the ladder. He did not know at first but the ex-schoolmaster was coming down from the loft in that abrupt fashion to eat him.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick had no such cannibal intention. While seeming to clutch wildly at Walden's legs in his descent, he was merely endeavoring to save himself from a dangerous fall. The boy sprang out of his way, and tumbled backwards upon the beds, which tripped his heels and received him somewhat more hospitably than the rough-hewn floor welcomed the plunging schoolmaster.

Then the two sat up, Walden on the nearest

bed, with his knees in the air, bracing himself with his hands behind him; Mr. Hedgewick on the floor, holding by the ladder with one hand, and feeling his neck with the other. Walden ventured to express a hope that it wasn't broken.

“No thanks to you if it ain't!” Hedgewick muttered, wrathfully. “Laugh, will ye, like a fool!” For Walden was again overcome by most untimely mirth, even as when he saw the big boys take their revenge on the schoolmaster by keeling him over in the snowdrifts.

Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick — or shall we follow the fashion of the settlers, and call him for short Ase? — looked about for some missile to hurl; but fortunately only the ladder was within his reach, and that was hardly available as a projectile.

Walden laughed until he fell back again on the bed, and lay there shaking.

“Really — I can't help — help it!” he said, chokingly. “If I'd seen my great-great-grandfather come down a ladder that way, I believe I should have laughed! You looked like a

bear and a spread eagle combined!" And the more he tried to control himself, the more he was convulsed.

"Lucky I'm too dizzy now to take ye by the heels and snap your ears off!" said Ase; at the same time feeling his own ears, as if to make sure they were not missing. "But you'll get your pay some time!"

"Pay for what? For laughing?" said Walden. "But you don't consider, Mr. Hedgewick! If it had been the President of these United States, I should have grinned! It's from no spite against you; but to see any man dive out of a hole in a floor that way, and dance with his heels up and his claws down,—you mustn't blame me,"—Walden held his aching sides,—“for—for smiling, Mr. Hedgewick!”

"It's for giving me the tumble I blame you!" said Ase, with a belligerent shake of his big black curly head.

"That was your own fault," returned Walden. "You had no right to pull up the ladder, and sit on it!" he added, with another burst.

“I was after that; and I had no idea! Oh! oh!” he struggled with his emotions, and added, “If it had suddenly rained cows and calves, I couldn’t have been more surprised!”

“You always was a giggling dunce in school,” growled the sufferer, who had just discovered that his nose was bleeding.

“Yes, — I don’t know about the *dunce* part,” said Walden; “but I had to laugh sometimes, though I didn’t know but your ruler would come whizzing at my head the next minute!”

“I’m sorry I didn’t give you the ruler more’n I did!” said Hedgewick, getting up on a block by the fire.

It was impossible for Walden to continue to stand in awe of a man he had seen descend from above in the manner described, and he was provoked to retort, —

“I was in hopes you had sense enough to be sorry you gave any of us the ruler as much as you did!”

When he came to think about it, he was astonished at his own audacity in thus “talking up” to the man who had once played the

tyrant over him. But now his slumbering indignation at the old outrage blazed up again.

“Nobody could keep that school without being savage with the big boys,” said Ase, stung into making some feeble defence of his conduct.

“You were savage with the little ones, too,” replied Walden; “and you couldn’t keep the school, after all! Other masters had managed to keep it before you, with not half your amount of muscle, but with a good deal more judgment and justice. You made us feel that you were our enemy the very first day you brandished your ruler in that schoolhouse. The man who taught there before you made us feel that he was our friend; and, though he had to lick some before the winter was over, we knew he was in the right; and if any big fellows had tried to turn him out, there were enough others that would have taken his part. That’s the difference in masters. Everybody was glad to see *you* pitched out.”

Walden got up, and stood with his little bundle under his arm; wondering whether

he should go and ask the tavern-keeper for the blanket or bearskin he had suggested, with a view to sleeping on the cabin floor. But, all at once reflecting that he ought not to allow himself to be kept out of bed by a bully, he stepped to the ladder, and adjusted it at the opening in the loft.

“Now I’ve had my say, Mr. Hedgewick,” he added; “and I’m willing to let the subject rest—for to-night, anyway. I’m going to sleep where the landlord told me to; you can do as you please about it.”

So saying, he scrambled into the loft. Ase cast up at him a vicious look, and started towards the ladder, as if minded to pull it from under him. But he didn’t. He was beginning to realize, as much as Walden did, their changed relations; they were no longer master and pupil. He sat down again by the fire while Walden crept into the bed under the low roof.

Then the men who were to occupy the other beds came in, and the boy heard Hedgewick tell them that he guessed he would go out and sleep in the woods.

“First, Mr. Brooke comes, and I am turned out of his bed in the tavern; and now somebody else is put into my old bed in the loft here. I’m just kicked about as if I was of no consequence,” Ase added complainingly.

What he really did, as Walden afterwards learned, was to get a buffalo-skin and roll himself up in it on the cabin floor. So the boy had the loft to himself. He could feel the wind blowing over him from chinks in the gable, and see stars through a gap in the roof, and hear the brook come tumbling down from the dam near by, with a lonesome sound in the November night, to whose soft lullaby he soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. A. RANDOLPH HEDGEWICK FAILS TO SEE THAT ONE GOOD TURN AT A GRINDSTONE DESERVES ANOTHER.

HE was awakened early the next morning by voices in the room below; which he found empty, dark, and cold, with the fire out, when he came down the ladder from the loft shortly after. He hastened forth, feeling that that day was the beginning of a new life for him there in the woods.

The recollection of his encounter with Hedgewick caused him some uneasiness; but he could not feel that he had done anything very wrong, nor believe that Mr. Brooke was a man to be much influenced by anything the former master might have to say against him.

“I’ll just go about my own business,” he said to himself, “and never trouble him unless he troubles me.”

He walked over to the tavern, and, finding the table crowded with early risers, breakfasting by the mingled firelight and daylight, he walked out again to take a view of the settlement.

The morning was mild and hazy. The smoke of smouldering log-heaps gave a bluish tint and a pungent odor to the air. In the midst of stumpy clearings was the newly built dam across the stream, with its skeleton saw-mill, and its little pond reflecting the rough banks and the reddening sky behind the forest-tops. The marks of civilization were of the rudest primitive sort: and yet Walden's heart swelled with anticipations of the life which was to grow up there, and of which he was to be a part.

Several of Gadbury's boarders were men who were building houses for themselves in the neighborhood — "rolling them up," as the phrase was; working in gangs, and assisting one another to "roll up," by means of inclined poles, the logs which were to form the walls of the future house.

Then there were the men, carpenters and woodsmen, employed by Mr. Brooke. Walden soon made acquaintance with these, and found enough to do.

“Here, Walden!” called Mr. Brooke from the store; “come and pick out your axe.”

The boy had already fixed his eye on the lightest of the axes which had come in the load the day before. He chose a helve to match, among several which had been shaped by backwoodsmen and brought in to be exchanged for goods at the store.

The helve was soon fitted to the axe and firmly wedged. All this time Walden had had nothing to say to Hedgewick, who was at work placing the new goods. But now the axe, and another which Mr. Brooke called his own, were to be sharpened.

“Take both axes, Ase, you and Walden,” said Mr. Brooke, “and give ’em a good grinding.”

Neither Ase nor Walden said anything as they took each an axe and went over to the stone at the tavern-door. Ase gave it a turn

and found there was no water in the under-hanging trough. He then brought out an empty pail, which he dropped at Walden's feet, saying tersely, —

“Fetch some!”

Walden hesitated a moment, but seemed to conclude it would be becoming in him to obey.

“From the brook?” he asked.

“No; from the spring.”

Ase pointed with an authoritative look. The spring was near by, with a bottomless barrel set. The boy soon returned from it with a dripping pail, and the trough was filled. Then Ase said sententiously, —

“Turn!” And Walden turned.

Ase held Mr. Brooke's axe to the stone, bearing on harder and harder, until Walden, tugging at the crank, began to laugh.

“Always snickering!” exclaimed Ase.
“What now?”

“I was thinking of what the boy said last night — that he'd rather go a-fishing all day than ‘turn grin'-stun half an hour.’ I wonder what he would have said if he had been

turning for you!" Walden added good-humoredly.

"Maybe you can guess what he'd say, 'fore we get through," muttered the grim axe-grinder.

It was very evident that he was doing all he could to tire the boy out. But Walden stuck to his task heroically, and took pride in keeping the stone lightly whirling even when the tool was lifted. He thus reminded himself of a story he had read of some people starving in a besieged town, who with gay defiance let some plump pigeons fly from the walls, in the face of the enemy.

"Glad you like turning so well," said Ase, feeling the edge for the last time, and then reaching to lean the helve against the side of the house. "Give me t'other axe."

"Beg pardon!" replied Walden, reaching for the axe, but holding on to it. "I like turning well enough, when it's my turn to turn. But I've turned for you; now it's your turn to turn for me. One good turn deserves another, as they say."

“Give me that axe!” Ase demanded, in the good old-style schoolmaster tones.

“I prefer to grind my own axe,” said Walden, quietly, still keeping out of reach, with his keen eyes fixed on Hedgewick. “Especially after seeing the way you have ground Mr. Brooke’s.”

“He told me to grind the axes, with you to help,” Ase declared.

“No, he didn’t; he simply told us to take the axes and give ’em a good grinding.”

“I’ll see about that!” muttered Ase, starting towards the store.

“So will I!” cried Walden, springing before him.

He was almost sorry that he had made a stand for his independence, since it made necessary an appeal to Mr. Brooke, that very first morning in the new settlement. But he concluded that, if A. Randolph Hedgewick was to be his master still, he might as well know the fact at once.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BROOKE SETTLES ONE DISPUTE, AND MR. GADBURY IS CHOSEN UMPIRE IN ANOTHER THAT IT LED TO.

HE did not have far to go, for Mr. Brooke just then made his appearance at the door. Walden made haste to get in his question, —

“I suppose you will trust me to grind my own axe, since I am to use it?”

“Why — yes — I don’t know,” said Mr. Brooke, doubtfully. “Can you?”

“I should hope so!” Walden replied, confidently. “I’ve done as much before now. Anyway,” he added, seeing Ase about to put in his remonstrance, “just let me try; and then, if you don’t say it’s ground as well as yours is, I’ll never ask to grind my own axe again.”

“Well, go ahead!” said Mr. Brooke, carelessly. “What is it, Ase?”

“I don’t want to turn grin’-stun for that boy!” said Ase.

“I didn’t very much fancy turning for him,” spoke up Walden; “but I did it.”

