



CUPID
OF
CAMPION

FRANCIS J. FINN, S. J.



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BY

FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.

Author of "Tom Playfair," "Percy Wynn," "Harry Dee,"
"Claude Lightfoot," etc.



NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

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CUPID OF CAMPION

CHAPTER I

In which Clarence Esmond places himself in the hands of the Bright-eyed Goddess of Adventure, and is entrusted by that Deity to the care of a Butcher's Boy.

On a morning early in September, the sun was shining brightly upon the village of McGregor. Nestled in a coulée between two hills, one rising squarely and rock-ribbed, lacking only the illusion of windows to give it the appearance of a ruined castle, the other to the northwest, sloping gently upwards, and crowned at the summit with a number of villas, McGregor, running down to the Mississippi River, was as pretty a town as Iowa could boast.

On this bright particular morning, an overgrown youth was sitting on the boat-landing, his feet dangling above the water, his face glooming darkly. Master Abe Thompson, age sixteen, was troubled in spirit.

He was homeless. He had lost his position, that of a butcher's boy, just a little after sunrise. It arose out of a difference of seventy-five cents in the butcher's accounts. Abe had been told under penalty of having "his face shoved in" never to darken the doors of the butcher-shop again. At the tender age of twelve Abe had left his home unostentatiously and without serving notice, and ever since had spent his time in losing jobs up and down the river. The trouble with Abe was that he never could resist "obeying that impulse," no matter what that impulse might be. He had been blessed, if one may say so, with an obedient mother and an indifferent father. The discipline of the public school which Abe was supposed to attend might have done something for the boy had he been present for so much as six days hand-running. But Abe had early made a successful course in the art of dodging duty. He was by way of joining that vast army of the unemployed who are the ornament of our country roads in summer and of our back alleys in winter. Abe was entitled to graduate with honors in the ranks of those who have learned the gentle art entitled "How not to do it." At the present moment Abe Thompson was in darkest mood. His soul just now was fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. His gloomy eyes moved vacantly over the waters shimmering in the sun. Suddenly his air of listlessness disappeared, his eyes grew tense. Among the boats around the landing was one small skiff riding high on the water, in which (for some people will be careless) lay a pair of oars and a paddle.

Abe was still gazing at this boat and its contents with greedy eyes when there came upon his ears the sound of a sweet, piercing soprano voice, giving, to whoso should wish to hear, the ineffable chorus of an almost forgotten music-hall melody:

"Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!"

Abe turned to discover coming blithely down street—the one street running through

McGregor—a gay lad of about fourteen years of age, dressed in an immaculate white sailor-suit. The approaching youth was walking, skipping, and jumping in such wise that it was hard to define what he was doing at any particular moment. He was rather small for his years, but apparently of muscle all compact. Gracefulness characterized his wildest and most impetuous motions. He was a perfect blonde, and his hair, bobbed after the fashion of little girls of ten or eleven, gave him a somewhat feminine aspect, further emphasized by his cream-and-rose complexion. A close observer, studying his pretty features, might indeed have inferred from his tip-tilted nose and his square chin that the youngster was not safely to be treated as a mollycoddle. Abe was not a close observer.

“I say,” he broke out, as the pretty boy drew near, “what sort of a lingo is that you’re giving us? You don’t call that American, do you?”

“Good morning, fair sir,” replied the boy, raising his sailor hat and bowing elaborately, “may I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?”

“What lingo was that you was a-singing?”

“The language, fair sir, of adventure.”

Abe frowned, and spat into the river.

“Permit me,” continued the newcomer, “to introduce myself. I have the honor of informing you that my name is Clarence Esmond. What is yours?”

“I’m Abe Thompson. What are you looking for this morning?” continued Abe, as he noticed that Clarence was gazing longingly at the craft moored at the river’s edge.

“Who?—me?” queried the debonair youth. He drew himself erect, threw back his head, raised his eyes, and with a dramatic gesture continued: “I am looking for the bright-eyed goddess of adventure!”

“Oh, talk American!”

“I will, gentle youth. I am looking for fun; and if something happens, so much the better.”

“Do you want to go anywheres?”

“I want to go everywhere. I’d like to be on the ocean, running a liner; I’d like to be a cowboy, dodging Indians; I’d like to be a soldier in the trenches, and a sailor in a submarine. In fact, I’d like to be everywhere at the same time.”

“You can’t do that, you boob,” said Abe with strong disfavor on his rugged face.

“I am one of those fellows,” continued Clarence, “who wants to eat his cake and have it.”

“Oh, jiminy!” roared Abe, breaking into a loud laugh, “you want to eat your cake and you want to have it at the same time?”

“That’s it exactly. I want to eat my cake, and at the same time have it.”

“Oh, jiminy! Why, do you know what you are?” asked Abe laughing with conscious superiority.

“Won’t you please tell me?”

“Why, you are an idiot, a plumb-born idiot.”

“Oh, am I?” and as Clarence asked the question his face beamed with joy.

“You sure are.”

“I suppose,” continued Clarence, “that you think I am one of those chaps who hasn’t got enough sense to come in out of the rain when it is raining.”

“You’re the dumbest idiot I ever met,” said the frank butcher’s boy.

“I guess you are right,” assented the lad beamingly. “Lots of people have told me I am an idiot. And I never do come in out of the rain when it is raining. I use a cravenette.”

“Oh, Lord!” cried Abe, all his crude humor stirred to scornful laughter, “what an awful ass

you are!”

“Thank you so much,” answered Clarence glowing with delight. “It’s a pleasure to meet a fellow who says just what he thinks.”

“Any more like you at home?”

“I happen to be the only child,” answered Clarence. “I am the light of my mother’s eyes. There are no others like me.”

“I should say not! Say, who let you loose?”

“That reminds me,” said Clarence, his smile leaving him. “I’ve got to be back at noon, and it’s nearly eight-thirty now. Say, do you know this river?”

“I should say I do. Do you want me to row you?”

“Is there any place around here worth seeing?”

“Sure! Pictured Rocks! Everybody goes there. It’s a mile down the river.”

“Suppose I hire a boat, would you mind acting as my guide—salary, fifty cents?”

“I can do better than that,” said Abe, becoming all of a sudden obsequious. “That’s my boat down there—that little boat with the oars—and I’ll take you to Pictured Rocks and bring you back for one dollar. That’s fair enough, ain’t it?”

Abe was young and his imagination undeveloped. Had he been older, he would have tried to sell the boat and a few houses nearest the river bank, all together, for a slightly larger sum.

“That’s a go!” cried Clarence, running for the boat, jumping in and seating himself to row. “Come on quick. Cast off, old boy.”

The boat was locked to a post. Abe was accustomed to facing such difficulties. He broke the lock under Clarence’s unobservant eyes, and, shoving the skiff off and jumping in, seated himself in the stern.

“You row and I’ll steer,” he said, as he picked up the paddle.

Clarence dipped the oars into the water, and with a few strokes the two started down the river with the swift current. It was a beautiful morning, clear and crisp. The river, a vast lake in width with islands and inlets and lagoons and streams between the Iowa and the Wisconsin shores, was dancing in the sunlight. Birds, late though the season was, made the air gay. On the Wisconsin shore the solemn hills, noble and varied, stood sentinel over the smiling valleys of golden grain which ran almost to the river’s banks; on the Iowa side, a twin range came down almost to the water. The river was clear and, despite the current, had all the appearance of a vast lake.

The air and the sunshine and the scenery entered into Clarence’s soul.

“Hurrah!” he cried, brandishing an oar. “All aboard to meet the bright-eyed goddess of adventure!”

And the bright-eyed goddess was not deaf to the summons of the thoughtless lad. The goddess was awaiting him. The meeting was to be very soon, and the interview a long one. And it is because of the meeting that this veracious story is written.

CHAPTER II

In which the Steamer St. Paul and a tramp lend their aid to the Bright-eyed Goddess.

“I say,” observed Abe presently, “you can row some!”

“What do you think I’ve been going to school for?” retorted the dainty youngster, as with even and strong stroke he sent the boat flying down the current.

“What are you giving us? There ain’t no rowing-schools.”

“It may be, fair sir,” answered Clarence, “that there be no schools with that precise name; at the same time, I don’t mind telling you that for the past three years I’ve been attending Clermont Academy in New York State, a young gentleman’s boarding school, as the prospectus says, where for the trifling sum of nine hundred dollars a year, cash in advance semi-annually, I have learned to play handball, baseball, football, lawn tennis, basket-ball, hurdling, shot-throwing, swimming, skating, and a few other little things like that.”

“You call that a school?” exclaimed Abe, his large nose curling in disdain.

“Everybody calls it a school,” answered Clarence, blithely, “even the babes in their mothers’ arms.”

“What about readin’, ’ritin’ and ’rithmetic?” continued the incredulous steersman.

“Oh, we’ve got all that, too; if we want that sort of thing. We can’t be running and jumping all day, you know.”

“That’s a measly school,” continued Abe.

“Awful sorry you don’t like it. Of course, you don’t have to come.”

“No school for me,” said Abe emphatically. “Say, why ain’t you at school now?”

“Because my ma and my pa are over here visiting. They’re going West as far as the coast, and my pa’s taking me along so’s he’ll know me next time he sees me. And my ma says she’s real anxious to make my acquaintance.”

“You don’t mean to say you don’t know your own pa and your own ma?” cried the scandalized Abe.

“Well, I haven’t seen ’em ever since I was eleven. A boy changes a good deal in three years. My ma didn’t change so much. But she says she’d hardly know me. I say, this river looks fine! How is it for swimming?”

“Mighty bad,” answered Abe, his power of invention beginning to stir. “If you don’t know this river, you’re just as like as not to get drowned. It looks all right,” continued the young vagabond, warming up to his theme; “but it’s full of sink-holes and places that suck you down. Don’t you ever go in this river unless you know some one who can show you a safe spot. You see that little house there, with the red roof?”

“It appears to me I do.”

“Well, the other day, three guys who didn’t know nothing about this river went in swimming just in front of it. All three went down, and they never come up no more.”

“What!” cried Clarence, resting on his oars and losing something of his color.

“Yes, sir,” Abe affirmed, regretting now that he hadn’t made it six or seven boys. “And their fathers all came here to see what could be done, and one of them went in and he was drowned too. It’s a mighty dangerous river in these parts.”

“That settles it,” said Clarence, resuming his rowing with a sigh. “I’ll not take the swim today that I promised myself.”

“Oh, I can fix that,” said Abe, “I know a place right down by Pictured Rocks where a hen wouldn’t mind swimming; it’s so safe. Oh, look!” he continued, “here comes the St. Paul.”

“What? Where?” cried Clarence, once more relinquishing the oars and craning his neck. “By George! That’s worth seeing. Where is it from?”

“From St. Louis. It’s a passenging boat and is going to St. Paul.”

The approaching steamboat, just turned a bend, was quite near them.

“Aha!” cried Clarence, picking up the oars and becoming melodramatic. “There she is! I can see her. Somewhere, Master Abe, in that boat is the bright-eyed goddess of adventure, and I’m going to meet her.” As he spoke he set vigorously to rowing out towards mid-stream.

“Say, you boob,” roared Abe, dropping his paddle in dismay: “You’re going to get run down. Do you want to get drowned?”

“Not at all. Now just sit tight, don’t rock the boat, and let me do it all by myself. We’re going to shoot right across her bow. You just leave it to me. We can do it easily.”

They were now quite near the steamer and it looked to Abe, as it looked to the captain of the boat, as though the little craft were almost certain of being run down. Abe fell back, his cheeks grew white, his teeth chattered; he turned his face from the approaching vessel. Meantime, there was a whistle, a clanging of bells, and hurried movements on the St. Paul. As the forward deck filled with excited passengers, the steamboat came almost to a full stop; observing which Mister Clarence, who had been rowing with all his might and main, lessened his efforts most perceptibly, and gazed enquiringly at the big boat.

“Say, do you know, Abe, I believe that boat’s in trouble? Maybe they want our help.”

Abe sat up and once more took notice.

“You young jackass!” roared the captain leaning as far as it was safe over the deck.

“Which one of us do you mean, sir?” asked Clarence.

“*You*, gosh blame you! *You*, drat your hide! If there were more idiots on this river like you, I’d give it up and take to farming. I’ve stopped my boat on your account.”

“Go right ahead, sir. I didn’t want you to stop.”

Clarence beamed kindly on the captain, smiled upon the passengers, and doffed his cap. There came a cheer from the deck, Clarence hummed “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,” and presently the two adventurers had the river to themselves.

“He said you were a young jackass,” said Abe presently.

“Yes, I noticed.”

“Well, you are.”

“Why, I could have made that easily. There was no danger at all. He had no business to stop that old boat of his. I didn’t ask him to. And then he goes and calls me names.”

“He said you were an idiot,” pursued Abe.

“That’s nothing. I’ve heard that before. Nearly all my friends say things like that to me.”

“I’ll not go rowing with you again, you big boob.”

“You’ll not get the chance. I’m off for the Coast at noon-time.”

“Here we are,” cried Abe presently, steering towards the shore. “This is the place that leads up to Pictured Rocks.”

“Hurrah for Pictured Rocks!” shouted Clarence, bringing with a few swift strokes the boat well up on the beach. “And what are Pictured Rocks anyhow?”

“The folks round here,” answered Abe, as he took the oars from the boat and carefully hid them in the undergrowth near the shore, “calls ’em Pictured Rocks, because the rocks up this here hill instead of being white like other rocks is in layers of red and orange and blue and all

sorts of colors between, and they says that the Injuns used to come here and use the stuff of the rocks for war-paint.”

“Well,” said Clarence, blithely turning a few cartwheels on reaching the bank, “I’m ready for your Pictured Rocks. Do you think I’ll find the bright-eyed goddess of adventure amongst them?”

“I dunno. Come right along; we can get up there in about fifteen minutes.”

But the bright-eyed goddess of adventure was nearer than Clarence fancied. She took, on this occasion, the guise of a tramp, who, making his way along the railroad ties of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul towards McGregor and chancing to see a youth in a white sailor-suit, thought it worth his while to pause upon his weary journey.

Abe led the way. He passed the tracks unnoticed by the road adventurer. Clarence, pausing at every other step to take in the view, presently followed.

“Say, young feller, could I say a word to you?”

“Make it a dozen, while you’re about it,” answered Clarence, gazing at the long-haired, unshorn, shabby, middle-aged man before him.

“I ain’t had nothing to eat since last night. Could you spare me a dime?”

“With pleasure,” responded the youth, taking out as he spoke a handful of coin, selecting a quarter and handing it over to the hungry one.

The sight of money brings a strange light into certain eyes. The tramp’s were of that kind.

“You’re carrying too much money for a kid. Give me some more,” he said.

“Skiddoo! Hump yourself!” yelled Abe from a safe distance.

Clarence was looking hard at his new acquaintance. There was no mistaking the glint in the fellow’s eye. The beggar had developed into the highwayman.

“Excuse me!” said Clarence, and turning tail he dashed down the track.

The tramp had a good pair of legs in excellent condition from much travel. He was quick to the pursuit.

“Run faster!” roared Abe, content to give advice. “He’s catching up.”

Clarence had a start of nearly ten yards; but before he had gone far, it grew clear to him that his pursuer was no mean runner. Nearer and nearer drew the tramp. The race could not last much longer.

Suddenly Clarence stopped, whirled around, and before his pursuer could realize the turn of events, plunged through the air, landing with both arms about the astounded man’s knees. The tramp went down with a suddenness to which few men are accustomed, and, assisted by a quick shove from the boy’s agile arm, started rolling from the tracks down an incline of some fifteen feet. By the time he had arisen to a sitting posture below and passed his hand over the several bruises on his head, the boy was back with Abe and lustily making his way up the hillside.

The tramp saw him, no more; but as he rose to resume his wearied journey, he heard a blithe voice far up the hillside carolling forth:

“Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!”

CHAPTER III

In which Clarence and his companion, the Butcher's Boy, discourse, according to their respective lights, on poetry and other subjects, ending with a swim that was never taken and the singing of Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay for the last time.

“That was great,” said Abe, enthusiastically, as he led the way up a steep and winding path. “You dished that feller easy. How did you do it?”

“I just tackled him.”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t you know anything about football?”

“Naw!”

“Well, when a chap on the other side has the ball and is running up the field with it and you want to stop him, you make a dive at his knees and clasp your arms right above ’em; and the faster he’s going, the harder he’ll fall.”

“I’d like to learn that game,” remarked Abe with some show of enthusiasm.

“What a nice little stream that is,” continued Clarence, waving his hand towards a tiny streamlet beside their upward path. “I like the sound of running water, don’t you? There ought to be a waterfall somewhere about here.”

“There is; it’s furder up.”

“Are you fond of Tennyson, Abe?”

“Eh? What’s that? Another game?”

“He’s a poet.”

“A what?”

“A poet: he writes verses, you know.”

“I don’t read nothin’.”

“Well, listen to this:

“I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally
And sparkle out among the fern
To bicker down a valley!”

“Sally is a girl’s name,” said Abe, whose brows had grown wrinkled from concentrated attention.

“I don’t think you quite got the idea of those lines,” said Clarence suavely. “But just listen to this:

“I chatter, chatter as I flow
To join the brimming river;
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.”

“Say that again, will you?”

Clarence obligingly and with some attention to elocution repeated the famous stanza.

“Who said that?” asked Abe.

“Tennyson.”

“What was he chattering for?”

“He wasn’t chattering; it was the brook that chattered.”

“Well, why didn’t he say so, then? He said, ‘*I chatter.*’”

“Oh, hang it! He put those words into the mouth of the brook.”

“But a brook ain’t got no mouth.”

“Yes; but he put himself in place of the brook. He just imagined what the brook would say, if it could talk. Listen once more.” And for the third time and still more melodramatically Clarence gave voice to the quatrain.

“Tennysee was a fool. The idea of a feller taking himself to be a brook. Why, if he *was* a brook, he couldn’t talk anyhow.”

“Abe, you’re hopeless.”

“See here, don’t you call me no names.”

“You’re a literalist!”

“You’re another, and you’re a liar!”

“Oh!” cried Clarence, gurgling with delight, “here are the Pictured Rocks, sure enough. And a cave!”

Beside the stream, a vast bed of rocks in veritable war-paint, hollowed at the centre into a rather large cavern, greeted the eyes of the astonished youth. The colors in horizontal layers were gay and well-defined, red being predominant.

“This is where the Injuns used to come for their paint,” explained Abe, forgetting his grievance in the pleasure of being a cicerone. “They used to come down this path and daub themselves up, and then cross the river to Wisconsin, and shoot the Injuns on the other side with their bows and arrers.”

Clarence was examining the surface of the rock. It was easy to rub away the outer part of the soft layers.

“Say, Abe, let me paint you. I think you’d make a fine Indian.” And Clarence with a handful of red sand sprang smilingly at his guide.

“You go on and paint yourself,” growled Abe, backing quickly. As a result, he missed his footing, slipped and fell into the tiny stream, where he sat for several seconds before it occurred to him to rise.

“Ha, ha, ha!” screamed Clarence. His silvery laughter, clear and sweet, was caught up by the echoes and came back translated into the merriment of elfland.

Much as the echoes seemed to appreciate his burst of glee, it did not appeal at all to the wrathful guide. His face had grown red as a turkey-cock’s; his fists doubled, and he was on the point of assaulting the unsuspecting Clarence.

“Oh, hark, oh, hear!” cried Clarence with a gesture and in a voice so high and ringing that Abe was startled, and paused in the execution of his revenge.

“Did you hear ’em?”

“Hear what?”

“The echoes. They’re the horns of elfland, you know.”

“The what!” exclaimed Abe. He had a dread of the unknown word.

“The horns of elfland faintly blowing.”

“You’re blowing yourself. Here you”——Abe stooped, picked up a small twig and placed it on one shoulderband of his blue overalls——“Knock that chip off’n my shoulder!”

Clarence surveyed his offended companion severely.

“Abe, come on; let’s go up. You know, I owe you a dollar. If you were to put one of my beautiful blue eyes into mourning, I think I’d claim that dollar for damages and then where would you be?”

“Well, then, you stop using them big words.”

“All right, Abe.”

With an occasional shout to set the wild echoes flying, the two pursued their steep upward way. For the most part, there was no conversation.

When they reached the waterfall, nothing would do Clarence but at the risk of life and limb to get under the hollow rock, over which fell the water in a wide but thin stream, and, extending his head and opening his mouth, catch what drops he could as they fell.

“Abe!” he suddenly said, “I think I know now where the goddess of adventure lives.”

“Eh? What?”

“If ever I wish to communicate with that bright-eyed lady, I’ll address my letters thus:

““To the Goddess of Adventure,
The Bright-eyed Waterfall,
Pictured Rocks,
Iowa, U. S. A.””

“You drop that goddess of adventure. I don’t believe in no such foolishness as that.”

“All right, Abe, if you don’t believe in her, she doesn’t exist. Now for the top.”

Up they went, with quick steps and, as regards Clarence, steady breathing. Abe was puffing. Loose living had reached out into the future and gained for him the “far off interest of years.” Abe belonged to that steadily increasing class of Americans who, growing up without recognition of any law of God or man are destined to be short-lived in the land.

Presently, they were at the summit.

“Look,” cried Abe, his sulkiness yielding momentarily to a spark of enthusiasm. He led the way forward a few feet and paused.

“Oh-h-h-h-!” cried Clarence.

Far, far below, the river rolled its flashing length, the broad river, silvery in the sun, the broad river with its green wooded islands, its lagoons, its lesser streams, its lakes. To the southeast another body of water, yet more silvery, emptied itself into the Mississippi. Beside both and around both and all the way that eye could see up and down the Mississippi River rose the full-bosomed hills, older than the Pyramids, holding their secrets of the past in a calm not to be broken till the day of judgment. Between the hills and the river, on the Wisconsin side, lay the valley, rich in golden grain, dotted here and there with granary and farm-house. It was in very deed a panorama beautiful in each detail, doubly so in its variety.

“What river is that?” asked Clarence.

“What! Don’t you know that? I thought from the way you were talking that you knew everything. That’s the Wisconsin River.”

“You don’t say! Why, that’s where Marquette came down. Think of that, Abe. Marquette came down that river and discovered the upper Mississippi. He must have passed right near to where we’re standing.”

“I’ve been round this river all my life, and I never heard of no Marquette. Who was he?”

“He was a priest.”

“A Catlic?”

“Yes, and a Jesuit.”

“I hate those dirty Catlics,” growled Abe, spitting savagely.

Behold, gentle reader, Abe’s religion. He hated Catholics, and in doing so felt consciously pious. He belongs, it must be sadly confessed, to the largest church in the backwoods of America; the Great Unlettered Church. So worldly a thing as a railroad has been known to put their religion to flight.

“I’m not a Catholic myself,” said Clarence, losing for the moment his light manner, “and I believe they’re superstitious and away behind the times; but I don’t hate them. Anybody who reads books knows that there have been splendid men and women who were good Catholics. A Church that has lived and kept fully alive for nineteen hundred years is not to be sneezed at.”

“Sneezed at! What do you want to sneeze at it for? What good would that do? We ought to blow it up.”

“My son,” said Clarence, raising his head, tilting his chin and assuming a paternal air, “I’m beginning to despair of you. A moment ago, you remember, I said you were a literalist. Well, it’s worse than that. You’re a pessimist.”

At this Abe broke into a torrent of profanity. In this particular sort of diction he showed a surprising facility.

“Excuse me, friend,” said Clarence, “for breaking in upon your exquisite soliloquy; but would you mind telling me what that big building over there in the distance is? It seems to be across the river from McGregor.”

“That,” said Abe with some unction in his tones, “is Champeen College.”

“Champeen College?”

“Yes, the Catlics are trying to run it, but them guys doesn’t even know how to spell it. They leave out the H. I saw their boat—a fellow told me about it—and sure enough they didn’t have no H.”

Clarence pondered for a few moments.

“Look here,” he said presently. “Perhaps you mean Champion College.”

“That’s just what I said; Champeen College.”

“You say Champeen; you mean Champion.”

“That’s what I’ve said all along—Champeen College.”

Again Clarence reflected.

“Oh!” he said, breaking into a smile, “I think I’ve got it. Leaving out that H you have Campion College. That’s it, I’ll bet; and Campion was a wonderful Jesuit priest, famous in history and novel. He died a martyr.”