“I don’t see, Ase,” remarked Mr. Brooke, “that you can reasonably object to returning the favor.”

“I do object, decidedly!” said Ase. “I didn’t hire out to turn grin’-stuns for upstart boys like him. You don’t know him as well as I do.”

“I think I stand a pretty good chance to get acquainted with him,” Mr. Brooke replied with a good-natured, open countenance and unruffled temper. “As for the terms of your agreement with me, I believe nothing was said about grinding axes, though I understood that you were to do anything I asked of you, within the bounds of reason.”

“So I was,” said Ase, glowering obstinately; “but” —

“Well, never mind,” interrupted Mr. Brooke. “If you consider it beneath your dignity” —

“I do!” exclaimed Hedgewick, with increasing vehemence, now that his employer

showed signs of giving in to him. "I should consider myself degraded."

"I'm sorry!" Mr. Brooke smiled pleasantly, and walked over towards Walden, who was waiting, axe in hand, to hear his decision. "Go into the store, Ase, and take care of your dignity. It won't degrade *me*, I guess, to turn grindstone, even for a boy. Come, Walden!"

"I—I can't let you do that!" Ase protested, in sudden consternation. Mr. Brooke made no reply, but went over to the tavern-door and left him staring.

"*You* hold the axe, and let *me* turn!" Walden entreated.

"No, no, boy," said Mr. Brooke, laying hold of the crank. "I want to see if you are really capable of grinding an axe. Now, don't bear on too hard," he added, playfully. "If you do, I may throw up the job."

Walden remonstrated in vain; and finally, in great shame and confusion, put his axe upon the stone, which his employer stooped to turn. He soon regained his courage, however, and laid the edge upon the watery, revolving rim,

and drew it to and fro, and turned it, shifting the helve from hand to hand, as his father had taught him to do when he was only fifteen years old, and as he had done many times since.

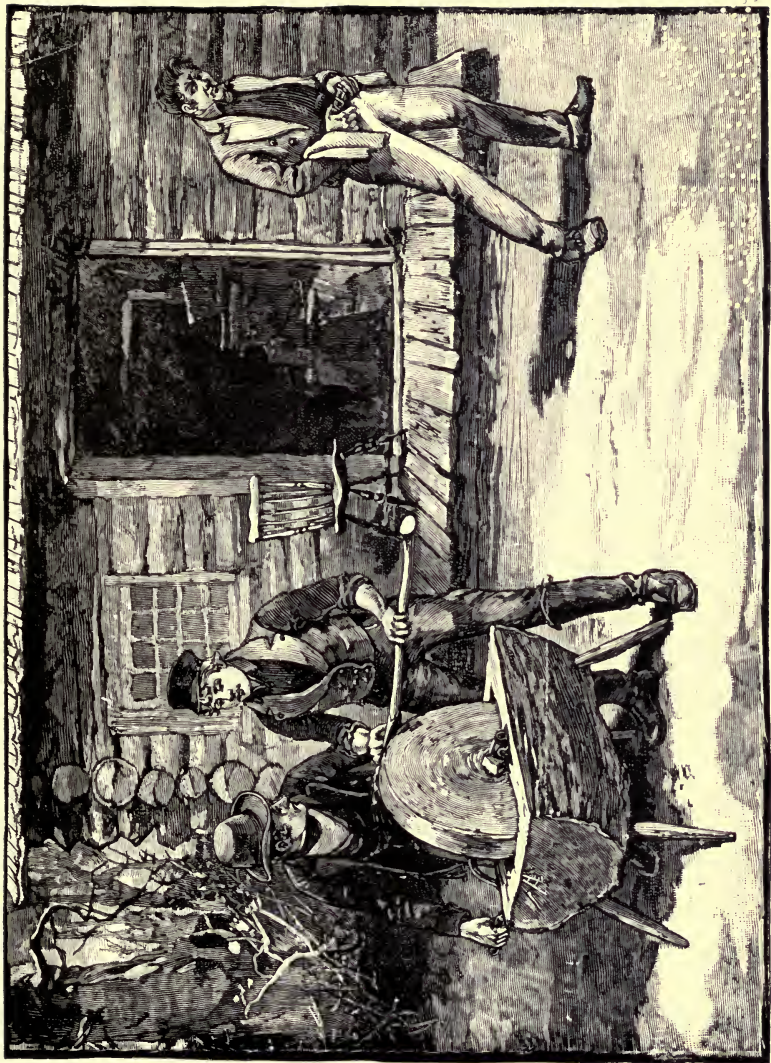
Then again he begged Mr. Brooke to change places with him, but that just and genial gentleman smilingly refused. "You're doing pretty well," he said. "But you haven't shown yet that you can finish what you have begun."

"Well, then, let her buzz!" laughed Walden, thinking no longer of anything else than putting the best edge possible, and the smoothest polish, on a very good axe.

Mr. Brooke regarded it approvingly when it was done, but said nothing. He then took up the other axe and examined that.

"I don't suppose I should be an unprejudiced judge," he remarked, in answer to a question of comparison from Walden, as they walked back to the store together. "But here comes Gadbury; he's the best axe-grinder I know of. See here, Gadbury!"

Thus accosted, the tavern-keeper, who was going by, turned up to the store.



HOW WALDEN GROUND HIS AXE. Page 84.

“Who’s the best judge of axe-grinding hereabouts?” Mr. Brooke inquired.

“Id’n’o’n’ti,” replied the old man, modestly. “But *I’ve seen* an axe ground ’fore to-day!”

“Here are two axes,” Mr. Brooke continued. “I sha’n’t tell you who ground them, but I want to know which is done the best.”

Walden’s heart fluttered with expectation as Gadbury took the implements, one after the other, felt their edges, looked across them at the light, turned his quid, and drew up one side of his face in a pucker of amused conceit.

“You want to know my ’pinion?” he asked. “Wal, it mayn’t be wuth a hooter; but, if ’tis, that ’ere axe” — handing Walden’s to Mr. Brooke — “is a decently ground axe.”

“And the other?” said Mr. Brooke.

“This ’ere may be a pretty good axe; I like the looks on’t all,” the umpire added, with great positiveness, “save an’ excep’ the grindin’. Good stuff, good helve, good every way. But the grindin’s uneven an’ too much on the edge, as you can see with your own eyes, Mr.

Brooke, though you may have ground it yerself, fuzino."

"No, I didn't," said Mr. Brooke, with a smile, while Walden had to put his face in a corner to conceal his delight.

But Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick, farther back in the store, looked glum.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRINDERS OF THE TWO AXES HAVE A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO TRY THEIR EDGE.

LOGS for the sawmill had been cut on the spot, and Walden, with his newly ground axe, was set to clearing up some heavy tree-tops, which were to be reduced to piles of fire-wood, or thrown into heaps and burned.

The preparations for sawing the first log went on before his eyes, and were as interesting to him as if the fate of an empire had been at stake. The new enterprise meant framed houses, with boarded sides and smooth floors, and other cheap conveniences, unknown in a settlement of log huts.

Walden was frequently called to help about the mill, using axe, or handspike, or nimble hands; and he was one of a small number of spectators who gathered to see the first slab cut, on the afternoon of the third day.

The bright new saw was fixed in the strong upright frame. The log was on the truck, or carriage, in its place. The gate was hoisted, the water rushed upon the wheel, the gearing moved, the flashing blade began to dance, the log was carried forward against the relentless teeth. Then, at the whizzing contact of wood and steel, and the sight of flying sawdust and the blade eating its way, a glad hurrah went up. Everybody congratulated everybody in general, and Mr. Brooke in particular.

The machinery was quickly stopped for some necessary adjustment. But the problem was solved; and in a few minutes the saw, once more set in motion, took off, cleanly and handsomely, the first slab.

“Now there’ll be a chance for the big bear I see in the woods t’other day,” remarked Gadbury, the tavern-keeper, as the log was backing up for a second cut. “Did I ever tell you the story ’bout the bear that tackled a sawmill onct, an’ ruther got the wust on’t?”

“Tell it, uncle,” said Mr. Brooke, in the best of spirits, as well he might be.

“Ye see,” the old man resumed, “the sawyer had shet down an’ gone off to bring some grease fer his gearin’, leavin’ his pail o’ dinner; an’, when he come back, there sot a big bear on the truck, pail under one arm, a-scoopin’ out the biled cabbage an’ corn-beef with t’other paw, like he was boss of the hull consarn.

“Sawyer wuz consider’ble discomfusticated, as I guess e’ena’most any man ’u’d be under the sarcumstances. But he had time to gether up his wits, fer the beast’s attention wuz so tuck up with his victuals ’t he never see no man. He wuz a-clawin’ an’ a-swallerin’, when the sawyer, thinkin’ jest to drive him away, slipped in an’ set the mill a-goin’.

“Bear felt suthin’ twitch his tail; turned, an’ see the saw a-bobbin’ an’ a-grinnin’ at him. Saw snarled an’ showed its teeth; bear snarled back, and showed his’n. Bear put out his paw, as if to see what sort of a critter wuz a-foolin’ with him; paw got bit. Then that ’ere bear went fer that ’ere saw. Bear’s natur’, ye know, ’s to hug. He hugged. He hugged that ’ere saw, an’ that ’ere saw sawed, whilst

the sawyer jest laid back an' kep' dark an' watched the fight. Bear got the wust on't; ripped clean in tew, slick as a whistle! Sawyer said he didn't haf to travel off fer no more grease fer his gearin' that season! Did I ever tell it? Id'n'o'n'ti!"

"You never told it to me," said Mr. Brooke. "But I've heard the story before."

"Wal, ye may have," said the tavern-keeper, biting a plug of tobacco. "I heerd it long ago's when I wuz a young man, an' carried a musket in the Revolution, an' fit under our gre't and good commander, Gin'ral Jawge Wash'n'ton. 'Twuz an ol' story then, fuzino."

"There wa'n't any sawmills so long ago," said Ase, who sometimes hazarded rash statements in order to make a show of superior knowledge, and who lost no opportunity of discrediting the old man's word since he had passed adverse judgment on his axe-grinding. "Sawmills wa'n't invented."

At the same time, having attracted the attention of the spectators, he flourished an axe which he picked up, and, stepping to a log

near by, struck it a blow that exhibited, as he evidently meant it should, a very creditable amount of muscle.

But Gadbury was not silenced.

“Sawmills wa’n’t invented, hey?” he slowly repeated. “Mabbe they wa’n’t. An’ mabbe bears wa’n’t invented, nuther. But I kin’ o’ run of a notion ’t I seen both, an’ some other things, too, thirty year, ’t least, ’fore ever your hair begun to curl, young man!”