Hereupon the butcher’s boy proceeded to express his sentiments on the Jesuits. He declared them at some length and with no little profanity.

“I think,” observed Clarence calmly, when Abe had stopped more for want of breath than of language, “that it’s about time to start down, if we want to have that swim. Be good enough, gentle youth, to lead the way.”

Their descent was along another roadway, south of the one by which they had come up. In parts, the path was so steep that it was difficult to keep one’s foothold.

Abe led sullenly. He was deep in thought. The problem of beginning life again was facing him, beginning life with one pair of ancient overalls, a shirt, a jack-knife, shoes that had seen

better days, and, in prospect, the handsome sum of one dollar. There was no question of his beginning life at McGregor. There confronted him, indeed, a difficulty, apparently insurmountable, in showing his face there at all. Abe figured to himself an irate boat-owner waiting at the landing for the person who had had the boldness to take away his skiff. How, then, he reflected, could he collect his dollar, get Clarence back, and escape unobserved. One plan would be to land below McGregor and let Clarence go the rest of the way alone. But even that plan had its risks. Doubtless, there were boatmen on the river even now in quest of the missing craft. Much thinking was alien to Abe's manner of life; continuous thinking, impossible. He left the solution in the lap of the gods, therefore, and started conversation with his companion. With Abe, language was not the expression of, but rather an escape from, thought. So he gabbled away, going from one subject to another with an inconsequence which bridged tremendous gulfs of subject.

In an unhappy moment, he became foul in his expression. He did not, by reason of being in the advance, see the blush that mantled his companion's face.

"Suppose you change the subject," said Clarence, giving, as he spoke, Master Abe a hearty shove with both arms.

If dropping the subject entirely is equivalent to changing it, Abe was perfectly obedient. At any rate, he certainly changed his base; and before the words were well out of Clarence's mouth, Abe was sliding down the steep incline at a rate which would have outdistanced the average runner. He went full thirty feet before a friendly stump brought him to a pause.

"Look here," cried Abe, remaining seated where he had come to a stop, and rubbing himself; "What did you mean?"

"You aren't hurt, are you?" enquired the sailor-clad youth, drawing near and really looking sympathetic.

"Hurt!" echoed Abe, rising as he spoke "I'm sore; and," he continued as he craned his neck to see what had happened to his clothes, "my overalls is torn."

"So they is," assented Clarence, his love of mischief once more in the ascendant. "How much are those overalls worth?"

"I paid eighty-five cents for them."

"Very good. I'll give you two dollars instead of one. Is that all right?"

"Suppose you pay me now," suggested Abe, holding out his hand.

"No you don't," answered Clarence. Our young lover of adventure was not of a suspicious disposition; nevertheless it was plain to him that Abe, once he had the money, would, as like as not, either attempt to take revenge for the indignities shown him, or desert at once and leave his charge to shift, as best he might, for himself. In fact, it would be just like Abe to refuse the further services of the boat. "We'll take our swim first, and then when we're on the boat and in sight of McGregor I'll pay you the two dollars."

Still rubbing himself, and muttering savagely under his breath, Abe led the way down. The descent was soon accomplished, and presently the two boys were disrobing.

"My ma told me that I might take a swim this morning," remarked Clarence, "provided I went in with some person who knew the river well, and who could show me a good place. Do you know the river and how to swim well?"

"I guess I do. Why, I know this river by heart." Here Abe paused, gazed carefully at the boat, and suddenly brightened up as though some happy thought had found lodgment in his primitive brain. "And look here," he continued impressively, "I want to show you something. You see that place where my boat is?"

“Seems to me I do.”

“Well, going *down* the river from where that boat lays is the most dangerous spot you can find. It is a risk for the best swimmer—big men swimmers—to go in there.”

“See here, I don’t want to go and get drowned,” protested Clarence. The young gentleman, having doffed his sailor costume, revealed to the admiring eyes of his companion a beautiful brand new bathing suit of heavenly blue, evidently put on for this occasion. Clarence had left home that morning prepared to go swimming.

“Oh, you won’t get drowned; there’s a place up stream just a little ways that I told you about where a hen could swim. We can row up there in no time. Get in the boat, in the stern, and I’ll row you.”

“As you say, so shall it be, fair sir,” and with this Clarence tumbled into the boat.

“That’s it,” said Abe, encouragingly, as he proceeded to shove the boat into the water.

“Hey! You’ve forgotten the oars,” said Clarence.

For answer Abe continued to push the boat.

“The oars! The oars!” cried Clarence.

“You don’t need no oars,” shouted Abe as with a tremendous effort he sent the boat spinning out into the current. “Now, smartie, I’ve fixed you! You stay right in there where you are, or you’ll be drowned sure.”

The boat with its solitary occupant was now fully thirty feet from the shore. Clarence, possessed of one single-piece swimming suit and nothing else in the world, turned pale with alarm.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he cried.

“There ain’t no meaning,” returned Abe, thoughtfully going through the pockets of Clarence’s sailor suit. “You just sit tight and maybe you’ll land in St. Louis by the end of the month.”

“Look here, I’ve got to be back at McGregor by twelve o’clock,” remonstrated Clarence, “You’re carrying this joke too far.”

“You’ll not see McGregor today, nor yet tomorrow,” answered Abe, grimly, as he wrapped up in Clarence’s handkerchief the paper money and the silver which he had found.

Clarence noticed with dismay that his boat, now at least twenty-five yards from the shore, was going down the stream at what seemed to him a very rapid rate.

In the meantime, Abe, having securely hid the money, stood on the shore and grinned triumphantly at the boy in the boat.

“You will use big words, will you? You will try to be funny, will you? You will shove me down the hill; you will come round here showing off in your dandy clothes! Next time you get a chanst, you won’t be so smart—Now, what have you got to say for yourself?”

The youth in the current saw that, so far as the butcher’s boy was concerned, his case was hopeless. In reply, then, to this question, he opened his pretty mouth, lifted his head proudly, and carolled forth:

“Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,
Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!”

As Clarence was singing, Master Abe, throwing out both hands in a gesture of defiance,

suddenly bolted into the bushes. He was gone, leaving on the shore his own and Clarence's clothes.

The deserted youth in the boat came to an end of his singing. He had sung bravely to the last note. He never sang "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" again. Abe was gone: he was alone. Clarence at last gave in. He burst into tears and wept for some time in sore bitterness of heart.

CHAPTER IV

In which Clarence Esmond, alone and deserted, tries to pray; and his parents defer their trip to the Coast.

After all, Clarence was but fourteen years of age. He was brave beyond his years. He had a craving for adventure. But, picture to yourself a lad in a thin blue bathing suit, in an oarless boat, alone on a great river. Clarence was really a good swimmer. He was at home in any lake; he had disported many a time in the salt water; but a river with its unknown dangers was new to him. The fear of the unknown, therefore, coupled with the warning of the butcher's boy, kept him in the boat, when in fact he could easily have made the shore. Adventure is all very well in its way, but one likes to meet that fair goddess with reassuring companions. No wonder, then, that the boy broke down.

For some minutes he continued to sob. His grief was poignant. Chancing to glance over the side of the boat, he saw his features, tear-stained and swollen, reflected in the clear water. It was the first time that he had ever seen his reflection when he was in heavy grief. He looked again, and then suddenly broke into a laugh.

"Never say die," he muttered to himself, and forthwith, putting his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, he began to meditate.

What would his parents think about it? They would search, they would find his clothes upon the river bank and conclude naturally that he was drowned. Perhaps, however, Master Abe would reassure them on that point. Clarence did not know that Abe, having taken to the bushes and making his way into the interior of Iowa, had already dickered with a farmer's boy for an old pair of overalls and was now doing his best to put as wide a distance between himself and McGregor as possible.

Once more Clarence raised his head and looked about him. The sun was now in mid-heaven and, shining down upon the boy's unprotected calves and shoulders, promised to leave the memory of that adventurous day in scarlet characters upon his tender skin. On one side flowed the Wisconsin into the Mississippi; on the other the Iowa hills frowned down on him. The river itself was clear of craft. Water, water, everywhere; and standing sentinel over the mighty stream the hills of two sovereign states. Hotter and hotter fell the rays of the sun.

"Lord, have mercy on me," exclaimed Clarence. He really prayed as he uttered these words.

Clarence, it must be confessed, knew very little of prayer. They did not specialize on that form of devotion—nor, in fact, on any form of devotion—at the academy of which for two years he had been a shining ornament. Vainly did he try to cudgel his brain for some other prayer. Even the Our Father, recited in tender years at his mother's knee, he had forgotten.

The sun grew hotter; it was getting almost unbearable. Clarence was driven to action. After some effort, in which he skinned his knuckles, he succeeded in dislodging one of the two boards serving as seats. Placing this next to the others he threw himself below, doubled up so as to get himself as much as possible under the welcome shade, and—happy memory—murmured:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray to God my soul to keep:
And if I die before I wake,
I pray to God my soul to take."

In saying these homely but beautiful lines, our adventurer had no intention of courting slumber. Nevertheless, he was sound asleep in ten minutes. The incidents of the morning, the climb up the hill, the rowing, the brush with the tramp—all these things, combined with the fact that he had stayed up late the night before and had risen that morning at five o'clock, sent him into a slumber the sounder for the quiet and the freshness of the great river.

About the same hour in which Clarence had snuggled low down in the boat and presently fallen into deep slumber, a gentleman came hurrying down to the McGregor boat-landing. He was a rather handsome man in the prime of life, dressed in a manner that showed he belonged to the many-tailored East. He was pulling at his mustache, gazing anxiously all about him, and betraying in many ways nervousness and anxiety.

"Beg pardon," he began, addressing a group of men and women who were waiting for the ferry-boat that plied between McGregor and Prairie du Chien, "but have any of you chanced to see a boy of fourteen in a white sailor suit about here? He's my son."

"Did you say a white sailor suit?" asked a man of middle age.

"Yes."

"Why, I think I saw a boy dressed that way this morning. As I was coming down the street, towards nine o'clock, I saw a boat going down stream with two people in it. First, I thought the one rowing was a girl; I took another look, and I could almost swear it was a boy dressed in white. They were gone down some distance, and so I couldn't say for sure."

Just then a young man of about twenty-one dressed in flannels joined the group.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "I'm a stranger here, and am rowing down the river from LaCrosse to Dubuque. This morning I locked my boat here, leaving the oars in it, and went for breakfast and a little stroll into the country back of McGregor. My boat has disappeared."

"Was it painted green?" inquired the first informant, "and did it ride rather high?"

"Yes, that's the boat."

"Well, the boat I saw, with, I thought, two boys in it, one in a white sailor suit, must have been your boat."

"Strange!" exclaimed Clarence's father. "My boy, I am sure, would not do such a thing."

"What about the other boy?" said an old inhabitant. "There's a no-account fellow hereabouts named Abe Thompson. He was the butcher's boy and got fired early today. He's disappeared this morning, too, and I'll bet my boots that he's the one who went off in that boat."

"That reminds me," put in another member of the group. "When the St. Paul came in here this morning, the passengers were all talking about a small boy rowing a boat up near Pictured Rocks, who tried to cross their bow. The Captain had to stop the steamboat and he said that the two boys in that boat seemed anxious to commit suicide. When the Captain roared at the oarsman and called him a jackass, the kid smiled and asked which one of the two he was speaking to."

"That was my son Clarence beyond a doubt," said Mr. Esmond with the suspicion of a smile. "It would be just like him to cut across the bow of a steamboat, and that question of his makes it a dead certainty. The boy sat up until one o'clock last night reading Treasure Island. He's very impressionable, and he left the house this morning with his heart set upon meeting with an adventure of some sort or other. It's near twelve o'clock now, and we were to start for the coast at one-forty. Can't I get a motorboat around here somewhere?"

The man who had been the first to give information then spoke up.

“Sir,” he said, “I have a fairly good motorboat at the McGregor landing. It will be a pleasure for me to do anything I can to help you.”

“Thank you a thousand times. Let’s get off at once. My name is Charles Esmond.”

“And mine,” returned the other, “is John Dolan.” The two, as they made their way to the motorboat, shook hands.

“This is awfully kind of you,” continued Mr. Esmond, as he seated himself in the prow.

“It’s a pleasure, I assure you. I’ve really nothing to do at this season, and so I pass most of my time on the river.”

As he spoke these words, the boat shot out into the water.

“Now,” continued Mr. Dolan, “as a working hypothesis, we may take it for granted that those boys went to Pictured Rocks; everybody goes there. So we’ll make for that place and reach it, I dare say, in six or seven minutes.”

“I hope nothing has happened,” said the father. “This morning my wife had a bad sick headache, and Clarence was overflowing with animal spirits. We had promised him, the night before, a ride on the river and a swim. He had never been on the Mississippi, and he was all eagerness. To make matters worse, I got a telegram this morning to send on a report on a Mexican mine—it’s my business, by the way, to study mines here, in Mexico, and, in fact, almost anywhere. That report meant two or three hours of hard work. So I told Clarence to run out and get some good boatman, if he could, and go rowing. I cautioned him to be careful about where he went swimming and not to go in alone. He promised me faithfully to be back at twelve. Now I have no reason to think the boy would break his word. In fact, I had an idea that he was truthful.”

“You talk of your boy,” observed Mr. Dolan, “as though you didn’t know him very well.”

Mr. Esmond relaxed into a smile.

“It does sound funny, doesn’t it,” he said. “The fact of the matter is that I really have very little first-hand knowledge of him. At the age of five, Clarence learned how to read, and developed a most extraordinary passion for books at once. If allowed, he read from the time he got up till he went to bed. I never saw such a case of precocity. It was next to impossible to get him to take exercise. His mother did her best to restrain him, and I did my share too, though it was very little, as I was away looking up mines nine months out of the twelve. When the boy was eleven, it became clear that some radical action had to be taken. I looked around for some school that would suit or rather offset his idiosyncrasy. After no end of inquiries I discovered Clermont Academy in New York State, where athletics were everything and such studies as reading, grammar and arithmetic were a sort of by-product. Clarence has been there for three years, and, up to a week ago, his mother and I never saw him from the time of his entrance. Well, he’s a changed boy. He is fairly stout, and muscular beyond my most sanguine hopes. He is up in all sorts of games. In fact, in his class—boys of twelve to fourteen—he’s the leader. All the same, I blush to say that I really know very little about my boy.”

“Perhaps the lad is a genius,” suggested Mr. Dolan.

“Some of my friends have made that claim and accused me of trying to clip his wings. All the same, I want my boy, genius or no genius, to grow up to be a hale, hearty man.”

“Halloa!” exclaimed Dolan. He had turned the boat shoreward. Before the eyes of both lay in full view on the bank two suits of clothes. The boat had scarce touched the shore, when Mr. Esmond jumped from it and ran to the spot where the clothes lay spread upon the ground.

“My God! These are my son’s,” he cried, gazing with dismay upon the white sailor suit

which he had caught up in his hands. His face quivering with emotion, he stood stock still for a moment, then sank upon the ground and buried his head in his hands.

“And this,” said John Dolan, looking closely at the abandoned overalls, “belongs to that ne’er-do-well butcher’s boy. It looks bad. They must have gone swimming here.”

Mr. Esmond arose and looked about.

“Where’s that boat they had?” he inquired.

“It may have drifted away,” answered John. “Or, more probably, that butcher’s boy, who is a known thief, has hidden it somewhere. He knew very well that there would be a search for it.”

“Say, Dolan, you’ll stand by me, won’t you? I am almost in despair; the thing is so sudden.”

“I’ll do anything you want.”

“Well, you leave me here and run back to McGregor. Send word to my wife that I am detained—don’t let her think or even suspect that our boy is drowned—and to put off our trip to the Coast, as I cannot make the train. Tell her to expect me and Clarence before supper. Then get the proper officials of McGregor to come here at once and drag the river. Hire any extra men you judge fit. Don’t bother about expense. Now go and don’t lose a moment.”

Left alone, Mr. Esmond made a careful search, tracing the boy’s steps in their ascent to Pictured Rocks. He went part of the way himself, crying out at intervals, “Clarence! Clarence! Clarence!” There was no answer save the echoes which to his anxious ears sounded far differently from the “horns of elfland.”

Again and again he called. And yet Clarence was not so far away—hardly half a mile down the river, locked in slumber, and, as it proved, in the hands of that bright-eyed goddess of adventure whom the reckless lad had not in vain wooed.

Returning to the shore, Mr. Esmond on further investigation traced his boy’s footprints to the river’s banks. At this juncture, several motorboats arrived, each carrying a number of men, and soon all were busy dragging the river.

At six o’clock John Dolan insisted on bringing the despairing father back to McGregor.

“Dolan,” he said, as they started upstream, “have you any religion?”

“I hope so. I’m a Catholic.”

“I don’t know what I am;—but my poor boy! His mother ought to be a Catholic, but she was brought up from her tender years by Baptist relations with the result that she’s got no more religion than I have. When my boy was born, I started him out on the theory that he was not to be taught any religion, but was to grow up without prejudices, and when he was old enough, he was to choose for himself. All the religion he ever got amounted to his saying the ‘Our Father’ and ‘Now I lay me down to sleep.’ At that school he’s been going to there’s no religion taught at all. I wish I had done differently. Think of his appearing before a God he never thought of. Some of our theories look mighty nice in ordinary circumstances. But now! My son is dead, and without any sort of preparation.”

“We can pray for him; we can hope.”

“Well, if his soul is saved,” said Esmond gravely, “it’s not because of me, it’s in spite of me.”

When the bereaved father reached the hotel, the despair in his eyes told the tale to his wife. Let us drop a veil over that scene of sorrow—the sudden loss of an only child.

CHAPTER V

In which Ben, the gypsy, associates himself with the Bright-eyed Goddess in carrying out her will upon Master Clarence Esmond, and that young gentleman finds himself a captive.

It was the time when the night-hawk, soaring high in air and circling wantonly, suddenly drops like a thunderbolt down, down till nearing the ground it calls a sudden halt in its fall, and cutting a tremendous angle and letting out a short sound deep as the lowest string of a bass violin shoots up into the failing light of the evening; it was the time when the whippoorwill essays to wake the darkening sky with his insistent demands for the beating of that unfortunate youth, poor Will; it was the time when the sun, having left his kingdom in the western sky, stretches forth his wand of sovereignty from behind his curtains and touching the fleecy clouds changes them into precious jewels, ruby, pearl, and amethyst; it was, in fine, the time when the day is done and the twilight brings quiet and peace and slumber to the restless world.

However—and the exception proves the rule—it did not bring quiet and peace and slumber to Master Clarence Esmond. In fact, it so chanced that the twilight hour was the time when he was deprived of these very desirable gifts; for his sleep was just then rudely broken.

First, a feeling of uneasiness came upon his placid slumbers. It seemed to him, in those moments between sleeping and waking, that a very beautiful fairy, vested in flowing white, and with lustrous and shining eyes, appeared before him. She gazed at him sternly. “Oh, it’s you, is it?” murmured Clarence. “I’ve been looking for you, star-eyed goddess. Be good enough, now you’re here, to supply me with one or two first-class adventures in good condition and warranted to last.” In answer to which, she of the starry eyes extended her wand and struck her suppliant a smart blow on the forehead. As she did this, the light in her eyes went out, her form lost its outline, fading away after the manner of a moving picture effect into total darkness.

Clarence’s eyes then opened; it was not all a dream—the loose board above him had fallen and struck him on his noble brow. Also, although his eyes were open, he could see very little. Almost at once he realized where he was. Almost at once he recalled, with the swiftness thought is often capable of, the varied events of the day. Almost at once, he perceived that the boat, no longer drifting, was moving swiftly as though in tow.

Clarence sat up. There was a splashing of the water quite near the boat. He rubbed his eyes and peered into the gathering darkness. A brown hand, near the prow, was clasped to the gunwale. Then Clarence standing up looked again. From the hand to the arm moved his eyes; from the arm to the head. Beside the boat and swimming vigorously was a man, whom, despite the shadows of the evening, Clarence recognized as young and swarthy. They were rapidly nearing shore.

“Say!” cried Clarence. “Look here, will you? Who are you?”

The swimmer on hearing the sound of the boy’s voice suspended his swimming, turned his head, and seeing standing in what he had supposed to be an empty boat, a young cherub arrayed in a scanty suit of blue, released his hold and disappeared under the water as though he had been seized with cramp.

The boat freed of his hand tilted very suddenly in the other direction, with the result that the erect cherub lost his balance so suddenly that he was thrown headlong into the waters on

the other side.

Simultaneously with Clarence's artless and unpremeditated dive, the strange swimmer came to the surface. He had thought, as our young adventurer subsequently learned, that the figure in the boat was a ghost. But ghosts do not tumble off boats into the water; neither do ghosts, when they come to the surface, blow and sputter and cough and strike out vigorously with an overhand stroke, which things the supposed ghost was now plainly doing. The stranger, therefore, taking heart of grace, laid the hand of proprietorship upon the boat once more. Clarence from the other side went through the same operation.

"What did you spill me for?" he gasped.

"I didn't know anyone was in the boat," returned the stranger with a slightly foreign accent. "When you stood up and spoke, I was plumb scared."

"I really think I'm rather harmless," remarked the boy, blithely. "Never yet, save in the way of kindness, did I lay hand on anybody—well hardly anybody. Where are we anyhow?"

"We're on the Mississippi River," returned the other guardedly.

"Oh, thank you ever so much. I really thought we were breasting the billows of the Atlantic."

Meanwhile, they had drawn within a few feet of the shore, on which Clarence now cast his eyes. On a sloping beach in a grove surrounded by cottonwoods blazed a ruddy fire. Standing about it but with their eyes and attention fixed upon the two swimmers was a group consisting of a man a little beyond middle age, a woman, apparently his wife, a younger woman, a boy a trifle older and larger than Clarence, a girl of twelve, and five or six little children. In the camp-fire's light Clarence perceived that they were, taking them all in all, swarthy, black-haired, clad like civilized people, and yet in that indescribable wild way of which gypsies possess the secret.

"Come on," said the man, as the boat touched the shore.

"Excuse me," said Clarence politely, "but I'm not dressed to meet visitors. The water is fine anyway; and it's not near so dangerous as it's cracked up to be. Can't you get a fellow at least a pair of trousers?"

"You'll stay here, will you?"

"I certainly will," answered the youth, turning on his back and floating. "I've had enough of being out on the Mississippi to last me for several weeks at the very least. Go on, there's a good fellow,—and get me something to put on."

With a not ill-natured grunt of assent, the man walked up the sloping bank. As he passed the watchful group he uttered a few words; whereupon the larger gypsy boy came down to the shore and fixed a watchful eye upon the bather, while the others broke up and gave themselves to various occupations. Clarence's rescuer went on beyond the fire, where two tents lay pitched beside a closed wagon—a prairie schooner on a small scale. After some search in which the young woman assisted him, he issued from the larger tent with a pair of frayed khaki trousers and an old calico shirt.

Returning to the river's edge, he beckoned the swimmer, who, quick to answer the call, seized the clothes and darted behind the largest cottonwood. Clarence was dressed in a trice.

"I wish," he observed, walking up to his rescuer, "to thank you for saving me. I've never been on a big river before; and I was afraid to try swimming. I say," and as Clarence spoke, he gazed ruefully at his nether garment, "who's your tailor?"

"What's your name, boy?"

"Clarence Esmond, age 14, weight 110 pounds, height five feet two in my—"

“And how did you come to be in that boat?”

Clarence, involuntarily gazing at his frail craft and noticing that the older gypsy, assisted by the boy, had already beached it, and was now getting ready to give it a new coat of paint, proceeded to tell at some length his various encounters with the bright-eyed goddess of adventure since his departure that morning from McGregor. While he was telling his rather incredible tale all the party gathered about him. Not all, he observed, were gypsies. The little girl of twelve was as fair-skinned as himself. She was a beautiful child, with face most expressive of any passing emotion. It was to her that Clarence presently found he was addressing himself. One of his subtle jokes, lost on the gypsies, drew a smile of appreciation from the little girl. She was dainty in her dress—which was in no respect gypsy-like.

“There’s another adventure here,” Clarence reflected. “Where did they get her?” However, he was content to keep these thoughts to himself. At the conclusion of his story, Clarence addressed himself to the young man.

“And now, sir, where am I?”

“You’re in Wisconsin.”

“Oh, I’ve crossed to the other side, have I? And about how far down the river am I from the town of McGregor?”

“You are—” began the younger gypsy, when his senior cut him short, and spoke to him hurriedly for some minutes in a language strange to Clarence’s ears.

“I say,” interrupted Clarence, “my folks must be awful anxious about me. Would you mind letting me know how far I am from McGregor? I want to get back.”

“You are over thirty-five miles from McGregor,” said the older man, thoughtfully doubling the actual distance.

“Whew! Where can I get a train? I’ve got to get back.”

“Hold on,” said the elder; “what does your father do?”

“He’s a mining expert.”

“Is he rich?”

“I suppose he is. That’s what people say; and if you get me back, I’ll see that you’re paid.”

Again the two men conferred. Watching them eagerly, Clarence gathered these items of information: the elder was called Pete, the younger, Ben; they were not in agreement, coming almost to blows; Pete was the leader.

After further talk the two women were called into council. Suddenly the older, a withered hag with deep eyes and heavy and forbidding brows, turned to Clarence.

“Your hand!” she said, laconically.

“Charmed to shake with you,” responded the amiable adventurer, extending his open palm.

Instead of clasping it, the woman caught it tight, and dragging Clarence close to the fire began eagerly to scrutinize the lines on his palm.

“You’ll live long,” she said.

“Not if I have many days like this,” commented Clarence.

“You’ll have lots of wealth.”

“No objection, I’m sure, ma’am.”

“You will learn easy.”

“That’s the very way I propose to learn.”

“You’ll marry three times.”

“Oh, I say; cut out at least two of those wives, won’t you?”

“You’ll have a big family.”

“No objection to children, ma’am.”

Suddenly the woman paused, gazing fixedly at the boy’s palm.

“Oh!” she suddenly screamed. “The cross! the cross! It’s there. I see it. Say, boy, you’re a Catholic.”

“You’re another,” retorted Clarence, indignantly.

“You are! You are!” And with a cry like that of some wild animal, the woman ran and hid herself in the larger tent.

“Boy,” said Pete, “we’re going to take care of you.”

“Thank you; but if it’s all the same to you, I’d just as soon take care of myself.”

“You’ll do as I tell you,” said Pete, gazing angrily at the lad. “You may be a fraud. We will find out, and if your story is true, we’ll see about getting you back to your people.”

“Oh, you will, will you?—Good night!” and with this Clarence turned and dashed up the river. Pete, followed by Ezra, was after him at once. The old man was quick to catch up with him, and he made this fact known to the boy by striking him with his closed fist a blow on the mouth which brought him flat to the earth. Pete kicked his prostrate prey as he lay, and was about to renew his brutality, when Ben roughly pulled his senior away.

“Look here!” cried Clarence ruefully, as he picked himself up. “Next time you want me to do something, tell me. You needn’t punch ideas in through my mouth. I guess I can take a hint as well as the next one.”

“You’d better do what Pete says,” whispered Ben not unkindly. “It’s no use trying to get away from him. I’ll be your friend.”

“Thank you. By the way, would you call kicks and cuffs adventures?”

The man shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, I was singing the praises of the goddess of adventure this morning. I wanted to meet her the worst way. Well, I’ve been meeting her all day and I’m kind of tired. If I get my hands on her, I’ll hold her under water till she’s as dead as a door-nail.”

“Oh, yes!” said the mystified Ben.

But the adventures of that day were not yet over, as Clarence, to his cost, was soon to learn.

CHAPTER VI

In which Clarence meets Dora, learns much of his gypsy companion, fights Ezra, and is sung to slumber.

“Dora,” said Ben, as they neared the campfire, “come here.”

The little girl came running at his call.

“I want you to show this boy around. He’s one of your kind, and you’ll be good company for each other while he’s with us.”

Dora held out her hand, her blue eyes all sympathy, her bright face kindling, her smile all welcome.

“Glad to meet you, Dora. My name’s Clarence Esmond,” said the lad, taking her hand and shaking it cordially. “There’s only one thing I’ve got against you.”

“Why? What have I done?” asked the little miss, dismay showing itself in her rounded blue eyes.

“It isn’t what you’ve done; it’s what you are.”

“Oh, indeed!” ejaculated Dora, her brows going up in bewilderment.

“Yes, indeed. I started out this morning in quest of my lady, the star-eyed goddess of adventure. I was just half in earnest. You see, I’ve been at Clermont Academy, New York, for three years, where nothing happened except three meals a day.”

“Oh, I see,” said Dora with the suspicion of a twinkle in her eye. “The meals happened three times a day.”

“Oh, go on! You know what I mean.”

“Oh, that’s a fact!” cried Dora. “Talking of meals, aren’t you hungry? You’ve had nothing since breakfast.”

“I ought to be hungry,” admitted Clarence, “but somehow things have been happening so fast that it’s interfered with my appetite.”

“That’s too bad,” said Dora. “Of course, if you don’t want anything——”

“Oh, I say,” interrupted Clarence, “I simply said I wasn’t *very* hungry. If you’ve got anything to eat——”

There was no need for Clarence to finish his sentence. Dora was off at once, and returned very quickly with a plate of cold meat and some crusts of bread. The repast, if the truth must be told, was not very inviting. However, it did not seem to strike Clarence in that way at all; for, standing with the plate in his hand, he set about eating with a vigor which promised a speedy disappearance of everything offered him.

“You said you weren’t very hungry,” said Dora, trying to suppress a smile.

“I’m not,” replied Clarence, continuing to do yeoman’s work.

“When you are hungry, I’d like to be around,” said the girl.

“Suppose,” said Clarence, “that we come back to our original subject. We were talking about you and the bright-eyed goddess of adventure.”

“Yes. Do go on, Clarence.”

“Well, anyhow, I’ve been reading books of travel and adventure all this summer. Last night I finished *Treasure Island*, and it got me going. I was just crazy to have a few adventures; so I called on the bright-eyed goddess to come on and set ’em up.”

“Did she come?”

“Come! I should say she did! She’s worn her welcome out already. But that’s not what I

wanted to say. Just before I woke up in that boat, which Pete and his friends are painting over right now——”

“They’ll sell it tomorrow for a few dollars,” interpolated Dora.

“Oh, indeed! How thoughtful! Well, just before I woke, I had a dream. I saw the bright-eyed goddess long enough to get a crack of her wand over the head, and she looked like you.”

“Like me?”

“Yes, your eyes are bright and blue, your complexion is what the novelists call dazzling, your hair is long and like the bearded corn when it is ripe. So was hers. The goddess wore a white dress. So do you.”

“I always wear white,” said Dora, simply. “When I was a baby, my mother consecrated me to the Blessed Virgin.”

“What, are you a Catholic, Dora?”

“Yes, Clarence; and mama kept me dressed in white with a blue sash till I was seven years of age. Then I made my First Communion. On that day, I told Our Lord that I would stick to the blue and the white as long as I could.”

“So you dress to please the Blessed Virgin?” queried the startled boy.

They were standing beside the fire, and the flames lighting up the girl’s features added to the glow of enthusiasm which had come upon her face as she spoke of the blue and the white.

“I wish I could say I did,” she made humble answer. “Sometimes I feel that I’m thinking too much of how I look. I hope it isn’t a sin to want to look pretty.”

“Of course, it isn’t,” returned Clarence, promptly. “Why, I’m troubled that way myself.”

Dora began to giggle.

“You’re laughing at me,” said Clarence, flushing.

“Excuse me,” said Dora. “I—I——”

This time she broke into silvery laughter.

Clarence gazed down upon himself. He had forgotten, in the interest of the conversation, his present attire. For a youth of fourteen, bare-footed, clad in a rusty calico shirt and trousers of uncertain age, to accuse himself of taking pride in his apparel and appearance was, now he came to think of it, highly comical. He joined Dora in her laughing.

“And yet I was not always thus,” he said. “You should have seen me this morning in my natty sailor suit. I really think I was stuck on myself. Dora, by George, you’re a good fellow.”

“Thank you. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll tell you something about the people you’re with.”

Clarence looked around. The twain were practically alone beside the fire. Two other gypsies, men whom he had not seen before, were helping Pete and the boy to give the stolen boat a new appearance. The little children were paddling about in the water. Strangely enough, they scarce uttered a sound. They played, it is true, but their play was largely pantomime. Ben was off to the right tending the horses. The two women were in one of the tents.

“Here’s a log,” said Clarence, rolling one forward with some exertion towards the fire. “Suppose we sit down, and criticize the whole crowd.”

Clarence had come to an end of his meal. He ate no more, because there was no more to eat. One would think, could one have seen them, that the two innocents, as they seated themselves on the log with their faces turned towards the river and their backs to the fire, had been acquainted with each other from their nursery days.

“First of all,” began Dora, “there’s Pete.”

“Oh, yes, I know Pete all right,” said Clarence, passing his hand over his mouth and rubbing his upper lip. “And I want to say right now that I’m not stuck on Pete.”

“He’s not—he’s not—” Dora paused and considered. “Well, he’s not real nice.”

“Nobody would say he was.”

“And he’s the leader of this band.”

“Gypsies, eh?”

“Yes, gypsies. It isn’t a regular band you know. It’s only a piece of one.”

“It’s a big enough one for me,” Clarence observed with emphasis.

“You see, Pete got into some trouble last spring in Ohio. He made some kind of a horse-trade and was sentenced to the workhouse for a month. He’d have been there longer, only Ben was sent down to wait for him and help him pay off his fine. And that’s how I came to be here.”

“What have you got to do with paying off Pete’s fine? What have you got to do with the workhouse?” asked Clarence indignantly.

“Nothing,” laughed Dora. “But if it hadn’t been for Pete’s being in the workhouse, I wouldn’t be here.”

“Tell me all about it, Dora.”

“I will—tomorrow. There’ll hardly be time tonight. You see, all these gypsies are on their way to join their own crowd somewhere further north in this State. We’ve been traveling up this way since last May—over four months.”

“How far have you traveled?”

“Ben told me that we’re about five hundred miles from where we started.”

“Five hundred miles! Let me think a minute.” Clarence began checking off on his fingers, murmuring at the same time under his breath.

“Why, good gracious!” he spoke out, presently. “You haven’t averaged much more than four miles a day.”

“Yes; but you ought to see the way we travel. We hardly ever go straight ahead. We generally zigzag. We cut across the country in one direction and then we cut across back again in another, always keeping near to the river. You see, we don’t like to meet people and we always dodge the towns and villages. I guess it’s partly my fault. They don’t want strangers to see me.”

“And I suppose they won’t want anybody to see me either,” said Clarence. “Say, did you ever try to break away?”

“I did in the beginning. Pete gave me an awful beating three different times; and I found it was no use.”

“Well, I’ll not stand for it. Why, it seems to me it would be easy to get away some time or other when nobody’s on the watch. Why, Dora, we’ve been talking here for fifteen minutes, and nobody’s been bothering about us in the least.”

“Don’t you believe it, Clarence. Those two women have been keeping their eyes on us ever since we shook hands. They take turn about, and the watching is going on night and day.”

“Is that so? By the way, I notice that boy helping those fellows at the boat is looking this way very often.”

“That’s Pete’s youngest son. He’s a bit quarrelsome. He’s generally pretty nice to me; but I think that’s because Ben gave him a shaking up one day when he was rude to me. His name is Ezra. I think he’s a sort of bully. I am afraid of him.”

“I don’t like bullies myself,” said Clarence.

“He’s watching you,” continued Dora. “He always gets angry and out of sorts when anybody is friendly to me. Those little gypsies all like me. But Ezra, when he notices them about me much, gives them a lot of trouble.”

“Maybe he’s jealous,” suggested the artless youth.

“Jealous? Why should he be jealous? He doesn’t care for me.”

“I can’t believe that,” said Clarence. “Anybody who meets you would be sure to like you, because you are a good fellow.”

Dora broke into so ringing a laugh that all the artists engaged upon the boat stopped their work to turn their gaze upon the two children.

“Oh, but you are the funniest boy,” she said.

“Thank you kindly; I do try my best. But come on, let’s finish up with the crowd before they get done with that boat.”

“That’s so. It’s so long since I’ve had anybody I could talk to that I can’t help wandering. Well, those two men with Pete are his oldest sons. They don’t seem to count much one way or the other. Three of those little children paddling in the water are Ben’s, and the other two belong to the oldest of Pete’s sons. His wife is dead, and Ben’s wife, that young woman, takes care of them. She’s real nice, and so is Ben. Ben is very kind to me. He treats me like a little princess. When I told him about wearing blue and white in honor of our Blessed Mother, he got me a lot of nice white dresses and three blue sashes, and his wife is just as kind. Her name is Dorcas. She helps me wash my things, and sews for me, and—you see that little tent over there?”

“It seems to me I do.”

“Well, that’s my tent. Ben got it for me. His wife sleeps with me every night; but she never comes in till I’ve said all my prayers.”

“*All* your prayers.”

“Yes, all of them.”

“I know only two,” observed Clarence regretfully, “and one of them, the Our Father, I’ve partly forgotten.”

“I’ll teach you all I know,” said Dora. “And,” she continued, “when I’ve finished my prayers, I sing a little hymn to the Blessed Virgin. Then she knows that I’m going to bed and she comes in. Isn’t that nice?”

“I don’t know,” returned Clarence, “I haven’t heard you sing yet.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that. I mean her staying out and leaving me to myself till I go to bed. I call that—I call that—delicate.”

“I can sing some myself,” said Clarence, more affected by Dora’s declaration than he cared to show.

“Oh, can you? We’ll get up some duets.”

“The kids at my school used to like to hear me sing, but perhaps it was because they didn’t know any better. But you didn’t tell me anything about that old woman who raised such a fuss about seeing a cross on my hand. What was the matter with her?”

“She hates Catholics. I don’t know what to make of her. She acts as if she would like to poison me because I’m a Catholic. She thinks you’re one.”

“But I’m not.”

“What are you, Clarence?”

“I’m nothing. My father said I was to wait till I was fourteen before I thought anything about religion.”

Suddenly Clarence stopped. The vision of his parents presented itself,—their grief, their bewilderment, their perplexity. His eyes filled with tears.

“What’s the matter, Clarence?”

The boy had not attended boarding school for nothing. With an heroic effort he mastered himself.

“Nothing. Something caught me in the throat. By the way, I’m fourteen now; have been since last June. It’s time for me to get busy and fix up the religious question.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Dora, turning shining eyes and the glowing face of enthusiasm upon her new friend. “I’ll instruct you in the Catholic faith myself.”

“But I don’t intend to be a Catholic. It isn’t up-to-date. There’s too much superstition in it.”

Dora’s eyes opened to their widest.

“Clarence, how can you talk so? I’m shocked. You need instruction badly, and I’m going to begin tomorrow.”

They certainly at this moment looked like life-long friends. Dora, once the question of religion had been raised, had become intensely earnest. Master Ezra, the boat repairing being fairly completed, had drawn near enough to see their faces without being able to catch the exact import of their words. He was plainly disquieted. Tiptoeing his way behind the trees he stole behind the two controversialists, and seizing the end of the log on which they were sitting, gave it a shove and a kick, with the result that the two fell sprawling to the earth.

Clarence was up at once, and with a courtly air caught the girl’s hand and helped her to her feet.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Ezra. His voice was raucous.

“My friend,” said Clarence. “I’m not at all pleased with that laugh of yours.”

“What?” sputtered Ezra.

“It notes the vacant mind,” continued Clarence, with apparent calm. “Also I desire to state that while I don’t mind your spilling me, I do object to your spilling this girl.”

“What?” roared Ezra, doubling his fists and advancing to within a few feet of the youthful knight.

“I’m not deaf, either. The thing for you to do now is to apologize to Dora.”

“What?” roared Ezra, louder than ever.

“Oh, you’re deaf, are you?”

Here Clarence put his two hands like a speaking-trumpet before his mouth and shrilled at the top of his voice.

“Apologize to Dora!”

For answer Ezra’s right hand shot out, aimed direct for Clarence’s jaw. The youngster, expecting such demonstration, jumped back, but not so quickly as to avoid entirely the force of the blow; and as he returned with a facer that caught Ezra between the eyes, the gypsies, man, woman and child, came hurrying to the spot in such short order that, when Ben threw himself between the two, a circle was already formed about the belligerents.

Ezra addressed Ben in gypsy patter. His words were few. Ben nodded.

“Go ahead,” he said, and drew back into the circle; and before Clarence had caught the full significance of these words, a blow planted full below his jaw sent him to the earth. He was up at once, and, on careful guard, warded off several more vicious attacks and waited for an opening. It came presently and left Ezra’s left eye in a state which promised to develop presently into deep mourning.

At this the gypsy lad lost control of himself and proceeded to strike out furiously and wildly. It was easy for Clarence, a trained boxer and agile as a cat, to ward off these blows; easy for him, now and then, to reach his adversary with what are known in sporting circles as love-taps. In a few minutes, Ezra was breathing heavily. Suddenly the gypsy changed his tactics; he

tried to catch Clarence in his arms and bear him to the ground. Clarence, not without difficulty, succeeded in breaking away, and, once free, changed his tactics, too. Springing forward, he literally rained blows upon the winded foe. Nose, eyes, mouth, jaw, all received vigorous attention, till Ezra, unable to stand the punishment, jumped back and averted his head.

“Did you say nuff?” asked Clarence, pausing, and standing still in the center of the ring.

For answer, Ezra made a flying leap at his foe, determined by sheer weight and momentum to bring Clarence to defeat. The young knight was quick to adjust himself. Ezra’s head, intended to ram the lad’s chest, found itself noosed within Clarence’s strong right arm. The catch nearly brought the young knight to the earth; but surefootedness won out, and Ezra was in chancery.

“Say ’nuff,” commanded Clarence, with a hug and a punch that were practically simultaneous.

Pete spoke sharply to Ezra.

“Nuff,” said the gypsy boy.

“All right,” said Clarence, and releasing his hold left Ezra free and evidently much the worse for the short encounter.

The gypsies had been silent throughout the brisk combat. It was impossible to tell from their faces on which side their sympathies lay.

“Boy,” said Ben, slipping into the ring, “I’d advise you to shake hands with Ezra.”

“Happy thought,” gasped Clarence. “Say, Ezra, if you’ll tell Dora you’re sorry for taking liberties with her, I’ll be glad to shake hands with you.”

For answer, Ezra broke into half audible maledictions.

“What did he do?” asked Ben.

Clarence explained.

“You apologize,” said Ben sternly, on hearing the story, “or I’ll give you another licking myself.”

“I’m sorry,” said Ezra, with the worst possible grace.

Then Clarence caught Ezra’s hand and pumped it up and down with an assurance which was amazing.

The night was now well advanced, and dark clouds, black and heavy, had within the last half hour shut out the friendly eyes of the stars. A peal of distant thunder was heard.

“We’d better get ready for bed,” said Ben.

At his word, all seated themselves about the dying fire, save Pete and his wife who at once made for the larger tent. One of the children came running to Ben with a guitar; whereupon Dora rose and with clasped hands stood beside the young gypsy.

Ben, striking a few chords, nodded to Dora, who, at the nod, opened her lips and broke forth in as sweet a voice as ever awoke the woodlands of Wisconsin into—Gounod’s *Ave Maria*.

Clarence was spellbound. He was exalted, carried out of himself. It was not the voice alone, though the voice was thrillingly sweet; not the music, though the air was one that holds music-lovers rapt the world over; not the accompaniment, though it was supremely exquisite in the sacred silence of the night. There was more than all this; faith, and love, and purity, and innocence—all springing from the heart of a child—supplied undertones beyond the reach of art that music could supply.

As the song proceeded, the rain began to fall, but the rain was heeded by none—not even by the little children. Towards the end, the down-pour grew heavy; but spellbound, no one moved. As the last note died into silence, there ensued a few breathless seconds; then came a

burst of thunder and a forked prong of lightning which seemed to strike into their very midst. All jumped up and made for cover.

“Come with me,” said Ben, catching Clarence’s hand. “Your quarters will be in the wagon. She sings,” he added, “that song every night, and,” continued the musician, as he helped Clarence into his new sleeping quarters, “she sings it like an angel.”

“So she does.”

“And,” added Ben, in a whisper, “she is an angel.”

Ten minutes later Clarence was lying upon a bed of straw, and meditating upon the events of the most adventurous day in his life. Around him lay four gypsy men—Ezra, Pete’s two older sons, and Ben. But he was, to all intents and purposes, alone. And then in bitterness and sorrow the young adventurer wept salt tears and checked with difficulty the sighs of utter misery. He was captive; his parents were, he supposed, frantic with grief. Perhaps they thought him dead. And so Clarence, frightened and unnerved, wept freely.

Suddenly the quiet was broken. The same sweet voice, low and clear, trilled out from the little tent:

“Mother dear, O pray for me,
While far from heaven and thee
I wander in a fragile bark
O’er life’s tempestuous sea.”

Clarence, at the first notes, stopped crying.

“By George!” he said to himself at the end of the first stanza, “Here’s the difference between that girl and me. I address myself to the bright-eyed goddess of adventure—and see where I am! And she calls on her dear Mother, who is also the Mother of God, and just look what Dora is!”

Before the second stanza was quite finished, the exhausted youth fell into a disturbed sleep. He tossed uneasily for a time, then murmuring as he turned, “Mother dear, O pray for me,” he was wrapped in a slumber which no noise could disturb.

CHAPTER VII

In which the strange tale of Dora, another victim of the Bright-eyed Goddess, is told to Clarence.

When Clarence awoke the next morning, it dawned upon him very slowly that he was in the firm grasp of a stronger hand, and, without any effort on his part, walking up and down the greensward at a pace not unworthy of a professional walker. A further survey brought to his notice the gypsies grouped together and eyeing him with interest. At her tent door, Dora, fresh as a dew-washed rose, stood laughing at him heartily. It was Ben, he also realized, who, holding him by arm and collar, was causing him to walk with such tremendous strides.

"I say, Ben, drop it. Let me go. What's the matter?"

"I've been trying to wake you for five minutes," said Ben smiling and puffing. "I rolled you over first where you were lying in the wagon, and shouted and pounded you; and when you didn't show any signs of life, I thought you were dead."

"Well, I'm alive all right," said Clarence, and, as Ben freed him from an iron grasp, proceeded to rub his eyes.

Pete, who had just brought the horses to the wagon, where his two older sons took them in charge, came running over, snarling like a wildcat, and seizing the boy by both shoulders shook him without mercy. How long the punishment would have lasted, had it depended upon Pete, is problematic; for Clarence, now thoroughly awakened, cleverly slipped down to the ground and sprang between the Gypsy leader's legs. As he did so, he thoughtfully humped himself in transit, with the result that Pete measured his length on the earth.

"I wish," gasped Clarence, "that you'd *tell* me what you want. I'm not a deaf mute."

Pete sprang for a stick in the bushes; but before he had quite made up his mind which to choose, Ben whispered remonstratingly in his ear. Ben was angry and determined. Bestowing a look of strong disfavor on Clarence, Pete gave an order of some kind to his company, who at once proceeded to break up camp.

"You go and help Dora," said Ben.

"Good morning, Clarence. How do you feel?" asked the child with a smile and the extended hand of welcome. The roses of dawn were upon her cheeks.

"Feel! I'm sleepy. Why, it is hardly daylight."

"We always travel early in the morning; it is cooler, and there are not so many people about. Towards noon we camp in some quiet place, generally by the river side; and then about four we go on, again, and keep on going sometimes till it's too dark to see. Come on now, Clarence; we've got to work fast, or Pete will be down on us."

Under Dora's direction, Clarence made himself quite useful. He was quick and intelligent. The two had their share of the work finished several minutes before the others.

"Where are we going?" asked Clarence.

"We're going to zigzag, I suppose," laughed Dora. "We'll strike into the country for four or five miles, and then we'll strike back again, and by the time we've pitched our camp tonight at the riverside we may be six or seven miles—at the most ten—further up the river than we are now."

"Do we ride or walk, Dora?"

"It's this way: the women and the children stay in the wagon. Pete takes the wagon too, now and then. The men walk and keep a lookout all the time. I generally walk myself; but

sometimes I ride. Ben told me that I could walk with you any time I wanted.”