Thereupon everybody laughed; Walden, for reasons of his own, perhaps a little more gleefully than the rest. Ase gave him a glowering look, and once more struck, with a prodigious display of force, his axe into the butt of the log. He left it sticking, and was rising up to answer the tavern-keeper, when Mr. Brooke interposed.

“Don’t waste breath in argument and strokes that do more harm than good. Come, boys!” he called, starting off towards the woods. “There’s a little stick up here I want to get out of the way. Bring your axes.”

By the “boys” he meant Ase and Walden;

and the "little stick" mentioned was part of a gnarly oak, near thirty inches in diameter, that was to be divided into lengths convenient for being hauled to a log-heap and burned.

"Now Ase will have a chance to show what he can do," said Luke Ball, one of Mr. Brooke's wood-choppers. "He's always bragging 't he can cut more wood in a day than any of us, only he never gits the time."

Mr. Brooke had heard his storekeeper brag of what he could accomplish with an axe, which, however, he did not often take occasion to wield, except for a few showy strokes. He had also been annoyed by the ridicule Ase habitually cast upon whatever Walden set out to do.

"Make the first cut about there," said he, laying a twig across the prostrate trunk; "and the next," taking a few paces toward the top, "where this decayed spot is. Then we can handle it."

At sight of the "little stick," Ase felt his ambition to swing an axe rapidly evaporate, and suddenly remembered some important

matter he had neglected at the store when he ran over to see the mill start.

“I’ll look out for that,” said Mr. Brooke. “Now, boys, there’s a little stint for you.”

The stem was slightly tapering, and the decayed spot appeared to offer a still further advantage to the chopper who should take the upper cut. Walden had his eye on it, but stopped at a stump to whet his axe, when Ase walked in before him.

“Oh, Ase!” cried Luke Ball, from a hemlock trunk near by. “You ain’t goin’ to let him butt ye!”

For one chopper to *butt* another signified that he was to make the cut nearest the thick end of a stem in the time it took his companion to make the next above, where the diameter was less.

“There ain’t no butting about it,” replied Ase. Schoolmaster as he was, or had been, he sometimes used the double negative, which form of speech he probably thought good enough for the backwoods. “There’s scarce any difference in the trunk, when you get

a few feet away from the stump, till you pass the branches."

"Wal!" said Tom Keyes, another chopper, who was helping Luke divide the hemlock logs by means of a cross-cut saw, "I'd give the boy the advantage of the difference, if the' is any; and of course the' is a little."

"*I'll* bet the boy can butt *him*," said Gadbury, who had sauntered up the stumpy slope after the choppers. "Come, Brooke, what'll ye bet?"

"Don't bet anything on me," spoke up Walden. "You'll lose if you do. But I'd just as soon take the first cut." And he walked over to the trunk, where he sat down beside the twig Mr. Brooke had laid across it, and continued sharpening his axe.

After some hesitation, Ase, for very shame, left the spot he had chosen, although he had already taken a chip out of it, and started to walk along on the trunk, saying that he didn't care; he wasn't going to try his strength with a boy's anyway.

"Of course not!" said Walden. "I don't

pretend I can chop with a man. But I guess I can manage to gnaw this stick off, give me time. I'm going to try it, and I'm going to have this cut."

So Hedgewick walked back to where he had made a beginning, and struck in his axe again.

"I've got a mighty dull axe!" he said.

"Is that so?" asked Mr. Brooke, surprised. "It has been used very little since you ground it the other day."

Meanwhile Gadbury was urging him to bet. Mr. Brooke laughingly put him off, but at last said, —

"Well, if you *will* be so foolish, I'll bet you a bushel of potatoes. But the odds are all against you; don't you see they are?"

"They may be, fuzino," replied the tavern-keeper. "Ol' man Gadbury don't know much, ye know; don't even know when sawmills was invented! But he'll resk a bushel o' taters on Walden's buttin' on him. Jes' to see a little fun goin' on, and encourage the boys."

"I'm sorry about those *taters*," Walden said to him, with a smile, as he stood on the log, poising his axe.

“You put in!” returned old man Gadbury, with an emphatic nod. “I’ve seen *you* swing an axe, an’ I’ve seen *him* swing an axe, an’ I ain’t afeard o’ losin’ the taters. Not if you’ll try. Don’t ye see, he’s gittin’ the start?”

“I haven’t lost any time while I was sharpening my axe,” said Walden, and he drove the bright edge into the brittle bark.

His strokes were not very heavy, and he did not seem to be hurried in the least. But every blow fell precisely on the spot where it would do the most good; and somehow his axe had a way of settling into the oak, which the apparent strength put forth did not lead you to expect.

“He’s a born chopper,” remarked the tavern-keeper, half leaning, half sitting on a neighboring stump. “Gives his axe jes’ the right slant, an’ hits where he aims ter, tu a hair, every time. Then, don’t ye see? there’s a kin’ of a force goes into the eend of his stroke, stid o’ losin’ itself in the air, ’fore it hits, like some folks’s strokes du.”

And he cast a sarcastic glance at Ase, rubbing at the same time his husky hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. GADBURY'S NOVEL METHOD OF RAISING POTATOES, AND HOW IT SUCCEEDED.

ASE set his first chips flying handsomely, and they were thick and broad. But, on getting deeper into the trunk, he soon betrayed that his skill was by no means equal to his strength. Much of the force of his strokes seemed to spend itself in the air, as the critic on the stump had intimated; and, what was worse, he could seldom strike twice in the same place.

The slanting sides of his cut were constantly getting haggled by false strokes, instead of preserving a clean and polished appearance, as Walden's did. "E'ena'most like the pages of a book," as old man Gadbury observed; "where the minister could write a sarmon, if he was so disposed."

Ase lost a good deal of time in trimming off those mangled edges, often striking still out-

side of them in the attempt, and thus involuntarily broadening his cut. Then another thing happened.

The decayed spot was near the upper side of the log, and to his inexperienced eye it had no doubt indicated easy chopping when he should get into it; perhaps he would find the trunk hollow. But it turned out quite otherwise. There had once been a limb there; the wood was dead, indeed, but hard as "linkum vity," as Gadbury pleasantly remarked.

"He's got into a knot older'n he is; old's the fust sawmill 't ever was invented, fuzino!" chuckled the tavern-keeper, again rattling his horny hands. "See here, Brooke! will ye say tew bushel?"

"Who is beating?" Mr. Brooke called back from the mill.

"Id'n'o'n'ti! But I'll ventur' a few more taters, jes' to see the fun go on."

"You'll ruin yourself, Mr. Gadbury," Walden laughingly protested, between strokes. "You and your boarders will" — hack! — "have to go without potatoes all winter, if



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you risk any more on ” — hack ! — “ my chopping.” Hack ! hack ! and out tumbled a big chip.

The day was cool, but both choppers had thrown off their coats at the beginning of the contest. Walden now flung his cap down on the log with his coat, and unbuttoned his vest. Ase threw off both hat and vest, and loosened his shirt at the throat.

The afternoon sun shone upon their faces, and their shadows chopped behind them, on the background of the bare hills. Gadbury rested on the stump, critical, turning his quid. Luke Ball and Tom Keyes plied their cross-cut saw on the hemlock trunk near by. Bluejays screamed and black squirrels leaped in the forest tops. The sawmill sang below, and the brook came down from above, falling into the little pond.

Walden had gauged his cut so as to bring the angle of the meeting sides very near the centre of the log. He did not quite clear it out, but turned to start the corresponding cut in the opposite side.

Ase turned at the same time; but he had not gone quite so near the centre, and he had left a much wider chip still to be taken out; or perhaps he expected to cut through from the other side, which promised easier chopping.

“Why don’t you notch out?” Gadbury asked him. “I wouldn’t leave sich a botch as that!”

“I wouldn’t, neither, if ’twa’n’t for the sun in my eyes,” replied Ase, in a voice which betrayed his laboring breath.

He was very much heated, his face was flushed and sweaty, the drops trickled down his brawny neck.

He wiped his low forehead, spat upon his hands (with a furtive glance at something very much like blisters appearing on the palms), and resumed his task.

Gadbury took up three thick chips, and, carrying them over to the other side of the trunk, sat down on them, again facing the choppers.

“It’s an easy thing to see white men work,

as the old Injun said," he remarked, cheerfully, once more biting his plug. "Though it *dooes* make my back ache to see *you*, Ase! Seems to me I feel the j'int's o' my fingers achin' round that 'ere helve; an' I'm git'in' awful hot about the neck an' chist! Plenty o' time, plenty o' time, Ase! What makes us so troubled in sperit? What are we so consarned about? Id'n'o'n'ti!" and the old man chuckled.

"You'd better go about your business!" said Ase.

"Why, I *be* about my business! I'm makin' money faster'n I ever did afore in my life — hand over fist!" said Gadbury, with provoking good humor. "'How so?' says you. 'Raisin' taters,' says I."

Walden had to stop and laugh; and he took that occasion to whet his axe again. He was well aware that the little time thus spent would be fully offset by the steel's keener edge and his own refreshed strength. Sharpening was not like chopping.

"I'm in a pretty hard place," he said, balanc-

ing himself on the log again. "If I get beat — as of course I shall, for Ase is only playing with me" — hack! (think of the easy impudence of his calling Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick *Ase!* wouldn't his old school-fellows have laughed?) "He's just making believe; he'll drop the log from under me, first you know! If I get beat," he went on — hack! — "I lose my credit as a woodsman. If I beat him, Mr. Brooke loses" — hack! — "his potatoes. And Mr. Brooke's interest is my" — hack! — "is my interest. So I lose, anyway."

"Never mind about Mr. Brooke's interest," said a voice; and the shadow of his employer, coming up behind, fell across the log. "Win for Gadbury if you can. Ase will look out for me. I'll say two bushels, Gadbury!" and Mr. Brooke walked off again.

Fresh courage and strength seemed to enter into the youthful chopper. Sunburnt, flushed, his short, fair locks tossed over his brow, his red flannel shirt-sleeves tucked up from his brown arms; his breath drawn in through open nostrils and exhaled in a quick "hah!" with

each stroke; lithe, athletic, keen-eyed, his features clear and strong; he stood on the log, above the cut already made, and with the other fast growing between his feet.

Ase was doing better than at first; his strength held out well, and he was getting what he called "the hang o' the axe." He would not be beaten by that boy! Hard and fast fell his strokes. Meanwhile, the tone of old man Gadbury's remarks changed somewhat.