“Ben’s all right,” said Clarence.

In the splendor of a roseate dawn, the party set out. For an hour they pushed into the interior, when, reaching a deeply wooded grove, they halted for breakfast. Within half an hour they were upon their way again; Pete and one of his sons in the advance, then the wagon, behind it Clarence and Dora with Ben and the other gypsies bringing up the rear. The road they were pursuing was overgrown with weeds and neglected—a road, evidently, where few ventured.

“Say, I never enjoyed a breakfast more in my life than that one. Bacon and eggs! I kept on eating them till I saw Pete looking at me pretty hard; and then I just had to quit. You must know, Dora, I’m a very bashful youth.”

“You took five eggs and lots of bacon,” said the candid girl, “and I don’t know how much bread. This morning before you got up, two of the gypsies traded your boat for over fifteen dollars’ worth of provisions. You say you are a bashful youth. I’m glad you told me, for I’m very sure I would never have found it out myself.”

“I manage to conceal all my virtues,” returned the affable lad, smiling broadly. “And now, Dora, if it is all the same to you, I wish you’d be good enough to tell me how you came to be here.”

“It’s a long story.”

“Well, we’ve plenty of time, and if you can stand telling it, I reckon I can stand listening. Were you kidnapped?”

“That’s a hard question to answer, Clarence. The best way will be for me to begin at the beginning.”

“Go ahead.”

“Well, when I was seven years old I made my first Holy Communion. You know what that means, don’t you?”

“I know what you people believe,” answered Clarence. “I’ve read a lot about it. But, say, do you really believe that Christ is present, and that what looks like bread is really His body?”

“Of course I do!” cried Dora resolutely.

“But why?”

“Because Our Lord told us so. That is faith, we believe on the word of God.”

“Well, go on, Miss Theology.”

“After making my first Communion, I started to go every day and I never missed once for over two years. We lived just a little outside of Dayton, Ohio, and I had to walk a mile to the church.”

“You did—and fasting?”

“Of course, and I just loved to go. Last April it was raining almost all the time. It was often hard to get even to church, and the rivers and streams around Dayton kept rising higher and higher. People said that if the rain didn’t stop, there would be a terrible flood. Well, the rain didn’t stop, and one day in May after three days of terrible rain I went to church, received Communion and started home.”

“Were you alone?”

“I was that morning. Generally some one of the family came with me; but the ground was so muddy that morning that my big sister who had intended coming with me backed out.”

“If I’d been there, I’d have gone with you,” volunteered her gallant companion.

“Anyhow, I had hardly got more than half a mile towards my home, when a man and two

women came running past me. They were very scared-looking and out of breath. As they passed me the man said, 'The dam! the dam! It's broken! Run for your life!' Just then a lot of other people came running, and I turned around, and do you know what I saw?"

"What?" cried Clarence.

"Men and women and children all running towards me, and further back—maybe it was two or three miles—a sort of a wall of water, and it was moving towards me."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Clarence. "What did you do?"

"I started to run and I did run. After a while, I got so out of breath that I began to stagger. I looked behind and it seemed to me that the wall of water was getting closer, and I started to run again. Somehow I hit my foot against a log and fell, rolling over to one side of the road, and when I tried to get up I couldn't use my foot. I had turned my ankle."

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Clarence, "What did you do then?"

"I was scared, and I began to cry."

"I'd have done that myself," commented the boy.

"Then I got on my knees and, while the people in crowds were hurrying past me on the road—you see I was to one side where I had fallen—I cried 'Oh, my dear Mother Mary, be my mother now and save me.'"

"And she did it?" asked the boy.

"I was still kneeling when there came dashing towards me a man on horseback. He saw me and checked the horse, and as he passed me he leaned over like a circus man and caught me up, and then set the horse at breakneck speed, and then I fainted."

"Gee!" said Clarence.

"The next thing I knew I opened my eyes to find myself in a gypsy camp. It was Ben who had saved me. He had just paid Pete's fine and got him out of the workhouse. They were all in a hurry to get away, because they were afraid Pete might be arrested for something else he had done. So they started off. Ben told me he would send me back to my parents just as soon as they had pitched camp for the evening. And he meant it too. But when evening came, and he started to get his horse ready, Pete made a fuss, and Pete's wife stood by him. They all got very angry. Then Pete's boys took their father's side. Indeed I thought there was going to be a fight. In the long run, Pete had it all his own way, and Ben came to me and told me to wait a little longer on account of the flood. And I've been waiting ever since."

"Four months?" said Clarence.

"Yes; and never a word from my mother or father. I don't know whether they are living or dead. Often I cry at night; but then I think of my Blessed Mother and I stop."

"I don't blame you for crying," said Clarence. "And I'll bet your parents think you're drowned."

"There were ever so many people drowned in that flood, I have heard," said Dora. "Anyhow I ought to be grateful to God for sparing my life."

"I say, Dora. We're both in the same boat. You know when I was shoved out into the river in my swimming suit, my clothes were lying on the shore. I'll bet my ma is crying now." And Clarence rubbed his shirt sleeves over his eyes.

"I miss my brothers and sisters so much," continued the girl. "Ben and his wife are good and kind, but I do get so homesick. Sometimes I am so lonely."

"I haven't got any sisters to miss me," pursued the boy. "I had two, but both of them were travelling with pa once in Mexico and they drank some polluted water and died of typhoid fever within two days of each other. And my little brother died when he was five. And now my father

and mother will think I am dead, too.”

Again Clarence used his shirt sleeves to wipe his brimming eyes.

“Sometimes Clarence, I dream that I’m home again and that mama is holding me in her arms and kissing me, and then I’m so happy till I wake; and then sometimes I dream that I’m receiving Holy Communion, and I’m as happy as can be.”

“You are?” said Clarence.

“Of course. Why, I have not received Our Lord for months, and I’m—I’m just hungry for Him.”

“Dora, you are a good fellow.”

“You told me that last night.”

“Do you know that I’m thinking seriously of adopting you?”

“What?” cried the girl.

“Adopting you. I’m short on sisters, and you could help to fill the supply.”

“Oh, thank you; you think I’ll do, do you?”

“You’ll do first rate,” answered Clarence tranquilly and failing to detect the mischief in Dora’s glance. “First chance we get to see a lawyer, we’ll have it fixed up. Say, is there no way for us to escape?”

“I’m afraid not; you’ll see for yourself as we go on.”

At this point of the conversation, Pete came running towards them, and catching Dora’s eye, held up his hand.

“What does he want?” Clarence inquired.

“That’s his sign to tell us to get in the wagon.”

“What for?”

“Probably there are some people on the road. Here now, jump in. We have to stay till he tells that we are free to go out.”

For half an hour they remained hidden. They could hear outside strange voices and the passing of some vehicle.

“This is funny,” observed Clarence.

“Do you know, Clarence, that since I joined the gypsies I have never seen a stranger’s face till you came yesterday?”

Clarence meditated for a moment.

“Oh!” he said presently, and with his most engaging smile. “It was worth your while waiting, wasn’t it?”

CHAPTER VIII

In which Clarence enters upon his career as a gypsy, and makes himself a disciple of Dora.

Clarence learned in the course of that day a good deal of his companions. It was a divided camp. Pete was the official leader, but his authority was weak. He was a dried-up man with furtive eyes and hang-dog aspect. He had a genius for breaking the law and getting into trouble. If there were twenty ways of doing a thing, Pete invariably chose the least honest. His range as a thief went from chickens to horses. In this, as in all other things, he was ably abetted by his shrewish wife. That remarkable woman had a gift for fortune-telling which was uncanny. It was not without reason that Dora suspected Pete's wife of having dealings with the devil. The woman had an intense hatred for anything that savored of the Catholic faith. Her eyes, whenever they fell upon Dora, shot forth a baneful light. It was Ben who stood between the child and her malignity.

Ben was of different mould. He was brave, open and kind. A certain gentleness and refinement were observable in him and his wife. Dora noticed these things and pointed them out to Clarence. But she did not tell him, for she did not know it, that it was her presence, her example, her sweetness and modesty, which had, to a great extent, developed in the gypsy couple these lovely qualities.

And, in truth, it was Dora who was, in a sense, the real leader. She was the uncrowned queen. Neat, spotless in attire, graceful of form and of dazzling complexion, she was always fresh and bright and candid and sweet. Upon the perfect features there was a certain indefinable radiance—the radiance one finds so rarely on the faces of those who appear to have been thinking long and lovely thoughts of God and whose “conversation is in heaven.” Dora knew well the companionship of saints and angels. A keen sense of humor, made known now in rippling laughter, now in the twinkling of an eye, showed that the child was wholesomely human. Ben seemed to worship the ground she trod upon; his wife was a no less ardent devotee, and the little children vied with each other in winning her word or smile. Even Pete's two graceless sons put aside their coarseness and what they could of their evil manners in her winning and dainty presence. Wherever she moved, she seemed to evoke from those she met undreamed-of acts of gentleness and sweetness and love. And indeed before the day was spent, the child unwittingly won a new devotee—Master Clarence himself. Clarence, be it known, was in most respects a normal boy. He was also unusually clean in thought and in word and in life. He had never used a really coarse expression, and he recoiled from any sort of foulness. If one were to ask why this was so, there would be no adequate answer, save that there is no accounting for the uncovenanted graces and mercies of God. A sort of instinct had guided the boy, during his three years at Clermont Academy, in the choice of his companions. He was always seeking the society of those he considered his betters. It took the lad little time to discover that Dora was pure, innocent, gentle, gracious, and high-minded above all whom he had ever met. Before nightfall, he too was her slave.

Let there be no misunderstanding. The reader who considers this a case of puppy love has missed the point. Clarence was at an age and development when the normal boy is little interested in the girl. But to him Dora was something apart. She was set high on a pedestal. She was an ideal. She stood to him for all that was good and beautiful and inspiring in human nature.

As for Dora herself, she had never before encountered a youth so blithe, so debonair, so clever of speech and quick of wit as the young adventurer. She perceived something in the boy of which he himself was scarcely aware—a knightliness, a gallantry that went with high ideals, a serene and lovely purity of heart. She, in turn, placed Clarence upon a pinnacle, and was in intent his devoted slave. Within twenty-four hours, she was unconsciously depending upon him.

On the very afternoon of their first day's travel, she organized a "Catechism class," consisting of Clarence, Ben, and his wife. It was held in the wagon and lasted for an hour. Before it was ended, each member knew how to make the sign of the cross, and Master Clarence himself, who had asked many questions and put many objections, was beginning to see that the Catholic Church was not so encrusted with superstitions, as he had supposed, nor in any wise, as he had once held, out of date.

Pete and his wife, upon understanding what was going on, were furious; the woman particularly so. The leader, afraid to wreak vengeance on Dora, singled out Clarence as the victim to his rage. Many a secret blow did the boy receive during the day's journey.

At nightfall there came a heavy rain. All took shelter in the big tent. Clarence happened to remark how two nights previously he had been engrossed in a wonderful story called Treasure Island.

"What was it about?" asked Ben.

"Do you want me to tell it?"

"Oh, do," cried Dora. "I haven't read a story or heard one for ever and ever so long."

"I like a nice story," said Dorcas, Ben's wife, beaming on the lad.

"Tell us Treasure Island," begged one of the children.

And Clarence, thus adjured, set about recounting that wondrous tale of ships and pirates and buried treasures. At the first words, Pete and his wife left the tent. But the others remained, and listened to a lad who coupled an extraordinary memory with a flow of vivid language. The story was in its first quarter when Pete returned and, to the disappointment of all, announced bedtime. The guitar was brought, Gounod's *Ave Maria* sung, and when sleep visited the eyes of Clarence, who kept himself awake to hear Dora's good-night hymn to the Blessed Mother, it visited a youngster who in twenty-four hours had achieved a partnership with a singularly lovely child in the leadership of a gypsy band.

CHAPTER IX

In which Clarence gets some further knowledge of a shrine, which has much to do with the most important events of this veracious narrative, and pays back the gypsy, Pete with compound interest.

It was the third day of Clarence's experiences as a gypsy. He and Ben and Dorcas had become great friends. Often the young gypsy couple chose to walk with Dora and the boy, and, in their talks, the subject was not infrequently religion. Clarence was quick to grasp the truths of faith, and, indeed, became a sort of assistant professor, supplementing the explanations of Dora with knowledge gained from his own wide range of reading.

Pete and his wife were at no pains to conceal their fury at the turn of events brought about by the arrival of Clarence. There was poison in their looks and venom in their tongues. Ezra made himself a sharer of this unlovely couple's feelings. He hated Clarence intensely; it was hatred born of envy. The memory of his defeat still rankled. One or the other of these three was always watching the boy, night and day.

On this particular morning, Clarence had, after breakfast, wandered into the forest to gather some flowers for Dora's altar. The little girl had the day previous brought him into her tent and shown him a little shrine of Our Lady Immaculate.

"I pray before it," she said, "and I have promised our Blessed Mother that if she have me restored to my home, I will join some Order in her honor where I can give most of my time to prayer and meditation."

"So you intend to become a contemplative?" asked Clarence, looking at the child with renewed interest.

"If God allows me, Clarence, I'd like to sit at the feet of Our Lord forever."

"Not for me," said Clarence, "I'd like to *do* things. The active life suits me. But really that is one of the great things about your Church."

"*Our* Church," corrected Dora with a smile.

"I can't say that yet," said Clarence. "Anyhow, as I was saying, one of the great things about your Church is that it has something to suit the taste of everyone. There's no end of variety in it. And say, Dora, where do you get all these flowers for your shrine?"

"Ben gets most of them. His wife helps, too. They began doing this long before they thought of becoming Catholics. Ben got me that pretty statue somewhere or other three months ago; and he began bringing flowers almost at once. He built the shrine, too. Whenever he came in up to a few days ago, he always lifted his hat. One day I found him kneeling before it. Since we began instructions, he kneels and makes the sign of the cross."

"Why don't you try to get Pete and his wife interested?"

"They never come to my tent; they don't even know about the shrine. Ben has arranged all that. I believe, if they knew about it, that they would smash the statue in pieces—and as for me, I don't know what they would do."

"By George, if I ever can do a good turn for Ben," exclaimed the boy enthusiastically, "I'll do it with all my heart. He is so kind and good and gentle. In fact, he seems to be deeply religious."

"That's just what I think. His wife is just as good. She has given up fortune-telling, she told me, for good. She says she'd rather starve than do it again. And Ben is figuring now every day how much he has taken dishonestly. He says before he gets baptized he's going to restore

everything that isn't honestly his."

"Dora, you've done all this."

"Oh, no, Clarence; I think it must be our Blessed Lady. She hasn't forgotten a single flower that Ben has brought to her shrine. She's going to pay him back with interest."

"You wouldn't mind, Dora, if I helped gather some flowers, too?"

"Indeed, no; but I want you to do it in honor of the Blessed Virgin."

"Of course. I'll get some tomorrow."

It was in consequence of this conversation, then, that Clarence was wandering in the woods. His quest was disappointing. No flowers greeted his searching eyes. Further and further he wandered. Suddenly, he was roughly seized by the collar from behind, and turning he saw that Pete had him in his vigorous grip, Pete with a branch of willow in his free hand.

"I told you not to try to get away," snarled the gypsy bringing the branch smartly upon Clarence's legs.

"Stop that! I wasn't trying to get away at all."

For answer, Pete laid the lash unmercifully upon the powerless boy, beating him with all his strength. The pain became so great that Clarence at length unable to restrain himself further burst into a loud cry for mercy.

Pete paused, looking around apprehensively. His keen ear detected the sound of far-off footsteps. Throwing the willow aside, he released his hold on the boy (who sank to the ground writhing in pain) and disappeared in his usually stealthy manner, into the bushes.

It was Ben who had heard the boy's cry of pain.

"What has happened?" he cried looking with concern upon the writhing lad.

"Pete has given me an awful beating," answered Clarence, mastering his voice, though the tears were still rolling down his cheeks.

"Why? What did you do?"

"He said I was trying to get away, and I wasn't. I just came along here looking for flowers for Dora's shrine. And the worst of it is," continued the boy with a rueful smile contending with his falling tears, "I didn't get a single flower."

"Perhaps that holy woman who is the mother of God will pay you back for every lick you receive. Dora said she is good pay."

Clarence arose, felt himself gingerly, and breaking into a smile remarked, "If it's all the same to the Blessed Virgin, I'd prefer to do my trading with her in flowers instead of lashes. Never mind, Mr. Pete, the first chance I get, I'll fix you all right."

The chance, it so came to pass, presented itself that very afternoon. They were now some six miles north of the Wisconsin, which they had crossed the preceding day, and had reached a spot on the Mississippi about three miles beyond Prairie du Chien, which is just across the river from McGregor. Clarence, of course, had no idea he was so near the place where his adventures had begun. The boy, still very sore and bruised, again started off along the river's bank in quest of flowers. Mindful of the beating, he made his way cautiously, warily, determined not to be taken unawares again. Suddenly his alert and attentive ear caught a slight sound. Someone in a grove of trees a few yards above the bank was whittling. Screening himself behind the willows about him, Clarence drew closer, and after a few paces thus taken, discovered Pete, a pipe in his mouth, seated on a log beneath a hollow tree. Pete, as he smoked vigorously, was whittling with a certain air of enjoyment a rather stout branch.

"By Jove," cried Clarence to himself, "if he's not getting a rod in pickle for me!" And Clarence felt his legs once more with a tender hand. "He has no right to whack me the way he

did. I'm not his son; I'm not in his charge. And I don't like the look of that rod at all. I wish I could stop him."

Clarence, securely screened by the bushes, continued to stare and meditate. A bee buzzed by his ear, and then another. Following their flight, he noticed that they disappeared in a hollow of the tree under which the industrious Pete was seated.

Five minutes passed. Pete still smoked and whittled. Then the old leader arose, and with a smile on his countenance, which would in all likelihood throw any child who saw it into convulsions, proceeded to lash the air, holding in his free hand an imaginary victim.

"I guess he thinks it's myself he's holding," murmured the astonished witness of these strange proceedings. "Also, I think I'll try to find out if there isn't a bee-hive in that tree."

As he thus communed with himself, Clarence bent and quickly picked up five stones; then rising, he sent one after the other driving at the hollow spot in the tree. The first stone went wild, the second struck the tree, the third nearly entered the hole, the fourth flew wild, and the fifth——!

So intent was the gypsy upon the imaginary castigation he was inflicting that he was still swishing the air violently when out of the hole flew an army of angry bees. They were not inclined to be dispassionate. Somebody had done them a wrong, and somebody had to suffer for it. The bees were upon the gypsy when he was just putting all his strength into a most vicious swing. He swung that stick no more. With a roar that set the echoes ringing, Pete dropped the stick, and clapping his hands to his head set out at a rate, which, if properly timed, would, no doubt, have created a new record in the way of a fifty-yard dash for the river, into which he plunged with an agility worthy of youth and professional diving.

To the gypsies who, attracted by his yells (for he had yelled all the way to the river's edge), had gathered on the bank, it appeared that Pete was going in for a long distance swim. In fact, he had almost crossed the river, before he ventured to turn back. Clarence, who had thoughtfully possessed himself of the switch and broken it into minute pieces, was the last to join the eager and mystified watchers.

"What's the matter?"—"What's happened?"—These and a dozen similar questions in English and in gypsy patter greeted his arrival.

"I rather think," said Clarence in his most serious manner, "that Pete must have run up against a swarm of bees, and they weren't glad to see him. I noticed him a minute ago running for the river with the speed of a deer. It was fine to see him go. It seemed to me that there was a bunch of bees around his head—a sort of a crown of glory—acting as his escort. It's a pleasure to see a man like Pete run. I'd walk twenty miles to get a treat like that."

Before Pete had quite achieved his return, Ben called Clarence aside.

"Clarence, you got those bees after Pete."

"Who told you?"

"Pete's oldest son; he was watching you. *There's always someone watching you.*"

"Great Caesar!" cried Clarence losing all his blitheness, and turning pale as a sheet. "I'm in for it now. He'll *kill me*?"

"Why did you do it?"

"I could hardly help it. I saw the old sinner sitting right under a bee's nest fixing up a switch; and I guessed he was fixing it for me. Then he stood up, and began switching somebody with an unholy joy on his measly old face, and I *knew* he was switching me. I couldn't stand for that, and I began letting fly stones at the hole in the tree, and that old pirate was so enjoying the imaginary whipping he was giving me that he didn't notice a thing till the

bees came out in a body and took a hand. It wasn't so very bad, was it, Ben?"

Ben grinned.

"It was good for him," he made answer.

"But what am I to do? I don't want any more whippings like I got this morning."

"It's all right for a while, anyhow," returned Ben. "I've told Pete's son that if he says a word about it to anyone I'll give him what you would get. I've scared him, and he's promised to keep quiet."

"Oh, thank you, Ben," cried Clarence, who had been thoroughly frightened. "You're splendid; and if ever I can do anything for you and yours, I'll do it, no matter what. Say, look at the old fox. Isn't he a sight?"

Pete had just reached dry land. His appearance justified Master Clarence's remark. Looking at his neck, one might surmise that Pete was suffering from goiter aggravated by an extreme case of mumps. As for his face, it gave one the impression that Pete had engaged in a prize fight, and remained in the ring for several rounds after he had been defeated. Pete, punctuating his steps with a fine flow of profanity, made for the larger tent. He was seen no more that day.

Clarence having made a most unsuccessful attempt to look sympathetic, went to the river and took a swim. Clarence knew the river now; it had no terrors for him. Whenever he went swimming (and he had been doing this several times each day) one or another of the gypsy men followed him into the water.

That evening, having finished, amid great enthusiasm on the part of his auditors, Treasure Island, Clarence contrived to have a few words in private with Dora.

"Dora," he said, "I've been thinking and thinking how you and I can get away together; but I can't see any way."

"It's no use to try," said Dora.

"But I can get away by myself, I think. I've got it figured out."

"You can!"

"Yes, I think so. Of course, there's danger in it. But I'd rather die than get another such a whipping as that old buccaneer gave me today. All the same, I hate to leave you here."

"Don't take any big risks, Clarence."

"But if I go, I'll never forget you; and, if I can, I'll see that you are freed."

"You won't be able to do it. If you were to get free, Pete would use some means or other to spirit me away."

"We'll see," said Clarence. "Will you pray that I may succeed?"

"Indeed, I will. What are you going to do?"

"I don't want to say anything yet. It may be a week before things come right. Good night, Dora; and don't forget me."

CHAPTER X

In which Clarence engages in a swimming race, and to the consternation of Dora, disappears in the waters of the Mississippi.

On the following day, the camp did not break up at the usual early hour. Pete remained in his tent nursing his injuries. The gypsies were kept mindful of his presence, now by an occasional bellow from the leader, now by a roaring burst of profanity. Ben had disappeared early in the morning; and it was for him they were waiting before they proceeded further.

It was nearly noon-time when he returned. After an interview with Pete, he called Clarence aside.

“Do you know where I have been, my boy?”

“No; where?”

“To McGregor.”

“You have! Is it far from here?”

“It’s ten miles down the river.”

“And what about my parents?”

“They stayed over at McGregor till yesterday afternoon, hoping to recover your body.”

“My body?”

“Yes. They are sure you were drowned. They have been dragging the river for you ever since you disappeared. Yesterday, your father had to leave. There’s a reward of one thousand dollars for your body.”

“Gee! I didn’t know I was worth that much.”

“Clarence,” continued Ben, “I’m sorry we’ve kept you. It isn’t all my fault. And I’m sorry about Dora. Pete is a born kidnapper; and he has more power than me. Anyhow, no matter what happens, so long as I’m alive I’ll see that no harm comes to that dear little girl.”

“Ben, you are a good fellow.” And Clarence shook Ben’s hand with vigor.

Within fifteen minutes the gypsies were on the road. They made only five or six miles that day, and about two hours before sunset pitched their tents in a clearing at the river side about fifteen miles north of Prairie du Chien.

Clarence, at the first opportunity, went to the river and looked about for a good place to swim. There was no need for a search. The suitable place was awaiting him. He had hardly got into his bathing suit when Ezra appeared and, saying little, followed him into the water.

Ezra was a good swimmer. He used a powerful overhand stroke.

“Say, Ezra, why do you always swim overhand?”

“It’s the best and swiftest,” answered the gypsy boy.

“It may be the swiftest,” returned Clarence; “but it’s no good for a long swim. I prefer going sailor fashion.”

“It’s the best for a long swim, if you’ve got the strength to keep it up,” retorted Ezra.

“All the same,” said Clarence, “I’ve got to see the boy who can beat me out in a long distance swim, if he sticks to the overhand.”

“You mean to say you can beat me?” said Ezra.

“Of course, I can,” returned Clarence superbly. “I can beat you or any of your family.”

“You see that island in the middle of the river?” asked Ezra, pointing as he spoke to a long, low island nearly a mile in length. Clarence looked at it intently. It was thickly wooded and ended to the south in a clump of willows deeply submerged in the water. The two boys were

bathing in a spot facing almost directly the middle of the long island.

"It seems to me I do," answered Clarence; "and it must be at least half a mile from us."

"I'll race you to the island," said Ezra.

"You'll lose," returned Clarence.

"Hey!" cried Ezra, "hey, Ben! this kid says he can beat me to that island. May I race him?"

"Come here, you two," said Ben, approaching them. As Pete was still nursing an inflamed neck, face, and temper, Ben was now in command of the camp. "Here's a good place for diving off," he continued, pointing to a spot where the bank rose three feet or more above the water's edge. "Stand back, both of you, on a line with me, and when I say 'go' start out with a good dive."

The two lads ranged themselves beside Ben. Clarence appeared to be unusually serious. One would think, looking upon him just then, that the winning of this race was to him a matter of life and death. The color had almost entirely left his cheeks, his mouth was closed tight, his chin thrown out, and his whole poise indicated supreme earnestness.

"Are you both ready?" asked Ben.

"I am," returned Ezra, who was quite cool and perfectly confident.

"Wait one second," said Clarence. Then he gravely bowed his head and made the Sign of the Cross.

"Wait!" came another voice; and all three turning saw Pete's wife hurrying towards them.

Holding out a skinny finger and pointing it impressively at Clarence, she screamed:

"May you sink, and never come up. May you drown, and your body never be found. May my curse follow you into the other world."

"Is that all, ma'am?" asked Clarence breaking into his sunniest smile.

The woman choked with rage. She tried to speak, but words and voice both failed her.

"Come on, boys," resumed Ben. "Ready?"

"Yes," answered the two in a breath.

"Go!"

At the word, the boys sprang into the water. Both disappeared beneath the surface at the same time. Within a few seconds, Ezra emerged and his hands rose high and fast above his head in the overhand stroke. Several seconds passed, and those watching on the shore began to show signs of nervousness. All the gypsies, save, of course, the snarling and profane invalid, were now gathered together beside Ben. Even Dora, who was never to be seen at the river side when the men were swimming, had joined the gazers, standing a few yards apart.

"Oh, Ben," she cried, "what's happened to Clarence?"

Ben made no answer. Scanning the surface of the river intently, he was pulling off his shoes.

"He's drowned! He's drowned!" screamed the gypsy hag. "My curse has fallen." Her laugh, horrible to the ear, rang out carrying in its undertones all manner of evil omen.

As the woman was speaking, Dora fell upon her knees.

"Holy Mary," she cried aloud, "save your dear child, Clarence. Remember he is not baptized."

The girl had not yet finished her adjuration when a great shout arose from the men and shrill screams from the children. Far out, fully five yards ahead of Ezra and as many yards further down stream, Clarence came to the surface. The boy had been the best long distance diver of all the youngsters attending Clermont Academy, the eastern boarding school.

A howl of rage arose from the old woman.

“Get up! Get up!” she cried, rushing with outstretched and hooked claws at the kneeling girl. It was only by the quickest of movements that Ben was able to save the child from bodily injury. As it was, the woman dashed into Ben’s rigid and protecting elbow, and, doubled up with pain, retired shrieking and cursing to the genial companionship of her husband.

Meantime the race went on bravely. The two boys for the next ten minutes retained their respective positions, with, however, one point of difference. Ezra was swimming in almost a direct line; Clarence was being carried down the river by the current. As the moments passed, the distance between the two visibly widened.

Ben was wringing his hands and frowning.

“What is it, Ben?” asked Dora. “Is there any danger? Is there anything wrong?”

“I’m afraid,” Ben made answer, “that if Clarence doesn’t fight the current more strongly, he may be carried down below the island. Unless he’s a wonderful swimmer, there will be danger.”

Ben’s forebodings promised, as the moments went on, to be justified. Both boys were nearing the island, Ezra not more than twenty yards below the point from which he had set out. Clarence quite near the clump of southernmost willows.

“Do you think he’ll reach it?” cried the girl.

“I hope so; I don’t know.”

Once more Dora fell upon her knees, and crossing herself, prayed with streaming eyes to the heavenly Mother in whom she ever confided.

“Look,” cried Ben. “Ezra has reached the island. And Clarence is trying to swim upstream so as not to miss it. My God!” he continued, “I do believe he’s giving out!”

A deathly silence had come upon all. Clarence was swimming wildly. He had abandoned the sailor stroke and was beating the water with aimless hands. On the stillness his voice reached them.

“Help! Help!” he cried.

Then throwing up his hands, apparently within a few yards of the willows, he disappeared in the calm river.

CHAPTER XI

In which John Rieler of Campion College, greatly daring, goes swimming alone, finds a companion, and acts in such a manner as to bring to Campion College the strangest, oddest boy visitor that ever entered its portals.

It was thirteen minutes to ten on the following morning when Master John Rieler of Campion College, second-year high, discovered that he earnestly desired to be excused from the classroom. It was a very warm day for September, the sun was shining with midsummer fervor, and John Rieler, who had spent the vacation on the banks of the Miami—whenever, that is, he did not happen to be between the banks—felt surging within him the call of the water. John, a smiling, good-natured native of Cincinnati, was in summer months apparently more at home in the water than on the land. One of the anxieties of his parents in vacation time was to see that he did not swim too much, to the certain danger of his still unformed constitution.

For various reasons, connected more or less with the discipline of Campion College, John had had no swim since his arrival seven days before. He was filled with a mad desire to kick and splash. And so, at thirteen minutes to ten, he held up the hand of entreaty, endeavoring at the same time to look ill and gloomy.

John had figured out everything. As recess was at ten o'clock, the teacher would not call him to account for failing to return. The recess lasted fifteen minutes, giving the boy twenty-eight minutes to go to the river, take a morning splash and return. Of course, there were risks; but in John's mind the risks were well worth taking.

The boy, on receiving permission, was quick to make his way down the stairs of the classroom building, and, turning to the back of the small boys' department and hugging the wall closely, he reached the shaded avenue leading from Church Street up to Campion College. Along this avenue was a cement sidewalk bordered on one side by a line of young poplars and on the other, below a terrace of some three or four feet, by another of ancient and umbrageous box-elders. The cement walk was too conspicuous; the graded road beside it equally so. Master John Rieler, therefore, wisely chose the abandoned path below; and doubling himself up, so as to escape the attention of the Brother in the garden, ran swiftly on. Church Street, leading to the city of Prairie du Chien, was passed in safety. The worst was over. An open road, really an abandoned street, left to itself by the march of the city northward, the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul track, and then, within a few yards, the bank of the inviting Mississippi.

A boat-landing, projecting quite a distance into the river, the property of the Jesuit Fathers at Campion, was awaiting the daring youth from which to dive.

He was at the further end of it in a trice, kicked off his shoes and stockings, and with the amazing rapidity of small boys when so inclined, was disrobed in almost the time it takes to tell it. With the slight delay of making a hurried but fervent sign of the cross, John took a header, rose, struck out vigorously, and having reached a distance midway between the landing and Campion Island, threw himself contentedly on his back and floated in an ecstasy of satisfaction.

"Ah!" he sighed, "how I wish I could stay right here till dinner time."

Presently he turned over quietly, and as his ears rose above the water, he thought he heard a splash a little above him. Beating with hands and feet, he raised himself as high as he could out of the water and looked in the direction whence the sound came.

Was that a hand—two hands—was it the head of a swimmer? John was puzzled. Even as he looked, the supposed head seemed to disappear. John swam towards the spot. As he drew near—there could be no mistake that time—a human head rose to the surface and almost at once disappeared again! Frantically John swam forward. As he came close to the place where the head disappeared, a slight bubbling on the water's surface caught his eye. Throwing himself forward with one almost super-human stroke, John reached down with his foremost hand—the right—and caught an arm. Up there came to the surface the face of a boy, lips ghastly blue, face deathly pale, corn-flower blue eyes that opened for a moment and, even as the tongue gasped out, "Help me, for God's sake," closed again.

Putting his hand under the body of the unresisting boy, John Rieler made for the shore. It was an easy rescue. The boy on his arm was unconscious and John Rieler was as much at home in the water as it is possible for any creature short of the amphibious to be.

On getting the boy to land, he lifted him upon the wooden platform of the pier, turned him on his back, raised him up by the feet, and satisfied that the stranger's lungs were not filled with water, rolled him over face upward and caught him vigorously on both sides between the ribs.

"Stop your tickling, Jock," came a weak voice. Eyes of blue, much bluer than the swimming suit of their owner, opened and shut again.

"Say, you're not dead, are you?"

"Of course, I'm dead," replied the blue-eyed one sitting up. "If I weren't, do you think I'd be talking to you?"

"I—I—thought you were drowned."

"Well, I'm not. How did I get here?"

"I fished you out. You were bobbing up and down there, and I just managed to get you as you went under for the last time, I suppose. How do you feel now?"

"Hungry," said the other, arising.

"Who are you anyhow?"

"I'm Clarence Esmond. Say, I'm starving!" And Clarence took a few steps with some difficulty.

John Rieler thought quickly, dressing rapidly as he did so.

"I'll tell you what," he said earnestly. "You come with me till we get to Campion College. I'd like to bring you in myself; but I don't see how I can do it without getting into trouble. Come on now; you're cold, aren't you?"

"Numb to the bone."

"Here take my coat till we get to the College. There—that'll warm you up some. Can you run?"

"I can try."

"That'll warm you some more." With this John Rieler put his arm about Clarence and swept him up the shore.

Clarence was exhausted; but the strong arm of the boy held him securely and so the twain made their way at a brisk trot.

"Now, look here," said Rieler as they reached the end of the street, and stood within a few feet of the Campion faculty residence, "you give me that coat; I'm going in by the back way. You walk straight on to where you see those steps. You go up those steps and ring the bell. The Brother will come, and you just tell him you're hungry and you want to see the Rector. Good-bye. Don't tell anyone you saw me. My name's John Rieler. Now be sure and do just what I tell you and keep mum."

“Thank you. I—I can’t talk. Good-bye.”

When the Brother-porter came to the door in response to the bell a moment later, he jumped back at sight of the apparition in the blue swimming suit.

“*Ach Himmel!*” he exclaimed, clasping his hands. The Brother was not an Irishman.

“Please, sir, I’m hungry and I want to see the Rector.”

“Come—this way.”

Following his startled and disturbed guide, Clarence was escorted into the parlor.

“Sit down while I go for the Rector,” and saying something that sounded like “*Grosser Gott,*” the Brother left Clarence shivering in a chair and surveying his new surroundings.

“Oh, Father Rector,” cried the porter as he opened the President’s door, “there’s a boy in the parlor who’s hungry and wants to see you.”

The Reverend Rector, busy with the morning’s mail, raised his head and said:

“A new pupil, I suppose.”

“I—I—think not,” answered the Brother, fidgeting upon his feet.

“Why, what are you so excited about?”

“He—he’s dressed only in a swimming suit. It’s blue.”

“Oh, he is. Well, at any rate,” said the Rector, inscrutable of face, “he’s brought his trunks along.”

“No, Father, he’s brought nothing but his swimming suit.”

“Exactly; he’s brought his trunks along. Think about it, Brother, and you’ll see I’m right.”

The good Brother has thought about it many a time since that day. He does not see it yet.

When, a few moments later, the President of Campion College stepped into the parlor, he, too, prepared though he had been, was startled beyond measure. He did not, however, manifest any sign of his feelings. Long experience in boarding schools had given him the power of preserving stoical immobility under circumstances no matter how extraordinary.

It was not, as he had expected, a boy in a bathing suit that confronted his gaze, but a creature wrapped from head to foot, Indian-like, in a table covering, predominantly red, appropriated, as was evident, from the center-table of the parlor.

CHAPTER XII

In which Clarence relieves the reader of all possible doubts concerning his ability as a trencherman, and the Reverend Rector of Campion reads disastrous news.

Throwing up the window-shades, the President hurried over to the boy, who had arisen at his entrance, and took a sharp look at the blue lips and the pallid face.

"Sit down," he said, "and wait till I come back."

Father Keenan, who at that time happened to be President of Campion College, bolted from the room—a most undignified thing for a Rector to do. On his way out, he detected hanging on a chair in the obscurest corner of the parlor the dripping "trunks" which were still puzzling the good porter. That much-perturbed man was standing outside in anticipation of further orders.

"Brother, go to the refectory and tell the refectorian to get up a quick breakfast for a hungry boy. Then go to the clothes-keeper and get a complete outfit of clothes for a fourteen-year-old and have them in the parlor inside of ten minutes. If the clothes-keeper says he hasn't any, tell him to steal them."

The words were not well out of Father Keenan's mouth when he was dashing along the corridor. The infirmary was close at hand, and the infirmarian in his office.

"Here quick, drink this down," cried the Rector a moment later, putting to the young Indian's mouth a small glass of cognac.

Clarence swallowed it at a gulp, whereupon while he coughed and choked and sputtered, the Rector, a veritable Good Samaritan, threw a heavy overcoat, which he had brought with him, over the flaming table cover.

"Does it burn?" asked the Rector, referring not to the coat but the cognac.

"I—I'm not a regular drinker," said the youth wrapping the coat about him and breaking into the ghost of his old smile.

"This way, now," continued Father Keenan, catching the boy's arm; and he led him into the corridor.

The boy's steps were faltering, and the Rector at once, noticing his weakness, caught him about the waist much as John Rieler had done, and bundled him into the refectory.

"This way, Father," said the refectorian, trying to look as though he were accustomed to feeding bare-legged boys attired in table-covers and winter overcoats in summer-time; and the "Squire," as he was popularly known among the students of Campion, pointed to a seat in front of which waited a plate of toast, a juicy bit of beefsteak and a huge slice of combread.

At sight of the food, Clarence slipped from the Rector's grasp and fell unbidden into the seat.

For the next five minutes he showed that in the matter of eating he was perfectly able to take care of himself.

The Rector and the Squire interrupted their observation of the much occupied youth by gazing at each other now and then and exchanging smiles of wonder and admiration.

"If you're thinking of coming to school here, my boy," observed the Rector, when Clarence had disposed of all the beefsteak and most of the toast and three-fourths of the combread, "I fancy we'll have to board you on the European plan."

Clarence lifted his eyes and smiled in his old way.

"Excuse haste and an empty stomach," he said.

The Rector laughed in a manner most undignified. In fact, he was so undignified, be it said, that everybody respected him.

“What makes you so hungry?” he asked.

“Because I’ve eaten nothing since ten o’clock yesterday morning.”

“Where on earth have you been?”

“I was with gypsies till yesterday evening; but I left without taking my supper.”

“Who in the world are you?”

“My name is Clarence Esmond. About a week ago I was over at McGregor—”

“Halloa!” cried the Rector. “Why, they’re dragging the river for you.”

“They might as well stop; it’s no use,” said Clarence, taking the last piece of toast and looking regretfully at the empty beefsteak dish.

“My, but this is an adventure!” exclaimed the President. “So you’re not a moist corpse after all.”

The Squire’s eyes were sticking out of his head.

“If you were only dead,” he said to Clarence, “you’d be worth a thousand dollars to me.”

“I’m sorry I can’t please everybody,” said the youth, taking up the last slab of cornbread.

“Am I expected to apologize for being alive?”

“Did you sleep last night?” continued the Rector.

“How could I? I was in the river most of the time.”

“But the river,” said the Rector, “has a very fine bed.”

Clarence broke into laughter.

“Thank you so much, sir,” he said, “I never, never, never enjoyed a meal so much in all my born days.”

“You’re welcome,” said Father Keenan. He turned to the wide-eyed squire, adjuring that thoroughly excited young man to go see whether the complete outfit of clothing were awaiting Clarence in the parlor. Their talk was brief; but when Father Keenan turned to address Clarence, the lad’s head was sunk upon his breast. He was sound asleep.

“Never mind about those clothes, Squire; or, rather, have them sent over to the infirmary.” Saying which, Father Keenan took Clarence, including table-cover and coat, in his arms, and conveyed him to the infirmary, where, warmly wrapped in a comfortable bed, he slept unbrokenly till after five o’clock in the afternoon.

Returning to his room, the Rector took up the morning paper. In examining the mail, he had, when Clarence’s arrival interrupted him, noticed the large headlines announcing a dreadful railroad wreck in the west; a broken bridge, a Pullman sleeper and a passenger car immersed in a flooded river. Suddenly, as his eyes ran down the list of the missing, he gasped.

For there in black type were the names of Mr. Charles Esmond, mining expert, and wife.

CHAPTER XIII

In which Clarence as the guest of Campion College makes an ineffectual effort to bow out the Bright-eyed Goddess of Adventure.

Father George Keenan, while Clarence slept, was an unusually busy man. He telephoned, he wrote letters, he sent telegrams. All the machinery of communication was put into requisition. Within an hour the work of dragging the water near Pictured Rocks was discontinued; by noontime a telegram arrived saying that Mr. and Mrs. Esmond were still missing and were in all probability drowned or burned to death; and early in the afternoon the proprietor of a hotel in McGregor arrived in person. The Esmonds had been at his place and had gone, leaving as their address "The Metropole," Los Angeles, California. But alas, they had not reached their proposed destination.

The hotel man was conducted by the Rector into the infirmary and brought to the side of the sleeping boy. He was breathing softly, the roses had returned to his cheeks and his head was pillowed in his right hand.

"That's him, all right," said the hotel keeper after a brief survey. "I'd know him anywheres. There ain't many boys around here got such rosy cheeks and such fair complexions. There ain't many boys who've got such bright, fluffy hair, and I don't know a single one who's got his hair bobbed the way he has."

On returning to his room, Father Keenan opened a special drawer in his desk and sorted out from a bundle of papers an envelope with a post-mark indicating that it had reached him several days before. He took out the letter and read it again.

"Dear Father Keenan: Probably you don't remember me. I was a boy with you at St. Maure's College—and a very poor boy at that. Other fellows had pocket money; I had none—most of the time. I hadn't been there long when you 'caught on,' as we used to say. During the five months we were together you seemed to know when I needed a nickel or a dime, and, in a way that was *yours*, you managed to keep me supplied. I say it was *your* way, for you got me to take the money as though I were doing you a favor. The amount you gave me must have been six or seven dollars, all told; and I really don't think I had sense enough at the time to understand how really kind you were. Many years have passed, and the older I get, the more grateful I feel. Up to a few years ago, I had lost track of you completely. I didn't know even that you had become a Jesuit. Well, Father George, I happened to see in our Catholic paper last week that you were Rector of Campion College, a boarding school. If you are one-tenth as kind to the boys under your care as you were to me, you'll be just the sort of President needed in such a place. The memory of our days in St. Maure's has helped me to live a good life and to practice my faith, surrounded though I be with enemies of the Church. There are three Catholic families here in a population of three thousand. God has blessed me in my business. I have my own home, a loving wife and five of the nicest children in the State of Missouri. Also, to speak of things more material, a grain store and a comfortable bank account.

"I am sending you with this a check for one hundred dollars, payment on your loans of pocket money with compound interest, and then some. Of course, you may do with the money as you please. But if I may make a suggestion—don't think me sentimental—it would please me if you were to put aside forty or fifty dollars of it to help out some poor boy in the way of clothes, books, and pocket money.

"In sending you this I do not wish you to consider our account closed. So long as God

continues to bless and prosper me, I intend sending you from time to time—every quarter, I trust—a like donation. May the money I send do as much good as you did me.

“I still remember the old boys of our day affectionately. Nearly all of them were kind to me. One in particular, a black-haired, dark-complexioned, mischievous little fellow, who was full of heart, I can never forget. I never met him but he sent me off supplied with candy. His name was Tom Playfair. What’s become of him?”

“Pray for me, dear Father George, and especially for my wife, who is an angel, and our children, who promise to be worthy of their mother. My love and my gratitude go with this letter.

“Sincerely and gratefully,

“JOHN S. WILCOX.”

“Strange!” meditated the Rector. “I just remember Wilcox, but I do *not* remember ever having given him a cent. Anyhow, I see my way to spend that fifty dollars as he suggests. Poor Esmond is an orphan, I fear. Well, the money goes to him.”

On getting word at half-past five o’clock that Master Esmond was awake and calling for food, Father Keenan hastened to the infirmary.

Clarence, fully dressed in a “purloined” set of clothes, was seated at a table and vigorously attacking a large slab of combread, a dish of hash, and a plate of pancakes. In the attack, executed with neatness and dispatch, and in which the youth played no favorites, Clarence had already aroused the amused admiration of the Brother Infirmarian.

“How do you do, Father Rector?” cried the boy, rising and bowing. “I feel able now to tell you that I’m grateful to you beyond words for your kindness. Your breakfast was the best breakfast ever served, that bed I slept on the softest, this supper the finest I could get, and the Brother, who’s been waiting on me as though I were the Prodigal Son is as kind and hospitable as though he took me for an angel.”

“Nobody would take you for an angel who saw you eating,” said the big Brother with a chuckle.

“How do you feel, my boy?” asked the Rector, as, catching Clarence by the shoulders, he forced him back into his seat.

“Feel? I feel like a morning star. I feel like a fighting-cock.”

“Ready, I suppose, for any sort of adventure?”

Clarence laid down his knife and fork once more.

“Adventure! Excuse *me*. I’ve got over that period of my life for good. No more adventures for me. Only a few days ago I came down the street of McGregor just crazy for adventure. I called her the bright-eyed goddess. I actually invoked her. I begged her to get out her finest assortment of adventures and show me. Well, she did. She got hold of me, and she didn’t let go till I got to bed here this morning. Oh, no. No more bright-eyed goddess for me. If I were to see her coming along the street, I’d duck into a back alley. I’m through with her ladyship for the rest of my natural life.”

“Indeed?” said the Rector.

Clarence was mistaken. The bright-eyed goddess was not done with him yet.

CHAPTER XIV

In which Clarence tells his story and gets the Reverend Rector to take a hand against the Bright-eyed Goddess.

“Suppose,” suggested the College President, as Clarence with a sigh of satisfaction came to an end of his meal, “you tell us your story.”

“It is a long one.”

“Wait till I come back,” implored the Infirmarian. “I want to hear it. I’ve been infirmarian in boarding college a great many years, but I’ve never yet seen any sick boy quite so healthy and with such an appetite as Clarence.”

“Thank you for the compliment, Brother. I often feel like apologizing for that appetite of mine.”

“Clarence,” said the Rector as the Infirmarian went off with the empty dishes, “have you any relations, besides your father and mother, living?”

“Just stacks of them, sir.”

“Where are they?”

“There are some in England; a lot of them, on my mother’s side, in Ireland—and oh, yes, I’ve a cousin and his family in New York.”

“Do you know the address of any of them?”

“I really don’t. You know I’ve been at Clermont Academy, a boarding school in New York State, since I was eleven, and I’ve lost track of all of them pretty much.”

“What about your cousin in New York City?”

“I do not even know where he lives. You see, he just came to this country from Ireland a month ago. He brought his family along, and they were still looking for a house when I last saw them three weeks ago.”

“Anyhow, they’re in New York City?”

“I think that’s pretty certain.”

“Very good,” said the Rector, taking out a small memorandum book and making a note.

“Well, let’s have that story,” cried the big Infirmarian, as he re-entered. He was eager as a small boy waiting his turn for the pie to come down the table.

Clarence began with his departure from McGregor, the climb up and beyond Pictured Rocks, his long ride on the river, his encounter with the gypsies, his friendship for Ben, his long talks and walks with Dora, his troubles with Pete and his shrewish wife, his frequent swims in the river.