It was plainly to be seen that, as he afterwards confessed, he was "feelin' shaky 'bout them 'ere taters." He got up from his throne of chips, and walked from one part of the log to the other, and squinted across the cuts, making silent comparisons, which were evidently not favorable to his side.

"Be ye gittin' tuckered?" he said to Walden. "Can't ye put in a leetle more ginger?"

The boy knew what he meant by "ginger," and quickened his strokes. The two openings made about equal progress towards the centre of the log; but, before it was reached, Hedgewick's drew to an angle, with still three inches

of solid heart of oak remaining for his axe. He would have been hopelessly beaten if he had been obliged to broaden the notch; but there was the unfinished one on the other side.

“Now’s your chance!” Gadbury cried, excitedly, to Walden. “I’ll give ye half o’ them taters! Two or three strokes right there! Leetle lower down! It’s off! it’s off — save an’ except a hangnail ’t the bottom!”

Walden’s part of the log wasn’t quite so nearly off as Gadbury said. But Ase was made to think it was. He had turned to chop on the sunny side. The level light was in his eyes again. He plied his axe furiously until, almost at the last stroke, it went wild, glanced, flew from his hands, and struck the stump where Gadbury had been sitting, a dozen feet away.

“Lucky I wa’n’t sett’n’ there now!” was the old man’s first exclamation. His second was, as the log began to twist and crack under Walden’s final blows, “We’ve got them ’ere taters, boy!”

CHAPTER XV.

A COON-HUNT WITH A DOG THAT WAS NOT A COON-DOG.

MR. BROOKE did not seem to be much displeased when he heard that he had lost his bet. He was not a betting man, and he had a fine sense of right, which would have troubled him if he had been conscious of taking anything from his neighbor without rendering a fair return.

Walden did not brag of his success, which had cost his employer two bushels of a product which commanded a good price in that new country. Hedgewick had still better reasons for silence on the subject. Mr. Brooke forbore making any comment, but said, quietly, —

“Take a two-bushel bag, Ase, and fill it from the large pile of potatoes in the cellar. Then, when you go to supper, you can take it over to Gadbury’s and pay our debt.”

Hedgewick’s soul revolted against that humil-

iation. "Let him come for 'em," he growled, ungraciously. But Mr. Brooke said that wouldn't do.

"It's a debt of honor, and we must pay it honorably, young man!"

Gadbury had no scruples against receiving it; he stood in his door with a number of his boarders (Walden and the wood-choppers among them), and watched with immense satisfaction the burly Ase bringing over the bag on his back.

"It's the heaviest two bushel o' taters ever *he* had to lug!" he remarked; while Walden's unfortunate risibilities ("tickle-strings," the old man called them) were so shaken that he had to dodge in behind the door, to avoid giving the ex-schoolmaster fresh offence.

Ase did not for a long while hear the last of the affair. Luke Ball and Tom Keyes made frequent allusions in his presence to famous feats of wood-chopping; and at almost every meal somebody would urge him to "take another *tater*;" adding, perhaps, "They're some o' *them'ere taters*, ye know!"

All this, I am sorry to say, increased the animosity with which Hedgewick was inclined to regard his former pupil. Walden himself did not willingly do anything to aggravate it. But, with those over-sensitive "tickle-strings" of his, he couldn't help laughing at the jokes which Ase did not find laughable.

The sawmill had hardly covered its own back with boarding when there came a snow-storm. That made a change of scene, but not of work, for Walden. He was in the woods the most of the time, now helping with his axe, now driving the team for the men, hauling logs or loads of wood, and clearing the ground for crops.

He loved this outdoor life, with all its hard work. In winter, too, no less than in summer, the forest had its charms for him. When the bare boughs revealed their wonderful tracery against the sky, or sparkled with glittering frost-work; when the snapping ice rattled from limbs and twigs at the touch of the morning sun, and the crows cawed high overhead; when the partridge skulked under low branches of

fir, drooping with their weight of snow, by the brookside, and the brook sang its cheery song between icy banks; when the rabbit hopped away before him, dotting the earth's white mantle with its tracks; at all such sights and sounds, a sense of wildness and beauty stirred within him, and he was happy without knowing why.

In the winter evenings he waited on customers in the store, when his services were needed. But he had much time to himself, and now the books which he had brought from home proved useful. He had never forgotten what Mr. Brooke, in their first interview, said to him about arithmetic; and he devoted many hours, and many sheets of birch bark (which served instead of slate or paper), to mastering what he had neglected at school.

He would have been glad of Mr. A. Randolph Hedgewick's assistance about certain hard sums, but would not ask for it; and it was perhaps all the better for him that he worked them out unaided. He did not know

how soon he had passed on where his former teacher would have found it impossible to follow. For that gentleman was not the mathematical prodigy he managed to appear to pupils a little more ignorant than himself.

Mr. Brooke had engaged the boy to do whatever work was required of him; and had concluded that he could afford to give him, besides his living, three dollars—a week, do you think? No; three dollars a month. Walden thought this liberal, and, for the times, it was. But how would it strike lads of his age and spirit and muscle, making a start in life to-day?

Walden did not get along very well with Ase in the store; and he had a particularly hard time with him when, in January, Mr. Brooke was away. Hedgewick had been left in charge; and Walden, in his subordinate position, endured his domineering and abuse as best he could.

Mr. Brooke returned from the East with a sleigh-load of goods; and in February Ase was sent for another load, to Walden's great relief. The boy was now employed much of the time

in the store, and he was rapidly learning the details of the business. Those were happy days when he had Mr. Brooke for a boss, instead of Ase.

He was in the woods one day in spring, when he saw a strange-looking animal running up a tall trunk near the edge of the clearing.

“A wild-cat!” was his first thought. But then he reflected that no creature of the cat tribe, that he ever heard of, had a bushy tail tipped and ringed with black.

“A coon!” was his second thought; and he felt sure this time that he couldn’t be mistaken.

Strange as it may seem, it was the first raccoon our boy of the backwoods had ever seen alive. He had often enough at home witnessed the depredations this nocturnal visitor committed in the cornfields; but he had never hunted it, and it did not often show itself by day.

While he stood watching it from below, it glided over a lofty limb and disappeared in the crotch.

“It has a hole there,” he said to himself; and it occurred to him that its skin would make a very good cap.

He kept his own counsel, but that evening told his good friend the tavern-keeper what he had seen. Since Walden had won for him “them ’ere taters,” and refused to accept any part of them for his share, Gadbury had shown him many favors.

“Keep dark,” said he, “’n’ we’ll have a nice little coon-hunt of our own Sa’day art’noon. He’ll stay where he is, fer that’s his hum.”

“You have a gun,” replied Walden, who remembered seeing one behind the chimney in the room Mr. Brooke occupied at the tavern.

“I’ve got a gun.” The old man’s eyes grew hazy with reminiscence. “My Revolutionary musket. The same ’t I carried to the war, when I fit under our gre’t and good commander, Gin’ral Jawge Wash’n’ton. But ’tain’t o’ much account fer huntin’. Though I s’pose — mind! I don’t say I know, on’y s’pose — ’t that ’ere gun killed a redcoat onct. Fuzino.”

Walden thought he would some time ask

him for the story; but just now he was more interested in a coat that wasn't red.

"I can chop down the tree myself," he said.

"So ye can! But how ye'll ketch the coon? Tell ye what we'll du. Git Warrett to come over 'ith his yaller dog an' his shotgun. An' the coon-skin shall be your'n, fer he owes me a good turn fer grindin' his axe, an' I owe you one fer them 'ere" —

"Don't mention the *taters!*" laughed Walden.

He got Mr. Brooke's permission to cut the tree; and, at Gadbury's invitation, Warrett came on Saturday afternoon, bringing his axe and his gun, and accompanied by his son Sam and his "yaller dog." The son Sam was the same boy whom Walden had seen turning the grindstone for the old man, on the evening of his arrival in the new settlement.

The "yaller dog" was not a coon-dog, and he could not be got to show much interest in anything supposed to be up the tree Walden pointed out.

“Wait till he sets eyes on him!” said the elder Warrett. “Then you’ll see music.”

“He ain’t good on a scent, but there’s a power o’ fight in him!” bragged young Sam.

The axes set to work on each side of the trunk, Walden taking the upper, and Warrett the under cut, in such a way as to lay the top over into the clearing. It was an elm of good size; but it was not long before it began to sway and rustle, and, at a finishing stroke from Warrett’s axe, went crashing down.

“Now for the varmint!” said Gadbury, as all went rushing towards the still quivering top.

The dog felt the excitement, and went capering among the branches; when shown a hole in the crotch, where Walden had seen the coon disappear, he bristled and pawed and gnawed and barked furiously. He was left to guard the entrance while Warrett stood by with his gun, and Walden cut holes, one after another, in the hollow limb.

At last a stick which the old man thrust in

discovered the tenant's lodging; and, after a few vigorous punches, the animal appeared through one of the holes Walden had cut. It was about one-third the size of the dog, into whose very face it put out its nose.

"Let Tory shake him!" yelled little Warrett, dancing "like a wild Injun," as old man Gadbury remarked afterwards.

There was some shaking done; but it struck Walden that it was in an unusual manner. The dog did not seize the game, but the game seized the dog. He pulled it out of the hole with his nose fastened in the raccoon's teeth. The dog jerked and backed off; the raccoon hung on with savage persistence. The "power o' fight" in the cur remained problematical; but his power of yelping was apparent. He filled the woods with his cries of terror and pain.

"The critter might 'a' hild on till doomsday," said Gadbury, telling the story in the evening, "if Walden hadn't 'a' run in an' gin it a coody-grass with his axe." He meant *coup de grace*; and, when asked to explain the term, said it was

one he learned in the army of the Revolution, when he "carried a musket and fit under that gre't an' good commander, Gin'ral Jawge Wash'n'ton."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRUE FAMILY HISTORY OF A KITTEN, A PUPPY, AND
A YOUNG RACCOON.

THE raccoon despatched, Tory got his nose free, and, turning tail, ran for home faster than he had ever run before in his life; uttering short yelps till he was out of sight.

“Why didn’t ye let ’em have the fight out?” said young Sam, in amusing bewilderment.

“There wasn’t any fight,” Walden replied, convulsed with mirth.

“But the’ would ’a’ been,” the elder Warrett declared, “if ye’d on’y waited fer Tory to git mad!”

“I thought it was about time for him to get mad, if he was ever going to,” said Walden. “I think *I* should have been, if a coon had had me by the nose!”

He sobered again when Gadbury, examining the carcass, said, oracularly, “The varmint’s



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got young uns in that 'ere limb. 'Twon't do to let *them* grow up to make mischief in our new cornfields."

"Nor leave 'em to starve," said Walden.

With a few strokes of his axe he enlarged the opening through which the mother-coon had been driven, thrust in his arm, and took out, one after another, five young ones that had not yet got their eyes open. They were passed around and regarded with a great deal of curiosity. Old man Gadbury was in favor of thumping their heads on the log at once.

But Walden thought he would like to have a raccoon for a pet; and young Sam had a still more original scheme for making them useful.

"Give 'em to me," said he, "an' I'll give ye five puppies not a mite older'n they be."

Walden did not readily perceive the value to him of five blind puppies; nor could he see what Sam wanted of so many helpless "coon-kittens," as the tavern-keeper called them.

"I'll take away the pups and give their mother the coons to nuss an' bring up. Then soon's they're big enough I'll show one to

Tory, an' make him fight an' shake it. Then when they're a little bigger I'll give him another. Fin'ly I'll turn him loose in a pen with the last one when it's got full-grown; for I'm bound to edecate him into a coon-dog, if I live!"

Walden laughed. "There's a cat in the store with kittens," he said. "I might give her one coon, and one of your puppies, and see if she'll bring them up. You may have the other four coons for educational purposes; and keep the rest of the puppies."

Taking the old raccoon for her skin, and one of her young for a pet, he returned triumphantly to the store, accompanied by the old man carrying the axe. Mr. Brooke congratulated him on his good luck, and took a lively interest in the experiment to be tried with the cat.

One of her four kittens was removed and the young "varmint" carefully put in its place. She did not seem to notice the fraud, but received and nursed the changeling as if it had been her own. Then, when Sam War-

rett, who had run home with his pockets full of coons, reappeared with a plump brown puppy in his hands, the further deception was practised of substituting it for another of her young.

She was kind to that also; although its greater size might have betrayed, even to a cat's comprehension, one would think, the fact that her hospitality was being imposed upon. The coon was about as large as one of the kittens, which it sufficiently resembled in shape and color. But the puppy was of a more decided brown, and nearly twice as big.

The next day another of her own young was abducted, leaving the cat with progeny belonging to three distinct families of carnivorous animals — the feline, the canine, and the ursine; the kitten, the puppy, and the little plantigrade stranger from the woods. She at first treated them all with about equal consideration; but soon her entire maternal affection seemed to centre in the raccoon, perhaps because it was the puniest of the three.

It did not get its eyes open, and it did not seem to grow. The kitten became playful, and the puppy thrived; but the other changeling did not change, except to become even slighter and feebler than when it was taken from the hollow limb. For its sake the foster-mother snubbed the puppy, and neglected her own child. She would cuff their ears, and snarl at them when they appeared to be taking too large a share of the nutriment she was able to supply; and one day, at the end of about a month, she forsook them altogether, carrying off her favorite in her mouth.

She took it to a new bed she found in another corner of the store; and, when Walden placed the kitten and puppy with her there, she abandoned them again, taking the poor little pet tenderly in her teeth, by the skin of its neck, and hopping back with it into the basket, which had once been the happy home of the now divided family.

Ever after that, whenever the forsaken ones were brought to her, she would immediately get up from her comfortable couch, and, leav-

ing it to them, trot off with her ridiculous charge.

Walden watched these migrations with much interest; and at length, to see what the cat would do, left her kitten in one bed while he replaced the puppy in the other. She was on her four feet with the coon in her mouth in a moment; but when, on going back to the basket, she found the kitten there, she went sadly away and did not return to either bed again.

From that time she might often be seen lugging her darling about and concealing it in out-of-the-way places, to her own perfect satisfaction and the amusement of the spectators; until one day a little tragedy happened, which involved more actors than the cat and her young raccoon.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. HEDGEWICK THINKS IT TIME FOR HIM TO QUIT, AND IS SURPRISED TO FIND HIS EMPLOYER OF THE SAME OPINION.

MR. BROOKE came into the store after dinner, and found Walden red-eyed and choking with anger. When he asked what the trouble was, the boy held out the limp and lifeless body of the cat's favorite.

"Dead?" said Mr. Brooke. "How did that happen?"

"Ask *him!*" Walden replied, giving Ase Hedgewick a wrathful look.

It was not in Hedgewick's nature to like anything in which Walden took delight; and he had come to hate the young raccoon. He had been laughing grimly at the calamity that had cut short its miserable little existence; but now, as Mr. Brooke turned upon him with a stern question, he thought it time to be serious.

"I don't know anything about it," he replied.

"He does!" cried Walden. "I saw him hit it with his foot."

"If I did, it was by accident," said Ase. "It's been hard, half the time, to keep from stepping on it ever since the cat has left it lying around."

"It was no accident," Walden rejoined. "It was between those barrels, when he came along and gave it a kick. I saw him; and I'm as sure he killed it as I am that he is forever doing mean things, which he thinks will spite me."

"Well, go to your work, Walden," said Mr. Brooke. "It can't be helped now."

Walden looked down at the cat purring and rubbing his feet, and mewling wishfully for the baby raccoon in his hand. He gave it to her, and she went off with it in her mouth, to fondle it for the last time, while he walked discontentedly out of the store.

Then Mr. Brooke said to Ase, "What did you want to kill that poor little thing for?"

Hedgewick stoutly denied the charge. Mr. Brooke frowned.

“I’ve watched you both carefully ever since that morning when you and Walden were at the grindstone together. I saw and heard a great deal more than either of you supposed; and I’ve noticed your treatment of him since. You have been constantly imposing on him, and trying to prejudice me against him; while he has seldom made any complaints against you, but has borne your insults as patiently as I should expect a boy of his spirit to do. He has so often been in the right, while you have been in the wrong, that I conclude he is in the right now.”

“Then, you think I lie about that coon!” exclaimed Ase, looking as if he could, as easily as not, make up his mind to throttle his employer.

Mr. Brooke answered firmly, “I believe Walden.”

“Then,” said Ase, “I guess it’s about time for me to quit.”

“As you please,” said Mr. Brooke. “How much do I owe you?” turning to his desk.

Walden was greatly surprised, on coming in

from the woods late in the afternoon, to learn what had occurred.

“I hope you don’t think it was my fault,” he said to Mr. Brooke.

“No, it was his own fault,” Mr. Brooke replied. “I’m sorry to lose him, for work is plenty and help is scarce, and he was a good hand in the store. But I think I know of somebody who can take his place.”

“Who?” Walden inquired.

“A young chap about your size,” said Mr. Brooke.

“His place — in the store?” said the astonished Walden. “I don’t believe I’m capable!”

“If you are not now, you soon will be.”

Mr. Brooke had raised his wages to four dollars a month since the days had lengthened and the spring work set in; he now advanced them to five, with the promise of a still further augmentation, “if it should turn out that he liked the store, and the store liked him.”

Tears shone in the boy’s eyes. To have his pay increased, to be rid of his one enemy, and, more than all else, to receive such proof of his

employer's confidence and good-will, seemed almost too much for one day.

His preference was for active outdoor life and the freedom of the woods. But he liked the store well enough when Ase was out of it. The work there was anything but confining, and there was no lack of exercise for strong arms and a sturdy back.

Hedgewick, when he threw up his situation, had not the least idea that his services could be dispensed with ; and Mr. Brooke's prompt offer to pay him off rather stunned him for a moment. He pocketed his pay, however, and went out to cool his anger, lingering in sight about the tavern, and still confidently expecting overtures for his return. He was wonderfully cheerful, whistling or laughing loud enough to be heard in the store, and appearing to enjoy his leisure immensely.

As Mr. Brooke did not hasten to call him back, he grew uneasy towards night, and took some pains to attract that gentleman's attention when they met at supper. The coolly civil look he received did not raise his spirits re-

markably ; and his talk at table, at first boisterously jolly, became fitful and forced. He was afraid Mr. Brooke did not see the immense importance to his business of the man he had lost.

He even found it necessary to remind him of his existence ; and for that purpose accosted him the next morning at the store, in an exceedingly mild and conciliatory tone.

“I d’n’know’s I’d ought to’ve left you so sudden, when you’ve so much outside business ; and, if ’twill be any ’commodation, I’ll come in and” — he hesitated, chilled by the coolness of his reception.

“Thank you, Ase,” Mr. Brooke replied cheerfully. “But I think I can get along.”

The discomfited Hedgewick saw there was no other way for him but to humble himself.

“I was hasty, — I’d like to take back what I said yesterday,” he resumed, with ludicrous embarrassment, looking foolish and scratching his ear. “I’m willing to keep on with you, if you’ve no objection.”

“If you mean here in the store,” said Mr.

Brooke, "you are too late. Your place is filled."

"I'm turned out for *him?*" said Ase, with a black look at Walden, in the back part of the store.

"Oh, no, Ase. You turned yourself out. I've plenty of work yet, however, if you care to do it."

"What work do you mean?"

"You know what the work is outside," said Mr. Brooke; "logging, teaming, clearing, helping about the mill."

"Work you know I won't do — no, sir! not for you!" Ase exclaimed. "I'll have nothing more to do with such a man. And as for that puppy" —

He did not allude to the dead raccoon's foster-brother, but shook his belligerent fist at Walden, and turned away muttering.

He remained a few days at the tavern, then went to build a cabin of his own on a piece of land he had taken up in another part of the settlement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BEE-HUNT, WHICH SHOWS THAT THEY DON'T ALWAYS GET THE MOST HONEY WHO RECEIVE THE MOST STINGS.

THEN, one fine summer afternoon, a pleasant surprise for Walden. As he was going from the store over to the mill, — where Mr. Brooke was putting in a “run of stone” for grinding the settlers’ grain with the same water-power that sawed their logs, — the boy noticed another boy approaching on foot, carrying a bundle, along the road that led from the woods.

It was a boy new to the settlement; yet his face, as he drew near, grinning under his straw hat-brim, grew astonishingly familiar to the gazer.

“Hallo, Walden!” he called, in a voice which was unmistakable.

“Amos!” Walden exclaimed, starting to meet him. “Where did you come from?” regarding him with delighted amazement.

“From home, of course,” said Amos, laughing. “For the same reason that made you leave. I couldn’t stand it any longer.”

He might have added that the letters Walden had written home from the new settlement had inspired him with a restless desire to try his fortunes with him there in the backwoods, and caused their mother to yield a reluctant consent to his going.

“What did Eli say?” Walden asked,

“To my leaving? He didn’t know of it,” replied Amos. “Nor James; he would have come too, if I had told him. Only mother and Susie knew. I’ve walked all the way.”

“You must be tired!” said Walden.

“I’m tired enough! But it rests me, seeing you,” replied the happy Amos.