“And,” he continued, “when I made up my mind to get away somehow or other, I was hard as nails; I could swim for any length of time, it seemed to me, without losing my wind or my strength; and I could eat like a horse.”

“We all know that,” said the Infirmarian.

“And how did you manage to escape?”

“It came about just the way I wanted. Yesterday afternoon we pitched camp at a place right opposite a long island. I went in swimming and began to brag purposely to Ezra about what I could do. I let him know that I thought I could beat him. As a matter of fact, I really think I can. Ezra bit. He challenged me to race him to the island. That was just what I wanted. The old hag, Pete’s wife, came over and cursed me, just before Ben gave us the signal to go. But I didn’t mind that. Curses, like chickens, come home to roost, you know.

“Well, at Ben’s word we plunged into the water, and I kept under till I thought I’d burst. When I came up, I was some distance down stream; and all the way over I kept drifting down. Of course, it looked as if it were not done on purpose—at least I think it did. By the time Ezra was within a few yards of the island almost straight across from where he had started, I was away down near the end of the island, almost or quite half a mile away. Then I began to pretend I was trying to swim upstream and couldn’t do it. When within five yards or so of the very end of the island where there were lots of willows and bushes, I started to splashing wildly as though I had lost my head. I turned towards the shore, gave one last look, and shouted, ‘Help! help!’ I’ll never forget what I saw in that moment. In front of the tent, Pete’s wife was standing with her hands—clawlike old talons—stretched out, palms down, as though she were trying to force me under water; near the edge of the river, Dora, in her white dress, was kneeling, and I could guess she was praying for me.”

Clarence paused a moment.

“Do you know,” he said gravely, “I feel now as I felt all last night, as though her prayers kept with me like an army of little angels. Tennyson says, ‘More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.’ I knew the line over a year ago. Now I know the meaning. Anyhow, after giving that yell for help, I let myself sink and then, under the water, I got to those willows which I forgot to tell you were partly under water. It seemed to me as I felt my way from trunk to trunk that I’d explode if I didn’t get air. I’ve stayed under water many a time; but I never stayed under so long before. When I did come to the surface, I came up cautiously, came face upward, so as to get just my eyes, my mouth, and, because I couldn’t help it, my nose out of water. It was all right. Between me and the gypsies was that clump of willows and I was in a little bay surrounded on three sides by trees and bushes. I lay on my back just long enough to get my breath, and kicked myself down till I came near the end of the inlet. Then I took a deep breath, and dived so as to get out beyond the island in the main current. The dive was a success. When I came up, I lay on my back with only my nose sticking out of the water and let the current carry me along until it grew dark.”

“What were the gypsies doing?” asked the Brother Infirmarian.

“I don’t know. I suppose they took it for granted I was drowned. You see, I wasn’t such a bad actor, and I did my part all right; and besides, they are very superstitious and believe that Pete’s wife has all kinds of power. She told them I was to drown, and that made it doubly certain to them. From what I know of them, I guess Ben came over and searched for my body half the night.”

“And what did you do when the dark came on?” asked the Rector.

“I reversed myself and began swimming. After a while I got awful chilly; so I went to the bank and went through all sorts of Delsarte movements to get warm. This took me from fifteen minutes to half an hour. Then I went in again and swam and floated till I felt I was freezing. I took to the shore again, and ran and jumped as long as I could, and that’s the way it went on the whole night. It was the longest night ever. Every minute got me hungrier and chillier. I didn’t notice the hunger so much; but it seems to me that I’d never, never be warm again. Oh, wasn’t I glad when the dawn came, and didn’t I pray for a hot sun. When the sun did rise, I saw that I was getting near a big town, and I looked about for some place to land. Somehow, I couldn’t quite make up my mind.”

“Why not?” asked the Rector.

“I didn’t like the way I was dressed. Bathing suits are all right for the water, but for company—I may be all sorts of an idiot, but I’m not as nervy as the average summer girl. No

decent boy is.”

“Oh, Lord!” gasped the Rector.

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

“Go on, my boy.”

“Well, I got past the city which, I saw on a sign at a boat landing, was Prairie du Chien, and—no, not quite past. A little after swimming under the bridge, I saw a building—a great big building that looked like a college. It was just beyond the railroad tracks, and it had a beautiful grove of trees just below the building itself. Right on the shore was a lot of weeds that had been cut and been lying there long enough to dry. There was nobody in sight, and so I slipped ashore and covered myself up in the weeds, and tried to get warm. I was there a long time; and it was a long time before I began to get anyways warm. Oh, it was delicious that feeling of warmth coming back slowly but surely. Really, I’d have gone to sleep, only something else began to go wrong.”

“Did the jiggers get you?” asked the Brother.

“No; it wasn’t ants or jiggers or bugs of any kind. It was my little ‘tummy.’ The warmer I got, the hungrier I got. If I had a thousand dollars then, I’d have handed it over gladly for a hunk of bread. After a while, I forgot I had ever been cold, but I was famishing. So I threw off the weeds, put on my bathing suit, and started for that building. I was afraid of my life of being seen by women-folks, so I crawled and walked and crawled. It was slow work. Well, anyhow, I got to the fence leading into those grounds and was just climbing over when down from the building came running and dancing a whole raft of little girls!”

“You struck St. Mary’s Academy, a boarding school for girls,” said the Brother, sympathetically. The Rector’s face was buried in his handkerchief. He was not weeping.

“One little devil—Oh, excuse me—one little double-pigtailed, blue-ribboned thing in the lead saw me and let out a yell. That got me going, and I jumped off that fence and sprinted for the river at the rate of one hundred yards in 9-4/5 seconds—at least, that’s what I thought I was doing, and the screams of all those girls behind me helped me to keep up my clip to the end. I’m sure they thought I was a burglar.”

“Anyhow,” said the Rector consolingly, “they won’t know you again.”

“I should say not. After this I intend paying visits in regulation costume. Well, then, I got into the river, clean blown. I was too tired to swim; so I just lay on my back, and paddled now and then with my feet. The cold got me again in a few minutes; my teeth began to chatter. Oh, it was awful. And then—then I swam and afterward began to lose all feeling, and then I lost consciousness and—I got here.”

“Oh, most lame and impotent conclusion,” said the Rector eyeing the boy sharply. “You’ve left something out.”

“So I have, Father, but I don’t think I have any right to tell the last part.”

The Rector looked puzzled.

“Very well,” he said presently. “Even as it is, it is a wonderful story. In fact, it’s a twentieth century romance. What was the last name of that child Dora?”

“Well, I declare!” said the youth. “It never occurred to me to think she had another name. All I know is that she came from near Dayton, Ohio. Oh, what an ass I am.”

“You might sing that opinion of yourself to the air of ‘My Country, ’tis of Thee,’” suggested the Infirmarian. “We call it the Siamese national hymn.” And he warbled slowly and solemnly to the well-known national air, the words, “O Vātana Siam.” “It will do you lots of good when you feel rather foolish.”

Just then, and while Master Clarence began assuring himself in liquid notes of what an awful ass he was, there came a timid knock at the door.

“Come in,” cried the Infirmarian.

“Is Father Rector in there?” came a much agitated voice, as the door opened a few inches without revealing who was without.

“Excuse me,” said the Rector, leaving the two to sing as a duet “O Vatana Siam.” Every note of it and the entire sentiment filled Clarence with pure joy.

Despite their long drawn and pathetic warbling, the two within caught the sounds of earnest voices without. After singing the air with the self-same words nearly a dozen times, and coming at length to the invariable ending “*Vatana Siam*” in the enunciation of which Clarence succeeded in outdoing all his previous efforts, the door suddenly opened, and the Rector entered, bringing with him, very red and very confused, Master John Rieler.

“Behold!” he cried, “your preserver, Clarence!”

“Whoop!” cried the singer, jumping forward and almost throwing himself into Rieler’s arms. “You’ve told on yourself, have you?”

“I had to,” said John, shaking Clarence’s two hands. “When I got back to class I began to worry. It wasn’t the going out of bounds, and it wasn’t the swim. I guess that finding of you in the water got on my nerves. I wasn’t scared at the time; but the more I got thinking of it afterwards, the more scared I got. It seemed so odd. And then I had a lot to explain to the teacher, and I couldn’t do it. Anyhow, I couldn’t eat any supper.”

“Oh, I say!” protested the Infirmarian, who happened to be well acquainted with Master Rieler’s efficiency as a trencherman.

“It’s so, all the same. Honest to goodness!” protested the youth, his eyes and features expressing depths of astonishment at himself. “I just actually couldn’t eat.” He paused a minute and added wistfully. “I could now.”

The Rector had put on his face of Indian immobility.

“John Rieler,” he said gravely, “there are two things to be considered in your conduct this morning. First, there is your going out of bounds and taking a swim without permission. Secondly, there’s your saving Clarence Esmond from drowning. For the first, you are to be punished.”

“Father Rector,” protested John earnestly. “I’ll not do it again. I’ll never jump bounds any more this year. I missed Holy Communion this morning, and it was a mistake. Right after supper, only a few minutes ago, I went to Confession, and I hope I’ll never miss a single day’s Communion till further notice.”

“Your punishment,” continued the Rector slowly and impressively—

“Oh, Father,” broke in Clarence in great alarm.

“Your punishment,” repeated the Rector, looking severely at Clarence, “will be not to go in swimming on any account, on any pretext, with or without companions, from the first of December till the first of April.”

“All right, Father,” said John, humbly. He was filled with a sense of the terrible penalty exacted of him till he noticed Clarence’s ecstatic grin. Then his mind fell to considering the dates, and he grinned also.

“As for saving Clarence’s life,” the Rector went on, “I don’t see well how I can reward you properly.”

“I’m worth one thousand dollars, cold,” said Clarence.

“Exactly,” said the Rector, “and the fact of your being alive does not depreciate your value

entirely.”

“No, not entirely,” assented the Brother, as though yielding a point.

“Anyhow, I should like to reward you, John. Now, is there anything occurs to you I can do for you?”

“I’m awful hungry,” said John modestly.

“Appetite,” observed the Rector, “waits on a good confession. Brother, can’t you set this boy up to something extra?”

“Beefsteak and onions, cornbread, buttered toast?” cried the Infirmarian interrogatively.

Master Rieler had no need to express himself in words. His face showed glad assent.

“Come and join me, Clarence,” begged the hero of the day as he seated himself later to the “spread.”

“Thank you; I’ve had a good meal already,” answered Clarence, “but I’ll take just a little to keep you company.”

His taking “a little” had such an effect upon the Infirmarian that after watching Clarence’s performance for a few minutes he could no longer contain himself.

“Look here, Clarence! If you go on, you’ll swell up and bust.”

“I’m not swelling so’s I can notice it,” returned Clarence cheerfully.

Before leaving, Father Rector said:

“Now, boys, I’m going to my room, and when you have finished your supper, I want you, John, to bring Clarence to see me. You will wait for him outside my door. Then I’m going to see the Prefect of Discipline and have you excused from studies tonight, so you can show Clarence around.”

There came a babble of enthusiasm from both boys.

“And besides, while Clarence is our guest, you, John Rieler, are to be his host.”

“Oh, thank you, Father,” said John.

“Do you mean to say, Father Rector, that I may stay here tonight?” asked Clarence.

“Yes, my boy”—here the Rector’s voice and face, despite himself, gave hint of a great pity; “you are to be my guest till we’ve got everything fixed to see that you are placed in proper care.”

“Isn’t he a trump!” cried Clarence as the Rector left.

“Trump! I should say he is.”

When Clarence was ushered by the proud young host to the Rector’s room, he was bade to sit down.

“Well, Clarence, while you were sleeping, I was quite busy on your case. The hotel-man from McGregor was here and identified you.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, and I’ve sent out for all sorts of information.”

“But, why don’t you wire my father?”

“The trouble is, Clarence, we don’t know where he is.”

“He’s at the Metropole Hotel, Los Angeles,” said Clarence. “The hotel-man could have told you that.”

“No, Clarence,” said the Rector trying to speak casually, “the train did not get there yet.”

“Was it delayed?”

“Yes. In fact, there was a bad wreck. Some of the cars tumbled into the water.”

“And did anything happen to my mother and father?”

“I hope not. The only thing, my boy, we know is that they are missing. Anyhow, they are

not listed among the injured or the dead. Here, sit down and look over this account in the paper.”

The Rector discreetly placed himself in such a position that he could not see the boy’s face. Clarence read, and after a few lines could not go on; tears blinded his eyes. For ten minutes, while the Rector busied himself writing letters, the boy wept, although making pretense of reading.

“This is awful, Father,” Clarence at length said.

“Have hope, Clarence. God has taken wonderful care of you today.”

“Indeed, He has.”

“Trust Him, and keep on hoping. As to all details, leave them to me. If there’s anything to be found out, I’ll get hold of it. In the meantime, you are the guest of Campion College. Here’s some change—pocket money. You know, you’ll have to treat John Rieler. And tomorrow you’ll be fitted out with what clothes you need. God bless you, my boy.”

“Father, you’re too good. Say, won’t you bless me—give me a priest’s blessing—the kind I’ve read about in books.”

“Certainly, Clarence.”

The boy fell on his knees, and over him stretched the Rector’s hands in a fervent benediction.

As Clarence went down the stairs with John, he said: “Say, John Rieler, I got some bad news and I felt sick all over. And do you know what happened? The Rector blessed me, and now I could stand anything.”

CHAPTER XV

In which Clarence begins to admire Campion College, and becomes the room-mate of a very remarkable young man, as the sequel will clearly show.

“Do you know where you are going to sleep to-night, Clarence?” asked John, as the two boys, after a long walk on the Bridgeport road, were returning to Campion.

“No; where?”

“You’re going to have the finest room in the house.”

“Indeed! Where is it?”

“You see our new classroom building, don’t you?”

“It seems to me I do.”

“Well, they say that’s the finest building of its kind in the West. On the fourth floor there are twenty-one or twenty-two rooms for a few boys in the college department. All of those rooms are reasonably large, but there is one big enough for two. There it is—at the south-eastern corner. It has a window on the east and two looking south. Two brothers live in it, Will and John Benton. John hasn’t come back to school yet; he’s not well—and so Will has it to himself, and to-night you are going to have John’s bed.”

“Is Will Benton all right?”

“All right! Say, he’s in the senior class, and he’s Prefect of the Sodality, and the best all-round athlete, and the best pitcher on the college team. All right! He’s the best boy in the college; and he goes to Communion every day. That’s nothing out of the way here. Lots of our boys do that. But Will Benton keeps it up in vacation time, too.”

“That’s funny,” mused Clarence. “In the last few days I’ve begun to meet Catholics. The first one I met was that little girl, Dora. She began her kidnaping story by telling me she used to go to Communion every day till she fell into the hands of the gypsies. Then you yank me out of the water, and when the Rector says he is going to punish you, up you speak and tell him you’re going to Communion every day. And now, I suppose you’re going to bring me up to introduce me to Will Benton, and *he* goes to Communion every day.”

“Yes; we’re going up now, for it’s nearly bedtime. Most of us go to Communion every day, you know, to help us keep from sin. And it does, too. A boy who knows he’s going to Communion tomorrow is mighty careful about what he says and what he listens to.”

“I am beginning,” said Clarence, “to be quite pleased with the Catholic Church.”

“I’m sure the Church,” retorted John, “will be proud and happy to know it has gained your approbation.”

“Seriously,” said Clarence, “I’ve changed my ideas completely since I met Dora. If she’s a specimen of the Catholic Church, I want to join.”

“What! Aren’t you a Catholic?”

“No. Who knows but I may be some day?”

“I thought you were a Catholic all along. Here we are,” continued John, as they entered the classroom building. “Let’s go up quietly. The boys are in the study hall now. Say,” he added, gleefully, as they reached the second story, “look in there; just see what I’m missing.”

“What a big hall!” exclaimed Clarence.

“Everything in this building is big,” said John with conscious pride; “the playroom and the dormitory and the classrooms, and the science department—they’re all big.”

“I think,” replied Clarence, “that, from your description, the place will suit me perfectly. In fact, I’ve a mind to buy it. Name your price.”

“For a fellow who arrives at Campion College in a bathing suit and nothing else, you’ve got the most wonderful nerve. Ah! here we are. This is your room for the night.”

“Come in,” said a rumbling voice in answer to John’s knock.

“I’ve brought him, Will. Here’s the boy who came to College down the river, Clarence Esmond.”

“Welcome, Clarence. You’re to be my guest for to-night and so long as you choose the room is yours. I’ve heard something of your story; in fact, everybody knows how you got here. I hope you’ll enjoy every minute of your stay.”

Will was a ruddy-cheeked young man of fully six feet, with tremendous shoulders and chest, and a voice that would compete, not without hope of victory, with a bass drum. His smile alone was enough to win him friends.

“Glad to meet you, Will,” said Clarence. “John here has been telling me all about you. He says you’re Prefect of the Senior Sodality. What does that mean?”

“Aren’t you a Catholic?”

“No.”

“Well, the Sodality is organized to honor the Blessed Mother of God, by getting its members to lead a good Catholic life and by doing good works. The Prefect is the leading officer; and he’s supposed, though it may not be always the case, to have special love for Mary and to show it in his life.”

“By George,” said Clarence, “here it is again. The first Catholic I ever met to talk with was a little girl with the gypsies, and almost as soon as she and I got to talking together, she began telling me about the Blessed Mother and singing her praises.”

“Was the girl a gypsy?” asked Will.

“No; she was captured in Ohio during the flood, last May.”

“Oh; that awful flood!” said Will, his cheerful grin deserting him. “I lost my little sister in that flood, too.”

“Are you from Ohio?”

“Yes, and my sister’s body wasn’t recovered till two weeks after she was drowned. Well, let’s change the subject. I hate to think of it.”

Within an hour Will Benton and Clarence had become fast friends. Within another, the much-wandering youth, satisfied that his adventures were over, had fallen into a dreamless sleep, little suspecting the amazing events that the morrow was destined to bring.

CHAPTER XVI

In which the Bright-eyed Goddess comes to bat again, and promises to win the game.

A pillow flung by the accurate arm of Will Benton early the following morning caught the sleeping visitor on the head.

"Eh, what is it?" cried Clarence, sitting up.

"It's sunrise, boy. Just look out that window and see how beautiful the new-born day can be when it wants to."

"Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top."

And as Clarence quoted the well-known lines, he jumped from bed and slipped quickly into his clothes.

"You read Shakespeare?" asked Benton, rubbing his eyes.

"Of course; I've been reading him off and on for the last two years. Say, what comes next?"

"We have morning prayers and Mass in a few minutes. Would you like to attend?"

"I certainly would. Dora explained to me a lot about the Mass."

"Dora?"

"Yes; that was the little girl's name."

"Strange!" murmured Benton. "Well, hurry on now. Here's a prayer-book with the parts of the Mass marked out. You may use it, if you wish."

Clarence was profoundly impressed by what he saw in the chapel. The boys—full, in ordinary, of mischief and life—were going about their devotions in earnest.

Clarence was seated next to John Rieler. That youth, when he was not singing lustily with the others, had his face buried in his prayer-book. Religion, Clarence perceived, entered intimately into the lives of nearly all these boys.

He was escorted by Rieler to breakfast, where he inspired much respect among the boys of the particular table at which he sat by his workmanlike way of getting through with the dishes served him.

The morning was devoted to shopping. Attended by the Brother Infirmarian, Clarence went to the city proper of Prairie du Chien, where in the course of an hour he was provided with a complete outfit of shoes and clothing.

After a hearty dinner, John Rieler brought Clarence out upon the campus.

"Say!" the youngster said, admiringly, "you ought to send this campus on east. Lots of our colleges would be willing to buy it. It's one big level—acres and acres of it—and all you've got to do is to walk out of your classroom building, and you're right on it. At the academy I went to, we used to go around to a good many other schools in the baseball and the football season; but I must say I never saw a campus anything near so good as this, and only one or two as handy."

"We're thinking of taking out a patent on it, and we are rather proud of it. The only thing is that we find it quite hard to live up to such a fine campus."

"Say, this is a funny school," Clarence remarked. A number of the smaller boys were now gathered about him. They had heard of his tremendous swim down the river and of his escape

from the gypsies, and made little attempt to conceal their admiration. In fact—a very unusual thing—they insisted upon being introduced.

“What’s funny about our school?” inquired one of the boys when Clarence had shaken hands with each and all.

“Why, you study here!”

“Study! What did you expect?” asked Rieler. “This isn’t exactly a health resort. All the same, study is no interruption to games. We manage to get a good deal in during each day.”

“This is our half holiday and we’re going to have a game of ball at two,” said a stocky youth with a freckled face and a substantial smile, “and the shortstop on our team is going down town to have his picture taken or some such foolishness. Will you help us out?”

“Delighted,” said Clarence. “I’ve played several positions, but shortstop is my favorite.”

Clarence, from the very outset of the game realized that he was the hero of the hour. Nearly all of the junior division boys not engaged in the game chose to be spectators.

Clarence rose to the occasion. The second batter up of the opposing team sent him a sharp grounder. He captured it on a very ugly bound, whirled it to the second baseman, who in turn threw it to first. It resulted in a pretty double play.

Then the onlooking small boys broke into cheers and yells, making at the same time lively demonstrations with legs and arms.

“Gee!” exclaimed an enthusiast near third base. “I hope he’ll stay here.”

On coming to bat, Clarence sent a liner over second, and reaching first, kept right on while the center fielder was throwing the ball in. When, a moment later, Clarence stole third and came in on an out at first, the storm of applause broke out again.

“Take off your hat,” said Rieler to the run-getter.

“Shucks!” said Clarence. “Say, here comes Will Benton, and he looks excited.”

“Hey, Clarence,” shouted Benton as soon as he was within hailing distance, “Father Rector wants you at once. It’s important and he says you’re to bring John Rieler along, too.”

For the first and only time in his life, Master Clarence surrendered his place in a ball contest willingly. Even Rieler, who next to swimming loved the national game, called with alacrity for a substitute.

“Hang baseball,” he said recklessly, as accompanied by Clarence and Will, he hastened toward the Rector’s room. “We can play that any fine day. But it’s nice to be with you, Clarence Esmond. I’ve a feeling that when I’m with you there’s something going to happen.”

“You may be only half in earnest, Rieler,” said Will Benton; “but the fact is I’ve got the same feeling myself. My firm belief is that Master Clarence’s bright-eyed goddess of adventure hasn’t lost her grip on her young victim yet. She’s got him hoodooed.”

“See here, you fellows,” remonstrated Clarence, “talk about something pleasant. What I want is a quiet life.”

“You’ll get a quiet life—somewhere, some day,” said Benton, “but I’ve a feeling in my bones that you’re not out of the woods yet.”

“I feel just that way, too,” added Rieler.

The Reverend Rector dressed in his street clothes was awaiting them at the entrance to the faculty building.

“Ah, Clarence,” he said, “are you ready for another adventure?”

“Anything but that, Father.”

“Oh yes, you are.”

“Never again, Father.”

“Very well; if that’s the case, we’ll drop it,” and the Rector assumed a look of disappointment.

“Drop what, Father?”

“Nothing much. You know, I’ve had the station agents about the river line to be on the lookout for that gypsy camp. We’ve got them located, or at least we know about where they are.”

“And,” cried Clarence, growing very red, “we’ve got a chance to save Dora?”

“That was my idea,” said Father Keenan. “I thought you were interested in the girl. But of course, if you don’t care for any more adventures——”

“Oh, Father, I take it back. I’d lose an arm or a leg—I’d lose anything to save that poor little child from the hands of Pete.”

“Ah!” said the Rector, “you really don’t know what you want sometimes. Now, boys, there’s a machine awaiting us at the side of this house, and if you would like to go, Rieler——”

“Like it! I’d not miss it for ten years of my life,” cried Rieler, ecstatically.

“And you, Will Benton? We may need your strong arm.”

“Father Rector, I consider this invitation the greatest privilege you’ve ever granted me, and goodness knows you’ve been giving me every favor you could since I came to Campion. Clarence has told me a good deal about that little girl-saint, and I’d do anything to save her.”

The four knights-errant had by this time taken their places in the automobile. Father Keenan gave the chauffeur a few words of instruction, and with a speed exceeding the limit allowed in any known State, county, city, or village of the United States the machine shot down Minnesota Avenue.