Then what long talks the boys had! Amos delivering messages and telling news from home, and Walden, after asking a hundred questions and showing the store, relating more in full the experiences he had briefly touched upon in his letters. Amos was especially pleased to learn of Mr. A. Randolph

Hedgewick's dismissal; and he had many a good laugh at his former schoolmaster's expense.

He had come to work; and his offer of services was welcome just then to Mr. Brooke, who proposed that he should take Walden's place, and make himself generally useful, while Walden continued to fill that of the departed Ase.

Amos gladly accepted, and set to work the next morning with willing hands. He was not so old within two years as his brother, nor so skilful with the axe; but he was strong and intelligent, and Mr. Brooke, watching him with evident satisfaction, said to Walden,—

“He'll do! he'll do!” adding, “It happens just right for me. I've got to make a journey to the East next week; and I was wondering, till your brother came, whether I could leave you in charge of the store. But with him to help, when you need help, I rather think I can.”

“I'll do my best to take care of things; and I'm sure I can rely on Amos,” replied Walden.

The boys were very happy together; and everything went smoothly with them, in their employer's absence, until a few days before he was expected to return.

In the month of May, about the time when he saw his raccoon running up the old elm on the edge of the clearing, Walden, exploring the woods one afternoon, had made another discovery. On the stump of a maple tree that had been recently cut, he noticed some bees feeding on the still oozing sap, and observed that they flew away in a certain direction.

"They are honey bees," he said to himself, "and there must be a bee-tree not far off."

He cut from the top of the stump a few chips sticky with the sweet juice, and scattered them, at intervals of a hundred yards or so, along the ground in the direction of the bees' flight. Returning the next day, he found them alighting on the chips, or darting away from them, in lines of flight which finally drew his eye to the top of a tall chestnut, deep in the forest.

Again he told nobody of his discovery except

the friendly tavern-keeper, who chuckled and said, —

“We had our little coon-hunt, that turned out lucky; an’ now I shouldn’t wonder a mite if we should be tacklin’ a bee-tree, some day. Say nothin’, but wait till the right time comes, an’ ol’ man Gadbury is the one to show ye how to git the sweet without the stings.”

“I think I’d better ask Mr. Brooke if we can cut the tree; for I believe it is on his land,” said Walden.

Mr. Brooke’s permission was readily obtained. Yet the time for getting the honey would not come, in the tavern-keeper’s judgment, until the bees had had time to lay in their next winter’s supply, and the weather was cold enough to keep them quiet when their home should be disturbed.

But one day, in Mr. Brooke’s absence, Gadbury came to Walden and said, —

“I’ve ben keepin’ my eye on that ’ere bee-tree, an’ I guess mabby the time’s come for cuttin’ on’t. Who d’ye think I seen there this forenoon, ’ith his head flopped over on his back

like he would break his neck off, an' his eyes a-starin' straight up into the canopy o' heaven, in the direction o' that 'ere tree-top; so engaged, he never spied me till I started to walk past, jes' as if I hadn't noticed him? 'Twas your friend Ase. He spoke, an' I spoke, civil enough; but nuther one on us mentioned bees, oh no!"

It was the old man's opinion that, if they did not get the honey very soon, somebody else would; and they accordingly made preparations for securing it that afternoon.

Luke Ball, one of Mr. Brooke's wood-choppers, was then let into the secret and invited to assist. Amos, much to his regret, was left in charge of the store. Walden provided sulphur for smoking the bees in their cavity; and with mittens and veils for their hands and faces, buckets for bringing away the honey, and axes for felling the tree, the little party entered the forest.

The tree was about half cut when the sound of the axes brought somebody tramping towards it through the woods.

“It’s Ase!” said Gadbury, biting his plug. “Keep to work, boys; don’t mind him a hooter. I’ll settle his hash!”

They plied their axes, Walden on one side of the tree, and Luke on the other, and the chips were flying in lively fashion when Hedge-wick came up, calling out, angrily, —

“Look here! you’re cutting my bee-tree!”

“How come it yourn?” the old man inquired.

“I found it, two weeks ago; it’s got my mark on it.”

“Somebody else found it two months ago; an’ got Brooke’s consent to cuttin’ on’t, long ’fore ever you sot up a claim tu it,” replied Gadbury.

“Who cares for Brooke’s consent?” Ase retorted. “A man’s got a right to a bee-tree wherever he finds it, in these woods.”

“Wal,” said the old man, “you’re in the right on’t, fuzino. An’ we’re in the right on’t ’cordin’ to your own account, a-takin’ the tree.” And he gave a half-audible chuckle. “Peg away, boys!”

“I’m going to have my share o’ that honey ; you see !” cried Ase, turning and walking rapidly away.

“He’s a-goin’ fer buckets,” said the old man. “Let him ! he’ll be jest a little mite dis-comfusticated, like as not, when he brings ’em !”

With flint and steel and powder, and dry leaves and twigs, he proceeded to start a fire ; which he had ready on a broad piece of bark covered with earth, by the time the tree came crashing down. Then, mittened and veiled, he rushed to the top, to find the hollow occupied by the bees.

A large limb had been split in falling ; it hummed with the maddened swarm within, and out of a broad crack honey was pouring in a stream of lucent gold. Walden, likewise mittened and veiled, came bringing the buckets to catch it ; while Luke hastened to make an under-cut at a place the old man pointed out, where the burning sulphur was to be introduced.

There seemed to be surprisingly few bees

about them at first; but they soon began to descend from the forest-tops, and pour out of the broken limb, and dart hither and thither, in swift zigzags and whizzing circles; and soon the air was full of them. Gadbury had intended to leave them for a while, in order to let the ignited sulphur do its work; but the prospect of Hedgewick's speedy return caused him and his companions to hurry up their operations.

Luke laid open the smoking limb; and Walden and the old man, coughing, and half blinded by the sulphurous fumes, cut out, with ladle and scoop, great masses of the dripping comb, and filled the buckets. They were in the midst of this exciting work when Ase returned, bringing a big black kettle and a small tin pail, and bellowed out at a distance, —

“Where's my share?”

“Here 'tis!” Gadbury answered, in a muffled voice. “Come an' git it!”

Hedgewick started to act upon this friendly suggestion, thinking, no doubt, he would find safety where there was so much smoke, al-

though he had not provided himself with a veil. But, as he drew near, it seemed as if the entire baffled and infuriated swarm gathered to wreak vengeance on him. Away went the tin pail as he flung up his hand to brush out his buzzing hair. Then, turning to retreat, he dropped his clattering kettle, and ran with both hands flying wildly about his neck and ears, until a dead limb on the ground tripped his heels, and he sprawled headlong.

“Oh, that Ase! that Ase!” said Walden, convulsed with laughter even at that critical moment, with the smoke in his eyes and nostrils and the bees getting in a sting or two despite his veil. “He’ll be the death of me yet.”

Hedgewick was up and running again by that time, slapping and cursing.

“’Minds me of that ’ere yaller pup o’ Warrett’s, arter the coon bit him,” said the old man, as he heaped up the honey-comb in the last of the three pails. “Wonder if he’s found out when sawmills an’ bears was fust invented — an’ bees, tew, fer that matter! Why don’t

ye come an' pick up your kittle an' pail, and take your sheer? It's here in the holler limb!" he called out to Ase, who was by this time afar off in the woods, still fighting the too persistent bees.

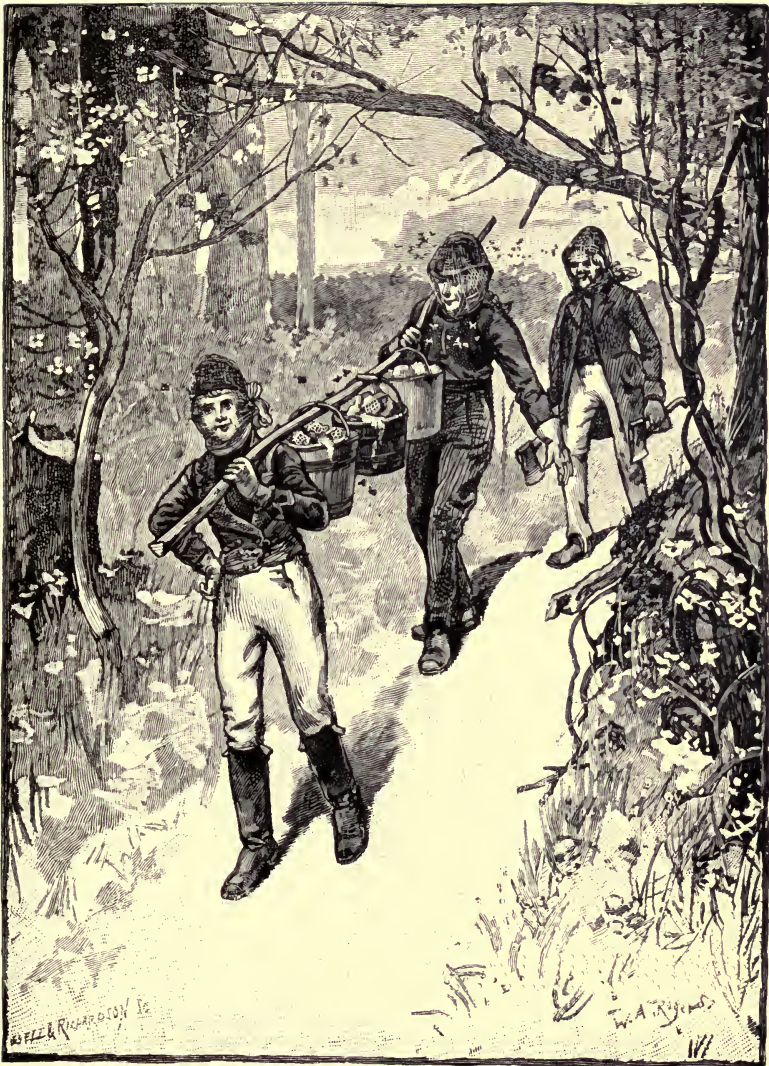
CHAPTER XIX.

A BURGLARY, WHICH LOOKED ALSO LIKE A REVENGE.

THE buckets well filled with honey and heaped-up comb, a sapling which Luke had cut was passed through the bails, and they were triumphantly carried off by him and Walden, resting the weight on their shoulders; while the old man followed with an axe in each hand.

“I got tew or three pesky little stings,” he said; “one up my trousers-leg, an’ one in my sleeve. But all’s fair in war-time. Can’t blame the bees. I tell ye, boys, I hain’t had sich a campaign sence I carried a musket an’ fit an’ bled under our gre’t and good commander, Gin’ral Jawge Wash’n’ton!”

As bees still followed them, they did not venture to unveil until they had got their honey safe in the cellar of the store, where it was to be divided.





“We got that ’ere bucket a leetle tew full,” said the old man. “I didn’t ca’c’late on the comb’s settlin’ down so.”

“It’s running over on the floor here now,” said Walden, who hastened to bring a basin and take out some.

Gadbury then selected a bucket for himself, leaving one for Walden and one for Mr. Brooke.

“You shall have a share, too,” Walden said to Luke Ball. “You got stung worse than either of us. Here’s yours, Amos,” giving his brother the well filled basin. “This is for staying here and *not* getting stung.”

“I’d rather have gone and got stung,” replied Amos, who could not cease to regret the fun he had missed.

The honey had been brought in through the cellar door, which Walden now shut and fastened on the inside. Even the pain of his stings did not lessen his satisfaction in the results of the afternoon’s adventure, which was something to talk about and brag of to all comers. But the sequel was not so pleasant.

When he went to the store the next morn-

ing, an astonishing sight met his eye. The cellar had been broken into, and one of the buckets with its entire contents had disappeared.

The other bucket remained, but it was overturned, and what was left of the honey had run out on the ground.

“Oh, that Ase!” Walden exclaimed once more. But he did not laugh this time.

It seemed as if the burglar had meant to destroy as much of the honey as he could not carry away; and Walden felt sure it was the work of Hedgewick, indulging his malice while taking more than his supposed share.

The simple fastening of the door — consisting of a strong wooden latch, the string of which was pulled in — had been forced; and the door stood wide open when Walden came down the ladder from the other part of the store. In his astonishment, he found himself stepping in the honey and tracking it about before he fully realized what had happened.

“Amos!” he said, — for Amos also came, attracted by his exclamations of astonishment

and anger — “go over and tell Mr. Gadbury I want to see him. Say nothing to anybody else, and be quick!”

Gadbury came, and saw, and shook his wise old head.

“Who do you suppose has done this?” Walden asked.

“Id’n’o’n’ti!” The old man bit his plug and screwed up his face into shrewd wrinkles. “But I can e’ena’most make a guess.”

“So can I!” cried Walden. “He knows the store — he knows just where we would be apt to leave the honey over night.”

“He’s a revengeful critter!” commented the old man. “No decent thief ’u’d ’a’ wanted to make sich a muss ’ith what he couldn’t lug away. Fer my part, I thought he’d be so laid up ’ith his bee-stings ’t he couldn’t git out an’ around ’n a hurry.”

“It’s his stings that must have maddened him to do this,” said Walden. “As if ’twas our fault that he got stung! All that nice honey I was going to show Mr. Brooke — not a pound of it worth saving!” And he seemed

almost ready to cry with disappointment and chagrin.

“Ain’t no doubt but what he done it,” mused the old man. “But the trouble ’ll be to prove it agin’ him. Best way is jes’ to keep quiet, say nothin’ to nobody, an’ see what ’ll turn up next.”

The boys thought this good policy, and set to work to clear up the cellar as cheerfully as boys could be expected to do on so trying an occasion. There was some rubbish not easily accounted for, unless the burglar, before going off with his booty, had amused himself by kicking a useless pail to pieces. This was swept into a corner, a new fastening was fitted to the door, and the cellar closed.

During the forenoon Gadbury sauntered over through the woods to call on Hedgewick in his new cabin; and reported the result of his observations to Walden on his return.

“I pretended to be huntin’ fer more bee-trees; goin’ by, I jes’ looked in to ax him ’f he got his sheer o’ the honey we lef’ fer him in the tree. But I didn’t git much out on him.

Grouties' feller ever you sot eyes on! An' well he might be!" the old man chuckled.

"Did you see any signs of honey?" Walden asked.

"Nary sign. But I see signs of bees, plenty on 'em, 'bout his face and neck, where they 'd peppered him. I complimented him on his new house, an' what I'd heerd said 'bout his gittin' ready to marry one of the Warrett gals. But I couldn't dror his fire; he was tew mad fer anything. Can't blame him; I sh'd be mad in his place, fuzino!"

"I don't see that we're likely to find out anything," grumbled Walden.

"You wait!" responded the oracular old man. "Suthin'll happen, you see!"

So Walden waited, and something did indeed happen, although not by any means what he expected or wished.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH GADBURY'S OLD REVOLUTIONARY MUSKET
PLAYS AN INTERESTING PART.

TWO nights after the theft of the honey, the store cellar was broken into again, — in very much the same way, — and more mischief was done. A keg of maple-sugar was overturned, and its contents were purloined or scattered. Even the pork-barrel suffered. The cover was thrown aside, and certainly one large piece of pork, which Walden had noticed emerging from the brine only a day or two before, had been taken; how much more he did not know.

“It’s the mos’ surprisin’est thing ’t ever I seen er heerd tell on!” old man Gadbury exclaimed, when he was once more called in, and found Walden gazing astounded at the scene of the last night’s depredations.

“To think of the scoundrel’s coming a second time!” said Walden. “What will Mr. Brooke think?”

“Id’n’o’n’ti!” replied the old man, with his plug between the only two front teeth he had left good for a bite. “But I know what he’s expected to think. He’s expected to make up his mind ’t he’s left his store in poor hands, an’ ’t if he wants it pertected when he’s away, he’d better call back somebody ’t knows the business better.”

“I thought of that,” said Walden. “Of course, he can’t bear the idea of the store’s prospering since he was discharged. But it *shall* prosper!” he declared, with angry emphasis. “And I’ll protect it!”

“What ’ll ye do?” queried the old man.

“I’ll stay here and stand guard!”

“Ye better not du it alone, youngster! It’s a desprit scamp ’at breaks inter a buildin’ this way, tew nights in a week; an’ ’f he comes agin, an’ finds nobody but a boy to tackle him, he jes’ ’s lives du ye a mischief as not.”

“I shouldn’t think he’d be such a fool as to come a third time,” said Amos.

“But his coming a second time shows he may be just that kind of a fool,” replied

Walden; "especially if his object is not only to help himself to things he's too mad to come here and buy, but to make Mr. Brooke believe he has left his store in careless hands. Any way, I shall keep watch now every night till Mr. Brooke comes back. Will that old musket of yours throw a load of buckshot?"

"It's done that as many times as onct sence I ben in the settlement," replied the old man. "An' the bagnet 'll du good sarvice in a clost fight. Though that 'ere ol' gun," he added, mournfully, "ain't the weepen it wuz when I carried it in the Revolution, an' fit under our gre't an' good" —

"Of course not," interrupted Walden. "But will it shoot?"

"Wal, yis; clean 'er out, chuck in a picked flint an' ile up the lock, 'twill do at short range."

"I don't expect anything else but short range with a burglar like this one!" said Walden.

After once more clearing up the cellar, and getting what was left of the crushed and soiled

sugar back into the keg, he brought the old musket over from the tavern and spent a good hour or two in preparing it for use. He washed it out with hot water, he wiped it out with tow, he picked out the rusted vent, adjusted a fresh flint, and gave the lock and the hinge of the pan a good oiling; then putting in a priming and a light charge of powder, he fired it out of the back door.

“She’ll do!” he said with grim satisfaction. “That was only for fun. Now for earnest.”

He rammed down a heavier charge of powder, then dropped the big rattling buckshot into the clumsy iron tube. So far it had all seemed a serious sort of sport to Amos; but at the sound of the deadly lead falling into the barrel he turned pale.

“Do you really mean to shoot him?” he inquired, anxiously watching his brother’s resolute face.

“Not unless I’m obliged to,” said Walden. “I don’t want to hurt anybody. But I’ve been left in charge of the store, and it’s my business to protect it. If it’s necessary to use a gun, I

shall use a gun. If at short range, as the old man says, then some rascal may get hurt."

"You ought to have somebody watch with you," suggested the younger brother.

"I should like it. But I don't expect you to."

"*I am going to stay with you, of course!*" Amos exclaimed. He was naturally more timid than Walden, yet he was not wanting in resolution. "But we are only two boys."

"Two boys, with the right on their side, and a gun that's been shouldered by a patriot in the Revolution, when he fit, bled, and died under that gre't an' good commander, Gin'ral Jawge Wash'n'ton," said Walden, imitating the old tavern-keeper's speech, and causing Amos greatly to admire his coolness while he laughed at his humorous mimicry.

"I thought from what Gadbury said, when he gave you the gun, he might watch with us," said Amos. "I'd get him and Luke Ball."

"Not both at once," replied Walden. "We may have two or three nights of watching. I'd like Gadbury to-night, and then Luke to-mor-

row night, if I don't have a chance to fire off this old musket in the meantime."

The tavern-keeper consented to watch with the boys the first night; and, quietly leaving his house at about nine o'clock, he entered the store, where he found them waiting by the dim light of a tallow dip.

The store consisted of two rooms, one above and one partly below the surface of the ground. This was the cellar, in the rear end of which was the door that had been forced by the marauder. The only other entrance was by a trap-door and a short ladder descending from the floor above.

The walls were of logs, banked up on the outside to exclude the winter's cold. Natural light was also excluded, except such as came in through the door when it was opened, or from the trap and numerous crevices in the upper floor. Between that and the cellar floor of hard gravel there was barely room for a man to stand upright.

Into this dismal place, crowded with casks and kegs and agricultural tools, Walden groped

his way down the little ladder, carrying his candle and followed by Amos and the old man. The glimmering rays showed the musket already there, standing with a pair of pitchforks beside the pork-barrel.

“Weepons enough fer a small campaign!” chuckled the old man, stooping under the low ceiling of rough slabs. “Why don’t ye fix the bagnet?”

“The gun won’t shoot so well with the bayonet on, will it?” said Walden.

“Jes’ ’s well, exac’ly, ’t short range,” replied the old man. “Bagnet gives ye a double advantage. Fust, you pull trigger; then foller up yer shot with a bagnet charge. I’ll give ye a lesson if the scamp comes to-night.” And he proceeded to fix the bayonet.

Walden was quite willing that Gadbury should use the musket; for now that the time of action seemed near, and he had only the light of the candle to cheer him in that gloomy cavern, he was unable to take quite so complacent a view of shooting a burglar as he had done by daylight.

He armed himself with one of the forks and gave the other to Amos, then sat down on an empty meal-bag at the foot of the ladder. The old man had a blanket to repose upon, and a molasses cask at his back, opposite the door. Amos squatted by the pork-barrel.

"Now, 'f everything's ready," said the old man, "hide yer light."