“Now, listen, boys,” said Father Keenan, as they swept past the Bohemian Catholic Church. “Yesterday, I got the local station agent, who is a very good friend of mine, to make inquiries northward about any gypsies who might be seen. Just a few minutes ago he sent me word that a message had come from Lynxville, to the effect that a party of gypsies had camped three miles below that village.”

“What time did he get the message?” asked Clarence.

“Just at a quarter past two,” said the Rector, “and he sent the news within fifteen minutes of the gypsies’ arrival there. A friend of his happened to be automobiling, saw the gypsies pitch tent, and hurried at once to let him know.”

“If they camped at two,” said Clarence, “they’ll probably stay for their noon-day meal, and won’t start off till half past three or four. Can we get there before then?”

Father Keenan looked at his watch.

“I’m afraid not,” he said. “It’s now twenty minutes to three. Who knows? If our chauffeur keeps up this clip, we may catch them.”

“And when we do catch ’em,” asked Rieler, “what are we going to do with ’em?”

“How many men are in the crowd, Clarence?” asked the Rector.

“Let’s see. There’s Ben, but you needn’t count him. He’ll be with us if it comes to a row. Then there’s Pete, the leader, his two grown sons, and Ezra. Just four in all.”

“I rather think,” said the Rector, “that we can manage things without getting the sheriff of Lynxville to come to our help with a posse.”

“Sure thing,” exclaimed John Rieler, his eyes dancing with enthusiasm. “I’m only sixteen myself, but I’m feeling pretty good, and I would like to tackle Pete.”

“I’ve whipped Ezra once,” cried Clarence, forgetting his avowed distaste for adventure, “and I feel pretty sure I can do it again.”

"I don't want to blow," said the brawny muscular giant who was Prefect of the Sodality, "but I really think I'd like to tackle those two older sons of Pete myself."

"And where do I come in?" asked the Rector.

"You've got the worst job of all, Father," said Clarence, grinning. "You'll have to take care of Pete's wife. For myself, I'd as soon fight a bunch of wild-cats. I think she's possessed by the devil."

"Well, boys," said the Rector after a moment's reflection, and with a certain tone of regret, "I'm not a fighting man. My cloth forbids it. If possible, we must get Dora without striking a blow."

John Rieler sighed like an auto in full speed with the muffler open.

"We're going to get Dora anyhow," pleaded Benton.

"Oh, yes; we'll get her, no doubt. Now here's the way we'll go about it. When we arrive at the camp, Clarence and John Rieler and myself will visit the gypsies. You, Will Benton, will remain in the automobile with the chauffeur."

"Father, won't you please let me in on this?" pleaded the chauffeur, opening his mouth for the first time. "If there's any fighting to be done, I'd like to have a chance."

"But we're not looking for a fight," persisted the Rector, who was clearly on the unpopular side. "Anyhow the three of us will visit the gypsies, and I'll do the talking. It is my intention to ask for the release of Dora, and, if refused, try to scare the gypsies into giving her up. While I'm talking I'll take stock of their forces. If I see that we'll have to fight for it, I'll raise my hand—my right hand—so."

And the Rector raised a closed hand with the index finger pointing upward. "That will mean, Benton, that you are to put on all speed for Lynxville, get the sheriff and one other man without delay. But if I see my way to getting the girl without a fight, I'll raise both hands upwards, and that means that you two are to step out of the machine and join us."

"All right, Father," said Will. "But I think we can fix things without any sheriff."

During the conversation the machine had been whizzing past hamlet, field and forest. Not once since leaving Prairie du Chien had their speed lessened.

"Now, boys," said the Rector, after the lapse of several minutes, "we're getting pretty near the place. Suppose we keep silent. Go slowly, now, chauffeur, and make as little noise as possible. And while we're silent, let us all say a little prayer that we may succeed."

The machine went forward slowly, cautiously. Clarence noticed the lips of John Rieler moving. Will Benton had removed his hat and sat with head bowed. Several minutes passed in perfect silence. Then the Rector touched the chauffeur's arm. The machine stopped.

"Look," whispered the Rector, pointing toward an open space on the river's edge.

All turned eagerly.

A little tent—Dora's tent—rose within thirty yards of them; only the one tent—nothing more.

CHAPTER XVII

In which one surprise follows so closely upon the heels of another that Masters Esmond and Rieler lose power of speech and Will Benton strikes a blow which will live forever in the traditions of Campion College.

“Follow me—quietly,” whispered Father Keenan to the two boys, Clarence and John.

In single file the three threaded their way through the shrubbery. Suddenly the Rector paused, and put his finger to his lips.

“Listen,” he said.

“Ben,” came a clear, sweet voice, “do you believe everything that the Catholic Church believes and teaches?”

There was a response pitched so low that the listeners as they pressed steadily forward failed to hear it.

“And do you forgive all who have injured you?”

Clarence thought he could detect Ben’s voice saying—“Yes, yes: I do.”

“And do you forgive Pete?”

“Yes, from my heart.” The three were now quite near and the deeper voice of Ben could clearly be heard.

“And, Ben,” continued the silvery voice, “you wish to die a Catholic?”

“I do—I do.”

“And to be baptized?”

“Yes, Dora.”

“You must know, Ben, that when no priest can be had, anyone may, in case of necessity, baptize. Now, I am going to the river for water; and while I’m gone tell God that you are sorry for your sins.”

Suddenly, the flap of the tent was thrown back, and Dora, like some heavenly apparition, stood revealed. Her face was stained with tears. For the rest, she was in modesty, in expression in dress—blue and white—a Child of Mary.

“Dora,” cried Clarence, no longer able to contain himself. “O, Clarence,” cried the child throwing herself into his arms. “Pete has killed Ben. He stabbed him an hour ago, because Ben defended the statue of our Blessed Mother from Pete and his wife. They were going to burn it.”

“Dora,” said Clarence, “there’s a priest here.” And he pointed to Father Keenan.

“O, thank God! thank God! He has sent you to prepare Ben,” and the child threw herself at Father Keenan’s feet, and in all reverence, kissed his hand.

The practical Father Keenan, as she did so, took the glass from her fingers, and handed it to Rieler.

“Run to the river, John, and get some water.” Then raising Dora kindly, and throwing his hands above his head, the preconcerted signal, the Rector hastened into the tent.

“Dora! Dora!” came a deep voice as the girl was about to follow the priest.

Clarence turned. Will Benton, pale as a sheet, his eyes starting from their sockets, was hastening toward them. He was holding out his arms toward the girl, amazement and incredulity upon his face.

Dora turned. An astounding change came at once upon her face at sight of Will Benton. Pure joy irradiated it.

“O Will! my dear Brother Will,” she cried; and darting forward threw herself into his outstretched arms.

“But,” cried Will, as he caught her up and pressed her to his bosom, “you were drowned. We buried you.”

“No, you didn’t, Will. Thanks to our Blessed Mother, I was saved. A gypsy saved me, Will; and now he’s dying in my tent, dying because he gave his life to save me from the gypsy leader and to preserve our Blessed Mother’s statue from insult. Come, Will, let us see him before he dies.”

Clarence and John Rieler, grouped together and holding each others hands, stood stock-still gazing open mouthed. They looked at each other, as Will and Dora made for the tent, with unutterable awe. Speech was inadequate; and still linked together they followed the brother and sister within.

On Dora’s couch, above him the dear statue for which he had given his life, lay Ben, the sweat and the pallor of death upon his face. On one side, his wife was staunching vainly a gash in his side. On the other, leaned the Rector, talking earnestly in low tones to the dying man. No king could have been more stately in life than was Ben in his dying moments. No saint could have been more humble. Crouching in one corner, wide-eyed and silent, were Ben’s three little children.

“Are all here?” asked the Rector rising and gazing around. “I want you all to see Ben baptized.”

“O dear Ben, we are all here and we all love you,” cried Dora. “And here’s my brother Will, come to see you, too. Will, Ben has been so good to me. I love him as though he were another father.”

The dying man turned dark, wistful eyes to the big brother.

“Will you forgive me? I love Dora,” he said simply.

“And I love anyone that is kind to my sister,” boomed forth Will Benton’s hearty voice. “Your hand, Ben. May God be as good to you as you have been to her.”

“Clarence,” cried the dying man, “will you forgive me too. I have been bad, I am sorry.”

Clarence essayed to speak, but before he could enunciate a syllable fell to blubbering. But he caught Ben’s hand and fondled it.

“I am glad I was stabbed,” said Ben simply, “in trying to save that statue of the very good woman who was the mother of God, I believe. I want to be baptized.”

John Rieler was dabbing his eyes.

“Let all kneel down,” said the Rector.

Even the gypsy children, following the example of Dorcas, fell upon their knees, and then, the priest pouring water on Ben’s head said solemnly, “I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

Dora slipped over and pressed her lips to the newly regenerated one’s brow. Dorcas followed the child’s example and, turning to the priest, said:

“Father, baptize me and my children.”

“Not yet, my child,” said Father Keenan. “Wait a little longer, so it can be done in church. Boys, kneel down, while we say the prayers for the dying.”

Suddenly Ben raised his head.

“Clarence and Dora,” he cried.

“Yes,” answered both coming to his bedside.

“Take care of Dorcas, my wife, and my children. Make them good Catholics.”

“Yes, Ben,” said Dora.

“Yes, Ben,” said Clarence.

“O,” said the poor fellow—poor, that is according to the world’s standard—“how happy I am. I am ready to——”

He fell back unconscious.

The Rector who had taken out his “Excerpts from the Roman Ritual,” began, at once, the Litany of the Dying. Before the final invocation was uttered, Ben, the simple, the loving, the repentant, breathed his last.

“Let all leave the tent,” said Father Keenan, on coming to an end of the prayers for the dying, “except the wife and the children. Wait for me without. I will be with you in a few minutes.”

Dora, weeping freely, caught her big brother’s arm. Clarence and John followed the two. There was, quite near the river, an avenue formed by nature, a clear space of nearly a hundred yards in length, bounded on the river side by willows and cottonwoods with a dense growth of shrubbery below, on the other by majestic elms. Up and down this court of nature walked brother and sister followed by the two amazed boys. The stabbing of Ben, his beautiful death, the reuniting of brother and sister had come together so closely, one upon the heels of the other, that Clarence and John were almost speechless. When they did speak, it was in interjections.

Will quickly comforted his little sister. His task was, indeed, not so difficult. News from home, news of the dear ones is to the exile one of the most engrossing things in the world. And it was all good news. Everyone was well, business was flourishing; the only sorrow that had fallen upon the family was the loss of Dora—and that sorrow was now turned into exquisite joy for Will, as it would be for his parents and the children when they received the good tidings by wire that very day.

“And, Will,” said Dora, “I don’t regret all that has happened. It was bitter to be away from mama and all the dear ones at home; and it was hard to miss Holy Communion; and I was so afraid of Pete and his wife all the time; but it’s all over now. Tomorrow, please God, I will go to Communion once more; and then home, home, home!”

The child’s eyes shone with joy. They had reached the end of the avenue, and turning started back. Clarence and John were now in the advance.

“As likely as not,” said Will, holding his sister’s hand, “father, on getting the telegram tonight, will take the train at once. I’m sure he will; and if mother can get away, she will come, too. I’ll wire them on the road back to Campion. But why, Dora, do you say you’re not sorry for all that happened?”

He paused, as he asked this question, directly before a thick clump of bushes, and, catching Dora’s two hands in his, gazed lovingly and eagerly into her starry eyes.

“Because,” answered the girl simply, “I believe I have helped to save the soul of dear, good, kind Ben. Oh, how happy I was when the priest poured the water on him and baptized him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

Will Benton, still gazing into the eyes of his sister, thought he heard proceeding from the bushes which he was facing a low, sibilant sound. It was not the hiss of a snake; it was the hiss of hate. His keen eyes darted from Dora’s and peered into the bushes. In a flash he threw the girl violently to one side, flinging her to the ground, and with a spring crashed into the shrubbery. He was not a moment too soon. Behind the bushes, an immense boulder in his right hand, a man, whose eyes shot hate and whose features were demon-like with passion, was in

the very act of bringing it down upon the unsuspecting girl's head.

It was not a moment too soon: Ben caught the man's upraised arm and gave it a wrench which sent the boulder thudding to the earth. That wrenched arm was never to be used again. A howl of pain arose which was stilled as suddenly as it began; for, still holding the paralysed arm in his grasp, Will Benton struck out with his left hand. It was an awful blow. Its receiver as it struck him under the jaw lost voice, and crumpled to the earth.

"Oh!" cried Dora, who had arisen, "it's Pete."

Will Benton drew the girl to his side.

"I know now," he exclaimed, "why you feared him. I saw his face for a second, and there was murder in it, murder and hell."

The two boys who, hearing the short-lived scream of the gypsy, had turned in time to see the memorable blow which had brought Pete to earth, were gazing in awe at the Prefect of the Sodality. It was something to be remembered. It was a blow which was to go down in the traditions of Campion College. For Pete, the murderer of Ben, the would-be murderer of Dora, never came to face trial. He lingered for several weeks. But the blow made trial unnecessary.

"O Will!" cried John Rieler, "how did you manage to see him hiding there?"

"He gave himself away," answered the young giant. "His fury and hatred got the better of him. When Dora spoke about Ben's dying a Catholic and used the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, he couldn't stand it. He had his arm raised holding that stone, and was just about to bring it down on Dora's head. A hiss escaped him, and I spied him while his arm was still moving: and—and—I really don't know how I caught him in time."

Father Keenan arrived at this juncture; and the two boys and Dora all began explaining at once. Out of the babel he gathered that Pete who, after stabbing Ben, took flight with his wife and kinsfolk, had returned—as murderers sometimes do—to find out the result of the stabbing; how his hatred goaded him on to attempt Dora's life, and how the brother with lightning speed had inflicted with his one hand a wrench, and with the other a blow which no one who had seen them could ever forget.

"Dan," called Father Keenan to the chauffeur, having ascertained that Pete was alive, "get busy. Bring Pete to the Sheriff at Lynxville; hire another automobile—a large one for Dorcas and her children. We are going to bring Ben's body to Prairie du Chien. I shall go with them. And come back here as fast as you can. We'll be ready to start long before that."

The Rector and the chauffeur put the insensible Pete in the tonneau.

"One moment, Dan," said Will Benton, who had taken out a pad and written a few lines. "If Father Rector has no objection, I'd like you to send this telegram to my father." Then he read aloud: "Dora alive, well, and found. She is with me. Hurrah!—Will Benton."

"Good for you, Will," said the Rector. "Your mind works as well as your fists. Thank you, for reminding me."

Before the return of the chauffeur, the Gypsy camp was dismantled, the tent, converted into a shroud for Ben, the furniture abandoned, and the precious statue placed in the hands of Dora, who vowed she would keep it as long as she lived.

Master John Rieler took little hand in these preparations for departure. He could not remove his eyes from the giant Prefect of the Sodality. Will Benton was considered the gentlest boy in attendance at Campion College. John was bursting to be back and to tell the boys the wonderful blow he had seen with his own eyes.

The kind Rector gave all his attention to Dorcas and her children. He soothed as much as was in his power the awful hours when death is the family visitant. The machines arrived

sooner than they were expected. The Rector went off first with the sorrowing wife, her children and the dead.

John still stood staring wide-eyed at Will Benton; remained thus while the young man assisted his sister into the machine and followed himself.

“Oh, it is excellent to have a ‘giant’s strength,’” said Clarence, catching John’s arm.

Rieler came to from his trance, and smiled enthusiastically. “Oh, Crickey!” he answered, “you bet it is.”

CHAPTER XVIII

In which there are a joyful return, a sad duty and a picnic, ending with a reunion of loved ones.

The ride back to Campion College, so far as the boys and Dora were concerned, was a thing of joy. Dora nestled beside her brother and gazed her fill of that splendid young man. John Rieler, seated on the other side, took his share of the gazing; love was in Dora's eyes; admiration, deep, unspeakable admiration, in John's. Occasionally, he put forth a timid hand to feel the muscle of the strong left arm.

"Will is a southpaw," he explained to Clarence, when that watchful youth happened to catch him in the act.

"What does he diet on?" asked Clarence seriously.

But Dora's admiration was not confined to her big brother. She drew from the willing lips of Clarence an account of his arrival at Campion College. In detailing Rieler's share in the event Clarence waxed so eloquent that the young water-rat flushed furiously.

In a word, the little party, very soon resolved itself into a highly satisfactory mutual admiration society, of which Will Benton, in view of his recent exploit, was incontrovertibly the uncrowned king.

"Clarence," said the giant, "it is owing to you that my sister has been found. You have put our family under an obligation we shall never forget."

"If John hadn't fished me out of the river, she'd be with the gypsies yet," said Clarence. "Thank John and not me."

"And," said John, "if you hadn't cranked Pete's hand and struck out with your good left arm there wouldn't be any Dora to save. Thank yourself."

"It is Dora that has saved me," said Clarence.

"I? How, Clarence?"

"Well, you got me to thinking right about the Catholic Church. I was almost ready to join when I left you by the river route. The boys at Campion—especially John and Will—got me to thinking of it still more. But when I heard you as we got near your tent, talking to Ben and asking him if he wanted to be baptized, there seemed to be a sort of explosion in my brain. When it passed away, I was determined to be a Catholic. All hesitation was gone. If that Church doesn't save my soul, nothing can do it."

"Say, Clarence," said Dora with a smile, "how about that lawyer?"

"Lawyer?"

"Yes: you proposed to adopt me. Can't we find the right man at Prairie du Chien? Clarence," exclaimed the child to her brother, "told me one day at the gypsy camp that he proposed to adopt me, because he had no sisters of his own."

"I'd be delighted," broke in Will Benton, "to have you as a brother, Clarence: you have been in very deed, a brother to my little sister. She told me all about your lively scrap with Ezra. And I'm sure my father and mother would make our home yours."

Clarence, thinking of his own dear ones, struggled hard to keep down his emotion. His lips quivered.

"O, I beg pardon!" said Will much confused. "I forgot." And in a few words he told Dora of the railroad accident.

"Clarence," said Dora, "did you pray to our Blessed Mother for the safety of your

parents?”

“Yes;” said Clarence humbly: “I thought of what you would do, and so I prayed to her.”

“I’ll join with you. And tomorrow, Clarence, I’m going to Communion again. Oh, I never felt so happy in all my life. I’m going tomorrow.”

“We’ll all go tomorrow,” added Rieler, “and we’ll all pray for your parents.”

And then the four innocents fell to laughing and talking till at length Campion College was reached.

Dora at once demanded a confessor; and while John Rieler hastened to do her bidding, Clarence and her brother brought her to the students’ chapel. For the first time in four long, long months, Dora had the privilege of visiting the Blessed Sacrament. Presently a confessor arrived, the young sinner entered the confessional, and came out within a few minutes in an almost perceptible aura of peace and joy.

The President, in the meantime, had returned. He was awaiting them outside.

“Well,” he said, “everything has been arranged. Ben is to be buried at the Bohemian Church tomorrow at seven o’clock. Will Benton, you should serve; and you may get John Rieler to help you.”

“Thank you, Father,” cried Will.

“On Sunday next—the day after—Ben’s wife and children will be received into the Church. They are now quartered with a friend of mine in the lower town.”

Dora grew happier than ever.

“I want to be received with them, Father,” pleaded Clarence.

“I can’t grant you that permission, I fear, Clarence. Besides, you need instruction.”

“But I’ve had instruction already—at least,” Clarence added, correcting himself, “I’ve had some. Dora told me a lot, and I’ve done some reading.”

“And I’ll teach you enough, Clarence, before Sunday,” said the girl.

“Well, we’ll see,” said Father Keenan.

The group, as this conversation went on, was moving slowly towards the concrete walk which fronts the entire line of the main Campion College buildings. In the meantime, Master John Rieler had been holding spellbound nearly every lad of the Junior division with his account of Dora’s rescue, and of Will Benton’s wrench and blow. As the party then reached the walk, coincidentally with the conclusion of John Rieler’s exciting narrative, the small boys, detecting their approach, spread out and, keeping at a respectful distance, devoured with their eyes Clarence, who swam to Campion; Dora, who lived a gypsy life four months; and, though his face had been familiar enough, the big Prefect of the Sodality. It is only fair to state that it was to Will Benton that they paid the most respectful attention. He was the hero of the hour. The Rector—a most unusual thing—was hardly considered.

Dora smiled and waved her hand.

“Three cheers for the Gypsy Queen,” yelled an enthusiast. They were given with wild and artless energy.

“And three cheers for Strong-Arm,” piped another. The cheers were deafening: Bedlam had broken loose.

“Let’s run,” said Will to Dora.

The child took him at his word: and the two darted along the walk, and tripped up the steps of the middle building.

The Rector with Clarence caught up with them shortly.

“Dora,” he said, “we have no place for you here; but there’s a nice family just north of our

residence building who'll keep you as long as you're with us. I've sent them word already, and they have prepared a fine supper—a sort of banquet, for you and Will and Clarence and John Rieler."

"Did I hear my name?" asked John, just then joining the group.

"Yes, you go to the banquet, too."

"Oh," said John, "this whole thing is like taking candy from a child. Say, Clarence," he added in a whisper, "they've got a first-class cook there, and I am hungry."

"I feel that way myself," admitted Clarence.

"I'll wager," said the Rector, his eyes twinkling, "that you two are talking about the supper."

"We just said we were hungry," explained Rieler.

"For that matter, I'm famishing myself," said the Prefect of the Sodality.

"And I'm hungry, too," added Dora.

"Very good: clear out all of you, and you boys will be back in time for night prayers."

And away they scampered like children—the big fellow, "Strong-Arm," leading in the romp.

The funeral of the faithful and well-beloved Ben was simple and solemn, and the mourners fit though few. The Reverend Rector himself offered up the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Very quietly the simple cortege proceeded to the Catholic burying ground; and when the last shovelful of earth was thrown on the coffin Dora stepped forward and laid upon the mound the flowers such as Ben once joyed to collect and place at the shrine of "that good woman who was the Mother of God."

They were scarcely outside the graveyard, when the Rector addressed them:

"You have all had too much of tragedy these last days for your tender years. Dora is a free agent; Clarence is simply our guest; they have a right to a holiday. As for you, Will, I give you the day in honor of the efficiency of your strong arm; and you, John, for saving Clarence."

The long faces shortened; eyes dimmed with tears grew bright. A holiday to the school boys! What trouble, what sorrow can hold its own against a holiday?

"I've secured a fine motor-boat for you——"

"I can run a motor all right," broke in Rieler his face deeply gashed by a smile.

"And I suggest," continued the Rector, "Pictured Rocks and a ride down the river."

"Ah-h-h-h!" gurgled Dora.

"Oh-h-h-h!" cried Clarence.

"Say—say," blurted John, "what about our breakfast? We've just been to Communion, you know, all except Clarence, and he hasn't eaten yet."

"There are some things, John," observed the Rector, "that you never forget. However, I haven't overlooked that particular item either. All you need do is to run down to the Prairie du Chien boat landing. You'll find a man there, John Durkin, the boat-owner, who's waiting to see that you get off with everything in good order. Then, John, you motor over to North McGregor, and bring the party up to Mr. Berry's hotel. He's heard of your wonderful adventures, and you are his breakfast guests."

"I took a meal there with my pa," whispered the radiant Rieler, "when he came up to see me last year. I'm glad I'm hungry," he added simply.

"I should think, John," observed the Rector, "that you must have that cause for rejoicing a good many times in the day. After your breakfast, you must get together provisions enough for a good dinner. The commissary department will be in charge of Will Benton. Here, Will, are a

few dollars for that purpose. Mr. Berry will help you do the buying.”

“And I’ll be the cook,” said Dora, skipping about in uncontrollable glee.

“The only thing left for me,” said Clarence with his most radiant smile, “is to be dishwasher. I accept.”

“Hurry away now,” continued the Rector; and at the words they were all dashing down the street, Dora in the lead.

“Last one down is a nigger,” yelled Rieler.

It should not be accounted to the discredit of that happy lad that he did not succeed in overtaking the fleet-footed Dora. Not for nothing had she lived for four months in the open. As a matter of fact Dora retained her lead—owing, it may be, to the chivalry of Clarence and Will. Nevertheless, John, despite his efforts, was the last, of which fact all were careful to remind him till he had succeeded in setting the motor-boat whirling off toward North McGregor.