Walden had an empty keg provided for the purpose, which he now placed over the candle on the gravelly floor. Utter darkness followed, accompanied by silence so profound that he could hear the beating of his own heart, and the breathing of the old man by the molasses cask. He was not a coward, and yet a sense of mystery and danger made his blood chill for a moment.

"What if there's more than one of 'em?" whispered Amos.

"They'll find three of us," said the old man; "an' one a vet'ran that's ben through campaigns in the Revolution, an' fit under" —

"Tell us that story about your musket's killing a red-coat," suggested Walden. "But speak low."

“I guess we better not speak at all,” Gadbury replied, “’f we don’t wanter give the villain warnin’ when he comes tu the door. I’ve got the range, but I shall be onto my feet when I fire. Level shot’s the best. ’Minds me,” he chuckled, “of a man ’t I knowed onct, that took his musket out int’ the field where he was ploughin’, to shute flocks o’ pigeons flyin’ over. But jes’ ’s often ’s he hild the barrel up int’ the air an’ snapped, jes’ so often it missed fire. Bimeby, arter he’d seen about the thickest flock ever wuz sail right clust over him, an’ the ol’ musket on’y snapped and spilt the powder out o’ the pan, he got riled.

“‘By the laws!’ says he, ‘I’ll try a shot at ol’ Goldin’!’”

“Ol’ Goldin’ was his best ox. He levelled gun, jerked trigger, an’ filled his flank full o’ buckshot. Ye see,” Gadbury explained, “flint wouldn’t throw fire into the pan when the barrel was hild up fer the pigeons, but it ’u’d du it every time when ’twuz hild down fer the ox!”

The tavern-keeper was inclined to talk

enough; but he would immediately fall back upon the necessity for silence whenever he was asked again for the story of the slaughtered red-coat. At last, as it grew late, he became silent altogether, and soon his deep breathing betrayed that he was asleep.

"Amos," Walden whispered, "go to sleep too, if you want to; there's no need of more than one keeping awake."

"Think I can sleep when we're expecting a burglar to smash in on us any minute?" replied Amos.

Yet, as no burglar smashed in for the next half-hour, Amos by that time tranquilly joined the old man, beyond the confines of slumber.

Then, with his back against the ladder-rungs, the sharpness of which he had somewhat ameliorated with meal-bags, Walden, still sitting awake, felt oppressed by the terrible loneliness of the situation. As he grew weary with waiting and thinking, the burglary, which had appeared to him so real by daylight, began to fade to a sort of hideous dream.

"Are we just making fools of ourselves

here?" he said to himself. "The idea of my keeping this old man out of his bed! I may as well get my head on something and go to sleep myself."

At that moment the oppressive silence was broken by a strange brushing sound, as of a heavy hand passing over the door on the outside. Walden at the same time felt a curdling sensation pass over his flesh and culminate in the roots of his hair.

"Gadbury! Amos!" he whispered, not daring to speak loud. "Did you hear?"

Not a word from the sleepers. Then came the brushing sound again; it seemed this time as if somebody was pressing hard against the door. He reached over to shake the tavern-keeper, and laid his hand on the musket.

At that moment there came a dull crash, and the door was burst in. It was a gloomy night, affording just light enough for Walden to see a dark form stooping on the threshold, as the door swung back.

"Who's there?" he shouted, snatching up the gun and levelling it, as he rose upon one knee.

“Who? O Lord! O Lord!” gasped the terrified Amos, suddenly awakened from a sound sleep.

“Where — where — where’s my gun?” stammered the old man, fumbling along the ground.

“I’ve got it,” said Walden. “Speak!” he cried out, his resolution ringing in clear tones through the tremors of fear that thrilled him from head to foot. “Or I’ll fire.”

No response from the bold marauder. Neither did he attempt to retreat. But with a slow deliberate motion he partly rose from his crouching posture, and stood half erect, under the low ceiling, as if about to rush upon the challenger back there in the darkness.

“Shute! shute!” said the tavern-keeper. “Massy sakes! why don’t you shute?”

But a point-blank discharge at three paces seemed such certain death to the intruder that the boy shrank from so terrible a responsibility. He would give him one more chance.

“Speak, I say, or you’re a dead man!”

Almost at the same instant he pulled the trigger. The gun snapped; there was a spark

from the flint, but it did not fall into the pan. Thereupon Amos, overcome by the mystery and terror of the situation, felt himself one crawling piece of flesh from scalp to shins, shrinking and shivering behind the pork-barrel.

“Gi’ me the gun!” said Gadbury, in hurried, husky tones, reaching for it in the darkness.

But Walden’s spirit was now fully roused, and he was troubled no more by scruples in regard to shooting so desperate a house-breaker. Click! click! he cocked the musket again and threw down the pan. Meanwhile, as if emboldened by the first futile attempt to shoot him, the enemy advanced a step, rising still more erect, dark and frightful, between Walden and the faint light of the doorway, until his exposed breast almost touched the point of the bayonet.

Flash! bang! Two lurid gleams from pan and muzzle, and a deafening explosion filled the cave with its roar.

CHAPTER XXI.

END OF THE TRAGICAL EPISODE OF THE BURGLAR, AND
ALSO OF THIS HISTORY.

WALDEN was thrown back against the ladder, almost insensible, by the recoil of the gun. Gathering himself up quickly, however, he saw the marauder tumbling out at the door, and heard old man Gadbury shrieking, —

“Give him the bagnet now! le’ me have the gun! Unkiver yer light an’ pitch in ’ith yer forks, boys! But be careful — the critter ain’t dead yit!”

Attempting to lift the cask from the candle, Amos upset it, and put out the light. He had lost his fork, and it was some moments before, in his agitation, he could recover it. Meanwhile, Walden and the old man rushed out to a strange conflict, and filled the night with their confused exclamations and yells for help.

Help and a lantern soon came from the tavern, and followed the cries towards the woods, where they found the boys with their forks and the old man with his "bagnet," close upon the wounded foe dragging himself towards the woods — shaggy, savage, dying, but still turning to strike and snarl when too hard-pressed.

On returning from the East the next day, Mr. Brooke saw the tavern-keeper and the two boys in front of the store, engaged in skinning an enormous black bear.

"Ha! where did you get that fellow?" he asked.

"We cut that bee-tree in the woods the other day," said Walden, "and I suppose he tracked the honey that dripped from one of the pails, for he broke into the store that very night to get at it. He came again two nights later — that was night before last — and got at the sugar and salt pork; so we kept watch last night, and caught him."

"An' will ye b'lieve," said the old man, "we



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SNARL." Page 160.

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wuz sich discomfusticated fools 't we never 'spected no bear, but thought 'twuz a feller 't we knowed had a spite agin us an' the store! We might 'a' kep' on 'spectin' him all our lives, fuzino, 'f we hadn't diskivered the real thief; which wa'n't over-'n'-above smart, I must own, fer a Revolutionary patriot that can boast of havin' fit an' bled under that gre't an' good commander, Gin'ral Jawge Wash'n'ton!"

"We thought he had carried one bucket of honey away," said Walden. "But it seems he had broken it to pieces, and then scattered the staves about, after licking them clean. If I was ever glad of anything in my life," he went on, "it was when I found I had sent my charge of buckshot into the heart of a bear instead of a man!"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Mr. Brooke. Then, after listening to a full account of the supposed burglaries, "I don't wonder you suspected somebody; but he isn't so bad a fellow as that. I'm sorry about the honey; but you'll more than make up for the loss by securing

such a skin as that, and such a supply of bear-meat.”

Walden was a happy boy that day ; and he even began to entertain friendly feelings towards the man whom he had triumphed over, perhaps not unjustly, but whom he had most unjustly suspected.

He was, if possible, made happier still by a bit of good news Mr. Brooke had brought him from home.

“My brother has finally squeezed the full amount of that order out of your friend Tadmore.”

From this time forth, the boy had the satisfaction of feeling that he was more firmly established than ever in the business and confidence of his employer. And I might go on to relate how, before many years, he became a partner in that business ; how his youngest brother, James, next came to him, and then his mother and sister, and finally Eli himself, giving up the old farm, which he had mismanaged, and gladly accepting the employment Walden gladly

offered; and how, "growing up with the country," our boy of the backwoods became one of its large-hearted, large-minded, influential men.

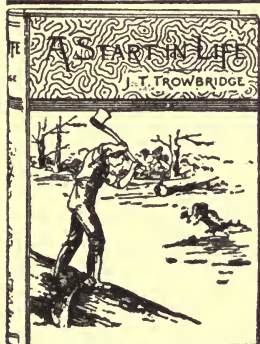
But I only set out to tell you of his Start in Life.

THE END.

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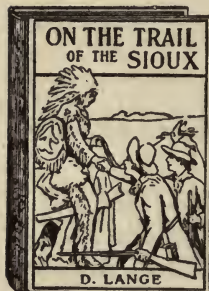
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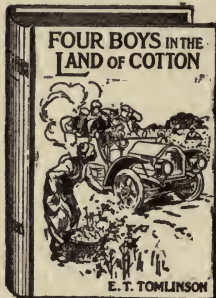
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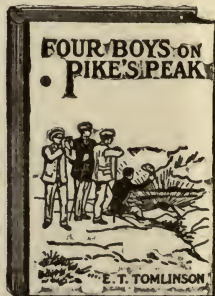
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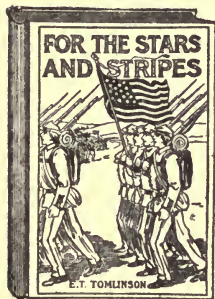
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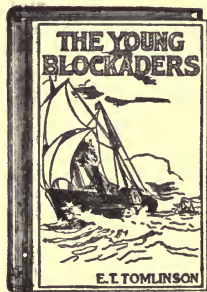
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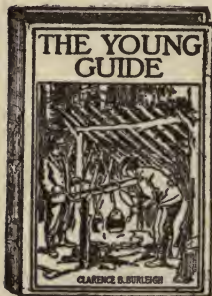
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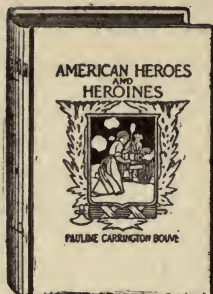


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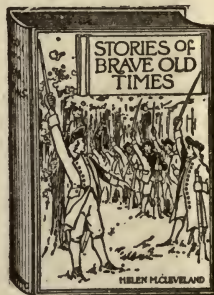
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202 Main Library

LOAN PERIOD 1	2	3
HOME USE		
	5	6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405

1-year loans may be recharged by bringing the books to the Circulation Desk

Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

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