Of that happy morning, of the breakfast at Berry’s hotel, where John Rieler by his execution regained the prestige he had lost in the race, of the ride down the river, during which the hills of Iowa threw back in multiplied echoes happy laughter and gleeful shouts, of the ascent to the heights above Pictured Rocks, where Dora led the way skippingly, and paused not for breath till they reached the summit; of the lively chatter and flying jest; of the tumbles, unnecessary most of them, as they went down; of the wonderful dinner prepared—gypsy-wise—by Dora at the gypsy fire set going by Clarence; of the ride down the river till they paused and surveyed the very place where Clarence’s boat was taken in tow by “good dear Ben”—of all these things there is a record in the unwritten book of sheer joy. There never was a jollier, happier party on the broad bosom of the upper Mississippi. A little joke evoked thrills of laughter; a good one, an explosion. No pen is adequate to give an idea of how these pure, innocent and loving hearts laughed and jested and drank deep of the unpolluted joy of life.

They turned their boats at sunset homeward; and, as the twilight began to creep from its hiding place in the East, Clarence begged Dora to sing them a song of her gypsy exile.

The clear, pure voice—the sweeter, the more pathetic, doubtless, for all Dora’s long days of suffering—rose and added its beauty to the splendors of the dying day. Dora had just finished “Mother Dear, O Pray for Me,” and at the request of all, was about to begin another hymn, when Will Benton cried out:

“Look: there’s a boat making for us from Smith’s Creek. I believe it’s the Campion.”

“So it is,” cried Rieler, keen of eye. “And Father Rector’s in it. And——”

Suddenly a scream of joy rang from Dora’s throat.

“Oh! oh!” she cried. “It’s mama and papa!”

CHAPTER XIX

In which John Rieler fails to finish his great speech, and Clarence is seriously frightened.

There were, as the two boats came together, shouts and joyous cries and a quick interchange of crews. Dora was in the arms of father and mother. Laughter and tears—the tears of strong emotion—were intermingled with incoherent sobs. Feelings were beyond the power of human language.

It was then, in the midst of all this, that Master John Rieler, filled with an enthusiasm which could no longer be bottled up, mounted the prow of the boat, of which he had that day been the happy engineer, and raising his cap aloft, bellowed at the top of his voice:

“Three cheers for——” But John did not finish this splendid sentence, and to this day no one knows for whom he intended the signal honor; for, happening to wave his cap wildly with these opening words, he lost his balance, and plumped into the water.

“Oh!” cried Mr. Benton, pulling off his coat.

“Stay where you are,” called the grinning Rector. “Don’t hurt Rieler’s feelings. To go to his help would be less sensible than carrying coals to Newcastle.”

John rose just then, and, shaking his locks, smiled graciously at the crews of the two boats.

“We don’t want you,” said the Rector.

“Thank you, Father,” John made grateful answer, and once more sank for a long, delicious dive. And thus did the youth continue to disport himself while huggings were renewed and Babel continued beside him.

“But, Father,” said Will Benton, “what I can’t understand is this! Dora was lost; after two weeks her body was recovered and she was buried in her coffin from our church.”

“You saw the coffin, Will?”

“Yes, Father.”

“But did you see Dora in it?”

“No, Father; you told us she was disfigured and bloated from being so long in the water; and you said we were not to see her.”

“Exactly. The facts are these: On one day, fourteen bodies of the flood victims were recovered. Very soon all were identified except that of a girl dressed in a white dress with a blue sash. I went to view the body, and really couldn’t make up my mind whether it was Dora’s, or not. Everybody insisted that it must be Dora. In the meantime, your mother was so broken-hearted by anxiety that it looked as if she would lose her mind. It occurred to me that even the recovery of the body and the Holy Mass over it would set her at rest, so I took the benefit of the doubt, and allowed the corpse in white and blue to be buried as though it were Dora’s. But mind, I never said it was Dora. I allowed the others to do that without contradicting them; and also my intention in having that Mass offered was that if Dora were alive, the Mass should go to the poor abandoned child who took her place.”

“Do you see,” said Dora, “how good our Blessed Mother is? That little girl because she was in blue and white got a Mass and Christian burial.”

“Hey, John Rieler,” called the Rector fifteen minutes later, “haven’t you had enough swimming yet?”

“If it’s all the same to you, Father Rector, I’d like to swim home.” John, while disporting in the water, had taken off his shoes and thoughtfully aimed them at the head of the admiring and

envious Clarence.

“It isn’t all the same to me,” responded the Rector. “Here, give me your hand. Now suppose we start.”

And as they spun homeward, Dora told her wondering parents the tale of four months on the open road.

“And,” concluded the child, “when I think of dear Ben, who died a saint, and of Dorcas and her children, who join the Church tomorrow, and of Clarence who is going to join——”

“You bet I am,” Clarence broke in from the other boat.

“I can’t say that I am sorry.”

“To those who love God all things work together unto good,” quoted Father Keenan.

“And when I recall,” said Mr. Benton catching Dora by the arms and beaming with joy and gratitude as he looked upon her radiant face, “how four months ago, you were pale, anaemic, and sentenced by the doctor to death within a few months——”

“What!” gasped Will.

“Yes; sentenced to death. The doctor said the child had no sort of constitution.”

“That doctor was loony,” said Rieler indignantly. “You ought to see her run. Those fawns you read about in poetry books haven’t anything on her.”

“I should say not,” added Clarence no less indignantly. “You should have seen her skipping up Pictured Rocks Hill. She never lost her wind, never turned a hair, and she’s as sure-footed as a chamois.”

“All the same,” said the happy father, “the doctor was right. He was a specialist and knew his business. He told me to keep her in the open as much as possible; he told me so the very day before the gypsies ran away with her. For four months she has lived the life the doctor prescribed—and lived it, I rather think, more abundantly than had she lived at home. Now, look at her. She is the picture of health.”

“She’s the picture of something more than health,” whispered Clarence into the ear of her big brother. “Do you remember those lines of Wordsworth:

“‘And beauty horn of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face’?”

“I don’t read much poetry,” admitted Will Benton.

“Well, I’ve often thought of those lines in regard to Dora, only I make them read:

“‘And beauty born of heavenly thought
Hath passed into her face.’”

Good old Ben said she was an angel. If she isn’t she is, as the gentlemanly druggists say, ‘something just as good.’”

“Beware of imitations,” said John Rieler.

Whereupon to the manifest discomfort of those in the boat, John and Clarence set playfully to punching each other.

“Well,” sighed Clarence, as he jumped from the boat at the Campion landing, “now for a quiet hour before going to bed.”

“Don’t forget supper,” said John.

“I don’t; but that is a quiet affair.”

“All the same,” continued John, “I’m going to keep near you. If anything happens, I want

to be around.”

Then came Dora with her father and mother to greet Clarence; and the child, as she introduced him, made such comments on their short but lovely acquaintance as caused Clarence to blush to the roots of his hair.

“Remember, Clarence,” said Mr. Benton, “that our home is yours, day or night, winter or summer, in any year, in any season. God sent you to our little girl.”

“I think,” said Clarence modestly, “that it was, the other way around. God sent Dora to me. It’s made me—different. Everything I see and hear now I see and hear from a different angle—and a better one.”

As they walked up toward the college, Clarence, ably assisted by the eager John Rieler, pointed out their path of progress toward Campion on his first arrival. He was at pains to expatiate on John’s delicacy as to introducing him personally to the Rector.

“It wasn’t so very wrong, anyhow,” said Rieler.

“Didn’t God send me to save Clarence from drowning?”

“Don’t reason that way,” remonstrated Will Benton, whose reputation as a student of logic was not brilliant only because his prowess on the athletic field blinded the boys to what were in their eyes less shining qualities, “Out of evil God draws good; he took occasion of your breaking the rule to save Clarence’s life.”

“I’m beginning,” said Clarence solemnly, “to lose all faith in the bright-eyed goddess of adventure. As Betsy Prigg said of Sairey Gamp’s Mrs. Harris, I don’t believe there ain’t no sich a person.”

“What are you talking about now?” asked Rieler. “Who’s Betsy Prigg? Who’s Sairey Gamp? Who’s Mrs. Harris? The bright-eyed goddess has gone to your head, and placed a few bats in your belfry.”

“John Rieler,” said Clarence, “at your age you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You ought to know your Dickens. Read Martin Chuzzlewit, and start tonight.”

“No,” continued Clarence, “I disavow here and now, forever and forever, the squint-eyed goddess of adventure. I thought I was in her hands; but now I firmly believe that all along I was in the loving hands of God.”

Father Keenan, who had preceded the party, was now seen coming down the steps of the faculty building. He was doing his best to carry off his Indian immobility of face, but with partial success.

“Clarence,” he cried, “come here.”

“Another adventure,” said Rieler.

Clarence turned deathly pale. Something had happened—something serious.

“Oh, Father, what is it?” he cried running to the side of the Rector.

CHAPTER XX

In which there is another joyful reunion, and Clarence presents an important letter to the Rector of Campion College.

“Clarence,” said Father Keenan, “there’s good news.”

“Oh, what is it? Were their lives saved? Were they unhurt?”

“Just forty miles to the East of the accident your father received a telegram. It seems there was some mining trouble in the Southwest, and he was ordered to go there at once. Both your father and mother got off at a junction and so missed the accident.”

“Oh, thank God! thank God! And when shall I see them?”

“Very soon, Clarence. On the very day you arrived here, I sent telegrams to different cities, and had advertisements inserted in the most prominent papers in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Cincinnati. The ads. read something like this: Any friends or relations of Clarence Esmond falsely reported drowned are requested to write or call upon the President of Campion College, Prairie du Chien, Wis.”

“Did you really do that, Father?”

“Yes, my boy,” answered the Rector, as the two went up the steps and proceeded in the direction of the infirmary. “And it seems that in New York a member of the firm that sent the telegram to your father read the ad. He at once wired your parents—and—and—” the Rector paused.

They were standing just outside the parlor, from which came the sound of voices.

“*They’re here! They’re here!*” cried Clarence, and burst into the parlor.

Father George Keenan considerably waited outside until the first rapture of reunion should have died away; waited and thought with gratitude to God of his part in a romance of the upper Mississippi, a romance of childhood and innocence, and the sure, guiding hand of Divine Providence.

The parlor door opened presently, and Clarence came out.

“Oh, Father Rector, won’t you please come in? Say, Pa, this is the priest who fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was naked, took me in when I was abandoned, and treated me as if I was a prince in disguise. Say, Ma, look at him and thank him, if you can. I can’t.” And Clarence blubbered.

“Father Keenan,” said Mr. Esmond with quivering lips, “if I should think of trying to thank you, I should become absolutely dumb. I am helpless; and to think that you should be the member of an Order I’ve been abusing all my life.”

Mrs. Esmond, in turn, took the dismayed Father’s hand, and tried to speak. She failed; but her eyes spoke the gratitude her tongue could not utter.

“Don’t—don’t mention it,” said Father Keenan lamely and with a vivid blush. “I’m happier than I can say to have done anything for as fine and as gifted a boy as I have ever met.”

There came an awkward silence. The Rector was confused beyond measure; Mrs. Esmond had gathered her boy to her arms, and was fondling him as she had done when he was a little child. Mr. Esmond was endeavoring with but ill success to master his burst of emotion.

“Say, Pa,” cried Clarence, breaking away in excitement. “There’s one thing I want to say right off. You said I might choose my religion when I was fourteen. Well, I’ve chosen. I want to be a Catholic.”

“Certainly, my boy, certainly. I never thought of your joining that Faith; but you’ll be in

good company.”

“And, Father Rector, may I be baptized?”

“Of course, Clarence, since your father so kindly consents.”

“And, Father, will you do it?”

“Gladly, Clarence.”

“Good! thank you. Come on,” and Clarence seized his hat.

“But what’s your hurry, Clarence?” asked Father Keenan, laying a detaining hand upon the eager neophyte.

“Isn’t this rather sudden, my boy?” inquired Mr. Esmond.

“It’s not at all sudden,” Clarence made answer. “I’ve been thinking about this and preparing for this ever since I met Dora. Do you think I want to go to bed to-night with original sin and all my life’s wickedness on my soul when I can get it off in a few minutes? Of course, I’m in a hurry.”

“Put your hat down, Clarence,” ordered the Rector. “But I promise you this: you’ll be baptized and made a child of God and heir of heaven before you go to bed tonight. And now, Mr. and Mrs. Esmond, I want you to come out and meet Dora, who did so much for Clarence and whom Clarence saved from the gypsies; John Rieler, who rescued Clarence from the river; and Dora’s parents and big brother. For the next hour, we are going to hold a symposium. Clarence will tell his story from the time he left McGregor till he took to the river; John Rieler will take up the theme and tell how he came to make Clarence’s acquaintance; I, myself, will describe the boy’s first appearance at Campion, and with the help of Will Benton will tell the tale of our visit to the gypsy camp and rescue of Dora.”

As everybody following hard upon introduction insisted upon talking at once, Father Keenan experienced no little difficulty in carrying out the proposed program. It was fully an hour before the story—the strange romance of the upper Mississippi—was clearly unfolded to the wondering grown folks.

“I say,” urged Clarence, when the various adventures had been adequately commented on, “isn’t it time for me to be baptized?”

“Oh,” said Dora. “Is it all arranged?”

“Yes, Dora.”

“And—and—may I be your godmother?”

“Delighted!” cried the boy. “Nothing could please me better.”

“You ought to know,” observed John Rieler, “that the Church has erected an impediment between godmother and godson. If you carry out that program, you two can never marry.”

“Marry!” cried Dora, “I’m not to marry. I’m to dedicate my life to Mary.”

“Marry!” remonstrated Clarence. “Who ever thought of such a thing? Dora and I don’t intend to discuss that subject ourselves; and we don’t”—here he looked severely at John—“care about hearing anyone else discuss it.”

“All right, Clarence,” said John, “if that’s the case I want to be godfather.”

After supper, Clarence, alone, went to the boys’ chapel, where for fifteen minutes he prayed and recalled in sorrow all the sins of his life. Then came Dora, John, Will and the two married couples followed by Father Keenan; and in the quiet of the evening Clarence Esmond filled with faith and love received upon his brow the regenerating waters of baptism and became a faithful child of the true Church.

On the next morning the three children and Will Benton attended the six o’clock Mass and together received Holy Communion.

Clarence frequently during that day pronounced it the happiest day of his life.

On Sunday evening Clarence, who had passed most of the time with his parents, entered Father Keenan's room.

"Why, Clarence! How happy you look."

"That's because I'm a hypocrite, Father."

"Surely, you haven't come to bid me good-bye?"

"Oh, I should hope not, Father." Here Clarence fumbled in his pocket. "This is a letter my Pa gave me to bring to you."

"So you were godfather for Dorcas and her children!"

"Yes, Father Rector, and Dora was godmother. Pa says it was awful good of you to pay the expenses of Ben's burial and to pay for the board of Dorcas and her little ones; but he's going to do the rest. He has an interest in the ranch in the Southwest, and they need a woman to feed the men and keep the house. Dorcas gets the position."

"Can she hold it?" asked the Rector.

"Oh, yes! Dora says that Dorcas cooks nicely and is fine at the needle, and is very neat."

"I hope she'll have a chance to go to church," continued Father Keenan.

"There's a church ten miles from the ranch; and the foreman is a good Catholic. He is to bring Dorcas every Sunday."

"Excellent," said the Rector.

"And did you hear about Pete?" asked Clarence.

"No; how is he?"

"Pa just got word. It took him thirty-six hours to recover from the blow that Will Benton gave him. He was unconscious all that time."

"Let us hope and pray that God may bring him to repentance," said the Rector.

"The jail doctor says he'll never do harm again. And, Father, tomorrow Dorcas goes to Communion; then she's coming up to bid you good-bye, and then off she starts to her new work."

"Thank God," said Father Keenan. "And now, Clarence, sit down while I read your father's letter."

And this is what Father Keenan read:

"My dear Father Keenan: I am trying to write what I have found it impossible to say. To borrow the language of my little boy—who, I believe, borrowed from the words of Christ in the New Testament—Clarence was hungry and you fed him, naked and you clothed him, and outcast and you took him in. He was sorrowful and you consoled him; orphaned, and, at the sacrifice of your precious time, you took the place of father and mother. He needed, too, someone to take hold of his complicated situation and you by telegram, telephone, letter and in every conceivable way unravelled the tangle within a few hours; and in doing so brought gladness to sad and suffering hearts; in a few hours, you effected the rescue of his dear little girl friend; and, when we arrived, had everything in the finest condition imaginable and everybody happy. In all this you were aided and abetted by that little saint, Dora—the most wonderful girl I have ever met—by John Rieler, that paragon of good-nature who saved my boy's life; and by that prince of young men, *Strong-Arm* Benton, which quick performance at the gypsy camp will never be forgotten by those who hear it told.

"To have my boy the intimate of Will, Dora and Rieler—the most wonderful trio one could bring together—I esteem a rare privilege and an honor. Their friendship is touched with youth, and purity and faith.

“You will be glad to know, Reverend Father, that, in my opinion, Clarence is not altogether unworthy of such splendid companions. At Clermont School in New York, where he attended for three years, he maintained a reputation for cleanness of speech and delicacy of conduct, which, among the faculty, made him a marked boy. He was the center of a group—some seven or eight in number—who had professed and followed out lofty and lovely ideals. God, I know not why, has been singularly good to my boy, and kept him from dangers to morals only too common in these pagan days.

“The duty of thanking you, of showing you my gratitude, will be with me, I trust, a life task. I can never forget how when my little boy—a veritable Dan Cupid up to date—arrived you took him in hand.

“His entrance into the Church pleases me more, the more I think of it. When his mother gave up hope of ever seeing Clarence again, it seemed for a time as though she would lose her mind. She insisted that Clarence had been taken from her untimely because she had not lived up to the Catholic Faith, in which, as a child, she was baptized. It was in vain that I pointed out to her that she had not been brought up a Catholic, that she was raised a Protestant; that she had been in no way responsible. She would not be consoled. Finally, with my full approbation, she promised God that should Clarence be returned to us, she would once more embrace the Faith of her fathers. She intends to go to confession and receive Holy Communion before we bid an unwilling adieu to Campion. She has already called at St. Mary’s Academy and engaged a splendid nun there to give her a course of instructions.

“In a short time—by Christmas at the latest—I am going to join the Church that received Ben and Dorcas with the same arms of welcome as it receives the princes and potentates of the earth. This, my fixed determination, is sudden; but for all that, it is none the less firm. It came to me last night, as I watched the radiant Dora and the reverent John holding my boy, whose face was aflame with zeal and faith as you, Father, poured the water of baptism upon his head.

“And now, Father, I’ve been thinking much of what you did for my boy. There must be other cases like his—cases of boys being thrown upon you—not coming in the guise of Cupid, it is true—but coming to you asking for education, board and books; but without money. In memory, then, of your kindness to my little boy, I enclose you a check for five thousand dollars as a fund for a perpetual scholarship to carry year after year through Campion College some boy whom God has given brains and ambition, but denied money. And if God continues to bless me in my enterprises, this will not be the end, by any means, of my help in that same line.

“And now, one more matter of business. Clarence is bent on going to Campion College. He loves the grounds, the buildings, the boys, and, so far as he knows them, the faculty. His mother and I are almost as anxious that he should attend your school as he is. We intend to stay here for a week or ten days to get better acquainted with our dear little boy—dearer a thousandfold that, having been lost, he is found. We, therefore, beg of you, Father, as a special favor, to register the boy at once; but to allow us his company till we leave. His board and tuition expenses are to begin, of course, from the opening day of school—two weeks back. Before leaving, I will make you a check to cover his expenses for the entire year.

“This is the longest letter I have written since the time I was engaged to her who is now my wife. It is long because I have been endeavoring, with poor success, to express my gratitude. But the task is beyond me. Beyond me, too, is it to express the present happiness of my wife, of Clarence, of Dora and of

“Yours with a heart full of gratitude,
“CHARLES ESMOND.”

CHAPTER XXI

In which everybody is happy, Will Benton is jocose, and justifies the title of this Romance of the Upper Mississippi.

Some few minutes later, Will Benton, who had been summoned, and Clarence were seated in the Rector's room. To the two Father Keenan read first the letter of Wilcox.

"He was a good fellow," said Will. "I like people who are grateful."

"It was this gift of one hundred dollars," said Father Keenan, "which made it so easy for me to fit you up, Clarence, and to see that Ben received decent interment. But now listen to this."

And Father Keenan read the letter of Mr. Charles Esmond.

When he came to the passage describing Clarence as a "veritable Dan Cupid up to date," Will Benton roared with laughter.

"Why, what's the matter, Will?" asked the Rector.

"Did you hear it? He's Cupid. Oh, goodness, that's the best yet. Clarence, you're Cupid." And Will Benton laughed more heartily than ever.

"It isn't such a bad joke," said Clarence critically.

The Rector then read on to the end.

"Say," cried Clarence, "I like that. You do a little kindness to a poor boy, and after many years he sends you money to do some more kindness to other boys. You try it out on me, and then my father gets the same idea and wants you to try it out on somebody else."

"Kindness is catching," said Will Benton, the kindest boy in Campion College.

"Our echoes roll from soul to soul," quoted Clarence, "and grow forever and forever."

"The next thing for you to do, Clarence, is to go over to the Vice-President's room and register. Will Benton will take you, and then he'll bring you over to the small boys and let them know you are one of them. After that you are free to go with your parents so long as they remain."

"Thank you, Father; I've got everything in the world I want, and I'm as happy as a big sunflower."

On their way to the classroom building there was quite a perceptible stir among the boys, numbers of whom eyed the two with artless interest.

"What's the matter with those boys?" asked Clarence. "What are they staring about?"

"I really think," answered Will Benton, "that they're staring at me. John Rieler made such a fuss about the knockout I gave Pete that he's got all the little boys crazy. Even a lot of the big boys are stirred up about it. I've been keeping to my room as much as possible these few days, because I don't like people to be making a fuss over me."

"Say, Will, is this true? I heard that since the fellows heard what you did to Pete ten boys of the senior division have at last asked to join the Sodality, when they wouldn't do it before."

"They'd have come in anyhow," he said.

The Vice-President was in his room, and promptly registered the happy Clarence. Then, Will Benton, very nervous, conducted Clarence over to the small boy's division.

At his coming, there was great excitement. The boys came flocking towards the two, and, in a moment, had them surrounded.

"Look at his arm"—"Isn't that a chest for you"—"His Southpaw dished the gypsy for thirty-six hours"—"He did it just like that"—"That's Strong-Arm for you." These and a thousand exclamations evinced clearly that Will Benton was still the hero of the hour.

Will blushed. He was frightened.

“Speech, Strong-Arm, speech,” cried a shrill-voiced youth.

“Speech, speech,” volleyed the others.

And then Will Benton, Strong-Arm, Senior, and Prefect of the Sodality, made his maiden speech, and cracked his first and only joke. Like most people who are immensely popular, Will Benton was not given to joking. He was always smiling, always jolly, always quick to laugh at other’s witticisms. But as for himself, he was literal, matter of fact, and serenely serious.

And the joke he got off on this occasion was really such a little joke. It wasn’t even original. But the boys who heard it doubled with laughter, and howled with delight. They thought it was the finest joke they had ever heard. Most of them continue to think so. They repeated it to each other, and wrote home about it. They made it a classic in Campion College, in such wise that it promises to go down to posterity along with the wrench and the blow which made Will Benton famous and immortal. On this one joke, Will Benton’s reputation as a humorist will live.

Here are the speech and joke:

“Boys,” he said, holding up his hands.

All grew silent and eager.

“Permit me to introduce a new student.”

Cheers and joyous yelps split the astounded air for full three minutes. Will Benton held up his hand once more.

Again fell the expectant silence.

“Here he is,” cried Benton, his face breaking into smiles, “CUPID OF CAMPION COLLEGE.”

THE END.

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Transcriber’s Notes:

Punctuation and type-setting errors have been corrected without note. Hyphenation and archaic spellings have been retained as in the original.

[The end of *Cupid of Campion* by Francis J. Finn]